ACADEMIC CONVERSATIONS Highlights (Zwiers & Crawford)

I didn't know what I knew until I talked about it. -7th grade science student

- More than we realize we are the products of thousands of <u>conversations</u>. Conversations are exchanges between people who are trying to learn from one another & build meanings that they didn't have before.

- <u>Academic conversations</u> are sustained & purposeful conversations about school topics.

- <u>Trivial Pursuit view of learning/game-show pedagogy</u> – in which knowledge & intelligence are seen as an accumulation of routines & facts. Most high-stakes tests reflect this view, which in turn shapes curricula & classroom teaching practices.
- <u>Brick-hauling model of teaching</u> – Teaching is not meant to be like loading up a truck (a student' mind) with a large pile of bricks (facts) to dump out into a pile somewhere (standardized tests). Bricks are meant for building.

It was weird. When we finished talking, we had a totally new idea. -6th grade student

- Structured interaction activities are not quite conversations & allow students to work on communication skills with extra supports in place.

The book was only so-so, but our conversations about it were awesome. -5th grade ELA student

Find Your Partner
Create pair cards, such as states & capitals, multiplication problems & answers, famous first & last names, events & their years, sentences missing words, split-up sentences, abstract ideas with concrete examples, & so on. Hand these out & have students find their partner to converse. Another variation, using a deck of cards, involves pairing red numbers with red numbers & black numbers with black numbers (e.g. five of hearts meets with five of diamonds).

If not the, major GOAL for classroom learning is being able to transfer skills or knowledge to new problems or situations. That is, students should learn how to use the ideas & skills learned in one class in other classes & in the real world.

- <u>Use question-charged quotations & statements</u>. Effective conversations can result from questioning the meaning of a quotation or statement. A quotation can come from a famous person or from a text. It might even be a commonly held truth or belief. The statement should incite students to respond with some emotion, shock, or anger that the idea would be said or believed.
  - Examples:
  - "My paramount objective in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it." -Abraham Lincoln

- Often, engaging conversations come from talking about connections between school & the real world. Conversation has 2 parts: (1) to come up with a life lesson from the text & (2) to figure out an effective way to communicate the life lesson to an audience.
- <u>You can transform much of what you teach into tasks that might exist in the real world.</u> Many topics & concepts in all disciplines can be shaped into engaging problems & tasks that foster more motivation & ownership of learning.

- Example, an objective such as <u>learning to summarize</u> might be turned into this task:

   You are working at a publishing company & the director has asked you to write a synopsis for an advertisement of this book without giving away the ending. It needs to be …

- Teachers who use tasks to build conversation skills often comment that working on such skills increases the quality of the final product & because students are engaged in the tasks, the conversation practice is more authentic than quick "turn & talk" sessions during a teacher presentation.

- <u>Sentence Starters</u> (stems or frames)
   - *Have students use starters in writing.* Before they converse, have students use the starters in writing. Usually, teacher use conversing (or allow it) in order to get a good piece of writing produced. This strategy uses writing to help scaffold better conversations.

- <u>Weave Academic Conversations into Lessons</u>
   1. Students have an initial academic conversation to PREDICT the topic & MEANING of the text, using several quotations & key words from the text, along with the title.
   2. The teacher reads aloud the 1st part of the text, stopping at times to think aloud & discuss the purpose of the text, predictions, connections to life & questions. The teacher might personalize, but doesn't linger too long on personal connections. She molds them into examples for supporting higher-level themes.
   3. Student pairs silently read the rest of the text, stopping at agreed points to write down conversation ideas. They can stop twice to converse about the text.
   4. The whole group holds a discussion to generate possible topics for extended academic conversations. This is a time to build background knowledge, vocabulary & ideas that will fuel conversations. The class generates ideas to work with & negotiate – not answers to simply repeat during the paired conversations.
   5. The teacher & a student model a conversation skill in a mini-lesson or fishbowl.
   6. Student pairs hold academic conversations (sometimes these are also used to generate ideas for writing).
   7. Students write & provide peer feedback.
   8. Students read each other's writing & have academic conversation about the ideas in the written pieces.

I want to say … *(with friends)*	And yet a more academic way to say it is … *(in school & at work)*
That's lame! No way! That's stupid! Bogus" You are so wrong!	I disagree because … I see it another way.
What's your point? So what?	Can you summarize that for me?
That's shady.	That seems unfair. (or unjust, immoral)
That's sick!	That's exceptional. (or fantastic, exquisite, excellent)
That's good.	That's appropriate. (or proper, acceptable, effective)
Whatever!	I'm not sure that's relevant.