

## **Eliciting, Interpreting, and Responding to Student Thinking**

### **Overview of eliciting, interpreting, and responding to student thinking**

Eliciting and responding productively to student thinking is the core work of teaching. Children's ideas are fundamental resources for instruction, and teachers deliberately unpack each student's thinking and use what they learn to design instruction for that student and for the whole class. They seek to understand students' ideas, questions, and ways of thinking, including possible misconceptions, and work continuously to identify students' strengths and areas for growth. Teachers draw out student thinking and skills through carefully chosen questions and tasks, and attend closely to what students do and say. They consider and check alternative interpretations of student ideas and methods. Teachers are attentive to how students might hear their questions and to how students communicate their own thinking. Teachers use what they learn about student thinking for formative assessment, to guide instructional decisions, and to surface ideas that will benefit other students.

### **Advancing justice through eliciting, interpreting, and responding to student thinking**

When teachers understand and appreciate a student's thinking, they are better able to support that student to contribute in class and to position them as capable among their peers. Patterns of inequity lead to the risk that some students' thinking will get prioritized in the classroom, while the thinking of others will be seen through deficit lenses. Teachers must be attentive to disrupting these kinds of patterns both in how they interact with individual students as well as in whose thinking is publicly elicited, raised up, and responded to. Teachers' interpretations of students are often biased by patterns related to race, gender, and other social identities. Interrupting those biases requires listening with a broad understanding of the subject area and a commitment to recognizing the many assets each student brings to school.



## Decomposition of eliciting, interpreting, and responding to student thinking

*Table 1: Areas of Work and Techniques for Eliciting, Interpreting, and Responding to Student Thinking*

| Areas of work for eliciting, interpreting, and responding to student thinking                                                                           | Techniques for eliciting, interpreting, and responding to student thinking                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
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| Formulating and posing questions designed to elicit and probe student thinking, with sensitivity to how students might hear or respond to the questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop general, open-ended questions.</li> <li>• Use native language to pose questions, or using translation support (if possible).</li> <li>• Slow the pace of questioning and use repetition or leveled prompts to allow students time to process language and develop a response.</li> <li>• Use gestures, visuals, or sentence stems to support questioning and student response.</li> <li>• Choose aspects of the student's expressed thinking or work to focus on, and develop appropriate questions using common patterns of student thinking to guide your focus.</li> <li>• Develop hypotheses about the student's thinking.</li> <li>• Pose questions that are culturally relevant and draw on the particular experiences and background knowledge of the learner.</li> <li>• Allow students to communicate in their preferred mode (e.g., drawing, writing, speaking, etc.).</li> </ul> |



| Areas of work for eliciting, interpreting, and responding to student thinking                                                  | Techniques for eliciting, interpreting, and responding to student thinking                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| Listening to and interpreting student responses                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give students ample time to express themselves.</li> <li>• Allow supportive “thinking time” for students to interact with a peer, draw, or write so they can practice language and develop a response.</li> <li>• Pay close attention to what the student says, without unnecessary interruptions.</li> <li>• Listen for ideas rather than academic language.</li> <li>• Notice specific features of the student’s thinking: common patterns, strengths, strategies, novel ideas, areas of particular interest or engagement, weaknesses, and errors.</li> <li>• Use knowledge of the student to make sense of their responses.</li> <li>• Purposefully connect the particular background knowledge or experiences of students to content.</li> <li>• Listen for specific evidence of English language development.</li> </ul>                                                                                         |
| Developing additional questions, prompts, and tasks to probe and unpack what students say and support their continued learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify elements of the student’s thinking that they have said little about, and probe further.</li> <li>• Identify particularly interesting or confusing (to the teacher) aspects of the student’s thinking and develop follow-up questions or prompts.</li> <li>• Focus on a particularly strategic aspect of the student’s thinking to probe further (i.e., a good starting point for the student, something they need to work on or develop more).</li> <li>• Develop additional questions that are attuned to the student’s English language learning.</li> <li>• Encourage emergent bilinguals who take risks to express themselves in English, and recognize that they have to do “double the work” as they engage in content discussion.</li> <li>• Question and probe emergent bilinguals with the same high expectations for all students, knowing that more planning and support may be needed.</li> </ul> |



| Areas of work for eliciting, interpreting, and responding to student thinking | Techniques for eliciting, interpreting, and responding to student thinking                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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| Responding to student thinking                                                | <p>Identifying an appropriate response to student thinking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider what kind of response is most likely to help the student continue to develop their thinking.</li> <li>Consider the situation: Is the interaction taking place in private or in front of other students?</li> <li>Consider any time constraints: Is there time for a more drawn-out response (e.g., a class discussion), or is there a reason to move on quickly?</li> </ul> <p>Implementing an instructionally appropriate response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask another student to repeat what a student has said, without agreeing or disagreeing.</li> <li>Ask other students to comment, add, or agree/disagree.</li> <li>Pose another question to draw out a student's idea or reasoning.</li> <li>Affirm a strength or notable aspect of a student's approach or idea.</li> <li>Pose a strategic example to challenge the student to revise or extend their thinking.</li> <li>Make a simple correction or addition to support the student's understanding.</li> <li>Model or explain an aspect of the idea, concept, or reasoning.</li> </ul> <p>Deciding whether the response was effective, and implementing a next step</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observe student thinking and work, and evaluate and interpret their thinking.</li> <li>Develop additional questions, prompts, or tasks (see row above) if necessary.</li> </ul> |



## Visual representation of eliciting, interpreting, and responding to student thinking

