

# Strengthening Your Practice for Equitable Classroom Discourse

Engaging all students in sensemaking in science requires that we learn and practice ways to elicit and clarify all ideas. When we model this for our students, we teach them important skills that will reach beyond the classroom into our multilingual world. The following reflection questions can help strengthen this important practice and work toward building an equitable discourse community to support collaborative sensemaking. Here are three sets of reflection questions: one for educators, one for student groups, and one for individual students.

## Reflection Questions for Educators

There is so much going on in most science lessons that it is hard to keep track of everything. Audio recording a lesson can occasionally help us notice our discourse patterns, which can then help us better support student engagement. Arranging with a trusted colleague to trade off occasional classroom observations can also give us an objective look at what is happening in our classroom. It can also help to schedule regular reflections on our progress. The following questions can be used alone or as part of a discussion with colleagues who are working toward the same goal.

### Teacher Weekly Reflection Questions

1. Who is doing most of the talking in my classroom—my students or me?
2. What are the most frequent types of interactions I set up and direct in my classroom—teacher to individual student, teacher to small group, student to student?
3. Am I giving equal time and attention to everyone’s ideas? Examples: English learners and English fluent students? Boys and girls? Students whose contributions are easy to comprehend and those whose contributions are not?
4. How long am I waiting quietly before and after a student answers?
5. What were a few interesting or surprising student ideas I heard this week?
6. Were there ideas I did not know how to handle? Did I make a note to go back to those?
7. Have I heard the multilingual learners in my class initiate ideas and exchanges?
8. Do I see/hear evidence that students are listening to one another? Helping one another?
9. Are my small group assignments working? Do I need to make any changes?
10. What one or two things do I want to work more on next week?



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# Reflection Questions for Student Work Groups

Because we are helping our students learn to collaborate effectively with one another, it is important to engage them in shared discussion about how well they are working together. The practice of regular reflection can reinforce their responsibility for their collaboration; and it emphasizes the expectation that they will use their agency as learners to improve their collaboration.

A group of students who work together regularly can discuss the following questions:

1. Are we all getting a chance to express our ideas?
2. Do we all feel as if we are really listening to one another?
3. Is anyone having trouble? What could we do to help?

# Reflection Questions for Individual Students

Working collaboratively as sense makers gives students opportunities to develop self-monitoring and self-management skills. To support their ongoing agency as learners, consider setting up regular opportunities for them to reflect on the nature of their participation and collaboration.

Here are some reflection questions for individual students:

1. Am I really listening to my classmates? What is the most interesting idea I heard someone say this week?
2. Am I expressing my ideas? If not, why am I hesitating? What can I do to change this? What help could I ask for?
3. Am I understanding and following everyone's ideas? What could I do to get better at this? What help could I offer if I am having trouble understanding someone? What could I ask?

