



Best Practices for Teacher-led Student Discussions







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Teacher-led student discussions are a crucial part of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Students are active participants in their own development; therefore discussions should be interactive in nature. Participation in discussing various SEL learning situations equips students to be able to understand and express their own emotions and perspectives. Students need to be asked to explain how they are feeling about a situation and how they think others are feeling.

1. Points To Emphasize in Leading a Discussion About an SEL Situation

In showing a Quaver Ready situation from a lesson or observing students engaged in role play, the teacher's questions ensure that students understand the points of views of all situation participants. For example, assume the lesson is about bullying and the lesson screen shows a student being bullied on the playground. In leading the discussion, we recommend asking the following types of questions:

- How do you think the person being bullied feels and how could that person cope with what is happening during and after the bullying?
- How do you think other students on the playground feel watching the bullying and what could they be doing?
- How does the bully feel and what encourages him or her to continue bullying?
- What would a teacher who might be watching the bullying feel and what would you want him or her to do?
- How would you feel if that were you being bullied and what would you say or do?

All these points of view are important to discuss. They will help students develop a better understanding of similar situations, gain insights into what causes these situations, and finally learn how to cope with the situation. At the same time, the questions bring out their own feelings and hopefully encourage feelings of empathy toward those experiencing the situation.

2. Overall Teacher Demeanor In Conducting the Discussion

Providing a non-threatening environment promotes effective class discussions, allowing students to safely discuss and respond to SEL issues. The teacher models the behaviors for the students, remaining sensitive to students' feelings and the degree to which they feel comfortable participating. Students and teachers will communicate non-verbally during class discussions. Attending to non-verbal cues (facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice) is helpful in evaluating student engagement.

Encourage, but do not require the students to participate. Make sure positive feedback is given on appropriate answers and help prompt students who are struggling. We recommend teachers not reveal their own responses initially, but rather encourage the students to think and respond independently. Evaluate student participation, ensuring all students are involved in the discussion.

Additionally, one of the teacher's main functions during discussions is to ensure that students stay on topic and respect each other's opinions. The goal is that everyone participates to the extent possible and gains insights that will affect their own future behavior.

3. Starting the Discussion

Before starting the discussion, secure everyone's attention. This can be done by letting students know that anyone can be called on during the course of the lesson. You may also create curiosity by inviting students to identify the many different ways they feel about a particular situation featured in the lesson. You can similarly create engagement by introducing competition between student groups. Divide the class into groups and keep track of how many students give appropriate answers to the questions. Put the points on the board so they can compete with one another. Refer to the Quaver white paper on Social Learning Structures on how to do this.

Teachers begin the discussion by explaining the situation. The first question to ask is what the topic is or where the situation is taking place. This can be the subject of more questions later on in the discussion. Next, describe the characters who are in the situation. Students can elaborate on this as well. And finally, explore what is going on in the situation. The teacher may explain these aspects to the students so they are all on the same page about what is happening.

You will find Notes on the Quaver lesson screens that help you with these topics, including suggested questions for how to start the discussion. Because there is a song in most lessons, another way to start the discussion is by discussing and evaluating the lyrics of the song. Ask the students what they think the lyrics mean.

4. Techniques for Selecting the Discussion

To add variation in the lessons, select students for their opinion in different ways. The simplest method is for the teacher to select the student to start the discussion. The teacher could also ask for volunteers who have raised their hands, but sometimes this results in a few students dominating the discussion. Another approach is to let the student who answered the question or made a comment select the next student. This allows for a variety of student responses.

Another selection technique that has proven effective is for the teacher to assign a random number to each student, which is unknown to other students. After answering a question or contributing to the discussion, the teacher asks the student to call out a number that hasn't been called before between one and the number of students in the class. The student with that number is then encouraged to answer the question or contribute to the discussion. Alternatively, the teacher can use 3 x 5 Index cards labeled with the names of all the students. The teacher shuffles cards, cuts deck and picks name on top. A student could also cut the deck and reveal the name.



At the end of the discussion, most students should have participated. If there is not enough time to do so, it is helpful to keep a checklist to keep track of students who contributed to the discussion. Non-participants can be offered the first participation opportunities during the next class discussion. Encourage, but do not require, reluctant students to participate, even if their comment is brief.

5. Extending the Discussion – Letting It Evolve

The best way of getting the most from a discussion is by asking open-ended questions. Students should be allowed to elaborate on their answers. Try to ensure that the students address all points of view as explained above. Ask other students if the selected student covered all aspects of the situation. Have students respond and react to other students' discussions. Ask if they have a different opinion on the situation.

Not all students will participate eagerly. Should the teacher need to prompt a student struggling to find an answer, there are a variety of methods to try. Give the student a partial answer and ask him or her to complete the answer. Ask clarifying questions: what did the student mean? Build on the other students' answers. Can the student give an example or explain why he or she chose certain words to provide a comment or an answer?

The teacher could also write the responses of the students on a whiteboard or flip chart. Alternatively, the Quaver Discussion Screen can be used to type in comments from the students. This keeps a record of the discussion in front of the students and can be reviewed at the end of the lesson.

Following the discussion, if the teacher feels that students have missed some key points, he or she may point them out, or hint about the points of view not covered and ask students to respond. The Hide Screen function in the Quaver Lesson Presenter can also be used by pulling down the screen to reveal all the answers you had hoped the students would provide.



6. Closing the Discussion

To close the discussion, summarize the points made in the discussion and give credit to students with insightful answers.

An interesting follow-up exercise would be to ask the students to create a poster that explains the important points they learned in the lesson. The poster could be drawn by the students or the teacher and displayed in the classroom. This way learning can be reinforced after the lesson is over. Check the Printables for the lesson; there may be a poster already there to work from.

Finally, ask the students to evaluate their discussion. Encourage them to take a few moments to reflect on their participation and give themselves an overall grade for the class. Did you know you can create custom rubrics like the one below? Create a Group Discussion Rubric inside Resource Creation and allow students to lead their own discussion reflections.

Menu

Group Discussion Rubric

Select a white box to learn more or highlight specific boxes.

	Exemplary (4 points)	Proficient (3 points)	Progressing (2 points)	Emerging (1 points)
On Topic	The group was fully focused on the discussion topic.	The group remained generally focused on the discussion topic.	The discussion was generally on topic but rambled at times.	The discussion rambled considerably, going far off topic.
Participation	All students participated and encouraged others to speak up.	Most students participated.	Some students dominated the discussion.	One student dominated the discussion.
Listening	Students listened attentively to one another during the discussion.	Most of the time, students were engaged in the other students' comments.	There were a few times when students were interrupted by others.	Students were talking over one another and not paying attention.
Respect	Students respected one another's ideas on the topic.	Most students were respectful of the other students' ideas on the topic.	Some students respected the ideas of others but others didn't.	Students did not try to show understanding and argued with one another.
Collaboration	Students built on each other's ideas, coming to new realizations and understanding.	Most students developed a greater understanding of the topic, learning from each other.	Some students built on others' input to develop a better understanding of the topic.	Students ignored what others were saying, failing to learn from one another.

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Menu

1.
Group Discussion Rubric

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