

CHAPTER 1

The Art of Conversation

Building and Reinforcing SEL Skills and Civil Discourse

Deeper conversations help people become explicable to each other and themselves. You can't really know yourself until you know how you express yourself and find yourself in another's eyes. Deeper conversation builds trust, the oxygen of society, exactly what we're missing right now.

David Brooks, *New York Times*, November 20, 2020, p. A27

When was the last time you had a powerful conversation that felt like the “oxygen” referred to above? Who was it with and what made the conversation have depth? How did you feel after the conversation ended?

The art of conversation—which is increasingly becoming a lost art—is something that dates back thousands of years and continues to be necessary for a positive outcome across most areas of life. Anyone trying to make a friend, get a job, find a partner, or even play certain video games will find their chances of success and enjoyment improved by effective conversational skills. These are skills that must be explicitly taught, reinforced, and supported throughout development. Students need these skills now and in the future.

The implications of conversations held within organizations have been examined by many researchers, including Perkins

(2003). They found that the kinds of conversations held can move organizations forward or backward. Forward-moving conversations, such as “foster cohesiveness of the group, leaving people feeling good about working together and looking forward to doing more together” (2003, p. 20), are especially important in times of stress, which unfortunately characterize so many classrooms and schools now. Perkins also distinguishes between conversations that are structured, directed, purposeful, respectful, and challenging and those that are superficial, disconnected, unfocused, and talk for the sake of talk; he refers to the latter as “coblubation” (2003, p. 149).

Sadly, many advisory period and homeroom chat times come closer to coblubation than purposeful conversation. Fullan (2005) points out that while general conversation times can be useful and feel positive, they don’t strongly contribute to building a positive classroom culture. Following Fullan’s analysis, this book was written to help improve upon the “oxygen” of classroom culture by promoting students’ social, emotional, and character development. As you’ll learn, this can happen in as little as 10 to 15 minutes daily by engaging students in systematic, strategic, thought-and-emotion provoking conversations in the classroom—what we call Morning Classroom Conversations (MCCs).

When conducted consistently over the course of a year, MCCs get students thinking about the world around them and their own opinions and values and create curiosity about what their classmates are thinking, feeling, and aspiring to do. When experienced over three years, MCCs have the potential to transform how students view themselves, their classmates, and learning. When conducted across multiple classrooms and grade levels, the conversations can be catalysts for transforming a school’s climate and culture.



REVISITING CONVERSATIONS YOU HAVE HAD

The word “conversation” is defined in most dictionaries as “a talk, especially an informal one, between two or more people, in which news and ideas are exchanged.” The key elements

here are “exchanged” and “news”—implying shared familiarity and, derivationally, making what is familiar to one person, familiar to the other also. However, the *value* of conversation goes far beyond the exchange of information. What makes conversations so important in human interaction?

Stop and think for a moment ...

Reflect on conversations you have had. What made your best conversations “genuine”? Did you feel heard/understood? Why? Did you want to talk to that person (or group of people) again soon? What about conversations that were non-genuine or unsatisfying? What was different about them? Let’s take a closer look.

It is likely in this reflection, you thought of terms like “empathy,” “emotional,” “compassion,” “gratitude,” or similar words. An effective conversation includes reciprocal discussion that allows for all individuals involved to feel heard and understood. When reflecting on a conversation, you might consider the following questions to determine if the conversation was genuine:

1. *Social etiquette*: Did the participants create a safe space, both figuratively and physically, for communicating? For instance, was personal space given? Was each person able to speak without being interrupted?
2. *Clarity*: Did participants express thoughts in a clear manner? Were inquiries made by the listener(s) to further expand understanding?
3. *Reciprocation*: Were both individuals allowed to share their “truth” and demonstrate vulnerability? Were all opinions recognized, respected, and validated?
4. *Interest and engagement*: How did you know that the other person was interested/uninterested in what you had to say? Consider verbal communication and nonverbal cues.
5. *Perspective taking*: Did all participants consider how others might feel? If power or status differentials were present, how were they acknowledged, monitored, and potentially adjusted?

6. *Common ground*: Were commonalities found, even among differences?

These six core sets of questions, though not an exhaustive list, can be helpful in a reflective way when revisiting old conversations. On the other hand, if you are planning to become a better communicator in the future, could these questions also be used in a preparatory sense? Of course! In fact, if you are to review these questions before entering a conversation, it is much more likely that you will be aware of your behavior and respond in a more genuine way. Additionally, these questions are a great self-monitoring tool during conversations. For instance, let's say you are in a faculty meeting where you were asked to break out into groups. You notice that your group is being particularly negative and you feel like you disagree with everything being said. By reviewing the aforementioned questions, you can think about ways to include all voices, model vulnerability by sharing your feelings, and do your best to find commonalities, even among differences. Ideally, your group members will notice the effort you are putting into fostering genuine conversation and will be more likely to respond positively and reciprocate your actions.

Using these tools helps in facilitating communication for adults, and the same is true for your students. In Appendix D, we provide rubrics that allow Conversation Leaders and students to track progress with regard to learning the components of good conversations, developing social-emotional learning (SEL) skills, and achieving positive outcomes as a result of engaging in MCCs. As with all things (think about how you learned how to drive!), what you focus on becomes a habit that runs like a program in the background. The same applies to students, of course. Guiding youth in effective conversations will lead these actions to become a part of their everyday behavior in ways they won't even realize but will benefit from greatly.

As you no doubt realized in your reflection, good conversations can be challenging. The types of conversations you reflected on were likely in person, but did you consider asynchronous conversations? Conversations are even harder

without synchronicity and depth. This form of communication is becoming increasingly common and includes text messages, tweets, and their many social media variations, emoji exchanges, and even email shorthand. Given that these are the types of conversations that many adolescents are having, you can see the importance of students being able to practice conversation skills. There is a necessity for real-time teaching and modeling in order to develop these skills with increased sophistication as students mature. More specifically, MCCs are meant to target Grades 5 through 12, recognizing that qualities of a genuine conversation may evolve throughout that developmental age span.



WHY ADOLESCENCE?

Human beings crave meaningful connection and want to feel heard, whether in person, by video, or through asynchronous exchange, and the adolescent population does not stray from that human desire. Erikson's developmental stages and more recent work by Damon and colleagues on the development of purpose provide a frame for understanding this need (Damon et al., 2003; Munley, 1975). As you may recall from your own higher education days, individuals from ages 12 to 18 are in the "Identity vs. Role Confusion" stage. During the transition from childhood to adulthood, individuals want to become more independent and begin to look at future relationships, family, education, and career paths to support the determination of who they truly want to be.

During this developmental stage, many adolescents' actions are attempts to answer the question, "Who am I?" and the question, "What can I become?" These are large, philosophical questions that are difficult for children to properly address and typically require a significant amount of unpacking. Another issue is that the answer to both of these questions suffers from social/historical baggage, including racism. Yet, young people are not seeking abstract answers but rather guidance for living their lives *now*, in a way that seems headed toward a meaningful future. This is where MCCs come along,

with the goal of expanding young peoples' horizons, their sense of personal possibility, and piloting them on their journey of social and emotional development. All students deserve to see themselves as engaged citizens whose voices and views matter and who, by their engagement, can make a difference and change past historical trajectories. As noted in *Educational Leadership* (Krahenbuhl, 2020), "classroom conversations should be a refuge from our fast-paced, me-first culture" (p. 28). They help students pay attention to others around them and attend more deeply to what they are saying.

SEL skills and character are essential tools to help guide adolescents on this journey. Especially during the middle school years, every day can seem life-defining. Friendships seem to be made or lost forever; good or bad test scores or performance in the arts or sports bring alternative futures in and out of focus. Skills in perspective taking, empathy, self-awareness, problem-solving, and getting along with others in various groups situations are put into use over time. Adolescents want and need to communicate about what they are feeling. Every generation of adolescents speaks in a variety of unique ways, especially, now, with social media and text and video messages. The desire for connection expands beyond speaking because adolescents also want to know that what they say has been heard. That's what happens in a good conversation; you know if you have been understood; and if not, you can correct someone right on the spot, and then the conversation can improve and proceed.

It's from the perspective of genuine conversation that students come to understand the limits of the abbreviated forms of conversation that many people, especially adolescents, use today. Without that perspective, many young people's view of themselves and their future is at the mercy of how their social media communications are made and responded to. As we know too well, this can take the extreme form of making adolescents hypersensitive to cyberbullying—even to the point of anxiety, depression, or suicidality. In order to protect youth from such potentially harmful situations, the goal is to help each student establish

a sense of purpose and positive self-esteem through foundational social-emotional skills and genuine connections, which are often established and sustained through good conversations.



HOW ARE CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS AND SEL CONNECTED?

For those of you who are familiar with SEL, a connection between SEL skills and genuine conversations may have started to register already. Although research has been studying SEL for years (Durlak et al., 2015), “SEL” has recently become the newest buzzword around schools. Educators now are increasingly recognizing the impact of SEL across many areas and the necessity of making time for such skill-building throughout all grades. While social and emotional skills, such as sharing, problem-solving, caring, and patience, are developed and understood based on modeling and practice in the home, children and adolescents spend much of their time in school. Just as reading cannot be reserved only for schools, social-emotional development, as well as character, cannot be reserved only for the home (Waangard et al., 2014). As we will show, MCCs provide an efficient vehicle for social-emotional and character development (SECD). First, however, it is important to provide clarity on buzzword terms as those who use these terms sometimes mean different things by them (Elias, 2013).

Explicitly defined, SEL is a “process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2018). As the definition implies, SEL is incorporated in nearly every interaction that humans have and is an ongoing process throughout life. SEL is a prerequisite for individuals to have the capability to interact appropriately with others and regulate feelings and thoughts.

TABLE 1.1 • CASEL’s Five SEL Competencies (adapted from www.CASEL.org)

Self-Awareness	Refers to understanding one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. This includes capacities to recognize one’s strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose.
Self-Management	Includes the ability to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations. This includes the capacities to delay gratification, manage stress, and feel motivation and agency to accomplish personal and collective goals.
Responsible Decision Making	Skills involved in making caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations. This includes the capacities to consider ethical standards and safety concerns, and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being.
Relationship Skills	Refers to being able to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. This includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem-solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed.
Social Awareness	Includes the ability to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. This includes the capacities to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

CASEL has delineated five basic competencies that comprise SEL skills: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills (see Table 1.1). These skills reflect what children need for success in school and life: they are going to have to be ethical problem solvers, understand their feelings and those of others, be able to take the perspective of diverse individuals and empathize with them, engage in nonviolent conflict resolution, and they will need to work effectively with people in groups, in both leadership and contributor roles. In CASEL’s most recent formulation, SEL is also essential for the reduction of biases of all kinds, including racism, and the promotion of equity grounded in compassion for others, particularly those different from oneself.

SECD is defined as “the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, take others’ perspectives, and establish positive, empathic relationships with others—competencies that are essential for the

development of all students" (Rutgers SECD Lab, 2018). What the SECD perspective adds is a recognition that skills need to be directed toward virtuous ends. So, SECD emphasizes students developing a sense of positive purpose and associated virtues, such as optimism, gratitude, and forgiveness. For adolescents in particular, being associated with making constructive contributions to others plays an important role in their identity development, and therefore in the motivation to learn and improve SEL skills. For simplicity sake, when SEL is used hereafter in the book, the authors are referring to their brand of SEL, which is SECD.

Each year, teachers around the world search for ways to help establish rapport and ensure their students feel connected to the classroom community. SEL skills are essential for this to happen positively and for supporting students' social adjustment, enhancing civic participation, and improving teacher-student relationships (Taylor et al., 2017; Weissberg, 2019). Students who are effectively taught social-emotional skills, on both an intrapersonal and an interpersonal level, are more positively adjusted to their schools, including those in marginalized groups (CASEL, 2013, 2015; Domitrovich et al., 2017). Not every school is using an SEL curriculum; even when they are used, they often are not sufficient to ensure these skills will be internalized and generalized to all aspects of students' lives. That's why MCCs were developed, as a way to exercise your students' SEL muscles. Put forth a small investment of time, daily or as often as you can, repeated over multiple years, and you have provided quite a meaningful and long-lasting repertoire of skills.

SEL skills are needed for youth to find their voice and become active members of society. Even as adults, you can likely think of a group of friends and/or family members where "sensitive topics" such as politics, racial injustice, or gender equality are not to be spoken about. Why is that? It seems simple for adults to generally get along with each other and help others, but an increasingly polarized society encourages avoidance of conversation, rather than making efforts toward continued practice with perspective taking, empathy, problem-solving, and embracing diversity. Therefore, the vulnerability and potential disagreement with which many

people are not comfortable stops many adults from engaging in important conversations. The reality is these conversations must be had, both now and throughout our future.

Similar to how these conversations must be had in adulthood, MCCs allow for students to make continued efforts toward understanding and equity. The students will get better at them over time, with your guidance. Some catch on faster than others, but just about anyone can learn to participate with patient support and encouragement from you and other students. Elias and Nayman (2019), in a civic participation program called “Students Taking Action Together (STAT),” have seen the benefits for students when they are given structured opportunities to identify an issue within their school/community, utilize a structured problem-solving model, create a plan, and carry out their change. With such a structure, students come to believe that their voices matter and that they have the potential to make a productive, collaborative impact. Not only does SEL support positive development, but the preventive nature of SEL can also decrease behavior incidents, reduce emotional deficits linked to mental health concerns like depression, increase resilience to adverse childhood experiences, and decrease substance abuse.



WHAT ARE MCCS?

By this point, you might be saying, “This sounds great, but what exactly is a Morning Classroom Conversation?” As we have seen through extensive research and shared practice around Morning Meeting, the transition from the home to school environment can be difficult for our students (Kriete & Davis, 2014). Although much existing research targets elementary-aged students, entry into school may be even harder for middle school and high school students. This is amplified in times of crisis or in traumatic contexts. If you ask most people, “Would you go back to middle school?” most would quickly respond, “No,” and there is a reason for that. Even at its smoothest, adolescent development poses significant challenges; in particular, the desire for connect- edness is strong but must be balanced off against fears

about social judgment. Further more, students will vary in the extent to which they want to acknowledge or express this tension. In an effort to address these underlying needs, MCCs facilitate classroom or group-based conversations for youth to develop a strong character both socially and emotionally.

The MCCs are meant to be a daily 10- to 15-minute conversation to start the school day, which allows the opportunity for middle school and high school students to transition from the outside world to the academic day. The length of the conversations is important, as anything too much shorter than 10 minutes may limit the depth of the discussion and anything much longer than 15 minutes may lead the students to become restless and lose interest in the topic being discussed. The potency of MCCs comes from their frequency, not from their duration on any given day.

In pilot MCCs, the conversations were often occurring during homeroom or an advisory period. As this could be considered underutilized time, fostering connection, conversation, and skill development are fruitful. We also understand that homeroom/advisory periods do not exist in all schools, so there are alternative implementation models explored further in Chapter 6.

MCCs can be led by you, the reader, who is likely a teacher, psychologist, social worker, master teacher, out-of-school group leader, school counselor, or others with ongoing responsibility for leading small or large groups of youth. “Conversation Leader” is the term used throughout this book for those who are guiding conversations, and the chapters that follow provide you with the preparation and materials required to engage in this role. The materials in this book will enable you to lead MCCs with your students and, in our final chapter, also assist you in how to prepare ways to introduce MCCs to colleagues via workshops, professional development, and collaborating with colleagues who have seen you put MCCs into practice and want to follow in your footsteps. For you (and for others who will engage in MCCs), introspection and self-awareness are imperative first steps in readiness, similar to the earlier part of the chapter

when you reflected on a good conversation in your life. By taking these steps, you are better able to create a safe and supportive environment, what is called the “brave space,” for your students to start their day.

If students know that their classroom always will be a place where their views are welcomed, their opinions respected, and perspectives expanded, they are much more likely to arrive ready to learn and more effectively engage in the classroom community (Vieno et al., 2004). Adolescents look forward to this time; sometimes it is like an oasis in a desert. Therefore, when Conversation Leaders start each day by opening the floor with a simple MCC prompt, you help students manage some of the strong feelings they are bringing in from home or about the prospects for the school day. Middle and high school students tend to generally focus on the self, so being given a voice at the outset of their day is appreciated. Then, they will be better prepared for the tasks of the learning day ahead.

THE UNDERLYING STRUCTURE OF MCCS

There are four major dimensions that comprise the framework for MCCs: skills, virtues, themes, and development. Through MCCs, youth will have an opportunity to exercise their SEL and conversation muscles together by strengthening skills such as emotion regulation, empathy, communication, and social problem-solving. Additionally, there are targeted virtues, such as constructive creativity and optimistic future-mindedness, in these conversations that intentionally connect to what is known about a youth working to establish their identity and sense of purpose.

In addition to virtues and skills that are necessary to support adolescent development, there are various *themes* throughout the school year that are generalizable to most schools (e.g., September, “Why are we here?”). These “themes” also can be adaptable to current issues within the class or school. Last, there is the *development* and expansion of the focus of students’ conversations and concerns over time. Students are asked to think in terms

of what is needed for them to create a *Better Me–Better School–Better World* as a focus for application of their skills and virtues. This developmental approach can be used to create a non-duplicative series of MCCs over a three-year period (if you are able to work with students over an extended time frame or if you are coordinating MCCs with colleagues who will conduct conversations with the same group of students over three years). Of course, you also can address one or more of the developmental stages within a single year. As you would expect, the more students are exposed to all three developmental stages, the more MCCs can deepen students' sense of purpose related to civic participation and social action. These four dimensions are further explored in Chapter 2.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM MCCS?

Pilot work in six schools yielded considerable feedback that was continuously used to improve the MCC structure and prompts. When surveyed about MCCs, one teacher's response captured it best: "Morning conversations were great."

Consultants reviewing feedback from meetings with teachers carrying out MCCs in pilot schools over the course of a year reported no negative feedback. Other feedback indicated that MCCs were used as a stimulus for journal writing, were valuable as a way to begin group counseling sessions, and led to fruitful discussions of culturally sensitive topics. Teachers also said that while they sometimes did not have time to complete their formal SEL lessons due to competing demands, it was not difficult to make time for MCCs. In this way, MCCs provide a consistent and ongoing thread for SEL skill and virtue development, regardless of what other formal SEL or character programming might be in place.

In Appendix D, you will find tools that allow for Conversation Leader and student self-tracking on the elements of good conversations mentioned earlier and on the development

of SEL skills. In addition, a tool also is provided to help Conversation Leaders monitor progress toward the intended outcomes of MCCs, especially when done daily over the course of year and when students can experience them for multiple years in the *Better Me–Better School–Better World* developmental sequence. These outcomes are summarized in Table 1.2.

TABLE 1.2 • MCC Outcomes

Students in my class/group get along well with one another.
Students work well together in groups.
Students are more willing to share during academic lessons.
Students are level-headed with regard to how they speak or act and rarely overreact.
Students appear to have more confidence when speaking to the class.
Students engage in productive conversations with their class/groupmates.
Students engage in productive conversations with me.
Students are respectful of class/groupmates opinions, even when they disagree.
Students are receptive to feedback about their ideas and communication style.
Students appear to be optimistic and have a growth mindset.
Students are willing to be generous to and forgiving of classmates.
Students are curious and creative and willing to “think out of the box.”
Students have a clear sense of responsibility as relates to school.
Students tend to persist in problem-solving, rather than getting thrown off by roadblocks.
Students appear to have a sense of positive purpose and a good moral compass.

THE CHANGING CLASSROOM ...

This book would not be complete if it was not noted that, during its creation, the nature of the classroom has been challenged by various societal factors, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the growing awareness of disparities and bias, the increased presence of social media and online

learning, and concerns about the lack of civic engagement and civil discourse. In response to the pandemic, some classrooms maintain social distancing, some have barriers between desks, and some are conducted in a remote environment. Some meet only on certain days of the week, and some have strict directions about where, when, and how students can move around in and out of the classroom. Some students experience various combinations of these. Even when classrooms are attempting to go “back to normal,” they do so with a heightened sense of inequitable and discriminatory practices, polarized views on many issues, and the knowledge that students will still spend inordinate amounts of time in front of screens.

SEL has gained significant attention during this time as schools consider how to continue social connection during remote learning, ways to integrate students back to school, best practices for maintaining a trauma-informed approach, ways to confront and counter racism, and, of course, the continued concern with academic proficiency and reducing disparities in achievement. SEL skills are at the heart of redressing all these issues because they all are interpersonal in nature and require addressing strong emotions, taking many perspectives, and solving numerous problems. If students are equipped with the SEL skills to help them identify social cues and be more careful with their inferencing, they are more likely to develop a responsible sense of purpose both online and in person. This book is intended to provide you with the guidance to use MCCs to accomplish these goals, and as questions arise, Table 1.3 can direct you where to find the answer!

TABLE 1.3 • MCC Question and Answer Guide

WHAT YOU MIGHT BE WONDERING	WHERE YOU CAN FIND IT
How does the MCC framework help youth?	Chapter 2
Can my school pick skills, virtues, and themes that relate to our population?	Chapter 2
How do I go about getting started with getting MCC off the ground in my classroom/group?	Chapter 3
Do I need to create the MCC prompts or do you provide them to me?	Chapter 3
What is a brave space?	Chapter 3
Do I need to do practice conversations before engaging in MCCs?	Chapter 4
What if some of my students have had MCCs in the past but others have never done an MCC?	Chapter 4
What if the homeroom period is already filled with other activities and I want to engage in this during my English classes?	Chapter 5
What if I start MCCs and my students aren't engaged?	Chapter 5
How do I prevent MCCs from taking up academic and core content time?	Chapter 5
What if I am a school counselor and I don't have a homeroom, is there another format to engage students in these conversations?	Chapter 6
What if I can't do MCCs every day with my group?	Chapter 6
Can MCCs be done in other contexts outside of a classroom?	Chapter 6
How do I differentiate for the unique needs within my classroom?	Chapter 7
How do MCCs progress over the years?	Chapter 8
How do I adapt MCC prompts to include more than one developmental stage in a single year?	Chapter 8
Can one Conversation Leader do this or does a whole school need to buy in?	Chapter 9
What if I am an administrator/lead teacher and want support in how to get my Conversation Leaders to buy in?	Chapter 9

Chapter Wrap-Up

Understanding the research and motivation behind the MCC program is crucial in creating genuine investment and commitment with students and Conversation Leaders. We began by revisiting the lost art of conversation. Looking at what worked best and not so well in past conversations helped illustrate the importance of SEL skills in carrying out those conversations. For adolescents, being able to listen to classmates and not just worry about what they want to say and what others will think about them is the start of developing their sense of positive purpose. In school, at home, in the community, and as part of the wider world, our students need to learn to speak with one another using empathy and fostering connection. To address this need, Morning Classroom Conversations were introduced as daily 10- to 15-minute conversations for students, Grades 5 through 12, implemented by teachers, school mental health professionals, or others with the ongoing responsibility of a group of adolescents. The goal of MCCs is to accomplish building a closer, more productive, inclusive, and caring classroom environment while also further developing students' SEL skills, character, sense of purpose, and overall wellness.



Reflective Conversations for Growth

At the end of each chapter, there are a series of questions to help you reflect on the chapter you just read. This “Reflective Conversations for Growth” is imperative to your development as an MCC Conversation Leader because it will allow you to have something similar to an MCC with yourself, your colleagues, and/or an SEL expert. As a Conversation Leader, you will want to explore the steps you might need to effectively prepare for MCCs. By doing so, you will deepen your learning and readiness and have the opportunity to think about how best to navigate your MCCs within the school, what support might be needed among colleagues, and the community resources that could help you.

These conversations are organized into the following sections: (a) Action Steps/Priorities, (b) Adaptations, (c) Challenges, and (d) Questions. With one or two questions or points to consider for each of these areas and consistent usage of these subheadings throughout all Reflective Conversations for Growth, the reader is allowed an opportunity to contemplate on chapter content in an intentional, organized way.

(Continued)

The Action Steps/Priorities questions are meant to help the reader reflect on the content of the chapter to determine what should be included within their action plan. By considering priorities, the many elements embedded into the chapter can be organized into an applicable list of what matters most within their school. In addition to the Action Steps, we understand that MCCs will be adjusted and modified for the unique needs of each population. Therefore, the second set of questions explores Adaptations that will need to be made in order to make the MCCs suitable. Next, there is a set of questions related to Challenges. Typically, when exploring content, a reader is able to quickly consider anticipated obstacles within their school. Using the Reflective Conversations for Growth, the reader is able to anticipate these challenges and problem solve, accordingly.

At the end of each “Reflective Conversation for Growth,” you will be asked to consider seeking answers to questions that remain. Some questions and/or comments are encouraged to be submitted to the Social-Emotional Learning Alliance for the United States (www.SEL4US.org), and/or your state SEL4US affiliate to learn more about what is happening locally and nationally in SEL that might help you better bring MCCs to your students. SEL4US is an organization dedicated to increasing awareness of SEL and supporting high-quality and equitable implementation of SEL-related efforts. At the state and community level, SEL4US makes teachers, administrators, and all community members aware of the best ways to develop social-emotional competence among our youth. Additionally, there is sometimes a suggestion at the end of each chapter for readers to email the authors at morningclassroomconversations@gmail.com with any question specific to MCCs that cannot be answered by their administration or colleagues. The questions and answers will then be posted to the MCC website, resources.corwin.com/MorningClassroomConversations. By consulting with those in nationally and locally recognized organizations, as well as the authors when necessary, the reader will be better able to explore the content of the chapter in a unique way and consider what is working in other locations. So let’s give it a try ...

Now that you have seen the basic rationale for MCCs and why the art of conversation is so important to the development of youth civil discourse, SEL development and more, reflect on/write down the following and commit to taking the appropriate follow-up actions in order to continue to learn and grow as a Conversation Leader.

ACTION STEPS/PRIORITIES

List one thing you learned or gained from this chapter.

ADAPTATIONS

Note one thought about how the topics within this chapter will need to be adapted within your classroom.

CHALLENGES

Write about one difficulty that you foresee within your setting.

QUESTIONS

Note the question that you still have. What do you want to learn more about? Where will you find this information?
