Leading effective discussion as a key active learning tool

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1. Introduction:

Leading effective discussion, which encourages involvement from all the students and promotes active learning, will be the main focus of my intervention. I will be examining the use of technology, clear allocation of discussion time and effectiveness of pair and group work during two sessions. My mentor's feedback and comments provided by students during an after-class, question and answer session, outlined the need for me to incorporate more active learning. The interviewed students showed interest in having more collaborative work in and outside the classroom, contributing to a more critical interaction with the learning outcomes.

The data was collected during two sessions, one taking place a month after the critical incident (at university) and one in the following week (online). To note - the only reason the second session took place online was due to the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 and its significant impact on our university.

STUDENT BODY

- 19 students
- Age: 22 – 64
- Multinational

35%   65%

2. Literature Review:

I have decided to incorporate Galloway's illustrative example of Mazur's peer instruction 'episode' and as Figure 1 outlines, posed a question - What are the key attributes to creating a successful branded content campaign. I have then incorporated Poll Everywhere (Figure 2), to give students the ability to answer individually, before moving onto discussion in pairs, followed by another vote and group discussion (2017). I was pleased to see all students engaging with the subject, enjoying using the technology and seeing their colleague's responses on the screen. Brookfield talked about encouraging the less outgoing students to participate, by allowing them more time to answer and for the teacher to be very mindful and help guide them through the process (2005). I also wanted to make sure the "discussion goes on", which was another important point made by Brookfield. The way in which I structured the follow up exercise, meant every student could further engage with the material and each other (2005).

The follow up exercise, which students described as "excellent and motivating" was Evaluation of Another Student's Work, as presented by Paulson and Faust (1998). I have incorporated it during my online session, by asking students to analyze and then compare and contrast two pieces of advertising. They had to submit the answers ahead of class to myself and one of their colleagues (whom I nominated for each person). The fellow student had to comment on their findings via email and then we discussed everyone's perspectives during the online sessions.

MENTOR

Alex incorporated the use of Poll Everywhere very successfully, allowing all students to engage with the subject matter. She should continue to use technology in her classes, however, should also focus on improving moderating group discussion. At times students got slightly lost in the amount of data shown on screen (via the Poll Everywhere reply function) and despite Alex trying to mitigate this by switching to a flip chart and narrowing down the answers, this could have been done more seamlessly. She demonstrated good understanding and use of active learning techniques (group discussion, pair work, app use), which in most part were delivered well and engaged the entire classroom.

4. DATA

3. Intervention:

During the first session following the critical incident I have primarily focused on incorporating group discussion, as positioned in Figure 1. I have created a series of questions, which the students had to work on independently, use Poll Everywhere to vote, then work in pairs and finally in groups. At the end of each segment (marked by a question) one of the students gave a summary of findings. This very focused approach to answering questions, gave each student an opportunity to participate and actively engage with the subject. I wanted to make sure the students stay connected to the subject, as we moved the classes online, as a response to the COVID-19 outbreak. To allow this transition to happen easily, I have emailed the students with a set of tasks to be completed ahead of the online session, which was then analyzed in pairs (offline) and during our online session.
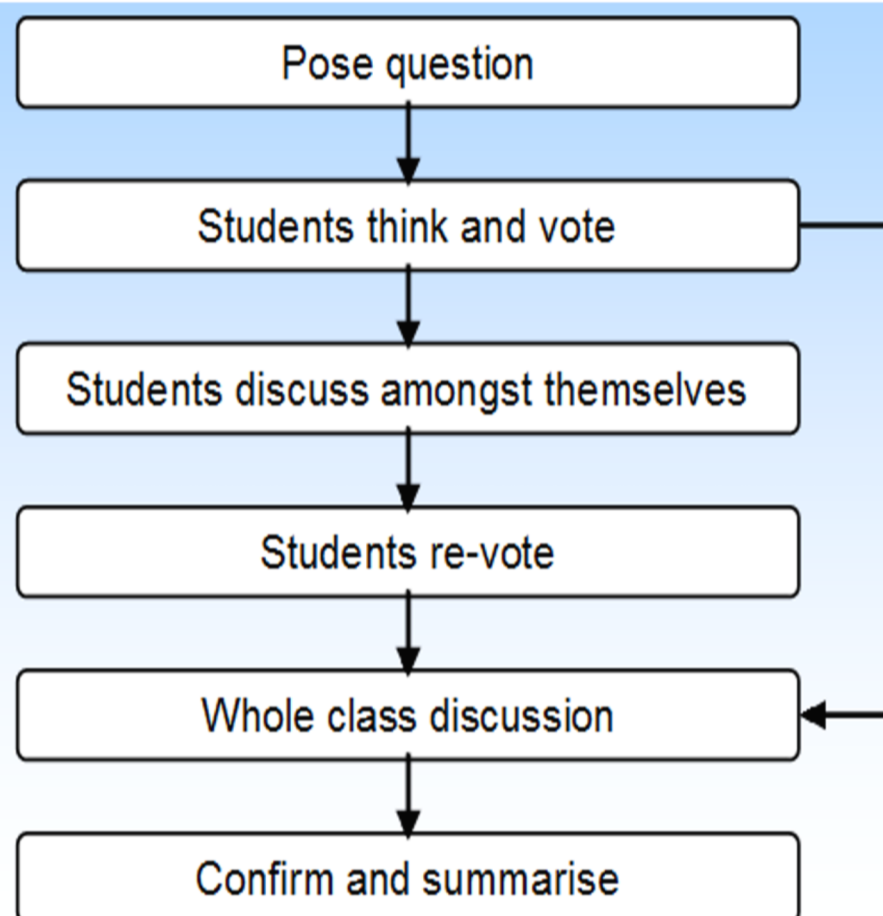

Figure 1

- Pose question
- Students think and vote
- Students discuss amongst themselves
- Students re-vote
- Whole class discussion
- Confirm and summarise

ⓘ Poll is full and no longer accepting responses

What are the key attributes to creating a successful branded content campaign?

"Good Casting"

"Actors"

"Clear Theme"
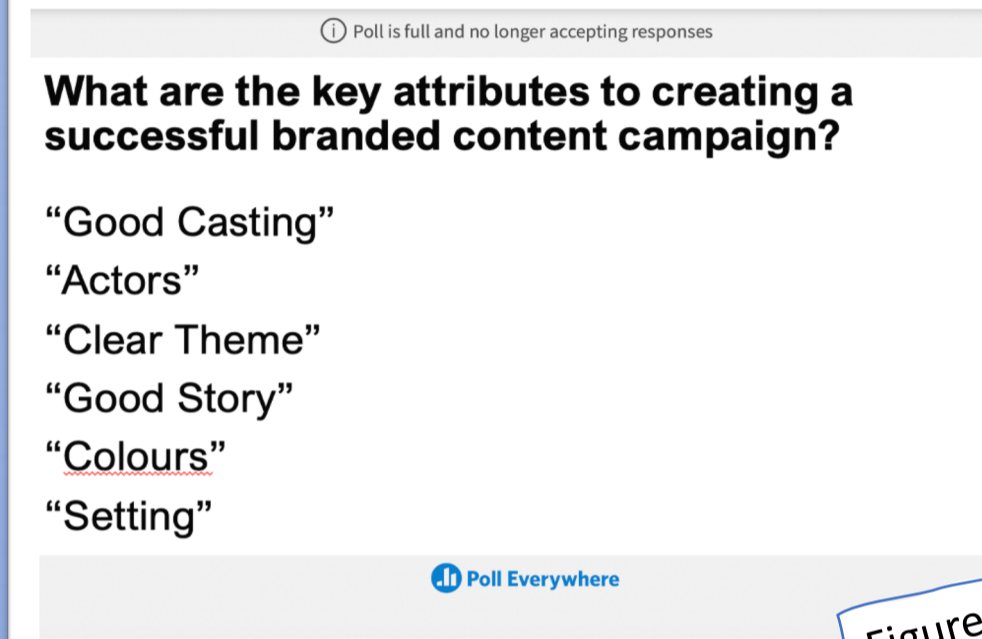
"Good Story"

"Colours"

"Setting"

Poll Everywhere

Figure 2

5. Conclusion:

Incorporating active learning into my teaching has been a gradual process. Being able to study different techniques and hearing feedback from my mentor and the students allowed me to create a set of exercises I am now able to modify and use in several sessions. I see a big improvement in student participation, mostly aided by using technology, such as Poll Everywhere and follow up in smaller groups, encouraging students to help one another. After repeated use of these techniques I have a newfound confidence in my teaching ability and will continue to explore new methods of active learning. Despite my initial struggle with effective carrying out of group discussion, I realized that appropriate and targeted questions, ability for students to think independently, before sharing their finding with the group and finally moderating the incoming answers, to assure full understanding of the subject, are essential in this method fulfilling its intended purpose of active learning. Combining it with a couple of interesting homework tasks, created a multilayered and more in-depth understanding of the subject.

STUDENTS

"Really fun and interactive session. I never used Poll Everywhere but it was super easy and meant we all had a say."

"It was interesting to see my friends take on my homework. I didn't think their feedback will be that valuable, but it was great and helped me better understand some parts of the question. It was also nice to know they had some issues with answering some parts, which we got to further explore during the online, follow up session with Alex."

MY COMMENTS

"I really enjoyed incorporating this structured approach to discussion and adding the use of Poll Everywhere. I have to be careful not to overuse technology and get better at controlling the group discussion and its outcomes, to assure students good understanding of the subject and fulfilling the planned lesson's learning outcomes."

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