

APPROACHES TO ENHANCE IN-CLASS DISCUSSION

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“Cool Tools”

WHAT ARE WE STARTING WITH?

- What goes well with the discussions you have in class?
- What does NOT go the way you want with discussions?
- Get into triads and use the huddle boards to take notes

WHY DO WE WANT TO HAVE CLASS DISCUSSIONS?

- It is important to know what you want the students to get out of discussion – if you don't know yourself, or are using discussion to “fill time”, you will not get the results you want.
- **Why do you have class discussions?**

EFFECTIVE DISCUSSIONS COME IN MANY FORMS

- There is no ONE right approach, and even a solid approach gets old.
- Having 3-4 different kinds of discussion rotating in a class offers variety to keep students engaged AND allows different students to participate
- **What kinds of discussion approaches to you use?**

SOME DIFFERENT DISCUSSION APPROACHES

- Small group discussion with large group “report out” (think-pair-share) on a single question
- Posing different questions to small groups and having them report their thoughts
- In-class writing and then discussing what students write
- Reading out loud the writing students prepared before class and using that as a starter
- Fish-bowl discussion (some students designated to talk, others must just watch/listen and take notes)

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR DISCUSSION

- At the beginning of the semester
 - Talk about the reasons you will conduct discussions, and what you want the students to get from the activity.
 - Talk about the kinds of discussions you will hold and what your expectations of them will be.
 - Have them engage in a discussion of what good discussions consist of, and have them set ground rules .

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR DISCUSSION

- Discussions work better when you have students actively prepare.
 - Broad reading questions that you will use as discussion starters.
 - Dilemmas, contradictions, inconsistencies, “puzzles” in your discipline – pose them for students to contemplate and then work through.
 - Students’ experiences connected to the material.
 - **What other strategies can we use to help students be prepared for discussion?**

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

- There are many techniques to encourage student participation.
 - Avoid calling on the “easy talkers” all the time.
 - You CAN call on students -- don’t use it as “punishment” for their lack of participation, but build it into the expectations.
 - Count off and have the “5”s or the “3”s be the talkers
 - Allow for “passes” if a student does not want to participate.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

- Monitor your role and responses to students –
 - Are you immediately responding to each student? That can shut down their communication with each other.
 - Are you unconsciously “judging” responses in such a way that conveys to students that they are “wrong”?
 - Are you asking questions with factual or right and wrong answers? These are discussion killers.

STUDENT ROLES

- Deer in the headlights – are you asking something they can actually understand and engage with? Sometimes we don't gauge student comprehension accurately.
- The “over talker” – what do we do about conversation dominators, hijackers, or other over-contributors?
- The silent students – what is keeping them quiet?

DON'T EXPECT PERFECTION

- Sustaining focused conversation is hard – things will not always go as you plan or wish.
- Sometimes getting off-track can lead to greater insights.
- If a discussion does not go as well as you would have liked, analyze it – what elements felt off? Have a colleague sit in and observe – they can perhaps spot problems you cannot.
- Don't give up on a technique after 1 or 2 tries. This is hard, and it takes practice!

LAST QUESTION

- What is the one idea you are walking away with?