Leading Effective Discussions

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Of All the Pedagogical Options – Why Discussion? (Exercise 1: post-its)

• High degree of student engagement.
  • But how in large classes?
  • What about online?

• Students are not treated as passive recipients of information.
  • What’s the value of that?

• Students can learn from one another.

• Participation bridges the gap between what we say and what students hear/infer.

• Students learn by doing.
  • They develop their own answers
  • They also develop their own questions

• The more active they are in the learning process, the more likely they are to:
  • Retain information
  • Apply information to different circumstances
  • Develop problem solving skills
  • Analyze their own attitudes
  • Understand and articulate their own learning
The Ophelia Syndrome & The Socratic Solution

• Act 1, Scene 3, *Hamlet*.
• *Ophelia*: “I do not know, my lord, what I should think.”
• *Polonius*: “I’ll teach you. Think yourself a baby…”
• What’s the Problem?
• Teacher gives answers, not questions;
• Does not allow or encourage independent thinking.
• Meno is uneducated. Socrates is, well, Socrates.
• Context: Even the uneducated Meno can, with proper guidance (good questioning), solve difficult problems.
• Teachers don’t give answers; students have them but need to discover them.
• Teachers are *facilitators*
  • The value of “yet”
What is an Effective Discussion?

• List all the attributes you can think of...what makes for a good discussion...keep writing....
## But How? Challenges and Solutions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s the Problem/Challenge?</th>
<th>Solutions?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Online</td>
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Face-to-face

Online
Evidence-Based Practices

Shrink the Class

• Divide the class into groups to give every student a chance to participate.

• Assign roles to require engagement.

• Minimize risk/embarrassment through small groups.

• Increase comfort and confidence by letting them refine and rehearse their comments in small groups.

• Enable students to deal with disagreement constructively.

Associated Techniques

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<tr>
<th>EXHIBIT 7.1</th>
<th>Discussion CoLTs</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>This CoLT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Is a Technique in Which Students:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1: Think-Pair-Share</td>
<td>Think individually for a few minutes, and then discuss and compare their responses with a partner before sharing with the entire class</td>
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<td>2: Round Robin</td>
<td>Generate ideas and speak in order moving from one student to the next</td>
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<td>3: Buzz Groups</td>
<td>Discuss course-related questions informally in small groups of peers</td>
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<td>4: Talking Chips</td>
<td>Participate in a group discussion and surrender a token each time they speak</td>
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<td>5: Three-Step Interview</td>
<td>Interview each other and report what they learn to another pair</td>
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<td>6: Critical Debates</td>
<td>Assume and argue the side of an issue that is in opposition to their personal views</td>
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Additional Strategies/Good Discussion Requires Some Effort!”

- **Pause for reflection** – give students time to process information/arguments before responding.
- **Quick writes** – to organize thoughts
- **Reflective writing** – to synthesize and assess
- **Online writing and discussion** – to keep the conversation going
- **Peer instructors**
- **Case studies**
- **Interactive lectures**
- **Bridging**
- **Be mindful of civility**
- **Consider the use of technology**
Strategies for Page 2 Learning Goals

• “Students learn by doing...they develop their own answers and questions.” But not everyone gets involved in the conversation:
  • **Quick writes** – have students pause and write down their answers/questions, even if they are not called on.
  • **End of class reflective writing** – give students five minutes to write reflectively on what was learned from discussion, if and how their answers/questions were addressed.
  • **Use BbLearn** for continuing discussion on topics.

• “The more active they are in the learning process, the more likely they are to...”
  • **Retain information** – **scaffold learning experiences** between sessions and use language like “as we learned from our discussion of...”, and then give them something to do with the information.
  • **Apply information** – **in assignments**, require students to apply knowledge learned from discussion, from someone else, from their own growth in their work. How? Critical refection essays, think pieces, journals.
  • **Develop problem solving skills** – use class time for students to **engage with each other**: CBP/PBL/Debates/Simulations.
  • **Analyze their own attitudes and learning** – **critical reflection** journals, cognitive wrappers, culminating experience presentations.
## Be Mindful and Intentional!

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<td>Develop good questions</td>
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<td>Prepare your students</td>
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<td>Disrupt the routine</td>
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<td>Be inclusive</td>
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<td>Be patient</td>
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<td>Listen/encourage/require listening</td>
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<td>Facilitate engagement</td>
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<td>Provide leadership and direction</td>
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<td>Respect ideas but challenge/correct</td>
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<td>Allow students to answer their own questions and those of others</td>
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<td>Synthesize information</td>
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<td>Provide a strong conclusion that demonstrates the value of their effort</td>
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<td>What about the quiet ones?</td>
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<td>How do we assess learning through discussion?</td>
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