

The background of the slide features a row of classical columns, likely from a government building, rendered in a blue-tinted, slightly desaturated style. The columns are arranged in a perspective that recedes into the distance. A dark blue rectangular box is superimposed over the upper portion of the image, containing the main title in yellow text.

What I learned about Discussions from 400 hours of Classroom Discussion

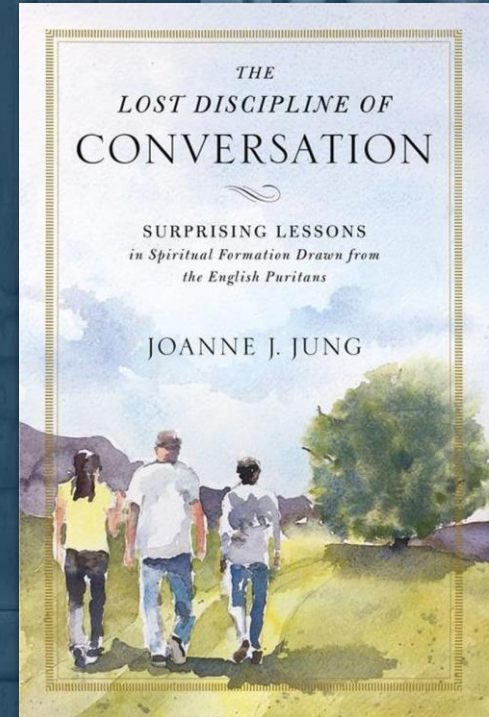
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Why Discussion?

1. We want students to love God by loving truth and the pursuit of truth. We want them to be able to pursue truth well.
2. We want to train students in careful reading, deep thought, disciplined curiosity, organized argument, articulate speech, and active listening.
3. “The one who does the work does the learning”
(Exeter)

Why Discussion?

“Over the centuries, our conversations have suffered a decline in meaningful dialogue, intentional engagement, and selfless attentive listening, especially in matters of a spiritual nature. We have settled for quick exchanges when the selfless presence, attentive listening, and thought-filled words of a sustained conversation would better meet the needs of the soul. We are in need of a recovery.” (Joanne Jung, *The Lost Discipline of Conversation: Surprising Lessons in Spiritual Formation Drawn from the English Puritans*, 18)



1. Tailor your discussions to your purpose

The form of the discussion should flow from a clear objective.

- A. Identify an objective
- B. *Students engaging meaningful texts in intelligent substantive discussions that demonstrate virtue [and include the teacher as a co-learner (not equal)]*
- C. Know your students and objectives – method follows

2. Culture is key

- A. The most important ingredient is a culture that understands and loves in-depth discussions on topics and texts as the expression and formation of Christian fidelity.
- B. Frequent clear communication of nature of and expectation for classroom discussion
- C. Model what you expect
- D. Students should feel valued and challenged by the person of the teacher
- E. Feel/atmosphere matters (scholé)

3. With Structure less is more

A.To an extent

B.What we call discussions matters

C.You want students who regulate themselves

D.Make them look organic and effortless

E.Make the grade as invisible as possible in the discussion

4. With frequency, more is more

A. Frequent low-stakes discussions will benefit students far more than tightly organized and high pressure discussions.

B. Frequent formal and informal feedback

- 1. During the discussion (mostly informal)**
- 2. After discussion (formal / not numeric)**
 - a. Exit ticket self-evaluation**
 - b. Summative and formative qualitative feedback**

5. Teach that the text is the teacher

1. In discussion, the text must be king. Other issues are interesting, but students must be pushed to interact deeply and consistently with the text.
2. One text, or at least only texts common to every student.
3. Require references to the text
4. Everyone should be checking references
5. Question but do not disrespect the text

6. Success depends on questions

A. Four Categories:

1. Questions that begin a discussion
2. Questions that push a discussion deeper
3. Questions that get broader involvement
4. Questions that end well

A. Learn by practice

B. Questions are a lantern not a stick

Questions that begin a discussion

A. Should be open ended with broad significance

B. Should be tied to a text

C. Focus on curiosity more than formula

D. Should interest you as the teacher

E. Should be focused and clear

F. Should lead to a deeper understanding of the text

Questions that advance the discussion

First affirm what was good, then . . .

A. Invite elaboration

B. Ask for clarification / distinctions / illustrations

C. Request textual support

D. Investigate motivations

E. Reword and cross-check

Questions to broaden involvement

- A. Have each student prepare / share a question
- B. Take turns opening discussion
- C. Register opinions on a position
- D. Directed handoff (a bit softer than a directed question)
- E. Ask low-risk questions
- F. Assign a specific task (Vocab checker)

Questions that end well

A. Effectiveness of this will depend on the discussion

B. Ask a student to summarize

C. Ask each student for a key observation

D. Ask a question related to significance

7. The table setting makes it a feast

- A. Provide definitions and key historical contexts.
- B. Anticipatory observation can go a long way depending on text and class.
- C. If the text is particularly difficult, provide students with a summary of the text and ask them to evaluate the summary using evidence from their reading to prove their assessments. (“It seems to me that the author is Do you see any evidence for or against this position?”)

8. During discussion do something

- A. Avoid eye contact
- B. Maintain a degree of mystery
- C. Body language is a form of formative feedback
- D. Your writing should not be visible to students

9. Hobgoblins or false fiends

- A. Silence is often good
- B. Honest confusion (affirm and coach)
- C. Emotions are good
- D. Contentious topics
- E. Assertive personalities (If it is not sinful do not squash it)

10. Fool's Gold and False Friends

- A. Dead-end contributions
- B. Side chatter
- C. Contradiction bloodhounds
- D. Chronological snobbery
- E. Cold callers
- F. Chatty chipmunks and Whac-A-Molers

Virtues of the Classroom

Fidelity

Initiative

Humility

Toughness

Integrity

Diligence

Zeal

Courage

23 A PSALM OF DAVID

1. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.
3. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

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