In *Students Center Stage: Focusing Classrooms on Challenging Work*, the 2015 winners of the Fishman Prize for Superlative Classroom Practice address a question at the core of their instruction: How can teachers get students to lead more of their own learning? How can teachers help their students master challenging material by stepping back in their classrooms?

As we continue to grapple with how to raise standards and improve the quality of classroom instruction nationwide, *Students Center Stage* offers concrete strategies that showcase just how four of the country’s top K-12 educators do what they do every day. A resource for all teachers, the essay collection is an important starting point for discussions about how teachers can evolve their instruction and shift their focus from their own moves to their students’, allowing students to lead the inquiry process and support their peers.

**Pre-Reading and Discussion Structure**

1. Propose *Students Center Stage* as a starting point for discussion about classroom practices that allow teachers to step back and students to take the lead.

2. Ask participants to download and read *Students Center Stage* by sharing this guide and this link: [tntp.org/fishmanprizeseries](http://tntp.org/fishmanprizeseries) (or you can request hard copies at tntp.org/request).

3. Assign a discussion facilitator to help guide the conversation, using this guide as a resource. Consider assigning someone else to take notes.

4. Revisit the topic at a subsequent meeting to give participants an opportunity to share how their classroom practice has evolved.

**Suggested Discussion Questions**

Use these questions or add your own to spark the discussion. Encourage participants to be specific and focus on concrete examples from the essays and their own classrooms.

- **How do you see these teachers focusing their classrooms on student-led learning?**
  What specific strategies do the Fishman winners use to enable students to lead their own learning? How could these strategies be adapted for your classroom?

- **How do students support their peers’ learning in these classrooms?**
  In Erica’s classroom, for example, kindergartners offer each other concrete feedback on their writing. What other strategies do the Fishman winners use to allow their students to help each other understand complex material? What is one way your students could support their peers’ learning?

- **How do “checks for understanding” permeate these teachers’ classrooms?**
  What are the ways Erin, for example, looks for evidence of deep understanding that goes beyond “right” answers? How does Erin’s practice of checking for understanding align with or differ from your own?

- **How have the teachers evolved their instruction over time?**
  Fishman winners all reflect on ways their practice has changed. What changes do they address and what are the results in their classrooms? How have those changes led to increased rigor? How do you see your own practice evolving and what are the results?

We invite you to join us on Facebook and Twitter to continue the discussion about rigor in the classroom and learn more about the annual Fishman Prize for Superlative Classroom Practice, which honors exceptionally effective teachers working in high-poverty public schools with $25,000 and a chance to share their expertise nationwide. If you know of a great teacher making a difference in the lives of low-income students, encourage them to apply to the 2016 Fishman Prize, at [www.tntp.org/fishmanprize](http://www.tntp.org/fishmanprize).