Colorful Discussions

Koehle, Karl

From our readings in "Facilitating Online Learning" by George Collison.

Chapter 5 describes six "voices" in which an instructor can use to guide discussions, frame questions, or spur dialogue within the classroom. These approaches include:

- Generative Guide
- Conceptual Facilitator
- Reflective Guide
- Personal Muse
- Mediator
- Role Play

Which voice resonates with your current or most comfortable delivery method? Please describe which voice(s) would you consider adding to your "palette" to more effectively engage more students in your practice area?

Response

Having not taught online at this point, I am sure this may be different in an online environment. For now, however, I think the voice that most resonates with me is the Reflective Guide. I am all about letting students figure it out on their own with guidance from me, and I find myself often rephrasing what the students have said with emphasis on certain phrases or words that they have used. I think this really helps give students those "aha" moments that are so critical to our profession!

One that I am intrigued by is the Mediator. I have historically put an end to any minor disagreements that occur within my classroom. I am intrigued by the idea of "letting the debate happen" and seeing where it goes, if students may appreciate it more/figure it out on their own. I'm torn between wanting to keep total control of my classroom and wanting to let kids explore/figure it out on their own.

Reply   Koehle, Karl

In a mentor role, I feel it's my job to give feedback, and that includes an ongoing lens of opinion on how their work is progressing. It is difficult to sit back and "let things happen." I too am intrigued with the role of mediator for the same reasons you mentioned. In a studio classes where work is mostly completed by the individual, we seldom have lively discussions, and when we do discuss or critique, it's sometimes like pulling teeth to get everyone to contribute.

In the past I often taken on the role of "Personal Muse" as it is most fitting my personality, and find that students are more open for conversation.
The reflective guide would allow me to clarify the student's word choices and observe how they engage with the questions.

For me, the big take-away from these readings is to ask more open-ended questions, and allow more time for processing and delivery.

Response

Voice of a facilitator

Currently, I teach in a face-to-face setting. As I monitor and spark discussions in my class, the "Conceptual Facilitator" is probably the most comfortable to my delivery method. In mathematics, I find that students tend to forget key elements or concepts to solving problems. Through in-class discussions, I address the misconceptions, the missed concepts, and the overlooked elements.

I would like to add or improve upon my voice as a "Mediator" in discussions. Almost every math problems can be solved by different methods. I would like to spark more discussions where students talk about why they solved the problem the way they did. I want to be able to mediate the discussion to help students conceptualize that their way is not the only way!

Reflective Guide

I think I would say that right now I see myself using a reflective guide voice. Teaching 7th graders I feel I have to do a lot of steering the conversation or refocusing the discussion around specific/important topics. It's hard to believe but 7th graders can get quite off topic during a discussion so being that guiding voice for me is important.

As   stated, I would like to try to be more of a mediator but find it quite difficult to give up control and or watch the conversation wander outside of the realm of importance. I think if you had the right class, maybe a higher level 7th grade class could handle me just being the mediator?

Reply   Koehle, Karl

I think discussion, analogy and application to a real-world context) were very important, but completely *missing* from my high-school algebra math class. Having a teacher who used only one method of abstract delivery, really stunted the growth for this visual/kinesthetic learner. The "Chicago Math" series which continually changed subjects with little review of skills was not helpful either.
Many years later, I'm finding all the ways that I want to employ math in my work, but lacking those foundational skills.. some days I think it's just too late to catch up.
(Big thanks to #KhanAcademy for making this knowledge available.)

This video: BLEW. MY. MIND...!
https://www.khanacademy.org/science/electrical-engineering/ee-circuit-analysis-topic/ee-ac-analysis/v/ee-sine-cosine-from-rotating-vector   (https://www.khanacademy.org/science/electrical-engineering/ee-circuit-analysis-topic/ee-ac-analysis/v/ee-sine-cosine-from-rotating-vector)
"So *THAT is how* sine and cosine work!!"

FYI - For game design, much of the motions and descriptive shaders/textures are accomplished with linear algebra.

Reply   Koehle, Karl

I too feel reluctant about giving up control.
Where do you think this comes from? Extrinsically motivated, and trying to fit-in all the required content to fit curriculum learning objectives, or intrinsically motivated, and perhaps trying to keep the 'ducks in a row' so they do not stray into unknown territory, or get left behind?
The "what if" question is opportunity for divergent thinking, but can build momentum for distractions and derailing the daily plan.

Case in point -
In my junior year high school college writing course several of my classmates used a coordinated tactic of discussion diversion to delay tests. Taking turns, they would each bring up key topic the teacher found interesting.. and before long, another class period had lapsed.

Distractions can also be used for good, right?
I have found that it can be nerve-racking to let a student "drive" the teaching station for show-and-tell, but they almost always keep it on topic, and appropriate.
Can lending students "the stage" give them a voice and appreciation for what happens on the other side of the desk?

Response

Hearing Voices

I initially gravitated toward the **Personal Muse** approach because it most closely aligns with who I am as a person. That's important to me. Teachers, in my opinion, should engender trust through authenticity. I try to be the same guy in front of a class as I am at the dinner table because I think students respond positively to honesty. Therefore, a model that presents my own inner-dialogue to the scrutiny of a class appeals to me. It also gives me the opportunity to expand my own thinking in regard to any given topic.

While I shudder away from the notion of playacting, I do see some benefit in developing a **Role-Play** approach because I often share insights gleaned from personal experiences. This could allow counter-arguments from participants without concern for personal ownership. I could relate the experience of someone (not me) that would illuminate the concepts being discussed.