

Appendix 4:

Breaking Ranks in the Middle

Text-Based Discussion Guidelines

Purpose: The purpose of a text-based discussion is to “enlarge” understanding of the text, **not** the achievement of some particular understanding. Multiple perspectives create broader understanding and present possibilities for new insights and meaning.

Organization: Provide each participant with a copy of the text (be sure that page numbers appear on the copies) ahead of time so that all participants have time to thoroughly read the piece. Encourage them to highlight passages and jot down notes about what they’re reading to share during group discussion. Very large groups should be organized into discussion groups of 8–12 participants to allow for deeper discussion than is generally possible in large groups. Each small group should appoint a recorder to capture the main points of its discussion for reporting out during a large-group debriefing session. Allow the small groups to discuss the text for a certain amount of time (for *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* texts, this could be 45 minutes to an hour, depending on the text). At the conclusion of small-group discussions, reconvene as a large group to discuss the points made in small groups. Use chart paper to record the major points made by each group. The facilitator/leader calls for small-group reporting in a rotation of one point per group at a time...sharing the larger understandings and remaining questions discussed by each group.

Here are several possible formats to assist faculty groups in processing the information they have read:

- **Jigsaw Reading.** Individuals are assigned different parts of a larger article or chapter and take notes or highlight important passages. Expert group members share that information with home team members so that each member of that team puts a piece of the “jigsaw” together, forming the basis of holistic understanding of a topic. Listeners may ask clarifying questions. A recorder takes notes for the group.
- **Popcorn.** Everyone reads the same passage. When reading is completed, individuals are given a prompting question (e.g., What new question or insight are you left with? What action are you considering taking after having read this text?) Participants “pop up” to share responses, sitting down as soon as they have completed their thought. Responses may be recorded on chart paper to be further processed or discussed.

- **Think-Pair-Share.** This is a cooperative learning strategy, which allows participants to think about a question, idea, or issue independently, and share their thoughts with a partner before discussion in a small group. The strategy allows participants to share their thoughts in a nonthreatening situation and involves all members of a group rather than the more confident, articulate few. The opinions of all members of the group are valued. The focus is on short-term, purposeful talk.

Ground Rules:

- All comments should be based on specific quotes from the text. Use page and paragraph line numbers, and wait until everyone has found the quote. Then the speaker reads that quote out loud.
- Listen actively and ask questions. A good text-based discussion is an inquiry into meaning: What did the author mean? What does the text mean to you? What do you think the text might mean to others? What are the implications of this text for ...?
- Emphasize clarification, amplification, and the implications of ideas. Ask each other questions about what you're reading. Don't be afraid to say what you don't understand in the text, or what you disagree with.

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