

Facilitation Structures to Support Student Interaction

Think, Pair, Share Discussion

Give students a topic to think or write about individually for a couple of minutes. Next, ask them to pair up to discuss what they wrote for a few minutes. You can then ask the pairs of students to share some of their views/conversation with the entire group. This activity encourages all students to speak and allows them a chance to articulate their ideas several times before sharing them with a larger group.

Fishbowl Discussions

In this activity, a small group of students sit in a circle in the middle of the room while the rest of the class sits in a larger circle around them. The students in the inner circle discuss a topic (they are the fish), while the students sitting in the outer circle watch silently (they are the bowl). The fishbowl is useful when you want to give voice to a particular group in the class, or when you want others to work on their listening skills. You might also consider assigning students in the inner circle specific roles or personas depending on the topic. Be sure you take time for members in the “bowl” to comment on what they observed.

Concentric Circles

In this exercise, your students will engage in a series of short conversations with 2-4 people. Ask students to arrange themselves into 2 circles, one inside the other, with the inner circle facing out/outer circle facing in (so that each person is facing someone). Give the group a question to discuss in these pairs. After 1-3 minutes, call time and ask the members of the outer group to rotate one seat/space so that everyone is facing someone new. Again, give the group a question (perhaps a different question than the one you previously asked) to discuss in the pairs. After 1-3 minutes, call time, have students move again, etc.

Peer Interview

Students pair up (preferably with someone they don't know well) and work together on a series of questions that ask them to draw on their prior knowledge of a given topic. Some example questions include: *1) Have you ever formally studied this topic before, in high school or college?; 2) What kinds of attitudes or opinions have you heard about this topic?; 3) What questions do you have about the topic that you want answered, either by the instructor or your peers?* You might consider using this strategy before starting a new unit to get a sense of what your students already know and to provide them an opportunity to unpack what they know about the topic and/or collect their thoughts before sharing ideas in the large group.

Gallery walks

During a gallery walk, students explore multiple texts or images that are placed around the room. Instructors often use this strategy as a way for students to share their work with peers, examine multiple historical documents, respond to a collection of quotations, compare pieces of artwork. After the gallery walk, students can meet in small or large groups to discuss their observations.

World Café

World café provides students with an opportunity to engage in multiple rounds of conversation in

response to discussion questions, taking ideas from one group and then adding on to them. Each table has a student assigned the role of “table host.” Groups of four or five students sit around a table (or group of desks) and discuss an open-ended question. After a given amount of time, participants randomly switch tables to engage in a new discussion. The table host will remain at their table and are tasked with filling in each new group of participants on the previous participants’ discussion. Through world café, participants gather a diverse range of perspectives on a given topic. Participants are encouraged to make notes or drawings (on notepads or paper tablecloths that stay at the table) during each discussion.

Carousel Brainstorm

Organize your students into small groups. Identify 3-5 major concepts you want your students to explore and then write one concept each on a piece of paper. Distribute the paper so that every group has one. Give groups 2-3 minutes (or longer) to brainstorm responses to the concept they’ve been given. When time is up, ask your students to pass their paper to a new group. Once each group has received a new concept, give them 2-3 minutes to respond to the previous group’s brainstorm and add any new ideas. Continue this process until each group has had the opportunity to respond to each concept.

Jigsaw

This cooperative learning strategy known encourages students to depend on and collaborate with others. The instructor should arrange their students in small groups that are each assigned a different topic or reading to explore. (This works well with 3-4 readings/topics.) Each group meets to prepare their ‘expertise’ on their assigned topic or reading (comparing understandings, clarifying, strategizing about how to explain or teach it to peers). Then they move into mixed groups, with one ‘expert’ on each reading or topic, to inform or ask their peers about their particular piece of the puzzle and collectively build a more complete picture of the broader issue or question addressed by the several articles or topics.

“Toss the Ball” Discussion

Instead of the instructor calling upon students with raised hands, each student is responsible for calling on the next person to speak. This works especially well for a topic where everyone is asked to share a perspective, or where you want to hear multiple answers to the same question.

Silent Instructor Discussion

The instructor deliberately sits quietly while a group of students or the whole class is tasked with facilitating the day’s discussion. This works best if the students are given plenty of advance notice and clear instructions.

Concept Maps

Creating concept maps can help you to get a sense of what your students already know about a given topic and provide an opportunity for them to draw on any prior knowledge. Concept maps also provide insight into how your students represent and organize knowledge and ideas, as well as provide an opportunity to see students’ developing understanding and knowledge over time. You can construct a concept map for a discipline, concept, or focus question. You might also use

a concept map for review of course material. You can create a concept map as a class or your students can create concept maps in small groups.

- As a whole class: First, identify a concept to explore and write it on the board. Then, invite your students to come to the board and contribute 1 word (you might ask your students to put their word on a post-it before putting it on the board so that the words can be moved around the board as needed) and 1 linking line.
- In small groups: Identify a concept and in groups of 3-4, ask your students to create a concept map, contributing 3 words and 3 linking lines each. You might then invite each group to display their map on the board for each group to interact with.