Facilitating Online Discussions

Definition:
Online discussions stimulate critical thinking, challenge students to think deeply, and are a great way to establish rapport.

Guiding Question
What can I do to facilitate robust online discussions to show that I value and appreciate my students’ contributions

Online Discussion in Action

**Set the Stage**
- Plan and prepare to accommodate different learning preferences.
- Create a comfortable, non-threatening environment.
- Provide structure and clarify co-created NORMs and expectations.
- Get to know your students and the skills and perspectives they bring to the discussions.
- Communicate the importance of the discussion to success.

**During Discussion**
- Use verbal and nonverbal cues to encourage participation—refrain from answering your own questions.
- Show respect for all comments and questions.
- Create balance and integrate student responses into the discussion.
- Summarize major ideas brought up and write them down.
- Combine discussions with other methods.
- Provide collaborative structures to ensure equality in sharing time.

**What to Do When Discussion Stalls**
- Make a challenging or proactive assertion.
- Allow students to gather thoughts and analyze in writing.
- Pose a new question.
- Draw connections to the real world.
- Summarize or ask students to summarize.

**After Discussion**
- Analyze what you learned about how best to approach the topic.
- Take notes on how the discussion went and use it as the basis for reorganizing your plan for the discussion.
- Rethink the material you included and how you presented it.
- Develop new ideas for future teaching and research projects.
- Rethink, retool, and revise.

Discussion Tech Tools to Try

**Padlet**: This is an interactive posting or “bulletin” board you can use to build community with students by collecting and commenting on anything from documents, posts, ideas, or web links. Teachers can have up to three padlets free of charge. Users can add links, YouTube videos, files, images, and more to Padlet notes.

**Parlay**: Parlay is a discussion-based learning tool and global community of educators who are re-imagining class discussions for the 21st Century. Socratic Seminars allow learners to engage in structured conversations about complex topics and challenges their ideas through active questioning. Students develop and build upon ideas of peers without being put “on the spot.”

Additional Resources

- 7 Strategies Designed to Increase Student Engagement in Synchronous Online Discussions Using Video Conferencing
- 5 Ways to Use Padlet in your Classroom
- 8 Ways to Use Parlay in Distance or Hybrid Learning