



VIDEO SUMMARY

Student-Led Classrooms

Resource person: Katherine Cadwell | History and philosophy teacher | Curated from TEDx Talks
Student-Led Classrooms | Active Learning Strategies | pedagogy

Katherine Cadwell describes students who had become skilled at seeking grades, correct answers and efficient completion while feeling uneasy around ambiguity. She redesigned her history and philosophy classes around Harkness discussions, a structured form of student-led inquiry.

Students sit around a shared table, work from demanding primary sources and pursue an essential question together. They ask questions, test interpretations, cite evidence, connect ideas and revise conclusions. Cadwell speaks less during the discussion, but her planning remains substantial. She selects the material and question, teaches the discussion skills, observes the exchange and tracks participation patterns.

The tracking has an instructional purpose. Cadwell can show students who initiated questions, who built on another person's idea, where the conversation became concentrated and where evidence entered the discussion. The group then uses that record to plan a better conversation. Student leadership grows through repeated practice and feedback.

Cadwell also teaches civil discourse directly. Students practise eye contact, active listening, respectful disagreement, evidence use and question formation. Removing phones is one part of her local routine. The broader principle is to reduce avoidable distraction while making the expected forms of attention explicit.

Participation needs careful design. A lively table can still favour confident speakers, fluent speakers or students with higher social status. Silent preparation, written entry points, rotating responsibilities, alternative contribution routes and transparent tracking can widen access. The quality of a discussion should be judged through the reasoning it produces and the individual learning students can later demonstrate.

The talk presents a teacher's case. It gives faculty a clear demonstration of how to structure challenge, evidence, inclusion and feedback while students lead the exchange.