

Conversation Comeback:

A Teacher's Guide to Class Discussion in a Distracted, Divided World

Assessment Questionnaire: Where are you, now?

Let's build a system that reflects *your* students and *your* school context!

***Focus on ONE group of students, e.g. 10th grade Literature or 7th grade History.**

Course Context

- Goal of course?
- What does your course build on from previous year?
- What does your course send kids into next?
- Realities re: content coverage? (e.g. AP, certain titles, etc.)

NOTES:

Faculty Context

- Expectations re: alignment with other classes?
- Appetite for interdisciplinary course material?
- Existing culture of skills-based learning?
- Existing student-led discussion practices? Existing gradebook structure?
- Three words students use to describe you as a teacher

NOTES:

Student Context

- Academic profiles / typical strengths and weaknesses?
- Social issues (e.g. first time in co-ed, new students, etc)?
- Demographics (how diverse are voices in room)?

NOTES:

School Context

- School mission / catch phrases
- School's approach to equity and inclusion
- School's approach to AI / ChatGPT
- School's strategic plan or other current initiatives

NOTES:

Assessing R.E.A.L.

Identifying Your “Why?” and Considering Seven Common Values

How you choose to assess student participation in R.E.A.L.® should be a design decision that reflects your school priorities, personal teaching style, and particular student needs. Without a doubt, as Tollefson and Osborn (2007) and others have pointed out: *We assess what we value, and we value what we assess.*

R.E.A.L.® has built a framework for thinking through what you value in discussion and how you can build an assessment practices that reflects those specific values. Ultimately, this approach can also help teachers communicate to students why their work matters, beyond just a grade! In our research, we found that the following SEVEN VALUES repeated among teachers across grade levels and disciplines when asked why discussion was important to them:

CHARACTER: Students learn to be better human beings through discussion, especially as they learn to listen and ask thoughtful questions.. Fundamentally, discussion is an opportunity for students to develop qualities like empathy and curiosity.

CONTENT: Students engage meaningfully with course content, ultimately experiencing discussion as a tool (not just an activity) that helps them deepen understanding of texts. Fundamentally, discussion is an opportunity for students to synthesize and dive deeper into important content.

EQUITY: Students all feel seen, heard, and able to participate during discussions, which reinforce norms for classroom community and include meaningful opportunities for differentiation. Fundamentally, discussion is an opportunity for students to learn that their voice matters -- and so do others' -- and that people start at different, and valid, places and perspectives.

GROWTH: Students improve at discussion, individually and as a group, likely cultivating a growth mindset through intense metacognitive engagement. Fundamentally, discussion is an opportunity for students to learn how to learn.

LEADERSHIP: Students learn to recognize contributions of others and structure classmates for success through discussion. Fundamentally, discussion is an opportunity for students to learn group processes and reflect on the role of individuals and community.

SKILLS: Students develop (and recognize) skills through discussion that will translate to the broader world beyond the classroom. Fundamentally, student-led discussion is an opportunity for students to master skills they need as contributors and citizens in the “real” world.

WRITING: Students’ experience with discussion has a direct, and positive, impact on their analytical writing. Fundamentally, student-led discussion is an opportunity for students to practice analyzing texts so that they grow as writers.

Ranking and Reflecting on **Your** Values

Write your top three values, and then own them!

Even if you believe in all seven values, there is no way to design an assessment system that approaches them all with equal integrity and rigor. Before feeling too guilty about that, remember that kids will have other teachers, who will have different priorities, at other stages in their academic careers.

Your priorities should reflect your style and your school context. For example: a 7th grade teacher dealing students coming from different feeder schools might need to build confidence and community so prioritize Growth; an 11th grade A.P. History teacher might choose Content and Writing (dreaming of those DBQ's!); a teacher in a school oriented to Mastery or career paths might rank Skills higher; etc.

1.

2.

3.

Thought Questions:

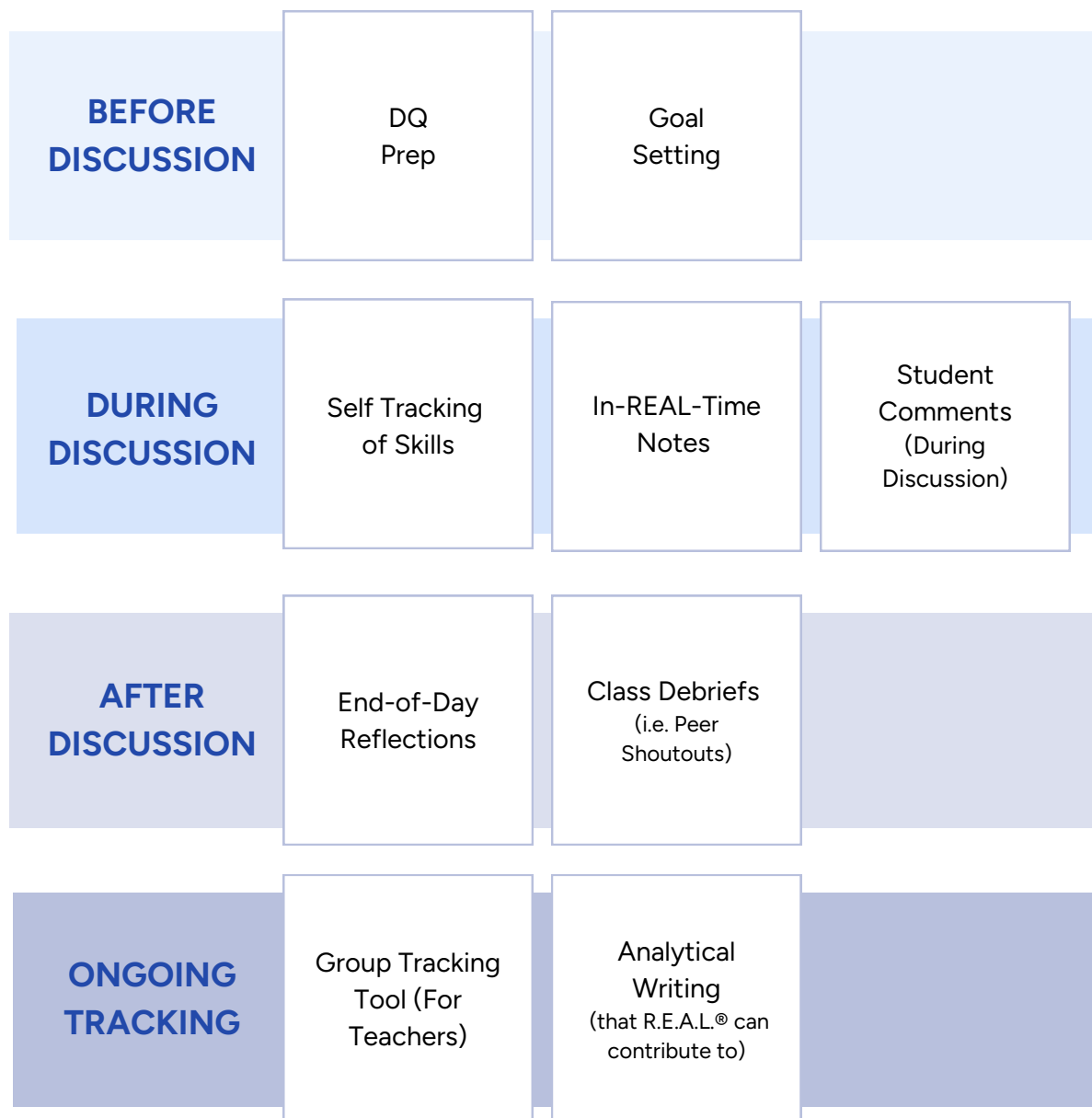
How do you currently assess discussion in your classroom?

To what extent do your current practices align with the values you articulated above?

ASSESSING R.E.A.L.

Start with a menu of data points or “artifacts.”

R.E.A.L.® routines generate a lot of “data” about student progress and performance during discussion recorded in Student Portfolios. To date, all teachers who have used R.E.A.L.® in their classrooms report that it makes discussion easier to assess! See below for the full “menu” of data that R.E.A.L.® provides:



ASSESSING R.E.A.L.

Choose the artifacts that align with **YOUR** values!

Which R.E.A.L.® artifacts will help you assess what you value? Discussion routines create an entire menu for you to choose from. Note: this is a menu (choose off it it!) *not* a laundry list (do it all!).



*If your top value is EQUITY, it is likely that your top priority is to empower your students to make every voice heard. While it is possible to find evidence of equity in student-written materials like reflections, your best evidence will probably come from your own observations, notes, and teacher tracking tools.