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ОПРАЦЮВАННЯ ДИСКУСІЙНИХ ПИТАНЬ

Teaching and learning are the two sides of a coin. There is much debate within the higher education community on how teaching and teaching effectiveness may be defined [3, p. 40]. For instance, Braskamp and Ory, define effective teaching as the “creation of situations in which appropriate learning occurs; shaping those situations is what successful teachers have learned to do effectively”. Centra J.A. defines effective teaching as “that which produces beneficial and purposeful student learning through the use of appropriate procedures” [5, p.42]. It can be assumed that good teaching is characterized by proper teaching method.

Exchange of ideas between several people is the best process of learning and teaching from one another. Depending on the nature of subject, number of students, and the facilities available, there are different methods can be used in the class.

Controversial issues are often included strategically as part of a teaching plan to help students to achieve desired learning outcomes. They are used to raise the complexity of an issue about which students may believe there is only one perspective. Controversial topics offer an unequalled opportunity to foster discussion in the class. The discussion thus far is based on the assumption that there is controversial and non-controversial material to be learned by students. A more useful way of thinking about controversial issues may be to accept that given the provisional nature of knowledge, it will be helpful for students’ intellectual development for all class discussion to be seen as controversial.

Discussion is thought to be a useful teaching technique for developing higher order thinking skills, skills that enable students to interpret, analyze, and manipulate information. Students explain their ideas and thoughts, rather than merely recount, or recite, memorized facts and details. During discussion learners are not passive recipients of information that is transmitted from a teacher. Rather, learners are active participants. As they interact during the discussion, students construct an

understanding about the topic [27]. In addition to developing thinking skills and constructing knowledge, discussion is an effective way to develop student attitudes, and advance student capability for moral reasoning [10, pp. 1423-1427]. In short, discussion provides opportunities for student thoughtfulness about the information received in class, and it requires students and teacher to develop a set of skills and dispositions that allow the discussions to take place.

Using discussions as a primary teaching method allows us to stimulate critical thinking. For effective discussion the students should have prior knowledge and information about the topic to be discussed. McCarthy, P. [20, p. 5] in his article “Common Teaching Methods” stated strengths of class discussion as “pools ideas and experiences from group, and allows everyone to participate in an active process”, Kochhar stated: “a problem, an issue, a situation in which there is a difference of opinion, is suitable for discussion method of teaching” [14, p. 347] .

Discussions allow students to process material in a way that promotes factual and procedural learning. Student participation in discussion enhances their ability to recall information. “Cognitive psychologists have demonstrated that long-term learning depends on the learner actively processing the material. Information that is not actively processed, but merely ‘recorded,’ is harder to retrieve from storage, less available for application to new situations, and more easily forgotten” [21, p. 245]. Another benefit of discussion is that it develops disciplinary procedural knowledge alongside of factual knowledge. A recent study of undergraduate biology majors shows that the use of peer discussion promotes “conceptual understanding” even among students who originally misunderstood the concept because peer discussion allows “opportunities for students to develop communicative and metacognitive skills that are crucial components of disciplinary knowledge” [25, pp. 122-124]. Simply stated, discussion allows students actively to engage materials in ways that promote both procedural and factual learning.

Used on its own or combined with lectures, discussion is an effective way to facilitate learning. Discussion can provide the instructor with an opportunity to assess student understanding of course material. In addition, by introducing their own observations and questions, students can explore ideas thoroughly. Most importantly,

discussions allow students to actively participate in the learning process. Learning is more interesting and students are often more motivated when they are actively involved in using the course material.

Class discussions offer students opportunities to test their ideas and opinions against the ideas and opinions of their peers. Discussion skills that students might learn include listening, clearly making claims, supporting claims with facts, helping a group move through obstacles, critiquing ideas and not individuals (keeping a high respect for human dignity), and developing together a shared understanding of the problem or issue [1, p.18; 19, p.33; 22, p. 28]. This is in line with Gage and Berliner who found that group discussions are an integral part of the life skills class. They are essential for building background on specific issues, creating motivation and interest, and giving students a forum for expressing and exploring new ideas and information. Group discussions help students learn to articulate their views and respond to opinions that differ from their own [13, p 87].

The findings related to the issue are also in line with Lowman who found that group discussion is one of the most widely used and valuable method in the teaching of life skills education [18, p. 52]. It represents a type of teamwork, based on the principle that the knowledge, ideas, and feelings of several members have great merit than those of a single individual.

Helping students to find respectful and culturally inclusive ways of dealing with controversial issues is an important part of university education and students' intellectual development. We expect that students will be able to recognize and think critically about various aspects of an argument, separating their own values, beliefs and emotions from its analysis and evaluation. Discussion engenders toleration of various viewpoints.

Discussion is almost a type of democracy and it is obvious that the process of dialogue, of exchanging ideas, is fundamental to a democratic society. If students can do it in this artificial environment [a class], then they will be able to continue those kinds of dialogues at their places of employment, at the dinner table at home, or in a public forum. And from that point of view the discussion is defensible!

Lastly, discussion activates thinking along the lines of self-evaluation; it is helpful in establishing an attitude of looking forward to progress and growth!

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