Preparing for the Lively Discussions Webinar

Dakin Burdick, 2019

The Tech Tools We'll Be Using

We are tempting fate and using two (2) tech tools in the same webinar. We will use Zoom because that is the tool that CPD uses, and we will use Google Docs because we have the best chance that everyone has access to them. It is your job to prepare for the webinar, you will need to sign up for Zoom at:

> https://zoom.us/signup

If you don't have a Google account, don't worry. I've created a Google Doc that anyone can access as long as you have the address. You will receive the address at the appropriate time in the webinar.

The Basic Idea

Please read through this basic information. We are going to hit the ground running in the webinar, and I would like you to understand the assumptions behind what we will be doing. Reading this will help you avoid being confused, as we may cover a lot of ground.

I am recommending the use of four styles of instruction to develop classroom conversations. Those tools are student preparation (homework), lecture, large group discussion, and small group discussion. During the webinar, I'll be offering several useful protocols you might use to organize small group discussions. Let me give you a brief explanation of the thinking that lays behind this method.

Adequate student preparation is essential for an effective course. I have done classroom observations and consultations with hundreds of faculty. About half the time, inadequate student preparation makes the class more difficult to teach and the discussions harder to conduct. In my opinion, homework should be preparatory in nature, should be turned in before class, and should be graded, usually lightly. The amount of time that students should spend preparing for class is defined by the Carnegie Unit, which tells us that students should spend two hours working outside of class for every hour inside class. The key to effective preparatory work is to make it moderately challenging, and make sure the students spend much more time on it than you do. You have plenty to do already!

Now that we have Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Blackboard and Canvas, we have a convenient way not only to only assign preparatory work, but also to receive it and grade it before class. Students can read texts (either purchased, rented, or in digital format) and they can access articles, books, audio (podcasts), and videos online. Videos can even include mini-lectures that you create with Zoom, Camtasia, or Screencastomatic, and then deliver through embedded YouTube videos (appropriately closed-captioned of course) through your LMS. In other words, content delivery is vastly easier than it was thirty years ago.

Reading is more efficient than lectures, since students can read about 3-5 times as fast as one can speak, and they can review recorded lectures as many times as they like.

To ensure students do the required preparation, have them demonstrate mastery of that material through a journal, reflection paper, quiz, or other tool. If these assessments of preparation are frequent (i.e. weekly in a 15 week course), it is not a bad idea to have them worth a relatively large amount of the course (i.e. 45% of the total class grade). The preparation is essential for their success in the course, and while they will generally get high grades on that preparation, their performance on a large semester project or on high-risk exams will often moderate their effect on the final grade. If there are infrequent assessments (i.e. 2-3 exams in a semester), they should be worth a relatively small part of the final grade (i.e. 15-20% of the total class grade). Reducing their value will reduce student anxiety and thereby reduce the probability of academic dishonesty, since students will hopefully feel less need to cheat or have someone else do their work for them.
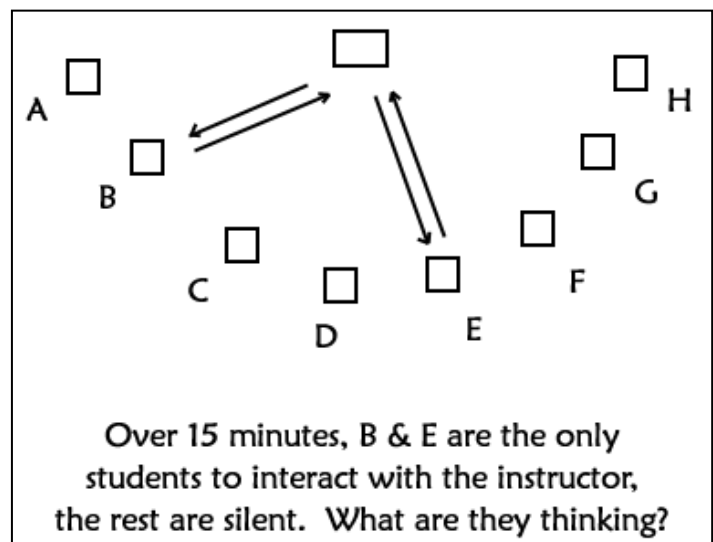
Students often do poorly on initial work in a class, particularly if it is a lower level required course outside their major. It takes them some time to understand what you want from them, and to learn the language and conventions of your discipline. It often takes 2-3 weeks to bring the preparatory work up to the standard that you desire, but that time and effort on your part will yield large dividends for the rest of the class. In a first year history class, I often assign weekly reading reflections of at least a thousand words, and many of the students feel they cannot write that much. By the third week, most of them are doing the work, and there are only a few students who will need special attention to help them achieve. In writing a long weekly reflection, students not only get practice in writing, but they also make visible their thinking, so that I can then customize the upcoming class based on their strengths and needs.

The largest portion of your time will probably be spent ensuring that students understand that you are serious about academic honesty. The temptation to cut and paste into weekly reflections will initially be quite high. It will take a few weeks for students to believe that you are serious about academic honesty, but if you establish a firm presence at the start of the semester, the rest of the semester will be easier. You will probably still have one or two outliers though, so stay alert! Make sure that the few who try to cheat do not invalidate all the good work that the rest of the students do. Admittedly, that will take time. On the other hand, you do need to give feedback, but use rubrics, boilerplate responses, and group feedback to reduce the time it takes you to give it. Using Just-in-Time Teaching can increase the usefulness of this type of homework by allowing you to read and grade it before they set foot in the classroom. That will help you teach them because you will know what they understand and what they don't, and allow you to customize the class for each new group of students. It will also make the class more fun for you, because you won't be just giving the same lessons year after year.

Lectures are used to introduce new material, especially material for which you couldn't find effective readings. Lectures can be used to set the tone of the class, to give group feedback, to demonstrate personal expertise, and to interest students in the topic. Keep the lecture short, say 10-15 minutes at the start of the class. After that, you start to lose the students. You have a choice of continuing the lecture and trying to entertain the students or stopping and having them practice what you want them to learn. Practice will help them improve. Prepare small group exercises that force students to practice and thereby learn disciplinary skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Organizing this sort of exercise is what we will practice in the webinar, and I'll share out a number of different discussion protocols so you can vary your instruction and also so you can find methods that work with your course. If you still need more at the end of the webinar, please let me know and I can help you develop them.

==Small group discussion== is used to build student confidence and enthusiasm, and to give students time to practice the things that you want them to learn. If something is important for them to learn, then the best time for them to practice that is when you are in the room with them, so you can help coach and guide them. Make the work authentic, which is to say it should be as close an approximation to what they'll really be doing as possible. The transfer of their learning will be better because of that. If the students are practicing math, design the problems so that calculations don't come out even every time. Design science labs that are explorations (i.e. problem-based learning) rather than attempts to duplicate someone else's examples (i.e. canned labs). If they have an opportunity to fail, those failures can create teaching moments where students are very open to learn and are motivated to do so. Again, student work should be moderately challenging. Don't drop them in the deep blue sea, but also don't give them something so easy that the best students are constantly bored. Small group work should also be limited in time and scope. Once one or two groups are done, bring people together to debrief, and to enlarge upon the topic. Otherwise, they will begin to talk about their social lives, and you will lose all the energy you have built up.

Finally, instructors can ==use large group discussions== to gather feedback on the small group work, to build a rapport, question assumptions, and enlarge the conversation. Like many other instructors, A

good large group discussion is enormously enjoyable for the discussion leader, but it should be limited in scope. In a large group discussion, only a few students have an opportunity to talk, and although it may feel like a great discussion to the discussion leader, there will probably be a lot of quiet people in the room, and it is better to keep the large group discussion brief and then move them back into small group work. The key is to keep them working. As the saying goes, whoever is doing the work is doing the learning.

Over 15 minutes, B & E are the only students to interact with the instructor, the rest are silent. What are they thinking?

Two Protocols We'll Use

There are two protocols that we'll use just to run the webinar: Simple Jigsaw and Round Robin. I will explain those here, so you know what to expect. I've broken each protocol into three pieces: Description, Time Required, and Online Equivalent. The Description describes how to use the protocol in a face-to-face (f2f) setting, and sometimes gives some background on the history of the protocol. The Time Required is my estimate of how long this protocol should take, on average. It is provided to help create your lesson plan, estimating how much time is spent on each activity. The Online Equivalent is a brief suggestion about how this protocol might be used in an online setting.

First, we will use the Simple Jigsaw to structure the conversations in the Breakout Rooms.

Simple Jigsaw: In groups of five, each participant is assigned a brief unique reading (either preparatory to the session or in the session itself). The group is given a general topic to discussion, and each participant takes a turn discussing it from the viewpoint of their unique reading. NOTE: You will receive your reading in the webinar itself.

Time required: 2 minutes per person.

Online equivalent: Participants are given their unique reading as homework and then discuss in their small groups synchronously at their normal small group meeting time.

Once in the Breakout Rooms, you will take turns talking, which is probably the most common of all small group discussion protocols. This method is called Round Robin.

Round Robin (aka. Go Around): Form small groups and have the participants take turns sharing one reflection about the day's topic. A variant of this in the 1970s was called Phillips 66, because students worked in groups of six for six minutes on a given issue, and then reported back.

Time required: 1-2 minutes per person in group.

Online equivalent: This could be used in almost every form of online discussion. If deep thought is necessary, use an asynchronous format. If you just want to maintain energy and build student confidence, use a synchronous format.

Thanks for reading this far, and I look forward to seeing you on Wednesday!