

Language Modeling and Conversations: Thick and Thin Conversations

Narrator: Welcome to this short presentation on Thick and Thin Conversations. This is one in our series of in-services on language modeling and conversations. This presentation is about ways to extend your conversations with children, how to make them longer, and how to increase the number of turns in a back-and-forth exchange. It fits into the foundation of our House Framework. The foundation represents Effective and Engaging Interactions and Environments. The foundation and all the components in the House Framework support school readiness for all children. By learning to engage children in longer conversations, you can help to foster their cognitive and social development, as well as their language development.

Let's think about some of the ways that a focus on extending the conversation can help young children. Extending the conversation provides models of appropriate conversation skills, supports higher-level thinking through use of questions that are meaningful, expands on children's language and thinking to include new concepts and ideas, and increases children's vocabulary by introducing and using new and appealing words. Well, what's a thick conversation? What's a thin one? Let's take a moment and listen to a thin conversation.

Teacher: One circle, two. What else do you need? Eyes. Are you putting hair on your snowman?

Girl: Yes.

Teacher: Yeah? Wow. What else do you need?

Girl: There.

Teacher: All done with your snowman? Snowgirl? Or is it a snowgirl? What are those?

Girl: Hands.

Teacher: Hands, oh.

Narrator: Now let's listen to a thick conversation.

Teacher: All kinds of snowflakes?

Girl: And snow right here in the house.

Teacher: Oh, you made snow on the ground! Oh, maybe we can make a chimney. Do you think?

Girl: Yeah.

Teacher: You have to stay warm. Are you going to make it?

Girl: Make it.

Teacher: Okay, let's see. Show me.

Girl: There.

Teacher: Oh, all done?

Girl: The chimney should be here.

Teacher: Oh, you think up here on the top?

Girl: Yeah.

Teacher: Should we make it up there?

Girl: There's snow on your house!

Teacher: Oh, no! How come my house got snowed? All around?

Girl: On the top.

Teacher: On the top, on the roof? Oh, we're not going to be able to go outside and play, do you think?

Girl: It's snowing!

Teacher: It's snowing?

Girl: Now under there...

Teacher: Oh, oh, you're snowing me in! What are we going to do inside the house?

Narrator: Hear the difference? Thick conversations have many back-and-forth exchanges between the adult and the child. Thick conversations have lots of opportunities for children to hear and use a variety of words and sentences. In thick conversations, adults respond to children's interests and ideas and help to expand on their understanding and help children develop new knowledge. And in thick conversations,

adults help children engage in more complex thinking by encouraging children to explain their thinking and make connections.

In the earlier module, we talked about getting conversation started. Now keep the conversation going. Make a comment on the child's interests or experiences, and then let the child take a turn. Ask a question about what the child is saying or doing, and then let the child take another turn. Or respond with a bit more information and keep the conversation going.

In this presentation, we've highlighted the importance of extending the conversation with children, making them longer, using new words, and guiding children's thinking about new ideas and concepts. Learn more about effective practices for making thick conversations in our other modules in this series from the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning. Have fun with your conversations. See our helpful resources and tips for teachers. Thank you for listening.