Morning Classroom Conversations Instructional Framework

Recent firsthand work by the MCC program developers has provided a fresh perspective on what students respond to and what their current school climate often lacks, with regard to fostering social and emotional growth. Foremost is the need for classrooms to provide explicit opportunities for synergistic, frequent conversations that give students a voice. These types of classroom-based conversations also serve as a reinforcement for social-emotional learning (SEL)–related lessons that may already be integrated into a school's curriculum and school environment. This need for synergy, student expression, and reinforcement of social and emotional growth is what inspired Morning Classroom Conversations (MCCs) and the framework behind it. A systematic series of MCC prompts provide a guide for how teachers and other school staff can convey school-wide themes, skills, and virtues to all students in a safe and approachable way. MCCs are designed specifically for secondary students (i.e., those in Grades 5–12) and will allow an opportunity for youth to engage in

meaningful SEL-based conversations to start their school day.

As introduced in Chapter 1, there are four main dimensions in the MCC framework: skills, virtues, themes, and development, all with the unifying theme of Positive Purpose. This chapter will explore the MCC framework in greater detail by discussing each of these dimensions in depth, and, at the end, provide and discuss a full sample month of MCCs. Conversation Leaders (those that facilitate the MCCs such as teachers, psychologists, social workers, master teachers, out-of-school group leaders, etc.) may use the template in Figure 2.1 to create a visual overview of what their year will look like with MCCs. The chart in Figure 2.1 describes the framework that has been used effectively and will be the source of the examples provided in this book. Please consider this chart as a model framework and modify as you wish to create your own Year-Long Themes, Virtues, and Skills chart that best suits your classroom and school context. Themes, while linked to the flow of the school year, are best honed to fit your local concerns, and local themes can be *added to* or *integrated with* the flow that is outlined in Figure 2.1.

DIMENSION 1: MCC SKILLS

In order for an individual to be successful in relationships, careers, and daily life, one must have, at minimum, the following skills: emotion regulation, communication, empathy and perspective taking, and social problem-solving. These will look familiar as SEL skills. While interactions in and out of school require all SEL skills, it is instructionally wise to focus on certain key skills to which the others are linked.

Emotion Regulation. Emotion regulation, as you may have found, is a popular term in education today. This refers to one's ability to have optimal awareness and control over their emotions, when they are felt, and how they are expressed. Included in this are both positive and negative emotions. It is particularly salient when discussing emotions such as anxiety, frustration, anger, sadness, or excitement,

FIGURE 2.1 ● Year-Long Themes, Virtues, and Skills Chart

Morning Classroom Conversations

Monthly Themes, Virtues and Skills

POSITIVE PURPOSE

Supporting Virtues

1. Constructive Creativity
2. Helpful Generosity
3. Optimistic Future-Mindedness
4. Responsible Diligence
5. Compassionate Forgiveness and Gratitude

Supporting Skills

1. Emotional Regulation
2. Communication
3. Empathy and Perspective Taking
4. Social Problem-Solving

Month	Theme	Virtue	Skills
November	*Making Ourselves, School and World Better*	Constructive Creativity	Communication and Social Problem-Solving
December	*Giving Back to Ourselves, School and World*	Helpful Generosity	Communication and Social Problem-Solving
January	*Planning for the Future*	Optimistic Future-Mindedness	Empathy and Perspective Taking; Social Problem-Solving
February	*Showing Resilience and Overcoming Obstacles*	Responsible Diligence	Emotion Regulation; Social Problem-Solving
March	*Appreciating Ourselves, Our School and the World*	Compassionate Gratitude	Communication; Empathy and Perspective Taking
April	*Connecting with Others and Being a Leader*	Compassionate Forgiveness	Emotion Regulation; Empathy and Perspective Taking
May	*Looking Forward: Next Steps on the Journey*	Positive Purpose	Communication and Social Problem-Solving
June	*Looking Back: What Have I Accomplished? What Have I Learned?*	All Virtues Summary	All Skills Integrated

and how emotional regulation can be used to control reactions to certain situations that may incite a high level of these emotions. Classrooms can't function when kids are hostile, dejected, or incredibly giddy. This skill is especially important with adolescents, given their stage of

development and its effects on their hormone levels and heightened sensitivity to their environment and their emotions.

Some SEL advocates have expressed concern that SEL can be used as an instrument of emotional repression (Simmons, 2019). The point of building students' emotion regulation skills is not to make them docile and compliant. Emotion regulation does not mean "doing what adults tell you to do." Emotion regulation means that students are able to modify their own emotions to be appropriate to situations they are in, as they perceive them. Biologically, it's about students controlling their amygdala reactions versus having their amygdala reactions control them. It means being better able to resist provocations and to handle difficult situations thoughtfully. As fostered by MCCs, emotion regulation is essential for civil discourse and effective social action.

Communication. Communication is not a single skill but a combination of many skills, skills that are necessary to carry messages to the world. If students have great ideas and can't express them, few if anyone will know about these ideas. If strong emotions are not able to be managed, the ability to send a message in a way that clearly conveys intentions or plans can be impaired. Communication can get complicated and multifaceted, and without explicit skill building in communication, the quality of exchanges that students have with one another and with the adults in their lives will not be as positive and fruitful as they could be.

Communication is defined as a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior, and it is necessary in order to successfully navigate through daily life. Communication is inherently at the forefront of the MCC skills, because it is practiced every day by listening and responding to the conversations that transpire from the daily prompts. However, similar to the other focal SEL skills, MCCs also address communication explicitly in certain skill-driven prompts so that students can discuss the many different methods of communication that have arisen in recent years (best denoted by various and ever-evolving social media), potential unknown factors that impact communication, and

how other skills such as empathy and emotion regulation relate to improving communication skills.

Empathy and Perspective Taking. What is referred to in Western religion as the Golden Rule—"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you"—is an exemplification of the importance of taking others' perspective and having empathy. It turns out that in virtually all of the world's major religions, there is an equivalent statement that is regarded as foundational (Templeton, 2002). The connection of empathy and perspective taking reflects the necessity of combining both the heart and the head in understanding and relating to others.

Let's take a closer look, to see why these skills are explicitly taught in various prompts throughout the daily MCCs. Empathy and perspective taking refer to the ability to understand and vicariously experience the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of another. It requires one to not *assume* how others are feeling but rather *seek out cues* to how they might be feeling. It requires getting into the shoes of the other person to see circumstances as he or she might be seeing them, rather than looking at the situation exclusively introspectively. No doubt, this is calling forth current emphases on the way racial bias or blindness impacts everyday interactions for many. It's not easy getting into the shoes of someone whose shoes you may never have seen. It's not possible to experience every other culture and every other context, but it is also not necessary. Human brains have been hardwired to pick up cues about circumstances that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable. That hardwiring tends to be protective and cautious and that makes evolutionary sense. But the frontal lobe, in combination with emotion regulation, makes it possible to think and not always instantly react. It allows someone to consider, in an instant, "What else could this be?" Students require that kind of empathy and perspective every day, to better understand the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others; this can improve communication and, in turn, improve social interaction.

Social Problem-Solving. MCCs explicitly address the social-emotional skill of problem-solving. Anytime there is a dilemma in a social situation, students should be capable

of choosing the right skill or combination of skills from their SEL toolbox to resolve the situation and improve the outcome for all involved. For this to happen most effectively, adolescents benefit from having a strategy they can turn to in these situations.

If you reflect on your own experiences in school, where you encounter many problems every day with students, parents, and colleagues, you likely will notice that when you have a strategy to deal with them, they are less stressful to handle. And the outcomes usually are better. But when every situation is responded to as if it never happened before, not only are the same mistakes often made over and over, but it's also exhausting and frustrating. Sometimes, by helping students develop social problem-solving strategies during MCCs, it can be easier to better attend to and improve your own strategies!

This skill will be reviewed by taking a sample prompt that is provided later in this book. Consider asking students, as a whole class, "The student next to you in class is trying to copy your paper during a test. What should you do?" This prompt creates an opportunity for students to explore their feelings about the situation and weigh the costs and benefits of potential choices of action and putting their other MCC skills to best use. It also serves as a gauge for you about students' problem-solving skills and moral compass. As they respond, you can highlight the SEL in their response. For example, a student may use empathy by suggesting a strategy that involves speaking to that student after class and encouraging them to be truthful to the teacher in hopes of getting the academic assistance they may need. Alternatively, a student may advocate using emotion regulation by avoiding getting upset and frustrated in the moment and instead speaking in a calm fashion. If a student were to say, "Stand up and tell the teacher what that student is doing and to stop it," a response that facilitates problem-solving would be to ask, "What would all the consequences of doing that be?" and "How else might the situation be handled, using empathy and perspective taking as a guide?"

All the skills emphasized in MCCs together create the tools necessary for students to effectively engage socially

both within their classrooms and outside of the classroom in their daily interactions. By practicing conversations involving situations that could become challenging, negative, or unproductive, students can instead create more positive outcomes, build stronger relationships, and improve their overall well-being. Most important, these skills set the foundation for the next important dimension of MCCs, the virtues.

DIMENSION 2: MCC VIRTUES

As you will notice in the template provided earlier in Figure 2.1, the core virtues within MCCs include constructive creativity, helpful generosity, optimistic future-mindedness, responsible diligence, compassionate gratitude and forgiveness, and positive purpose. Of these, positive purpose is superordinate. It fits with the key questions that adolescents are trying to answer: "Who am I? What can I become?" While it is the rare youth that knows their life purpose in adolescence—particular early adolescence—it is both common and desirable that adolescents "try on" different purposes for varying lengths of time. Research suggests that when youth have a sense of purpose, they are better able to function as learners, classmates, and friends (Malin, 2018).

Positive purpose is affected by a set of supportive virtues. These virtues have been identified as helping adolescents move forward, particularly in trauma-informed contexts (which now seem ubiquitous), toward the development of their sense of positive purpose (Hatchimonji et al., 2017, 2019; Malin, 2018). Trauma, particularly chronic trauma such as poverty, racism, or early loss or severe illness of a parent, functionally limits an individuals' sense of who they are and what they can become. Often, young people can get caught up in resentful demoralization, revenge, hopelessness, or internalized marginalization. The virtues that will be discussed, and that MCCs are particularly designed to exercise, are necessary for building a virtuous cycle from a vicious cycle of self-fulfilling negative prophecy. To have effective conversations with others, one must feel that one has something to bring to the encounter and that

one can benefit as well as contribute. Adolescents need these virtues to continue to engage in genuine exchange.

Helpful Generosity. Helpful generosity as a virtue means, in essence, that no matter what my life difficulties are, no matter what challenges loom, I have something to contribute. The intangible and intrinsic rewards of helpful generosity—from holding doors for others, sitting next to isolated classmates, helping someone who looks confused, being a caring friend, helping harmonize groups one is part of in school or out—can encourage a sense of positive purpose in the helping professions. Particularly for students who are used to being "remediated," the idea that they have something to give to others is a powerful counternarrative to abject failure. Generosity also requires one to be perceptive of others' needs and feelings. In MCCs, students are encouraged to strive for and work toward genuine understanding of others and to see themselves as being sources of help, including for school and community problems. Civic engagement and positive social action flow from having Helpful Generosity as a personal virtue.

Optimistic Future-Mindedness. Why have a conversation if you don't believe it can accomplish anything, or that you don't have anything worth saying? Having students exercise this virtue helps them to believe things can be improved and that they can have an active role in that improvement. This is complemented by fostering a growth mindset, or the belief that abilities, situations, and environments can be improved through hard work and dedication, as well as intrinsic motivation, the inner drive to pursue an activity due to genuine interest, and enjoyment. This does not come easily to students who have experienced ongoing trauma, who have been saddled with attending "failing schools," and who themselves have been failed by teachers, parents, educators, and/or other human services professionals whose job it was to help them. That's why MCCs require repetition over the course of a year and over the course of three years. Establishing positive virtues as self-habits takes time and practice. The result: students adopt a kind of future-mindedness that is optimistic in order to maintain the belief and the motivation to continuously improve the possibility of a Positive Purpose in their future.

Constructive Creativity. Constructive creativity encourages genuine exchange by allowing students to think outside of the box regarding ongoing social issues, peer conflicts, relationship building, and self-expression. This virtue also fosters openness to other thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Creativity is most aligned with positive purpose when it is constructive because it specifies that creativity should be utilized to constantly improve one's self, their relationships, and their larger communities. With constructive creativity, students are better able to see a pathway to positive purpose despite social stigma, pressure, or bias against pursuing those pathways. And because adolescents will inevitably encounter problems along the way to their positive purpose, having an attitude of constructive creativity will help them move forward with optimism.

Responsible Diligence. Responsible diligence is a close cousin of social problem-solving. In a sense, it's the virtue that benefits from and spurs on a problem-solving mindset. In order to have genuine exchange, students must begin to understand that those around them will not always, perhaps not usually, be in agreement with their views. This is inevitable and not necessarily a negative. The conversation will continue regardless, because of the belief that persisting in the process of exchange can lead to a mutual understanding. As students pursue social action, they will find ever-increasing obstacles to their ideas. They cannot allow themselves to be deterred by this. They need responsible diligence to persist constructively. During MCCs, students get practice in handling disagreements, focusing their conversations on seeking understanding and mutual problem-solving, rather than just expressing one's viewpoint and expecting agreement. They come to learn that civil conversations and civic engagement will take both a considerable amount of diligence as well as responsibility, but are well worth it!

Compassionate Forgiveness and Gratitude. The final set of virtues emphasized in MCCs is compassionate forgiveness and gratitude. Research into these areas has increased dramatically and has shown clear benefits to both young people and adults (Chiaramello et al., 2008; Dutro & Bien, 2014). The inability

to forgive—seen most familiarly in holding grudges—has far more negative effects on the "offended" party than the alleged perpetrator. For youth in trauma-beset contexts, there is often resentment and forgiveness might be seen as weak. However, it is a virtue that, left uncultivated, can effectively cut off a path to positive purpose.

Relatedly, even (and sometimes especially) among those who have the fewest material possessions and advantages, gratitude for what one does have can be a force for good in one's life. (Some might view this as an example of fostering docility and submission; however, forgiveness exists alongside the other virtues—solutions to social problems fueled by envy, hatred, and revenge rarely have good long-term outcomes.) It is not unusual for an "attitude of gratitude" to spur helpful generosity and optimistic future-mindedness, creating a pathway toward positive purpose. March 30, 2020 was the first Worldwide Day of Gratitude (https://www .younison.org/leanonus) and an extraordinary array of materials to promote this virtue was collected for ongoing use. This is one of many ways that the essential role of gratitude has been recognized.

Exercising compassionate forgiveness and gratitude in MCCs teaches students the benefits and appropriateness of feeling care and compassion toward their peers—much as they would want peers to feel the same toward themselves. It is important to show compassion and support by respecting and valuing differing viewpoints, even in situations where there is a disagreement or someone may otherwise become upset or frustrated. This also can apply to the actions of others, meaning that when someone does something that someone else dislikes or that has a negative impact, care and compassion must be used in order to have a better understanding of the actions of others and move forward with a more positive viewpoint. Adolescence is a good time to start to learn that it is all right to be upset about someone's actions but that they need not reject that person altogether or fail to see what is good about them.

Each month throughout the school year will be dedicated to one or more of the virtues described earlier, with

the exception of September and October (or the first and second months of the school year), which is left as a time for teachers and students to acclimate to the new school year. As each virtue is learned, understood, and practiced, the subsequent virtues will then build on and often show strong links to one another. MCCs are intentionally formatted with an understanding that skills create the foundation for exercising virtues, and virtues are linked together to help students find their positive purpose.

DIMENSION 3: MCC MONTHLY THEMES

Another component of MCCs that ties in closely with both skills and virtues is monthly themes. MCCs include various themes that emerge throughout the year that are generalizable to most schools (e.g., January/Month Three: Planning for the future; June: Looking back: What have I accomplished? What have I learned?). Please refer to the one-page MCC summary (Figure 2.1) to review the full list of monthly themes in MCCs.

As you approach this section of the chapter, you may ask yourself, why are themes necessary when skills and virtues are already in place for each month? The answer is both simple and complex. Simply put, the MCC themes work in connection with the virtues and skills to foster positive purpose, which is the overarching theme and overall goal for full participation in the MCC structure. Possessing positive purpose means that a student has found their drive to achieve and discovered how they can make a positive impact on the world around them. Themes are a kind of glue that holds skills and virtues together in the life of a student, a classroom, and a school.

Indeed, students all spend many days engaged in schooling (whether in person or virtually), beginning toward the end of summer, proceeding through fall and winter, and culminating at the tail end of spring or perhaps the earliest days of summer. There is a flow to these days, to how school years unfold, and students think about this. (So do staff, often

being excited about the start of the year, dreading standardized testing in the spring, and exhaustedly looking forward to the end of the year!) Therefore, focusing prompts around these monthly themes often taps into what is on students' minds and helps create conversations that assist students in their journey through self-exploration.

Conversation Leaders also should keep in mind that these themes will provide tremendous synergy with any social-emotional and character development program or other similar approach your school is already using or will choose to take on. For example, if there is a specific evidence-based curriculum, such as the Second Step program, or educational approach, such as trauma-informed teaching, that your school has implemented, you can and should intertwine these approaches by regularly referencing them. As a Conversation Leader, you can connect themes related to these approaches into your MCCs and at other times throughout the school day and in various contexts. The more generalized and connected the themes, virtues, and skills become, the more cohesive they become to the overall educational experience, and the more likely your school and your students are to successfully retain and use what they are learning.

In addition to strengthening existing SEL strategies and programs, if a specific issue were to arise in the classroom and/or school, the "theme" structure is adaptable to target these areas. For instance, if there is a problem with a rise in bullying in a middle school, this could be a targeted theme for that schools' MCCs for an appropriate period, by incorporating complementary skills such as social problem-solving, virtues such as compassionate forgiveness and gratitude, or themes such as connecting with others and being a leader. Schools in New Jersey recognize October as "anti-bullying month," complemented by a week in that month designated as the Week of Respect. Creating a theme in October around this context certainly would make sense for New Jersey schools. The MCC themes that have been presented are meant to be general enough to easily adapt to each school-specific climate and culture needs.

DIMENSION 4: MCC THREE-YEAR DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION

As a teacher, administrator, support staff, or a member of the school community, you are well aware of noticeable differences in students as they develop through adolescence. The common trends of social and emotional development must be considered when implementing MCCs and other social-emotional character development (SECD) programs. In an effort to correlate with the increase in sophistication and maturity across grade levels, the MCC model utilizes a three-year *Better Me–Better School–Better World* developmental framework. With this framework, it is not necessary to formulate different questions and topics for every grade level; rather, the questions are adapted to be focused on their application and relevance to the self, the school community, and then the wider world, as students' progress in their development.

The *Better Me–Better School–Better World* framework, as its name suggests, targets a different set of goals each year. The *Better Me* framework has students focus on improving themselves, exploring their interests and beliefs, and reflecting on their own actions. The *Better School* framework encourages students to continue to apply the skills and virtues to themselves and expand their thinking to apply those skills to their school community, whether it be their classroom, their school, or school-related events in their town. Last, the *Better World* framework further challenges students to think about their influence on larger communities around them, including their municipality, their state, their country, or the world. Each year in this framework is meant to build upon the previous year and further challenge students' thinking and actions.

The progression might look like Table 2.1 for February/Month Four.

By referring to the same themes across grade levels, students can revisit past topics and expand their conversations from a more advanced social and emotional lens. In

TABLE 2.1 ● MCC Theme: Showing Resilience and Overcoming Obstacles

Year 1—*Better Me*	Students explore how to express themselves, to learn from their mistakes, and to be self-aware, among other skills.
Year 2—*Better School*	Students discuss how to work well with others even in the face of social challenges and to be aware of how their thoughts and actions impact others around them.
Year 3—*Better World*	Students discuss topics such as how certain mindsets can impact larger communities, how to seek out opportunities to share their views about social issues with others and take on leadership roles, and how to show appreciation and support for community members, first responders, and political leaders, etc.

addition, students' sense of positive purpose is expanded as they widen their horizons. For more examples of what this will look like in action, you can visit Chapter 8.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: WHAT MCCS LOOK LIKE OVER THE COURSE OF A MONTH

The background information presented thus far provides you with an understanding of the evidence-based foundation for MCCs. Now, it's time to take a look at what MCCs look like in practice, starting with a sample of MCCs carried out daily over the course of a month. There are other formats to use if daily MCCs seem too challenging, and these are presented later. However, it's best to start with the most basic program structure.

SAMPLE DAILY MCC STRUCTURE

The sample calendar in Table 2.2 demonstrates at a glance one month of suggested daily prompts. As MCCs are meant to follow a daily structure, each month is divided up into four weeks, with five prompts per week, depending on the typical number of school days in any given month. These twenty prompts shown in Table 2.2 are adaptable to a calendar format and can be utilized in part or in whole by Conversation Leaders. The chart provides the Year 1— *Better Me* structure for the month of January/Month Three, with the theme of Planning for the Future. We use the

TABLE 2.2 ● January/Month Three (Year 1—*Better Me*): Planning for the Future

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Week 1	A new student just arrived at your school. What do you think it feels like to be living in a new place with all new people? Has this happened to you? (Skill: Empathy)	What is one action you can take in your school now that will help prepare you for your dream job of the future? (Theme: Planning for the Future)	What is it like to work in a group where others do not communicate effectively to solve a problem? (Skill: Social Problem-Solving)	How can you nonverbally demonstrate that you are actively listening to your peers? (Skill: Empathy)	Not every moment in our lives is going to go well but when bad things happen, we have to try to learn from those situations. Think about a bad moment in your life, and challenge your thinking around how this event helped you. (Virtue: Optimistic Future-Mindedness)
Week 2	Why does it usually feel good to share our feelings with others? (Skill: Empathy)	Pessimism has been related to stress, anxiety and depression. What could you do today to help combat your negative thoughts and turn them into positive thoughts? (Virtue: Optimistic Future-Mindedness)	If we disagree with someone's perspective, what would be the best thing to do? Have you ever had trouble doing this? (Skill: Social Problem-Solving)	Why might people not listen to new ideas? What helps you to be more likely to listen to new or different ideas? (Skill: Empathy)	Is it helpful to think about our past when paving the way for our future? Why or why not? (Theme: Planning for the Future)
Week 3	Who do you admire most? What are some qualities that you admire about this person? (Theme: Planning for the Future)	Small miracles happen every day. What could you do to raise your awareness of these miracles? (Virtue: Optimistic Future-Mindedness)	What does charity mean to you? Do you need to give money, food, or clothing in order to help others? How else can you do it? (Skill: Social Problem-Solving)	What effects can stress have on the body? Why is important to monitor your stress level? (Virtue: Optimistic Future-Mindedness)	What are you most passionate about? How can you do more of what you love doing? (Theme: Planning for the Future)
Week 4	There are many different ways that help to keep us organized (calendar, apps, planner, etc.). How do you stay organized? (Theme: Planning for the Future)	What is something about your future that you are optimistic about? Why? (Virtue: Optimistic Future-Mindedness)	The person next to you in class keeps trying to look at your paper during a test. What do you do? (Skill: Social Problem-Solving)	What do you like most about being a ____ grader? When do you feel you are at your best in the school? (Virtue: Optimistic Future-Mindedness)	"Don't judge others unless you are standing in their shoes." Do you agree with that quote? What does it have to do with Empathy? (Skill: Empathy)

term *Month Three* to denote the third full month of MCCs, based on beginning in November/Month One; for schools that begin the school year in August, for example, MCCs would start in October/Month Zero and would reference the month numbers, rather than the month names, thereafter.

In Chapter 8, you will find a more comprehensive look at the progression of MCCs for each school year. While this chapter specifically outlines the *Better Me* framework, Chapter 8 shows how students progress from *Better Me* to *Better School* to *Better World* each year that they are provided with MCCs, with the goal of expanding students' worldview and increasing their skills for civic engagement. Although only one full month sample is provided Table 2.2, you can find the entire year of *Better Me* daily prompts in Appendix A, *Better School* in Appendix B, and *Better World* in Appendix C of this book or on the companion website, resources.corwin.com/MorningClassroomConversations.

Figure 2.1 shows how complementary skills and virtues can be integrated into monthly themes. For the sample provided, the complementary skills are empathy and social problem-solving, and the complementary virtue is optimistic future-mindedness. These skills and virtues, along with the overall theme, are cycled throughout each day and week so that there is an equal (or almost equal) amount of conversations for each. Skills and goals are specifically chosen for each month to build upon the overall monthly theme. For example, in order for students to benefit the most from prompts centered on future planning, such as Week 1, Day 2 earlier, they must also have an understanding of how to problem solve in certain situations and have empathy for themselves and those around them. Similarly, optimistic future-mindedness plays a vital role in planning for the future and allows students to set positive goals and have faith in their own abilities.

As you can see, MCCs have an underlying pedagogical structure linked to SECD, along with opportunities to develop conversational skills. Like many good strategies, MCCs can look deceptively simple. For optimal impact, there are a number of guidelines for how to prepare for MCCs and how

to organize prompts over the course of a whole year. The next chapter outlines in detail the nuts and bolts of carrying out MCCs and the many different ways prompts can be used.

Chapter Wrap-Up

The MCC approach is multilayered, with each layer equally important to understand and integrate consistently into daily prompts. We reviewed the underlying structure of MCCs and how they prepare students for school and civic engagement through four distinct dimensions (skills, virtues, themes, and developmental progression). We examined how the daily prompts for MCCs provide an opportunity to sharpen students' focus on certain SEL skills, think about and internalize key virtues that promote positive purpose, and discuss themes that are relevant to their life in school. This is all done within a unique, three-year developmental framework, through conversations that allow students to take ownership of the self (*Better Me*), expand to think of themselves as participants in improving their school community (*Better School*), and ultimately see how they can take social action to impact positive change in their neighborhoods and beyond (*Better World*). A sample month is provided as a visual to demonstrate the unique MCC framework in practice.

Reflective Conversations for Growth

Now that you have reviewed the multiple dimensions and moving parts to MCCs to understand the overall structure, as well as taken a look at one traditional sample month of prompts, reflect on/write down the following and commit to taking the appropriate follow-up actions in order to continue to learn and grow as a Conversation Leader.

ACTION STEPS/PRIORITIES

What skills, virtues, and themes are most needed for your classroom or your school and how can they be used to improve the school? Please choose at least one for each.

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ADAPTATIONS

Using thoughts from your Action Steps/Priorities and Figure 2.1 as a starter guide, what will a Year-Long Themes, Virtues, and Skills chart look like in your classroom? How will it be used?

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CHALLENGES

What is one challenge you foresee with implementing this framework, taking into consideration the sample month? How can you address this challenge? Who can help?

_____

_____

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QUESTIONS

Do you have any questions that remain? Looking to contact the authors? Send an email to MorningClassroomConversations@gmail.com with a specific MCC start to finish question and the authors will get back to you within 48 hours.

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