

## Cultural Discourse Norms

The norms that students come to school with - the current classroom norms, various disciplinary norms, and the discourse norms students may find themselves in in the future (e.g., college) - are all valid modes of communication. Students can benefit from trying out and becoming adept at various models, as each hones a different discourse skill and serves a different purpose. In validating students' home discourse patterns, teachers also create a bridge between home and school identities and leverage *all* students' funds of knowledge. Let's take a look at a few different types of discourse as examples.

In some traditional indigenous communities, discourse participants are expected to cede "the floor" to the oldest member of their discussion group, and only contribute ideas after older members of the group have had a chance to express themselves. Listening attentively and demonstrating respect are highly valued characteristics in this model. The focus is on finding points of agreement and consensus rather than on debating. This model provides students with opportunities to develop their listening capacity and look for connections among viewpoints. Teachers can incorporate this model of ordered turn taking by extending it to include other parameters for ordered participation (e.g., students seated from left to right, or wearing darker to lighter shirts to speak first).

In some college discourse contexts alternatively, the person who gets to take the turn to speak in a group conversation, is the person who is able to garner the attention of other participants in the moment, e.g., by speaking up at the right moment, speaking with confidence, and by projecting. These are all qualities which might enable someone to "hold the floor." In this model, participants are jockeying to get their voices heard and hold the attention of their peers. Often, participants are building a collective understanding in this model by debating ideas. An important drawback is that it does not teach students to "hold space" for one another or demonstrate the value of all contributions. Teachers can clarify the kinds of discourse norms they and their students will use to cultivate shared learning, and how these may change based on the requirements of specific occasions. Naming these as specific classroom discourse norms for students, used at certain times, has value.

A key idea is that the norms of discourse, as well as expressions of meaning making, may be very different from one community, and from one context, to the next. If any community discourse norms are different from the classroom norms, it could be helpful to have conversations with students and/or their parents (with younger students) in order to better understand these norms and ensure there are no cultural conflicts. It is important to provide space and support for these discourse sensibilities in classroom practice *as well as* scaffold classroom discourse structures that may be unfamiliar to students.