

Class Discussion Skills 101

Your school district probably does not have a formal, written-down plan to train children to be students. Consequently, many youth lack even the basic skills to succeed in class. Both younger and older youth may seem grossly unprepared to properly participate in class discussions, making teaching very difficult, perhaps impossible.

Here are the skills that students need to succeed in classroom discussions. Although ideally, these skills would be taught in the earliest grades, these strategies are designed to be used with both older and younger students. If by fifth grade, a student hasn't mastered these skills, the chance that he or she will do so without explicit instruction is probably fairly slim. Since some youth will never acquire discussion skills on their own, even if you are not provided a formal plan or mandate by your district to provide this training, you may want to ensure that you still teach these important skills.



Discussion Skills or Disruption Ills



Eyes on Teacher

Don't assume students have been taught this basic, essential skill. *Strategies:* Use a magnet and metal to teach that students' eyes must be "stuck" on the teacher. Relate to jobs: what would happen if a surgeon's or crane operator's eyes wandered.



Ears on Teacher

Not listening equals not learning! *Strategies:* To teach listening skills, hide treats or prizes then verbally instruct the students to locate the hidden items. Discuss how listening was essential, then relate to school. Discuss the consequences of not listening in jobs, parenting, driving, etc.



Follow the Discussion

Keeping up with the conversation is essential for discussions. *Strategies:* To teach following the flow of discussion, play "Telephone." That's the game where one person whispers a sentence to the next person, then that person tells the next person, etc., until the sentence has been whispered to everyone. The last person says what they heard, which will now be very different from the original. Discuss: missing all or part of a discussion results in receiving as poor, inaccurate and missing information as playing "Telephone."



Keep On Following

Staying tuned in is critical. *Strategies:* To further teach on-going concentration skills, begin a story. After several sentences, "toss" the story to one of the students, then use a timer or bell to signal that the story is being tossed to yet another student. Once everyone has contributed to the story, ask the students to discuss the twists and turns of discussions, and how much you miss when you don't consistently focus