Leading Effective Discussions

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TODAY

- Why use discussion?
- Setting the mood for discussion
- Planning for discussion
- Managing discussion
**WHY DISCUSSION?**

- Deeper understanding/learning
- Adds relevance to content
- Build community in the classroom
- More fun for you!
SETTING THE MOOD

What does an effective discussion look like? What type of environment cultivates discussion?
SETTING THE MOOD

- Build rapport (student-instructor AND student-student)
  - Learn names
  - Icebreaker or other activity
  - Share something about yourself
- Set clear expectations for discussion
  - Physical layout of room
  - Prepare your students ahead of time
  - Etiquette
PLANNING FOR DISCUSSION

- Identify and allow for class time for discussion, including a summary
- Identify goal of the discussion
- Identify type of discussion
- Write appropriate prompts (in advance!)
- To evaluate or not?
- Have a backup plan
Discussion Types

- Whole class
- Small groups: pair & share; 2, 4, 6, 8
- Fishbowl, Jigsaw, Debate
- Others?
WRITING GOOD DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Freewriting or just warm-up:
- The question I’d most like to ask the author is…
- The idea I most take issue with is…
- What struck me the most about today’s reading is…
- Quotes to affirm or challenge
WRITING GOOD DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Common experience
- Relevant, real-life topics
- Problem- or case-based topics
- Controversial topics
- Questions
  - Specific vs. general
  - Open-ended vs. closed-ended
  - Convergent vs. divergent
  - Use Bloom’s taxonomy
BLOOM’S TAXONOMY

- Identifies six levels of thinking
- Keep in mind when writing discussion questions/prompts
- Often ask questions geared toward lower levels, but need higher-level questions for engaging discussion
MANAGING DISCUSSION

- Set expectations and ground rules
- Use a variety of strategies
- Facilitating
- Student issues
- Hot button/controversial issues
- Wrapping up
DISCUSSION STRATEGIES

- Wait for a response!
- Allow students time to write/reflect
- Change language: “How many of you would be willing…”?
- Use small groups or pairs
- Call on students
Facilitating Discussion

- Model appropriate behavior
  - Body language
  - Be encouraging and respectful
  - Actively listen and thread comments
- Let students call on/engage students
- Ask questions to clarify or guide the discussion
- Let the students do the work!
STUDENT ISSUES

- Class monopolizer
- Shy students
- Unprepared students
- Off-target comments (holding bin)
- Others?
HOT-BUTTON MOMENTS

- Deal with the problem right away
  - Be calm and relaxed
  - Breathe
  - Refer to the ground rules

- Make it a teachable moment
  - Focus on the issue, not the student
  - Use reflection to defuse the situation
  - Address students outside of class, if necessary
WRAPPING UP DISCUSSION

- Clarify and summarize key points
- Ask students what they’ve learned, connect to course learning objectives
- Make connections to everyday lives or future careers
- Consider opportunities for reflection
  - Before this discussion I _____, but now I _______. 
SUMMARY: DISCUSSION DON’TS

- Don’t use just a question-answer format
- Never embarrass or humiliate students during discussion
- Don’t ignore comments
- Don’t interrupt students
- Don’t let “wrong” answers go unaddressed
SUMMARY: DISCUSSION
DO’S

- Plan for the discussion
- Cultivate a supportive learning environment
- Be respectful and model appropriate communication techniques
- Facilitate, let the students do the work
- Use a variety of formats
- Deal with problems right away
THANKS FOR COMING!

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