Practice & Reflect Annotated Example

Currently Teaching, Sample 1
Module 3D: Planning Effective Class Discussions

To plan for an upcoming discussion, I created specific in-class questions and prompts related to the content and used cooperative learning activities to increase student participation. In my New Literacies course (an undergrad Education course), I planned an activity called a "19th Century Blog." Each student was asked to take out a piece of paper and something to write with. Then I told them that they will have 2 minutes to respond in writing to a prompt, which was a quote from the reading. After the 2 minutes, they must stop writing--even in mid-sentence--and pass their paper to the person on their left. I gave them another 2 minutes in which they had to read the other student's response and write their own--add to it, agree, disagree, go off on a tangent, etc. This activity continued around the circle until the original person got his or her paper back. The trick was they could not talk during the activity. They could laugh, but they couldn't talk until the end, once their written conversation was completed. This "rule to the game" was key to the success of the activity because it effectively bottled up students' thoughts to the point where those thoughts exploded into conversation once they finally were allowed to talk. After a few minutes of small group conversation, I went to whole group share, in which each group shared their ideas and the other students responded and discussed. It was a lively conversation and almost every student had something to contribute. The level of the discussion was much deeper and students made connections to each other's comments, which had not happened in the past.

Students appeared to enjoy both the written and oral conversations that took place. One student who is typically very quiet shared in his small group and was encouraged by them to share his point to the whole class. It appears that was exactly the encouragement he needed because he did share with the whole class.

A challenge I had (and have always had) with planning effective discussions is how to grade them. I have a hard time keeping track of participation while also listening to and managing the discussion. I do have a participation/attendance grade on my syllabus, but after watching this module, I realize that I need to change it and make the grade and expectations for participation clearer. As I have it now, it's more like a fudge-factor kind of grade, which is not good! I have never had a student challenge me on their participation grade, and I think that's because it's so vague that there is nothing to go by except attendance. I like the idea of using a self-grading rubric and also using guided questions for the reading so that students know what to cull from the course reading or assigned homework.

Successes

- Names the technique and explains how it was implemented
- Describes what worked well
- Provides examples of student responses and/or reactions

Challenges

- Identifies any challenges encountered
- Explains what may have led to those challenges
- Provides examples of student responses and/or reactions

My next steps will be to use the self-grading rubric from this module. And I will introduce it to my class. I'll also share examples and non-examples of responses. I like it because it sets clear expectations not just for the quantity but also for the quality of student responses, which is way more important. I plan to introduce the self-grading rubric on the first day of class and also share some examples and non-examples of effective responses. I could even do a role play on the first or second day of class to get the point across.

Next Steps

Lists the next steps

Explains why you are taking these steps

Includes a time frame for implementing the next steps

Practice & Reflect Annotated Example

Currently Teaching, Sample 2
Module 3E: Facilitating Engaging Class Discussions

My favorite technique in this module is Hatful of Quotes. Because I already had a discussion planned for Thursday's class, I decided to try it out. I pulled six quotes from the reading and made enough copies for everyone to have one quote each. They each pulled a quote and moved into small groups with the same quote to discuss. After about 10 minutes of small groups, I brought everyone back, and we discussed the reading as a whole group.

The interactions in the small group were lively and almost everyone participated, even my quietest students. I did expect that because I have seen the impact of working in small groups. What really surprised me was the level of discussion in the large group. Students were really engaged and debating at a level I had not seen previously.

During the class, I had students talking directly to each other as opposed to me, which usually is the case. After the class, one student stopped by to say, "That was a great discussion! I hope we get to do that more often." Another said, "I learned a lot more about the reading in my small group."

I did encounter a challenge that happens in all discussions… the dominant talker! I noticed that one small group in particular had a hard time stopping one student from driving the conversation. She didn't let anyone else get a word in. She tried to take over the whole class discussion as well, but I used some of the techniques to try to divert her. I believe there are just some students who like to debate, and they don't necessarily see that they are overtaking a conversation. Although the structure of this technique limited her impact to one group, it did not alleviate it completely. One student in the small group completely checked out, although he did share in the large group. I also noticed a few students rolling their eyes when the dominant talker started up.

My next steps are to work with students to establish norms for discussion and include things such as how to respectfully disagree, make sure everyone has an opportunity to talk, etc. I'm doing this to build student skills to hold a small group discussion, so they are better able to manage the dominant talker themselves. I plan to tackle this in our next class session.

Successes
- Names the technique and explains how it was implemented
- Describes what worked well
- Provides examples of student responses and/or reactions

Challenges
- Identifies any challenges encountered
- Explains what may have led to those challenges
- Provides examples of student responses and/or reactions

Next Steps
- Lists the next steps
- Explains why you are taking these steps
- Includes a time frame for implementing the next steps

ACUE

Practice & Reflect Annotated Example

Currently Teaching, Sample 3
Module 3E: Facilitating Engaging Class Discussions

I implemented the technique of extending wait time and found it to be extremely successful. For each question I asked, I slowly counted to 30 in my head and checked to see how many hands were raised. For some questions, I waited even a little bit longer. I had many more students raising their hands and participating in the discussion. For students who want time to collect their thoughts before blurting out an answer or who are introverted, this allows them the necessary time to collect their thoughts and feel comfortable in what they have to say before they say it. While implementing this technique, I noticed the longer I waited, the more students put their hands up. I also noticed the responses were more detailed and well thought-out.

Although I did not encounter any challenges with this technique, I do believe there may be a point where the wait time just becomes uncomfortable and some students may start putting their hands down. I think students may begin to feel self-conscious sitting with their hand in the air, waiting to be called on. I also think some students may get frustrated with being the first with the answer but not being called on. It's important for instructors to send the message that they will provide multiple opportunities for students to "show what they know" and it's not a race to be first. It's important for instructors to judge the time carefully. I learned pretty quickly to judge the time better.

My next step is to establish wait time as a cultural norm in the classroom. I'll begin by explaining to students the purpose of wait time and establishing that I will call on various people to respond whether their hands are raised or not. I'll practice being comfortable with silence by counting seconds down silently before calling on a student, and I'll address students who call out directly by saying, "We're giving a little bit more time for everyone to pull their thoughts together." I've already talked to the students about my use of wait time, and they seemed to understand. My next step is to monitor my use and the impact on students. I will ask a colleague to come to a class next week and see how long I am waiting and how many students are raising their hands.

Successes
- Names the technique and explains how it was implemented
- Describes what worked well
- Provides examples of student responses and/or reactions

No Challenges Occurred
- Discusses possible challenges that may arise when using this technique
- Explains why these challenges may arise

Next Steps
- Lists the next steps
- Explains why you are taking these steps
- Include a time frame for implementing the next steps