Inviting Students into the Conversation with Collaborative In-Class Debates

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(Lewin & Wakefield, 1983)
Overview

• Part I: Why?
  – Brief review of some of the merits (and potential pitfalls) of in-class debates

• Part II: How?
  – Different types of in-class debates
  – Description of what I did in my class (and what I would do differently next time)

• Part III: Discussion
Part I: Why Debate?

- Highlights the role of conflict and constructive disagreement within the discipline
  - Emphasizes the notion that readings (e.g., journal articles) are not “information” but arguments

- Encouragement of a critical thinking disposition
  - Openness to multiple perspectives
  - Recognition of the complexity of the topic at hand
Why Debate?

• Development of information literacy, argumentation, and other higher-order thinking skills
  – Assessing the credibility of sources
  – Recognizing inconsistencies
  – Evaluating evidence
• Remember that you will need to prepare strong arguments for your own side, as well as responses to the arguments you can expect to hear from the opposing side.
• You will want to find empirical evidence that supports your position and present this evidence in a compelling way.
• You will also want to find empirical evidence that supports the alternative position and look for weaknesses or holes in that evidence.
• You should also examine your own evidence for weaknesses that will be pointed out by the other side, and prepare a defense.
• There is a lot to think about, which is why you have a team of other people to work with!
E.g., Gregory & Holloway, 2005
Why Debate?

- Development of perspective-taking & social skills
  - Ability to “cognitively step into the shoes of another person” (Zorwick, 2016)
  - Listening skills
  - Cooperative problem-solving within the team
Why Debate?

• Development of oral communication skills
  – Many undergraduates have little opportunity to practice their oral communication skills
  – Debating can increase speaking ability and confidence
  – Requires students to think on their feet
“Debating is the ultimate multi-task school activity since it involves research, writing, speaking, listening, and teamwork.”

Part II: How?
Some Different Types of Debate

• Four corner debate
• Role-play debate
• Think-pair-share debate
• Meeting-house debate
In-Class Debates in PSY326

• Teams of 4 to 5 students; students chose week/topic, but were assigned to either the affirmative or negative position

• Were given some help to get started
Example (Debate 1)

• Proposition: It is possible to know someone better than they know themselves.
  – Definitions: to “know someone” means to understand their behaviour and decisions

• To get you started:
Choosing Topics – Some Advice

• Propositions should have at least 2 sides that can be reasonably supported with evidence
  – Simple propositions, complex arguments

• Be relevant to the course material and (hopefully) interesting to the students
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• A different person should be assigned to each speaking role (if possible)

• Must work effectively as a team to prepare for a strong debate performance
Schedule & Time Allotments

1.a. Affirmative Opening (5 minutes)
   – Define the main terms and outline the affirmative case

1.b. Negative Opening (5 minutes)
   – Contest any badly defined terms and outline the negative case

2.a. Affirmative Constructive (5 minutes)
   – Complete the case, especially with evidence

2.b. Negative Constructive (5 minutes)
   – Complete the case, especially with evidence

Break (5 minutes – confer with your team)

(Bean, 1996)
Schedule & Time Allotments

3.a. Negative Rebuttal (3 minutes)
   – Show weaknesses in the most important arguments of the affirmative case
3.b. Affirmative Rebuttal (3 minutes)
   – Show weaknesses in the most important arguments of the negative case
4.a. Negative’s Response (3 minutes)
4.b. Affirmative’s Response (3 minutes)
5.a. Negative Closing (2 minutes)
   – Brief summary of the case that’s been made, final words
5.b. Affirmative Closing (2 minutes)
   – Brief summary of the case that’s been made, final words
Assessment

• Presents a convincing, well-developed, logical argument
• Well researched; effective use of evidence from legitimate sources
• Considers and takes into account counterarguments – is well prepared to respond to the other side
• Articulate, confident, clear
• Appropriate timing, professional, follows rules of the debate
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• Students also submitted a short (2-3 page) paper on the day of their debate
  – Written individually
  – “Should summarize their team’s arguments and the evidence they will use to support their arguments, as well as the evidence they will likely use to counter the opposing argument”
  – Also include list of references
Mark Breakdown

- Team opening: 10 points
- Team constructive: 10 points
- Team rebuttal: 5 points
- Team response: 5 points
- Team closing: 5 points
- Teammate (peer) evaluation: 5 points
- Individual written report: 10 points
- Total: 50 points (worth 15% of final grade)
“It was really refreshing to do a group debate after 3 years of passive learning, reading papers and writing essays.”
Questions, Comments?

Key References:
