**Café Conversation**

Café Conversation is a collaborative discussion strategy, adapted from the Café Technology concept, engages participants in open dialogue about those ideas and questions that are critical to discuss at any given point in time. Where Café Technology relies on the group to determine the content and structure of the work, Café Conversation provides much more scaffolding, sometimes necessary for students who are unaccustomed to managing their own dialogue.

Café Conversations are focused on global guiding questions - usually related to specific content, but focused on large concepts and ideas, rather than discrete facts. When first using Café Conversations, teachers should determine the focus of discussion and the guiding questions for that discussion. As students become more adept at managing their own dialogue, they should also be engaged in developing topics and guiding questions for discussion.

The general process follows:

* Students are grouped into groups of no more than four.
* Each group sits with a guiding question, a large piece of chart paper, and simple art supplies.
* Groups are given the parameters for the discussion – purpose, expectations, time, rotation process, evaluation, etc. (see the student information sheet)
* Groups have between 10 and 15 minutes to engage in dialogue around the guiding question, during which time they are also responsible for tracking their thinking and discussion using the chart paper and art supplies (through pictures, diagrams, words, questions, etc.)
* At the end of the time, groups rotate to the next guiding question. This process continues until all groups have worked with all questions. Note: it is important that the questions not be dependent upon one another, or linear in nature, since different groups will rotate through in different orders.
* When all rotations are complete, each group returns to its original guiding question and chart, discusses the completed chart for 5 minutes, focused on what others added to their ideas, and on what they wish to report on for the full group about the total work done with the question.
* Groups report out a general summary of their guiding question chart.

**Issues:** The Café Conversation strategy is intended to encourage students to talk in-depth and in individualized ways about important content. Therefore, it requires a level of tolerance for meaningful “noise” in the classroom. When students first begin using the strategy, they may struggle with staying on topic, having much to say, or feeling self-conscious about the process or their response to the content. It is critical in this early phase that teachers continue to maintain the process in the face of less than ideal situations, remind students about the purpose for the process (open sharing of ideas vs. responding correctly to a question), and clearly model the types of behaviors they wish to see in students. In addition, providing students with a print piece (included in your master set), identifying key positive café behaviors and noting how students will be “scored” on their process, will support teachers in seeing the process through several times before students will reap the full benefit of the learning experience.