

Discussion as a Way of Teaching  
Lesson Plan  
Prepared for: COML510/DPLS776

**Context:** This lesson would be part of a collection of lessons on good pedagogy for college level instructors.

**Theory:** Group discussion is frequently employed in the college classroom as a learning activity. However, effectively leading is a skill which may not be innate to many who find themselves teaching at the college level. Becoming skilled at leading group discussion is a something that can be learned and improved.

**Previously Covered Material:** Normally this lesson would be part of a larger unit on lesson planning and course organization.

**Readings:**

- 1) How to Lead a Discussion. (2019) Retrieved from <https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/teaching/small-groups-and-discussions/how-lead-discussion>
- 2) Designing Effective Discussion Questions. (2019) Retrieved from <https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/teaching/student-teacher-communication/designing-effective-discussion-questions>
- 3) Chapter 5 of Brookfield, S. D. and Preskill, S. (2005) *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

**Goals & Objectives:**

1. The student will be able to describe the basic steps to planning a lesson which uses a classroom discussion as a teaching methodology.
2. The student will be able generate effective discussion questions, and how to evaluate discussion questions.
3. The student will be able to determine if their subject or topic is a good candidate for classroom discussion.
4. The student will be able to apply this concept as a teaching strategy in their own classrooms.

**Out of Class Work:**

- 1) Complete assigned readings
- 2) Have students generate a list of open ended questions, and closed ended questions as practice.
- 3) Students will write a one-page summary of how they have observed and experienced faculty utilizing classroom discussion in the past. The need to include examples of both effective and ineffective use of classroom discussion.

**Time Frame:** 60 minutes

**Key Concept:** The key to good classroom discussion is the combination of good questions, good listening and good responses on the part of the instructor. The instructor can come prepared with good questions, but the listening and responses must largely be developed on the fly. This “on the fly” nature of leading group discussion is what can make it challenging. These on the fly skills can be developed and refined.

**Resource Materials:** Students will need blank paper to write on.

**Activity:**

1. Ask students to report on their best and worst experiences related to discussion experiences in the classroom. Discuss.
2. 5 -10 minute “lecturette” on the power of discussion as a teaching method.
3. Using the handout and accompanying PowerPoint *Designing Effective Discussion Questions*, view and discuss.
4. Next give students about 5 minutes to work on three of their own “good questions” on a topic of their choosing.
5. Have students form groups of two, exchange their questions, and discuss with the goal of giving each other feedback.
6. Debriefing: Ask the students to discuss their dyad group work with the rest of the class. What did they learn?

**Summary:** Most of us have experienced the use of group discussion in the classroom. This teaching method is used frequently, but seemingly rarely analyzed or discussed. There does seem to be certain teachers for whom the leading of discussion “comes naturally.” However, this skill can be taught and refined, and even those who employ it regularly can learn about how to improve their own discussion leadership.