

**CONNECTED EDUCATION**  
EVERY LEADER, EVERY  
TEACHER, EVERY LEARNER

**BRIDGE**



LINKING INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION

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*Active Learning  
through Discussion*



This document is based on innovative ideas shared by Arpan Chokshi at the Axis Education Forum 2017. It describes how to use group discussion to engage learners in learning about a topic while building their thinking and communication skills.

Discussions are based on texts relating to topics the learners are studying. Discussion is learner-led. The teacher provides the context, gives support but does not facilitate, and can use the discussion to assess learner understanding. The method can be used with both small and large groups.

## **What are some benefits of learning through discussion?**

- Learners develop and practice thinking skills – for e.g. they learn to interpret meaning, analyse and make judgements about ideas, see connections, question assumptions, distinguish fact from opinion, and build ideas from evidence
- they learn to listen attentively and to express and defend ideas clearly
- they learn to collaborate with their peers and build on each other's ideas to achieve a purpose.

All these skills will be needed in 21st century careers.

## **What makes group discussions effective?**

The first essential is to model good discussion practices. Below you will find a number of tools for guiding and structuring discussions. With practice, learners will be able to have independent discussions with less and less teacher support.

At the start of the year, have learners develop their own rubric for evaluating their discussions. The process of developing the rubric will depend on the grade. Some suggestions are to give learners the basic categories; to do one column together and have the learners complete the rest; and giving feedback to learners while they are developing it, to raise the level. Some benefits will be:

- Learners take ownership, because they set the standard for themselves
- It provides guidelines and reminds learners of the requirements
- It makes expectations explicit and creates a basis for peer-to-peer accountability

A learner-created rubric will be an investment in quality discussions for the rest of the year. It can be updated as the class progresses.

Give learners sentence starters that they can use to show they are listening, to share their thinking, to disagree respectfully and to ask clarifying questions:

Showing Active Listening		Sharing your Thinking	
<u>Show it:</u> Eyes on the speaker Nod your head Keep hands still Lean in	<u>Say it:</u> Good idea because ... I agree because ... I like that opinion because ... I want to add that ... I also want to share ...	I think ... because ... I knew that ... because it says in the text ... If you look at the text it says ... I'd like to share my perspective on that ...	Evidence that ... is here in the text I infer that ... because ... I predict that ... because ... My thinking was that ... because ...
Disagreeing Respectfully		Asking Clarifying Questions	
I disagree with ... because ... I don't agree with that idea because the text says ... I have another idea ...	I have a different perspective because ... When I thought about it, I thought that ... My thinking was different because ...	Why do you think that? What do you mean when you say ...? Can you explain that? Do you have an idea about that? Can you make that more clear to me?	What is the support for your thinking? What else do you think? How can you prove that ...? Can you give evidence that supports that?

Source: Jeromie Heath

Bloom's Taxonomy question starters are also a useful resource for writing/ asking questions. You will find some examples on the handout from this presentation at [www.tinyurl.com/discussnotes](http://www.tinyurl.com/discussnotes).

## Pre-discussion activities

Before each discussion, give the class time to become familiar with the text. These activities will help learners prepare for a meaningful discussion:

Identify main ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read the text and identify key words and ideas</li> <li>Write a short summary using key words/ideas from the text and demonstrating the relationship between those keywords/ideas. For example: "_____ argues that _____ and supports this argument by _____."</li> </ul>				
Analyse text & mark supporting evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mark important/interesting lines in the text and write 2 – 3 related questions, eg:               <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">What did the writer mean by....</td> <td style="width: 50%;">How is this similar/different to...</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Do you agree with the argument that.....</td> <td>Why did the writer...</td> </tr> </table> </li> </ul>	What did the writer mean by....	How is this similar/different to...	Do you agree with the argument that.....	Why did the writer...
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Do you agree with the argument that.....	Why did the writer...				
Connect text with own life / the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write a question that requires deeper thinking to answer, about how the text connects to broader themes. Example: How has my/your life been affected by _____? How can society address the issue of _____?</li> </ul>				

## The teacher's role in learner-led discussions:

- Take note of the learners' level of understanding of the topic for later follow-up.
- If the discussion goes off-topic or loses momentum, ask a question to re-direct it (prepare a variety of questions beforehand).
- Ask a question about the process to have the learners reflect on the discussion, which they can do silently. In time the quality of the discussions will improve.
- Have learners grade their group, using the rubric. Ask for and make suggestions on how to improve.

If you would like more information to help you introduce discussion in your classroom, click [here](#) for Arpan Chokshi's presentation on Fostering Discussion and Debate in the Classroom at the 2017 Axis Summit Forum. This includes links to other sites with ideas on how to encourage participation, provide structure, and monitor and assess discussions, e.g. Alexis Wiggins on "Spider Web Discussions".

