Original Research Paper

English

A SUCCESS STORY- STRUCTURAL METHODS TO ENABLE BRAINSTORMING AND IDEA GENERATION IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS

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ABSTRACT The researcher, as a Communication Skills trainer, observed that normally in any communication skills classroom environment, the facilitator/ supervisor/teacher is faced with the challenge of teaching the students to participate in group discussions and debates by speaking on various topics. In order to speak effectively, the student must have a comprehensive backup of ideas, thoughts, and expressions on the given topic. For this, the student is asked to generate ideas by brainstorming the topic. This is easier said than done. Existing brainstorming theories do not address the problem of providing a standardised, uniform, and systematic method of dealing with general group discussions. The studies fail to provide a systematic, step-by-step guide to idea generation. Therefore, the practical application of brainstorming remains a challenge. The researcher tries to develop a standard set of methods to deal with idea generation in general group discussion and conversation environment. The mind needs a strategy/ strategies to facilitate sorting of random thoughts, views, observations, to further organise them in a cohesive, composite and logical unit. For this purpose, the researcher formulated certain methods to enable the students to focus on the topic in a sequential manner. The study was conducted upon graduate students of a University. The researcher's methods made idea generation systematic and uniformly dispersible in a regular classroom situation. The study was disseminated through classroom teaching.

KEYWORDS : brainstorming, group discussions, idea generation, communication, speech methods.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General aim: The aim of the study was to enable average graduate students belonging to various fields, to generate ideas and develop a systematic approach to handling group discussions and debates. This technique would enable students, employees, and trainees to organise and present their ideas and information and develop effective communication skills.

Specific Aim: to develop strategic, structural, systematic and sequential brainstorming methods.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sampling, data collection and experiment. Disseminated through classroom teaching and observation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A classroom sampling was carried out in a class of 50 B.Sc Agriculture/ Forestry First semester students. They were told about brainstorming on topics in group discussions and were given a topic and specified a time limit. It was observed that just five to ten students came up with points, and the rest could not develop and put forward discussion points on the given topic. Also, the students who did come up with points were not able to synchronise and connect ideas as a whole. The students were then given a framework or a structure/ s as to how thoughts and ideas can be generated by aspects based introspection, or a strategic approach.

DEMONSTRATION OF ASPECT BASED STRUCTURAL APPROACH:

1. In the classroom students are given a topic "The Problems of Youth in India". The students are given some time to think but are not given some tangible road of thought to follow. In this case, the mind will generate a number of ideas, but the cohesiveness and interconnectedness of the ideas remain a challenge. Therefore how to make a student generate so many points that he can speak at length for a few minutes, and that too speak in a sequence?

EMPLOYING THE STRATEGIC APPROACH:

The approach structure may be one of the following:

1. Chronological.

This implies thinking on a topic in a time sequence as in,

a) Discursive chronology-
A simple presentation /examination of the past, present, and future of the youth problems, i.e. problems in past, present and future- just in discursive or presentation form.

b) Comparative chronology - similarities and differences
In this case, youth problems are not discussed but compared to find similarities and differences. (Example- youth problems vs. adult problems/ youth problems in past vs. present/ youth problems in India Vs. Other countries/ youth problems in Rural vs. Urban areas and so on)

2. PROBLEMS- CAUSES- IMPLICATIONS METHOD
This approach deals with the problems of the youth, the causes and the implications.

3. Problem- solution method This approach deals with the problems and solution method of approach.

4. Pros- cons Approach (advantages/disadvantages)
This approach is based on idea generation by focussing only on one aspect, the negative and positive aspects of youthdom in general.

6. Story telling method When, where, why, how, something happened to youth. Story telling through examples.

7. Aspectual Method
Exploring the various aspects of a topic. Any topic will have certain angles or aspects to brainstorm. Like:
a) Social aspects
b) Political aspects
c) Economical aspects
D) Religious aspects
e) Cultural aspects
f) Philosophical aspects
g) moral-ideal aspects

For example: what are the social aspects/angles to youth issues? How is society impacted by it? (Students talked about the positive impacts negative aspects) Is there a political aspect to youth problems? How do you think of economic problems of youth, how do youth issues emerge out of our culture? How do the youth problems impact our existing culture? Is ideology or morality causing youth problems? What are the moral problems of a youth?

PROCESS:

As soon as the topic is assigned to students for brainstorming, they are told to choose any one of the above explained methods. The students then begin noting down the topic on paper. In this way, they are forced to focus on the topic.

A student might combine more than one method for an exhaustive study of the topic, and depending on his capabilities for complex thinking. The time taken was 20 min.

It was observed that this structural method enabled the students to develop points in a sequential manner. It saved time needed for thinking and helped them focus on one approach at a time and come up with the best possible approach for the topic. It also enabled them to visualise the points, as they were written down. Speaking thus became easier and qualitative speaking material is generated in the form of ideas. .

The teacher was thus able to disseminate the technique of brainstorming in the classroom and get positive results. More study on

this structural approach to brainstorming will immensely help in improving the debating and group discussion skills of students.

Appendices:
Sample brainstorming sheets:

SAMPLE SHEET1

SAMPLE SHEET 2