Various Activities to Facilitate Participation in Group Discussions

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Various Activities to Facilitate Participation in Group Discussions (MS#2071)

Dr. Tanya Kunberger, U.A. Whitaker College of Engineering, Florida Gulf Coast University

Abstract

Research has shown that group discussions benefit students’ comprehension of material, critical thinking, and development of communication skills. However, ensuring both preparation and participation by all or even a majority of students is often one of the most challenging aspects of class discussions. This participation is further complicated in larger classrooms, where individual voices may be less likely to be heard—either from the perspective of timing / logistics or from a students’ unwillingness to contribute. Awarding credit for class participation and / or soliciting participation from reluctant students are potential solutions, but can be a complex undertaking if an instructor wants to divide a larger class into smaller discussion groups.

This poster presents approaches taken in an upper level course at Florida Gulf Coast University (FgCU) to both increase the preparation of students for class discussions and promote participation of more students in class discussions. These roundtable activities are bi-weekly occurrences and focus on both historical articles written by some of the most well-known researchers in the field to journal articles published within the last six months on transformative research or recent projects. Inclusion of both pre-class activities and the associated rubrics, as well as various in class approaches will be included.

Project Overview

General Course Information

• Senior level course
• Required of all Civil Engineering Students

Roundtable Expectations

• Students are expected to read article prior to class attendance
• Individual accountability based on either written submission prior to class (3 of 8) or brief quiz at start of class (5 of 8)
• Each quiz worth 20 points, each written submission worth 40 points (20 points extra credit built in)

Roundtable Quiz Questions

• What are 2 – 3 critical points of the article?
• What are 2 important qualifications of the author (not included in the article?)
• How does the article relate to the course?
• How does the article relate to other courses, broader engineering concerns, the real world etc?

In Topic Discussions, students divide themselves into groups of 5 – 7 individuals. Each group is given a unique topic for discussion and students begin by presenting their question and a second summarizes the table discussion on the topic. Each group member is responsible for summarizing the table’s response to a specific question and becomes the speaker for that table when the question is discussed with the entire class. After each table’s speaker has had a chance to respond to the question in the larger group discussion, the speaker for that table will be selected from each group. Students begin by having each student draw a slip of paper out of a container. Those slips contain a letter, number, and question. Students begin by forming groups based on the letter on their paper. All students in this group have the same question. This question is the basis for the first discussion. Once this discussion time is complete, students transition to groups based on the number on their paper. These groups contain an individual from each of the initial groups. Each person must read their question and summarize the discussion from the first table to their new group. This person then is given a chance to provide additional thoughts on each subject.

In Written & Table Discussions, students divide themselves into groups of 5 – 7 individuals. Each group is given a unique topic for discussion. Those topics begin by reading the article. Each group member is responsible for summarizing the table’s response to a specific question and becomes the speaker for that table when the question is discussed with the entire class. After each table’s speaker has had a chance to respond to the question in the larger group discussion, the speaker for that table will be selected from each group. Students begin by having each student draw a slip of paper out of a container. Those slips contain a letter, number, and question. Students begin by forming groups based on the letter on their paper. All students in this group have the same question. This question is the basis for the first discussion. Once this discussion time is complete, students transition to groups based on the number on their paper. These groups contain an individual from each of the initial groups. Each person must read their question and summarize the discussion from the first table to their new group. This person then is given a chance to provide additional thoughts on each subject.

Table Discussions

• Individual accountability
• Allows students to listen and gain additional perspectives in initial discussions.
• Requires students to participate in secondary small group discussions while allowing for presentation of group rather than individual thoughts.
• Introduces students to wider group of classmates in smaller group settings.

Jigsaw Discussions

• 1 – 2 times mid to late semester
• Allows students to listen and gain additional perspectives in initial discussions.
• Requires students to participate in small group discussions while allowing for presentation of group rather than individual thoughts.
• Encourages greater awareness of group discussions as each individual is ultimately responsible for reporting out on a section of the discussion.
• Requires large group participation as individuals are responsible for presenting group thoughts on particular subject.

Large Group Discussions

• The ultimate goal of the course which is the ability for all students to engage in a larger group discussion.
• Builds on previous experiences designed to make student more comfortable contributing in a larger group setting.
• Topic direction heavily influenced by students with only minimal input from instructor.

Conclusion

• Employing a framework that scaffolds allows for students to gain confidence in expressing opinions in group discussions.
• Providing options that allow for contributions that may or may not be personal thoughts increases the likelihood that hesitant students will contribute (reduced fear of “wrong” or “unpopular” response).
• Providing multiple approaches to discussions also keeps the bi-weekly activity fresh and different.

Future Direction

• Incorporation of student-led group discussions to further increase the course focus on students over faculty.
• Solicitation of student questions in a more intentional manner to form the basis (or partial basis) of discussion activities.
• More formalized assessment of activities to determine significance of approach to classroom participation.

Approach and Observations

Example Discussion Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Activity Type</th>
<th>Article Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Quiz &amp; Topic Discussion</td>
<td>Geosyntra (Sub-discipline Specific Trade Magazine), May/June 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Written &amp; Table Discussion</td>
<td>2015 International Foundations Conference and Equipment Expo Conference Proceedings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Quiz &amp; Topic Discussion</td>
<td>Canadian Geotechnical Journal, Volume 1, No. 1, 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Written &amp; Table Discussion</td>
<td>Civil Engineering (Discipline Specific Magazine), July/August 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Quiz &amp; Jigsaw Discussion</td>
<td>Geotechnique, Volume 65, Number 4, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Written &amp; Large Group</td>
<td>2015 International Foundations Conference and Equipment Expo Conference Proceedings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Quiz &amp; Large Group</td>
<td>Canadian Geotechnical Journal, Volume 34, No. 4, 1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Written Roundtable Expectations

Criteria

Highest Performance Level Rubric Expectations

Critical Points (35%) Recognizes & details important points of article. Illustrates relationship between points with article as well as other sources. Acknowledges any implicit limitations associated with presented results / discussion.

Course Relation (20%) Presents a clear, well-developed relationship of discussion topic to course objectives.

Author Qualifications (10%) Includes a recognition of and appreciation for the merits of the author.

Clarity & Completeness (25%) Clear, concise, well written. Free of spelling / grammatical errors. Flow is smooth and logical.

Synthesis & Conclusion (10%) Highly organized, illustrating big picture as well as finer details. Shows strong link to previous topics and future direction. Presents personal observations in addition to article information. Includes unique insights.

Table Discussions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Discussions</th>
<th>Table Discussions</th>
<th>Jigsaw Discussions</th>
<th>Large Group Discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 – 3 times early in semester</td>
<td>Allows students to contribute in small groups of familiar individuals as a starting point for discussions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 – 3 times early in semester</td>
<td>Singular focus initially encourages a more in depth analysis and potential extension of ideas beyond initial topic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 – 3 times early in semester</td>
<td>Provides opportunities for students to contribute to larger group discussion by presenting group rather than individual thoughts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 – 2 times early in semester</td>
<td>Allows for small discussions on multiple topics and the ability to transition between topics.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 – 2 times early in semester</td>
<td>Encourages greater awareness of group discussions as each individual is ultimately responsible for reporting out on a section of the discussion.</td>
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