

How can dialogue increase student participation in learning?

Independent evidence

Teachers should structure learning as far as possible as dialogue between themselves and their students, and between students. This is most effective if it is open-ended and exploratory rather than a series of routine exchanges, and encourages students to see themselves and their peers as architects and engineers of their own learning. Dialogue like this tends to focus on how people learn, remember, approach problems, and evaluate their learning, as well as appropriate subject knowledge and formal assessment criteria i.

Your evidence and reflections

Consider the opportunities your students have for open dialogue in your sessions. You could do this by reviewing a series of lesson plans and identifying the stages when the onus was on the learners to discuss a topic and come to a conclusion. Alternatively you could ask the students to keep a diary over a short period and note down the times when they were involved in open discussion, how you set that up, and what the outcomes were.

Putting the evidence to work

You could use your evidence from lesson plans or observation to think about opportunities for increasing the dialogue between yourself and students and among students themselves. You could start with the learning outcomes for a particular session, for example improved telephone skills when dealing with a complaint from a client; phrase that as a question – “What are the dos and don’ts of dealing with client complaints?” – and design an activity which encourages discussion about the issues – perhaps a demonstration video or role play of how not to do it.

i Find out more about structuring dialogue for learning in: Ecclestone, K (2008) *Improving formative assessment in vocational education and adult literacy and numeracy programmes*. Report for the Quality Improvement Agency and the National Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

You can find an overview of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) Further Education projects at: <http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/FEcommentary.pdf>

To read about the importance of listening to learners as part of an inclusion strategy, access this report by Rachel Davies: <http://www.nrdc.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=1275>