Chapter 6
Discussion Approach to Instruction
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Editors' Foreword

Preconditions (when to use the theory)

Content
- In-depth exploration of topics, not presentation of large amounts of information
- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills

Learners
- All students

Learning environments
- All classrooms
- As part or whole of lesson

Instructional development constraints
- Minimal, given that few resources need to be developed

Values (opinions about what is important

about ends (learning goals)
- Emphasizes learning, not teaching
- The importance of deep thinking, sharp analytical skills, and empowerment of learners

about priorities (criteria for successful instruction)
- Effectiveness and appeal are highly valued
- Efficiency is not highly valued, for this method takes more time for interactions and processing

about means (instructional methods)
- Values active student learning (participation)
- Values respecting different perspectives
- Values collaboration and democratic processes
- Values questioning, critical thinking, and problem solving skills
- Values creating a community of learners
- Life experiences should be inseparable from learning

about power (to make decisions about the previous three)
- Values empowering learners
- Should be very inclusive and participatory

Universal Methods

related to Merrill's First Principles
1. Engage learners in real-life problems, connected to their own diverse backgrounds.
2. Activate prior learning on which to build new knowledge.
3. Demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving skills during the discussion
4. Apply new knowledge through exercises done by individuals or small groups, with the help of advance organizers and group feedback or reflection.
5. Integrate new knowledge through future interactions with others, changes in respect for others.

related to principles of discussion teaching
1. Share the responsibility for learning between instructor and learner.
2. Create a climate of collaboration and respect for diverse world views.
3. Ensure that instructors using the Discussion Approach have clear mastery of a discipline as well as strong facilitation skills.
4. Acknowledge and utilize the life experiences of learners.
5. Include opportunities for higher-order learning, such as listening, reflection, and synthesis.
6. Promote a more democratic learning community.
7. Ensure that the physical set up in the classroom allows for interactions among learners as well as instructor(s).

related to the process of discussion teaching
1. Develop a plan.
2. Develop a concept outline.
3. Add a question outline.
4. Create a visible outline.
5. Model the discussion process through demonstration.
6. State clear expectations.
7. Set ground rules for interaction.
8. Design practice session.
9. Anticipate obstacles and problems.

Situational Principles
- Very young learners, special needs learners, or others who have lack of facility with language and expression may require some changes in the principle of shared responsibility for learning.
- Online discussions present special requirements for change in flow of conversation, but also exciting new opportunities for communication.
- If you have resistant students, who can rob the discussion approach of its power, allow for more time practicing or more small-group discussions to overcome resistance.

— CMR & ACC