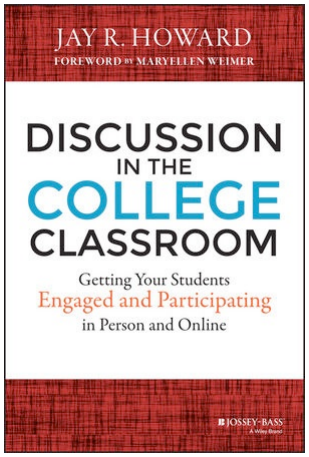


Discussion in the College Classroom: Getting Your Students Engaged and Participating in Person and Online

Howard, Jay R.
Wiley, John & Sons, Inc., 2015

Book Review

Tags: classroom discussion | discussion | student learning

Reviewed by: Rob O'Lynn, *Kentucky Christian University*
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A single-frame cartoon rests on the upper right-hand corner of my university office door. A professor stands before a full room of students; the board behind her is full of lecture material, most likely a quantum mechanics equation based on the arrows and lines. She is smiling from ear to ear having finished, saying to herself, “That was a great lecture.” Across from her sit her students. They are wide-eyed and, collectively saying to themselves, “I am so confused!” The caption underneath declares it all: “Great Moments in Teaching.” I can hear the collective groaning even as I type.

I would like to think that I am becoming a good professor. Not just a good professor, but an effective professor, one who is shaping the minds of future leaders. Many professors would like to think that of themselves. That is why many are in the noble profession of education. The question is, then, are teachers effective in the classroom?

Jay Howard’s *Discussion in the College Classroom* opened my academic eyes to be sensitive to teaching better. I had fallen into the trap similar to that of the professor in the comic – I assumed that because there were no questions the students had listened to and processed everything that I had said. Howard calls this “civil attention,” something that the author claims has become common in college classrooms across the country.

According to Howard, the current generation of college students are good students who want to show respect to their faculty members. They do this by quietly checking their Twitter feed, reading the latest Reddit forum, or watching a Vine post from one of their friends. They will laugh in the right places, answer the patented questions correctly and perform well on our

rubric-based tests not necessarily because we are the sensational sages that we think we are but because they have learned how to beat the system at its own game – civility receives an "A."

Howard has an antidote for this type of dilemma – figure out your students, how they learn and process information, and then guide them in discussions in ways with which they can effectively engage. As many writers have mentioned, teachers need to become partners in the educational journey. The difference with Howard is that he has mounds of data to back up this assertion. What the book lacks is practical application for contemporary classroom contexts (only the final chapter offers any actual advice on bettering a teacher's discussion abilities).

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