

# Discussion Based Learning (DBL)



## What is DBL?

**Discussion-Based Learning (DBL)** is a teaching style that encourages students to **critically think** about topics. Imagine a Socratic-style lecture in a university class; that's essentially DBL. By preparing your classes to engage in DBL, you empower students to think beyond formulaic answers and offer them the chance to voice their opinions and experiences. DBL also gives students the opportunity to investigate assumptions, learn the habits of democratic discourse, and experience collaborative learning (Garrett, 2020).

However, DBL can be difficult to implement well, as teachers must manage spontaneity effectively. Challenges might arise if discussion questions aren't fruitful, or if students lack enthusiasm for the topic. Students might also be accustomed to being passive learners, used to traditional lectures. Most of these issues can be overcome by adhering to these three principles:

## Principle 1 - Students Need an Inclusive, Hospitable Learning Environment

It's vital for teachers to create a learning space where students feel comfortable and accepted when expressing themselves. This gives students the chance to take risks while speaking. One way to foster a sense of belonging is by knowing all your students' names and interests. Teachers can also incorporate frequent ice-breaker activities, even with the same group of students.

## Principle 2 - Students Need to Prepare for the Discussion

Give your students the discussion questions or potential topics in advance, allowing them ample time to reflect. If pre-circulation isn't possible, provide students with five to ten minutes of quiet time to work through their thoughts in a journal before the conversation begins.

## Principle 3 - Teachers and Students Need to Practice Three Essential DBL Skills

For effective discussions, both teachers and students must develop these three core skills:

- **Questioning:** To cultivate deep understanding and critical thinking, focus on **discussion-based questions** that align with learning goals and push students beyond simple recall, often guided by frameworks like **Bloom's Taxonomy**. (Bloom's Taxonomy refers

to a six-level learning framework that guides students towards developing higher-order thinking. The levels are: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.)

- **Listening:** For effective DBL, **active listening**, which involves mindful presence and deep understanding, is crucial for both teachers and students, fostering valuable contributions and deeper comprehension.
- **Responding:** For effective discussion facilitation, teachers must strategically choose responses, either continuing teacher-to-student dialogue by exploring, extending, or challenging, or fostering student-to-student interaction by restating or inviting, while practicing patience with silence and managing dominant talkers.