Procedures for Integrating Student-Centered Discussion into your Class

BEFORE SEMESTER BEGINS

1. **Make sure that you've tested the capabilities of your classroom's computer, projector, and videoconferencing software to the best of your ability.** It is important to practice the procedures that you'll need to do for this well before the first day you plan to implement discussions on the devices you plan to use. Become familiar with the processes that you will need to do to get the discussion to work (e.g., signing into accounts, opening up tabs, ensuring the video/audio/projector works). The goal is to make these procedures feel normal when you go to enact this in class with your students.

2. **Make sure you are clear about necessary materials and procedures for your students.** This would be something to put in your syllabus. If they need to download something onto their computers, let them know how to do this. Show them where links to video chat will be posted on your LMS. Indicate what they will need to have in order to successfully participate in discussion. Let them know they should contact you immediately if this is going to be problematic for them. If you have the opportunity to test capabilities with your students in advance, that is a bonus.

3. **Post the video chat link in a clear place for all students to see.** A good place to put this is on the Welcome Page/homepage of your class on your LMS. Consider using an eye catching color and larger font to exemplify the importance of this link. Make sure you are labeling it clearly.

DURING CLASSES

At this point, you will have your face-to-face students in front of you. You will also have opened up the video chat as the host, and your online students will have used the link you provided to access the meeting. Your online students are projected onto the screen for you and your face-to-face students to see. Everyone can see and hear each other. You are ready to begin discussion groups.

4. **Recap the material to be discussed.** You may have prepared discussion questions/prompts or your students may have prepared discussion questions/prompts. Either way, this is the time that you want to provide time for students to review these and/or the material they may be drawing on for their small group discussion. You will want to give a solid two to three minutes for this (or more, depending on the amount of questions). This will orient your students for discussion *(NOTE: you can do this part ahead of time if you want to save time in class).*

5. **Introduce the parameters of discussion.** These parameters should include expectations of discussion in breakout groups AND whole group discussion after. *(NOTE: You can do group selection ahead of time if you want to save time in class).*

Group Selection	Let them know if you are going to randomly assign students, or if they can choose their groups. If they are going to choose their group, make sure to give them time and a platform to decide what groups they will be in (you can do this part ahead of time).
Length of time	This is the length of time you are expecting students to remain in their breakout groups in active discussion. This can be set in Webex (v.40.9) OR you can give them a set time to plan to be back to class.
Product, artifact, and/or goal	What would you like students to show from their discussion? It's important that students understand this ahead of time so they can work towards this goal. • A verbal recap by one person in the group about what was discussed? • A set of notes/summary about what was discussed emailed to you? • Some kind of digital artifact you'd like them to create (make sure they have enough time for this) • Being prepared to address specific questions in the whole group *This is not an exhaustive list.*
Listening in/ Checking in	If you are planning on bouncing from group to group, be sure to let students know about this ahead of time. Make sure you let them know if you only plan to listen OR if you plan to interject (and what circumstances you may interject).
Scaffolding	**[for the beginning of the semester]** You'll want to let students know in advance what is expected in these discussions. Students who are less familiar with small group discussions will likely need guidance in terms of what it means to engage meaningfully in discussions. For example, explain to your students what it means to ***substantiate their arguments by showing evidence from the text, critiquing another's argument, asking for clarification, expanding on a question using a related resource,*** and/or ***drawing from one's own experiences.*** *This is not an exhaustive list.*

6. **Get ALL students into the whole group chat.** After expectations have been set, you will need to get all students into the whole group chat. Face-to-face students will need to click the link to the chat so they can be in the whole group chat so they can be sorted into breakout groups. **IMPORTANTLY, you absolutely must mute the class computer audio at this point, or else you will get feedback.**

7. **Group selection.** It's time to breakout into small groups!
   a. **Student selected.** If students have selected their groups, pull up the document that reflects this (e.g., Google Doc, Microsoft 365). Manually sort these students into their groups on Webex. Once groups are selected and you've clicked OK, students will be prompted to exit the whole group link and go into their breakouts.
   b. **Random**. If you are selecting at random, you can use the Webex random sort function. Once groups are selected and you've clicked OK, students will be prompted to exit the whole group link and go into their breakouts.

8. **Engage in listening in/checking in**. It is important that you engage in this, as you can take notes and pull important points across the small group discussions to bring up in the upcoming whole group discussion. You want to give students 3-5 minutes before you begin checking in or listening in. Towards the beginning of the semester, it's also not a bad idea to identify instances of effective small group conversations and bring this up as an example in whole group. This is a way to provide positive feedback for students who are doing well and provide concrete and supportive examples for those who are still learning how to engage in discussions.

9. **Bring it back to the whole group. Make sure to unmute the class computer!** It's important for you to have an idea about how you want students to bring in what they discussed in their breakout groups back to the whole group. This could be asking students to share (briefly, perhaps 30 sec. – 1 minute) a point where everyone was ***energetically engaged*** in the conversation OR a ***sticking point*** (a point/problem that they had trouble dealing with or were confused by). This helps everyone shift from small group to whole group discussion. It can also be a time for students to write what they might want to say or contribute.

10. **Open up the whole group discussion and encourage students to build off one another.** While this will be uncomfortable for some teachers at first, you want students responding to each other and not you simply responding to what students say one after the other. That means you would not evaluate or comment on each statement provided by your students, leading to (at first) uncomfortable silences. However, you can prompt with phrases, such as "Who can build off of what [student] mentioned here?" or "I heard [student's group] talking about that. Can you add to that?" Over time, students will understand that they are the ones who will sustain the conversation as you listen and make notes of their thinking.
    a. **Times you should step in as facilitator and take up a larger role:**
        i. Students are directly asking for clarification or are letting you know they are unsure and other students are not stepping in to provide any clarification or understanding.
        ii. When you are noticing their conversations are connecting to course material, but they haven't made the connection directly themselves. This facilitation should not trample on students voices but instead wait for a quiet moment and help make that connection the course material that will help them synthesize information and see the bigger picture.
        iii. Students are conveying factually incorrect information/misinformation that is not going challenged by other students. This is particularly important if the information is directly harmful to a population (e.g., racist, misogynist, xenophobic, hateful remarks towards a given group).
        This is not an exhaustive list.

How do I build in student-centered, synchronous discussion into my course calendar and activities?

This section includes example syllabus items to illustrate how I've set this up in the past. It includes:

- Active Class Participation parameters
- Syllabus statements
- Course calendars and example timeline for collecting questions
- Scaffolding and modeling for what makes for substantive questions or prompts for discussion.
- Scaffolding and modeling for what makes for substantive discussion responses

Active Class Participation

Active class participation is one of the ways that you can holistically account for students' overall participation in class. When it comes to discussion, this is where you can loop in your grade. I usually keep a list of my students and identify whether or not they share in whole group and small group. This helps me evaluate their active class participation.

> *Tip.* Most students tend to share in small groups. Some students will need time and scaffolding to figure out how they participate in whole group, especially with a large class.

Syllabus Statements

Below, you will see an example of a syllabus statement for Active Class Participation.

Active Class Participation

For this course, active participation is a requirement that is expected along with your attendance at all **synchronous** course meetings. You are expected to actively participate in a constructive manner during all class activities and discussions, **whether we are meeting in person or online, through discussion boards or Flipgrid**. To fully participate, you must read the assigned texts *before* each class session, and complete all required tasks, activities or projects on time. In addition, I expect you to bring all of your work (e. g., course texts, articles, responses, notes, etc.) to each face-to-face class session. **I will check in at the midpoint (see Course Calendar) of the semester with feedback based on the following criteria:**

Evaluation	Criteria
+ (full credit)	• Turning in all assignments on time to Blackboard • Evidence that you've read all assigned texts as observed by course instructor within **whole and small group** discussion (i.e., direct references to texts) • Evidence that you've read all assigned texts as observed by course instructor within course writing (i.e., use of APA citations) • Engaging in thoughtful, reflective, and creative responses ideas found in texts, assignments, and classmates as observed by course instructor • Working productively with your team as observed by course instructor • Initiating scheduling of required meetings with course instructor

Course Calendars and Example Timeline for Collecting Student Questions

You can collect students' questions to help increase your students' engagement not only in their reading of course content but also in their discussions. It's important to keep this well-organized so that both you and your students can work within the patterns of participation quickly. The following is an excerpt from my course calendar:

Date of class	Topic/Questions	Readings DUE (on this date)	Assignment DUE (on this date)
THURSDAY 2/6	Finishing Course Overview What is Literacy? Why are research and historical perspectives important to teaching pedagogy and literacy?	**Choose any THREE:** **Scribner (1984)** *Literacy in three metaphors* **Gee (1991)** *What is literacy?* **Frankel, Becker, Rowe, & Pearson (2016)** *From "What is Reading?" to What is Literacy?* **TMPL7**: *Chapter 4 – Marie M. Clay's Theoretical Perspective: A Literacy Processing Theory (Doyle)*	Written reflective response with **discussion questions due** to BB **Wednesday 2/5 at 11:59 pm** *("What is Literacy?" prompt)*
THURSDAY 2/13	Introduction to theories and models Literacy theories as demonstrated through research – a historical perspective	**Lenses**: Chapter 1 – Introduction to Theories and Models (READ THIS FIRST!) **TMPL7**: Chapter 1 – Literacies and Their Investigation through Theories and Models *(Unrau, Alvermann, & Sailors)*	Written reflective response with **discussion questions due** to BB **Wednesday 2/12 at 11:59 pm** *(specific prompt will be provided)*

Below, I will walk through how discussion questions are collected from students.

- **THURSDAY IN CLASS:** Assign readings due the next Thursday. Indicate that reflections and discussion questions must be turned in the night before.
- **WEDNESDAY EVENING:** Students turn in their questions.
- **THURSDAY IN THE DAY:** Collect questions, de-identify them, and organize them. Here are a couple of ways you can organize them:
    - **Topic**: You spend time copying and pasting the questions AND grouping the questions by general topic area, giving those question topic areas a name. This is a great method if you want to encourage student choice and deeper dives into a topic area. The downside is that this does take a great deal more time.
    - **Random numbered:** You spend time copying and pasting the questions into a document and then numbering them. Students can then be randomly assorted into groups and identify with group members the questions they'd prefer to talk about. While this takes less time, the downside is that students in a group may not have as focused of a discussion.
- **THURSDAY IN CLASS:** Provide the questions to students and engage in the general procedures for integrating student-centered discussion into your class.

    Tip. Importantly, you need to schedule when students turn in their questions relative to the time you will have available to you to compile them. If you feel like you will need two days to compile questions, have students turn in their questions two days prior to your class meeting.

Scaffolding and Modeling Substantive Questions and Prompts

While some students might be particularly adept at discussion, others will need help and practice understanding expectations. Like the scaffolding helps provide a shape and structure to a building in progress, scaffolding helps our students by providing structure and expectations when they are just learning different processes. Here are my standard tips for scaffolding writing engaging discussion questions and talking points/prompts:

Tip 1: ALWAYS Make sure to point your peers in the direction of the section you are referring to (APA in-text references typically are author, year, p. #). This should be clear and easy to locate in the text.

Tip 2: Your discussion points should be open-ended, meaning that they cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no." "Yes" or "no" questions are close-ended, and they tend to close down conversation unless we follow it up with, "Why?"

Some examples of discussion questions and talking points:

- Is a particular passage or idea from a reading raising questions for you? **Ask a question** and see how others might answer that question. Be ready to have an answer for that question yourself, even if it is a tentative/"half-baked" one.
- Not sure of something you read? **Ask for clarification** and others' ideas about a particular section.
- Is a particular passage or idea challenging something you believe or understand about literacy, learning, and teaching? **Pose a question related to this** or **raise a critique** about the section in question.
- Do you have a real-life experience connected to the readings? **State a personal connection** and ask if anyone else has experienced something similar.
- Are you noticing a similarity between your reading and another text? **Make a text connection** and ask if others might have additional connections.
- Is the reading reminding you of a resource (e.g., app, website, book, video, etc.) that might be helpful? **Offer a resource** and ask others to check it out and see what they think (this list is not exhaustive)

Scaffolding and Modeling Substantive Discussion Responses

In terms of what constitutes **substantive discussion responses**, some examples of scaffolding could be modeling:

- Asking for clarification is a point that a group member made was unclear
- Offering a personal experience/connection/anecdote or readings from other classes
- Offering a related theory-to-practice connection to the text/response
- Offering a constructive critique of the text/response (kindly, respectfully)
- Offering an additional resource that supports the text/response
- Or something else substantive commenting on the text/response (this list is not exhaustive)

It is important to let your students know that in substantive discussions, it is not enough simply to agree with a text/response and summarize the main points by explaining what you agree with. You must begin to <u>synthesize</u> your own thinking across the texts we are reading in class, texts from other

courses, and the thinking of your peers. All of the above are ways that students can synthesize instead of summarize.

You can also provide **sentence stems** for students responding to group members, small or whole group:

- "I am not sure what you mean by that, [student]. Could you elaborate a bit more?"
- "I'd like to build off of what [student] mentioned…"
- "This reminds me of [part of the text] on page…"
- "This reminds me of [text] we read in [different class]…"
- "[Student's] point reminds me of a time where…"
- "I would like to offer a counterargument to [student's] point…"
- "[Resource] relates directly to [student's] point. [Discusses resource and where you can find it]…" (this list is not exhaustive)