

TOPIC POSTERS

PHILOSOPHY FOR CONSIDERATION

OUR UNIQUENESS – OUR RELATIONSHIPS

We are all unique individuals – there is no one exactly like you and there is no one exactly like me. We grow into our uniqueness through the process of our life experiences. We acquire opinions and interests along the way and these in turn, mold or shape us by adding color to our unique personalities. When we find others who share in our interests (i.e. hobbies, sports, musical genres), it is often a delight to our hearts!

As skilled conversationalists, we will take a mental note of those individuals who share in our interests and will often take the time to engage in conversations with them about these preferred topics. We could likely spend endless hours engaged in conversation with these individuals. Such experiences can bring fullness into our dialogue but at a deeper level, these social interactions can allow us to make mutually gratifying connections; which can then lead towards intimacy (i.e. friendship) within our personal and professional relationships.

As skilled conversationalists, we will also keep track of those individuals who may have topics of interest that are quite different from our own. Knowing individuals who are unlike us can also be considered a mutually gratifying experience. We might learn new information about the world, we might have our opinions challenged, we might gain a new hobby or we might just add more variety to the types of conversations that we can enjoy with others. Either way, we will demonstrate an interest in these individual's preferred topics to show that we care about them. This is especially true for those individuals with whom we desire relationship.

OUR BRAIN – ITS DATA COLLECTION

Our brain has an amazing filing system that stores important data! For example, it tracks our personal preferences; which can then go on to create our unique 'self'. It also tracks preferences held by our conversation partners. This data can be helpful in gaining an awareness of others. This is a very important social function because it allows us to gain their perspective. As we learn to see beyond ourselves, our emotions (i.e. empathy) can move toward their fullest potential!

Data collection in adults: For some adults, this tracking system can be impaired for a number of reasons. The lack of social awareness that emerges can have devastating consequences on the quality of the relationships these individuals may have - both personally and professionally.

Data collection in children: For some children, this tracking system may not get a chance to develop efficiently. Either the children may be unaware of this process for acquiring information about others OR they may simply lack interest in keeping 'conversational data' on other people in their lives. For some of the children within our caseloads, this is true. Beyond our caseloads, neuro-typical children have the potential for this loss of interest in others as well. In a society where there is a growing dependency on technology, children have the potential to lose their interest in developing social relationships with others.

So that our children can become competent communicators who are also socially-emotionally grounded; we as educators must consider and implement enriched curriculum to teach these vital life skills. We must also be cognizant of the power we hold in becoming an influencer; simply by modelling these skills within our day-to-day living!

One of the ways this is done, within the Color My Conversation program, is through a craft project known as the Topic Library.

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PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

TOPIC POSTER DESCRIBED

A Topic Poster is a craft activity; which allows children to explore their personal topics of interests and those held by their conversation partners. It acts as a visual document that children can reference and then use when engaged in conversations with their friends, family, educators and others within their community.

TYPES OF TOPIC POSTERS

There are two general types of Topic Poster projects that the Conversation Coach could consider, depending on the children ages and cognitive readiness.

1. TOPIC LIBRARY: The Topic Library is intended for older children. An association will be drawn between the organizational system used within a physical library and the organizational system that we have within our brains.

2. TOPIC HOUSE: The Topic House is intended for younger children or for those with whom the concept of a Topic Library would be too abstract. A simple association would be drawn between the rooms within a home, its family members and the topics of interests that are held by those who live there. This concept can also be applied to a school or another place (i.e. sports team, hobby club) where the children may frequent and have opportunity to engage in conversations with others.

WHO DEVELOPS THE POSTER?

The children will create their own poster during lesson time and/or as a home assignment. Adult participation is encouraged but the children should be given the freedom to explore and create their own document in a way that is meaningful to them.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO DEVELOP?

The Topic Poster takes time to create (i.e. a couple of weeks), however, it is well worth the effort! It can be a powerful and valuable strategy to support a child's ability to retrieve topics of conversation when dialoguing with others.

OUTCOMES FROM THIS PROJECT

- **SELF-AWARENESS:** Upon completion of this project, the children can be reminded of what makes them unique individuals. This can be a great self-esteem booster.
- **DEVELOPMENT OF CURIOSITY:** If the children have limited interests, this activity can also spur them on to become curious in developing new topics of interest.
- **AWARENESS OF OTHERS:** The children can gain new perspectives as they come to realize that - not everyone sees the world through their eyes!
- **VARIETY AND FLEXIBILITY:** As the children become aware of other individual's topics of interest, they can then start to engage in conversations that have a greater variety of topics.
- **CURIOSITY AND EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT:** As children experience a greater variety of conversations, their confidence and skill can be honed. As they grow in curiosity - they can develop a greater appreciation for others. In this environment, empathy and other social emotional learning can transpire!

Additional information about this craft project is available through Color My Conversation.

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