# “Conversational Moves”

**Adapted from Brookfield & Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999).**

**Lesson objective**: The goal of this exercise is to make the dynamics of good classroom discussion more transparent by introducing students to a range of rhetorical strategies for making productive contributions to a discussion.

**Additional outcomes:** Creates a sense of community by modeling how respectful academic discussions unfold.

***Step 1.*** In advance of class, cut up the attached hand-out and fold up the pieces.

***Step 2****.* At the beginning of class, randomly distribute one “conversational move” to each student and ask them to “do it” at least once in that class period whenever it feels natural or appropriate.

***Step 3****.* At the end of class, talk about what makes for a productive academic discussion. Consider distributing the full hand-out so that students are aware of a fuller range of “moves.”

* Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person has said.
* Ask a question or make a comment that encourages someone else to elaborate on something that person has said.
* Make a comment that underscores the link between two people’s contributions. Make this link explicit in your comment.
* Use body language (in a slightly exaggerated way) to show interest in what different speakers are saying.
* Make a comment indicating that you found another person’s ideas interesting or useful. Be specific as to why this was the case.
* Make a comment that at least partly paraphrases a point someone has already made.
* Make a summary observation that takes into account several people’s contributions and that touches on a re-occurring theme in the discussion.
* Ask a cause-and-effect question—for example, “Can you explain why you think it’s true that if these things are in place, such and such a thing will occur?”
* Disagree with someone in a respectful and constructive way.
* Contribute something that builds on or springs from what someone else has said. Be explicit about the way you are building on the other person’s thoughts.

***Note***. Adjust the notes to suit your specific needs. Ex: “Conclude the discussion, summarizing points of disagreement and consensus” or “Identify a flaw in the argument, read it out loud to your peers, and ask a question about it” if doing this during a workshop. And so forth.

# “Nine Modes of Participation”

* **INITIATING**: breaking an initial or interim silence by introducing a new idea or topic for group consideration
* **INFORMATION SEEKING**: asking a factual question to clarify context
* **EXPLANATION SEEKING**: asking a colleague to clarify or elaborate an argument
* **INFORMATION GIVING**: providing relevant factual information
* **EXPLANATION GIVING**: introducing or clarifying an evidence-based argument
* **ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION**: engaging someone who has not recently spoken to participate in the discussion or complimenting a colleague for their contribution to discussion
* **SUMMARIZING**: listening attentively to the contributions of others and offering a clear recapitulation of the main points)
* **COMPARING IDEAS**: identifying the relationship between two or more ideas and/or suggestions
* **SYNTHESIZING**: combining two or more ideas to create a novel argument