

## Should Students Raise Their Hand in Small Groups?

By Michael Linsin

Requiring students to raise their hand before speaking is good classroom management practice.

You can't very well control the flow of learning and discussion while being interrupted every few minutes.

Inspiration will sag. Trains of thought will vanish. Boredom and inattentiveness will pervade your classroom like a Golden Gate fog.

It's also impolite to call out, like cutting in line at the box office.

Hand-raising, on the other hand, is fair to every student – which is why we recommend it as part of [an effective classroom management plan](#).

But what about when you're working with small groups, say four or five students? Should you require hand-raising then?

The truth is, with groups this size, it's best to shelve the practice.

Here's why:

**It dampens the experience.**

Asking students to raise their hand takes the joy out of being in a small group. It removes the essence, the seasoning, the élan of debate and discussion. Without the spark of give-and-take spontaneity, it's hardly worth doing at all.

**It discourages active participation.**

Your students must be able to speak directly to fellow group members without going through you first. Otherwise, they'll grow bored with the process. They'll become less interested, less invested, and less motivated to try and understand one another's point of view.

**It makes students self-conscious.**

Because the intimacy of small groups can be intimidating, your primary goal should be to get your students lost in conversation – which makes creating a natural, organic experience all the more important. Being 'in the moment' also increases learning tenfold.

**It's poor preparation for their own groups.**

Another important goal should be to become less and less involved, to raise questions or advance ideas and then fade into the background. You're preparing them, after all, to conduct their own groups, to have stimulating debate and discourse without you.

**It's no fun for you.**

Done right, and [in a way that allows you to all but forget about the rest of your class](#), leading small groups is one of the great joys of teaching. But

you have to allow free-flowing expression in order to experience the empathy, humor, and camaraderie of inspired group learning.

### **A Deft Touch**

Before jumping into small groups it's important to model in detail what productive conversation looks like, including how to make eye contact, ask polite questions, and chime in without interrupting.

Still, your success is largely dependent on your role as leader and facilitator of the group.

It's dependent on your reassuring looks and quiet encouragement . . . your gentle corrections and calm persistence . . . your ability to pull from students the thoughts, ideas, and *passion* they feel on the inside but struggle to express.

Through your artful prompts, probing questions, and evidential challenges, you'll get there. You'll sculpt your students into a whole that is greater than its parts.

A disparate crew that relishes learning together.

A small, tender group that gets lost in the moment.