

fy our own views but also to listen critically and to shift our own point of view in light of other ways of seeing the world.

To see how inquiry and persuasion work together, consider what happens in an ideal class discussion. Suppose an instructor gives students an open-ended discussion question such as, "Why doesn't Hamlet rush to his revenge?" or "To what extent was Louis XIV a good king?" If no one proposes an answer, no conversation takes place: Students simply wait in embarrassed silence for the instructor to tell them what to think. If everyone simply asserts his or her own initial opinion, the conversation stops after each student speaks. Productive discussion occurs only if students are willing to support their views with reasonable arguments and only if these arguments differ in fundamental ways so that students begin seeing "all the available means of persuasion." Soon students begin shifting their initial views, influenced by others' arguments, and find new and better positions to which they can commit themselves. As can be seen in the following list, the rhetorician's view of a productive conversation matches the criteria for effective class discussions established by researchers who study critical thinking:

CRITERIA FOR AN EFFECTIVE CLASS DISCUSSION

- Students challenge one another for reasons and examples.
- Students offer counterexamples, counterinstances, and counterarguments.
- Students piggyback on one another's comments.
- Students identify the function of their comments (e.g., "I would like to comment on A, add to B, or disagree with C").
- Students view themselves as scholars discussing worthwhile materials.
- Students search for and present relationships between the subject under discussion and other relevant school subjects and outside experiences.
- Students relate the specific subject under discussion to more general principles.
- Students ask relevant and sequential questions.
- Students don't take things for granted, but ask for justification.
- Students ask for clarification (e.g., "What do you mean?").

—Source: Matthew Lipman, Paper Presented at Connecticut Critical Thinking Conference, 1985.

For Writing and Discussion

Working in groups, construct your own view of what constitutes a good class discussion. To what extent does your vision of a good class discussion match the criteria listed by Matthew Lipman? What advice would you give teachers and fellow students for improving the effectiveness of class discussions?