

Structuring Student Participation in Discussion

When facilitating a class discussion, it is ideal to hear from as many different students as possible, not just the few who feel the most confident sharing ideas in group settings.

One of the most effective means of equalizing participation and engagement across a group is to provide a structure for response when you pose a question to your group. Use the tips below to create a rich and engaging discussion with students.

Think-Pair-Share: Explain to students that you are going to pose a question. Their job is to think silently to themselves about the answer and give a thumbs-up when they have thought of something; then, when you say it's time, they'll turn to the person sitting next to them and share their answer. After they've had a chance to share with their partner, you'll open it up to the whole group to share. To encourage active listening within the whole group, you can ask specifically for answers that pairs had in common or answers that students heard from their partners.

Toe-to-Toe: Have students stand up. Explain to students that you'll call out two body parts, like "toe-to-toe!" and their job will be to find someone silently and stand toe-to-toe with them. Once everyone is silently paired (if there's an odd number of students, you can play, too), pose a question for the pairs to

discuss. After a minute, call out a new set of body parts, such as "pinky-to-pinky," "elbow-to-elbow," or "knee-to-knee." Their job is to find a new partner, connect silently, and then together with their new partner answer a new question posed by you.

Give One, Get One: After students think and journal about a topic, ask them to get up and find someone across the room with whom to share their thoughts or answers. The students will then move to another partner when prompted and will share both their own thoughts and those of their previous partner.

Hop and Find: Ask everyone to start hopping on one foot. Now their job is to hop around and find someone else also hopping on that same foot. If almost everyone has a partner, but you have two people left hopping on different feet, tell them they can be partners. Once they've found a partner, have them do something fun to connect, like give a high five. Then ask a question, and have them share answers with their partners.

In-Out Circle: Have students stand up in a circle. Ask every other student, going around the circle, to take a step into the circle and then make a half-turn clockwise so that they are now facing the person who used to be standing to their right. Now they have a partner (if you

have an odd number of students, you can play, too). Have them do something fun to connect, like have a thumb war. Then ask a question, and have them share answers with their partners. Next, tell the outside circle to move one person to the right, so each student has a new partner. Ask a new question for them to share, or ask them to share what they just learned about the first question from their last partner.

Pass the Ball: Gather all your students in one circle. Hold a ball, and explain that this is the “talking ball.” Ask a question, and ask anyone who wants to answer to raise a hand. Toss the ball to someone with a hand up. That student can answer while he or she has the ball and then toss it to anyone else with a hand raised. Once everyone who wants to answer has had a chance, they can toss the ball back to you, and you can pose a new question.

Gallery Walk: Students work together in small groups as they walk around the classroom observing material at various stations. Each group starts at a different station and pauses to reflect on the content at the station. Students write reactions, questions, or comments on a worksheet, flip chart, or Post-its near each station. If cooperative learning techniques will be used, assign roles like leader, monitor, reporter, and recorder. The role should be alternated between each team member. As groups rotate through each station, students can read content left by the previous group and add their own. Students end at their first station to read what was added. The group wraps up with a final conversation about takeaways.

Recommended Resources

- The “BEETLES” Project Promoting Discussion Resources

Methods for Calling on Students Randomly

As an educator, it can be helpful to have a system for calling on students randomly, instead of always asking for volunteers. This can be helpful for equalizing participation in class discussions, assigning cleanup tasks, or other situations where you want to distribute the attention evenly and not be seen as picking favorites. If you are using these methods to call on students to answer questions publicly, ensure they’ve had time to prepare an answer they’re ready to share, so they don’t feel embarrassed or put on the spot. A great way to do this is to have them discuss the answer to a question in a group, letting them know this ahead of time: Make sure everyone in your group is ready to share what your group thinks because I’m going to call on someone randomly. This gives them a reason to feel accountable in their group discussion time and gives everyone time to prepare to be called on.

- **Popsicle Sticks:** Many teachers will have a cup with popsicle sticks in it. Each popsicle stick has a student’s name on it, so he or she can say, Okay, today’s sweeper will be . . . (pull a stick without looking) . . . Jennifer!
- **Spinners or Dice:** Inside a classroom, you can give each seat a number. If students are at shared tables, you can even number the tables and the seats. So then you can say, Okay, today person number . . . (roll the dice or spin the spinner) . . . four at each table will share the answer you got.
- **Train or Pass It On:** Students call on one another to answer and/or ask questions. Students should not raise their hands to be called on and should be encouraged to call on a variety of people in the classroom. Students can also “pass” on a question they

do not want to answer by calling on another student for help. This is called "Pass It On."

Recommended Resources

- *Tools for Teaching* by Fred Jones
- *Rethinking Classroom Management* by Patricia Belvel

Transition Strategies

Experienced educators will readily tell you that management issues often come up during transitions: those moments between activities when students are rotating between stations, stopping an activity and transitioning into cleaning up, moving from their desks to the carpet, or walking from the classroom to the garden. The following are a few effective strategies for making transitions smooth and structured. Always consider that students have different and unique mobilities and adapt as necessary. Ask a teacher if you have questions or need suggestions about how to best lead these activities with their students.

Walking Transitions:

These are great ways to engage a group while moving together from one place to another (e.g., walking from the classroom to the garden or cafeteria).

- **Buzz Like a Bee:** suggested for grades Pre-K–1—When walking from one place to another, invite students to "waddle like a duck," "buzz like a bee," or the like. This works best outdoors.
- **Follow the Leader:** suggested for grades Pre-K–2—When walking from one place to another, have the children follow you as the leader, and change up how you move (e.g., by walking, then skipping, then galloping, then hopping, etc.) If you have a fair amount of

distance to cover, you can rotate leaders as you keep going, giving students a chance to lead the group.

- **Walk and Talk:** suggested for grades 3 and up—For this activity, get your students into two lines of equal length. Have one line face the other. Then have each student high five the student across from them in the other line. This is their partner. Pose a question, and have them talk about the answer as you walk together to your destination. If the walk is long enough, you can stop part way, and send one student from the front of one line to the back of the line. Have that line bump up, and everyone will have a new partner. Give these new partners a new question to discuss and continue walking. This activity works best with open-ended questions such as, "What are all the ways you can think of that nourishing foods help us in life?" or "What are all the ways you can think of that plants help animals?"

Other Transitions:

The following are effective ways to structure all the other transitions that happen in a class, such as when students are switching gears between an activity and cleanup. To begin, use your callback signal to get students' attention. Then explain what's next, starting with a phrase like, "In a moment . . ." or "When I say 'Carrots,'" to let them know not to start the transition until after you've explained it. So, for example, you might say, "When I say 'Carrots,' we're going to start cleaning up . . ." Once you've signaled for the transition to begin, the following structures can also help things along and make the transition its own small, fun, collaborative activity.

- **Transition Music:** suggested for all

grades— When you have a task that should take a specific, short amount of time, you can play a song for just that amount of time, and challenge students to complete the entire transition (rotating stations, cleaning up their supplies, whatever the task is) in that amount of time. They'll know their time is up when the song ends.

- **Visual and Audio Timers:** suggested for all grades—Display a large, visual clock or timer that older students can reference to see how much longer they have at a station or on a task. You can also create auditory cues for younger students such as, “When you hear my chime, you have one minute to wrap up. When you hear the double-chime, it’s time to start cleaning up.” Again, challenge your students to complete their transitions in the amount of time given.

Recommended Resources

- “Mastering Classroom Transitions,” Edutopia

Back Pocket Activities: What to Do If You Finish Early

“My lesson went great, but now we’re finished, and we still have ten minutes until I send them back to class. What should I do?!” “My students are working in groups, and one group is finished, but another group needs more time. What should I do?!” Everyone works at a different pace, and this means that situations like those described above come up all the time. Back Pocket Activities are activities that require little to no prep and can take up as little or as much time as you need them to. Here are a few Back Pocket Activities to get you started:

Indoor Back Pocket Activities:

- **20 Questions**
 - Suggested grade level: 1st and up

- Materials: None
- Activity: Think of something related to what you’ve been studying together. Invite your students to ask “yes/no” questions to figure out what you’re thinking of. If they get it in fewer than twenty questions, they win. If not, you win! After one round, invite student volunteers to think of words, whisper them to you, and then they can lead the activity with the class, answering the yes/no questions from their peers.

- **Charades**

- Suggested grade level: 3rd and up
- Materials: A cup full of words related to what you’ve been studying together that could be acted out
- Activity: Invite a volunteer up to choose a word from the cup. Their challenge is to act out the word, and have the class guess the word. Whoever guesses correctly first gets to be the next actor, if they want to. Otherwise, just ask for another volunteer.

- **The Word Game**

- Suggested grade level: 4th and up
- Materials: Chart paper or a whiteboard and markers
- Activity: Divide the class into two teams. Ask each team to send up one volunteer. Have those two volunteers sit in front of the board, facing the rest of the class. Explain the way the game works: You’ll write a word on the board, and the two volunteers will try to guess the word. Their team will give them one-word clues, which cannot be the word itself or anything that sounds like or rhymes with the word. Behind the volunteers, write a word on the board that is related to what you’ve been studying, such as “nutrient” or “pollinator.” Ask Team A if anyone has a one-word

clue for their volunteer to start things off. Call on someone, saying “This team for ten points.” They give the clue, and the person up front gets one guess. If they get it right, they get ten points. If they get it wrong, it goes to Team B for nine points. It keeps going back and forth, decreasing in point value each time as they gather more and more clues. If it gets all the way to zero, they can read the word and then start over with two new volunteers and a new word.

- **Research**

- Suggested grade level: 4th and up
- Materials: Books or computers with internet Activity: Establish a “Wonder Box” or other space where students can record and submit research questions throughout the year such as, “What is a carbohydrate?” If a student finishes their work early, they can pull out a question, research an answer, and then submit it to you. If you approve it, they can present it to the class for extra credit. (You can also plant questions in the Wonder Box to get things started, or encourage them to research things you think would be of interest.)
- Games/Icebreakers—You can also use any of the Name Games or Icebreakers listed above as Back-Pocket Activities.

Outdoor/Garden Back Pocket Activities:

- **Digging in the Digging Bed**

- Suggested grade level: Pre-K–1
- Materials/: Trowels
- Preparation: Designate a bed or area in your garden where students can freely dig.
- Activity: This is as simple as it sounds! Just let “early finishers” dig in the “Digging Bed.” Kids this age love to dig!

They can look for insects, mix water with soil, or just dig holes.

- **Finding Insects**

- Suggested grade level: K and up
- Materials: A piece of plywood (optional: art supplies) Preparation: Lay a piece of wood or plywood on the ground, and leave it there for a while. Insects and other critters will start to live underneath it!
- Activity: Send students to the piece of wood to look for insects and other critters. Have students observe the insects and other critters. If time allows, each student can illustrate a critter they saw.

- **Snail Patrol**

- Suggested grade level: K and up
- Preparation: Decide what to do with snails. Some schools feed them to the chickens. Some create “Snail Havens” where they can live their lives in peace without eating all the crops. Some kill them.
- Activity: Have students gather snails off of plants, and do whatever you and your class have decided to do with them.

- **Garden Tasks**

- Suggested grade level: K and up
- Materials: Garden tools
- Activity: Have students help with basic garden maintenance by weeding, deadheading, flipping compost, or watering plants.

- **Rainbow Chips**

- Suggested grade level: 1st–5th
- Materials: A variety of paint chip samples from a local hardware store
- Activity: Give each student a paint chip and have them look for an exact color match in the garden. When they find it, they can show you (or show a buddy) and then trade in for another color.

- **Flower Bracelets**

- Suggested grade level: 2nd and up
- Materials: Blue painter's tape
- Activity: Give each student a piece of blue painter's tape, and have them wrap it around their wrist, sticky-side out. This is easiest if you work with a friend to wrap each other's. Let them know which flowers and leaves they can pick, and then let them pick and add flowers and leaves to their bracelets.

- **Sheet Shake**

- Suggested grade level: 3rd and up
- Materials: A sheet you don't mind getting dirty; magnify glasses or bug boxes;
- Activity: Have student place a sheet on the ground underneath a shrub. Have them gently shake a branch of the shrub, and let the insects fall out. Then have students observe the insects using magnifying glasses or bug boxes. If time allows, each student can illustrate an insect.

Recommended Resources

- Life Lab's Back Pocket Activity Videos

Lesson Closing and Reflection

Leading Reflection Sessions

For new knowledge or concepts to sink in, it is critical for students to have time to reflect on their learning. FoodCorps lessons include prompts for students to reflect on both the content of the lesson and the process of learning together. Here are some tips for leading reflection sessions effectively.

Ask Broad Questions

Conclude your lessons by asking one or more broad questions that connect back to the essential question that guided the lesson. With a broad, open-ended question, you're not trying

to get the students to fill in the blank or guess what you're thinking. What do we call the part of the plant that grows under the ground? is not a broad question. Instead, inspire students to think deeply about the topic and consider how it is relevant to them.

According to the Lawrence Hall of Science's "Beetles" project, broad questions achieve the following:

". . . allow the student to make sense of and explore their own ideas freely, in their own terms, often without restrictions and with only minimal guidance from the instructor. These questions are useful to encourage students to synthesize ideas, extend ideas, deduce and predict, organize elements of what they've learned into a fresh pattern, and make learning relevant to their own life experiences. Broad questions encourage students to share various ideas during a discussion and to value other students' ideas as they are expressed" (Lawrence Hall of Science 2018)

Here are some examples:

- What did you learn about today? (where food comes from, how people prepare nourishing food, etc.) How might you use this knowledge in your life?
- What surprised you about this activity?
- What other questions do you have about this?
- How would you explain this (the topic of today's lesson) to someone else?

Inquire about Students' Personal Viewpoints

It is also valuable to ask your students probing questions that allow them to explore their viewpoints to honor their personal curiosity and connection with food. Questions that begin

with certain phrases that move beyond “yes” or “no” answers and support the expansion of their curiosity beyond the classroom are key.

Here are some examples:

1. How do you feel about . . . ?
2. What would you change if you were to do this on your own? (e.g., if you were to recreate this recipe, plant your own garden bed, etc.)
3. How would you describe your experience with . . . ?

Invite Students to Reflect on Their Learning Process

In addition to reflecting on what they learned, it is valuable for students to reflect on how they learned it. These questions might focus on how they took in new information or how they worked with others.

Here are some examples:

1. What strategy did you use to figure that out? Did anyone else use a different strategy?
2. What did you or other members of your team do that made it fun and productive to work together? What do you think you and your team can work on to work better together in the future?

Your reflection sessions can take many forms. You might discuss as a whole class, have individuals write responses, or even just have students think quietly about answers to the questions. The most important thing is to protect some time (usually about five minutes) at the end of your lesson to do this reflection so that the learning can sink in.

