

Contrasting Cases to Support Teacher Noticing of Important Features of Discussion

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To support teachers learning to notice discussion features, we constructed contrasting cases of classroom discussion. Contrasting cases are juxtaposed examples that are chosen to highlight distinctive features or relationships (Gibson, 1969; Schwartz & Bransford, 1998; Bransford & Schwartz, 1999). For example, pairing wines side-by-side can help people learn to perceive subtle differences they might otherwise gloss. The purpose of contrasting cases is to help people learn to notice important features or dimensions so they can develop a more differentiated understanding of a concept or phenomenon. This can help people learn to distinguish one thing from another, recognize what features or elements are important, and better understand conditions of applicability. Here, we developed contrasting cases to help teacher-candidates and prospective teachers learn to perceive and differentiate important features related to the concepts of uptake and revoicing (Set 1, pp. 2-9) and valuing student language (Set 2, pp. 10-24).

Students work on the contrasting cases activities in pairs. Each student receives copies of the dialogs in the first set printed on separate pieces of paper. They work with their partner to (a) rank the dialogs from the best to the least good example of classroom dialog, however they define that, and (b) identify and record two to three principles that guide their ranking. Students can start with set 1 of the activity and then move on to set 2, modifying their principles if needed. The activity takes approximately 30 minutes. There is no correct answer in the rankings or principles, and the function of the activity is to help students identify, discuss, and refine their understanding of important features of classroom discussion.

Next, we recommend the instructor facilitate a whole class discussion about students' rankings and their principles, opening space for learners to talk about what they noticed and the principles they generated and why, and connecting to other instruction about classroom discussion in the course or professional development opportunity.

Contrasting Cases – Activity Set 1

Read through each of the following excerpts. They represent different potential dialogs from one small part of a class discussion. In them, students are using articles, maps, and graphs to decide whether or not the placement of toxic waste sites is an environmental justice issue. The goal is that across them, these short, targeted excerpts will highlight different features of how students and teachers are picking up and building on each other's ideas.

- A) As a pair, rank the 6 dialogs in order from what you consider the least good example of a discussion to the best example. There is no right answer here.

- B) Think about what made you choose the ranking you did, focusing particularly on the taking up and building of ideas. As a pair, identify 2-3 principles that guided how you ranked them. Taken together, your principles should explain the ranking of all the dialogs (e.g., for any dialog pair, someone should be able to look at your principles to decide which one you likely thought was better.) You should be able to imagine applying these principles to a new video or transcript of a discussion.

1)

2)

3)

C) What was your ranking of the six dialogs? Write the letters (A-F) in order from least good to best.

Least good

Best

Dialog A:

S1: I talked about how toxic waste sites are kinda like the lead paint we read about last week—they both make people sick.

T: Okay. Good! Someone on the other side of the room want to share? Can you add something new?

S2: I'd like to add that rich people don't get sick because they don't live by the toxic waste sites. They're just mostly by low-income neighborhoods.

T: Great! That's one perspective. Does anybody see it differently?

S3: Well, people could just move away from the toxic waste if they don't like it.

Dialog B:

S1: I talked about how toxic waste sites are kinda like the lead paint we read about last week—they both make people sick.

T: So, what I hear you saying is that the location makes it an environmental justice issue because they don't make people sick evenly, right? So, not everyone is impacted equally by the toxic waste sites. Someone on the other side of the room want to share? Can you add something new?

S2: I'd like to add that rich people don't get sick because they don't live by the toxic waste sites. They're just mostly by low-income neighborhoods.

T: Right! So, the map is showing us that toxic waste sites are usually located near low-income communities, where the article said people are more likely to have asthma and other health problems. David and Jose, it sounds like you are both saying that makes it an environmental justice issue. Does anybody see it differently?

S3: Well, people could just move away from the toxic waste if they don't like it.

Dialog C:

S1: I talked about how toxic waste sites are kinda like the lead paint we read about last week—they both make people sick.

T: So, what I hear you saying is that the location of toxic waste sites is an environmental justice issue because they make people sick. Can you tell me more about why you think it's a justice issue in particular?

S1: They don't make people sick evenly. Like, white people and people with money don't get sick as much.

T: Yeah. So not everyone is affected equally by the toxic waste. Someone on the other side of the room want to share? Can someone add to that using the data?

S2: I'd like to add that rich people don't get sick because they don't live by the toxic waste sites. They're just mostly by low-income neighborhoods.

T: How did you figure that out? Can you tell us what you saw in the map that told you that?

S2: I saw that the area around the toxic waste sites is red on the map. The red means that it's a low-income neighborhood, and the pink and yellow are more expensive houses. But the area around the toxic waste sites is red in almost every area of the map.

T: Does anybody see it differently?

S3: Well, people could just move away from the toxic waste if they don't like it.

Dialog D:

SI: talked about how toxic waste sites are kinda like the lead paint we read about last week—they both make people sick.

T: So, what I hear you saying is that the location of toxic waste sites is an environmental justice issue because they make people sick. Who gets sick more and who gets sick less...

S1: Like, white people and people with money don't get sick as much.

T: Yeah. So, not everyone is affected equally by the toxic waste. Someone on the other side of the room want to add? Maybe about what kinds of neighborhoods...Toxic waste sites are usually near...

S2: Near low-income neighborhoods.

T: Right. What told you that from the map? The area around the toxic waste sites is what color?

S2: Red.

T: Which means...

S2: Low income

T: Good. So we see from the map that low income neighborhoods are more affected, which makes it unequal and a social justice issue. Anyone see it differently?

S3: Well, people could just move away from the toxic waste if they don't like it.

Dialog E:

S1: I talked about how toxic waste sites are kinda like the lead paint we read about last week—they both make people sick.

S2: Can you say more about what you mean by that?

S1: Like, they don't make people sick evenly. White people and people with money don't get sick as much.

S3: I'd like to add to David because rich people don't live by the toxic waste site. The toxic waste sites are mostly near low-income neighborhoods.

S4: So, are you saying that the red on the map means that it's a low-income neighborhood?

S3: Yeah, and the area around the toxic waste sites is red in almost every area of the map.

S1: Ok. Let me try to summarize. The map is showing us that toxic waste sites are usually near low-income neighborhoods, and cause low income people more health problems. And that's why we think it's an environmental justice issue. Does anybody think something different?

S3: Well, people could just move away from the toxic waste if they don't like it.

Dialog F:

S1: I talked about how toxic waste sites are kinda like the lead paint we read about last week—they both make people sick.

T: Okay. Good! So toxic waste makes people sick. Anyone else want to add to that?

S2: I'd like to add that rich people don't get sick because they don't live by the toxic waste sites. They're just mostly by low-income neighborhoods.

T: Alright. You're saying rich people don't get as sick, and the waste sites are by low income neighborhoods. Does anybody else see it differently?

S3: Well, people could just move away from the toxic waste if they don't like it.

Part 2

Do your principles apply to raking these short dialogs? You can add to them or refine them your principles you'd like.

Dialog G:

S1: Like White people and people with money don't get sick as much from the toxic waste. So that means it's not fair.

S2: I agree with David because rich people don't live by the toxic waste sites. The toxic waste sites are mostly near low-income neighborhoods like we can see on the map.

Dialog H:

S1: Like White people and people with money don't get sick as much from the toxic waste. So that means it's not fair.

S2: I agree with David because pollution is really gross, like when there's garbage in the ocean and it kills the dolphins. People shouldn't pollute the earth.

Dialog I:

S1: Like White people and people with money don't get sick as much from the toxic waste. So that means it's not fair.

S2: People shouldn't get punished and get sick more because of where they live. They can't afford to move.

Names: _____

You will be given a set of excerpts with (6) dialogs each. Each set represents different potential dialogs from two different high school ELA class discussions. The goal is that across them, these short, targeted excerpts will highlight different features of how teachers respond to students in ways that value or devalue students' ideas and language.

Rank: As a pair, rank the 6 dialogs in order from what you consider the worst example of a discussion to the best example. There is no right answer here.

List principles: Think about what made you choose the ranking you did, focusing particularly on the valuing/devaluing of language and ideas. As a pair, identify 2-3 principles that guided how you ranked them. Taken together, your principles should explain the ranking of all the dialogs (e.g., for any dialog pair, someone should be able to look at your principles to decide which one you likely thought was better.) You should be able to imagine applying these principles to a new video or transcript of a discussion.

Guiding Principles:

1)

2)

3)

What was your ranking of the six dialogs? Write the letters (A-F) in order from least good to best.

Least good

Best

Text: Passage from Romeo and Juliet.

O Romeo, Romeo,
wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name,
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet

Dialog A

T: What do you think Shakespeare is telling us here about how Juliet is feeling?

S1: Juliet...I think she feels like *está atrapada entre dos mundos* and she want to be with Romeo.

T: I like how you were willing to express yourself in two languages there. Who else would like to share their thoughts?

S2: It's unfair. I ship them.

T: OK. You think it's unfair that they can't be together. Anyone else? Thoughts about what Shakespeare is saying here?

Dialog B

T: What do you think Shakespeare is telling us here about how Juliet is feeling?

S1: Juliet...I think she feels like *está atrapada entre dos mundos* and she want to be with Romeo.

T: Ok. Interesting. *Atrapada*. Trapped. Anyone else?

S2: It's unfair. I ship them.

T: You ship them? What does that mean?

S2: Like, want them to get together.

T: Ok. That's a new one for me. Ship. Anyone else? What do you think Shakespeare is telling us? What is Juliet saying in that last line? If Romeo will be hers she'll...

S2: No longer be a Capulet

T: Good. So she's saying she's so in love she'll give up give up being a member of her family.

Dialog C

T: What do you think Shakespeare is telling us here about how Juliet is feeling?

S1: Juliet...I think she feels like *está atrapada entre dos mundos* and she wants to be with Romeo.

T: Hmm. I don't think everyone understood what you're trying to say. Who wants to help? Who has something to contribute about how Juliet is feeling in this passage?

S2: She would give up her family for Romeo

T: Good! She says would give up being a Capulet..."I'll no longer be a Capulet"... to be with Romeo. Who else has something else to say?

S2: It's unfair. I ship them.

T: [S2] let's focus. We're talking about what Shakespeare is saying about how Juliet feels.

Dialog D

T: What do you think Shakespeare is telling us here about how Juliet is feeling?

S1: Juliet...I think she feels like *está atrapada entre dos mundos* and she want to be with Romeo.

T: *Está atrapada entre dos mundos*. I think you're on to something important. Can you write that on the board in Spanish? Let's use google translate to write it in English too for those who don't know Spanish. If you don't know how to spell it, you can say it into the phone.

[Writes on the board]

Está atrapada entre dos mundos.
She is trapped between two worlds.

T: Now we have the idea up in both languages. *Atrapada*, trapped. That's a powerful choice of words. What do you see in the text that makes you think she feels trapped? You can say it in Spanish or English.

S1: I think she's trapped between wanting to be a good daughter and be with Romeo. And also maybe like between being a kid and adult.

Dialog E

T: What do you think Shakespeare is telling us here about how Juliet is feeling?

S1: Juliet...I think she feels like *está atrapada entre dos mundos* and she want to be with Romeo.

T: Ok, but let's try to stick with English here in this class. Do you want to try again? What is Shakespeare telling us about Juliet's situation?

S1: I think her family would be mad, but she want to be with Romeo.

T: OK. She *wants* to be with Romeo, but her family would be mad at her. How do you know? What makes you say that in the text?

Dialog F

T: What do you think Shakespeare is telling us here about how Juliet is feeling?

S1: Juliet...I think she feels like *está atrapada entre dos mundos* and she want to be with Romeo.

T: Can you explain to those who don't know Spanish what that means? If you're not sure, maybe someone can help you translate.

S2: [S1] is saying it's like Juliet is like caught or trapped between two worlds (*está atrapada entre dos mundos*). Her family and Romeo.

T: So she feels caught or trapped. Can anyone say – what in the text would make you think she feels that way?

S3: Like she says she would give up being a Capulet. Or he could give up his name. They can't stay part of their families and be together. I totally ship them.

T: Ok. That's a new one for me. Ship. What does it mean?

S3: Like I want them to get together. Be a couple.

T: Why do you ship them? What makes you pull for them?

On this day, Ms. Luz was reviewing the “Do Now” activity and was fielding responses from youth about the relationship Julius Caesar had with Brutus. Specifically, she asked her students to reflect on and compare Caesar’s reaction to both the individual wounds he received from the various men who participated in his assassination with the final wound he received from Brutus, his supposed best friend. While Ms. Luz spoke to the entire class, only a few of her students responded, and like many other classroom interactions during her second semester course, the male youth dominated the official classroom discussion space.

This sequence began as Enrique and Ms. Luz discussed why Caesar was shocked when he saw Brutus among the men who conspired against him. Ms. Luz’ asked Enrique how we (the reader) can know that Caesar was shocked and saddened:

Dialog G

Ms. Luz: How do we know this, Enrique?

Enrique: Because Caesar trusted

Ms. Luz: Cesar trusted

Enrique: Brutus

Ms. Luz: Caesar trusted Brutus [writing on transparency]
And in fact when he's stabbed by all these men. He's jumped, right.

William: He wa--

Ms. Luz: He was stabbed by all these men

William: He was shanked!

Ms. Luz: Alright, so when he's stabbed by all these men. Isn't it a fact that he only reacts to his best friend, the last guy to stab him. The rest – he's more in shock. And just like trying to control his pain, or bleeding, or something. But when his best friend stabbed him. What does he say to him?

Enrique: I'm from the projects

Ms. Luz: He does not say "I'm from the projects" Enrique

Dialog H

Ms. Luz: How do we know this, Enrique?

Enrique: Because Caesar trusted

Ms. Luz: Cesar trusted

Enrique: Brutus

Ms. Luz: Caesar trusted Brutus [writing on transparency]
And in fact when he's stabbed by all these men. He's jumped, right.

William: He wa--

Ms. Luz: He was stabbed by all these men

William: He was shanked!

Ms. Luz: Hm. Is *shanked* another way to say someone got "stabbed?"

William: Yeah, *shanked* is like when someone gets stabbed with whatever, maybe a knife, maybe some other sharp object. It's slang for stabbed.

Ms. Luz: Cool. I've never heard *shanked* used that way before. It sounds so much more dramatic when you say *shanked*. I can almost feel the violence in the word. That's powerful. I can see using that word in a narrative because it's so evocative. Though maybe I recommend you use "stabbed" for your school essays, because some folks like me who read your work might not know what "shanked" means.

Alright, so when he's *shanked* by all these men. Isn't it a fact that he only reacts to his best friend, the last guy to stab him. The rest – he's more in shock. And just like trying to control his pain, or bleeding, or something. But when his best friend stabbed him. What does he say to him?

Enrique: I'm from the projects.

Ms. Luz: Are you suggesting that's something Cesar might have been thinking? Or are you making a personal connection to something about the projects?

Dialog I

Ms. Luz: How do we know this, Enrique?

Enrique: Because Caesar trusted

Ms. Luz: Cesar trusted

Enrique: Brutus

Ms. Luz: Caesar trusted Brutus [writing on transparency]
And in fact when he's stabbed by all these men. He's jumped, right.

William: He wa--

Ms. Luz: He was stabbed by all these men

William: He was shanked!

Ms. Luz: Shanked. Hmm. Is that gangster for stabbed? Alright, so when he's shanked by all these men. He was shanked. Isn't it a fact that he only reacts to his best friend, the last guy to stab him. The rest – he's more in shock. And just like trying to control his pain, or bleeding, or something. But when his best friend stabbed him. What does he say to him?

Enrique: I'm from the projects

Ms. Luz: Are you saying he's a gangster?

Dialog J

Ms. Luz: How do we know this, Enrique?

Enrique: Because Caesar trusted

Ms. Luz: Cesar trusted

Enrique: Brutus

Ms. Luz: Caesar trusted Brutus [writing on transparency]
And in fact when he's stabbed by all these men. He's jumped, right.

William: He wa--

Ms. Luz: He was stabbed by all these men

William: He was shanked!

Ms. Luz: Alright, so when he's shanked by all these men. Isn't it a fact that he only reacts to his best friend, the last guy to stab him. The rest- he's more in shock. And just like trying to control his pain, or bleeding, or something. But when his best friend stabbed him. What does he say to him?

Enrique: I'm from the projects

Ms. Luz: Enrique, please tell us what connection you're making between what's happening here in the play and the projects.

Dialog K

Ms. Luz: How do we know this, Enrique?

Enrique: Because Caesar trusted

Ms. Luz: Cesar trusted

Enrique: Brutus

Ms. Luz: Caesar trusted Brutus [writing on transparency]
And in fact when he's stabbed by all these men. He's jumped, right.

William: He wa--

Ms. Luz: He was stabbed by all these men

William: He was shanked!

Ms. Luz: What do you mean, he was shanked?

William: Caesar was caught off guard, stabbed, betrayed by one of his homies. Shanked!

Ms. Luz: Why did you decide to say shanked instead of stabbed?

William: Cuz the word shanked is more dramatic, more passionate than stabbed.

Ms. Luz: I totally see what you're saying, We've been talking about the language we use with different audiences. For example, the type of English Shakespeare used to write this play. Class, where or with whom might we use the word *shanked* instead of *stabbed*?

Anna: I think I would use *shanked* in our class for discussions and papers cuz I know you always try to connect with us and how we use language to express ourselves. But I know when I'm in other classes with other teachers, I'm not gonna say *shanked* cuz I get told not to use slang in the classroom.

David: Yeah, I think for a test like SBAC or college essay I would say *stabbed*, so I don't lose points or get judged for not speaking correctly.

Ms. Luz: Alright so when he's *shanked* by all these men. Isn't it a fact that he only reacts to his best friend, the last guy to stab him. The rest – he's more in shock. And just like trying to control his pain, or bleeding, or something. But when his best friend stabbed him. What does he say to him?

Enrique: I'm from the projects.

Ms. Luz: Are you suggesting that's something Cesar might have been thinking? Or are you making a personal connection to something about the projects?

Dialog L

Ms. Luz: How do we know this, Enrique?

Enrique: Because Caesar trusted

Ms. Luz: Cesar trusted

Enrique: Brutus

Ms. Luz: Caesar trusted Brutus ((writing on transparency))
And in fact when he's stabbed by all these men. He's jumped, right.

William: He wa--

Ms. Luz: He was stabbed by all these men

William: He was shanked!

Ms. Luz: Alright so when he's shanked by all these men. Isn't it a fact that he only reacts to his best friend, the last guy to stab him. The rest- he's more in shock. And just like trying to control his pain, or bleeding, or something. But when his best friend stabbed him. What does he say to him?

Enrique: I'm from the projects

Ms. Luz: Class, what does Caesar say to Brutus?