THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Quality Teaching and Learning

PRESENTER NOTES
ASKING QUESTIONS

This guide is for presenters of the ***Language Modeling and Conversations: Asking Questions*** in-service suite. This in-service suite includes PowerPoint slides and supporting materials. Please remember to use and adapt these materials as needed for specific audiences.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Presenter PowerPoint slides (17 slides)
- Optional slide: *Say HELLO*
- Projector and audio equipment
- Learning Activities:
  - » *Learning through Meaningful Questions*
  - » *Planning Questions that Extend Conversation*
  - » *Developing an Action Plan*
- Tips for Teachers
- Tools for Teachers
- Tools for Supervisors
- Helpful Resources
- Flip chart or similar large paper and markers for writing participant ideas

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

- This presentation focuses specifically on how to use questions to extend conversations with children.
- This is one in a series of five in-service suites called *Language Modeling and Conversations*.
- The presentation includes examples, including video clips, of different types of questions that help children access higher level thinking skills.
- Learning activities offer participants opportunities to discuss and practice asking different types of questions and to develop a plan for how to apply the strategies in their own classrooms.
- This presentation includes interactive language facilitation strategies from *Language is the Key*. Presenters who have a copy of this video-based program may consider including this resource as part of the presentation.
- HELLO is an overarching framework that links and organizes the five *Language Modeling and Conversations* suites. HELLO is described in the optional slide at the end of this document, as well as in *Tools for Teachers* and *Tools for Supervisors*. These three documents appear in each of the five conversation suites.

NOTE

For more specific information on promoting culturally and linguistically responsive conversations with children, refer to the *Revisiting and Updating the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Birth to Five* at: http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/Dual%20Language%20Learners/ecd/culture_and_diversity/manage_pub_00602a1_092305.html, and to the *Strategies for Supporting All Dual Language Learners*, a document developed by the National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness at: http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/docs/dll-strategies.pdf

NCQTL

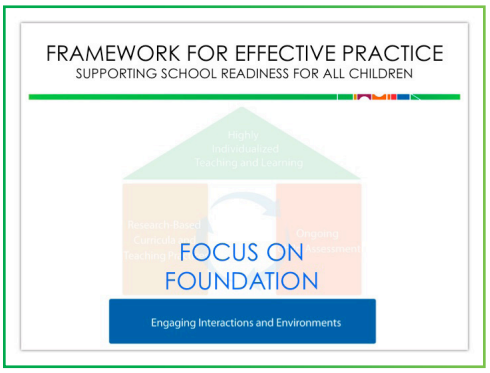
SLIDE 1:
ASKING QUESTIONS

Introductions:

- Begin the training by giving participants background information about yourself.
- Provide an opportunity for participants to introduce themselves (e.g., where they are working, their current role, etc.).
- In a small group or with the large group, ask participants to share a funny question asked by a child.

Introduce the topic:

- *Asking Questions* focuses on using meaningful questions to increase the quality and duration of conversations with children to encourage higher level thinking.
- Highlight two main points:
  - » Engaging children in conversations fosters language, cognitive and social development for children.
  - » These benefits are greatly impacted by the quality of what is said in the conversation.



SLIDE 2:
FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Review the NCQTL Framework for Effective Practice.

- The House structure supports school readiness for all children.
- The foundation represents effective and engaging interactions and environments.
- The pillars represent research-based curricula and teaching practices and ongoing child assessment.
- The roof represents highly individualized teaching and learning.
- All components interact with each other and are essential for effective everyday practice for all children.
- This presentation fits into the *foundation* of the House.
- *Asking questions* helps extend conversations and supports engaging interactions between children and teachers in the classroom.

LEARNING ACTIVITY:
LEARNING THROUGH MEANINGFUL QUESTIONS

Have participants find a partner in the room that they do not already know.

Introduce the activity.

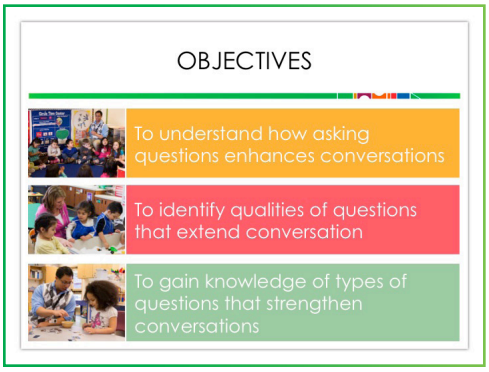
Let's get to know each other a little more. Each of you are going to find another person in the room that you do not already know and you are going to take turns interviewing each other.

HANDOUT

Distribute the *Learning through Meaningful Questions* handout to participants and review directions.

DISCUSSION

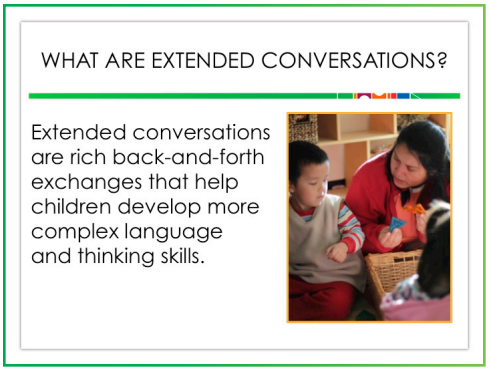
Bring the group back together to discuss the activity. Using the wrap-up discussion questions, ask for volunteers to share their insights and experiences from this activity. Presenters can choose to discuss as many of the questions as time allows.



SLIDE 3:
OBJECTIVES

Outline the objectives for the presentation:

- To understand how asking questions can enhance conversations
- To identify qualities of questions that extend rather than limit conversation
- To gain knowledge of specific types of questions that strengthen conversations and promote higher level thinking



SLIDE 4:
WHAT ARE EXTENDED CONVERSATIONS?

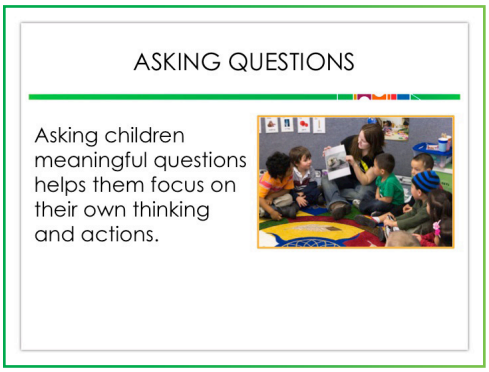
Define extended conversations:

Extended conversations are rich back-and-forth exchanges that help children develop more complex language and thinking skills.

- **Rich exchanges:** A conversation that includes a varied vocabulary and complex sentence forms.
- **Back-and-forth exchanges:** Conversations with equal verbal communication between the child and adult (taking turns).

OPTIONAL SLIDE PPT

Optional slide *Say HELLO*: This slide provides an overview and visual that represents the five in-service suites on *Language Modeling and Conversations*. Show this slide especially if you plan to present all five conversation in-service suites.



SLIDE 5:
ASKING QUESTIONS

- Asking children meaningful questions is one strategy for extending conversations with children.
- Questions provide children opportunities to focus in on their own thinking and actions.

Length of video: Approximately 37 seconds

SLIDE 6:
VIDEO: MAGNETS

Introduce the video.

Inform participants that they will watch a video of a teacher asking children questions and engaging children in extended conversations. Encourage participants to take note of how the teacher uses questions within this conversation example.

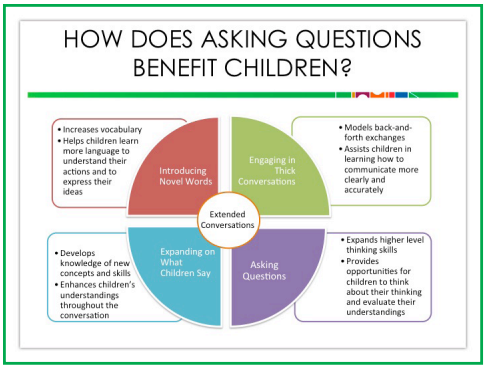
VIDEO

DISCUSSION

Ask participants to share how the teacher uses questions to extend this conversation.

NOTE

The video can be paused after each example for discussion.



EMPHASIZE

Asking meaningful questions encourages children to practice higher level thinking skills.

SLIDE 7:
HOW DOES ASKING QUESTIONS BENEFIT CHILDREN?

Extended conversations benefit children's:

- Language development
- Cognitive development
- Social and emotional development

Extended conversations:

- **Provide models** of appropriate conversation skills.
- **Support** higher-level thinking through meaningful questioning.
- **Expand** on children's language to include new concepts and skills.
- **Increase** children's vocabulary by introducing novel words.

The graphic on this slide illustrates the four components of extended conversations:

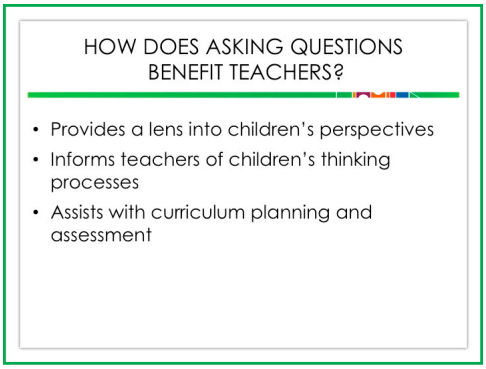
- Engaging in thick conversations
- Asking questions
- Expanding on what children say
- Introducing novel words

This presentation focuses on the second component, **asking children meaningful questions**.

- Asking meaningful questions provides opportunities for children to:
  - » Activate higher level thinking skills
  - » Think about their thinking
  - » Evaluate their understandings.

NOTE

Higher level thinking involves thinking that goes beyond restating facts. It includes developing connections among facts, making inferences and drawing conclusions, predicting, putting facts together in novel ways, and finding solutions to problems.

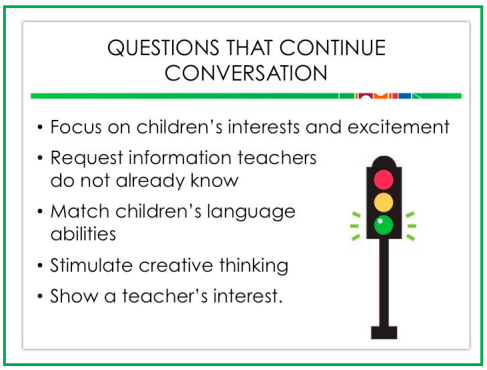


SLIDE 8:
HOW DOES ASKING QUESTIONS BENEFIT TEACHERS?

Asking questions:

- *Provides a window into children's perspectives:* As teachers listen to children's responses they gain insight into how children see and experience the world around them.
- *Informs teachers of children's thinking process:* As teachers pose questions and actively listen to children's responses they are informed of how children reason and think.
- *Assists with curriculum planning and assessment:* As teachers ask children questions and gain insight into how children are thinking they can use this information to plan curriculum and on-going child assessments.

Additionally, asking children meaningful questions provides an opportunity for teachers and children to develop and extend a positive relationship.



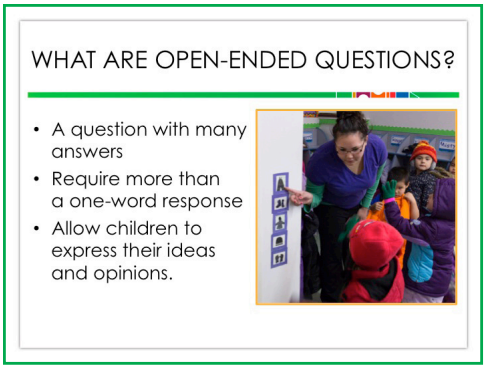
SLIDE 9:
QUESTIONS THAT CONTINUE CONVERSATION

We want to use questions to extend and strengthen our conversations with children.

Questions that strengthen conversations:

- Build on children's interests and excitement
- Request information teachers do not already know
- Match children's language abilities
- Stimulate creative thinking
- Show a teacher's genuine interest in the topic.

Questions with these qualities engage children in thinking creatively and in solving problems.



SLIDE 10:
WHAT ARE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS?

Questions that encourage conversation and help develop higher level thinking are referred to as open-ended questions.

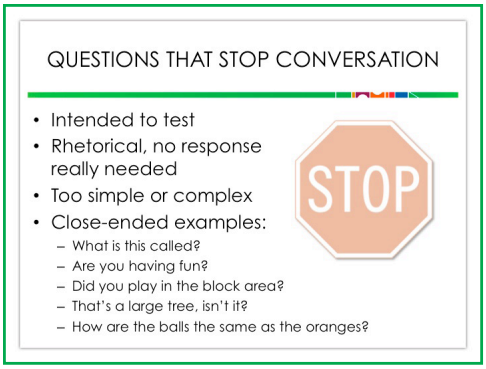
Open-ended questions:

- Are questions with many answers.
  - » Children do not have to find a single "correct" answer.
  - » The answer is not already known by a teacher.
  - » Questions go beyond simple memory tasks and restating facts.
  - » Children learn to analyze facts, make connections, and develop a deeper understanding of concepts.
- Require more than a one-word response.
  - » Children are more likely to respond using longer phrases and sentences.
  - » Children practice using vocabulary and sentence structure.
- Allow children to express their ideas and opinions.
  - » Children can imagine a variety of possibilities.
  - » Children express their own original, imaginative ideas.

Additionally, adult-child relationships are strengthened as adults actively listen to children's responses, showing respect for children's thoughts and ideas.

EMPHASIZE *

Open-ended questions provide children with opportunities to use language to express their ideas.



SLIDE 11:
QUESTIONS THAT STOP CONVERSATION

Some questions teachers ask may actually stop conversation.

Questions that stop conversation:

- Are intended to test what a child knows
- Do not require a response
- Are too complex or too simple.

NOTE

Posing these types of questions isn't necessarily inappropriate; they just serve a different purpose.

These types of questions are known as close-ended questions.

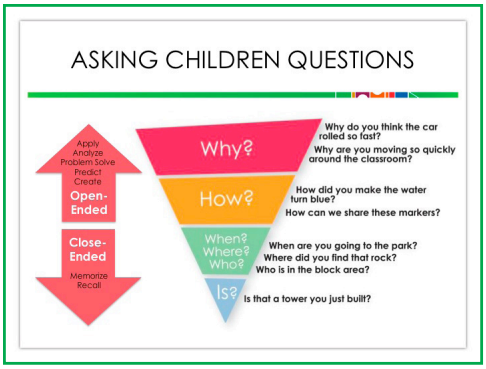
Close-ended questions:

- Typically only encourage a one-word or short phrase response or a non-verbal nod of the head.
- While close-ended questions can assist a teacher in determining what a child already knows (for example, asking a child "What letter is this?") they do not encourage children to elaborate their ideas and thinking.
- Have only one correct answer.
  - » A child who does not know the one right answer, may quit responding after a few failed attempts.
  - » A child who always knows the correct answer to close-ended questions may not get enough practice in expressing ideas and thinking more creatively.
- Additionally, close-ended questions have the potential to project adult assumptions onto the situation.

Examples of questions that limit opportunities to extend conversations:

- "What is this called?"
- "What color is it?"
- "Are you having fun?"
- "Did you play in the block area?"

When asking these types of questions, teachers limit opportunities for children to use language to explain activities and ideas that are interesting to them.



SLIDE 12:
ASKING CHILDREN QUESTIONS

Close-ended questions:

- Tend to engage children in more basic thinking processes, such as memorizing or recalling simple facts.
- Typically require children to provide specific responses about what they know rather than about what they think.

Open-ended questions:

- Allow children the opportunity to reflect on their own thinking.
- Allow children to consider why things happen, to make predictions, problem-solve, to elaborate, tell stories, and think creatively.

NOTE

Make sure to emphasize that one type of question is not necessarily better than another type of question.

- Each type of question serves a different purpose.
- For the purpose of extending conversations, open-ended questions are easier for children to respond to.
- Open-ended questions provide more opportunities for teachers and children to engage in multiple back-and-forth exchanges, and children's responses provide information on children's ideas and interests teachers can follow up on.

The questions that we ask provide children with opportunities to engage in various types of thinking.

The inverted pyramid graphic displays examples of questions that can start conversations.

Bottom two tiers:

Close-ended questions:

- Typically begin with is, who, where, and when
- Provide children with the opportunity to share specific knowledge that they have
- Assist children in recalling facts and accessing information that they have memorized.

Top two tiers:

Open-ended questions:

- Typically begin with how and why
- Require children to access higher level thinking skills to formulate a response
- How and why questions require children to explain their actions or thoughts
- Assist children in clarifying their ideas and verbalizing their understandings
- Provide children with opportunities to be creative and imagine a variety of possibilities in their responses.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: PLANNING QUESTIONS THAT EXTEND CONVERSATION

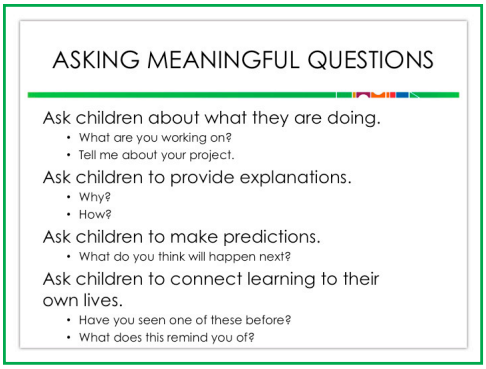
In this learning activity, participants work individually or with a partner to modify questions to stimulate extended conversations with children.

HANDOUT

Distribute the *Planning Questions that Extend Conversation* handout to each participant and review directions.

DISCUSSION

- Ask for volunteers to share example questions.
- Discuss with the large group how each example will stimulate an extended conversation.
- Hear an example from each of the six questions.



SLIDE 13:
ASKING MEANINGFUL QUESTIONS

For questions to be successful in extending a conversation, the questions need to be meaningful and interesting to children.

Four strategies for developing meaningful questions:

Ask children about what they are doing.

- Children become more aware of their actions when they communicate verbally about what they are engaged in.

Ask children to provide explanations.

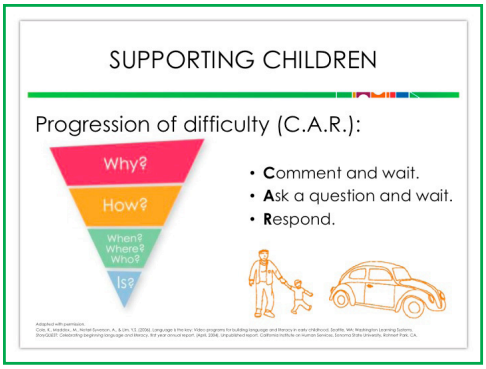
- Asking children why and how questions allow children opportunities to express their thinking process and share their opinions and beliefs.

Ask children to make predictions.

- These questions promote higher level thinking and encourage children to think beyond the here and now and to anticipate what might happen next.

Ask children to connect learning to their own lives.

- Making these connections requires complex cognitive skills as children have to think beyond the classroom context and apply their learning to another environment.



SLIDE 14:
SUPPORTING CHILDREN

It takes time for children to learn how to understand and respond to different types of questions.

- Close-ended yes or no questions are the easiest for young children to respond to.
- Next on the continuum are questions that ask children who, where, and when.
- How and why questions are more difficult for children to answer. (While challenging, these questions lead to some of the greatest cognitive benefits as they access higher level thinking skills.)

EMPHASIZE

Carefully match language and cognitive complexity of questions to individual children.

NOTE

Preschool children are more successful in giving appropriate answers to questions that refer to people, objects, and events in the immediate environment.

Tips for how to support children in conversations (scaffolding):

- Assess the difficulty of questions for preschool children.
- If a child becomes frustrated because a question is too complex, repair the communication breakdown and continue the conversation by rephrasing and simplifying the question.
- Be patient and listen intently to children's responses. Waiting after asking a question gives children time to analyze the problem and think of possible solutions.
- Remember the three steps from *Language is the Key*: **C.A.R.**
  - » **C**omment on what the child is doing/saying and wait.
  - » **A**sk a question that guides the child to take another turn in the conversation and wait.
  - » **R**espond by adding a little more.

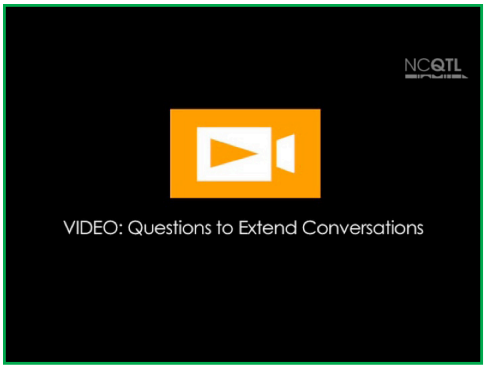
It is essential to carefully match levels of language and cognitive complexity of questions to each individual child as communication breaks down when a child does not feel able to respond.

NOTE

Questions are a great strategy for extending conversation, but they are not the only strategy.

DISCUSSION

Encourage participants to discuss how they might use these strategies to support a child who is a dual language learner.



Length of video: Approximately 2 minutes and 10 seconds

SLIDE 15:
VIDEO: QUESTIONS TO EXTEND CONVERSATIONS

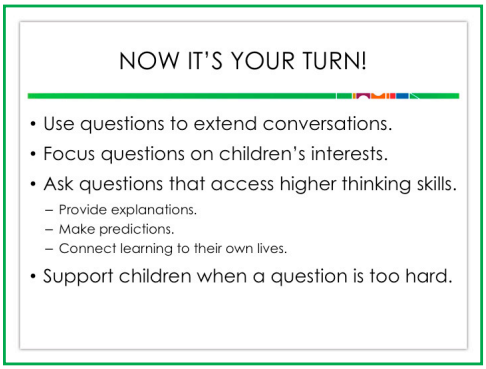
Introduce the video.

Inform participants that they will view a video that provides many examples of teachers posing meaningful questions to children. Have participants take note of the variety of questions that elicit meaningful conversations between teachers and children.

VIDEO

DISCUSSION

Ask participants to share their thoughts on the type and content of questions the teachers asked.



SLIDE 16:
NOW IT'S YOUR TURN!

Now it is your turn to take what you have learned back to your classroom. Review key strategies:

- Use questions to extend conversations.
- Focus questions on children's interests.
- Ask questions that help children engage in higher level thinking skills.
  - » Provide explanations.
  - » Make predictions.
  - » Connect learning to children's own lives.

Support children when a question is too hard by rephrasing the question to make it more specific and concrete.

HANDOUT

Based on participant roles distribute and review handouts.

Tips for Teachers: This tip sheet for teachers includes simple, straightforward suggestions and reminders for how to build extended conversations.

Tools for Supervisors: This is a guide to focus supervisors on conversations in classrooms. It provides several essential elements to capture extended conversations. Note: this tool corresponds with the five NCQTL *Language Modeling and Conversations* suites.

Tools for Teachers: This visual supports teaching and learning by serving as a reminder for how to engage children in rich back-and-forth exchanges.

Helpful Resources: This is a list of additional resources related to the importance of engaging children in conversations.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

This learning activity provides an opportunity for participants to develop a plan for how they intend to integrate this content into their classrooms/centers.

HANDOUT

Distribute the *Developing an Action Plan* handout to each participant.

Set up the activity:

- This handout is designed to assist participants in planning opportunities to engage in extended conversations with children.
- The first column provides space to select a time of day and location that is appropriate for engaging in an extended conversation with a child or group of children.
- The second column provides space to outline the topic of conversation and how this topic fits with a child's or children's interests.
- The third column provides space to brainstorm meaningful questions that promote thinking based on the conversation topic.

Provide time for participants to work alone or together to plan meaningful opportunities to engage in extended conversations in their classrooms.

Have participants organize into small groups and share their action plans. If time allows, bring the large group back together and have several volunteers share their plans.

NOTE

If you are training in a classroom, provide time for participants to go to areas of the room and use materials as they plan their conversation possibilities.

SLIDE 17:
CLOSING

Provide participants with NCQTL contact information and encourage them to visit our website for additional resources.

OPTIONAL SLIDE:
SAY HELLO

Note: This slide outlines the series of five in-service suites on Language Modeling and Conversations. The recommended placement for this overview slide is after Slide 4.

Asking Questions is one in a series of five in-service suites focused on engaging children in conversations. These five suites can easily be remembered by "Say **HELLO**." This progression begins with teachers **H**aving conversations with children and then **E**xtending these conversations into thick verbal exchanges. Three strategies then outline how to create thick verbal exchanges: **L**isten and ask questions, **L**isten and expand, and **O**ffer new words. This in-service suite is focused on listening and asking questions to extend conversations.

The five HELLO in-service suites include:

Have conversations.
- In-service suite: *Language Modeling and Conversations: Engaging Children in Conversations*

Extend into thick.
- In-service suite: *Language Modeling and Conversations: Thick and Thin Conversations*

Listen and ask questions.
- In-service suite: *Language Modeling and Conversations: Asking Questions*

Listen and expand.
- In-service suite: *Language Modeling and Conversations: Expansions*

Offer new words.
- In-service suite: *Language Modeling and Conversations: Novel Words*