

THE IMPACT OF DISCUSSION ON TEACHING- LEARNING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

We are unwaveringly committed to teaching through discussion because of the benefits we have consistently enjoyed in its practice. In fact, we have found that at least fifteen arguments can be made regarding the ways in which participating in discussion helps learning. Discussion methods are a variety of forums for open-ended, collaborative exchange of ideas among a teacher and students or among students for the purpose of furthering students thinking, learning, problem solving, understanding, or literary appreciation. Participants present multiple points of view, respond to the ideas of others, and reflect on their own ideas in an effort to build their knowledge, understanding, or interpretation of the matter at hand. Discussions may occur among members of a dyad, small group, or whole class.

KEYWORDS: Intellectual, Collaborative, Intellectual, Productively, Rationale, Assumptions, Transformation, Context.

INTRODUCTION

Discussion methods are a variety of forums for open-ended, collaborative exchange of ideas among a teacher and students or among students for the purpose of furthering students thinking, learning, problem solving, understanding, or literary appreciation. Participants present multiple points of view, respond to the ideas of others, and reflect on their own ideas in an effort to build their knowledge, understanding, or interpretation of the matter at hand. Discussions may occur among members of a dyad, small group, or whole class and be teacher-led or student-led. They frequently involve discussion of a written text, though discussion can also focus on a problem, issue, or topic that has its basis in a "text" in the larger sense of the term (e.g., a

discipline, the media, a societal norm). Other terms for discussions used for pedagogical purposes are instructional conversations. A defining feature of discussion is that students have considerable agency in the construction of knowledge, understanding, or interpretation. In other words, they have considerable "interpretive authority" for evaluating the plausibility or validity of participants responses.

DISCUSSION

The present age is an age of discussion. We come to definite conclusions and decisions after thorough discussion. This remark may be applicable to discussion on a political level. But it is equally applicable to education.

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Discussion has now come to challenge the authoritarian methods through which education was imparted in old days. In these days, the teacher's authority was accepted in all matters. The pupils had little say in the instructional programme. But now the entire literary and non-literary activities to be carried on, in and outside the classroom, are first discussed in a socialized atmosphere by the teachers and pupils and then given a practical shape. Discussion may assume the form of a conference a symposium or a seminar. Herein lies the importance of discussion is not only difficult but also dangerous. Once a subject is put to discussion, we cannot withdraw it nor can we clothe it again with mystery. The main purpose of discussion is to educate young children in the process of "group thinking and collective decision."

ESSENTIAL PARTS OR CONSTITUENTS OF A DISCUSSION

The essential parts of a discussion are:

THE LEADER

The leader no doubt, is the teacher himself. In organizing a discussion a lot of study, preparation, selection and planning will be done by the teacher, while acting as a leader. But the teacher must not dominate the entire scene. Such an attitude will block rather than facilitate the "meeting of minds". The teacher should watch carefully while the discussion is going on and act as a prompt guide when pupils come face to face with difficulties.

THE GROUP

Then the group is, clearing the students in a social studies class. The group is generally composed of all types of temperaments and all varieties of minds. The teacher's duty is to encourage every student to participate in the discussions. Even the humblest member of the

group should be heard and his contribution appreciated.

THE PROBLEM

The problem or topic for discussion must be one which the students should feel their own. The problems should be made as precise and exact as possible. The selection of the problem should be made by the teacher with the cooperation of his pupils. It must be real and functional and within the capacity and comprehension of the pupils. '

THE CONTEXT

The context is the body of knowledge, the needed material of study. It should also include maps, charts, pictures, diagrams and other audio-visual aids. Facts, of course, cannot be discussed. These, may however be proved true or false. But propositions, which are "statements about values", can be discussed and their truth established. It is about these statements that difference of Opinion arises and discussions take place.

EVALUATION

At the end of the discussion each participant should evaluate whether discussion about the particular problems or topics has added to his knowledge and information, changed his ideas, attitudes and prejudices and increased the range of his interest. A successful discussion must bring in the necessary change and make participant a more active citizen than before.

NATURE OF A DISCUSSION

It should be remembered that classroom discussion is not an occasion for practicing the act of public speaking on skill in debating. The debater always tries to win an argument. He knows no compromise. Discussion on the other hand, is a sharing and weighing of all sides, which may be "as many as there are conflicting

interests of values". The participants in a discussion are interrelated in a process of competitive co-operation. Agreement is the declared purpose of a discussion. It is always organized and undertaken in a disciplined atmosphere. Discussion is an important means exchanging ideas with other: and 'often results in pooling opinions and joint action". A good discussion in fact is well planned and well mannered conversation. A, such every participant in a discussion. Must be. Clear good natured tolerant and sincere good natured. tolerant and sincere.

BENEFITS OF DISCUSSION

Note that we don't claim that the mere act of engaging students in group talk somehow brings these benefits automatically. The advantages we're claiming for discussion accrue only when students strive to practice the dispositional ideals outlined in Chapter One. If these dispositions are realized, even in part, discussion brings the following benefits:

- It helps students explore a diversity of perspectives.
- It increases students' awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity or complexity.
- It helps students recognize and investigate their assumptions.
- It encourages attentive, respectful listening.
- It develops new appreciation for continuing differences.
- It increases intellectual agility.
- It helps students become connected to a topic.
- It shows respect for students' voices and experiences.
- It helps students learn the processes and habits of democratic discourse.
- It affirms students as co-creators of knowledge.
- It develops the capacity for the clear communication of ideas and meaning.

- It develops habits of collaborative learning.
- It increases breadth and makes students more empathic.
- It helps students develop skills of synthesis and integration.
- It leads to transformation. Let's examine each of these benefits individually.

HOW DISCUSSION HELPS STUDENTS?

DISCUSSION HELPS STUDENTS EXPLORE A DIVERSITY OF PERSPECTIVES

Discussion is one of the most effective ways to make students aware of the range of interpretations that are possible in an area of intellectual inquiry. Teachers can introduce these diverse perspectives themselves through lecturing or pre reading, but that is often dismissed as "secondhand" exposure. There is nothing like students' hearing from each other's lips the diversity of interpretations that can be made of the same apparently objective facts or the same apparently obvious meanings. It's much harder for learners to ignore views that are contrary to their own if they're expressed spontaneously by their peers rather than discovered in a text or mediated through a lecturer's words. Physical encounters with equals who hold "inconvenient" opinions are a powerful force. We cannot skip or skim contrary views that are expressed by peers in the same way we can skip a few paragraphs in a book or tune out parts of a lecture. It helps to increase the chances that discussions will be distinguished by interpretive diversity if participants are drawn from diverse social, ethnic, and gender backgrounds; take a variety of ideological perspectives on common experiences; and express their perceptions in different terms. Discussions that involve students who speak in different voices, express varied viewpoints, and use different expressive forms help students learn about the contested nature of knowledge. Being exposed to

different perspectives helps students develop a general tentativeness toward their own (and others') intellectual claims. They come to realize that there is rarely a single, unassailable interpretation of an issue or problem but rather a range of sustainable views, each of which may hold a legitimate claim on at least some participants. This is not to say that all interpretations are equally valid. It is only to aver that coming to hold a relatively secure opinion that may be effectively defended against other views usually results from hearing out and analyzing the diversity of viable perspectives that are available in the whole group. Groups composed of people who exhibit a diversity of ways of speaking and thinking and who bring many different cultural, classes, and gender experiences to the conversation present particular challenges. When people use language differently, there is always the possibility that no one will understand what anyone else is saying. This is the postmodern nightmare—a mutually frustrating Tower of Babel in which no common agreement on the meaning of words is possible. Although some degree of misunderstanding and miscommunication is endemic to discussion, this is more likely to be kept within reasonable limits if people try to observe the disposition of mindfulness discussed in Chapter One. Mindful participants try to understand the meaning of other people's words in the way that they have been framed. We address these challenges fully in Chapters Seven and Eight.

DISCUSSION INCREASES STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF AND TOLERANCE FOR AMBIGUITY OR COMPLEXITY

A good discussion is one that leaves issues open for further inquiry and in which as many questions are raised as are answered. If participants begin a discussion with definitive views, they should conclude it with a sense of tentativeness. They should learn that the topics

explored are complex and that our understanding of them is contingent, always requiring further study and reflection. Discussions help students learn to tolerate the ambiguities inherent in so much intellectual inquiry. Discussion is not suited to teaching that is intended to initiate students into a predefined body of truths, facts, or ideas. Such teaching can be defended as a legitimate and necessary educational process. But we feel strongly that the concept of "guided discussion"—if that phrase is taken to mean that students will be guided during the discussion to learn certain content—is an oxymoron. We have both been participants in—and orchestrators of—discussions where the leader nudges the conversation along to a predetermined conclusion with which the leader agrees. This happens when leaders ignore questions or ideas raised by students that are inconvenient or awkward for the leader's position. It happens when leaders reframe what a student has said in a way that distorts the student's meaning so that it supports the leader's views. Guided discussion is a self-negating concept if it means guiding talk toward a particular position or point of consensus. Whenever this happens, it means that certain perspectives and information have been excluded at the outset. To Paterson (1970), a discussion like this is counterfeit. At the heart of discussion is the open and unpredictable creation of meanings through collaborative inquiry. For a discussion leader to have decided in advance what these meanings should be is intellectually dishonest. Such a counterfeit pedagogy is manipulative in a way that contradicts the spirit of democratic discourse. Guided discussion makes sense only if what is being guided are the processes by which students are helped to listen respectfully, seek clarification, and create opportunities for all voices to be heard. In discussions we can initiate students into the habits of democratic discourse, but we should never initiate them

into predetermined conclusions or preselected meanings.

DISCUSSION HELPS STUDENTS RECOGNIZE AND INVESTIGATE THEIR ASSUMPTIONS

Teachers concerned to develop critical thinking in students know that discussion is an important crucible for this. In conversation we enjoy multiple opportunities for the clarification and scrutiny of each other's assumptions. Sometimes this happens without a teacher's intervention when one participant points out the assumptions underlying another's position. At other times the hunting of assumptions can be an important discussion purpose. Becoming aware of our assumptions is a puzzling and contradictory task. Few of us can get very far doing this on our own. No matter how much we may think that we know what our assumptions are, we are stymied by the fact that we're using our own interpretive filters to become aware of our own interpretive filters! This cognitive catch-22 is the equivalent of a dog trying to catch its tail or of trying to see the back of your own head while looking directly into a mirror. Becoming critical happens only when we find mirrors that reflect a stark and differently highlighted picture of how and what we think. Our most influential assumptions are too close to us to be seen clearly by an act of self-will. This is where discussion comes in. In discussions, students can serve as critical mirrors for each other, reflecting the assumptions they see in each other's positions. As students become aware of the diversity of perspectives on an issue that a group represents, they can learn to see the world through multiple lenses. As they question each other about the reasons, evidence, and experiences that lie behind the comments each makes, they start to realize that seemingly random viewpoints are always grounded in assumptive clusters. They learn that what

different people consider obvious, factually true, or common sense depends very much on the different assumptions they hold.

DISCUSSION ENCOURAGES ATTENTIVE, RESPECTFUL LISTENING

In a properly conducted discussion, listening is just as important as speaking. To be heard is to be treated with respect. Conversely, to speak and sense that one is not really being listened to is to feel voiceless, ignored, and demeaned. So a good discussion participant is not necessarily someone who speaks a lot or who voices startlingly original opinions. Participants must learn to listen carefully to what each other is saying; otherwise, there is little chance that the group will be able to do a sustained or probing analysis of a topic, problem, or theme. Such analysis develops organically as various lines of inquiry intersect or double back on themselves. Attentive listening makes it easier to reinterpret earlier comments in the light of later opinions. Of course, listening attentively is not easy. In fact, it is probably much more tiring than contributing to the discussion. Given the complex multiplicity of expressive styles, the nuances of race, class, and gender, and the variety of idiosyncratic speech forms, it is sometimes amazing to think that anyone ever understands anyone else! Race, class, gender, learning style, personality—all these things complicate our efforts to understand one another in daily conversation without the added difficulties posed by the complexities of intellectual inquiry. Concrete thinkers in a group become frustrated with those who speak only in abstract or holistic terms. Those who express themselves in rambling, disconnected sentence fragments infuriate more task-oriented learners eager to get to the point. What to one person is a permissible question according to standards of critical inquiry can seem rude, bigoted, or hurtful to another. Grappling with these different patterns of

communication is enormously challenging. However, discussion provides the opportunity for students to summarize and reframe each other's comments and to show how their own contributions spring from or build on others' ideas. This ability to summarize other people's views accurately and to see the links between seemingly unconnected ideas is a core process of all intellectual inquiry. Letting another person see that you are striving to understand as closely as possible the exact meaning of what the person is saying is wonderfully respectful and affirming. It is also crucial to the building of democratic trust.

DISCUSSION DEVELOPS NEW APPRECIATION FOR CONTINUING DIFFERENCES

Sometimes we may expect that discussion will allow participants to resolve their differences. Not only is this an unrealistic expectation, but it may not even be a desirable one. When differences of opinion are strongly felt or when perspectives on an issue are highly divergent for cultural or ethnic reasons, even discussions that take place over a period of years can hardly be expected to overcome such long-standing and deeply rooted differences. Continuing disagreement may be a productive outcome of a conversation, particularly when the participants gain a clearer sense of the basis for that disagreement. In addition, an airing of differences can stimulate more discussion and provide an opportunity to clarify one's views in relation to another's. Part of the process of confronting differences is to disclose the ways in which dominant groups and prevailing cultural traditions have silenced certain voices and to explore how these traditions have functioned to prevent their contributing to the conversation. Some people would claim that because society is so unequal and racist, discussion is not only unfair but may even exacerbate existing differences and inequalities

(Ellsworth, 1989). Although this possibility is always present, the alternative is accepting an inequitable status quo. Therefore, discussion leaders committed to democracy and education for mutual growth must make special efforts to avoid silencing certain students. They can use a variety of methods to make discussion as fair and inclusive as possible and strive to respect and understand enduring differences.

DISCUSSION INCREASES INTELLECTUAL AGILITY

Engaging in discussion requires a certain intellectual agility, an ability to think on our feet and to react to unanticipated comments. Students know this, and that's one of the reasons why some of them fear discussion so much. They realize that they can't anticipate the range of responses that their comments will elicit. Since it's almost impossible to frame a contribution so perfectly that everyone will agree with every aspect of it, students know that what they say will sometimes be challenged, contradicted, even negated. This means they'll have to think quickly to formulate a counter response or to mount a defense against arguments that are new to them. Of course, it's quite permissible in a discussion to ask for time to formulate an informed and useful response. We can say to someone, "I need some time to think about what you've said, so I'd like to deal with your comments later." Students should not feel that they have to have an immediate, intelligent, and articulate reaction to every point that their comments provoke. Discussion is not a performance in which we're all expected to win intellectual Oscars for the brilliance of our speech or the speed of our thought. But at a minimum we must expect questions about what we say in discussions. People will want to know what's behind our thinking. Sometimes they'll misunderstand what we've said and will ask us to explain our point again, but with

different examples. They may want to know what evidence we base our viewpoints on, what assumptions undergird our positions, and the extent to which we're open to critiquing or changing our ideas. So whenever we open our mouths to speak in a discussion, we know that isn't the end of the matter. Every one of our contributions contains an implicit invitation to our listeners to seek clarification.

DISCUSSION HELPS STUDENTS BECOME CONNECTED TO A TOPIC

Building connections, both personal and intellectual, is at the heart of discussion. Ideas that are perceived as distanced or irrelevant when presented through a lecture come alive when we have to explore them through speech. Arguments that were abstract when read in a text grab our attention when spoken by a peer. Interpretations that might be skipped over when encountered outside the classroom cannot be dismissed when proposed by a colleague. When we're introducing students to a new topic, it's usually safe to assume that no inherent point of connection exists between students' experiences and the topic of discussion. In these situations, we can help create this connection by asking students to play certain predefined roles in a discussion. Some can be provocateurs, arguing a certain line of analysis in the strongest and most controversial terms. Others can be devil's advocates, with a charge to counter every element in a particular line of argument. Still others can be intellectual detectives concerned to point out biases that keep recurring in the discussion or to bring the group's attention to areas of inquiry it keeps approaching and then steering away from. As students begin to adopt these roles, there is often a sense of playfulness, a feeling that this is just a game of artful pretense (which, of course, it is). However, after a while this sense of artificiality starts to diminish, and students find that they

actually care about what others think and say about the topic being discussed. A commitment develops to understanding the topic fully and to seeing its exploration through to whatever the end might be. The insights gained through discussions sometimes connect directly to action in the world outside. When students analyze their experiences in discussion, they often start to make connections between this analysis and their lives. How do the insights they are developing affect how they live as parents, friends, lovers? What do these new understandings mean for their political commitments and involvements? In what ways does a point raised in discussion cause them to rethink what it means to work responsibly and ethically? Some discussions veer back and forth between the analysis of a problem and considerations of how participants might act in response to it. In this way discussions become crucibles for the kind of praxis—the continuous spiral of action, reflection on action, further action, further reflection on action, and so on—envisaged by Freire (1993). Some of the best discussions we have participated in have caused us to locate our private troubles in the context of wider public issues (Mills, 1959). When this happens, the next step is usually to think about how we might join with others similarly affected to take collective

DISCUSSION SHOWS RESPECT FOR STUDENTS' VOICES AND EXPERIENCES

The two of us espouse democratic ideals in our teaching. We want to turn the hierarchical experience of higher education into a collaborative and respectful adult educational process. We believe that college students should be treated as adults, irrespective of their chronological age. They should not be talked down to, infantilized, or demeaned. Their experiences must be recognized and valued. Teachers who believe in inclusivity and who value students' voices and experiences can't

avoid using discussion. And in discussions, students will sooner or later invoke their experiences as evidence to justify the truth of their assertions. At the forefront of discussion is the analysis of experience, in particular the attempt to understand how individual experience is socially formed. In discussion, we value formal knowledge and theoretical understanding, but we also dignify (in a critical way) participants' experiences. Discussion participants often dismiss their own experiences as anecdotal and idiosyncratic. They denigrate their personal experiences in deference to "book knowledge," which seems codified, legitimated, somehow "more true" than individual stories. Good discussions affirm that personal experience is an important object of study, but they take the analysis of experience beyond individual storytelling to an analysis of the generic, recognizable elements that are embedded in particular tales. In discussion, we apply formal theory to review individual experience and to point to its social formation. This helps us realize that our individual stories are held in common and that they are shaped by the same economic and political forces that exist in the larger capitalist society. A good discussion leader will try to encourage students to talk about the experiences that have shaped how they think and act. As the adult educator Myles Horton observed, "You can't say you respect people and not respect their experiences" (Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 178). In a very real sense, we are our experiences. But dignifying and valuing people's experience doesn't mean treating them reverentially or uncritically. As Horton said to Paulo Freire, "Often when I say you start with people's experience, people get the point that you start and stop with that experience. There's a time when people's experience runs out" (p. 128). He argued that "people know the basic answers to their problems, but they need to go further than that, and you can, by asking questions and getting them stimulated, coax

them to move, in discussion, beyond their experience" (p. 136). So while we believe that recognizing, honoring, and celebrating experiences in discussion is important, we don't believe this is all that should happen. Experience is problematic. It is constructed by us as much as it happens to us. Our experiences can be understood in multiple ways, depending on the culture, gender, class, and history of the person interpreting them. Experiences can also be distorting. Understood in a certain way, they can teach us habits of bigotry, paranoia, and exclusion. The fact that a theoretical idea contradicts a student's experience doesn't mean that the student should ignore the theory. For a discussion to be considered educational, students should be encouraged to subject their experiences to critical analysis. Good discussion leaders ask provocative questions about experience. They supply alternative interpretations of students' experiences and new perspectives on those experiences. But they do this in a respectful way. They acknowledge that ultimately the experience is the students' own, and they never insist that students must agree with teachers' or anyone else's interpretations of experience.

DISCUSSION HELPS STUDENTS LEARN THE PROCESSES AND HABITS OF DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE

Learning democratic discourse is difficult. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the adult educator Eduard Lindeman (1947) proposed eight democratic disciplines that, taken together, formed "the natural code of behavior for a citizen living under democratic conditions" (p. 113). These disciplines included learning to live with diversity, learning to accept the partial functioning of democratic ideals, learning to avoid false antitheses, learning to ensure that means and ends are as congruent as possible, learning to value humor, and learning to live with contrary decisions and perspectives. If

discussions are introduced and conducted with careful attention to these disciplines, we believe they can become laboratories in which students learn democratic habits. A discussion group can constitute a safe space in which the democratic experiment can be tried, adapted, and reframed with a minimum of serious consequences for participants. Discussion in which participants are given opportunities to voice concerns, work collaboratively, formulate ideas, express disagreement, and solve problems collectively is both a foundation for democracy and a sign that democracy is taking hold. Without this kind of constant experience of the democratic process, it is hard to see how people can become citizens in any but the most nominal sense. But with the opportunity to learn and practice democratic disciplines and dispositions, the possibilities are limitless.

DISCUSSION AFFIRMS STUDENTS AS COCREATORS OF KNOWLEDGE

In discussion, students have the same right to be heard as teachers. Because the flow of conversation and the development of contrasting lines of inquiry can't be predicted, students and teachers share responsibility for the evolution of the group's knowledge. Creating insights, validating or refuting claims, and exposing group members to alternative perspectives are all shared responsibilities. When teachers declare passionately that they view their students as co creators of knowledge, students who have been burned by experiences of false and spurious democracy in the past may react with skepticism, hostility, or cynicism. Given the usually submerged power dynamics of higher education classrooms, it would be surprising if this were not their reaction. But if these espousals of the democratic creation of knowledge come over time to be seen as sincere and acted on, the effect is remarkable. When students feel respected and treated as coequal creators of

knowledge, they are much more likely to take the discussion process seriously. Having one's views attended to carefully and granted public credibility is a powerful experience for students who have learned to think of themselves as failures or imposters. In the best discussions, students should feel that their contributions are indispensable. The feeling should prevail that to lose anyone's participation would be a loss to the group as a whole.

DISCUSSION DEVELOPS THE CAPACITY FOR THE CLEAR COMMUNICATION OF IDEAS AND MEANING

Postmodern theorists challenge the idea that the unambiguous communication of transparent meanings between individuals, let alone among groups, is possible. Yet the human impulse to create shared meanings and understandings shows no sign of abating. In fact, the era of increased electronic communication is usually celebrated for the way in which it has increased the possibility for all kinds of new information exchanges. Through electronic networks, we can communicate immediately and relatively cheaply with people all over the world. Yet in societies that are increasingly fragmented along lines of race, gender, class, and ideology and in which ever more specialized communities of interest speak their own private languages, the possibility of dialogue across differences begins to seem increasingly remote. Through discussion, we can help students grapple with the difficulties of trying to communicate ideas and meanings not immediately clear to others. Discussions can be a training ground in which people learn the importance of giving examples to illustrate complex propositions. Through conversation, students can learn to think and speak metaphorically and to use analogical reasoning. They can become more adept at entering into other participants' frames of reference and seeing the world through the

multiple lenses these represent. They can learn to vary the pace at which they disclose new ideas according to the complexity of the ideas and the relative sophistication of other learners. They can get better at knowing when using specialized terminology is justified and when it is just intellectual posturing. As they respond to questions asked by their peers, they can learn to recognize what aspects of their own communication styles are creating difficulties for others. The object of discussion is to create a climate in which all participants are supported in articulating clear and convincing arguments while remaining open to different or newly emerging perspectives. Finding one's voice, expressing views that are true to oneself, and articulating claims forcibly should not interfere with the imperative to communicate clearly and to be open to the wide diversity of opinion found in any group.

DISCUSSION DEVELOPS HABITS OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The importance of learning to work collaboratively with peers and colleagues is, like motherhood and democracy, difficult to criticize. Not surprisingly, the rhetoric of collaborative learning has swept through the educational world in the past three decades (Bruffee, 1993). Yet true collaboration-people combining their efforts to help each other learn and to create something that is greater than the sum of their individual energies-is rare. The pressure of time and the lack of collectively developed ground rules often conspire to turn collaborative efforts into a series of individual projects spuriously linked together. It probably doesn't help that most collaborative work takes place within a system of competitive grading. But if the conditions for democratic, critical discussion are carefully created and respected, students can end up learning collaborative habits. They learn to listen respectfully and attentively to each person's contributions to

the group. Through valuing devil's advocacy and critical analysis, they learn to reduce the tendency toward groupthink whereby certain ideas come to be regarded as off limits, sacred, unchallengeable. They learn to create spaces in which everyone's efforts are recognized. They learn that being a productive group member is not the same as directing everybody else or speaking all the time. They learn to value silence and reflective speculation. Learning to do these things is crucial if students are to work well in collaboration. Collaboration is addictive. The more successful people are at collaborating with others, the more they seek out the chance to do it. Unfortunately, opportunities for collaboration are all too infrequent. Discussion can give us the sense that by collaborating with others, we can solve problems and realize purposes that would be out of reach on our own. It provides an important outlet for the kind of communal sharing that many people crave. Sometimes discussion groups decide to try to reach some kind of consensus. This does not and should not come easily. Consensus doesn't come about merely by accepting the group's collective judgment. It emerges out of much sharing, haggling, and compromise by everyone involved. A consensus viewpoint transcends the views of any one member yet incorporates, to some degree, the views of all. In striving for consensus, we often increase our identification with the group by hearing out everyone's individual views. Reaching consensus is a collaborative process that can promote mutual respect and help people place concern for the common good above immediate self-interest. It also teaches vocal members of the group to adopt a somewhat more self-effacing attitude.

DISCUSSION INCREASES BREADTH AND MAKES STUDENTS MORE EMPATHIC

One of the irreplaceable benefits of discussion is the opportunity it affords people to expand

their horizons, develop new interests, and appreciate new perspectives. Discussion can take us out of ourselves and open us to new realms of experience. In especially intense and engrossing discussions, we actually surrender a part of our identity for the sake of the group.

This may not entail the wholesale adoption of the interests and opinions of one's classmates, but it often means gaining a different perspective on these interests that puts them in a new and more understandable light. Through discussion, we can increase our capacity to empathize with others, to walk in their shoes, and in the process to gain new sensitivity about what they have experienced and the burdens they must continue to shoulder. Individual problems shrink in magnitude just a bit, and the challenges of tackling problems that affect the entire group take on a new intensity.

The more we learn about the people in a group, the more chance we have of probing sensitive and challenging issues. Giving class members license to speak freely about their experiences, ideas, and feelings invariably increases the level of trust.

Although we believe that discussion should eventually move beyond uncritical personal disclosure, we know that such disclosure is an important starting point in opening people to a broad range of experience.

DISCUSSION HELPS STUDENTS DEVELOP SKILLS OF SYNTHESIS AND INTEGRATION

Students with good discussion habits know that some of the most important ways they can contribute to a discussion are by linking apparently unconnected insights, by drawing the group's attention to emerging themes, and by pointing out similarities of reasoning or evidence embedded in multiple arguments. Students who are skilled in discussion will work

dialectically (Basseches, 1984). On the one hand, they encourage an exploration of the widest range of interpretive perspectives possible. On the other hand, they strive to discover commonalities and previously unnoticed connections. Over time, they

DISADVANTAGES

- Time consuming
- Easily dominated by the out spoken pupils
- Some pupils may not interested from listening to others.
- All types of topics cannot be taught by Discussion
- This method cannot be used for teaching small children.
- The students may not follow the rules of discussion.
- The teacher may not be able to guide and provide true leadership in the discussion.

CONCLUSION

The learning-through-discussion framework shares aspects of Bereiter's (1994) concept of progressive discourse, where the goals are for learners to first develop their individual thinking, then suspend these opinions to consider alternatives, and later negotiate meaning with other discussants to arrive at a shared understanding of the issues at hand. With thoughtful and well-designed discussion tasks, teachers can help students attain learning goals of critical inquiry, debate and reflection. The Discussion Method demands that students come to class well prepared. Compelling them to think out their arguments in advance and to answer their peers' questions and counter-arguments, it sharpens their powers of reason, analysis, and articulation.

It thus provides them with fundamental skills necessary for success in any discipline or profession.

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