



Empowering Educators, Empowering Students: Navigating the New ESL Landscape

**Alberta Teachers Association
2010 ESL-Council Conference**



Building Language, Literacy, & Understanding through Academic Conversation

***Empowering Educators, Empowering Students:
Navigating the New ESL Landscape***
November 5, 2010
Jeff Zwiers

That with which to walk away

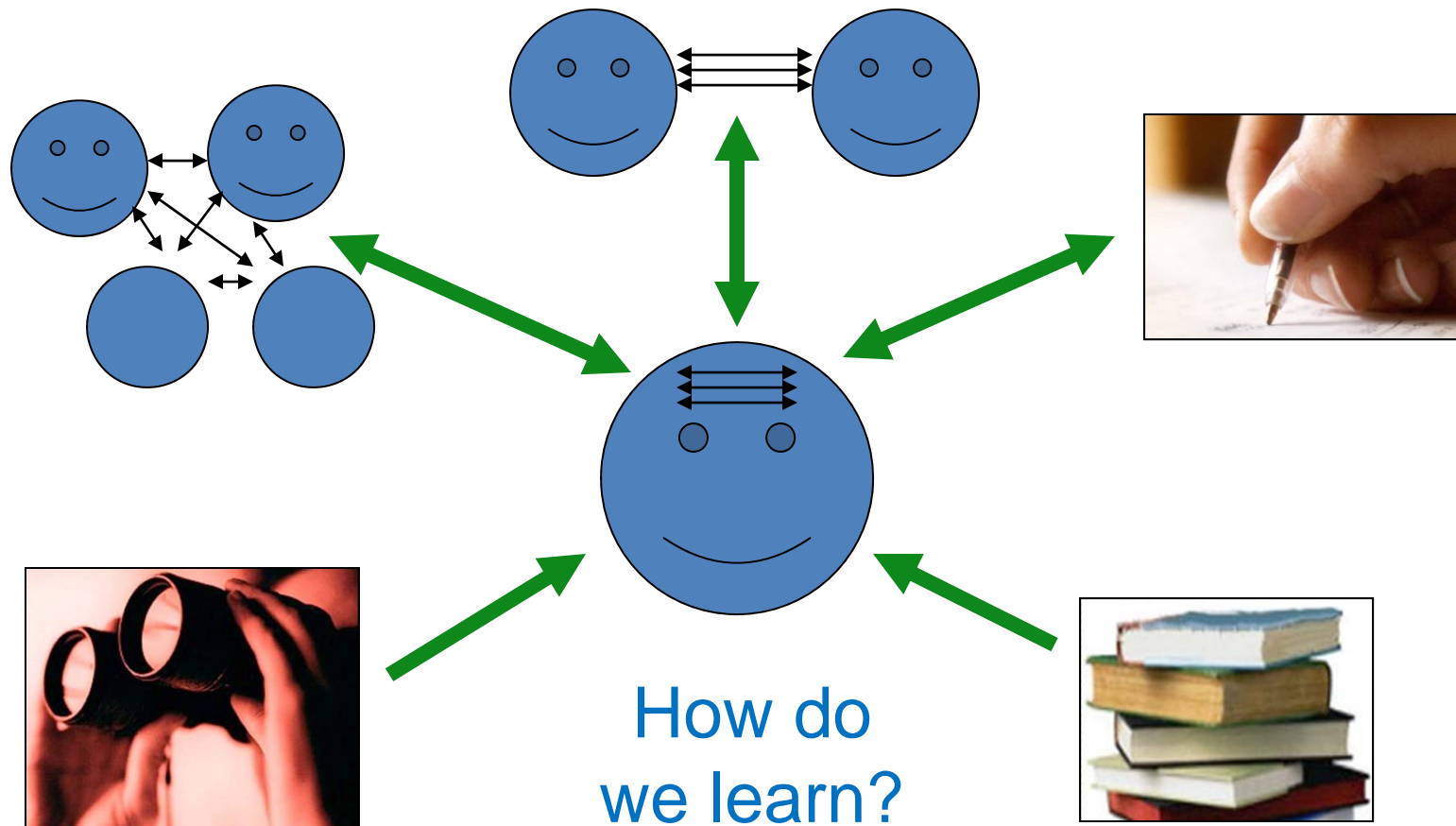
Why
use them?

**Academic
Conversations**

What
are academic
conversations and
skills that drive them?

How can I build AC skills
and use conversations to
teach academic language,
thinking, & content?

“All learning involves conversation. The ongoing dialogue, internal and external, that occurs as we read, write, listen, compose, observe, refine, interpret, and analyze **is** how we learn” (Routman).



Converse with a Partner

How can conversation in class help someone learn?



Rationale 1: Research on classroom talk

Conversations can leave us pondering and processing ideas which, in turn, contribute to the **inner dialogues** that we hold in our heads throughout each day (Vygotsky, 1986). These inner dialogues sculpt our thinking and language.


We **learn words** not from dictionaries but **from of other people**; and the words carry with them the accumulated meanings of their previous users. (Bakhtin, 1986)

“One of the opportunities school can offer pupils is the chance to **involve** other people in their **thoughts**—to use conversations to develop their own thoughts” (Mercer, 1995, p. 4).

Academic conversations develop students’ intellectual agility (Brookfield and Preskill, 2009). Students learn to think in real time--**to think on their feet**.

“Information can be accumulated, but knowledge and understanding are only generated by **working with information**, selecting from it, organizing it, arguing for its relevance” (Mercer, 1995, p. 67).

“Talk, like reading and writing, is a major motor—I could even say **the major motor**—of intellectual development” (Calkins, 2001, p. 226).





Rationale 2: Findings

- **85%** of class time was devoted to lecture, question and answer, and seatwork. (Nystrand, 1997)
- Teachers encouraged elaborations, but only **16%** of the paired interactions were beneficial to learning. (Staarman, Krol & vander Meijden, 2005)
- English learners spent only **4%** of the school day engaged in school talk; and **2%** of the school day discussing focal content of the lesson. (Arreaga-Mayer & Perdomo-Rivera, 1996).

Rationale 3: Not quite enough

The following were not enough to develop skills for extended conversations and the deep, enduring learning that they foster:

- Tranquilization-Interrogation-Regurgitation
 - Sentence starters and frames 
 - Quick think-pair-shares
 - Discussions in which a few students and the teacher dominate the talk
 - Isolated, disconnected facts and vocabulary
- 

Rationale 4: Advantages of more & deeper talk

Language and Literacy Advantages

- Conversation builds academic language
- Conversation builds vocabulary
- Conversation builds literacy skills and comprehension
- Conversation builds oral language and communication skills

Thinking Skills Advantages

- Conversation builds thinking skills
- Conversations promote different perspectives and empathy
- Conversation fosters creativity
- Conversation fosters skills for negotiating meaning and focusing


Social Advantages

- Conversation builds relationships
- Conversation builds academic ambience
- Conversation makes lessons more culturally relevant
- Conversation fosters equity

Content Learning Advantages

- Conversation builds content understandings
- Conversation cultivates connections
- Conversation helps students to co-construct understandings
- Conversation helps teachers and students assess learning

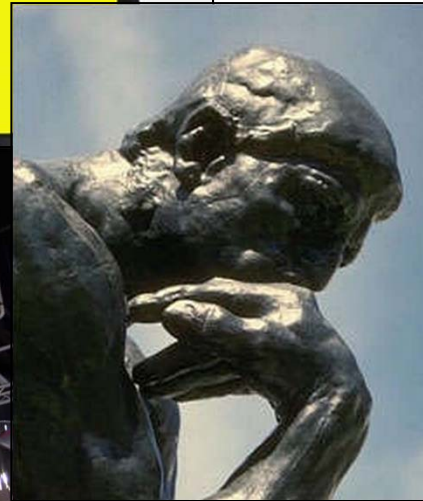
Psychological Advantages

- Conversation develops inner dialog and self-talk
 - Conversation builds engagement and motivation
 - Conversation builds confidence and academic identity
 - Conversation fosters self-discovery
 - Conversation builds student voice and empowerment
- 

Conversations give students opportunities to to *authentically* talk about:

Abstract concepts

Complex ideas



Higher-order thinking processes

“In my classroom, _____, a poignant example of an abstract concept that my students must learn is _____”

Academic Language



Three reasons for showing this photo?

Academic Language Snapshot

Evidence
Analyze
Interpret
Elaborate
Support
Compare
Apply

Thinking Terms
(Terms that travel
across disciplines)

*Photosynthesis, democracy,
imagery, numerator, etc.*

Content vocabulary
(bricks)

Content vocabulary
(bricks)

**Grammar &
organization**

Long Sentences
U-turn terms
Transitions
Clauses
Pronouns
Word order
Punctuation
Text structure

ACADEMIC METAPHORS:

100/hr! (Pollio, 1977)

“stand idly by while...”

“played a key role in” “in the wake of”

“narrow pursuit” “no simple formula”

Scaffolding Oral Academic Language with **Pro-Con Improv**

Topics:

Camping, Shopping, Traveling, Cell
Phones, TV, Computers, Video Games,
School, Cars,

Transitions:

However,
On the other hand,
Then again,

~~but~~



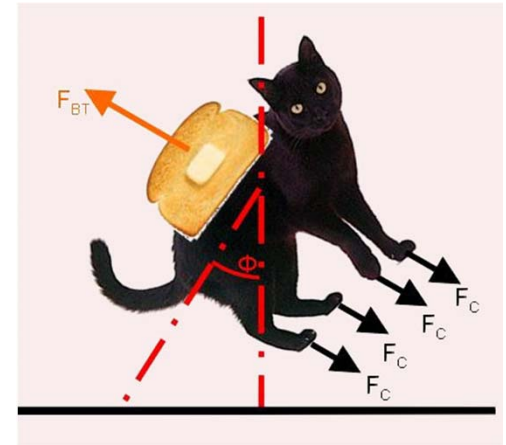
Bulking up Conversations

David: Why did that happen?

Liliana: Gravity, I think.

David: Yes, gravity pulled it down.

Liliana: So, now what?



Lisa: I think there are different ways to solve it.

Edgar: So? Just do what the book example did.

Lisa: But why do you turn the fraction over?

Edgar: Who cares? Just turn it over.

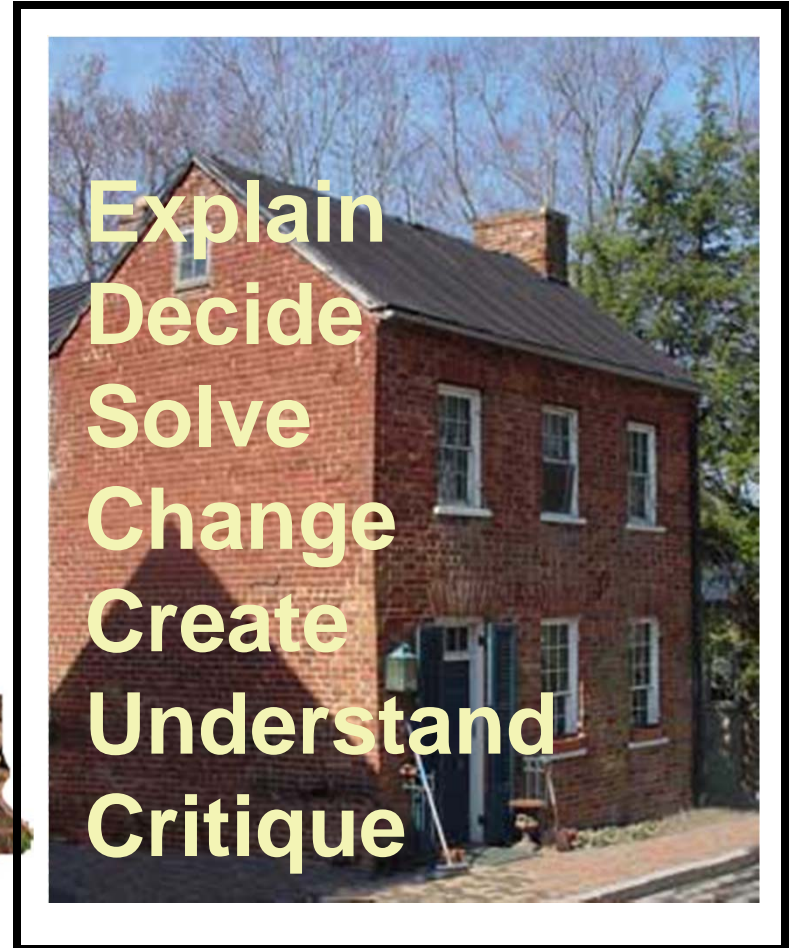
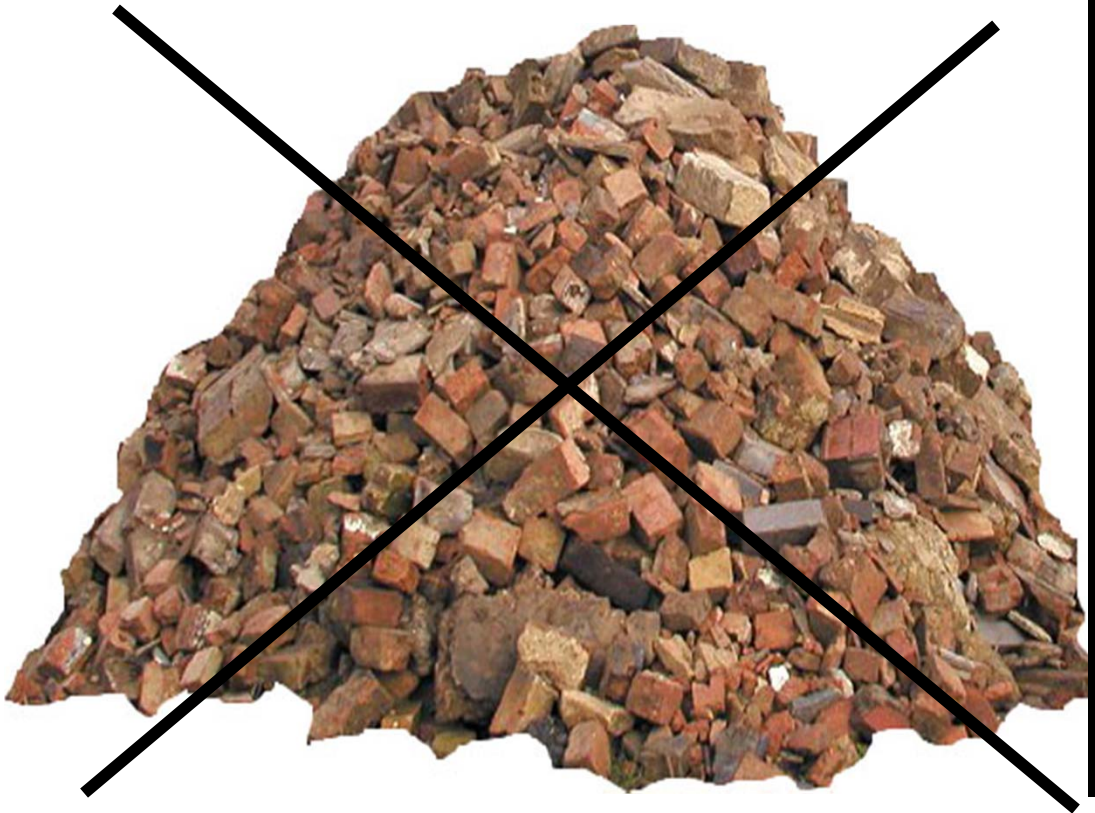
Lisa: OK.

$$\frac{3a}{3c-6} \div \frac{9ab}{c^2-4} =$$

Conversation Feature 1: Meaningful Purpose

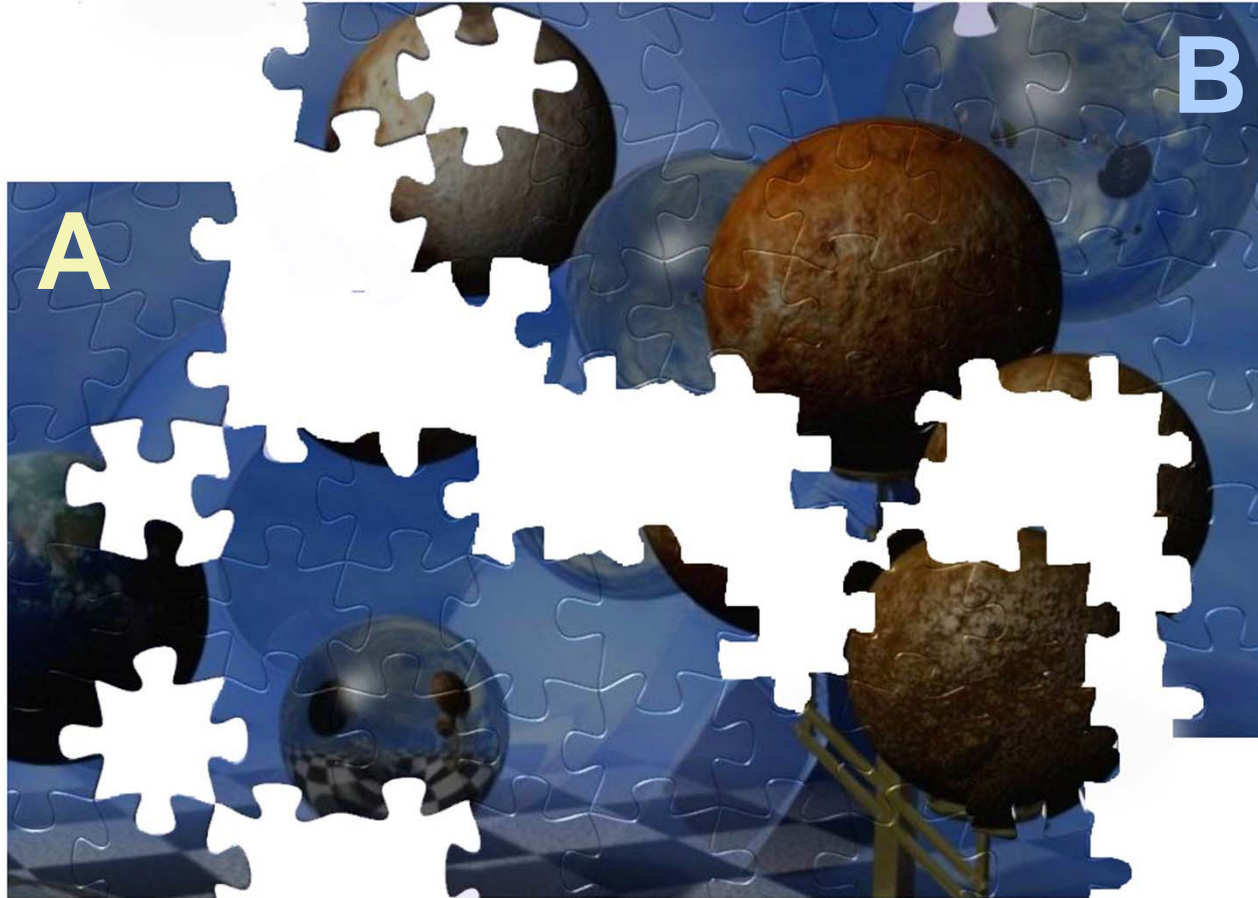


Conversation Feature 1: Meaningful Purpose

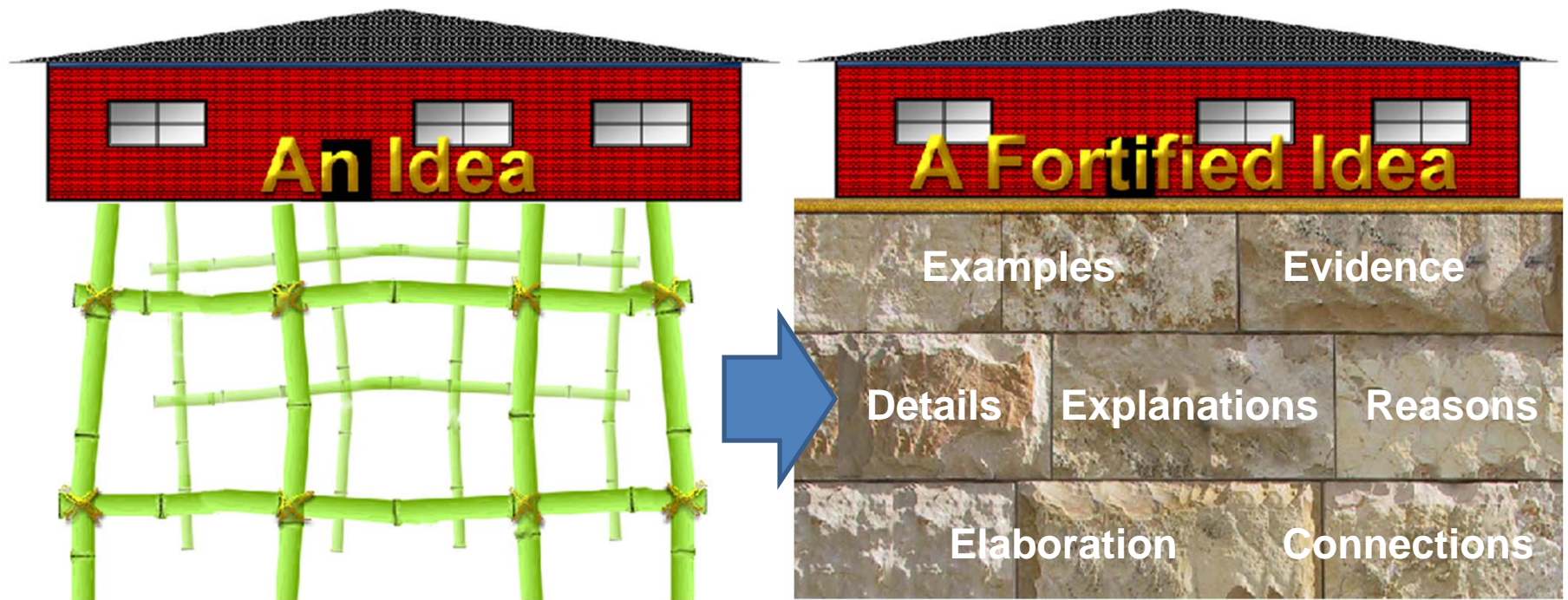


Conversation Feature 2: Information Gap

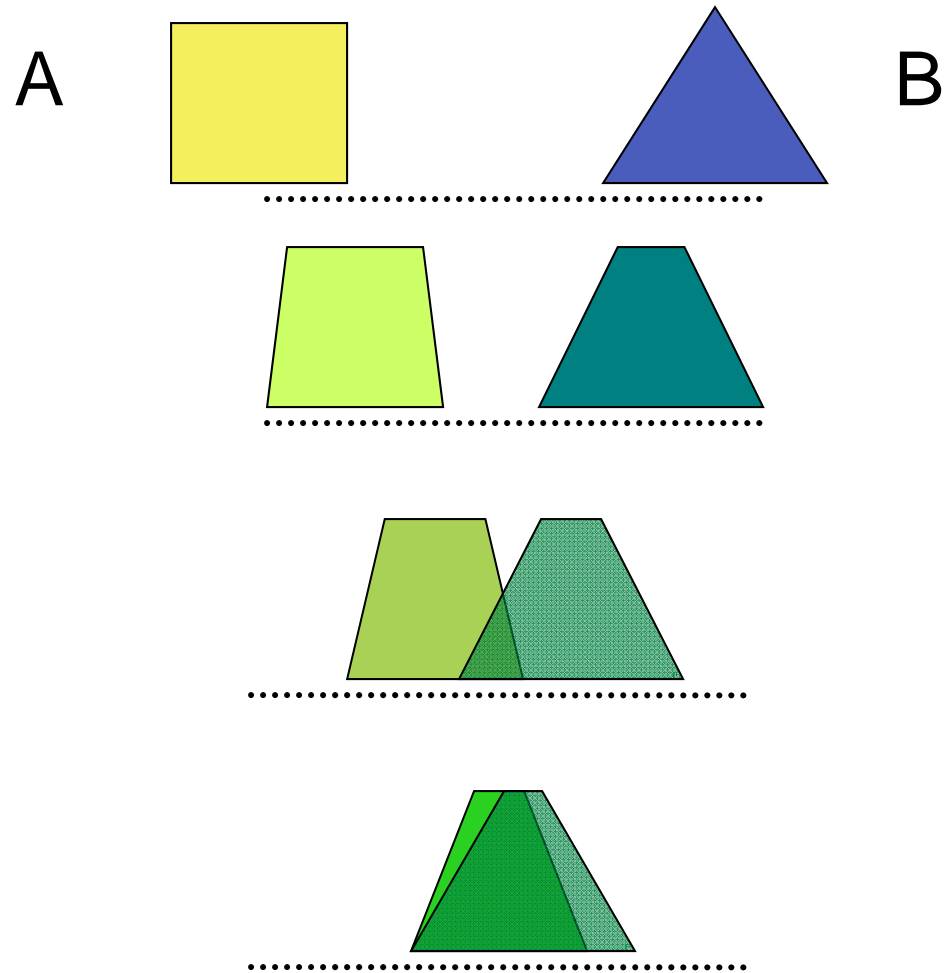
(Facts, Opinions, Perspectives)




Conversation Task Feature 3: Collaborative Fortifying of Ideas



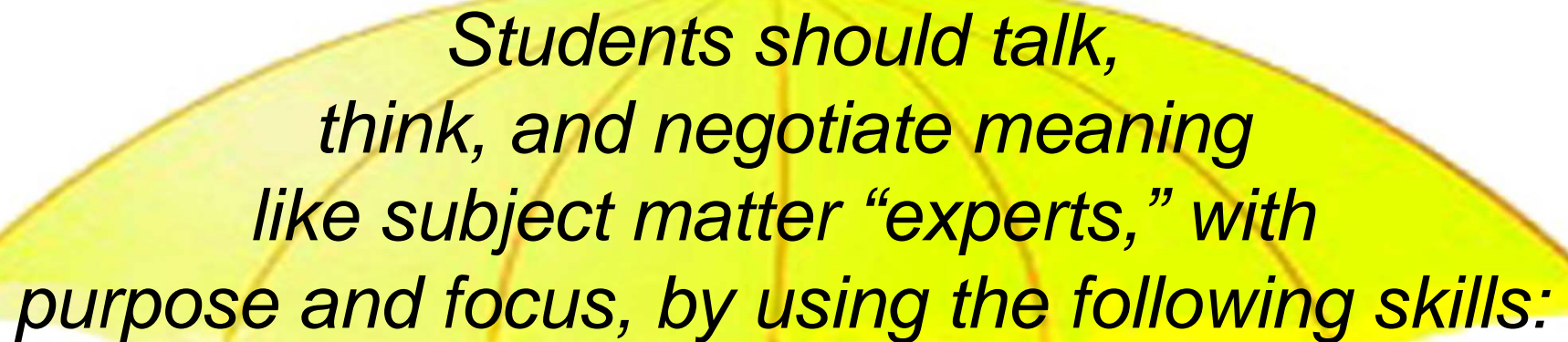
Conversation Feature 4: Negotiation of Meaning



Negotiating meaning

- Sandeep: I think it's (*The Giver*) about showing how evil humans can be.
- Tasha: Why do you say that?
- Sandeep: Because all those memories are described.
- Tasha: So, if all those things are so bad, what is wrong with those people who want to make sure the children don't know that stuff? I don't want to know all that stuff.
- Sandeep: We are better off knowing our past, even if it's bad.
- Tasha: Everything? There are a lot of horrible things that even we don't know about; they would give us nightmares and, I don't know.
- Sandeep: Well, maybe some stuff shouldn't be passed down to us. But we need to learn, too, from mistakes.
- Tasha: OK, maybe, but what bad things should we know about? What will help us learn and not do that stuff?
- Sandeep: I don't know, maybe things like nuclear bombs, you know, and war.
- Tasha: OK, but maybe not the gory details.
- 

What should happen in a productive academic conversation in your subject area(s)?

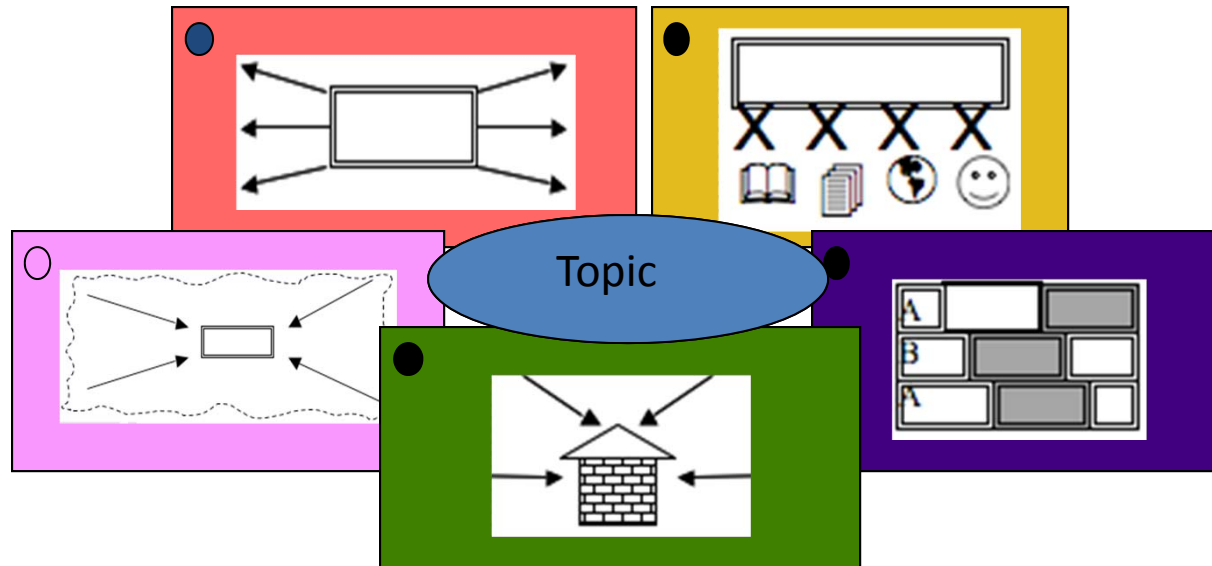


Students should talk, think, and negotiate meaning like subject matter “experts,” with purpose and focus, by using the following skills:

- Elaborate, clarify, and question**
- Support with evidence and examples**
- Build on & challenge partner ideas**
- Paraphrase ideas**
- Synthesize conversation points**

Developing Academic Conversation Skills

- Skills with symbols

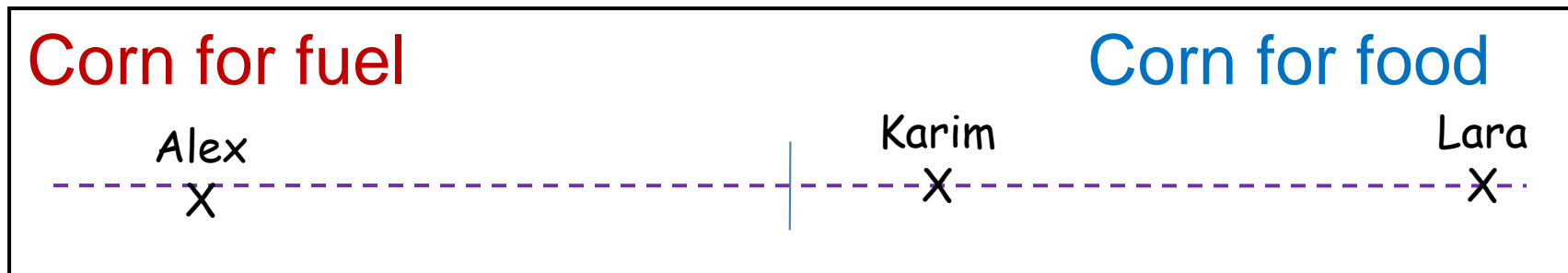


- Hand motions for prompts



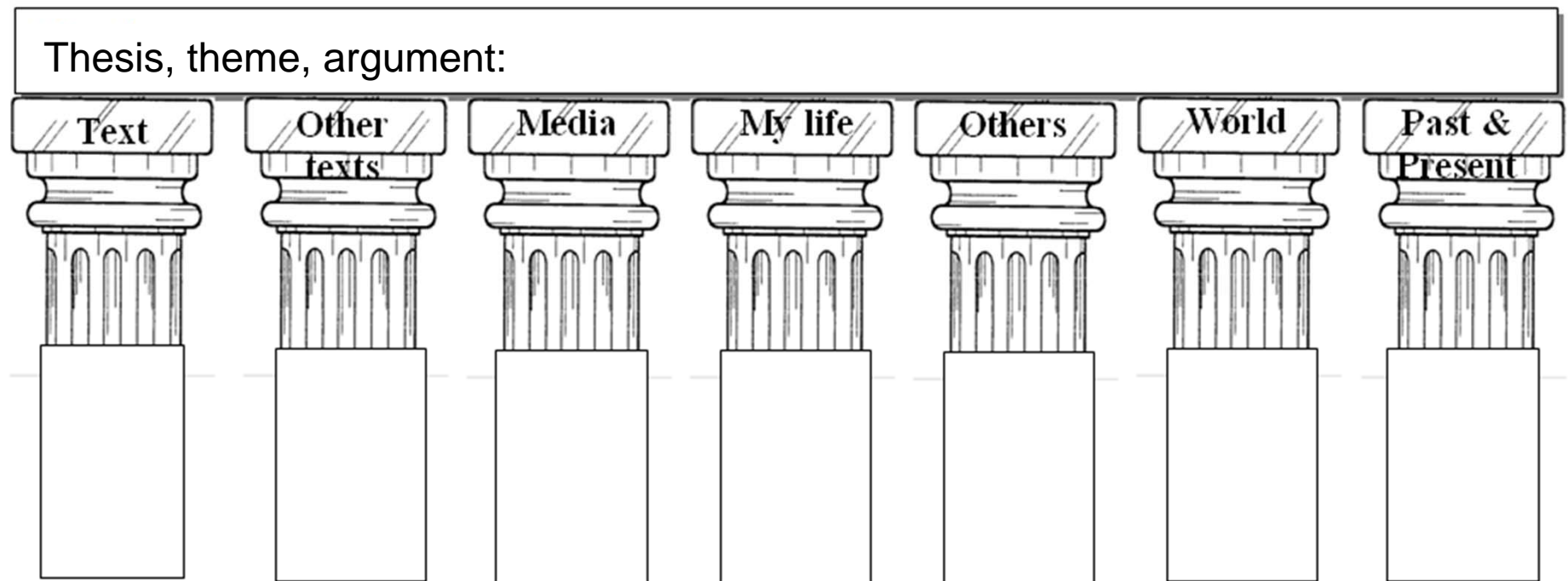
Activities for developing AC skills

ELABORATING & CLARIFYING: Opinion Continuum



Activities for developing AC skills

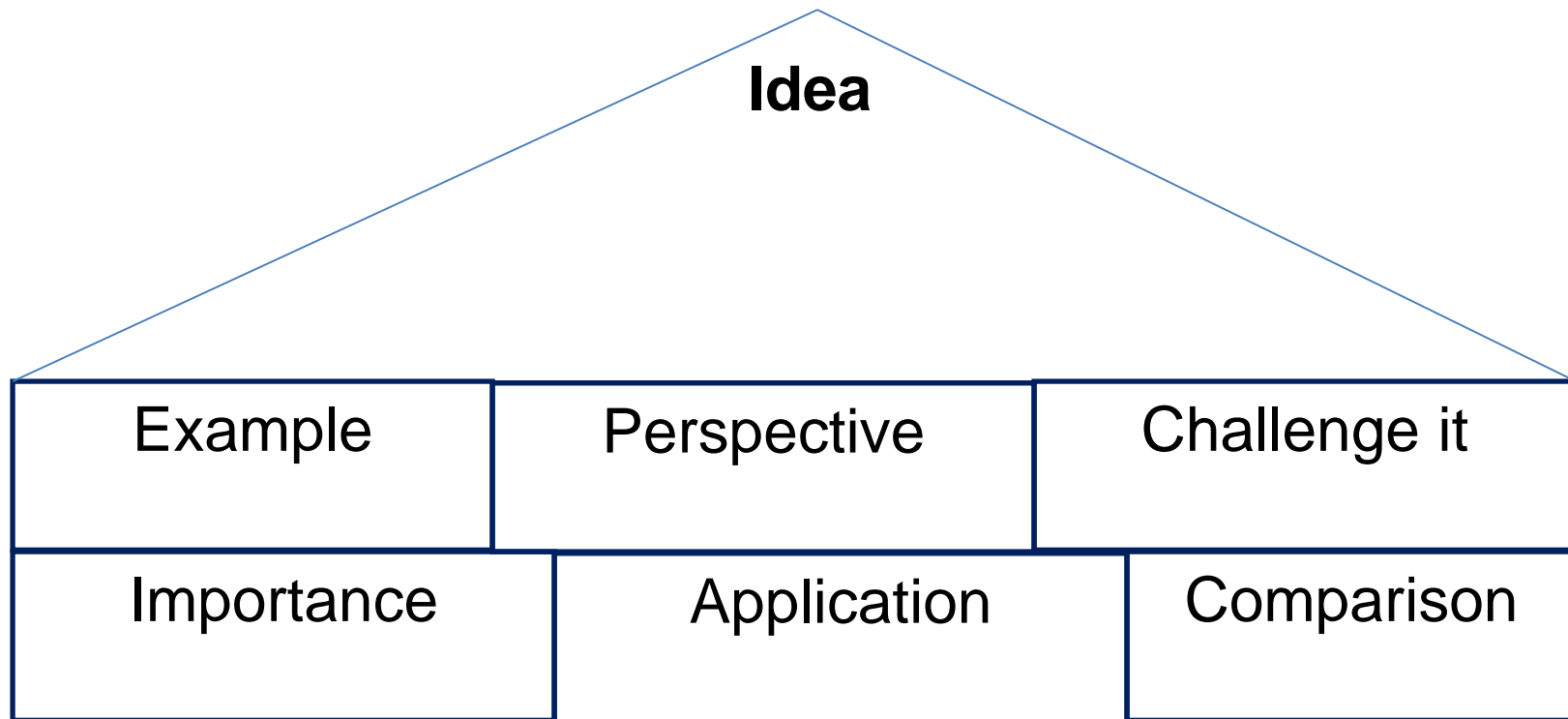
SUPPORTING WITH EXAMPLES: Evidence Columns



Activities for developing AC skills

BUILD ON & CHALLENGE IDEAS:

Idea Building



Activities for developing AC skills

PARAPHRASE: Interview Grids & Webs

Name	Compare bird and insect adaptations	Explain how crocodiles have adapted	Argue why dinosaurs became extinct
<i>Silvia</i>	Birds and insects can escape by flying	Fast in water; sharp teeth	Meteor started an ice age
<i>David</i>	Some bugs smell bad; others can sting you	They eat everything; camouflage	Smoking
<u>Safiye</u>		Very tough skin, they look like logs	They got diseases and ran out of food

What is your favorite holiday and why?

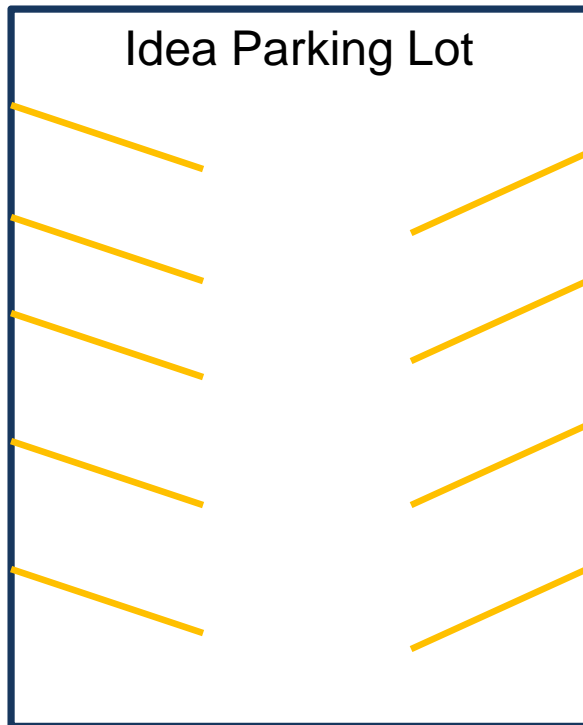
Etienne

Halloween because...


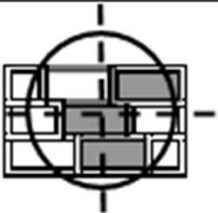
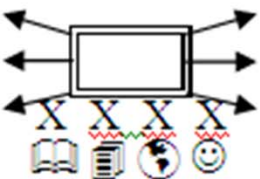
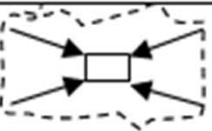

Activities for developing AC skills

SYNTHESIZE CONVERSATION POINTS:

Parking & Pruning Ideas



Assessment: Academic Conversation Rubric (Lang)

	<i>At or above</i>	<i>Approaching</i>	<i>Below</i>
	(T) Think and Talk like literature 'experts' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interpret themes & apply them to life - Connect to characters & other texts - Critique texts & author techniques - Use literature terms & syntax 	Make some connections, some complex sentences and literature terms, & deep thinking	Use short sentences, just social language (slang), few connections or perspective
	(F) Stay focused <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build on comments - Connect ideas to topic well - Negotiate conflicting ideas and word meanings 	Mostly on topic; some idea building and negotiation; few tangents & deviations; some confusion	Rarely connect or build on ideas; Many tangents & unrelated information Not negotiate differing ideas
	(S) Support ideas & opinions with examples from text, life & previous lessons; Clearly explain & elaborate on ideas	Some prompting for and support of ideas with examples and clarifications	Little or no support of ideas and reasons; lack of appropriate prompting
	(P) Paraphrase partner ideas to clarify, deepen, and stay focused; synthesize key points or steps at end	Some paraphrasing and synthesizing of key points or steps	Little or no paraphrasing and synthesizing
	(C) Use communication behaviors; actively listen (eyes & body), take turns, value partner comments, be	Some appropriate listening and turn-taking behaviors	Little eye contact or listening; interrupt; one dominates talk

Video 1: AC after Read-Aloud & Discussion



Notice: Student independence in conversations; teacher moves

Video 2 – Group AC (8th)



Notice: Teaching focus, interactions, teacher moves

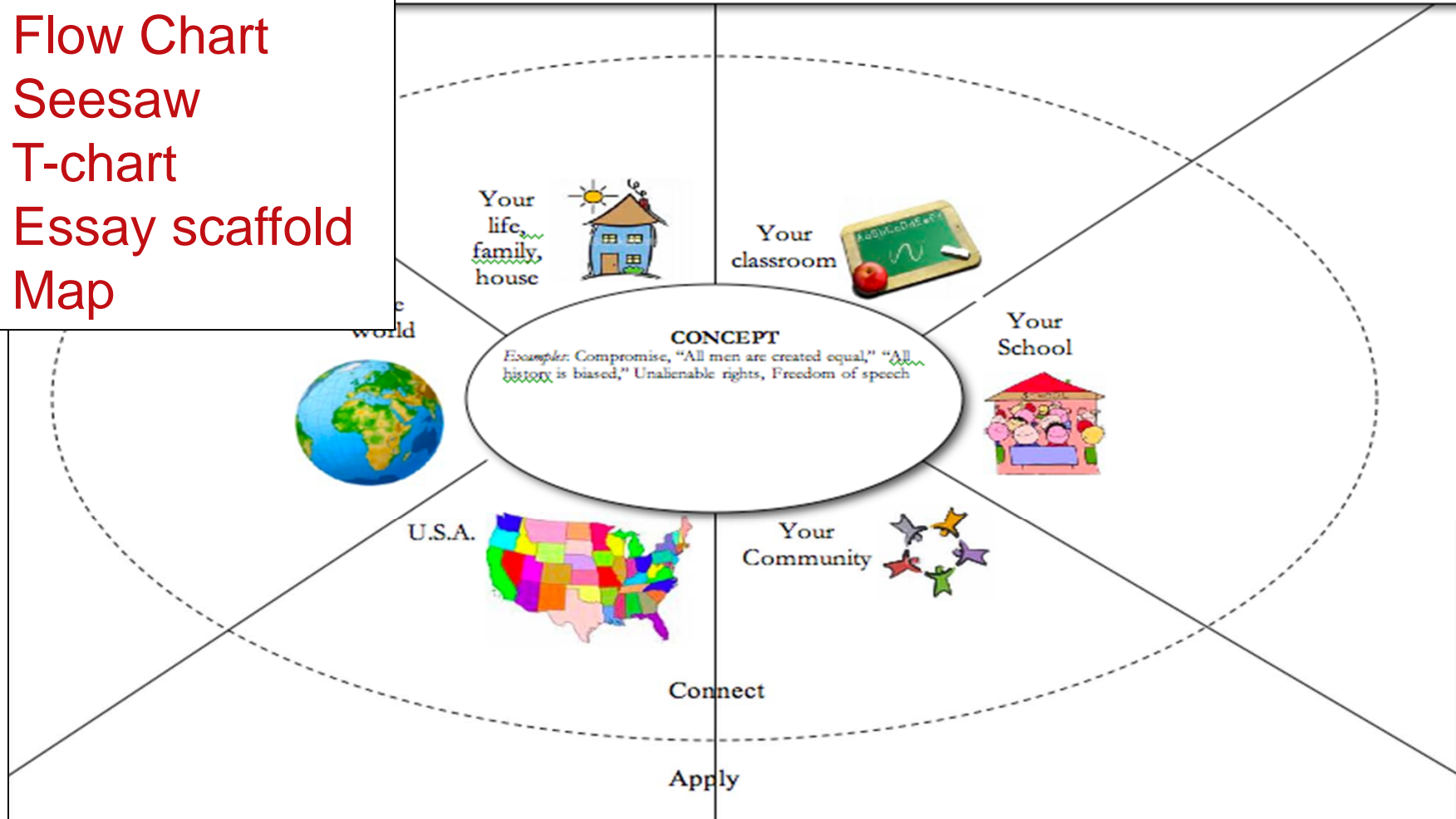


Visual Scaffolds for Conversations

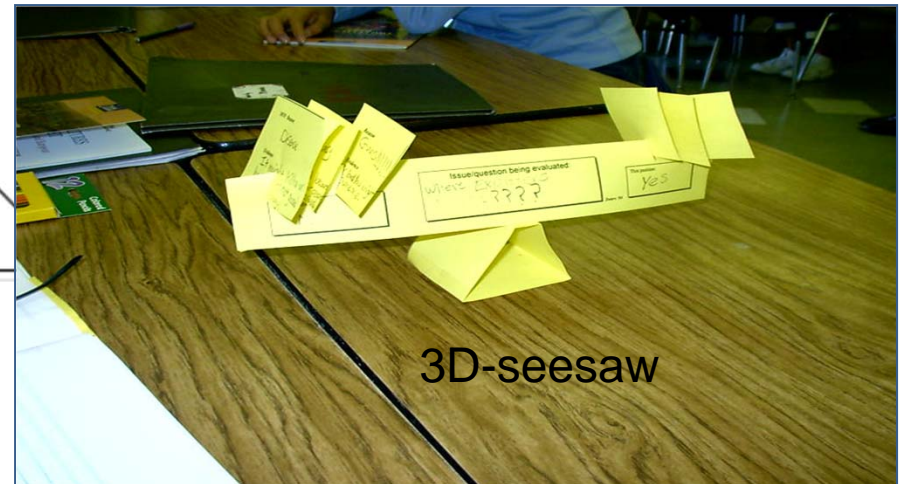
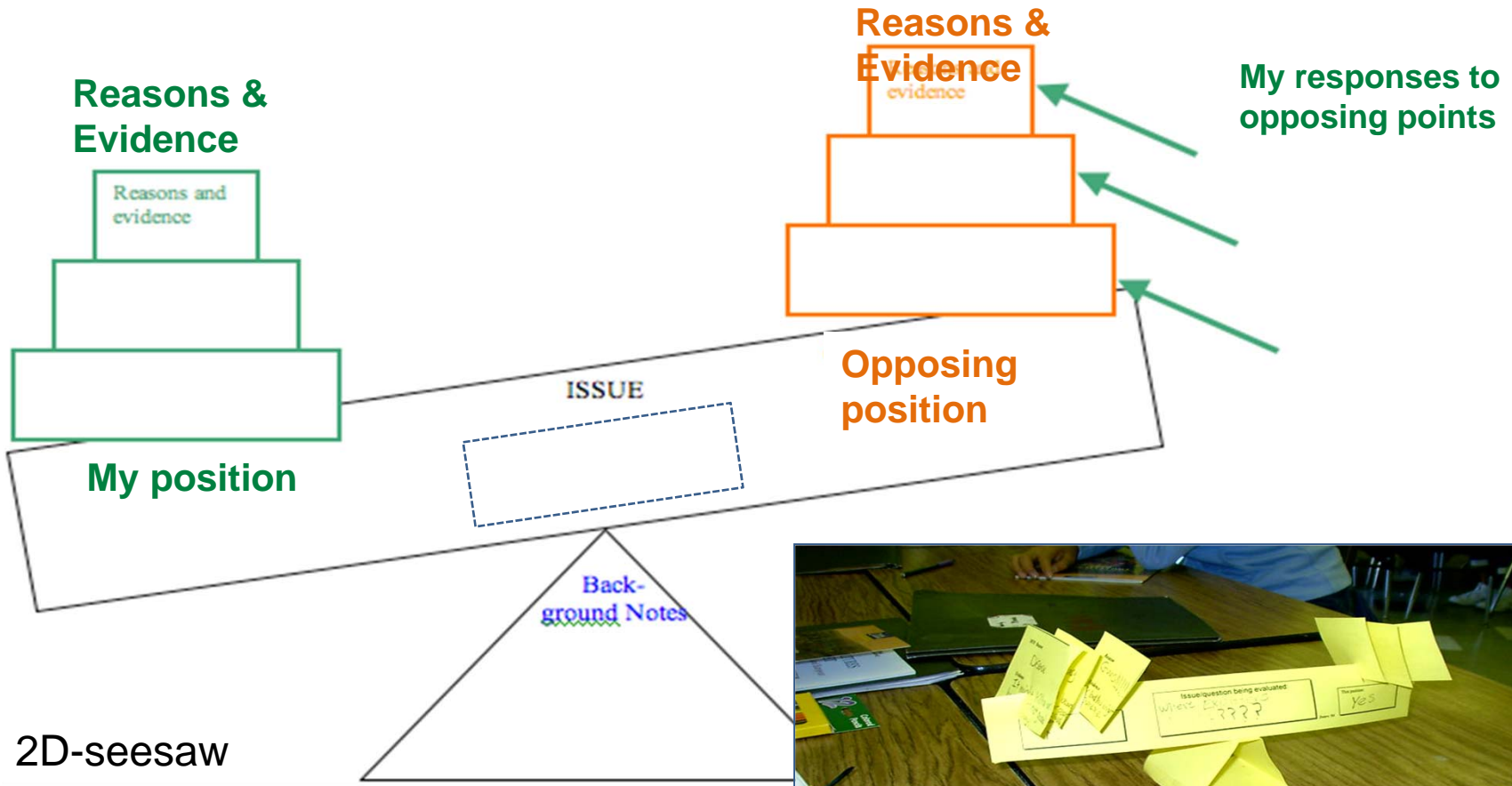
Venn Diagram
Data Table
Flow Chart
Seesaw
T-chart
Essay scaffold
Map

Connect & Apply Concept Map

cept to the past & present (to help understand it) AND apply it to the future (use it to improve)?



Persuasive Seesaw Conversation (& pre-writing)



Practice Academic Conversations

Identity


Excerpt of poem by Julio Noboa Polanco

**Let them be as flowers,
always watered, fed, guarded, admired,
but harnessed to a pot of dirt.**

**I'd rather be a tall, ugly weed,
clinging on cliffs, like an eagle
wind-wavering above high, jagged rocks.**

**I'd rather smell of musty, green stench
than of sweet, fragrant lilac.
If I could stand alone, strong and free,
I'd rather be a tall, ugly weed.**

Possible conversation prompts:

- Why did the author write this?
 - What does this poem try to teach us?
- 

Paired Synopsis



- 1. What are five core academic conversation skills?
(And their hand motions?)**
- 2. How can you use paired conversations in your discipline?**
- 3. What questions do you have about academic conversations?**

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Coding Academic Conversations

		Maria	Alex
1	Alex: Why did the author write the story?		T3
2	Maria: I think she wrote it in order to teach us that people are more important than money and that we shouldn't, you know, just be selfish.	T3	
3	Alex: Can you elaborate on the part about people and money?		E3
4	Maria: Well, you know, people are more important than money because they are.	E1	
5	Alex: I agree. Like in the story the man got a lot of money but lost all his friends along the way. I mean, we need money, but we also need friends to spend time with.		F3, E3, T3
6	Maria: And laugh with and talk with. Like, I need to talk with my friends all the time. Yesterday we talked a lot.	F1, E2, T1	
7	Alex: What do you talk about?		F2, E2
8	Maria: Things you wouldn't understand (both laugh). School and stuff. Now, back to the idea of friends and people. They, like, are more important than money because, well, we get bored without others. <u>There's poor people who are happy cuz they spend time with friends and laugh.</u>	F3, E2, T2,	
9	Alex: So you are saying that others can make us happy, even if we are poor, right?	C3	F3, C3
10	Maria: Yes, well, I don't know. But people are important.	F3	
Overall Communication (based on video observation)		C3	C2

Practice Academic Conversations

Choose your topic/text (handout). Have a conversation with a partner.
Use the symbols on the handout and use the sentence frames.

Language Arts

(poem)

History

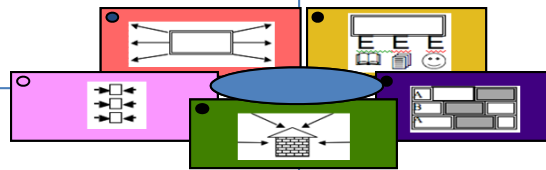
(myths)

Math

(interest)

Science

(resistance)



Reasons for Weaving Conversations into Each Lesson

- Learn to collaborate and build ideas together
- Allows for speaking practice--quieter students talk more in pairs and groups
- Connect with the materials on a more personal level
- Teacher can formatively assess understanding, thinking, language
- Keeps students engaged
- Share and learn different perspectives; empathy
- Students can get feedback on their ideas
- Producing language leads to greater retention
- Deepens content concepts
- Builds confidence,
- Builds independence of thought
- Socializes, build relationships
- Transfers to writing
- Skills needed in the future
- Trains students to listen
- Allows students to clarify ongoing thoughts
- Practice new and academic language
- Students hear language models



Skills for the future

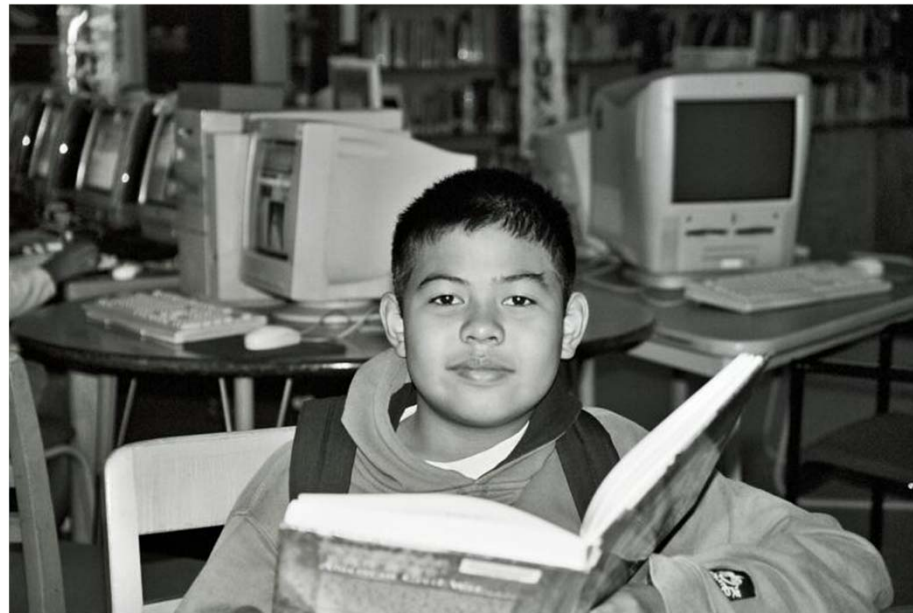
Pick three skills desired most by future employers

- _ Summarize
- _ Write clearly
- _ Ask questions
- _ Do well on tests
- _ Communicate
- _ Prioritize
- _ Solve problems
- _ Finish homework
- _ Follow directions
- _ See other perspectives



Converse with a Partner

What does it mean to learn?



Sample Transcript

A: Why do you think the author wrote this story?

B: Maybe to teach us that we should be who we're born to be.

A: Can you elaborate?

B: Well, in the story Charlie wants to be smart and his operation makes him smart, but then people don't like him. It wasn't natural.

A: Hmm. True, but I also think it showed that we all can be smart. And so what if science helps us? Science helps us be better in lots of ways.

B: Can you give an example of that?

A: Like drugs. When we are sick, they help cure us.

B: OK, but maybe only in certain situations, you know.