

Conversation Scaffolding

Objectives:

For some children, having a conversation is not a natural event. They may need work on some basic skills in a more structured activity. I've found they need to know such things as how to initiate a topic, the differences between making a comment and a question, how to change a topic, how to continue on a topic, and to how enter and exit a conversation.

Materials:

I have access to a die to cut multiple shapes out of paper. You can cut them by hand out of paper, if you wish. I use rectangles to represent comments, circles to represent questions, and triangles to represent when a topic is changed. Each person in the conversation gets their own color of shapes. This provides a good visual of who contributed to the conversation and what part they played.

Directions:

If this is the first time you have done this activity you may want to brainstorm and discuss the parts of a conversation as listed above. Have the students discuss topics they enjoy talking about and list them on a white board. This is helpful when a topic has been depleted and the conversation gets bogged down. Nominate a student to start the conversation with a greeting (depending on your agreed upon setting), and leading question on a topic. You will be surprised how often a student will start with a comment and not understand why the conversation is slow to start. The person with the leading question then places one of his circles on the table. Another participant then makes a comment and places a rectangle on the table in line with the circle. He may then ask another question putting his color circle down in line with the rectangle. If he changes the topic, a triangle is placed down as well. The conversation continues until the shapes are all placed down on the table and you have a good representation of the conversation. You can discuss how to exit the conversation appropriately. The student's then discuss who contributed comments, and questions, how often the topic was changed and if it was done appropriately. There is usually one student who hasn't contributed as much and another who may have contributed much more than the others. You may find another student changing the topic on every turn. If someone doesn't contribute much you can discuss ways to get people to be included more.