A “Strive-for-Five” Conversation Experience

The Quality of Conversations Matters
Responsive and purposeful conversations between teachers and children are powerful in building oral language. When these conversations are strategic, content-rich, and include a number of back-and-forth exchanges, they are also effective in promoting children’s vocabulary development and their understanding of related concepts (Wasik and Campbell, 2012). These extended conversations should give children explicit opportunities to:

- Hear new words several times in meaningful contexts
- Use the new words in the conversations and related activities
- Connect the new words with familiar words and ideas

It is often suggested that we “strive for five” talking turns a piece in our teacher-child learning conversations. Our tool kit for achieving this includes open-ended questions and statements, follow-up questions, and feedback to extend a child’s use of language and higher order thinking. Try it out!

A “Strive-for-Five” Practice Conversation
With a partner, try out a conversation that gives each of you multiple chances to hear and use new vocabulary words*. For this experience you must incorporate:

- 5 or more communication exchanges/person
- 2-3 select vocabulary words relevant to upcoming unit of study
- At least 1 open-ended question
- A validating or clarifying response

Following this experience, consider:

- What was the most difficult part of this conversation?
- How can planning for and modeling such purposeful conversations support your students’ learning?

* We suggest that Coaches/Curriculum Liaisons identify specific topics and vocabulary words relevant to upcoming units of study in order to guide this exercise in serving as both practice and preparation for participating teachers.