Facilitating Discussions
Level 1: Foundations
Graduate Teaching and Learning Program
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Name one deeply personal fear you have about leading discussions . . Like your deepest, darkest fear that you have never told ANYONE!
Consider why this may have been the wrong approach to facilitating discussion. Make some notes for yourself.
On a piece of paper, write down one (deep, dark) fear you have about facilitating discussions.

Do not identify yourself.
Paper Toss

Q.: What are the benefits of the paper toss over simply asking the question?
   • Make note of your thoughts.
   • Turn to a partner and discuss your ideas.

“Lowering the Ego Threat” (Bruce Ziff)

Deanna’s Bonus: Save the papers and revisit them at the end of the semester. This is a great way to measure shifts in knowledge, attitudes, and skills and to track progress.
In Groups of 4 (3 minutes)

Scenario:
You are stranded on an island. If you had known this would be your fate, name one book, one food/drink item, and one luxury item you would have brought with you.

These items should be things you “can’t live without.”
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In Groups of 4 (3 minutes)

- Introduce yourselves (briefly!)
- As a group select your 3 items.
- (Your group must agree on your selections!)
- Choose a group representative to present your selections.
Reflection: Write, Pair, Share
Write (1 minute); Pair, Share (2 minutes)

Q: What is the underlying purpose of these activities?
Q: How could you use these kinds of activities for formative assessment purposes?

Formative assessments are low stakes (low/no grade value). Used to help instructors identify students’ skills/knowledge, make teaching adjustments students identify areas for improvement
Do you feel differently about answering the question about your deep dark secret? Why?

Would you feel differently if you had the opportunity to talk in a small group?

Make note of your thoughts

Name 1 personal fear you have about leading discussions.
Learning Objectives

Build understanding of

• **Benefits** of discussion to student learning
• Discussion barriers in the classroom
• Techniques to better facilitate classroom discussion
Learning Outcomes

**Describe** how discussion enhances learning

**Confront** and **reflect** on discussion barriers

**Practice** discussion approaches

**Describe** the benefits of discussion to student learning

**Describe** strategies for
  - Setting a climate for discussion
  - Getting students to talk

**Design** a discussion
ICEBREAKERS

• Initiate
  • Classroom community
  • Safe learning environment
• Set stage for active participation
• Provide opportunities for
  • Topic lead-ins
  • Formative assessment
• Both

Image: https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/map-icebergs-route-south
“I do have to lecture. What else can you do in these large classes?”
“I can’t get the content covered if I don’t lecture.”
“Students want me to lecture.”
“Students don’t bother to learn anything.”
“Students don’t have the critical thinking skills to participate.”

~Maryellen Weimer, “More Evidence that Active Learning Works,” Faculty Focus, 3 June 2015
Image: https://goo.gl/images/ak0dl5
Active learning “involves students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing.”

~Boswell, Charles and James Eison (1991) *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom*, 2

Image: https://staging.cokecce.com/corporate-responsibility-sustainability/active-healthy-living
Some THEORY

• Memory is affected by how deeply new info processed

• Learning elaborated by:
  • Thinking about relationships
  • Explaining
  • Summarizing
  • Questioning

Image: http://daniel-venezuela.blogspot.ca/2014/06/can-we-get-grand-unified-theory-of.html
What is going wrong with the facilitation of discussion in this classroom?
What could the instructor do differently?
To what extent *should* the instructional approach be modified to meet the preferred learning style of students?
BARRIERS

• Student
  • Fear
  • Discomfort
  • Quick to agree
• Instructor
  • Fear
  • Discomfort
  • Content tyranny

Images: http://neatoday.org/2015/03/03/engaging-student-resistance-works-better-punishment/
http://searchengineland.com/content-marketing-works-230337
http://upgradedape.com/how-millions-have-removed-their-fears-in-one-sentence/stid
“Teachers may cover the content, but if that doesn’t promote learning, does it really matter that it’s been covered?”

~ Maryellen Weimer, “More Evidence that Active Learning Works,” The Teaching Professor Blog, Faculty Focus, 3 June 2015
Barriers | Students

- Fail to see the value
- Resist participation unless it’s “on the test”
- Accustomed to/prefer passive learning
Students may be looking for the “right” answers.
"Anyone, anyone" | Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1985), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhICFdWeQfA
Understanding our learners and being effective in our role in supporting discussion

↓

Expert vs. Novice Learners
Expert learners. . .

- Poses useful questions
- Identifies relevant information, ignore irrelevant
- Recognizes context and select information to suit needs
- Organizes knowledge around key principle and concepts
- Self-regulates time and efforts
- Self-motivates
- Has capacity for flexible thinking
Novice learners need to learn...

- **Core concepts and experiences**
  - Foundational knowledge, examples, resources, varied experiences
- **Task analysis**
  - Understanding the problem/key questions to focus on key issues
- **Pattern recognition**
  - Structure information in meaningful ways to see patterns
Novice learners need to learn...

- **Metacognition**
  - Develop awareness of their own thinking and develop flexibility adapt
- **Self-regulation**
  - Learn to control own thinking and actions
Novice learners will require support in classroom discussion.
One Minute Paper

What skills (other than content knowledge) can *classroom discussion* develop?

Image: [http://www.thumbsupprogramme.co.uk/ask-a-question](http://www.thumbsupprogramme.co.uk/ask-a-question)
Brainstorm

What skills (other than content knowledge) can classroom discussion develop?

• Formative assessment. . . .
Is there value in this use of class time?
What are students learning?
SET THE STAGE
Classroom Community

Increases

• Engagement
• Motivation
• Collaboration
• Willingness to take risks
PRACTICE DISCUSSION FRIENDLY BEHAVIOURS
PLAN A STRATEGY
SHARE THE PLAN
FACILITATE — DON’T DOMINATE
AVOID COMMON PITFALLS
Get Students TALKING

1. Common experience
   • Reading (scholarly, primary source)
   • Video clip/photograph
   • News story
   • Case study
   • Scenario

2. Groups given different materials

See handout for discussion structures.
Get Students TALKING

- Buzz groups
- Write, pair, share
- Brainstorming
- Begin with 1 minute paper
- Jigsaw
- Start with a poll
- Open discussion

See handout for discussion structures.

https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/teaching/small-groups-and-discussions/how-get-students-talk-class
Image: http://cliparts.co/cartoon-of-people-talking
Design Questions Thoughtfully

- Good questions:
  - **Cause** genuine & relevant inquiry into big ideas/core content
  - **Provoke** deep thought, lively discussion, more questions
  - **Require consideration** of alternatives, weigh evidence, support/justify ideas
  - **Stimulates** rethinking
  - **Spark** connections to prior learning/personal experiences

See handout for question types.

https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/teaching/small-groups-and-discussions/how-get-students-talk-class
• Information (5 w’s)
• Evaluative
• Critique
• Experiential
• Analysis /diagnostic /prediction
• Priority & sequence
• Compare & contrast
• Cause & effect
• Clarification
• Connective
• Summary
In Groups of 3 (10 minutes)

Begin to design a discussion on 1 of these topics:
• The high cost of post-secondary education
• Mental health and wellness on university campuses
In Groups of 3  (10 minutes)

Determine the:

• Purpose of the discussion
• Discussion method/structure
• Question types to be used
  • Question(s) to be discussed
• Anticipated Student Response/Questions)

See handout for ideas on question types and discussion structures
References:

Discussion Leading Guidelines, Stanford Teaching Commons,

“Discussions,” Eberly Center: Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation, Carnegie Mellon,
https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/instructionalstrategies/discussions.html

Leading Better Discussions, Center for Teaching Excellence, Duquesne University,
http://www.duq.edu/about/centers-and-institutes/center-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-and-learning/leading-better-discussions


Learning Outcomes

Describe how discussion enhances learning
Confront and reflect on discussion barriers
Practice discussion approaches
Describe the benefits of discussion to student learning
Describe strategies for
  Setting a climate for discussion
  Getting students to talk
Design a discussion
What are your questions?