



Course Overview

The College and Career Readiness Standards for English ELA and Mathematics emphasize improving the quality of student-to-student discourse as a major feature of instruction. The new standards specifically describe the importance of students understanding the reasoning of others and engaging in meaningful conversations using evidence for claims. Yet this type of student-to-student discourse tends to be rare in classrooms. Common classroom activities, such as whole class discussions, jigsaws, and think-pair-shares, can have the appearance of constructive interactions, but they often do not provide adequate opportunities for all students to engage in academically rich, back-and-forth dialogues.

This short course looks closely at student-to-student discourse and addresses how to facilitate student engagement in the types of interactions required by the new standards. It organizes a massive collaboration of educators who wish to support students, particularly English Language Learners, to co-create and build upon each other's ideas as they interact with the content. Starting with the notion that in order to improve the quality of student discourse, educators need to listen closely to existing talk, the course asks participants to gather, analyze, and share examples of student conversations from their classrooms. The overall goal is for participating educators to better understand student-to-student classroom discourse and use what they learn to facilitate higher quality interactions that build disciplinary knowledge and skills.

Course Goals

- Develop a practical understanding of academically-engaged classroom discourse, with emphasis on what this looks like in linguistically diverse classrooms that are focused on teaching to the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards.
- Listen more carefully to student talk and use a discourse analysis tool to analyze student discourse, focusing on how interactions build disciplinary language, knowledge, and skills.
- Learn and practice practical teaching strategies for building students' abilities to engage in constructive face-to-face interactions.
- Collaborate with other educators and build professional relationships that result in an online community focused on improving students' abilities to engage rich academic discourse across disciplines and grade levels.

Topics by Session

Session 1 – Constructive Conversations

- Observe and analyze classroom conversations in order to gain insight into student discursive practices
- Examine how student-to-student conversations can be powerful ways to develop language, thinking skills, and content understandings.
- Recognize the features of constructive conversations (e.g., construct and clarify meanings, develop coherent idea(s), focus on lesson objectives, etc.).
- Form optional teams in order to collaborate and reflect on student conversations with other educators

Session 2 – Teaching, Facilitating, and Reflecting on Conversation Skills

- Identify insights about student language use in conversations (from assignment 1 and content knowledge) that can inform and improve teaching and learning in your setting.
- Consider several core conversation skills and how these may be taught in your setting.
- Design classroom activities that are authentic and purposeful, prompting the use of thinking skills in conversation in order to reach complex content understandings.
- Generate effective conversation prompts and clarify conversation purposes.
- Discuss and reflect on the process of designing and teaching conversation activities with others.

Session 3- Modeling and Scaffolding Conversation Skills

- Examine ways to model and scaffold conversation skills or moves
- Design and implement a lesson or activity that involves modeling and scaffolding of conversation skills appropriate to your setting.
- Build expertise in analyzing recorded student conversation samples, discussing how interactions build disciplinary language, knowledge, and skills and identifying next steps
- Involve students in the learning process, providing appropriate feedback during and after student conversations and sharing the analyzed conversation with them

Session 4- Cultivating Conversation Expertise

- Review what makes a student-to-student conversation "constructive" and the role of constructive conversations in the CCSS and other new standards
- Identify a particular area/aspect of classroom discourse upon which to focus and cultivate expertise
- Share learnings and insights regarding how to facilitate constructive conversations with others through presentations that can be shared with colleagues not taking the course
- Build educator conversation skills and identify next steps for working together as an online community

Throughout the course, opportunities are provided for teachers to connect their learning across sessions and to explicitly consider the implications of that learning for classroom practice. Teachers will also be able to revisit their work and reflections by viewing their individual Course Portfolios.