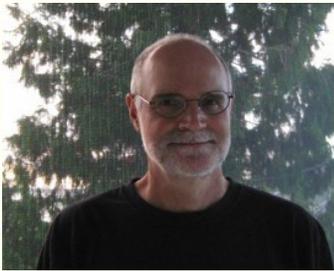


Research: Want Your Students to Seem More Likeable? Teach Them Follow-up Questions

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Most of us have been fortunate to have had an occasional super-star student in our classes. These are students who seem to easily and effortlessly engage in conversations with you (the teacher) and other students no matter what country they come from. When the super-stars are in small-group discussions, their groups always seem to be active and involved with each other, often smiling and laughing.

If we closely observe these super-stars, we notice that, in many cases, they are using a conversation technique that makes them appealing interlocutors: they ask a lot of questions, and especially many follow-up questions.

Interestingly, there is research which supports the idea that people who ask more questions are actually more likeable and make a more positive impression on others during a conversation. And best of all, this is a technique which we can easily teach our students.

Karen Huang and her research team at the Harvard Business School analyzed more than 300 online and face-to-face conversations between people getting to know each other. In one study, participants engaged in a 15-minute conversation with a randomly- assigned person. Some of the participants were told to ask a lot of questions (at least nine) and others were told to ask few questions (less than four). After the conversations ended, the participants told the researchers how much they liked their conversation partner. The results showed that the people who asked more follow-up questions were

References

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considered more likeable.

A second study looked at the effects of asking follow-up questions at a speed-dating event involving 300 participants. The researchers analyzed the number of questions and follow-up questions that the participants asked and found that the people who asked follow-up questions were more likely to be asked for a second date.

It was pointed out that the aim is to have a dialog, not just a police-style interrogation. In essence, this means listening to someone's answer and asking a follow-up question about it.

After reviewing the studies, NPR's (National Public Radio) social science correspondent Shankar Vedantam concluded, "This is a learnable skill, and it's a skill that is useful to learn."

Indeed, it is. The link below leads to a set of exercises that is designed to not only help students develop this technique, but also to let them experience the positive effects that it can have on them. Briefly, there are three steps:

Step 1: Students are introduced to the technique by working individually with model conversations.

Step 2: In a "Student A / Student B" format, pairs practice the technique in a structured exercise.

Step 3: Together, each pair writes 5-10 questions about any topic(s) they want.

Step 4: Each student is matched up with a different partner. Each new pair reads their questions and asks follow-ups to each other.

This process has been used with students from over 30 countries and has always had the same results: The volume of voices rises and the smiling and laughing increase as students progress through the steps.

Feel free to print these out to try with students. <https://commonsense-esl.com/2018/01/01/want-your-students-to-seem-more-likeable-research-says-teach-them-follow-up-questions/>