Random Discussion Leader (RDL) to Improve Discussion and Student Learning

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Can assigning a random discussion leader (RDL) improve student learning?

Details

• Two, 400 level ENVIR discussion-based classes (14 and 19 students)
• Lighter reading load, close reading expected
• Students prepared and turned in discussion notes each day (one pass)
• Discussion leader selected in class, at random
• Candy in every class—labeled piece is RDL

Results

• Observation. Better discussions: students demonstrated deeper & more nuanced understanding, practiced communicating complex ideas and participated more equitably

• Student Assessment. When asked to compare this class to other discussion-based classes, students indicated that RDL contributed to:
  • More and better preparation (97%)
  • Improved class discussions (86%)
  • Improved quality of learning (82%)

Student Quotes

“The RDL not only forced me to read the assigned text, but to think critically and take more detailed notes for lectures.”

“RDL made discussions richer, brought new ideas and teaching techniques, and allowed most people’s thoughts to be heard. I always came away learning more from my peers, because everyone was prepared to be the discussion leader.”

“This class developed my discussion skills, argument formation, and active critical thinking. It forced me to engage with the material in a novel way.”

Try it!

Student Assessment of how RDL Changed the Class Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Overall Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change or worse</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Preparation Time and Quality

- Improved
- No change or worse