

IMPROVING CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

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NEW ROLES FOR STUDENTS

HOW CAN TEACHERS IMPROVE CLASSROOM DISCUSSION?

Transforming roles is key to successful discussion. Discussion is a form of classroom interaction that engages students in speaking and listening to one another – not just to the teacher.

Well-structured student-to-student talk enables students to make meaning of new knowledge. This powerful way of learning requires significant shifts in both teacher and student roles and practices.

TEACHERS MOVE FROM CONTROLLING TO SUPPORTING ROLES

Teachers who choose to engage students in productive discussion relinquish direct control over each and every classroom interaction, transitioning to supporter and facilitator. Teachers do not abdicate responsibility; they shift the focus of responsibility to teaching students to become more responsible learners.

SHIFTS IN TEACHER ROLES

From	To
Questioner	Listener and monitor of the discussion process
Monopoliser of air time	Listener and facilitator of equitable participation among all students
Evaluator	Advocate for student self-assessment and peer assessment of knowledge and reasoning
Hub or pivot for all classroom talk	Encourager of student-to-student interactions

STUDENTS ACCEPT INCREASED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN LEARNING

Well-conceived discussion puts students in the driver's seat, actively directing and managing their learning while also collaborating with their peers.

SHIFTS IN TEACHER ROLES

From	To
Compliant and passive observer	Committed and proactive contributor
Respondent to teacher questions	Generator of questions
Dependent learner	Self-directed learner
Isolated and competitive learner	Collaborative learner
Receptacle for teacher knowledge	Constructor of own understandings

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TEACHING PRACTICES TO SUPPORT STUDENT DISCUSSION

Student acceptance of these new roles requires a shift in the ways they view themselves within the classroom community. Students cannot assume these leading roles without coaching and support from their teachers.

- Equitable participation
- Collaborative exploration
- Deepen thinking
- Social
- Cognitive
- Use-of-knowledge



- Craft questions that engage
- Ensure student readiness to discuss
- Sustain student thinking
- Teacher-guided
- Structured small group
- Student-driven