

Discussion Moves that Foster Critical Inquiry, Curious Exploration, and Collaboration

Pursuing inquiry by asking thought-provoking questions is perhaps the best way to move dialogue forward in critical, curious, and collaborative ways. Such questions can help elicit more insight from students, call up additional perspectives, and effectively engage disagreeable views in a productive manner. Below are a variety of “discussion moves” questions that instructors can model, and students can practice as part of class dialogue. Consider providing students with a list of possible questions and encouraging them to practice using them. You can also explicitly ask someone to use a question at a given moment of a discussion; this can even be framed in a fun way, such as “It’s time for a ‘move us forward’ inquiry question. Who can ask one?”

Basic Critical Questioning Protocol

Stephen Brookfield outlines four basic questions that can ground critical thinking and guide inquiry and dialogue in fruitful directions:

- What assumptions do we hold about the topic, issue, or situation under examination – particularly concerning what counts as legitimate knowledge as we have defined it?
- How can we check these assumptions out for accuracy and validity?
- What alternative perspectives, explanations, or interpretations can we bring to bear on this topic, issue, or situation?
- What conclusions can we draw, or action should we take informed by our critical analysis?

Moves that Identify Assumptions

- What is one of the assumptions of this idea or perspective?
- When I’ve heard this before, I’ve thought it means X. Do we think this assumption fits here?
- What cause and effect relationship do we see at work in this idea?
- I can see a few assumptions behind this perspective, such as X, Y, and Z. Which of these seems most likely to you? Which seems least likely?
- What’s the most accurate assumption we can find in this idea or perspective?
- What do you think is the most explicit assumption being made here?
- What word, phrase or concept used do you think indicates an assumption underlying this perspective or idea?

Moves that Seek Evidence

- What is one of the conclusions of this perspective or argument? What’s the most convincing piece of evidence provided to support it?
- What is one piece of evidence supporting this view that you find most persuasive or convincing and why?
- What is one piece of evidence supporting this view that you find least persuasive or convincing and why?
- Of the various ideas or arguments we have made, which ones are most clearly grounded in evidence from our course readings?
- If you were to convince a skeptic of the validity of this perspective/argument/research, what evidence would you select to try and convince them?

Moves that Generate Multiple Perspectives

- What if we considered this issue from another perspective such as X? What would it look like if this were our starting point for analysis?
- How do you think author X or someone with perspective Y would approach this issue?
- Let's imagine we've never heard this view before or read anything about it – where would we start in learning about it?
- Let's imagine the most unlikely, even off-the-wall, ways of understanding this issue – what would they be?
- Which perspectives seem to be missing in our discussion? What might our discussion look like if these voices were here?
- What would happen if we considered different data concerning this issue?
- What are some other examples we could give regarding this idea or issue?
- Is there an idea, data source, or other factor that you think has been excluded here? Why do you think this is?
- What are some other options or factors available to us to explore this issue or solve this problem?
- What questions or issues have been raised for us today?
- What remains unresolved or contentious about this issue?

Moves that Elicit More from Students

The following questions can be used to elicit more insight from students or challenge them to articulate a more robust idea or argument. These can also be adapted as redirect questions to bring other voices into the conversation.

- What assumption are you making that you feel most confident about?
- What assumption are you making that you feel least confident about?
- What is a good example of what you are talking about?
- What do you mean by that?
- Can you explain the term you just used?
- Can you explain why you think your conclusion is accurate?
- How do you know that?
- What data is that claim based on?
- What does the author or text say that supports your argument?
- Where did you find that view expressed in the text?
- What evidence would you give to someone who doubts your interpretation?
- What evidence do you have that you feel most confident about?
- Can you put that another way?
- Why do you think this is true?
- What do you think you might be leaving out?
- What do you think X would say about your analysis?
- What do you think you may have missed?
- What is a different way of presenting that argument?
- Whose work or views might you have ignored?