



Teacher Tip of the Week

Making the Most of Class Discussion



When it comes to checking students for understanding of academic material, class discussion can be a valuable tool. Likewise, when it comes to developing critical-thinking skills and applying what has been learned to new and unfamiliar situations, class discussion offers a powerful teaching technique. Indeed, something is lost in the classroom where discussion is not utilized—and perfected. And students gain learning and social benefits when discussion is present. This is true whether we are teaching first graders or high school seniors. Yet good classroom discussions have two parts—getting ready and actually leading. Let's look at these vital teaching elements.

Getting ready to lead a class discussion requires at least three steps.

First, **WE MUST ORGANIZE THE MATERIALS TO BE DISCUSSED FROM A BROAD-BASED PLATFORM.**

This includes selecting the units of information to be discussed, breaking down the basic components, and plan-

ning work or practice that complements the discussion. If resource information is needed for the discussion, we should choose and have available these textbooks, related library books, and other pertinent materials. Without question, the information that can break deadlocks or clarify the facts and, thus, allow discussions to continue must be a part of our organizing effort. In addition, even visual aids to keep the points or issues on the table should be prepared.

Second, **WE MUST ANALYZE THE QUESTIONS TO BE DISCUSSED.** If we intend for class discussion to result in learning, we must list the important discussion questions involved in each lesson or unit. Then we should use the questions we believe would have the most value and interest to students. We also need to outline the important angles or aspects of the discussion questions for which sufficient background has been developed.

Third, **WE MUST HAVE EVERYTHING READY AND IN PLACE BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF DISCUSSION.** Do not try to "ready the room" after the discussion is underway. Rather, check the room beforehand for comfort, proper lighting, ventilation, and even quietness, including outside sounds. Place chairs or desks in a way that facilitates the discussion.

Leading a discussion is an art that requires both attitudes and skills. First, **CRE-**

ATE AN INFORMAL ATMOSPHERE, AND VERBALLY SET THE STAGE TO PUT THE CLASS AT EASE. Then, state and clarify the question, problem, case, or issue. As you do, try to arouse student interest in the topic being discussed. You will find the task much more successful if you advance a leading question of an analytical, judgmental, or comparative type.

Second, **MAKE SURE YOU TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN DIRECTING THE DISCUSSION.** Good class discussion will not result from a "sit back and see what happens" approach. You must ask and redirect questions and keep the discussion moving in a developmental direction. In the process, do not be reluctant to use charts and other visual aids, if appropriate. As you lead, indicate points of agreement or disagreement. Likewise, give credit for all worthy, relevant ideas. Encourage exploration and new suggestions, and summarize points when they have been fully developed. Also, call attention to unexplored concepts. Try to involve nonparticipants. Simply direct and invite discussion away from the few who are monopolizing it. When necessary, break friction, tension, and deadlocks with humor and redirected questions. Maintaining an informal atmosphere, and verbally set the stage to put the class at ease. Then, state and clarify the question, problem, case, or issue. As you do, try to arouse student interest in the topic being discussed. (continued on page 2)



Points to Ponder

Name-calling and bullying:

- AT WHAT AGE DOES NAME-CALLING SEEM TO OCCUR MOST FREQUENTLY?
- WHY ARE SOME NICKNAMES VIEWED POSITIVELY BY STUDENTS?
- HOW SERIOUS IS THE PROBLEM OF NAME-CALLING IN YOUR SCHOOL?
- HOW DO PARENTS VIEW NAME-CALLING?

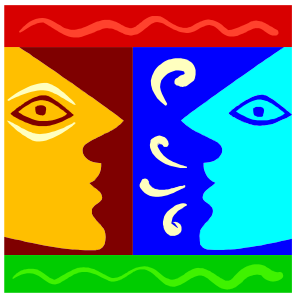


HELPFUL WEBSITES FOR TEACHERS

www.brainpop.com

BrainPOP is an educational program, providing content spanning 7 main subjects including: Science, Math, Social Studies, Health, Arts & Music, and Technology.





The New Teacher Support Program

Making the Most of Class Discussion

cont...

Second, **MAKE SURE YOU TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN DIRECTING THE DISCUSSION.** Good class discussion will not result from a “sit back and see what happens” approach. You must ask and redirect questions and keep the discussion moving in a developmental direction. In the process, do not be reluctant to use charts and other

visual aids, if appropriate. As you lead, indicate points of agreement or disagreement. Likewise, give credit for all worthy, relevant ideas. Encourage exploration and new suggestions, and summarize points when they have been fully developed. Also, call attention to unexplored concepts. Try to involve nonparticipants. Simply direct and invite discussion away from the few who are monopolizing it. When necessary, break friction, tension, and deadlocks with humor and redirected questions. Maintaining an informal atmosphere at all times will increase participa-

tion. However, unless a significant teaching point remains, do not continue after the groups feels satisfied that the question has been covered.

rings for recess, lunch, or the end of the period. For best results, bring the discussion to a close prior to ending the class.

Third, **GIVE AN ORGANIZATIONAL SUMMARY.** This is not a difficult task. During this step, simply state major points of agreement, principles that surfaced, or action that is to be taken. In the process, indicate questions needing further clarification following the discussion period or arrange another discussion. Begin and end on time. Do not let a discussion go on, for instance, until a bell

An effective teacher knows leading class discussion requires the ability to listen. It is often hard to be a good listener because our minds race ahead about eight times the speed at which we talk. However, being a good listener usually requires asking questions of the speaker in order to clarify the issues being discussed—and reminding students to do the same.—*The Master Teacher*

“I AM INDEBTED



TO MY FATHER FOR LIVING, BUT TO MY TEACHER FOR LIVING WELL.”—ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Teach your Students to Follow Directions—A Skill That Needs to Be Taught!

Get highlighters (or use thick yellow markers) for each student. **ALWAYS** have them highlight the clue words in the written directions.

TELL THEM: to picture in their heads what they are to do; to say to themselves in their own words what they are to do; to write the directions in their own words.

WHEN YOU GIVE DIRECTIONS: use verbs; keep it sequential 1-2-3; keep it short and be clear.

AFTER YOU HAVE GIVEN DIRECTIONS: ask 5-8 students to repeat the directions; have students whisper the directions to their neighbor: in front/ behind/on the right/on the left; have students write the directions and read aloud to the class and discuss accuracy.

Think! Before you do anything. Have a 5 minute start period when **NO** questions may be asked, then have a 2 minute period during which you **MAY** answer questions of value. Everyone stops and listens

during this time. When a question is asked, you ask the class, “How many know the answer?” If the majority of the class raise their hands indicating that they know (therefore the directions were already given), say to the inquiring student: “Maybe someone will be nice and tell you what you are to do.”

After a few days students learn very quickly to listen to the directions when given.



Meet the Principals: MEL BROWN

School: **Mt. Juliet High School**

How long have you been a principal at this school? **3 years**

Colleges and universities attended:

Lipscomb University – BA; Middle TN State University – MED; TN State University - EDS

Special interests and hobbies: **Family, Church, Reading and gardening**

Who or what inspires you each day as you do your job and why?

I love what I am doing. I believe that whatever gifts I have been given I should use to

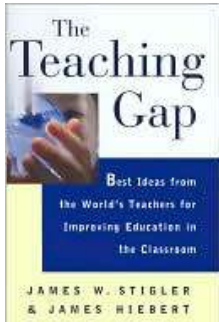
serve others to the best of my ability. I do like to meet my family obligations.

If you had not gone into education, what type of job would you have chosen? **Medicine**

What is the most favorite part of your job? **Working with young people as they develop into adults.**

What is the favorite part of your job? **I enjoy every part of my job.**

Suggested Reading for Teachers



The Teaching Gap: Best Ideas from the World's Teachers for Improving Education in the Classroom by James W. Stigler, James Hiebert, James Hiebert

In The Teaching Gap, the authors draw on the conclusions of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) -- an innovative new study of teaching in several cultures -- to refocus educational reform efforts. Using videotaped lessons from dozens of randomly selected eighth-grade classrooms in the United States, Japan, and Germany, the authors reveal the rich, yet unfulfilled promise of American teaching and document exactly how other countries have consistently stayed ahead of us in the rate their children learn.

Our schools can be restructured as places where teachers can engage in career-long learning and classrooms can become laboratories for developing new, teaching-centered ideas. If provided the time they need during the school day for collaborative lesson study and plan building, teachers will change the way our students learn.—Barnes and Noble

New Teacher Support Group Participants



AMBER GAILBREATH
MT. JULIET HIGH SCHOOL
ENGLISH/BIBLE

WHY DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER?

"I have always wanted to teach high school. I think that is when students really begin to develop the characteristics and habits that will last them a lifetime. So I feel that secondary education is extremely important. It is my goal that I will be able to facilitate their development in such a way that they will be able to reach their full potential. (It is also very important to me that I set a good example for my students in all areas of my life.)"—Amber Gailbreath



ADRIENNE ISSI
MT. JULIET ELEMENTARY
MUSIC

WHY DID YOU BECOME A TEACHER?

"I wanted to take what I love and am enthusiastic about and share that knowledge and enthusiasm with children."—Adrienne Issi



DENISE MCMILLAN

PRE-K COORDINATOR

When Terry Edwards asked me to write something for the newsletter, the first vision in my head was a scene from a Saturday Night Live skit. Actress Molly Shannon would start to recite a monologue that would sound something like, "My first teaching experience can best be summarized in the words from the hit song I Will Survive performed by Donna Summers...Once I was afraid, I was petrified". Okay, okay, after that short movie had played in my head, I began to think about the professional experiences that has formed my beliefs about education.

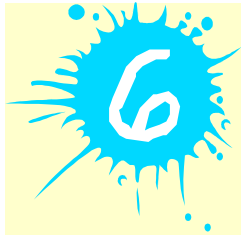
My experiences have lead me to believe that teaching and learning can best be visualized as a scaffold. If you have ever been to a construction site, you have seen the scaffolds surrounding the building under construction. Our students are the building project. You are a part of the scaffold surrounding your student. You are a very important and critical piece of the scaffold. There are also many other pieces that are just as critical but may not be directly attached to you. The whole scaffold maintains its integrity because each piece provides strength and experience to the whole.

We each have a part in the teaching and learning process. We each bring unique talents and expertise to our classrooms. Our individual teaching toolbox holds those unique gifts but it should also hold some very common items.

1) The belief that every minute of every day with students should be used to teach and learn. The routines, procedures, and teaching in each classroom should maximize student learning and independence. We cannot afford to loose a single moment to "free time".

2) Be prepared but be flexible. The teachers that have "the best students" and "the best class" always have a plan and a

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Marzano's Nine Essential Instructional Strategies

Number Six: Cooperative Learning

Research shows that organizing students into cooperative groups yields a positive effect on overall learning. When applying cooperative learning strategies, keep groups small and don't overuse this strategy-be systematic and consistent in your approach.

Applications:

- * When grouping students, consider a variety of criteria, such as common experiences or interests.
- * Vary group sizes and objectives.
- * Design group work around the core components of cooperative learning-positive interdependence, group processing, appropriate use of social skills, face-to-face interaction, and individual and group accountability.

Next week: #7 Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback

ADVICE FROM THE

Continued from page 3

back-up plan. They have tool #1 in their toolbox!

3) Stock up on "positives" for your students, parents and colleagues! I look at this like creating a bank account with the people I know and meet. If I can create a positive account balance with the people I work with each day, then when I have a negative comment or action, I won't completely bankrupt my relationship.

4) Practice empathy and understanding. Our students come from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances. If you have not attended poverty training, I would highly encourage you to make this a part of your professional development. This information helped me look at students and families in a whole different way.

5) Laugh and learn something new everyday! I feel that learning is a lifelong process and hopefully you enjoy teaching everyday. Find joy in everyday tasks.

I hope that we can all add skills and knowledge to our toolboxes along the way. Our purpose and positive direction will only strengthen our students and community.

Time Management Tips for Teachers

There is no end to the many valuable ways a dedicated teacher can spend time and effort helping young people develop into skilled and knowledgeable citizens. Finding time for all the things that you want, need, and are inspired to do on behalf of your students is often a challenging task.



Fortunately, you are in good company in this search for more time. The experiences and creative thinking of teachers from throughout the United States who have 'been there, done that' can help you make the most productive use of your every day.

EIGHT BASIC PRACTICES FOR MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME

1. Become aware of how you actually spend your time. Keep a log for a

week. Take a few seconds after each activity to jot down what you just did and how long it took. You will be surprised to discover where your time actually goes and how you may be wasting it.

2. Make a "To Do List" at the end of the day—for the next day. Break major projects into manageable tasks.

3. Prioritize your list into tasks that you "must do," "should do," and "would like to do" (label them priority 1, 2, and 3). Be realistic about you can accomplish.
4. Focus on your number 1 priority items during the time of day when you feel the most energetic, and do the worst among them first. Then move on.

To be continued next week....

Need a Laugh?

The little boy wasn't getting good marks in school. One day he made the teacher quite surprised. He tapped her on the shoulder and said..."I don't want to scare you, but my daddy says if I don't get better grades, somebody is going to get a spanking."

