FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS THAT WORK

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BY THE END OF THIS WORKSHOP YOU WILL ...

Understand and appreciate challenges and opportunities in facilitating discussion faced by your colleagues. Identify strategies to address these challenges and opportunities.

Recognize the importance of questions you pose. Describe what an interpretive question is and how this type of question can help you facilitate discussion among your students.

Identify other resources that exist to help you facilitate discussions in your classes
WHY DID YOU COME TO THIS PROGRAM?

WHAT ARE YOUR IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ABOUT FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS?

OR

(WHAT HAVE YOU TRIED THAT DIDN’T WORK?)

WITHIN WHAT CONTEXTS ARE YOU FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS?
INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS

A type of question asking for what the author meant, as opposed to
- Factual questions – elicit student regurgitation of facts
- Evaluative question – elicit student judgments (most people have opinions about issues!). Still play a role in discussion.

A form of active learning/active lecturing that can be used to stimulate discussion in the classroom.

Higher level learning-accomplished by requiring students to produce something with the material.
# QUESTION TYPES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Question</th>
<th>Interpretive</th>
<th>Factual</th>
<th>Evaluative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic (General)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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CHARACTERISTICS OF WELL-DEVELOPED INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS

Make questions interpretive - ask students to explain the author’s meaning

Interesting - teacher is curious about answers

It can be answered - not insistent on one answer

It is ambiguous (not “yes” or “no”)
THINGS THAT MAKE STORIES GO VIRAL
(ON THE INTERNET)

Read the article (New Yorker Magazine)

Spend 3 minutes writing an interpretive question (or questions) you have about the article.

In groups of 3, discuss your question(s)

Report out of questions
AN EVALUATIVE QUESTION

What have we learned in this exercise about the advantages of using interpretive questions to enhance learning?

What was challenging?
MAKING IT REAL FOR YOU

Topic or principle to be taught

Teaching and learning objective

What type of discussions do you anticipate using in a class period?

Write at least one interpretive question you might ask to facilitate discussion on the topic or principle

What types of responses would you expect from class?
USING DISCUSSION IN CLASS – GENERAL TIPS

Set the stage (early in the course/class) – clarify parameters and “norms” for discussions
- Don’t assume they “know how”!
- Rules of engagement – debate vs. dialog
- Dialog is an intellectual practice for mastering material
- Grading (not recommended) / participation policy
- Balance openness and safety – emphasize importance of considering different approaches

Starting a discussion
- No factual questions, use basic questions to initiate discussion.
- Don’t start a discussion to try and get basic information out (by asking facts or higher level of analysis) – stakes are too high – students will either know it or they won’t.
USING DISCUSSION IN CLASS – GENERAL TIPS

Guiding a discussion
- Importance of non-verbal cues
- Clarify misunderstandings
- Keep returning to key issues
- LISTEN

Common challenges
- Student who talks too much
  - Tell students they can have one response
  - “I have already heard from X let’s hear from Y”
- Students who talk too little
  - Give students a highly structured task to spark thinking before class
  - Time to get together is smaller groups (“Think Pair Share”)
RESOURCES

https://www.facebook.com/insideteachingmsu
https://twitter.com/InsideTeaching

Teaching Essentials for Careers in Higher Education (D2L)
http://grad.msu.edu/teche/ (instructions to get to on-line modules)