Consensus Building Activity Protocol

What is a Consensus Building Activity?

A Consensus Building Activity allows for participants/students to dialogue and/or discuss a proposed question/topic/theme in great detail. Through this process, participants/students are able to cross-articulate in great detail about a proposed question/topic/theme and to note them down in and/or through an initial “Brainstorm” or official notes. At the end of a discussion, the participants/students construct a verbal and written summary of agreed upon contributions by each participant/student. This official response can be written in a writer’s notebook/journal/chart paper. It can either be written in formal notes (outline or bullets) or summarized using a Graphic Organizer (i.e., one that asks participants/students to identify 4-5 key points and then create a summary).

Why would I use Consensus Building with Participants/ ELL Students?

This process encourages oral language as a way to come to an agreement on any given question/topic/theme. In fact, participants/students make contributions to a discussion, irrespective of their proficiency level (whether it is content and/or language specific).

Consensus Building can best be used during Collaborative Group Work (Gibbons, 2002), which allows for participants /students:

- To hear more language as well as here similar ideas expressed in different ways.
- To have language directed to them (input) in a targeted way to encourage language use within a specific context and content area.
- To have learners interact with various peers (instead of the ones that the participant/student keeps within their comfort zone), which allows the learner the opportunity to hear various “output” responses.
- To create more responsibility for clarifying their own questions when they surface in the discussion – participants/students can use their text to help clarify questions or to help them “find the words” to express their thoughts.
- To experience a considerable amount of “message redundancy”, where various words are repeated that are directly related to using the content area language within context – this process supports comprehension.
- To engage in purposeful and communicative tasks to get new information or to clarify prior knowledge.
- To increase the participants/students confidence level with respect to the content being introduced or reviewed, academic language use within context and/or both.

(Gibbons, 2002)
How do I implement Consensus Building into my Professional Development/classroom?

The best way to teach Consensus Building is to divvy up students into collaborative groups (Please follow the protocol in your USB Drive that outlines a Jigsaw Activity, where participants are first assigned to Home Base Teams and then to Expert Groups).

Then provide each collaborative Expert Group a heading/question/topic/theme to dialogue and cross-articulate about in great detail. Have the participants/students record their notes either in a writer’s notebook, a journal, a graphic organizer or using a simple outline or bullets format.

After a detailed discussion, the collaborative Expert Group must come to a consensus before they can return to their Home Base Teams. To facilitate this process, one of the members of the collaborative Expert Group takes on the role of “scribe.” As the group identifies at least 4-5 main ideas/key points that were discussed in their cross-articulation, the “scribe” probes his collaborative group to elicit responses from them, or the collaborative Expert Group members begins to pose suggestions to the “scribe” on what to outline, bullet or write as a final summary. If the “scribe” encounters some difficulty writing what someone else contributes/suggests (verbally), another collaborative group member can take the “scribes” position to move the process along. The idea here is to develop a “consensus” (summary) of the initial heading/question/topic/theme.

After each collaborative group has generated a summary of their detailed discussion, they return to their Home Base Teams and share their “Expert Group” summary.

The facilitator/teacher can then generate a Whole Class Discussion for further insights to be learned from the final sharing of information. The facilitator/teacher then provides any clarification or correction of information by providing students with an actual text or Handout that provides the correct information. Participants/students are also encouraged to look up information in provided text, if the facilitator/teacher identifies misinformation in the collaborative group’s final work.