



COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

OVERVIEW

Encouraging discussion and interaction among students in the classroom is one of the most effective strategies for learner-centered teaching.

Terry Doyle, author of *Learner-Centered Teaching*, argues that “discussion elicits higher levels of reflective thinking and creative problem solving...” (90). Yet simply making time for discussion is often not enough. Giving students structure through which to start conversations can be a critical part of an effective discussion process.

GROUP DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Think. Pair. Share. (10-15 minutes)

Especially with larger groups, Think. Pair. Share. can be an effective way to encourage students to talk with each other and takes the burden off one student to come up with the right answer. There are a number of ways that this strategy can be modified, but the basic structure is:

- 1. Think.** Provide a concept, passage, question, image, or problem. You can give students all the same starting point, or very different starting points depending on what you want to achieve. Ask them to reflect individually about their interpretation or perspective.
- 2. Pair.** Then put students into groups of 2 and have them discuss what they wrote or were thinking about. You may give them guiding questions to help facilitate their conversation, or have them answer a question together.
- 3. Share.** Have students share out what they discussed, how they answered the question, and what they interpreted. This can be done as a whole class.

Gallery Walk (30-45 minutes)

The gallery walk encourages discussion and peer review of work. In the gallery walk, students must produce something for display, and then others in the class use those displays as starting points for discussion. The gallery walk is a good way to compare students’ interpretation of a similar concept or to consider how a specific concept could be applied in a variety of ways. Start by deciding as a group how the work will be evaluated.

Round Robin (30-45 minutes)

Choose 5-10 concepts or questions for discussion and write them on large pieces of paper, positioned at stations throughout the room. Break students up into groups of 2-3 to answer one of the questions. After 5-10 minutes, have students move onto the next station and add to previous students’ answers. Keep going until students have visited every station. You can stop for discussion after each move or at the end of the entire exercise. You may discuss how completely questions were answered, and how

READINGS & RESOURCES

Bruffee, Kenneth. *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Barkley, Elizabeth F., Major, Claire Howell, and Cross, K. Patricia. *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. Jossey-Bass, 2014.

See also: **Peer Reviews** at <https://think.dasa.ncsu.edu>

students’ understanding of the content changed through the exercise.

Group Mind Mapping (20-30 minutes)

This strategy is a great way to activate students and use the wisdom of the crowd to spark conversation and debate. As an active learning tool, it encourages negotiation, deliberation, and creative association as the exercise progresses. This strategy works best with groups of 3-5 students.

Start off by giving the students an open-ended question or prompt that does not have any “right” answer, such as: “What are the most significant films of the last 50 years?” Students can write their answers on Post-it notes and stick them to the wall in no particular order. Prompt them to start to group like pieces of information or answers together. Ask questions to guide their consideration of what commonalities are driving these groupings. You can further associate groups together by measures such as time, cause and outcome, or other relevant themes.