

Conversation on Risky Topics

When kids meet in their base groups to share possible inquiry topics, Joyce and I sit down with each for a few minutes. One thing we are watching for: some kids may mention topics that they don't feel brave enough to bring up in front of the whole class. We want to make sure these topics don't get lost—so we are ready to help bring those concerns back, to help plug them back into the choosing process at some later point.

In the first group I sit down with, one student lists his topics as global warming, poor people, and drugs. Everyone listens politely, but later, when they report to the whole class, neither drugs nor poverty gets mentioned. So at that time, I simply say, "There were a couple more topics I noticed on people's cards earlier that didn't come up yet, but I think they might be important or interesting so I am going to add them to the list myself. One is drugs..."

MARIA (Jumps in instantaneously): *And alcohol.*

JOSE: *Like teenagers with alcohol.*

JOYCE: *I just read a study that said drinking is more common, even among sixth graders.*

ASHLEY: *Well, I don't drink.*

BRAD: *Teenagers drive fast and crash their cars.*

This sparks a lively conversation that extends to piercing, tattoos, and other teen topics.

SMOKEY: *So what's a big name for all this? All these different kinds of behavior?*

NADIA: *Self destruction? Mutilation?*

DIEGO: *The idea is that teenagers like to do risky stuff.*

SMOKEY: *Risk-taking, that's a great term for it.*

This interactive conversation continues as we also add the problem of poverty to the list.