

Essential Features of Structured, Inclusive Academic Discussions

1. An Appropriate Question/Task

- a clearly worded task, with any embedded vocabulary clarified through pre-teaching
- an open-ended task that invites varied responses
- a modeled response so students fully understand the task demands: generate reasons and justification, examples, predictions, etc.
- a task that elicits/expands upon prior knowledge/experiences (or follows a schema-building activity if students have limited background)

2. Structured Thinking/Processing Time (“Prepared Participation”)

- adequate wait time for all students to process the task and formulate a response (without hand-raising or blurting)
- for more demanding tasks, time to write first to organize and focus thinking
- for more demanding tasks, sentence starters that model academic discourse and include target vocabulary

3. Partner Rehearsal (Prior to Unified-Class Debriefing)

- students feel more accountable for generating a thoughtful response when they know they will be asked to share with a peer
- less intimidating practice with academic responding
- entire class is engaged in responding since relatively few will actually contribute to the unified-class debriefing
- students receive feedback on their response before potentially contributing to the class discussion and have the opportunity to modify/improve

4. Unified-Class Debriefing & Wrap-Up

- no initial hand-raising or blurting
- random calling on students (consider jump-starting the discussion with a few “nominated volunteers” identified by the teacher during the structured thinking and writing phase of the activity – this makes the discussion run more efficiently and ensures a range of responses)
- authentic volunteers asked to contribute after random calling
- accountable listening: assigned note-taking task, an expectation to acknowledge similar ideas or report a partner’s idea

Classroom Observation Tool: Structured Lesson Engagement and Class Discussion

Assess each item using this scale: 3 = strongly evident, 2 = somewhat evident, 1 = not evident. Provide concrete observational data and constructive feedback for each item.

Engagement Strategies	Observations & Feedback
<p>Students are partnered for structured interaction.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ρ 1 ρ 2 ρ 3</p>	
<p>Critical lesson tasks and questions are clearly posted (overhead/board/LCD).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ρ 1 ρ 2 ρ 3</p>	
<p>Lesson delivery/task is regularly interrupted to orchestrate a concrete student response to instruction (e.g. tell your partner, write an example, underline).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ρ 1 ρ 2 ρ 3</p>	
<p>Teacher clearly sets up lesson tasks including; written and verbal instructions, time frames, student responsibilities (e.g. note taking, text marking, active listening).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ρ 1 ρ 2 ρ 3</p>	
<p>Teacher routinely structures student use of academic language; modeling an appropriate academic response, providing sentence starters w/target vocabulary and syntax, partner rehearsal before whole class reporting, etc.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ρ 1 ρ 2 ρ 3</p>	
<p>Every student appears appropriately engaged in each lesson activity (e.g. taking notes, sharing w/partner, reading along).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ρ 1 ρ 2 ρ 3</p>	
<p>Teacher actively monitors student responses (e.g. walking around, providing feedback, redirecting off task behavior).</p>	

ρ_1 ρ_2 ρ_3	
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Name:	Lesson:	Subject Area:
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Questions Regarding Structured Student Lesson Engagement

For the Specific Lesson on

I plan to teach this lesson on the following date(s)

P Grouping:

- . What will be the most beneficial way to partner/group students for structured interaction?

- . How will students be kept "on-task"?

P Questioning:

- . List at least 2 critical questions/tasks that all students must respond to/complete for this lesson that guide students' understanding of the focal lesson concepts.

4

4

- . List the anticipated responses that will demonstrate students' understanding of the focal concepts being addressed in this lesson.

4

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P Academic Vocabulary:

- . What academic vocabulary will be critical to explicitly teach to students in order for them to understand the lesson and successfully complete any lesson tasks?

How will you teach these key terms to students?

P Sentence Starters:

- . What scaffolds will you provide to support less proficient learners in accomplishing your tasks: sentence starters, note-taking support, model answers, partner rehearsal, visual aids, etc.?

- . List at least 2 sentence starters that students will use that will demonstrate students' understanding of the lesson and will demonstrate their ability to utilize academic vocabulary.

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- . How will you explicitly teach students effective use of these academic language scaffolds?

P Student Engagement:

- . How will you actively monitor student engagement? For example, will you be walking about to review the quality of students' written work and shared verbal responses as they interact?

- . What clues (evidence checks) will you look for to recognize that students are actively engaged in various lesson tasks?

P Assessment:

- . How will you assess whether students are leaving class with the intended skill set?

- . What will you do to meet the needs of students who have not met the intended goal?

For General Classroom Practices:

Grouping:

- 4 Are students partnered for routine verbal rehearsal, accountable listening and sharing, idea generation, etc? If so, how? If not, why not?

Questioning:

- 4 Are students regularly cued to reflect (not blurt), write a brief response to a posed question/task, and prepare to share within a unified-class discussion?

Sentence Starters:

- 4 Are students regularly provided with sentence starters and expected to utilize academic language or are they simply sharing utilizing casual English?

Student Engagement:

- 4 Are students provided with other forms of learning scaffolds and response tasks that provide the teacher with evidence checks of engagement during teacher read-alouds, lectures, class reading, films, etc.?

Idea Wave (A Structured Academic Discussion Strategy)

Implementation Guidelines for Teachers:

- 4 Students listen while the teacher poses a well-focused question or task that gets students thinking about a topic before or after reading (e.g., List 3 potential reasons the proposed amendment to the constitution will/will not pass in the Senate).
- 4 Provide students with one or two ideas to jump-start their list. Ask everyone to begin their brainstorming list by copying the ideas from the board. This will get their cognitive juices flowing and help struggling writers feel less intimidated by a blank piece of paper.
- 4 Give students adequate quiet time (e.g., 3 minutes) to consider what they know about the topic and record a number of possible responses prior to the unified-class discussion. Encourage students to jot down as many ideas as possible, using phrases.

- 4 Provide students with 1 or 2 sentence starters after they have generated individual brainstorming lists. The sentence starters serve as models of effective syntax and academic vocabulary usage. Ask them to select their favorite idea(s) and rewrite it using a sentence starter. In this way, less proficient academic language users will have a linguistic scaffold to bolster their linguistic output and confidence in sharing aloud. They will also receive some vital guided practice in writing academic English discourse vs. simply writing down their spoken English. For example, if students are being asked to make predictions about what will happen in the next chapter of *The Joyluck Club*, they might be provided with these sentence starters: *I predict that Waverly's mother will be disappointed in/proud of her daughter's behavior because...; Based on Waverly's relationship with her mother, I assume that her mother will react very positively/negatively because...*
- 4 After students have completed writing a complete statement, ask them to practice sharing their idea with a partner. Before they begin "rehearsing" with a partner, model how to read aloud each sentence starter using one of your ideas. Ask everyone to read aloud your two sample sentences with you, after you have modeled using effective prosody (proper pronunciation, pausing, and intonation). In this way, less confident language users will have a necessary rehearsal session.
- 4 Monitor students' written responses and select 2 "nominated volunteers" to jumpstart the discussion. Remind students to use a "public voice" when contributing.
- 4 Whip around the class in a relatively fast-paced and structured manner, simulating a wave-like direction (e.g., down rows, around tables), allowing as many students as possible or necessary to share an idea using the assigned starter in 15 seconds or less.
- 4 Require that students point out similarities/differences in responses rather than state that their ideas have already been mentioned: (e.g., *My idea builds upon/is similar to*). This fosters active, accountable listening and validation of ideas. Consider also giving students a focused active listening and note-taking task during the idea sharing: (e.g., Jot down 2 ideas that you hadn't thought of and the name of the contributors).
- 4 Refrain from interrupting the structured idea generation by elaborating upon students' contributions during the Idea Wave; synthesize/elaborate to provide closure.

Language Strategies for Active Classroom Participation

Expressing an Opinion

I think/believe that . . .

It seems to me that . . .

In my opinion . . .

Predicting

I guess/predict/imagine that . . .

Based on . . ., I infer that . . .

I hypothesize that . . .

Asking for Clarification

What do you mean?

Will you explain that again?

I have a question about that.

Paraphrasing

So you are saying that . . .

In other words, you think . . .

What I hear you saying is . . .

Soliciting a Response

What do you think?

We haven't heard from you yet.

Acknowledging Ideas

My idea is similar to/related to

_____’s idea.

Do you agree?

I agree with (a person) that . . .

What answer did you get?

My idea builds upon ____'s idea.

Reporting a Partner's Idea

Reporting a Group's Idea

____ indicated that . . .

We decided/agreed that . . .

____ pointed out to me that . . .

We concluded that . . .

____ emphasized that . . .

Our group sees it differently.

____ concluded that . . .

We had a different approach.

Disagreeing

Offering a Suggestion

I don't agree with you because . . .

Maybe we could . . .

I got a different answer than you.

What if we . . .

I see it another way.

Here's something we might try.

Affirming

Holding the Floor

That's an interesting idea.

As I was saying, . . .

I hadn't thought of that.

If I could finish my thought . . .

I see what you mean.

What I was trying to say was . . .

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Language Strategies
to Acknowledge Other People's Ideas

Casual Conversational English

My idea is like _____'s idea.

My idea is the same as _____'s.

Formal Spoken & Written English

Expressing Agreement & Building Upon an Idea:

My idea is similar to/related to _____'s idea.

My idea builds upon _____'s idea.

I agree with _____'s perspective. I also think that . . .

As _____ already pointed out, it seems like . . .

_____ already mentioned . . ., but I would like to add that . . .

Expressing Polite Disagreement & Providing Reasons:

I don't entirely agree with _____ that . . .

My opinion/experience/perspective is different than _____'s.

My idea is slightly different than _____'s.

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Example Structured Academic Talk:
Benefits of Highly Structured and Systematic Student Partnering

Brainstorming/Casual English:

List 2 additional benefits for English learners when teachers systematically integrate thoughtful, structured opportunities for students to partner during various lesson stages.

1. Teacher's response: all students can practice important lesson vocabulary
2. Student's response: lesson is more interesting
- 3.
- 4.

Select your two favorite ideas and rewrite them using the following sentence starters.

1. Structured partnering tasks enable all students to ____ (verb base form: *practice, rehearse, try*)

Teacher's modeled response:

Structured partnering tasks enable all students to practice important lesson vocabulary

2. Structured partner discussions benefit students by ____ (verb + ing: *providing, allowing, helping*)

Teacher's modeled response:

Structured partner discussion benefit students by allowing them to practice new vocabulary.

During the class discussion, jot down two ideas you had not already considered.

- 1.
- 2.

uReading Relevant to Closing the Verbal Gap for K-12 English Language Learners and Striving Readers

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