

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson Template ---

Title of lesson: Getting Out of the Way: Facilitating Student-Centered Discussion

Suggested grade/age: 10th-12th grade

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: 30-45 minutes

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:

(Why is this lesson important in the development of your students' skills or knowledge? What do you want students to learn or be able to do? What "best practice" does this lesson incorporate?)

Too often, teachers are at the center of each discussion, with simple questions bouncing back to them before reaching one or two students. By putting ourselves at the center of each discussion, teachers limit student expression and set ourselves up for burnout. Using student-centered discussion requires active listening from teachers and students. When taught appropriately and with scaffolding, this method empowers students to take control of their classroom while allowing for more exciting and authentic discussion.

Of course, this is not actually one lesson but a strategy that teachers work on for months or years. In this lesson I showed a few options of how to run and process a student-led discussion, including moments for teachers to step back and other moments for them to teach discrete listening/speaking/participation skills.

Brief summary/outline of lesson:

(What steps do you take to implement this lesson in your classroom? Where is this lesson located in the school year or unit—beginning, middle, end? Does this lesson scaffold or build to a culminating assessment or demonstration of learning?)

Some strategies for generating and processing student-led discussion:

- 1) Journal about a great discussion you had recently. What were the qualities of that discussion? What did it sound like? Where and how were you seated?
- 2) Share with partners to discuss how authentic conversations feel and happen.
- 3) After creating ground rules for discussion, organize students into a circle or square. Ideally, they should all be able to see everyone in the circle.
- 4) Give students choice of how to discuss a text (through question generation and voting, or an open floor, or asking students which text they would like to discuss.)
- 5) Allow students to discuss without being called upon. When needed, break discussion to discuss:
 - a. The progress of discussion. How comfortable is it, who is speaking, etc...
 - b. Check in with a discussion tracker, who shows a "heat map" of the discussion based on participation.
 - c. Moderate student participation by handing out "speaking cards" to limit participation. Once a student has used his/her speaking cards, his or her job is to listen.

d. Freeze and analyze body language of the classroom.

Related Resources:

(What technology, articles, books, or supplies do you recommend?)

Teaching with Your Mouth Shut by Donald Finkel

Teach Like a Champion (accompanying video especially useful) by Doug Lemov
Harkness resources from Exeter academy

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

I've used versions of these techniques with a variety of students. Depending on student ability and age, a teacher might introduce the concept by assigning jobs to students (recorder, question generator, etc.)

Ideally this type of discussion leads to a conversation and lesson about how to generate exciting discussion questions.

For additional information, contact: Emily Meisler, Saint Paul Academy and Summit School