

Tips on “Getting Students to Participate In Discussion”

Adapted From: “The Skillful Teacher” by Stephen Brookfield, 2006 (Jossey-Bass)

“Conversational Roles” (p. 145)

Having a role and knowing that they have a particular task seems to reduce performance anxiety in students. The teacher can assign specific “roles”. Important to alternate them, so that the same person is not constantly taking on the same “role.”

- “Problem, Dilemma, or Theme Poser” – Student has the task of introducing the topic of conversation. She draws on her own ideas and experiences.
- “Reflective Analyst” – This student keeps a record of the conversation’s development. Every 20 minutes or so, she gives a summary that focuses on shared concerns, issues, common themes.
- “Scrounger” – This student listens for helpful resources, suggestions, and tips that others have voiced during the discussion. She keeps note and reads it out loud at the end of discussion.
- “Devil’s Advocate” – This student listens to any consensus that the group reaches, then expresses a contrary view. This helps the group explore alternative views.
- “Detective” – This student listens carefully for unacknowledged, unchecked, and unchallenged biases that seem to emerge in the conversation.
- “Theme Spotter” - This student identifies themes that arise during the discussion that are unexplored.
- “Umpire” – This student listens for judgmental comments that sound offensive, insulting... that contradict ground rules for discussion.
- “Synthesizer” – This student underscores links between different contributions at the end of discussion.

“Quotes to Affirm Challenge” (p. 149)

- Making it easier to begin discussions that are grounded in pre-assigned text.
- Students are asked to bring to class two quotes they have chosen from the text.
 - One quote, the student wants to affirm or to emphasize (thinks it’s correct, or confirms a view she holds, or supports it intuitively).
 - The other quote, the student wants to challenge.
- Students talk about their Quotes to Affirm in small groups and decide upon 1 quote. Then, the small groups report to the whole class—each group explains why they chose that quote.
- Students then talk about their Quotes to Challenge in small groups. They decide upon 1 quote and report it back to the whole class.
