**THE BIG LIST OF CLASSROOM DISCUSSION STRATEGIES**

Adapted from Jennifer Gonzalez’s “Cult of Pedagogy”

GALLERY WALK

Basic Structure: Stations or posters are set up around the classroom, on the walls or on tables. Small groups of students travel from station to station together, performing some kind of task or responding to a prompt, either of which will result in a conversation.

PHILOSOPHICAL CHAIRS

Basic Structure: A statement that has two possible responses—agree or disagree—is read out loud. Depending on whether they agree or disagree with this statement, students move to one side of the room or the other. From that spot, students take turns defending their positions. Allow students to change their positions throughout the discussion.

HUMAN GRAPH

The instructor puts up posters on four walls, and opposing walls have opposing viewpoints on them. Students then use the walls to positions themselves in the room according to their position on those axes. For example, students might arrange themselves on an axis reflecting their level of concern for nature in itself, and a second reflecting their belief in economic libertarianism. Once they are in the initial four main areas defined by the graph, they talk to the people around them about the topic under discussion, and clarify their positions relative to the others around them. The four quadrants can then be used to form new heterogeneous groups for follow-up discussions.

PINWHEEL DISCUSSION

Basic Structure: Students are divided into 4 groups. Three of these groups are assigned to represent specific points of view. Members of the fourth group are designated as “provocateurs,” tasked with making sure the discussion keeps going and stays challenging. One person from each group (the “speaker”) sits in a desk facing speakers from the other groups, so they form a square in the center of the room. Behind each speaker, the remaining group members are seated: two right behind the speaker, then three behind them, and so on, forming a kind of triangle. From above, this would look like a pinwheel. The four speakers introduce and discuss questions they prepared ahead of time (this preparation is done with their groups). After some time passes, new students rotate from the seats behind the speaker into the center seats and continue the conversation.

SOCRATIC SEMINAR

Basic Structure: Students prepare by reading a text or group of texts and writing some higher-order discussion questions about the text. On seminar day, students sit in a circle and an introductory, open-ended question is posed by the teacher or student discussion leader. From there, students continue the conversation, prompting one another to support their claims with textual evidence. There is no particular order to how students speak, but they are encouraged to respectfully share the floor with others. Discussion is meant to happen naturally and students do not need to raise their hands to speak. This overview of Socratic Seminar from the website Facing History and Ourselves provides a list of appropriate questions, plus more information about how to prepare for a seminar.

AFFINITY MAPPING

Basic Structure: Give students a broad question or problem that is likely to result in lots of different ideas, such as “What were the impacts of the Great Depresssion?” or “What literary works should every person read?” Have students generate responses by writing ideas on post-it notes (one idea per note) and placing them in no particular arrangement on a wall, whiteboard, or chart paper. Once lots of ideas have been generated, have students begin grouping them into similar categories, then label the categories and discuss why the ideas fit within them, how the categories relate to one another, and so on.

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES a.k.a. Speed Dating

Basic Structure: Students form two circles, one inside circle and one outside circle. Each student on the inside is paired with a student on the outside; they face each other. The teacher poses a question to the whole group and pairs discuss their responses with each other. Then the teacher signals students to rotate: Students on the outside circle move one space to the right so they are standing/sitting in front of a new person. Now the teacher poses a new question, and the process is repeated.

CONVER-STATIONS

Basic Structure: This is a small-group discussion strategy that gives students exposure to more of their peers’ ideas and prevents the stagnation that can happen when a group doesn’t happen to have the right chemistry. Students are placed into a few groups of 4-6 students each and are given a discussion question to talk about. After sufficient time has passed for the discussion to develop, one or two students from each group rotate to a different group, while the other group members remain where they are. Once in their new group, they will discuss a different, but related question, and they may also share some of the key points from their last group’s conversation. For the next rotation, students who have not rotated before may be chosen to move, resulting in groups that are continually evolving.

FISHBOWL

Basic Structure: A group of students sit facing each other in the center of the room; the remaining students sit in a circle around them. The central students have a conversation based on a pre-determined topic and often using specific skills the class is practicing (such as asking follow-up questions, paraphrasing, or elaborating on another person’s point). Students on the outside observe, take notes, or perform some other discussion-related task assigned by the teacher.

HOT SEAT

Basic Structure: One student assumes the role of a book character, significant figure in history, or concept (such as a tornado, an animal, or the Titanic). Sitting in front of the rest of the class, the student responds to classmates’ questions while staying in character in that role.

SNOWBALL DISCUSSION

Basic Structure: Students begin in pairs, responding to a discussion question only with a single partner. After each person has had a chance to share their ideas, the pair joins another pair, creating a group of four. Pairs share their ideas with the pair they just joined. Next, groups of four join together to form groups of eight, and so on, until the whole class is joined up in one large discussion.

THINK-PAIR-SHARE

Simply have students think about their response to a question, form a pair with another person, discuss their response, then share it with the larger group.

5-MINUTE INFORMAL WRITING

Give each student 5 minutes to think about and record their thoughts/responses to a specific question in preparation for discussion.

ROLES

In small group discussion, assign each student a role (ex. Scribe, taskmaster, spokesperson, timer, etc.).

THINK-ALOUD PAIR/TRIAD PROBLEM SOLVING

Divide students into groups of 2 or 3. Give each pair/group a problem to solve, a text (or image) to interpret, or a case history to discuss. Ask students to designate an explainer, a questioner, and a recorder. The explainer explains how to solve the problem, interpret the text (or image), or analyze the case. The questioner asks questions when the explanation is not clear or is incomplete. The questioner can also ask questions that might generate new or different explanations. The recorder records the explanation via writing notes and/or drawing diagrams. After 10 minutes, ask each explainer to present the explanation, using the recorder’s notes. As a follow up, you might discuss what types of questions were most helpful in refining the explanation, and why.

ROUND-TABLE

Students are separated into small groups and each group is given one piece of paper. Students will pass the piece of paper around the table and each write their response to a given question while simultaneously stating it aloud. This continues until all students have exhausted their ideas. These ideas can be used to stimulate either small or large group discussion.

JIGSAW

The teacher presents the topic to be learned and divides students into small groups. Each student is responsible for reading and summarizing part of the information on the topic. The student will present the summary of the information to the small group. Each student's part is essential just like all pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are necessary for the complete picture. Each student gets to become a teacher and the workload is divided and conquered.

TALKING STICK OR BALL

Only those with the talking stick/ball can speak during the discussion. The talking token is continuously moved throughout the students.

ROUND-ROBIN / TWICE AROUND

Students are separated into small groups. Each student is given 2 minutes to offer a prepared response to a specific question or problem. This continues until each student in the group has had the opportunity to share. On the second time around, each student has 2 minutes to rebut or accept others’ ideas.

SEND-A-PROBLEM

Each group member writes a review question on a card. They then take turns asking the group to solve the question. If there is a consensus on the answer, it is written on the back of the card. After all questions are answered, the card stack is sent to the next group, who repeats the process without looking at the first group’s answer until they have reached a consensus. Time required: 2-3 minutes per person for each group that works through the card stack.

CHALK TALK

A silent way to reflect, generate ideas, check on learning, develop projects, or solve problems, chalk talk uses either a chalkboard or a very large sheet of newsprint. The facilitator makes many pieces of chalk or markers available and explains VERY BRIEFLY that Chalk Talk is a silent activity. (No one may talk at all. Anyone may add to the chalk talk as they please.) Students can comment on other people’s ideas simply by drawing a connecting line to the comment. To start the facilitator writes a relevant question in a circle on the board, such as, “What do you know about Croatia?” or “How shall we proceed?” The facilitator can stand back and let it unfold or expand thinking by circling some ideas, writing questions about a participant comment, or adding his/her own reflections or ideas.