Defined Academy

LAUNCHPAD ACTIVITY
Student Voice

OVERVIEW OF THE TEACHING PRACTICE

A classroom that honors student voice is a place where students feel like their ideas are welcomed. They know that it's OK to offer ideas, share opinions, and speak in their own authentic voice – and maybe take a risk sometimes. Honoring student voice is an important part of creating a student-centered learning environment. It's a key feature of project-based learning.

It is likely you include student voice in a variety of ways in your classroom already. For example, you may conduct discussions and assign writing in which students are invited to share their thoughts. You might give students surveys at the beginning of the year to find out what they are interested in. You might use morning meetings, circle time and informal reflective moments to encourage student voice.

Honoring student voice also means students are able to connect with each other. A good way to support students in making connections is to provide a structure for listening to each other, sharing ideas, and building on one another's ideas. When students are analyzing a piece of text, for example, they can regularly use discussion protocols to help develop the skills of engaging in discourse and respecting the perspectives of others. Structures like this, along with a classroom culture that creates a safe and inclusive environment, will help all your students make their voices heard.

EXPLANATION OF THE ACTIVITY

TITLE: Making Space for Our Voices
GRADES: 4-12
TIME: 20 minutes

PURPOSE: To help students create space to share their own perspective and build on the ideas of others.

OVERVIEW

This is a text-based discussion strategy that ensures that students have an opportunity to reflect on a passage and discuss it with peers equitably.

STEPS

1. *Review.* Provide students with a passage to read or a video to watch. As they review, they should highlight or make note of anything that stands out to them, and prepare to explain their reasoning.
2. *Arrange*. Students should sit with groups of about three and arrange themselves so they are able to make eye contact with each other.
3. *First share.* The first student in the trio shares their primary takeaway and reasoning. The partners listen. (2 min)

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4. *First response.* One partner responds to the first student. They might share why they agree, another perspective to consider, or a related thought. The partners listen. (2 min)
5. *Second response.* The other partner repeats the same process. The partners listen. (2 min)
6. *First reflection.* The first presenter in the small group reflects on what they heard their partners say. They might share how it extended their thinking or why their thinking remains unchanged. (1 min)
7. *Repeat.* Repeat steps 3-6 with the other two partners. (14 min)
8. OPTIONAL (but encouraged): When all groups have finished sharing, the teacher should debrief the whole process. Some possible questions include:
    a. How did it feel to have space to share and know others would listen?
    b. What new ideas do you have?
    c. What might we do differently next time?

NOTES

- Plan to model this strategy the first time you use it.
- Some students might benefit from visual cues to remind themselves when to listen. For example: we've seen some teachers provide students with color-coded cards to sit in front of them. When it is a student's turn to talk, they have a green card in front of them. Yellow means that it's their turn to listen.

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