Using Peer Feedback as Authentic Formative Assessment

Discussion practices that support student interaction.

1) Large Group (Based on Harkness Model): On a checklist roster with student names, track desired discussion behaviors and habits with labeled columns. These could include: introducing new ideas, providing supporting evidence, asking questions, moderating, clarifying, raising counterpoints, providing counterexamples, redirecting, or making connections. Depending on the students or the time of year, including columns with undesired behaviors -- clearly labeled as such! -- is useful. Teach and model as necessary. Frequently I will track discussions with this checklist visible via document camera or overhead. The goal is for students to have independent discussions. When they do this they are, in addition to learning from each other, providing feedback for one another's ideas.

2) With Partners: Each student keeps their own personal checklist of positive discussion behaviors. Before partner discussions (such as independent books talks, homework shares) they can be directed to preview the list to determine which they should focus on practicing. After discussions they can reflect on which they felt they did well and which they will need to attempt more.   Model checklist available in Common Core MAISA units.

3) Wait Time: Model the thinking you expect students to do during discussions. This can be done as "Think Aloud" mini-lessons, in a fishbowl practice discussion, pausing and interrupting large group discussions, or however else might be effective. Students need to see that the discussion behaviors we teach reflect internal processes. For the ideas and examples that get raised in discussion to have impact, students need to understand that when they hear someone raise a new idea, they should relate it to things that they have thought. "If I had noticed that quote, then what I would have to consider about my idea would be…" or, "If I thought that idea were true, then I would have to consider that such-and-such piece of evidence I felt was important could also show…" This kind of thinking reinforces the idea of discussion as feedback and creates conditions and material for students to fully develop ideas in their writing.

4) With Partners, modified Wait Time: One partner speaks. The other has to reflect in writing (2 or 3 minutes, quick notes) on the different ways the speaker's ideas or examples might relate to their own before responding. Partners switch roles. Build this into or combine with large group discussions.

5) Small Group (3 or 4 students) Micro Lab:
   a) Opening Rounds, 1.5 minutes each.
      i) Person A talks for one minute. All are silent for 30 seconds afterward to process and take notes.
      ii) Person B talks for one minute. All are silent for 30 seconds… as above
      iii) As above.
      iv) And so on if a group of 4.

   b) Conversation Round. Students discuss, referencing one another's ideas, clarifying, asking questions, making connections, creating consensus, noting agreements and disagreements, and so on.

   c) Expand discussion to whole class continuing as b) above.

   When discussion matters, students learn to value writing as a way to reflect on and extend topics that have grown to matter to them in a social setting -- the classroom. This makes a difference in how they view writing, themselves as writers, and the feedback they give and receive.