Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

LISTENING AND QUESTIONING TO BUILD COMMUNITY

"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about."

–Margaret J. Wheatley

OVERVIEW

Students engage with listening, questioning, and paraphrasing protocols to build accountability in their classroom and school community.

LEVELS

- Middle School
- High School

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To build a positive classroom climate at the beginning of the year
- To cultivate strong relationships between students
- To establish a deeper sense of accountability to the classroom community

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 1 hour over two class periods

MATERIALS

- Sample Classroom Norms to build Community and Accountability
- Accountable Talk Stems (one per student or pair, or projected on a screen)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Develop key listening and questioning skills related to expressing empathy and building deeper understanding

- Build a classroom community of safety, trust and inclusion in which they feel accountable to each other

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- Making Practices Culturally Responsive
- Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs
- Making a Practice Trauma-Informed
- Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered
- Facilitating Bridging Discussions: Preparing Your Classroom

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Accountability
- Deep Listening
- Thoughtful Questioning

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision Making

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused attention
- Non-judgment
- Open awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Deep listening and questioning can be used to strengthen the classroom community, make connections, bridge differences, and develop peer relationships.
- Take a moment to reflect on how you hold yourself accountable to creating safety, trust, and inclusion in communities of which you are a part. How do others in the communities that you are part of maintain accountability?
- Note that there are many cultural differences in communication and norms. For example, cultures differ on the body language that reflects listening and respect. Explore your own cultural norms and prepare to encourage students to share their personal and cultural norms as well.

INSTRUCTIONS

BEFORE STUDENTS ARRIVE

- Print out copies of the Accountable Talk Sentence stems (one per student or one per pair or have it projected on the board).
- Be prepared to keep track of time for the class during the discussion protocol to instruct students when it is time to ask questions and switch partners.
- For Day Two, choose two of your already established classroom norms for the class to work with, or choose two from the list of sample classroom norms that you would like to adopt.

DAY 1

PART 1: INTRODUCTION (15 MINUTES)

- Open the discussion by sharing that today the class will be exploring how to listen deeply to classmates' points of view, ask thoughtful questions, and respond to their peers to build understanding.
- Hand out the Accountable Talk Sentence Stems.
    - Ask your class to brainstorm a definition for the term "accountable." You can then add onto their brainstorm by sharing that "being accountable during today's activity means caring about others in your community, working to understand their perspectives, and engaging in ways that help everyone learn in a safe, trusting, and inclusive environment."
    - Ask the class to brainstorm how the types of questions in the handout might help them stay accountable to another person and how they might serve to cultivate safety, trust, and inclusion in a community. Examples:
        - They help students understand each others perspectives.
        - They demonstrate careful listening and genuine interest.
        - They allow students to build on each other's ideas.
    - Consider sharing the following definition of inclusion with your students, if helpful: Inclusion is a sense of connectedness or belonging to others and within an organization. This includes creating conditions where all feel accepted, affirmed, safe, empowered, and supported, and where all have equitable voice and power. (KIPP Equity Glossary)
    - Conduct a quick practice round using the Accountable Talk Sentence Stems. Choose a statement that will be engaging for your students and that they can easily practice the sentence stems with.
        - Examples include: "Winter is the best season because it's fun to play in the snow" or "16 (or whatever ages most of your students are) is the best age because you are starting to have more autonomy.".
    - Invite students to raise their hands and respond using one of the Accountable Talk Sentence Stems. Ask at least three students to respond using the sentence stems.

PART 2: PRACTICING WITH ACCOUNTABLE TALK SENTENCE STEMS (10-15 MINUTES)

- Next, let students know that they will practice having quick conversations using the Accountable Talk Sentence Stems.
- Break the class into small groups of 2-4 students each.

- Share a prompt with the class and invite one student in each group to respond, uninterrupted, for 1 minute. Share your own prompt or pull from the list below:
    - My favorite class in school is…because…
    - I find…to be the hardest part of the school day because…
    - The most interesting thing I learned this week was…because…
    - I am looking forward to…this year…because
    - …is unfair and I think it would be better if…
- Then give the listeners in the groups 1-2 minutes to respond using the Accountable Talk Sentence Stems.
- Invite a new student to be the speaker in each group and repeat the protocol with a new prompt.
- Repeat with new prompts until all students in each group have had the opportunity to be the speaker.
- Let students know that they will be continuing to practice these questioning skills as well as the new skill of paraphrasing with each other in the next lesson.

DAY 2

PART 1: INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

- Introduce the activity by sharing that today students will have the opportunity to continue to practice deep listening skills using the accountability stems.
- Share that in addition to using the accountability question stems, paraphrasing, and adhering to classroom norms are other ways students can be accountable to each other. You might say something like: “Classroom norms help everyone know what is expected of them and what they can expect of others. Paraphrasing, or restating something someone else said in your own words, can also show you are accountable to another person, because it demonstrates that you are listening deeply to what they share with you.”
- It may be helpful to review the Building Collaborative Classroom Norms practice, or any classroom norms you have already developed before the next activity.

PART 2: USING THE “ECHOING A FRIEND” CONVERSATION PROTOCOL (15 MINUTES)

- Next, place students in pairs. For this activity, do not let students self-select their pairs; instead have them partner with someone they don’t know well.
- Consider having pairs engage in a short ice-breaker to warm up before the activity.
- Let students know that they will each take turns sharing their thoughts on classroom norms and using the Accountable Talk Sentence Stems. Then at the end, each student will write down a paraphrase of what they heard into their journal and check with their partner for understanding.
- Share the first classroom norm that you chose for the students to discuss. Use your own or choose from the Sample Classroom Norms.
- Invite Speaker 1 to talk, uninterrupted, for 1-2 minutes answering the question:
    - “How does this classroom norm serve to build safety, trust, and inclusion in the classroom community?”
- Their partner should listen and not speak until the 1-2 minutes is up.

- Next, Speaker 2 uses the Accountable Talk Sentence Stems to ask 1 or 2 follow-up questions and respond to their partner. **At the end, Speaker 2 should ask Speaker 1 what part of the conversation they would be comfortable with Speaker 2 paraphrasing back to the class.**
- Repeat the protocol above having partners switch roles.
- Once both partners have had a chance to be speakers and listeners, invite them to take 5 minutes and paraphrase – restate something someone else said in their own words – what they heard in their journal.
- Then have students share their paraphrased reflection back to their partner to check for understanding.
- If you have time, ask for a few volunteers to share out loud and paraphrase what they heard from their partners.

CLOSURE (5-10 MINUTES)

- As a class, ask students to reflect on how they felt discussing their classroom norms using the listening and accountability protocols.
    - Thinking about the exchanges we just had, how did this protocol help you uphold our norms and practice accountability?
    - Did you learn anything new about your partner?
    - What did it feel like to be the listener and what did it feel like to be the speaker?
    - What did it feel like to hear your partner paraphrase what you shared with them?
    - How can you stay accountable to your classroom community? What concrete actions can you take to uphold norms that build safety, trust, and inclusion in the classroom community?

SOURCE

Making Caring Common, Harvard Graduate School of Education

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What worked or didn’t work in leading this practice? How did the students respond to the practice? Would you change anything for next time?
- Did anything unexpected come up in your class’s discussion about the classroom norms?
- Are your students listening and responding differently to each other? Are conversations shifting? Is the classroom culture changing as a result?
- Are there other ways you might incorporate the Accountable Sentence Stems into classroom learning?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Active learning techniques, in which students actively discuss and reflect on ideas rather than passively absorbing them, boost students' engagement and learning. Debate-type activities, in particular, in which students must consider other points of view and clarify their own, have been shown to improve students' critical thinking, perspective-taking, and communication skills.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students' capacity for empathy can be developed by learning to appreciate other people's identities and perspectives. Listening and questioning protocols can help set the stage for students to engage more deeply in peer and classroom conversations. This can build trust, belonging, and connection in the classroom, and help students consider ways they can be accountable to upholding classroom norms.

Research shows that a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need that leads to positive life outcomes (mental, physical, social, economic and behavioral). Teachers can play an essential role in providing supportive opportunities for students to build and develop a sense of connectedness and belonging within the school community. Establishing prosocial classroom norms is an important aspect of creating an inclusive school climate. Further, using conversation protocols to explore norms helps increase engagement in classroom conversations and helps to support deeper thinking.

TERMS OF USE

Thank you for downloading this resource! Please feel free to share it with friends, teachers, colleagues, and anyone else who might benefit from it.

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With gratitude,
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