

by Rachel Bate



Learner-led discussion in the ESOL classroom: an action research project in east London

Research questions

1. How can discussion develop learners' language?
2. How can discussion enable and motivate learners to speak from within?
3. How do tutors manage these instances?

What has changed?

I felt a significant shift in my behaviour and role as a tutor as the project developed. In the initial stages in particular, I became a lot less focussed on what I was doing and a lot more focussed on what the learners were talking about and how they were talking about it....I found active listening very difficult at first, as I was concerned about what I had to do and latterly worried about exam requirements. However, concentrated listening was invaluable; it not only provided most of my content for the next five sessions but gave me much better understanding of learners' language and the way they interacted.

Read our full report



Key findings/Recommendations

Tutors need to re-evaluate the role and purpose of discussion in their classrooms.

Learners with emerging linguistic resources can and should be encouraged to participate in critical discussions when they are able to draw upon their own experiences and/or supported by linguistic or material based input.

Discussions should be used to inform all aspects of future learning, encouraging learner self-direction and independence.

Learner-led discussions are appropriate for exam focussed classes, especially as they increase learner engagement and highlight gaps in language knowledge which may be omitted when following traditional syllabuses.

Discussions should be used for learners to critically reflect upon the language learning process.

Resources and learners' work

