Increase Participation with Think-Write-Pair-Share

Do students give you blank looks when you pose a provocative question?

There could be many explanations for this behavior: shyness, low confidence in speaking English, or fear of saying something stupid in front of their peers and teacher.

The Think-Write-Pair-Share approach to class discussions can increase participation (or help you identify why a question is confusing). Pose a question to the class and give students time to think and write notes individually for 2-5 minutes, then have them share their answers with a partner for 2-5 minutes. Finally, ask specific pairs to share main points in a whole class discussion.

Think-write-pair-share allows students time to gather their thoughts and find necessary vocabulary. This is important for non-native speakers of English, but it also benefits native speakers who are unfamiliar with the specialized language of the course. The Think-Write-Pair-Share technique also gives students an opportunity to rehearse their answers with each other before speaking in front of the class. Teachers can quickly gauge the class's level by walking around the classroom to peek at students' notes and listen in on the pair conversations. With Think-Write-Pair-Share, the whole class is engaging with the question, not just the four articulate students who do 75% of the talking in a class discussion. (That’s the average for a class of 40 students!)

Think-Pair-Share follows the same steps as above, minus the writing component. Instead, you give the students a shorter time to think about the question and then have them share their thoughts with a partner.

Affinity mapping is a variation to Think-Write-Pair-Share. After you pose your question or problem to the class, have students write notes on small pieces of paper one thought per slip of paper. Then in pairs, silently sort the pieces of paper into categories. In part two of the pair-work, students discuss the labels for their categories or why they arranged the ideas in the way they did. Finally, the teacher calls the whole class together to compare answers and sorting schemes.