

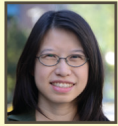
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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Centre for Teaching and Learning

**Tools
For
Excellence**

Classroom Discussions Practical Ideas for Improving Participation

Lecturing can be an efficient way of relaying a lot of information. A number of faculty will argue that this is their job; to clarify material found in the text book as well as share new concepts with their classes. Others will suggest that lecturing alone does not maximize learning. Students need to work with the information, they need to understand it, express it in different ways and be able to apply it to new situations. Professors who are able to engage students in classroom activities that extend their thinking and require students to manipulate what they have learned create a deeper and often more enjoyable level of learning.

Planning:

Instructors who plan carefully will find that students respond eagerly. Decide what you want the students to be able to do as a result of your lecture and then create a discussion that will lead a student's understanding to your objective. Normally discussions centre around *processing*, *interpreting* and *analyzing*, and *debating*.

Initially students will be familiar with questions that merely require recall. Their answers will be right or wrong. Students will need to understand that questions which require them to think, analyze situations, and apply their knowledge to new challenges do not have right or wrong answers. Rather they require an evaluation based on criteria such as validity, quality of the materials and logic.

Questioning:

There are several forms of questioning that professors may want to try. Everyone is familiar with the *recall* question. It can be helpful at the beginning of a class when one is trying to encourage students to remember past learning on which to attach the new information. Give students four seconds of thinking time. The research is very clear.

Convergent questions (single answer) will engage students in inferring and recognizing relationships.

Evaluative questions will involve making judgments regarding the logic of their answers, the reasonableness of their arguments and their ethical relevance.

Divergent questions (number of possible answers) demand imagining new possibilities, such a question might begin with “what if?”

As groups are discussing their task the professor will walk around, listen in and ask extending questions such as ‘How might you do that?’ or “Why do you think that would happen?” or “What else might the consequence be?”

Some Practical Suggestions:

Use some version of the think-pair-share strategy.

Pose question to groups of six, allow 10 minutes discussion and report back.

Recognize that students are often afraid to disagree with each other. Address those fears with guidelines and examples illustrating constructive ways to disagree.

Really listen to what students say. Summarizing what a student says cannot be done accurately without listening closely.

Use student answers, comments or ideas subsequently.

The good news is, solutions like those suggested here, do not take a lot of upfront planning. They're easy to implement and will make a big difference in the quality of your class discussions.

Use Bloom’s Taxonomy:

Bloom identified six levels of thinking. The basic three, Knowledge, Understanding, and Application will not be dealt with here.

However the higher levels are:

Analysis of relationships, of elements and of organizational principles. Questioning words include: compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test.

Synthesis, the compilation of information in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions. Questioning words include: assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write.

Evaluation, presenting and defending opinions by making judgments about information, examining the validity of ideas or quality of work based on a set of criteria. Questioning words include: appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate.

Using these key words will raise the level of thinking.

Centre for Teaching and Learning

The Centre for Teaching and Learning at UBC's Okanagan campus promotes and supports excellence in teaching and learning . The Centre provides campus-wide support for all models of teaching and learning, including online learning.

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"To lead, support and promote teaching and learning excellence, innovation and scholarship at the UBC Okanagan campus."