

Group Discussion: The Teacher's Role?

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Group discussions are a popular way of increasing the opportunities for authentic talk by language learners. However groups can also present problems: one or two learners may dominate talk or teachers may have difficulty in adapting to a less up-front teaching role. This article reports a small action-research project which shows how teachers can monitor and adjust their roles. The teacher-researcher wanted to adapt her directive teaching style to a more facilitative role with small groups. She analysed her own language and its effects on learners' talk over three sessions in which three different groups of students were discussing a movie. On each occasion this analysis led to her modifying her language in the next session. This study suggests a process whereby other teachers could carry out action research in order to monitor their teaching. The actual effect of a teacher reducing her own intervention suggests that while a decrease in teacher talk may be helpful, this is not the only consideration. Teacher intervention may sometimes be important to maintain interaction levels.