CHAPTER FOUR
TALKING AND LISTENING

This chapter covers task talk and topic talk, considering the learner as both speaker and listener. *Informal Classroom Drama* covers other spontaneous talk, of a fictitious sort.

Listening is developed incidentally by many activities in this curriculum—by playing games, listening to recordings, viewing films and slidetapes, serving as audience for other students' performances, participating in writing workshops, and so on—but talking and improvising especially feature interaction. They call for an immediate response by making the listener and speaker constantly exchange roles. Having something to listen *to* is not all that is needed for exercising listening skill. The learner must have something to listen *for*—a good *reason* to listen. Purely as audience for a performance, he may respond only inwardly, and inner responses may be enough, for the moment. But listening often prepares for action, either now or later. And when the listener takes outward action right away as the result of what he hears—as in conversing and improvising—he learns to attend carefully and respond relevantly so that on those occasions when he does not take action immediately, his inner responses are richer.

To listen well one must truly *receive*, not jam the channel by transmitting at the same time. On the other hand, the perpetual sound issuing from electronic media and urban bustle numb many children to the point of simply tuning out sound. Classroom experience calling for responses by listeners acts as a corrective. The reason we do not isolate the treatment of listening in this book is that activities that *entail* attention, as a preparation for action of one's own, teach listening skills far better than special drills focusing on listening alone.

Talk can take on forms and purposes in school that provide learning of a sort seldom occurring in casual out-of-school conversation. Because vocal exchange requires the listener to comprehend and the speaker to compose, it's a good way to amass voluminous, timely, and well-motivated practice in getting and giving meaning. This process transfers readily to reading and writing. Comprehending ideas, relations, and styles presented orally helps a person understand these in a book. Listening is the foundation for reading at all ability levels of comprehension, just as talking is the foundation for writing at all levels of composition. Because constant practice in good interaction are the best teachers of speaking and listening, talk in small groups should be a staple learning activity for all grades and allotted a large amount of time in the curriculum.

When talk teaches, the speakers are picking up ideas and developing them: substantiating, qualifying, and elaborating; building on, amending, and varying each other's sentences, statements, and images. All these are part of an external social process that each member of the group gradually internalizes as a personal thought process: he begins to think in the ways that the group talks. Not only does he take unto himself the vocabulary, usage, and syntax of others and synthesize new creations out of their various styles, points of view, and attitudes, he also structures his thinking into mental operations resembling those of the group interactions. Good discussions by groups build toward good thinking by individuals.

Your job is to establish those small-group interactions that, when internalized by individuals, will most enhance the growth of thought and speech. For students the purposes for conversing need not, and in most cases should not, be to improve their listening and speaking skills, but rather to solve a problem, explore a topic, play a game, complete a group-chosen project, and so on. Although the most mature may appreciate the skills for their own sake, most youngsters need more practical and satisfying goals. Conversing activities should allow for this. The practices presented in this chapter aim to accommodate both their immediate motivation and longer-range goals.

A major issue for the teacher concerns how much to lead and how much to leave alone. The more you lead, the more those who have most to learn about conversing will speak to and for you only and be lost without you. And yet without some guidance from you, many youngsters will simply fall back on old vocal habits and not experience what good talk can do for them. Do allow, however, for the tremendous help that activity cards and other self-directing materials can afford in focusing and structuring group talk when you aren't there, especially to the extent that talk interweaves with other activities. You play your part in peer talk as much when you make or choose activity directions as when you influence their talk directly while it's occurring.

TASK TALK

An easy way to gain interactive experience toward topic discussion arises naturally as a by-product of doing other things. This "incidental" talk actually teaches a great deal about vocal exchange and often exercises thought and speech as much as discussion having only that goal.

■ GIVING DIRECTIONS

Whenever students are collaborating, a natural situation exists for giving and taking directions. The classroom should provide repeated opportunities for a member who knows how to do something to share what he knows with others, giving them step-by-step instructions. For example, a knowledgeable student might show others how to work certain equipment, how to make an art project, how to set up a science experiment, how to work a puzzle, or how to play a game. Giving directions poses one of the most challenging kinds of communication problems. See *DIRECTIONS*.

■ PROJECTS

Rather than necessarily focusing on the process of discussion itself, a group of inexperienced learners can focus on a concrete goal such as making a magnet, acting out a text, or inventing a new board game. Any collaboration calls for discussion—planning ahead and working out details along the way.

Putting together a collection such as a museum, collage, bulletin board display, or anthology involves selecting, ordering, and arranging items—a process that provides an important stimulus for task-oriented language. A group-produced TV show, radio broadcast, slide presentation, newspaper, book, literary magazine, encyclopedia with pictures, or catalogue of information, such as a telephone or address book or consumer's guide, requires considerable planning plus later maintenance talk.

Older learners can coordinate research projects by different groups on a common topic such as organic gardening so that a variety of information-gathering techniques like interviews, case studies, surveys, eyewitness reporting, library research, experiments, or journals might all contribute to final information-sharing, significant discussion, and a full-scale report. Such multigroup projects entail frequent exchanges to coordinate, compare, and otherwise interrelate.

■ GAMES

Disagreements arise when playing card and board games because players interpret or remember rules differently, so players have to remind each other, discuss their varying understanding of the rules, and refer to the written rules as evidence. Most folk games such as charades, Password, or Twenty Questions are known by different rules, and one of the valuable problems players face is to reach agreement on some version or compromise of versions of how to play. Generally, games entail as well other vocal exchange to monitor and maintain play. Game rules and materials provide the easiest way for students to get used to interacting without the teacher.

■ BRAINSTORMING

Much task talk centers on solving practical problems. Brainstorming is a technique for quickly bringing forth from a group a great number of different and stimulating ideas for solving a problem. Instead of weighing ideas as they come up, members "storm their brains" for further possibilities, withholding judgment for the sake of amassing as many solutions as they can think of.

A recorder who can write fast should put all suggestions on a blackboard or large sheet of paper where the group can see them. Each participant sitting in a semicircle can call out his thought or suggestion as soon as there is an opening, and the recorder should write it immediately. Participants should be encouraged to give off-the-top-of-the-head, rapid-fire thoughts, not apologizing for the wildness or silliness of any suggestion. Evaluation will come later. No analysis, editorial comment, or negative criticism of anyone else's ideas should be allowed. At this point, the more ideas the better. The goal is for the group to concentrate fully and build toward as intense an experience as possible.

Encourage groups to try out various graphic forms for recording their thoughts. They may start out with a simple list and then find that they are listing mixed things that they want to separate. So the recorder might list some things in

one place on the board or paper and other things elsewhere on it. Thus clumping and circling may help, and eventually the group may want to connect the circled clumps by hubs-with-spokes, branching, or some other means of mapping relations among the ideas.

Wait a while for the evaluation of the ideas—a day or so for older students. The next session can begin with the recorder reading all the ideas, and the group can classify them as:

- Good ideas that can be tried right away.
- Long-range projects or projects that need some rethinking.
- Unusable ideas.

It's in this second session that a true discussion occurs. The wealth of suggestions must be organized, reflected upon, and evaluated.

Any problem or subject of interest to the students is good grist for a brainstorming session. Problems may be personal ones (how to make friends), broad social issues (ways to help the homeless), subjects related to school (ways to extend readership of student writing beyond the classroom), or ways to do or make something (a way of watering classroom plants over weekends and vacations).

Older students may want to refine their consideration of a problem by spreading it over five brainstorming sessions according to the analytic structure below. Each session deals with only one question.

1. What is the issue, problem, or goal?
2. What has caused this situation or keeps us from accomplishing our goal?
3. What might we do to solve the problem or reach the goal?
4. Is there anything that will prevent us from doing this?
5. What should be our next steps?

Brainstorming builds facility, imagination, and confidence in individuals and will serve them in good stead when faced with improvising or writing tasks that call for quick-witted facility and abundance of concrete ideas. The critique and ordering of the suggestions that follow the initial brainstorming session foster analytical thinking and categorizing. At the same time, participants feel communal commitment to the ideas generated, which they view as the property of the group as a whole. As a way to develop a subject out of a practical interest, brainstorming represents a transition between task talk and topic talk.

TOPIC TALK

Topic talk exists primarily to deal with a relatively disembodied subject and is not merely a by-product of some other activity. Like problem-solving, however, talking about physically present objects or pictures provides a concrete approach to the relative abstractness of topic discussion.

■ SHOW-AND-TELL

A natural avenue of this sort at all ages is show-and-tell—if listeners are encouraged to participate and if the group is small (three to six). Although a fine transi-

tion from play prattle to speech modified for a listener, talking while showing belongs no more to small children than to adults, who do exactly this when they demonstrate appliances, explain exhibits, chat about a "conversation piece" on the coffee table, or use a skeleton to teach anatomy.

But as a school practice, it should be done in small groups without an adult leader. Large groups intimidate those who would most benefit from show-and-tell and discourage questioning, without which the main value is lost. The main value for the undeveloped child, whose utterances tend to be short, egocentric, and undetailed, is to encourage elaboration. For the more developed learner, small-group, interactive show-and-tell gives help in stating and organizing better the material he has begun to elaborate. The trick for both is to use dialogue to make the monologue fuller and better verbalized for an audience. This experience will improve written composition before pen ever touches paper.

Show-and-tell allows the speaker to take off from a familiar or loved object that he feels and knows more about than his audience does and that, by prompting ideas, helps him to find and sustain and maybe even organize a subject. But the very personal nature of the object challenges his egocentricity, for outsiders do not share his feeling and knowledge.

As he talks, he can look at the object and do things with it, which will suggest things to say, but his speech continuity can no longer merely follow the blow-by-blow continuity of his play. What he does is tell stories about how he got the object or what he has done with it, or give information about what it is and how it works. His speech diverges somewhat from the ongoing action, becomes more independent, and necessarily becomes more abstract. While pointing, he inevitably talks of some things that cannot be pointed to—the past, feelings, purpose, function, and certain general information. But to be an important kind of learning, show-and-tell must be taken seriously and made a flexible, staple process for any age.

PROCEDURE

Help students to come together in groups small enough to reduce shyness, encourage interaction, permit listeners to examine the object, and afford everyone a long enough turn without tiring the group.

Second, make clear through activity directions and by your own example that listeners should question and otherwise contribute. Let the shower-teller begin as he will. When he has said all that initially occurs to him, encourage the audience by solicitation and example to ask natural questions: "When did they give it to you?" "What happened to the wing there?" "What's the red button for?" "What do you do if you want to get the money out again?" "Where do you keep it?" "Do you let your brother use it?" These questions call for anecdote, explanation, and information. They are asked at first, if necessary, by the teacher and then by the other listeners as they grasp the possibilities.

Questions act as prompts that replace play as a cue for ideas. They cause the speaker to sustain his subject, to elaborate. With experience, the speaker will be more likely to anticipate questions and supply more information and background without waiting for questions to prompt him. Thus the monologue element will grow. A lot of practice in oral explaining can even influence the order of information—the mentioning of certain items first so that later items will be clearer. Questioning, then, allows the needs of the audience to influence the speaker.

Another sort of contribution from the audience can take the form of similar anecdotes or information summoned to mind in the listeners by what the speaker is saying. A good session can, in fact, produce a spontaneous "thematic unit" in this way that could lead to making a booklet or display together featuring similar objects and experiences. A pupil in Texas who brought to school an extracted tooth stimulated his listeners to contribute in turn their tooth stories, and another telling of an object he acquired while lost one day prompted his listeners to compare adventures when they got lost.

Third, the talk might be given a special focus by directions asking students to bring, on different occasions, something that (1) has a good story behind it, (2) they made or grew, (3) means a great deal to them, or (4) moves or works in a funny or interesting way. This is how show-and-tell can become something of a composition assignment. Narrative, exposition, and explanation are emphasized in turn by calling for objects that are associated with memories or that have certain characteristics.

Some objects were acquired in an interesting way or have had curious things happen to them; thereby hangs a tale (narrative), so the speaker must grapple with sequence and continuity. Drawings and paintings that he has done also contain stories—fantasies or real events—that the artist can relate as he explains his picture. If the speaker tells how he made or grew the object, he is describing a process. If he tells how he feels about it, he is doing a personal oral essay. Gadgets, machines, and other apparatus elicit explanation of purpose and operation.

Show-and-tell will grow as students grow, for their meaningful objects will reflect their maturing amusements, crafts, thoughts, and feelings. But for older students, call show-and-tell by another name to avoid suggesting that they are continuing a childish activity. Talking while displaying or pointing can blend with activities described in *Labels and Captions*, which features the coordination of words with things. Thus, show-and-tell not only parallels the juxtaposition of words and pictures in a book but also prepares for such monologues as slide-show and film narrations, display and exhibit explanations, presentations with an overhead projector, and sales pitches, all of which are activities to make available also. The television talk-show format provides a more mature-seeming occasion for older students to combine show-and-tell presentation with other dialogue.

To make the connection with composition, show-and-tell activity directions should include an option to write up the presentation and, after it has benefited from audience interaction, print it with others as a book of memories or how-to-do-it or whatever.

■ SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

By *discussing* we mean small-group topic talk, not what has generally been called class discussion, which is rarely a real discussion. The sheer size of a classroom of students precludes enough attention, participation, and interaction—three essentials for authentic discussion. To maintain continuity the teacher invariably talks too much. You may resort to prompting by questions to keep the discussion going, and most class members may play only the very restricted role of answering these questions, unless they are the loquacious few who carry on long monologues. Usually the questions are ones to which the teacher knows the answer. Serial exchanges between you and pupil A, then you and pupil B, and so on, may

serve another purpose, such as checking information or soliciting scattered opinions, but this is not discussion. Very experienced veterans of small-group talk may eventually become capable of making large-group discussion work, but if so that is an end not a means, for the amount of practice it affords a given individual always remains small.

Small-group discussion should be a staple, significant classroom process given the same kind of importance and commitment afforded reading or writing activities. It's through discussing that learners face the challenge of defining, clarifying, qualifying, elaborating, analyzing, and ordering experiences, concepts, opinions, or ideas, thereby developing their thinking and verbalizing skills for reading and writing.

Your basic job as the teacher is to create a good climate for conversation—relaxed but concentrated. The tone must be warm and friendly but not saccharine. Everything you do should show you truly value what your students say, well beyond mere polite attention. The art of conversing is at once a profound social and cognitive activity, based on real respect, not etiquette.

You may have to train at least some of your students to talk seriously to each other. Your hardest job will probably be to determine who needs training and how best to help them without keeping them dependent on you. See pages 50 to 54 in *SETTING UP* for general suggestions on forming and running groups.

It's easy to conclude erroneously that students don't know how to converse seriously and effectively, because many factors other than discussion ability can account for bad discussions. Aside from the number and personalities of the particular people forming the group, a major factor is motivation, which depends in turn on the nature of the topic, how it was chosen, why the topic is to be discussed in the first place, whether results will lead to other action, and what sort of warm-up, if any, preceded discussion.

EMBEDDED DISCUSSION

Until students have become seasoned discussants, they may not see the value of discussion for its own sake. To choose to discuss a topic with no warm-up or follow-up activities presupposes students who have already got used to good talk and know that it has its own rewards. Before reaching this point, most students of any age will need for the discussion to be embedded into a continuity of other activities leading in and out of it. We don't mean now merely task talk that accompanies other action, for that has no crystallized topic.

An example of topic talk embedded in a bigger framework would be a discussion of what the moral of a fable should be after reading it without its moral. Activity directions might say to listen to the fable, write down on a slip of paper what one thinks the moral should be, read aloud the proposed morals, then either choose one or fashion a new one that group members think expresses the moral best, and finally reveal what the author's moral was. Revealing the author's moral may, in fact, provoke further discussion if partners disagree with it.

The activity really just specifies how to go about discussing the meaning of a reading selection—or of a fellow member's composition—in a way pertinent to the fable form. In effect, the activity directions provide warm-up and follow-up for discussion and program the structure of it to the extent, for example, of forcing a summary statement—the moral the group members choose. The suspense about what the author's moral is adds interest to their own discussion, but the

main motivation is to compare their understandings of the fable and to work out one that fits best.

As this example suggests, various activities embedding discussion within other language arts activities may well set up successful discussion so that training may not be necessary. Discussion of both reading selections and each other's writing will often naturally center on topics. Members of a group reading a selection in common can follow the practice on page 161 of writing down questions or other topics and bringing these to the discussion. And whenever a writing-workshop group tries to work out just what the main idea of a member's composition is, that automatically focuses discussion on a topic (what the author's "theme" was). Talking about a text also furnishes knowledge common to all group members to which they can refer for evidence.

Other good embedded discussions occur when activity directions say to write about a personal problem (real or made-up) as a letter to an advice column, then to answer such a letter for each other. That is, each writes a problem letter and after these are read one at a time in the group, the members discuss the best solution to each. For one thing, this activity solicits topics from students themselves, which ensures a lot of motivation. Directions can follow up discussion by telling the group to draft a collective response or to write separate responses. These can be posted along with the problem letter for other students to read and judge. Part Three, "Developmental Speaking, Reading, and Writing," contains many other examples of interwoven reading, speaking, writing, drawing, or viewing photos, and so on that frame small-group discussion of topics.

Before you conclude that certain of your students don't know how to discuss, try some such activities. Letting students discuss topics drawn from social studies, science, or math will extend the possibilities of involved, purposeful talk. It is not the purpose of a discussion to convey information; that should be done elsewhere—through trips, reading, classroom pets, films, and life experience. But subject-matter studies can supply the information that students can put into meaningful frameworks of ideas by means of discussion, at the same time sharpening their communication skills. Citing information from one source or another should certainly become common practice in discussing topics.

ESTABLISHING CONDITIONS

Attentive involvement is the main quality of a good conversationalist. And the main problem is distraction, whether it comes from outside the group, from irrelevant private associations of ideas, or from entanglements of personalities. So, at first, you exert an influence against distraction and for concentration. This need not and should not be done in a disciplinary way. Members of the group are seated in a circle, perhaps around a table. A specific visual focus may help: they can write the subject on a placard or chalkboard close by, or place the picture or object within easy view. One teacher solved the noise problem in a ninth-grade class by placing a group in a corner of the classroom with a microphone and an interconnected set of headphones. An interesting advantage of this ingenious makeshift arrangement is that students listen more closely to each other and concentrate better.

The basic conditions for small-group discussion are matters of common sense. Group members need to agree on a topic, say what they think about it, listen to what others say about it, respond to what others say, and stick to the topic.

The question, about which teachers may disagree, is whether these commonsense conditions, which in fact define small-group discussion, need to be stated and taught to students as rules.

An initial presentation of rules may help some less mature children to conceptualize discussion behavior, which may, in turn, help them to achieve it. A demonstration by one group for the rest of the class may also help. Once good interactive habits have been formed, the rules can be dropped. Small children may like ritual, but procedure should be emphasized no more than is necessary to induce the habits. Sometimes "collaborative learning" becomes so formularized through elaborate briefing and debriefing and other structuring procedures that students lose control of their own speech, which then lacks the spontaneous interaction that makes discussion worthwhile.

You may not need to set up rules at all, depending on the development of your students, but can let them remind each other when they're all talking at once, not participating, getting off the subject, or asserting egos more than ideas. How much does common sense have to be taught? Actually, the best way for members of a group to deal with these problems is to listen to themselves as they play back tapes of their own discussions. Even primary children can hear what they need to change. Try this before deciding you should teach common sense in the form of rules.

Some teachers who have tried small-group discussion and been disappointed have concluded too readily that poor results meant that rules and a leader were necessary. If students are using the small-group discussion time to "get away with stuff" because you are not leading them, or if certain personalities deadlock the group, or if an inept attack on a topic leads to a dead end, it may well *appear* that the problem is the students' lack of understanding of how to interact. But we have to ask *why* a group isn't discussing well. Failure may have more to do with distraction, impulsivity, poor motivation, and egocentricity than with ignorance of commonsense principles of interaction. You will do better to gain insight into these causes, as you will through experience, than to rely on rules.

If, for example, discussants are not really involved in the subject, then of course the talk will fall apart. When small-group discussion fails, we find, it's usually because the teacher or the program has set the topic. As so often, student decision-making accounts for the difference. Or the particular people in the group do not know or trust each other well enough yet to talk freely. Or they may have chosen the topic and mix easily socially but need some practical framework or goal.

Before you make judgments about what ineffectual groups need, let them try topic discussion when it is embedded in integrated language arts activities, such as the fable example mentioned earlier, or such as the captioning of photos and other activities in Part Three, "Developmental Speaking, Reading, and Writing." The degree to which small-group discussion is isolated or integrated makes enormous difference in how well students go about it. Furthermore, many groups that fall apart or fail to follow commonsense principles will discuss well when following activity directions, which to some extent can build in the focus, the reminding, and the strategies that a teacher might provide. Habits of autonomous peer interaction in all other activities, finally, do wonders for small-group discussion in particular because the heart of the matter is social collaboration anyway.

TEACHING THE PROCESS

If well convinced from trials and observation that your students truly cannot discuss well without some training with you, then consider how you might best take

part in problem groups. Even students who *can* discuss without you might well benefit from your sitting in occasionally. But without *leading* discussion, you can establish a positive tone and model the ideal participant by listening closely, responding pertinently, calling attention to hang-ups in group functioning, and suggesting strategies for dealing with the topic. A major reason youngsters may not listen to each other is that they assume that they can learn only from adults, not from other minor critters like themselves. If you attend to and value their peer talk, they will also. As in many other matters, real attention establishes value. If you praise and blame, however, or otherwise make yourself the motive center of the group, students will talk to and for you, not to and for peers, and consequently will listen only to you and use the time while another member is talking to prepare their next bright remark for you to praise. The problem of inattention decreases as the peer-to-peer nature of the group becomes real to youngsters.

Fasten them on each other. When some students are not listening well to one another, you can ask one to repeat what another has just said. You should resist the temptation to repeat what a soft-spoken child has contributed, thus focusing the attention of the group on you. Ask him or a classmate to do that so you build toward independence from your leadership even as you exert it. The measure of your success is how well the discussion goes without you, how soon the participants can take over your role. By enabling youngsters to exchange with their peers in learning ways you are giving them a great educational gift for the rest of their lives. After all, any teacher's ultimate goal is to become unnecessary. If you need too much to feel needed, you unconsciously keep the students dependent on you.

ESTABLISHING THE MEANING OF THE TOPIC. Participants need to understand the question or topic in the same way, but is it better to discover discrepancies in understanding it at the outset, or will it be more valuable for learners to discover in the course of discussion that they are taking a term or concept in different ways? Suppose children are discussing animal communication, and it is clear to you that some are thinking only of mammals, with whom they identify much more than with birds, reptiles, or fish. (Discussion sessions give you important insights into students' concepts and knowledge so you can better fit other learning into the frameworks they already have.) A lot of good discussion consists of defining the topic itself.

You could post a rule that discussion should begin with taking turns saying what the topic or key words in it mean. Or while sitting in you could say that you think Ellen and Robin don't mean the same thing when they refer to the term or topic. Then they can check this out. Or you can help discussants habitually listen for this when playing back a tape. In other words, by instituting certain procedures you can head off a problem so that the activity "runs more smoothly," but the ultimate question is which way will teach the most. This is a typical sort of judgment that a teacher has to make. The better you know your students, the easier it is to decide.

Common understanding about the topic does provide a touchstone for relevance when the group is wondering if some utterances are getting off the subject. But of course the very exploration of a topic often leads to new conception of it—a discussion value that must be allowed for in setting a topic and sticking to it.

KEEPING THE FOCUS. Usually all that an off-subject utterance requires is a neutral reminder. But try to be aware of why students digress. If too many discussants wander frequently from the topic, you had better ask if the subject really interests

them, or determine what else the matter might be. They might discuss what would be a better topic. Digressing is, after all, mostly a matter of uninvolvement. Think of how difficult it is to divert even a small child from something he wants to do very badly. But digression may also arise because of involvement. Something just said may remind a child that "Daddy locked himself out of the house yesterday" or set him to wondering, "What would happen if a locomotive got too hot and started to turn red all over?" Though irrelevant to the group's present focus, these are legitimate private associations and should not appear as enemies to the teacher or as mistakes to the child. You simply say, "That might be a good incident to act out next time" or "You can suggest that for a later topic." No remark is ultimately inappropriate, only immediately inappropriate. All ideas get their time; another idea has the floor now.

REPETITIONS AND NON SEQUITURS. Immature discussants sometimes repeat what someone else just said. If you suspect this is caused by inattention, try asking, "You are agreeing with Joan, then?" or "Did you hear Joan say that before?" This lets the repeater know that he may have missed something and also shows that you are setting an example of listening. But consider the possibility that this person repeats as a way of trying to participate when he is not confident enough yet to venture his own ideas.

Another characteristic of immature discussion is abrupt change of topic. Some non sequiturs, however, are not born of inattention; a learner may be breaking new ground in another aspect of the topic. Help the group determine this and at least acknowledge that a shift *has* occurred. Do they accept this or want to shift back once they know what the non sequitur means?

Occasionally, when you feel that a certain remark is especially fruitful or difficult or deserving of thought, you might ask someone to paraphrase what was said. Such feeding back can help the speaker to know how well he was understood as well as sharpen listening among peers. Part of your role is to heighten awareness of pace so that ideas are given their relative due and the discussion thickens and thins at appropriate places.

THE IMPULSIVE INTERRUPTER. If someone seriously interrupts another's sentence, say, "Brad hasn't finished yet," in a factual rather than accusing tone of voice, or "Remember about waiting your turn"; or make a simple gesture that says, "Hold off a moment." In extreme cases, when a chronically impulsive child habitually interrupts, you may as well focus the group momentarily on this problem and discuss it before proceeding, if the group seems mature enough. Ask what they all might do to help the interrupter listen more and wait for his turn. The point is that when an individual problem impairs group functioning, it is then a group problem also, and time should be taken to restore functioning. Turning in annoyance on the individual culprit makes him defensive and makes matters worse; he needs rational help. If the group can think of no solution, ask the interrupter to act as recorder for several minutes, listening only, and perhaps taking notes, and then, when the time is up, to tell in his own words the gist of what the group said, and to voice what he thinks of what they said.

The interrupter's difficulty in waiting usually stems from one or more of three things—impulsive inability to delay responses, egocentric disregard for what others say, or overanxiety about having a chance to get attention. Small-

group rather than whole-class discussions will at least provide the interrupter with more opportunity for the attention from others that he needs.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION. A discussant who wants to talk doesn't raise his hand; his cue to speak is simply someone else's stopping. If you call on members who raise their hands, you inevitably become the focus of the group. Hearing out the last speaker and then starting to speak without signaling will help students listen to and focus on each other. Don't worry about silences. Usually people are thinking then. If you rush to fill silences, they'll feel there's something wrong with staying quiet for a while. Eventually you might ask a question they could ask themselves without you—that is, whether they've exhausted the topic or just need a new angle on it.

It may help shier members to have an understanding for a while that each member will say in turn at the outset what he thinks about the topic. Then members can comment on each other's openings. Groups discussing without the teacher may still want to agree to do this if members feel it useful. If someone doesn't participate for a long time, you can say, "We haven't heard from you yet," or "What comes to your mind about this?" Sometimes just looking at a person will draw him out. Reticent people may need a skillful alternation of encouraging and letting alone. They probably want help joining in but don't want to feel pushed.

QUESTIONING. One sort of participation you can model is that of good questioning. Occasionally interject questions calling for elaboration, clarification, or qualification. These should not be mere conversation prompters; they should express your real feeling that what a speaker has said is incomplete, unclear, exaggerated, or overgeneralized. Whereas a declarative statement to that effect sounds critical and omniscient, an honest question or request expressed unaggressively in a natural tone of voice can help the speaker think a little more. This can set a good example for the listeners, who may have found the statement incomplete or unclear too but were not aware that they did, or, with naive acceptance, did not realize that questioning might relieve their uncertainty. You might say: "Will you explain that a little more?" (clarification); "*All* animals?" or "Is there a time when that is *not* true?" (qualification); "Tell us some more about what they do because I'm not sure yet how that fits in." "Can you give some examples?" "What other possibilities are there?" or "What would happen if you did that?" (elaboration).

HELPING WITH HANG-UPS. Even if agreement about terms should head off some definitional misunderstandings, as new words and concepts are introduced into discussion, the problem may keep cropping up. If so, you might say, "Leon, I think when you say 'power' you're including a lot of things Anne doesn't have in mind." Or ask another member if he thinks those two students mean the same thing by the word. Either you or another student should try to say what Leon means and what Anne means. Leon and Anne can be asked if that is, in fact, what they do mean. In other words, hang-ups should come under discussion until, again, the group process continues unimpaired.

If you believe a disagreement stems from different information—Alice has seen so-and-so and Elmer has heard or read something different—you may ask them each, "Where did you learn that?" or "What do you think proves what you

say?" Partly, this questioning is intended to establish the habit of asking for, and giving, evidence. Documenting statements is something that small-group discussion should pursue eventually in many ways. Mainly, at first, you help the students to see how some disputes may be resolved by getting more or better information, or at least to see that different information is the source of the dispute. This could lead to research that could be brought into the next session.

For disagreements founded on different values, you can only remark, "Jeff and Carol seem to be arguing over a difference in what they like. He considers machines very important, and she doesn't because she cares a lot more about live things." This does not, of course, resolve the disagreement—which isn't your job—but it serves to clarify the basis of the disagreement.

Often, blockages reflect personal relations among the participants. If doing so does not embarrass them too much, you might remark, perhaps humorously, "Ed and Rick always seem to disagree, no matter what the subject is," or ask, "Do you always agree with Julia?" Another person may say, "Sure, they like each other." (Giggles.) "Do you think you can like each other and still disagree sometimes?" It's true that a teacher shouldn't meddle with students' personal relationships, but, as you can bring out, when feelings they have about each other interfere with the activities of the group, the group has some right to talk about them. As a general principle, whatever impedes discussion of the topic can itself become the topic until the way is cleared again. Metacommunication—talk about talk—is fair game as a practical matter of troubleshooting their own functioning. If members want to get on with their discussion, they have a good reason for wanting to improve their group interaction.

In some cases personality clashes can't be lessened by group attention, and what is needed is a change in the make-up of the group so that these students don't have to work together for now. Sometimes one student will so dominate the others that the best thing to do is to add new members who might challenge the dominant one.

Sometimes when discussants get blocked because they have exhausted all the ways they know to think about a subject, you can encourage them to think about the topic from a fresh point of view. If they're discussing shoplifting, for example, and they reach an impasse, you might ask them to consider the problem from the point of view of a store owner or law enforcement officer or insurance adjuster. They could even role-play these personages.

TOPICS

Discussants must choose their own topics, whether they make them up or borrow them. If students talk about what they care about, small-group discussion usually succeeds. But you may help groups to frame topics that best express their interest and to cast them in the most useful form. It makes a great deal of strategic difference, for example, whether a topic is a word ("Suicide"), a phrase ("The Increase in Teenage Suicide"), a sentence-statement ("Adult neglect causes teenage suicide"), or a sentence-question ("Why are so many adolescents committing suicide today?"). A yes-or-no topic like "School campuses should be open" invites an either-or response and thus may block qualification and refinement of thought. "When should ...?", "Who should ...?", and "Why should ...? will probably elicit more thoughtful exchange.

As students mature, topics can be stated so as to call for increasingly difficult thinking tasks. The following broad types of topics roughly exemplify an order of difficulty.

ENUMERATION. The kind of topic most appropriate for beginning conversationalists calls for listing or enumeration; for example, "How many different ways does an animal get food?" Listing is, in the first place, a simple kind of thinking but an important one, and we know that small children can do it and learn from it. Cognitively, the process is one of furnishing positive instances of a category, "Animal Ways of Food-Getting" or "Uses of the Magnet." This relates to concept formation. Disagreement occurs when an instance is offered—say, birds flying south to get food—and another child objects, in effect, that the instance is negative, not positive. (Birds fly south, he says, for reasons other than to get food.) If the category is vehicles, "sled" may be challenged as an example. These disputes lead to precision of concepts and finer discrimination, to more analytical thinking.

Second, listing requires the least sophisticated interaction among learners. Essentially, it is a piling of ideas, like brainstorming. A suggestion by one makes another think of something along the same line. Disagreement over instances, however, does represent greater interaction and a step upward from mere influence by association of ideas.

Enumerative topics may be of different sorts that can be roughly scaled to form a progression. For the youngest children the topics should be concrete, such as: "How many ways can you think of to use a ping-pong ball? A brick? A coat hanger?" and so on. For more mature learners the enumerative topics can call for categories that are more abstract, complex, or novel, such as: "How do people get other people to do what they want?" Finally, enumeration topics can call for listing in a rank order according to some system of priorities: "If you were leaving your home forever and could take only six things with you, what would you choose, in order of importance?"

CHRONOLOGY. Another kind of topic for beginners calls for chronological ordering—making up a group story, planning an action, or telling how something is made. Such topics could be interspersed with the enumerative kinds. Most often they will relate to other activities such as drama, writing, and making things. The purpose of discussion is to work out an order of events that is going to be carried out in some way. The process is one of building, act by act or step by step, which is relatively simple in itself but usually entails reasons for choosing one suggestion over another. Thus the main form is easy but invites some more complex kinds of thinking. Sometimes a group will think of things later that should have gone before. This backtracking and readjusting is something a closing recapitulation could help put to rights.

Planning an action also calls for chronological ordering. Questions such as "How are we going to arrange for the class to get here and not suspect our surprise?" or "How are we going to get John's bicycle back?" call for chronologically ordered steps. To deal with a question such as "How should we go about making a bird feeder?" both enumerative and chronological orderings may be needed. For example, in order to settle on the type of feeder, a listing of things that birds will be attracted to and will peck at might have to precede a session on construction.

COMPARISON. Enumeration can lead to definition and comparison topics by making the category one of similarities or differences but taking only one or the other at a time at first: "In which ways are cars and boats alike?" or "How are you different from a chimpanzee?" Dealing simultaneously with both similarities and differences—full comparison—is rather advanced and might come after experience with just one at a time.

ANALYSIS OR EXPLANATION. These topics call for analyzing something into components and explaining how or why something is as it is. Furnishing some sort of evidence to support the analysis or explanation naturally becomes important. Topics may be stated as questions of several sorts—yes or no, which or what, how or why, and so on. Some may be put as propositions to accept, modify, or reject: "When school campuses are open, students have a better attitude about learning." A more open topic of this sort that has proven very successful at many age levels is "Do you think it is better to be the oldest child in a family, the youngest, the middle, or an only child?" The topic is of universal interest, allows participants to draw evidence from their real-life experience as well perhaps as from literature and factual reading. It staves off crude dichotomy because it has more than two alternatives, and yet the alternatives are concrete and finite. In arguing among them one may do considerable reasoning and documenting.

The more students experience small-group discussion, the more they appreciate the importance of backing up their statements with evidence, because asking each other for proof makes up a good part of intellectual interaction as young people ask *themselves* why things are so. Evidence may consist of personal experience, others' anecdotes, consensus of opinion, the word of experts, research findings, or logical conclusion. Encourage group members to ask themselves what sort of proof it would take to persuade each other of their arguments. Some remote topics, like international affairs, however, make discussants depend so much on secondhand sources that they can hardly do more than parrot what everyone else has also read or heard.

The degree of truth in a selected proverb can make a good topic for analysis. Consider "A rolling stone gathers no moss" or "Birds of a feather flock together." Translating the figurative language into literal circumstances complicates the intellectual activity and gives it a literary twist. See *IDEAS* for more suggestions for discussion and writing topics.

OPTIONAL PROCEDURES

Recording discussion sessions of beginners can help them considerably to become aware of how much they participate, how they interact, when they interrupt, when they get off the topic, and what other strategies they might take toward a topic. Playing back amounts to feeding back to yourself, which is preferable to outsider commentary, although groups might agree to exchange tapes and respond, especially if they're interested in each other's subjects. Discussing their own discussions deepens perspective and heightens awareness. By watching and discussing these same tapes, teachers too can learn perhaps better than any other way what makes and breaks discussion.

Recapitulating or summarizing their own discussion gives group members extra learning benefits and frequently proves useful for a following activity. When a group feels it has finished a topic, participants simply try to say what they

remember that's important of the ideas they generated. Individuals amend or add to what the others remember. Activity directions may require a summary so that some conclusion can become the basis of further action, but even without follow-up, discussants will get satisfaction sometimes from feeling either some resolution of their topic or some advancement of it over where they started.

Sometimes groups may find that members disagree about which points were made. Or the effort to recall and pull together their ideas may stimulate further ideas. Occasionally the act itself of summarizing helps members clarify what they did say or decide. Once all the returns are in, perspective is sometimes different. Summation is an important kind of thinking, a further abstracting of what one has already thought. Younger children will content themselves with selective recollection, but as they grow, their manner of summarizing will also grow.

If its task calls for recording a conclusion, the group can appoint a scribe to write it down. In fact, it may want a scribe to take notes throughout the discussion as well. In this case, the scribe reads back the notes, and the other members amend if necessary and dictate a summary as they thrash it out. A common use for both scribing and summarizing is to report to classmates the ideas a small group comes up with in connection with a broader project. Often, then, the scribes may become spokespersons before the whole class.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Small-group discussion may evolve into panel discussion, which is discussion held before an audience but unplanned except for the designation of a topic. Panels become one of the options open to students who have had small-group discussion experience and are mature enough to take an audience.

In general, the only necessary preparation for a panel is deciding on a topic. Discussants need not be assigned positions in advance nor directed to prepare what each will say. Dividing panelists into teams, setting up debates, and choosing dualistic yes-or-no topics all promote dogmatism rather than flexibility. Panelists bring personal biases to a discussion anyway; they should not be prevented, by a prior commitment, from changing their minds, making concessions, or finding areas of agreement with other panelists. On some occasions participants might prepare by reading something about the topic beforehand.

If small groups are feeding into a large group like the whole class, the spokespersons might form a panel to report what their groups have said, respond to each other's reports, and then invite audience commentary. If the groups have been discussing the same topic at the same time, as "buzz groups," the panelists can bring to bear on a topic the ideas of a whole class. If the groups have been conducting different investigations related to a common theme or project, panelists can interplay these varying points of view.

A discussion before an audience can take on the qualities of a workshop, whereby the discussion process itself becomes the subject as well as the original topic. The panel might sit in an inner circle facing each other and the audience in a larger concentric circle surrounding it. After responding to the panel's ideas, and perhaps summarizing them as well, the audience comments on the panelists' interaction—helpfully and considerately, to be sure.

The audience benefits by becoming aware of aspects of discussion dynamics that are hard to remain sensitive to when one is participating—things that advance or block communication. For example, a panel may circle repetitiously, become

lost in trivialities, get distracted from a good line of thought by an irrelevance, fail to pick up and develop each other's points, or get hung up unwittingly on a hidden problem of definition. Some members may dominate or contend with certain others out of personal opposition, or stubbornly reiterate just for the sake of defense. One way to become aware of problems is to observe them taking place in *another* discussion group.

EXPLOITING AUDIENCE RESPONSE. A common experience for spectators is that they find themselves itching to get into the fray. While listening, they think of counter arguments, points left out, other sorts of ideas stimulated by the panelists. This is an excellent educational moment that can be exploited in three ways. One is simply to turn the pent-up reaction into small groups to continue the forum there (assuming the panel initiated it). Another is to let some of the more aroused spectators form a second panel. A third way is to take the discussion to paper while it's hot. The audience can put down what they think about what has been said and other further thoughts stimulated by it.

MOCK PANELS. Discussion and improvisation meet in the form of mock panels, for which students play roles—that is, pretend to be certain people or kinds of people engaged in turning over an issue. They can play roles they've made up, characters from fiction, or personages from history, improvising a discussion of an issue according to how they think the characters would have talked about it. On a more abstract level, each discussant may be assigned a certain family, social, or professional role that would be expected to furnish him with a particular bias, point of view, or investment. One cast, for example, could consist of a convict, a warden, a parole officer, a district attorney, and a judge. See page 108 for more on mock panels.

MONOLOGUES

Monologue arises out of dialogue. Questions prompt the shower-teller or the interviewee to hold forth, or a small group sends its spokesperson to report its results to the whole class, or one person takes over a "talk show" and holds forth. From dialogue, the speaker learns to objectify and organize thoughts, to accommodate and interest a listener. Using this experience, he practices monologuing further with announcements, storytelling, media narrations, and speeches. Any of the ten kinds of discourse discussed in Part Three can be developed through monologue.

The continuity of a monologue must come from within the speaker, from his perception of how to string his utterances together to develop a subject. He does this spontaneously, of course, but practice in oral soloing can improve what he utters more deliberately on other occasions, as when writing. Monologuing is an important step toward sustaining composition on paper. Written monologues make up in fact a good portion of Part Three, "Kinds of Discourse."