Student-Led Discussions

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## Student-Led Discussions

### The practice and the need it addresses

**Student-Led Small Group Discussions of Assigned Reading**

**The Need**

According to constructivist learning theory informed by cognitive and educational psychology, the optimal conditions needed for learning include accurate assessment of student background knowledge; engaging, scaffolded activities; cognitive elaboration; and more knowledgeable others available to assist when needed.

**The Practice**

Whole class discussions of the assigned reading are preceded by small group discussions of four to five students who

- Share individually written responses to four questions:
  1. Briefly quote text that you found interesting or surprising
  2. Describe what made the quote noteworthy
  3. Apply the quote to yourself as a (student or researcher or future occupational title)
  4. Ask a discussion question starting with How or What

- Choose one question to present to the whole class for discussion.

### Evidence Supporting Student-Led Discussions

**Evidence**

Student-led discussions provide conditions for effective learning:

- **Student Engagement** when asking questions relevant to their interests (Brunig, Schraw, Norgy, & Ronning, 2004; Slavin, 2006)
- **Cognitive Elaboration** when responding to discussion questions (Brunig, Schraw, Norgy, & Ronning, 2004; Slavin, 2006)
- **Zone of Proximal Development** successfully navigated with instructor scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1925/1962).

**Benefits for UNLV Students**

- Highly diverse undergraduate students ask questions about ethnicity, race, and culture that I would not ask
- Of 36 students’ course eval comments, 17 ranked discussions as most beneficial
- Improved participation by students reticent to speak during class
- Students read assignments
- Improved insight into student needs and interests

### Resources

**Helpful Resources**


### Adopting Student-Led Discussions in Your Class

Successfully used with first and second year undergraduates as well as doctoral students.

Successfully used across disciplines: social science, chemistry, business, film, policy administration, hotel administration

**Adopting Student-Led Discussions**

1. Provide individual writing task for students to organize thoughts (e.g., quote and rationale for quote)
2. Responses can be posted to Discussion Board on Canvas or submitted in class by hard copy
3. Have student make reading personally relevant (e.g., apply the quote to yourself as a future teacher)
4. Ask students to rephrase discussion questions from Yes/No to asking how or what
5. Have small groups give everyone a chance to present their discussion question to the large group at some point during term