

Survey Responses  
Pam Grossman

Selected responses from a survey given to students to get feedback on unit on discussion.

During the past 4 weeks, we've engaged in a number of activities around discussions of literature, including the use of Yvonne Hutchinson's CASTL materials, the videotape of a student-led discussion, the enactment of a class discussion on "The Yellow Wallpaper" facilitated by your peers, in addition to readings, and your own efforts to try out a discussion-related strategy in your classroom.

**1. What did you learn about leading discussion in English classrooms in the course of this unit? What new insights occurred to you? What did you learn about role of teachers in a discussing? Roles of students?**

I believed that the main concept I learned was that discussions don't magically happen in the classroom. There is a significant amount of preparation required for a fruitful discussion to take place. I found it surprising to note how much student writing goes into preparing for discussion and having something valuable to say. I was surprised and relieved to discover how little teachers need to talk during a real classroom discussion. The students should do the majority of the talking. It was also interesting to note how certain notes are assigned in discussion, how those roles rotate. It never occurred to me to gather information about class activities in this way. I see how useful and beneficial that would be. (2003)

Discussions need to be scaffolded. Students need to practice specific skills & task before putting it all together in a discussion. Teachers have to help students learn how to be active contributors & active listeners. Use the text to find supportive evidence, build off each others' comments - all of these processes I thought were intuitive actually need to be scaffolded & taught before teachers can expect student to use them. Observations & reflection are 2 great tools to do this! (2003)

Through this unit I learned how intricate and calculated a teacher must be to scaffold students in discussion. During Hutchinson's video, it occurred to me that a lot of the effectiveness of a discussion is based on the "behind the scenes" preparation work, such as making text, anticipation guides and having students generate their own questions. I also learned that an indicator of successful discussion is when the teacher no longer is a part of it.

I hope to one day have my students lead discussion on their own!  
(2003)

There are a lot of concrete strategies for leading discussions. Don't try to introduce too many discussion strategies at once. Remember to debrief not only content, but also process of discussion. Teachers are more necessary at beginning of year, but can really change the tone/direction of a discussion so that students instantly rely on you instead of on one another. (2004)

It takes time. Students are not going to engage in meaningful discussion right away. There are various elements needed to be incorporated in terms of scaffolding for discussions. The role of teachers comes first. I personally must prepare to engage students in scaffolding (effective) activities. There needs to be modeling done. Students will then begin to discuss, as well as understand the significance of discussions. (2004)

It is easy to feel like you have to be the one in front of the class leading discussions, but there are many ways to get students involved. Good discussions involve scaffolding—it's a process. There needs to be a balance of questions specifically about the text and those that get beyond the text (thinking about levels of questions). (2004)

Students can discuss on their own!  
Teachers need to do a lot of scaffolding before trying discussions  
I'm intrigued by having students learn from watching videotapes of themselves discussing  
It is important to have a good question, although it's also good to have students generate their own questions.  
Discussion can be more productive if students are not just regurgitating the plot of the text. (2004)

**Of all the different materials and activities we used, which were most influential in your learning? How did the materials/activities affect both your thinking about discussion and your ability to lead discussions?**

My question about preparing students for discussion (the last one on our handout) was very beneficial. I believed that we all have this image of what we want our class discussions to work like. That is the end result. Yvonne Hutchinson's materials showed how to get there, the process involved in getting that point. I found that these materials empowered me in leading discussions and thinking about them. Watching everything unfold broadened my

ideas of what is possible with my kids and gave me an opportunity to practice what I learned. (2003)

The video & resources materials on Yvonne's website there's nothing better than watching someone else do it. The video raised my expectations for the quality of discussion my students are capable of - made me realize there is much the teacher needs to do in terms of scaffolding, setting norms, using strategies to encourage participation - without being too dominant in the discussion (2003).

I think watching the video and witnessing the conscious effort Hutchinson places in having quiet students take made me realize how important it is to have all students' voice heard. I know that I should also take that advice.

For me, being a facilitator during the "Yellow Wallpaper" made me realize what power the role of the facilitator has in steering the discussion. I also learned that a discussion is as good as the questions posed! (2003)

I enjoyed and learned a lot from the small group discussions we had about the Hutchinson video. It was good to view the highlights of the video and discuss the different issues it raises. Practicing on our own class was helpful as well—seeing the principles in action and experiencing the pitfalls and successes of leading the discussion. (2004)

Leading the discussion of Yvonne in smaller groups. Coming up with questions about "The Yellow Wallpaper." Most of the activities made me consider how to give students more responsibility in their own paths to discovery. (2004)

Small group discussions/reciprocal teaching of Yvonne's strategies because we linked Yvonne's practice to our own and also practiced leading discussions. (2004)

Planning for my class's discussion and talking to many different people about how to do it (Pam, Christa, my CT). the non-video files on CD Rom were helpful—i.e. metacognitive chart, anticipation guide, etc.

-- Video way too long

--Best activity was our C&I discussion the day we turned in our papers—discussion as class was helpful, and it was nice to break into small groups and take turns leading discussions. It helped me

to revise my discussion strategies for the future and learned how well other strategies worked for people. (2004)

**What specifically did you learn from our investigation of Yvonne Divans Hutchinson's materials? How can you see using what you learned in the future?**

I've actually tried a few of her strategies on my students last week. I made a point of not having my loud students dominate the conversation. So at several points during the discussion, I state to my loud students, thank you for your participation, but let's have some of our quiet students speak. I also love the anticipation guide, because it warms up students to the major issues and ideas they'll come across in the text. (2003)

I learned some valuable and plausible methods for me empowering student to engage with a text. I will certainly use the anticipation guide. I'd love to make it a standard portion of my curriculum. In addition, I will use the small group discussion that I used in my strategy. I'm intrigued by the classroom scribe idea a well. There are manifold benefits to using that. I'm worried about time, though. I'm not sure there will be enough to do it regularly. ~~What~~ What is regularly, though? Did Yvonne Hutchinson do this daily? Weekly? (2003)

\*Anticipation guide to promote active reading, call on prior knowledge, pique curiosity

\*Pair shares, students calling on other students, soliciting responses from quiet students to get total participation

\*Setting norms for types of acceptable responses - warranted & plausible

\*Allowing for thinking time: scaffolding discussions, steering it back to text

\*I want to use all this, but I recognize the importance of implementing these strategies/ideas early in the year in order to see real progress in my students. (2003)

I learned about anticipation guides, discussion norms, annotation, seminar discussions. I can see myself using all of it. (2004)

The use of the anticipation guide...how to get students "into" a text. To not be afraid to set up a classroom for discussion. (2004)

Useful tools—anticipation guide, rules for discussion, marking text

I used a different questioning scheme in my classroom and Yvonne's materials might inspire me to use student generated questions for discussion. (2004)