

## Language Modeling and Conversations: Asking Questions

Narrator: Welcome. This short presentation from the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning is about more ways to extend the conversation. This presentation focuses on ways to ask questions. Asking Questions is one module in our series on language modeling and conversations. It is part of the foundation of our House framework: Effective and Engaging Interactions and Environments. The components of the House support school readiness for all children. The components interact with each other and are essential for effective teaching. Let's see how asking questions or asking the right kinds of questions can help to extend conversations with children and enhance their learning.

Teacher 1: I know. No color in here, and Devin had a question. How did he make green?

Narrator: Asking questions is one way to extend conversations with children. But asking questions can limit or stop the conversation or they can extend and expand the conversation. Let's think about the kinds of questions that extend the conversation. What makes a question meaningful? What kinds of questions give children opportunities to expand on their own thinking and understanding?

Here are some ideas for questions that are likely to extend the conversation. They build on children's interests in things and ideas that capture the child's attention. It could be a question about a worm crawling on the sidewalk, or a new way to use a toy, or the food that's served at lunch. Watch and listen for what captures a child's attention: questions that extend the conversation request information that is not already known; questions that extend the conversation match the children's language abilities—they stimulate creative thinking and new ideas; and questions that extend the conversation demonstrate a genuine interest in the topic. Now let's listen.

Teacher 2: How are you getting all this water over there?

Boy: Because with the water...

Teacher 2: Let me see.

Boy: Look, it went fast!

Teacher 2: Wow! But I see a big difference. Look, this is nice, clean water, and what's happening to all this water?

[Children and teacher speaking in Spanish]

Boy: It turned into sand.

Teacher 2: It turned it into sand? Muddy and murky water?

Boy: Mm-hmm.

Teacher 2: Mm-hmm.

Boy: Why did it turn into this color?

Teacher 2: Well, what do you think happened to it?

Boy: With this sand.

Teacher 2: It got a little murky from all the dirt, yeah.

Boy: And it turned into sand.

Teacher 2: Very—it's almost like mud, huh?

Boy: Yeah.

Teacher 2: Oh, yes. Let me see, Anthony. Let me see how it goes down. Over here. Yep, what's making it go down?

Children: The water!

Teacher 2: The water's making it go down?

Boy: Yep.

Teacher 2: Do you think it—

Boy: [Inaudible] It's so strong.

Teacher 2: It is. Oh, Jason says it's very, very strong.

Boy: And it's going to—it's making a water pool.

Teacher 2: It is. But look, look how much is going all the way over there.

Boy: That's why the sand...

Teacher 2: So if you just leave the sand right here without the water, will it go all the way down? What do you think? You want to try? Okay. Okay, go ahead.

Narrator: What did you hear? Some questions were open-ended. There were lots of possible responses. Other questions started with "how" or "why." They guided children to expand their thinking, to make connections and comparisons, and to explain their ideas. But a conversation isn't all questions. You also heard comments and other thoughtful responses. A conversation has lots of turns, and both comments and questions.

Having longer or extended conversations with children is important. These conversations benefit children's language, cognitive, and social development. Take full advantage of your interest in children and what they have to say. In our module on asking questions, you can learn more effective ways to extend conversations and make them more productive. See our helpful resources and tips for teachers for more ideas. Please see our in-services in this series on language and conversations. Thank you for listening.