

Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to
Accelerate Student
Learning

Companion Guide

Chapter 5: Academic Discussions
Intentional Step Two



Chapter 5

Intentional Step Two: Facilitate Peer-to-Peer Academic Conversations.

Rigorous academic discussions involve higher levels of peer-to-peer communication. Rather than students always directing their responses to the teacher, teachers should promote student-led discussions that encourage them to share their ideas and challenge each other's thinking. The teacher can facilitate these types of conversations by redirecting students when they look to the teacher. Instead of answering, the teacher can deflect by saying: *Lily has a question. Who has an answer for that?* This response helps train students to not always look to the instructor.

Increasing the frequency of student-to-student questions and conversations helps build trust among students and the teacher. Students are encouraged to ask questions when they don't know the answer and to think out loud as they talk through a problem with their peers. These processes help them learn about the right questions to ask to delve deeper into a topic and encourage self-assessment and reflection (Lombardi, 2017).

Strategy 1: Student Conversation Starters

The teacher provides students with a list of possible conversation starters. These prompts help students learn to disagree, agree, summarize, clarify, paraphrase, and build on what someone else says while also incorporating academic language in their responses. For example, a student could say, "I agree with Lily, except..." or "I disagree with Jason, and I also think." Be sure to encourage students to use relevant academic language as they formulate their responses.

As students are talking, the teacher can walk around the room and listen to student conversations. They can address any misconceptions, push the groups to think further about

topics, and throw in different elements to help the conversation continue. See the “Student Conversation Starters” handout for an example.

Sometimes students don't have the language to respond to their peers. Providing scaffolding (.82), such as Sentence Starters, helps them learn how to have more meaningful and rigorous student-to-student conversations and encourages them to rely on each other for academic discussion (.82). Students can also practice critical thinking, initiative, empathy, understanding, and communication skills.

Chapter 5 Handouts

1. Organizing an Argument
2. Comparing Media Forms
3. Jigsaw
4. Reciprocal Teaching
5. Bloom’s Taxonomy Questions
6. Thinking Notes Bookmark
7. Student Conversation Starters