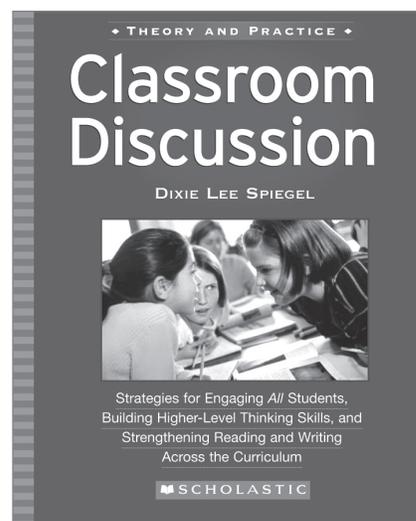


A Study Guide for
Classroom Discussion
by **DIXIE LEE SPIEGEL**



One important way to use this book is to discuss the ideas in it! To support this kind of discussion, the author has designed a detailed plan for a Professional Study Group that can be implemented without outside help. You and your colleagues can share the role of leader, or one person can assume that role. Be sure to check with your school district about providing participants with Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for completing this plan.

The plan is made up of four two-hour meetings, plus time for reading chapters in this book and for carrying out classroom-based “homework” assignments. Meetings might take place twice in the fall and twice in the spring, with time between sessions for you to try out ideas. The plan assumes that participants teach at several grade levels, but it can be easily adapted for participants who teach at one grade level. Because there is so much small-group discussion, it can be used with groups as large as 50, although about 25 participants is ideal.

Each session is divided into five sections:

- **Preparation by the Participants** explains what group members need to do before coming to the session, such as chapters to read from the book and, after the first session, homework that should be completed.
- **Leader’s Materials** lists what the designated leader needs to bring to the session.
- **Goals** suggest purposes and aims for each session.
- **Suggested Outlines** present activities designed to help you meet the goals. They are “lesson plans” of sorts. As with all lesson plans, you should adjust them as you go, giving more time to some activities, eliminating some altogether if you determine the group does not need them, and adding other activities. The outlines are bases from which to start.
- **Homework** recommends classroom-based activities to prepare for the next session. You may choose activities other than the suggested ones, but for this plan to be meaningful, participants should be encouraged to try out discussion strategies between sessions.

Session 1: What Is Discussion? Why Is It Important? and What Is My Attitude About Using It in My Classroom?

Preparation by the Participants

1. Read Chapters 1 and 2 of this book.
2. Try the Listening In activity on page 34. Bring your draft of a discussion checklist (described in “Listening In” on page 13) to the study group.
3. Always bring your book to the sessions. You may need to refer to it.

Leader’s Materials

Chart paper, markers, masking tape

Goals of Session 1

1. To develop a commitment to use discussion in the classroom
 - a) to reflect upon personal attitudes toward using discussion
 - b) to explore the benefits of discussion
2. To seek solutions for barriers to effective discussion
3. To explore the nature of true discussion
4. To prepare for effective discussion in the classroom
5. To practice effective discussion strategies

Suggested Outline

The Leader may do the following:

1. Make introductions as needed, provide an overview, and work with participants to establish the expectations for the study group and, if applicable, review the requirements for earning CEUs. (15 minutes)
2. Have a U-Debate (see page 67) to explore attitudes toward discussion in participants’ classrooms, addressing goals 1, 2, and 5 above. (30 minutes)
 - Have participants do quick writes (page 97), jotting how they feel about using discussion in their classes. To indicate their initial attitudes toward using discussion in their classrooms, ask participants to rate themselves on a scale of 0 (most negative) to 10 (most positive). (3 minutes)
 - Seat participants according to their assessment of their attitudes. Make a quick tally of the ratings. (2 minutes)

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- Discuss the benefits of and barriers to discussion and possible ways to overcome the barriers. (20 minutes)
 - Have participants change seats as their attitudes change per the U-Debate format.
 - Have everyone quick write a second time, reflecting on how their attitudes changed during the discussion and rating themselves again. Make a tally of the second ratings and use this information to plan the next three sessions. (5 minutes)
3. Explore the nature of true discussion, addressing goals 2, 4, and 5 above. (20 minutes)
 - Have participants meet in small groups to discuss and combine checklists that they generated for the Listening In activity. Have them combine lists into one comprehensive list divided into “essential” and “desirable” characteristics of a true discussion. (15 minutes)
 - Ask each group to share its checklist with the entire group. Develop a class chart labeled True Discussion. (Note: You will need to provide a copy of the chart to each participant shortly after Session 1, for use on homework assignment 2, below.) (5 minutes)
 4. Develop a set of discussion questions to help students reach a curricular goal, addressing goals 4 and 5 above. (30 minutes)
 - Organize participants into grade-level groups and have them develop a set of sequenced questions to help students reach one curricular goal, following the models on pages 25 and 26. The participants might use the sections on Getting Discussion Started in the different disciplines (Chapter 2) to help select appropriate questions. Each participant should leave the group ready to use the questions in his or her classroom. (See homework assignment 2, below.)

Homework

1. Read Chapter 3 of this book.
2. Before the next study group session, provide time for discussion in your classroom, following the guidelines on pages 39–41. You will probably wish to combine this activity with assignment 3, below. Be prepared to discuss your experiences in Session 2.
3. With your students, use the sequenced set of discussion questions developed in Session 1. Use the class chart on True Discussion from activity 3 to evaluate how well the discussion went. Bring the chart to class.
4. Have your students do at least one of the following activities. For the activity they choose, write up a “lesson plan” to show how you prepared for the activity, developed it, and followed up. In addition, reflect in writing on what went well and what didn’t. Be prepared to discuss your plan during the next session.
 - Form at least one Buzz Group (page 31).
 - Have your students complete a Discussion Web (pages 32–33).

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- Do the Listening In activity on page 34.
 - Initiate a discussion using the Semantic Webbing activity (page 49).
 - Try out the Fishbowl technique for discussion (page 51).
 - Use Response Journals to prepare for discussion (page 55).

Session 2: Preparing for Discussion

Preparation by the Participants

1. Do the four homework assignments from Session 1.
2. Bring your curriculum guides, standard course of study, or other documents describing the curriculum for your grade level.
3. Always bring your book to the sessions.

Leader's Materials

True Discussion chart from Session 1, chart paper, markers, masking tape

Goals of Session 2

1. To reflect upon the discussion strategies from Session 1, homework assignment 3, which asked participants to identify issues and solutions to problems
2. To continue to reflect upon the nature of True Discussion
3. To collaborate on ways to prepare the classroom climate for discussion
4. To practice writing good questions for discussion
5. To practice effective discussion strategies

Suggested Outline

The Leader may do the following:

1. Have participants reintroduce themselves if needed and provide an overview of Session 2. (5 minutes)
2. Discuss the activities participants used for homework assignment 4, addressing goals 1 and 5. (25 minutes)
 - Divide participants into small groups according to which homework activity they completed. (Those who tried Fishbowl work together, those who tried Buzz Groups work together, and so on.) Have each group discuss what worked well and what problems they encountered. (15 minutes)

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- Use the jigsaw procedures (page 81) to form new groups made up of one member from each of the first groups. Members of the second groups report to each other the results of the first discussion. In this way those who did not try an activity will learn its benefits and potential problems. (10 minutes)
3. Revise the True Discussion chart based on what the participants have learned about discussion since the last session, addressing goal 2. (5 minutes)
 4. Collaborate on ways to prepare the classroom climate for discussion, addressing goals 3 and 5. (40 minutes)
 - Have participants select one of the following goals: (1) creating a spirit of inquiry, (2) developing teacher trust of students, (3) developing student trust of the teacher, (4) promoting student trust of peers, or (5) enhancing student trust of self. Reorganize groups according to goals and have participants identify several guidelines for reaching these goals in their classrooms. Write the guidelines on a chart and make copies for the participants. (30 minutes)
 - Ask each group to share its chart. (10 minutes)
 5. Write questions for a curriculum topic, addressing goal 4. (35 minutes)
 - Divide participants into grade-level groups and have each group identify one curriculum goal and follow the steps on pages 77–79 to write an application-level question and a set of prep questions, addressing goal 4. (35 minutes)

Hint: After the group identifies a curriculum goal, each participant may write an application-level question to propose to the group. In this way each participant brings something to the discussion. Similarly, after one application-level question is selected, each participant may write several prep questions and share them.

Homework

1. Read Chapters 4 and 5 of this book.
2. Use the grouping strategies from pages 71–77 to form small discussion groups. Be prepared to discuss any problems and successes you encounter.
3. Have your students do activities from at least two categories, below. For each activity bring a one-paragraph reflection about the experience to the next session.
 - Preparation:
 - Background Knowledge Quiz (page 60)
 - List-Group-Label (page 61)
 - Exclusion Brainstorming (page 63)
 - Expectation Outline (page 64)
 - K–W–L Strategy (page 65)
 - Planning Chart for Whole-Class Discussion (page 66 and Appendix 5)

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- Follow-Up
 - U-Debate Forum (page 67)
 - Preparing Students:
 - Putting It All Together (page 81)
 - Journals (pages 82–83)
 - Discussion Planning Sheet (page 83 and Appendix 6)
 - Developing Guidelines for Discussion (pages 83–84)

Session 3: Facilitating and Following Up on Discussion

Preparation by the Participants

1. Complete the three homework assignments from Session 2.
2. Always bring this book to the sessions.

Leader's Materials

Chart paper, markers, masking tape, one blank Discussion Web for each participant (Appendix 1)

Goals of Session 3

1. To explore participants' experiences with grouping
2. To explore participants' experiences with preparing students for discussion
3. To provide participants an opportunity to initiate discussion and get answers to their questions
4. To practice strategies to facilitate discussion

Suggested Outline

The Leader may do the following:

1. Have participants reintroduce themselves as necessary and provide an overview of the session. (5 minutes)
2. Share experiences with grouping, addressing goal 1 (homework assignment 2 from Session 2). (30 minutes)
 - On a chart, list grouping problems along with solutions. Make copies for the participants.

Hint: The Leader might want to use the List-Group-Label strategy (page 61) for this discussion, which will help participants focus on big ideas rather than on isolated problems.

3. Share reflections on preparing for and following up discussion, addressing goal 2 (homework assignment 3 from Session 2). (20 minutes)
 - Divide participants into groups according to the activities they completed. Have each group use Steps 1–3 of Discussion Webs (pages 32–33) to determine whether the activity was effective or not. (Note: Although the activity is usually done in pairs, it can also be done in small groups.) (10 minutes)
 - Post the webs around the room and give participants the opportunity to read each one. (10 minutes)
4. Ask the participants if they have questions or concerns about discussion that have not yet been dealt with in the study group. Engage the participants in a whole-group discussion of these questions, addressing goal 3. (30 minutes)
5. Practice strategies for facilitating discussion, addressing goal 4. (25 minutes)
 - Divide participants into small groups and tell them that they are going to engage in a discussion based on a relevant question that you give them. Assign the same question to all groups, or give a different question to each group. For example, the school may be considering new policies, or there may be specific grade-level issues that need exploration.
 - Assign participants roles and have them review their roles (5 minutes):
 - Tally Master (page 91)
 - Discussion Leader (page 92)
 - Connector-Extender (page 95)
 - Clarifier (pages 95–96)
 - Have each group discuss the assigned question. (15 minutes)
 - Have the group then talk about the effectiveness of the assigned roles for facilitating discussion. (5 minutes)

Homework

1. Read Chapter 6 of this book.
2. Have your students do at least one of the following activities. Reflect in writing on what went well and what didn't. Be prepared to discuss your activity in class.
 - Semantic Webbing (page 97)
 - Mini-Lesson on Shaping an Idea (page 98–99)
 - Mini-Lesson on Continuing Thinking After Discussion (pages 102–103)

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- Reflection Journals (pages 104–107)
 - Thinking Charts (page 108)

Session 4: Assessing Discussion

Preparation by the Participants

1. Do the two homework assignments from Session 3.
2. Always bring your book to the sessions.

Leader's Materials

Chart paper, markers, masking tape

Goals of Session 4

1. To explore participants' experiences with facilitating discussion
2. To discuss a discussion curriculum and design assessments
3. To provide participants with an opportunity to make rubrics for assessment
4. To provide participants an opportunity to initiate discussion and get answers to their questions
5. To practice strategies for facilitating discussion

Suggested Outline

The Leader may do the following:

1. Explore participants' experiences with facilitating discussion (homework assignment 2 from Session 3). (35 minutes)
 - Divide participants into small groups according to the activities they completed for homework and have them answer the questions "What was the greatest benefit of this activity" and "What was the greatest drawback?" (15 minutes)
 - As a whole group, use Semantic Webbing (page 97) to create two charts, one for benefits and one for drawbacks. Start by having each group share their discussion points, but allow additional information. Be sure to cluster the ideas into larger concepts, as specified in the webbing guidelines. (20 minutes)
2. Present a discussion curriculum and design assessments, addressing goals 2 and 3. (60 minutes)
 - As a whole group, explore the Discussion Goals Checklist (Appendix 12). Have the participants add or delete goals as they see fit. (15 minutes)
 - Discuss the qualities of an effective rubric for assessment. (5 minutes)

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- Divide participants into grade-level groups to prepare an assessment rubric for one major category listed on pages 118–123 (Preparation, Focus, Purpose, and Engagement, etc.). For example, third-grade teachers might prepare an assessment for Interactions while fifth-grade teachers might focus on Levels of Thinking, since, presumably, their students are more sophisticated readers.
 - Collect and photocopy the rubrics and distribute them to all participants. (5 minutes)
3. Discuss topics initiated by the participants. Ask if they have questions or concerns about discussion that have not been dealt with in the study group. Engage the participants in a whole-group discussion of these questions, addressing goal 3. (25 minutes)