

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

What's the Problem/Challenge?		Solutions?
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

EXHIBIT 7.1
Discussion CoLTs

This CoLT	Is a Technique in Which Students:	It Is Particularly Useful for:
1: Think-Pair-Share	Think individually for a few minutes, and then discuss and compare their responses with a partner before sharing with the entire class	Preparing students to participate more fully and effectively in whole class discussions
2: Round Robin	Generate ideas and speak in order moving from one student to the next	Structuring brainstorming sessions and ensuring that all students participate
3: Buzz Groups	Discuss course-related questions informally in small groups of peers	Generating lots of information and ideas in a short period of time to prepare for and improve whole-class discussions
4: Talking Chips	Participate in a group discussion and surrender a token each time they speak	Ensuring equitable participation
5: Three-Step Interview	Interview each other and report what they learn to another pair	Helping students network and improve communication skills
6: Critical Debates	Assume and argue the side of an issue that is in opposition to their personal views	Developing critical thinking skills and encouraging students to challenge their existing assumptions

Additional Strategies/Good Discussion Requires Some Effort!/#dontforgetto

- ***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 reflection 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!		
What? Our role	How? Think “strategy”	Why? Rationale
Develop good questions		
Prepare your students		
Disrupt the routine		
Be inclusive		
Be patient		
Listen/encourage/require listening		
Facilitate engagement		
Provide leadership and direction		
Respect ideas but challenge/correct		
Allow students to answer their own questions and those of others		
Synthesize information		
Provide a strong conclusion that demonstrates the value of their effort		
What about the quiet ones?		
How do we assess learning through discussion?		