

Using pre-work to welcome diverse voices and structure the discussion

Jane Mansbridge uses student reading responses to structure a tight discussion and ensure that different voices are heard

Featured faculty: Jane Mansbridge

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Class: DPI 216: Democratic Theory (Spring 2016), 30 graduate students

IGNACIO QUINTANA, HKS STUDENT: Jane, in order to give equal weight to different voices in the class, does something that I've never seen a professor do, which I think is fantastic. We have to write a reading response to her in an email, 3-400 words, once a week or so.

JUAN RIESCO URREJOLA, HKS STUDENT: She will give you back your reading response and she would say, among all the points that you wrote, x y and z are the most interesting, so I would ask you to articulate this argument in the slide 27.

[Classroom footage]

JANE MANSBRIDGE, PROFESSOR: And I tell people, look I'm circling this and I want you to more or less use these words because you have been very concise. I don't want you to waste the time of the class, I want you to not wander on about this.

WEI LUO, HKS STUDENT: It's a very useful tool for structuring at different important points what we should talk about as a group. It's also very useful I think for bringing in people who usually would not speak.

JUAN: She's giving you time to prepare and to articulate your comment or your answer in a way that is going to provide the class something that is well-prepared and well-thought. In a class where 60-70% of the students don't have English as first language, it is super useful to know what you have to say and when you have to say, in order to articulate and to be sure to communicate in the best way you can the idea to be efficient to the class discussion.

IGNACIO: The way she gives voice to everyone, shared voice the way she takes everyone's comments and makes something out of them or puts them in the right perspective, actually sort of erodes your biases a bit. I've felt that way, I mean I've felt that I was paying more attention to everyone, not just to the ones that I would naturally listen to.

CHINA BOAK TERRELL, HKS STUDENT: There's always a personal kindergarten pride that comes with seeing your name next to a particular idea and being acknowledged to make your contribution. That is fabulous because it's validating.

MANSBRIDGE: We all know that when we produce something, we take ownership of it and we care about it more, and we invest ourselves in it more. So even when you're just producing words in a class, they're your words, they're not Jenny Mansbridge's words, they're your words, you've thought about them. You then in a way almost remember the whole class around your ideas and so it's very important that there be some of your ideas in the class, and that's part of what discussion does.

