

Questioning for Classroom Discussion: Grades 6–12

Classroom discussion is a high-impact learning strategy. John Hattie (2012) found discussion to have a high effect size—among the top 10 variables identified in his studies.

New standards, including the Common Core State Standards; New Generation Science Standards; College, Career, and Civic Life Standards; and English Language Proficiency Standards Core, feature discussion skills such as speaking, listening, collaborative thinking, deep cognitive processing, and text-based dialogue. And popular teacher assessment systems, such as Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching, also include discussion skills.

Yet researchers and practitioners observe that teacher talk continues to dominate in most classrooms. Student opportunities for extended talk or interaction with one another is rare. Furthermore, teachers report that neither they nor their students have been prepared for the complexities of discussion.

In this course, you are embarking on a learning journey designed to open up new vistas and offer new insights that you can use with your students to make classroom discussion a manageable process. First, you’ll explore four quality questioning practices that drive productive discussion:

- Framing a focus question
- Promoting equitable participation
- Scaffolding student responses to deepen thinking
- Creating a culture for thoughtful discussion

Then, you’ll learn the discussion skills that comprise the DNA of meaningful discussion. Typically, students don’t arrive at school prepared to engage in productive discussion, so developing these discussion skills is crucial. You’ll explore research-based skills in three key categories: social,

cognitive, and use-of-knowledge. Then, you'll learn how to decide which skills are most appropriate for your students given their ages and developmental levels and the subject you teach. Using the threefold framework can help you plan disciplined discussions in which students' skills are intentionally targeted for development.

Well-planned discussions serve two purposes: to support students in deepening conceptual knowledge and transferring it to different contexts and to sharpen skills associated with thoughtful discussion. To accomplish these purposes, discussions must be both well-planned and skillfully executed, which you'll learn how to achieve using the five-part stages of discussion framework. You'll also learn about three types of classroom discussion, with a module devoted to each: teacher-guided, structured small-group, and student-driven. You'll access tools, techniques, and protocols to support each as you move through these modules.

In each module, readings are augmented by classroom videos showing teachers and students using all these frameworks, tools, and techniques to increase learning and achievement through discussion. Throughout the course, you'll have structured opportunities to apply these strategies to a selected class of your own students.

This course aspires to both motivate you to incorporate discussion into your classes more frequently and intentionally and provide you with the tools, techniques, and other resources to support this effort. Welcome to this journey!

Reference

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.

Course Objectives

After completing this course, you should be able to

Module 1

- Deepen your understanding of discussion and its value to students' academic and social outcomes.
- Assess the extent to which your current lessons incorporate opportunities for students to engage in discussion.

Module 2

- Connect the four practices of quality questioning to productive discussion.
- Help your students understand and use think times to sustain their thinking and engagement in discussion.
- Use the three important steps in the framing of a question for discussion in your selected classroom.

Module 3

- Understand how skills within the social, cognitive, and use-of-knowledge skill sets support student engagement in disciplined and thoughtful discussion.
- Assess proficiency in the skills and dispositions within each of the three skill sets (social, cognitive, and use-of-knowledge) that are most relevant and appropriate to your students, given their age and developmental level and the content area.

Module 4

- Deepen your knowledge of the strategies, skills, and habits of mind teachers employ to successfully orchestrate a teacher-guided discussion.
- Match specific scaffolds and strategies with common challenges that emerge during classroom discussion.

- Use the Cycle of Discussion and related resources to plan, guide, and reflect on a discussion for your selected class of students.

Module 5

- Understand the value of structured small-group protocols in engaging all students in deepening their understanding of content being studied and helping students learn, practice, and develop proficiency in key discussion skills.
- Select and use structured small groups with your students for the dual purposes of advancing their mastery of content standards and their proficiency in targeted discussion skills.

Module 6

- Understand the features of student-driven discussion that enable students to assume responsibility for their own learning and deepen their understanding of academic content.
- Identify behaviors that will help students assume responsibility for directing their own discussions.

Course Syllabus

<p>Module 1</p>	<p>Why Focus on Questioning for Discussion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module Welcome • Video: Questioning for Classroom Discussion • Reading 1: Making the Case for Questioning for Discussion • Reading 2: Rethinking Student and Teacher Roles for Discussion • Reading 3: How to Scaffold Skills for Student Discussion • Check for Understanding • Application: Taking Stock of Student Discussion in Your Classroom • Module Journal
<p>Module 2</p>	<p>How Does Quality Questioning Drive Purposeful Discussion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module Welcome • Reading 1: Quality Questioning: The Heart of Thoughtful Discussion • Video: Four Practices of Quality Questioning • Reading 2: Going Deeper into Four Quality Questioning Practices • Reading 3: <i>EL</i>—A New Rhythm for Responding • Check for Understanding • Application 1: Framing a Quality Focus Question • Application 2: Designing and Teaching a Mini-Lesson on the What, Why, and How of Think Times • Module Journal
<p>Module 3</p>	<p>The DNA of Productive Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module Welcome • Video 1: The DNA of Productive Discussion • Reading 1: Capacities Required for Productive Discussion • Reading 2: Scaffolding Tools to Develop Discussion Skills • Reading 3: Dispositions That Support Productive Discussion • Video 2: Inside Classrooms: A Focus on Skills • Check for Understanding • Application 1: Selecting Student Discussion Skills • Application 2: Pre-Assessing Identified Discussion Skills • Module Journal

<p>Module 4</p>	<p>Teacher-Guided Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module Welcome • Video 1: The Discussion Cycle • Reading 1: The Teacher as a Coach During Discussion • Reading 2: The Five Stages of the Discussion Cycle • Reading 3: The Challenges of Sustaining Student Discussion • Check for Understanding • Application 1: Identifying Teacher Planning and Coaching in a Discussion • Video 2: Teacher Planning and Coaching in a Discussion • Application 2: Modeling, Scaffolding, and Coaching to Focus and Sustain Student Discussion • Module Journal
<p>Module 5</p>	<p>Structured Small-Group Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module Welcome • Video 1: Structured Small Groups • Reading 1: The Value and Variety of Structured Small Groups • Video 2: Structured Small Groups: Appreciating Multiple Viewpoints and Deepening Understanding • Reading 2: Structured Small Groups: Posing Questions and Agreeing and Disagreeing Respectfully • Video 3: Structured Small Groups: Learning to Agree and Disagree Respectfully • Reading 3: Tips for Using Structured Small Groups as Arenas for Student Discussions • Check for Understanding • Application: Using Structured Small Groups for Class Discussion • Module Journal

Module 6	Student-Driven Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Module Welcome• Video 1: Introduction to Student-Driven Discussions• Reading 1: What Are Student-Driven Discussions?• Reading 2: The Changed Roles of Teachers and Students in the Cycle of Discussion• Video 2: Roles and Responsibilities of Listening Students• Video 3: Student Responsibility for a Productive Discussion• Check for Understanding• Application 1: Survey of Student Responsibility for Participating and Learning• Application 2: Plan and Observe a Student-Driven Discussion• Module Journal
-----------------	--

Resources

Adler, M. J. (1985). *How to speak, how to listen*. New York: Macmillan.

Applebee, A. N. (2003). *The language of literature*. New York: McDougal.

Block, P. (2011). *Flawless consulting: A guide to getting your expertise used* (3rd edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bridges, D. (1979). *Education, democracy and discussion*. Windsor, UK: NFER Publishing.

Brookfield, S. D., & Preskill, S. (2005). *Discussion as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques for democratic classrooms* (2nd edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Boyd, M., & Galda, L. (2011). *Real talk in elementary classrooms: Effective oral language practice*. New York: Guilford.

Cartier, J. L., Smith, M. S., Stein, M. K., & Ross, D. K. (2013). *5 practices for orchestrating productive task-based discussions in science*. Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Cazden, C. B. (2001). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning* (2nd edition). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Conley, D. T. (2008). *College knowledge: What it really takes for students to succeed and what we can do to get them ready*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Copeland, M. (2005). *Socratic circles: Fostering critical and creative thinking in middle and high school*. Portland, MN: Stenhouse.
- Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (2014). *Dispositions: Reframing teaching and learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Danielson, C. (2013). *The framework for teaching evaluation instrument* (2013 edition). Princeton, NJ: The Danielson Group.
- Dillon, J. T. (1988). *Questioning and teaching: A manual of practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dillon, J. T. (1994). *Using discussion in the classroom*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2008). *Content-area conversations: How to plan discussion-based lessons for diverse language learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Goodlad, J. (1984). *A place called school*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Graff, G. (2004). *Clueless in academe: How schooling obscures the life of the mind*. Hartford, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hale, A. S., & City, A. C. (2006). *The teacher's guide to leading student-centered discussions: Talking about texts in the classroom*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Hammond, W. D., & Nessel, D. D. (2011). *The comprehension experience: Engaging readers through effective inquiry and discussion*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Haroutunian-Gordon, S. (2014). *Interpretive discussion: Engaging students in text-based conversations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Ho, A. D., & Kane, T. J. (2013). *The reliability of classroom observations by school personnel*. The MET Project. Seattle: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Isaacson, W. (2014). *The innovators: How a group of hackers, geniuses and geeks created the digital revolution*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Juzwik, M. M., Borsheim-Black, C., Caughlan, S., & Heintz, A. (2013). *Inspiring dialogue: Talking to learn in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kamil, M. L., Borman, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., & Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices*. Washington, DC: Institute for Education Sciences.

- McCann, T. M. (2014). *Transforming talk into text: Argument writing, inquiry, and discussion, grades 6–12*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Mehan, H. (1979). *Learning lessons: Social organization in the classroom*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Michener, C. J., & Ford-Connors, E. (2013). Research in discussion: Effective support for literacy, content, and academic achievement. In J. Ippolito, J. Lawrence, & C. Zaller (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy in the era of the common core: From research into practice* (pp. 85–102). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Murphy, P. K., Wilkinson, I. A. G., Soter, A. O., Hennessey, M. N., & Alexander, J. F. (2009). Examining the effects of classroom discussion on students' comprehension of text: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*(3), 740–764.
- Nystrand, M. (1997). Dialogic instruction: When recitation becomes conversation. In M. Nystrand, with A. Gamoran, R. Kachur, & C. Prendergast (Eds.), *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom* (pp. 1–29). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Perkins, D. N. (2010). *Making learning whole: How seven principles of teaching can transform education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Popham, W. J. (2013). *Evaluating America's teachers: Mission possible?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Ritchhart, R., Church, M., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Making thinking visible: How to promote engagement, understanding, and independence for all learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rowe, M. B. (1986, January–February). Wait time: Slowing down may be a way of speeding up! *Journal of Teacher Education, 37*(1), 43–50.
- Sartain, L., Stoelinga, S. R., & Brown, E. R. (2011). *Rethinking teacher evaluation in Chicago: Lessons learned from classroom observations, principal-teacher conferences, and district implementation*. Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute.
- Sawyer, R. K. (2009). The new science of learning. In R. K. Sawyer (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of the learning sciences* (pp. 1–16). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Schmoker, M. (2011). *Focus: Elevating the essentials to radically improve student learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Smith, M. S., & Stein, M. K. (2011). *5 practices for orchestrating productive mathematics discussions*. Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
- Wagner, T. (2010). *The global achievement gap: Why even our best schools don't teach the new survival skills our children need—and what we can do about it*. New York: Basic Books.
- Walsh, J. A. (2017). *Improving classroom discussion*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Walsh, J. A., & Sattes, B. D. (2005). *Quality questioning: Research-based practice to engage every learner*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Walsh, J. A., & Sattes, B. D. (2011). *Thinking through quality questioning: Deepening student engagement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Walsh, J. A., & Sattes, B. D. (2015). A new rhythm for responding. *Educational Leadership*, 73(1), 46–52.
- Walsh, J. A. and Sattes, B. D. (2015). *Questioning for classroom discussion: Purposeful speaking, engaged listening, deep thinking*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Wells, G. (1993). Reevaluating the IRF sequence: A proposal for the articulation of theories of activity and discourse for the analysis of teaching and learning in the classroom. *Linguistics and Education*, 5, 1–37.
- William, D. (2011). *Embedded formative assessment*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Video

From *Questioning for Classroom Discussion: Secondary*, 2017, Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Copyright 2017 by ASCD.