Facilitating Academically Productive Conversations (APCs) Through Norms of Classroom Discourse

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DEFINING ACADEMICALLY PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS (APCs) AND FINDING THEIR PLACE IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

DEFINITION: Academically Productive Conversations (APC) can be described as discourses that fulfill two functions:
1. enhance or refine knowledge for the interlocutors; 
2. maintain or improve the social relationships involved in the exchange of knowledge.

The conversation can occur within a collaborative learning group or within the context of an entire class discussion, and it may or may not be directly facilitated by the instructor.

RATIONALE: Many classrooms follow the Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) discourse pattern, wherein the teacher initiates a question, receives a student response, and responds with an evaluation of the student response, and responds with an evaluation of the student response.

As a strong proponent of linguistic development, and knowing that one of the most crucial components of an effective language learning program -- English or otherwise -- is practice with oral language through peer interaction (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2010), this concerned me and drove me to ask the questions that drove this inquiry project.

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INQUIRY QUESTIONS

How do APCs support academic and social learning?

How can teachers intentionally support students’ engagement in APCs?

TEP ALIGNMENT

- Criterion 2: Demonstrating effective teaching practices: the teacher uses research-based instructional practices to meet the needs of all students.
- My Goal: to inform my own instruction and implementation of peer discussion in the classroom, and provide me with the rationale I will need to support these pedagogical decisions which may be contrary to more traditional methods of teaching.

REFINING KNOWLEDGE

“Truth is not born nor is it found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people who collectively search for truth, in the dialogic interaction” (Bakhtin, 1999 as cited by Meacham, 2016). This truth is developed through:
- co-construction of knowledge (Paratore & McCormack, 1997)
- development of inner dialogue (Vygotsky, 1986 as cited by Zwiers & Crawford, 2011)
- reasoning and argument (Gillies, 2019)
- cognitive elaboration (Webb et al, 2019)

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

“Students who learn school subject matters in classrooms guided by Accountable Talk standards are socialized into communities of practice in which respectful and grounded discussion... are the norm” (Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2007, p. 286). These standards include accountability to:
- The Learning Community
- Accepted Standards of Reasoning
- Knowledge

For students developing their academic repertoire, “The discourse [becomes] a melding of ideas from peers, their own personal experiences, and the language of text and instruction” (Paratore & McCormack, 1997).
- Externally Authoritative Discourse (EAD) (Bakhtin, 1986)
- Internally Persuasive Discourse (IPD) (Bakhtin, 1986)

GOALS OF CONVERSATION

“Teachers need to guide students in practicing new ways of talking, reasoning, and collaborating with one another” (Michaels & O’Connor, 2012, p. 9). This practice should be in pursuit of four communicative goals:
1. Help individual students share, expand, and clarify their thoughts;
2. Help students listen carefully to one another;
3. Help students deepen their reasoning;
4. Help students engage with others’ reasoning

ATTITUDE & DISPOSITION NORMS

Zwiers and Crawford (2011) outline five norms of discourse communities required to make conversations not only academically productive, but socially positive as well:

- Humility
- Thoroughness
- Respect
- Positivity
- Interest

CONTEXTS FOR COLLABORATION

COMPLEX INSTRUCTION (Mathematics)
- “groupworthy” tasks
- assigning competence
- validating and sharing multiple approaches

LITERATURE CIRCLES (ELA)
- quality, applicable text sets
- thinking aloud
- modeling and practicing talk about text

GUIDED GROUP INQUIRY (Science & Social Studies)
- identifying a topic within a problem area
- planning, obtaining, and evaluating information
- organizing information to present

CONVERSATION & TALK MOVES

These goals are operationalized through Teacher Talk Moves (Michaels & O’Connor, 2012) that model and structure practice in the Student Conversation Skills -- also termed “Conversation Moves” (Zwiers & Crawford, 2015) -- that students must develop to have APCs that approach the communicative goals outlined above. The matrix below illustrates the relationship between these two sets of linguistic tools:

- Share, Expand, Clarify
- Time to Think
- Who Can Rephrase or Repeat?
- Deepen Reasoning
- Engage with Others’ Reasoning

- Listen Carefully
- Paraphrase Synthesize Conversation Points

- Elaborate and Clarify Support Ideas with Examples
- Ask for Evidence or Reasoning Support Ideas with Examples
- Agree/Disagree, Why?
- Build On and/or Challenge A Partner’s Idea

TALK MOVES

- Support Ideas with Examples
- Build On and/or Challenge A Partner’s Idea

REFERENCES

Scan the QR Code to access my references page:

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