

# The Language of Learning

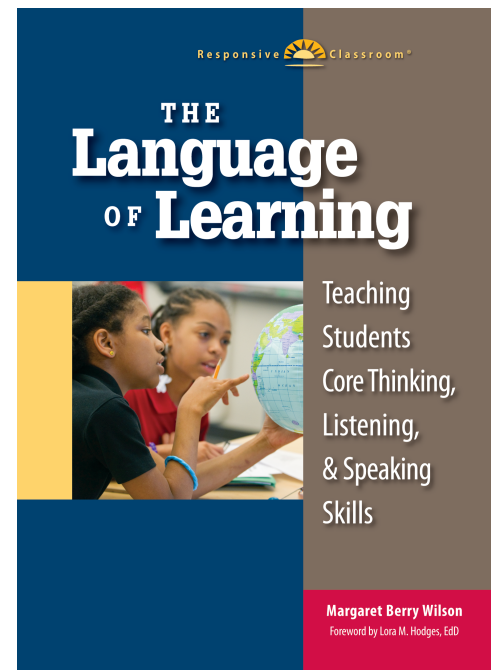
## Teaching Students Core Thinking, Listening, & Speaking Skills

### Introduction ■ The Power of Student Conversation

1. The author describes a classroom conversation in which students helped each other better understand a book's characters. Does her story call to mind a similar conversation in your own classroom? What were students discussing? How did the conversation come about?
2. Page 2 of the introduction mentions five skills that make for powerful academic conversations:
  - listening deeply
  - reflecting on what others are saying
  - expressing ideas clearly and persuasively
  - asking insightful questions
  - debating respectfully

Which skills are you particularly excited about teaching? Why?

3. Of the five important characteristics of productive student conversations listed on page 3, which do you currently notice most often and least often in your students' academic talk? Why do you think that's so? Does one characteristic stand out for you as particularly important for the students you teach? Why?



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## Chapter One ■ Listening Essentials

- 1.** The “student speech bubbles” on pages 25 and 28 in this chapter give examples of language you might teach students to use with each other as they learn how to listen carefully and respectfully. How would you adapt these examples to more precisely fit the students you teach and your teaching style?
- 2.** On page 11, the author notes the importance of modeling listening skills for students—that is, listening to them as you want them to listen to you and to classmates. Which of the three aspects of this listening—listen with your full attention, remember key details from conversations, avoid interrupting—comes most easily to you? How could you and your colleagues work together to continue refining your skills?
- 3.** Before teaching children to respond to a signal for quiet attention, the author suggests that you consider exactly what you want students to do when you use the signal (p. 12). What are some specific expectations that might work well for your teaching style and the students you teach?
- 4.** The author suggests a couple of ways to support students who struggle to restrain themselves from interrupting a speaker (pp. 33–34). Add some of your own suggestions to the list—these can be strategies you already use or ones you’d like to try.
- 5.** On page 14, the author mentions the importance of introducing the “smaller” skills of listening (voices off, bodies calm, eyes on speaker) during the first days and weeks of school. In your own classroom, at what points during the day would you do that teaching? What language might you use to introduce these skills to students?

## Chapter Two ■ Speaking Essentials

1. As you look at the guidelines for teaching the skills covered in this chapter (p. 44), which one seems particularly intriguing, puzzling, easy to follow, challenging to follow, or likely to have the greatest impact on students?
2. The author suggests three ways to provide students with ongoing support as they're learning how to take turns during a whole-group discussion (pp. 46–47). What additional techniques would you add to the list? (Name techniques you're already using or ones you'd like to try.)
3. As you think about teaching students to pause before speaking (pp. 56–59)—one of the key skills that will help them speak with clarity—in which situations do you think they'll find it easiest to practice that skill? In which situations will they likely find it difficult? How might you scaffold their learning in the difficult situations?

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ S C E N A R I O \_\_\_\_\_

A somewhat shy child, David has been making great progress sharing his ideas with classmates in small groups. Now you'd like him to extend those skills to speaking in larger groups.

Which strategies discussed in this chapter might you use to help David comfortably share his ideas with the whole class?

## Chapter Three ■ Asking and Answering Questions

1. The author says that when students learn to ask (and answer) well-crafted questions, they reach new and deeper levels of learning (p. 70). Have students asked questions that startled you with their wisdom, insight, or depth? Share one such question and describe the circumstances in which the student asked it.

### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ S C E N A R I O \_\_\_\_\_

Robert loves science and, as a result of his voracious independent reading, he knows a great many science facts that his classmates have yet to learn. Lately he's developed a habit of asking somewhat off-topic questions as a way of showing all that he knows. For instance, when students were working in small groups to begin exploring the life cycles of common insects, he peppered groupmates with questions such as, "Did you know that you should use vinegar on some bug bites and baking soda on others?"

Considering the author's ideas on pages 77–79, how would you guide Robert toward asking respectful, purposeful questions that deepen classmates' learning as well as his own?

3. On pages 82–84, the author describes a process for teaching students how to ask strategic questions. Would you adjust this process in any way for the students you teach? Describe a couple of ways of providing practice and support that you're looking forward to trying.
4. Choose one of the three question-answering skills described on pages 85–91 (understanding what the speaker is saying, referring to the question in the answer, answering questions concisely and completely). Do you think the students you teach will find this skill easy or hard to build? Why? How might you scaffold their learning of the harder skills?
5. When you think about the questioning skills you studied in this chapter, do any stand out for you as especially important for students to have if they're to meet Common Core and other standards and succeed in our 21st century world?

## Chapter Four ■ Crafting an Argument

1. Under “Why These Skills Matter” on page 102, the author lists several reasons for helping students craft good arguments. Which reason is particularly relevant to the students you teach? Why?
2. Anchor charts, as shown throughout this chapter, are a great way to help students remind themselves of the skills that will help them craft persuasive arguments: they’re clear and concise, and students can access them independently whenever they need to. What other supports have worked well or do you think might work well?

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ S C E N A R I O \_\_\_\_\_

Karen, an enthusiastic student, loves sharing her research with classmates, but they often don’t get the full benefit of her knowledge because she tends to deliver her information in an excited jumble, with her main idea buried.

Do you have a student with a similar issue? Which of the techniques mentioned in this chapter would you use to help your student organize spoken presentations? Do you have additional ideas you might try?

4. In this chapter (as in others), the author notes the importance of considering where students are developmentally when you’re teaching them the language of learning. As you think about the developmental characteristics of the grade level you teach, which of the essential argument-crafting skills (listed in the box on p. 106) might be most challenging for them to learn? Why? How could you support them while still maintaining high expectations for their learning?
5. The author suggests several ways to help students practice presenting evidence to back up their ideas and arguments. (pp. 120–121). What other ways of practicing this crucial skill might work for the students you teach?
6. When teaching your students the skill of persuading others (pp. 122–124), what examples of persuasive speech from history, current events, or students’ everyday lives might you present to demonstrate the importance of this skill?

## Chapter Five ■ The Art of Agreeing and Disagreeing

- 1.** On pages 141–147, the author talks about the importance of teaching students to agree thoughtfully—that is, to provide reasons and evidence for their decision to agree. What are a few ways you might explain, demonstrate, and give students practice in this skill?
- 2.** The often-heard maxim “We can disagree without being disagreeable” expresses one of this chapter’s key ideas. Thinking back on students you’ve taught, in which situations has it seemed easy for students to disagree calmly and respectfully? When has it seemed harder?
- 3.** Which of the skills mentioned on pages 148–161—disagreeing respectfully (giving reasons and evidence for disagreeing, questioning someone’s reasons and evidence), expressing partial agreement, and responding when someone disagrees—seem most important for your students to learn? Suppose you’ve taught them these skills. Imagine a discussion scenario in which you need to remind or guide them in using these skills. What might you say?
- 4.** The section called “Giving Meaningful Feedback” (pp. 162–164) suggests that using positive reinforcement is a powerful way to support students’ growth in using the skill of agreeing and disagreeing respectfully. Of the several examples of reinforcing language given in the “teacher speech bubbles” in this section, which sound most compatible with the students you teach and your teaching style? What are some other reinforcing statements that would “feel like you” and be appropriate for the material you typically teach?
- 5.** The author offers a sample letter that you could send home to parents suggesting ways they could help their child practice agreeing and disagreeing respectfully. What other ideas do you have for ways to engage parents in their child’s learning of these skills?