

Leading Class



When you teach, try these tips for improving class participation.

BY ROBB JONES
Curriculum Development

Brother Johnson asked the Gospel Doctrine class a question. There was a long silence that seemed to make him and the class members uncomfortable. As the stake Sunday School president observing the class, I noticed that just as some class members were about to comment, Brother Johnson answered the question and went on to another part of the lesson.

This can happen in Church classes as well as in the teaching in our homes. I have learned that two things are essential to encourage class discussions: (1) ask questions with more than one possible answer and (2) give class members adequate time to search for or think about an answer.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

Asking the right types of questions can lead to good class discussions. Church manuals are filled with carefully crafted questions designed to encourage class members to search the teachings for answers or to ponder and apply what

they have learned.

You can ask questions that will require students to search the scriptures or the words of the latter-day apostles and prophets for information. Here are two examples of search questions based

on the teaching suggestions in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*: “Study the section beginning on page 52. What has the Savior done so we can become joint heirs with Him?” and “Review the section beginning on page 211. What did Joseph Smith teach about the significance of having a physical body?”

Other questions ask class members to think about the meaning of what they have read or to apply to their lives what they have learned. These questions are usually asked after class members have become familiar with the lesson material. For example, after asking the search questions above, you could ask the following questions to help class members think about and apply what they have read: “What are ways we can show the Lord our gratitude for His atoning sacrifice?” or “How can understanding the significance of having a physical body affect the way we care for our bodies?”

Wait for Student Responses

Regardless of the questions you ask, give class members adequate time to search for or think about the answer. Students will learn to answer questions if they know that you will not answer the questions for them.

Discussions

After my experience in Brother Johnson's class, I decided to keep track of how long teachers waited for a response after they asked a question. I found that most teachers waited only two or three seconds, though when I asked them, they thought they had waited much longer. Students, on the other hand, told me they needed more time to think about their answers.

In an attempt to help teachers get more class participation, I encouraged them to count silently to 20 after asking a question, giving the class time to ponder. They learned to say things like "I'll give you time to think" or "Would you please ponder this question, and then I'll ask for responses." As teachers in my stake began to do this, class participation increased and class members felt the Spirit as they began to "teach one another" (D&C 88:77).

I attended a class in which the teacher gave class members over two minutes to ponder a question related to the application of a gospel doctrine. For me it was a time of quiet reflection. I felt the Spirit and gained some insights about the doctrine that I probably would not have learned without those moments to myself. This particular experience helped me understand that giving class members time to ponder a question gives them time to think more deeply and to listen to the Spirit. (See 3 Nephi 17:1–3.)

Your class or family can enjoy similar spiritual experiences during discussions if you use open-ended questions and then give everyone time to ponder before responding. ■

STUDENTS' RESPONSES INVITE THE SPIRIT



"Creating an atmosphere of participation enhances the probability that the Spirit will teach more important lessons than you can communicate.

"That participation will bring into their lives the direction of the Spirit. When you encourage

students to raise their hands to respond to a question, while they may not realize it, they signify to the Holy Ghost their willingness to learn. That use of moral agency will allow that Spirit to motivate and give them more powerful guidance during your time together. Participation allows individuals to experience being led by the Spirit. They learn to recognize and feel what spiritual guidance is."

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "To Learn and to Teach More Effectively," *The Religious Educator*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2008, 6.

