



Teaching Dialogue

The **Teaching Dialogue** method combines brief theoretical and practical inputs with targeted questions and guided discussions. Rather than relying on one-way instruction, learning is constructed through dialogue, creating a shared exchange between the lecturer and the students. Communication is primarily taking the form of questions and answers, encouraging students to participate actively in the learning process.

(Meyer & Stocker, 2018, p. 1)

Why Teaching Dialogue?

The Teaching Dialogue method can be applied across disciplines and teaching formats, offering multiple benefits for students. It can enhance:

- Students' retention and depth of understanding
- Students' intellectual development, including greater tolerance for ambiguity
- Students' sense of belonging and engagement in the classroom
- Student attendance, which tends to increase dramatically when lecturers use questioning techniques compared to traditional lecture formats

(Wright & Onufer, 2022)



Preparation of Teaching Dialogue

- **Understand the material thoroughly:** Know the material well and understand its key components.
- **Define core concepts:** Identify what students must understand.
- **Create a clear structure:** prioritize key ideas; drop less important points if needed.
- **Plan key moments:** introduction, transitions, and closing.
- **Prepare guiding questions:** Design purposeful open questions which foster meaningful responses and reactions. Use layered questioning: start broad, then probe deeper. Certain questions should be planned word by word in advance such as
 - **Introductory questions** to get the dialogue started
 - **Transitional questions** to move from one sub-topic to the next
 - **Concluding questions** to consolidate the learning and reach a broader significance or theoretical level

(Welty, 1989)

Guidelines for Teaching Dialogues



Recommendations when asking questions

- Ask only one question at a time.
- Wait for responses in silence (at least for three seconds).
- Ask open-ended questions (such as “how” and “why”) instead of narrow yes/no questions, as they foster a more positive classroom climate and encourage greater participation by allowing for multiple valid responses rather than focusing solely on factual correctness.
- Avoid rhetorical or leading questions. A good question does not suggest that the lecturer already has a ‘correct’ answer in mind.
- Encourage critical thinking rather than testing factual knowledge, avoiding purely reproductive questions such as ‘What does the author say about...?’
- Anonymous audience response tools (e. g. Mentimeter) encourage whole-class participation without pressuring individual students to respond.



Options when reacting to answers by students

- Take note of contributions without immediate comment.
- Affirm and rephrase contributions.
- Ask for clarification or greater specificity, for example by requesting a more precise formulation or an illustrative example.
- Organize ideas by assigning them to categories, either verbally or in writing.
- Provide an overview by summarizing key points.
- Relate contributions to one another by highlighting connections.
- Return contributions to the group as a prompt for further discussion.



Options when being asked questions by students

- If a question is unclear, restate it before answering (“If I understood you correctly...”) and, if helpful, clarify with an example.
- Open the question to the group instead of always answering it yourself immediately.
- If a question leads off track, you may want to write it down visibly and indicate that you will return to it later.
- If you cannot answer a question, acknowledge it and note it down (“I’m not sure about that right now.”).

(Meyer & Stocker, 2018, p. 1-2; Welty, 1989; Wright & Onufer, 2022)



Process

- **Cultivate a Supportive Environment:** Foster a classroom atmosphere that encourages open communication. Create a safe space where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas and asking questions.
- **Leading through questions:** Guide the discussion toward the intended insights using both participants' contributions and your subject expertise. However, keep in mind that the Teaching Dialogues cannot be planned in every detail and requires a high degree of flexibility and improvisation. You may want to start the Teaching Dialogue with clear learning objectives to provide direction.
- **Develop solutions with students:** Students develop and discuss solutions with the support of the lecturer by the lecturer calling out questions and reacting to the students' (partial) solutions and giving support, including short inputs.
- **Establishing links to prior knowledge:** New content is linked to students' existing knowledge to support understanding and long-term retention.
- **Consolidating key concepts:** Lessons may conclude with a review and summary of the key concepts to consolidate learning and reinforce the main takeaways.

(Karlsruher Institut für Technologie, n. d.)

Sources

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