Group Discussion as a Teaching Tool

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Abstract

Teaching requires not only knowledge but also a great skill, deep probe into the subject supported by an ever widening positive approach. Numerous are the ways and methods of teaching, what counts most is the efficiency, accuracy and the effectiveness of the method adopted. In the competitive age, the teaching tools must have quality. GD is one such tool that provides ample scope to the students to think rationally, to reflect logically and to be able to understand, brood over and assimilate a subject. Group discussions are the best motivators that sharpen the skills. Group Discussions transform the personality of students, making them more confident and more proficient in languages. Looking at its multi-faceted benefits it has been incorporated by the leading groups and companies as a regular practice.

Keywords: *Skill Development, Proficiency, Efficiency, Rational*

Introduction:

Discussions can be an excellent strategy for enhancing student motivation, fostering intellectual agility, and encouraging democratic habits. They create opportunities for students to practice and sharpen a number of skills, including the ability to articulate and defend positions, consider different points of view, and enlist and evaluate evidence.

While discussions provide avenues for exploration and discovery, leading a discussion can be anxiety-producing: discussions are, by their nature, unpredictable, and require us as instructors to surrender a certain degree of control over the flow of information.

Fortunately, careful planning can help us ensure that discussions are lively without being chaotic and exploratory without losing focus. When planning a discussion, it is helpful to consider not only cognitive, but also social/emotional, and physical factors that can either foster or inhibit the productive exchange of ideas.

Increase Students' Comfort with the Specialized Language and Methods of a Field:

All fields have a terminology shared by scholars and professionals in that field, as well as commonly understood approaches to solving problems and discovering knowledge. One of the main goals of both introductory and advanced college courses is to help students learn to think like an economist, a sociologist, a biologist, or an historian by learning the language and methods of a field. Discussion is an excellent forum for learning to think like a specialist by giving students a chance to practice analyzing the world through the lens of a particular field.

Students can be made to analyze the text.. What should students pay attention to? How would a specialist talk about this? A good example for any kind of physical or social science is how to analyze a study. What are the components of a study that students should pay attention to? For the humanities, it can be the process of analyzing a particular kind of text. For engineers, it might be how to begin thinking about a design goal and the specifications given for a project.

A teacher can help students to assume varied ways and approaches of thinkers belonging to various fields.

Students can be asked to compare and contrast two texts or examples. This helps them focus on what matters in your field. What distinctions are most important? Which details are critical? How do you know "good" from "bad"—what are the value judgments made in your field?

Guiding Discussion:

It is especially important for the discussion leader to provide both a model for thinking like a specialist and a structure for student discussion.

Before starting an open discussion, you might ask students to recall some new terminology introduced in lecture or the reading and walk them through the process of applying that terminology to an example. However, students need more than a review session.

They also need a chance to think for themselves and internalize this new way of viewing the world. So you'll want to walk students through a specific process at least once and then give them many opportunities to practice. Encouraging Participation All students need a chance to practice using a new language or method.

A large group discussion can limit participation, giving only a few students full opportunity to practice. The typical solution to this problem is to have students pair up to dis-cuss a question or problem for five minutes and then bring them back for a full-group discussion. Variations on this theme can maximize each student's participation and exposure to other students' ideas:

Partner Swap:

Have students pair up for a series of practice or discussion rounds and rotate partners for every new example or question. This format works well when you want students to practice a simple skill such as analyzing the meter of a line of poetry, but not when you want students to develop a complex skill such as analyzing the historical context of a poem.

Pair partnering helps more than the group discussion in general. Small groups prepare them for further elaborate GD; s. This format works best when you can create a topic that has many levels of discussion. For example, have the pairs analyze a basic aspect of the text or problem (What is the hypothesis of this study, and how did the researchers test it?).

In small groups, have students discuss a more complex issue (Do you think the methods are a good test of this hypothesis? What aspects of the study design would you change? What are the ethical concerns in this study?).

In larger groups, students can discuss their reactions, share ideas, and build on each other's suggestions.

Trouble-Shooting:

When students are not already heavily invested in a field, even important exercises can lack intrinsic interest.

If students' participation is not so good, try to trace out the smallest interest they have in the whole matter. A teacher must take that lead to proceed.

You can also connect what students are doing to the activities of scholars or professionals in your field. Students often don't understand how skills learned in introductory, or even advanced, classes relate to the kinds of original scholarship or careers that they are interested in.

Develop Critical Thinking:

Critical thinking is an important goal in most fields, whether it is used to analyze the logic of a philosopher or to find the potential problems with a proposed healthcare initiative.

Discussion is an excellent tool for developing students' reasoning skills because it gives you access to their thought processes and an opportunity to guide students to a higher level of thinking.

Prompts and Exercises Critical thinking can be applied to any text, claim, or open-ended question. Choose topics that are likely to provoke student interest but not necessarily topics that students already have strong and passionate opinions about.

To teach critical thinking, you need a window of open-mindedness and curiosity.

Stir Up Controversy:

Provide students with a provocative or controversial quote from some expert in your field (possibly a guest lecturer or the author of a class text). Use the expert's claim as a challenge to students: Is this expert right?

How would you decide? What information do you need? What information do you have? Payne and Gainey (2003) have developed a list of controversial claims in many fields, from marketing to medicine that may be useful for your course.

Provide Alternatives:

Giving students an open option for all probabilities to occur would be a right choice. . Instead of taking a vote, or asking students to immediately choose a side, start with a question that encourages open thinking. What is the issue here? or What is this really a choice between? Can launch a deeper conversation than which do you agree with? Ask students to describe the perspectives that inform each alternative and critically discuss those perspectives as much as the actual claims.

Directing the Discussion:

A Teacher's role is to guide and direct the students properly. Reasoning used by the students' needs testing. A good teacher needs to evaluate the content of reasoning used by the students.

One must focus attention on the quality of students' reasoning, not just the content of their reasoning. Instructors need to be able to recognize both common errors in reasoning (such as making unsupported assertions and using anecdotal evidence) and the signs of high-level reasoning (such as focusing on empirical evidence for a theory and the ability to integrate personal values with evidence).

A discussion leader can then focus on guiding students from common reasoning errors or simplistic reasoning to more complex or high-level reasoning. When students make a claim, ask them for their evidence or logic. Then ask the class to evaluate the evidence or logic. Encourage students who disagree on a point to identify the source of the disagreement (i.e., trusting different kinds of evidence or weighing certain values more strongly) rather than simply the point of disagreement.

Encourage students to talk to each other, not just to you.

It would be better for the teachers not to reveal their opinion. This helps students to think original.

Develop Problem-Solving Skills:

Problem solving requires both divergent and convergent thinking. You can encourage students to find creative solutions to complex problems, and you can also teach individuals how to come to a collective decision.

Brainstorming:

Most brainstorming sessions focus on generating as many solutions as possible. You can expand this approach by asking students to brainstorm for each important step in the problem-solving process.

This helps in getting innovative ideas as well. Have students brainstorm for relevant information (What do you already know about this problem and its causes?), important considerations (What

are some things that a solution needs to accomplish and take into account?), possible solutions, and possible obstacles.

Multiple solutions to a problem, multiple ways to seek the alternatives all become possible through it.

The Deliberation:

Create a problem that requires making a decision or choosing a specific course of action (Parker, 2001). When you introduce the problem, explain that the goal of discussion is to come to a consensus. This is an important problem-solving skill for all fields that require group decision making, such as business, politics and policy, engineering, or healthcare.

Two Solutions:

Once a problem is introduced and students have engaged in some brainstorming, you can split the class into two or more groups. Each group develops its own solution or decision and presents back to the full group at the end of class.

This is a great strategy to use if you can create a scenario based on actual data about a historical event or experiment (such as a design failure that led to an improved design or different methods for improving medical compliance in underserved communities). When groups present their decisions, you can give them feedback about the real-world consequences of their choices

Reality Check:

If you uncovered any major gaps in student understanding, revisit the topic at the end of the discussion and base any follow-up assignments on this area. Email or online discussion boards are also an excellent way to extend classroom discussion. As homework, you can require every student to submit an online response to a question posed in class.

To help students reflect on the discussion process, ask students to write about how the discussion changed their thinking or understanding (Davis, 2001, p. 72). You can also ask students to assess the quality of the class discussion. Ask them to evaluate their own contributions and how they might improve their participation.

If the discussion involved any major conflict or disagreement, ask students to summarize the conflict, evaluate how the group handled it, and add their own perspective. To find out what students understand about problem-solving strategies, ask them to make notes individually about how the class solved a problem, along with general suggestions for solving similar problems.

Conclusion:

Group discussion has to be a continuous process. It has been adopted as a strong teaching tool that sharpens the wit and shapes the personality of the students. As it is concerned with personality development too even the business concerns have adopted this device. Group discussion provides an extra opportunity to look at a problem with multiple perspectives and seek its solution in the most effective manner.

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