

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 11

Four Techniques to Encourage Diverse Voices

A classroom that cultivates leadership is one where all students feel like they have something to offer and feel secure in the knowledge that their voice will be valuable to others.

To encourage a diverse range of voices in the classroom, it is important to create a positive culture that builds upon student ideas as opposed to shutting them down. The goal is to avoid the type of classroom where students wait to hear the right answer from the teacher or feel like their perspective is going to be stupid or wrong. These techniques help: 1) set a positive tone that welcomes diversity; 2) make learning fun through skill-building games; 3) provide a mixture of expression formats; and 4) set routines that promote student leadership.

Technique	Examples
<div>1</div> <p>Welcome diversity, promote common connections. It is important to set a positive tone that invites students to discover their interests and what they have in common.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be careful about asking questions with a “right answer” voice, where it is clear that you know the answer. Explicitly say that you genuinely want to know or that you are curious about their perspective, that there isn’t a right answer. Even if there is a right answer, pose an additional challenge to “push back against the experts”.• Use activities where students have to work together to create a product that incorporates what they have in common (art projects and interviews work great!)• Include warm-up discussion activities where students have to get up and have conversations with different partners. When possible, mix up partners as many times as you can so that students can have time speaking one-on-one with more people in the class.
<div>2</div> <p>Hide the “vegetables”. Students are always on the hunt for what is considered “right” or “wrong” with their speaking. Hiding skills instruction in the context of a fun game that involves public speaking can disrupt this pattern.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make public speaking fun through simulations where students have to use their public speaking skills in an imaginary world. Some examples include: simulations where the adults have disappeared and they have to create a new government or challenges where students have to build a company and pitch it to the class.• Warm-up public speaking skills using fun resources like fairy tales or favorite books.• Borrow from elementary school and practice informative speaking through familiar routines like “show and tell”.

3

Mix it up. Creating an inclusive classroom means that there needs to be multiple forms of expression, so that students have a lot of ways to share what they know.

- Any public speaking activities should include a mix of spontaneous and prepared assignments, group/pair/solo speeches, seated vs. standing speaking activities; loud vs. quiet engagement.
- Incorporate routines where students nominate different speech topics or story prompts – student input ensures that topics are relevant to different kinds of students.
- Provide speech activities that can be pre-recorded, like a podcast or video, to support students who express themselves better through media.

4

Get started, then release. Students are great at experimenting and riffing with familiar structures and routines. It helps them to have a few routines to get started so that everyone has a common reference point to know what leadership looks like.

- Start a class once a week with an easy public speaking warm-up and then gradually open it up as something students take turns leading. Physical stretches and tongue twisters are a great kind of warm-up.
- Practice consistent structures for debate and discussion and then have students facilitate them. Encourage them to include as many people as possible when they lead.
- Pair up students in “coach buddies” to have someone who helps them with public speaking preparation.
- Reward students for using discussion starters that invite more perspectives and voices.

