

Discussion Strategies: Beyond Everyday Conversations

Book Information: *David Kehe and Peggy Dustin Kehe.*

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Discussion Strategies is a textbook for teachers who want to create student-centered lessons where the students, NOT the teachers, are the ones who are doing most of the talking in English. Kehe and Kehe have designed a compact intermediate level book that coaches students in the art of discussion. Students first work in pairs, groups of three, and finally each student is faced with the ultimate challenge of leading a discussion with a group of six people. In order to achieve that final goal students are introduced to a wide variety of discussion strategies such as using rejoinders, soliciting more details, and interrupting others during a discussion. One of the strong points of this book is that it offers students multi-skill activities within small supportive groups, which helps to motivate students to participate more.

Regarding the content of this book, it has been my experience that interest levels are easily maintained throughout the year for two simple reasons: students are able to change partners every week, and the textbook contains intriguing articles based on real events and actual research findings that have been reported in *The Japan Times* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Students seem to be especially interested in reading about the following topics: why short people live longer, stress, superstitions, smoking, and getting fat.

Most units start off with a keyword/expression box, which is then followed by an instruction section, a short article, a factual question/answer section, and finally a reaction/opinion section. The activities in this book basically revolve around one person (Student A, B or C), reading a short article, while the other two students occasionally interrupt to ask questions. For example, in Unit 12 *Is it ever O.K. to tell lies?* student A reads and then asks six factual questions, which serves as a verbal comprehension quiz for students B and C. Student B then reads their own unique article while student A and C listen carefully without taking notes. During this time the instructor is free to squeeze their way in between the groups to monitor their progress and keep track of the time. Occasionally, I have to stop the class to remind speakers to have more eye contact, project their voice, enunciate more, use pauses, hand/facial gestures, and the appropriate key phrases of that unit. Regarding the latter point, some of the more advanced students have

pointed out that they are able to have a discussion without using the key words and expressions for that chapter. However, other students have made positive comments about the clearly defined key words and expressions that are systematically found at the beginning of the unit.

At the end of each unit Kehe and Kehe have provided some additional exploratory reaction questions that can be used to allow students to break away from the textbook and exchange personal stories and opinions. At the end of the class, I remind students which unit to do next for homework and what pages students A, B, and C should do. I have found that students are generally willing to do their homework since it is not overly taxing and can be completed in less than 20 minutes.

Instructors are not required to prepare any lectures or handouts; instead most of the instructors' time will be spent introducing and reviewing various discussion strategies, organizing groups, joining discussions briefly, and offering friendly reminders to students. Generally speaking, in one 90-minute class, I have just enough time to take attendance, practice the new phrases, and divide the students into pairs or groups. In the highly unlikely event that there is extra time left over, pages 211 to 220 give instructors additional tips and guidelines regarding extending activities, suggestions for specific units, and evaluation. Most instructors will find that the activities in each unit give students ample opportunities to work on their reading, listening, and speaking skills.

As the class progresses further into the book new strategies are introduced and earlier ones are reintroduced which gives students more chances to internalize what they are learning. Without a doubt, students and teachers will need time to learn how to navigate through this uniquely designed book with its multiple sub-sections within units.

Over the course of a year, it is rewarding to see the shy students gain more confidence in speaking and the active talkative students learn to become better listeners.

Reviewed by *Manfred Delano Cannegieter*

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