



Microlabs

These guidelines and questions were adapted from those developed by Julian Weissglass for the National Coalition for Equity in Education based at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Purpose

To address a specific sequence of questions in a structured format with small groups, using active listening skills.

Time allotted

About 8 minutes per question — this works best with a series of no more than three questions.

Group format

Form triads — either with the people you're sitting near — or find others in the group you don't know well. Number off — 1, 2, 3.

Facilitation Tips

"I'll direct what we will talk about. Each person will have one minute (or, sometimes, 2 minutes, depending on the group and the question) to talk about a question when it's their turn. While the person is speaking, the other two in the group simply listen. When the time is up, the next person speaks, and so on. I'll tell you when to switch." Emphasize that talk has to stop when you call time, and conversely, that if the person is done speaking before time is up, the three people should sit in silence, using the time to reflect. Review the Guidelines (previous page).

The quality of the questions matter in this exercise. The questions should be ones that are important to the group.

The Activity

After instructing the group, read the first question aloud (twice). Give everyone time to write in preparation. Then, tell people when to begin, and then tell them when each one/two minute segment is up. On the first question, begin with person #1, then #2, then #3. Then read the next question aloud. On the second question, begin with #2, then #3, then #1. On the third question, begin with #3, then #1, then #2.

Reflection questions following the activity

- What did you hear that was significant? What key ideas or insights were shared?
- How did this go for you? What worked well, and what was difficult? Why?
- How might your conversations have been different had we not used this protocol?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of using this activity? When would you use this protocol?
- What would you want to keep in mind as someone facilitating this activity?