

Implementing Working Agreements

Now that we've developed our working agreements in the areas of listening, speaking, thinking, and behavior, we have to begin implementing the use of our agreements.

At the beginning of each of my math classes, students take up to five minutes to discuss the previous night's homework. This is an example of integrating the working-agreements rubric (see "Our Working Agreements") into our lesson as a way to model, practice, and assess students' listening skills.

Lesson Plan

1. Write directions on the board instructing students to take out last night's homework.
1. Direct students' attention to the listening section of the working agreement.
2. Quickly have students read the qualities and characteristics they agreed to strive for.
3. Ask for a student volunteer to model a homework discussion with you.
4. Ask the audience to watch for examples from the working agreement as well as examples that don't fit with the agreement. I would suggest the teacher model the bad examples or negative behaviors.
 - a. Model sitting across from a partner so you cannot see his or her work. Ask the audience, "What's wrong with this picture?"
 - b. Model asking a thoughtful question: "I got a different answer than you for that question. How did you come up with your answer?" Ask the audience what they noticed.
 - c. Model interrupting the person by talking to a neighbor about last night's episode of *American Idol*. Ask the audience, "What am I communicating to my partner when I act like this?"
5. Now, let the students know they will assess themselves a score of 1–4 (see Our Working Agreements) when they're done discussing the homework on how well they listened. Let them know that what is most important is being able to explain why they assessed themselves the way they did.
6. Have students discuss the homework with a partner.
7. At the end, have students look at the working agreements about listening, and let them privately decide how they would assess themselves and why.
8. Have students show you their self-assessment using their fingers.
9. Call on a couple of volunteers to explain their reasoning. Thank them for their honesty.
10. Have a brief, private time for thinking. Ask students, "What will you do differently to improve next time?" Let them share their thoughts with a neighbor.
11. Remind them that when discussing their homework, listening to their partner's ideas is very important.

This is the up-front investment. At first, it will take more time, but it will pay off. You can apply this type of lesson to the many situations in which we expect students to work socially. As they become familiar with the procedure and as we explicitly model what we expect and provide them with honest opportunities to assess themselves, our students will become more productive and efficient. They will begin using and thinking about their social skills.

As the students develop their skills in other categories of the working agreement, we will be able to integrate all of these abilities and qualities in a way that makes sense to them.

Assessment Options

Here are some ways you can ask students to assess themselves:

- Show me how you rated yourself with your fingers.
- Privately, in your mind, think about how you would rate your work and why you gave yourself that score.
- Assess your behavior today based on our working agreements. Please write your assessment in your math journal and explain your assessment in writing.
- Assess your speaking today and explain it to your partner.
- As a team, assess your listening and speaking during the activity. Come up with a team assessment, and be ready to explain your reasoning.

Here are some keys to self-assessment and using the working agreement:

- It's not the score a student gives that matters; it's the reason for the score.
- The goal is for honesty with oneself. This goal requires the teacher to remain neutral with his feedback. A simple "Thank you" will do.
- Students must be held accountable to think about and discuss what they would do differently next time.
- Mix up the forms of assessment, and keep them simple and quick.
- The power of self-assessment is that the students own it.