

Inviting Students into the Conversation with Collaborative In-Class Debates

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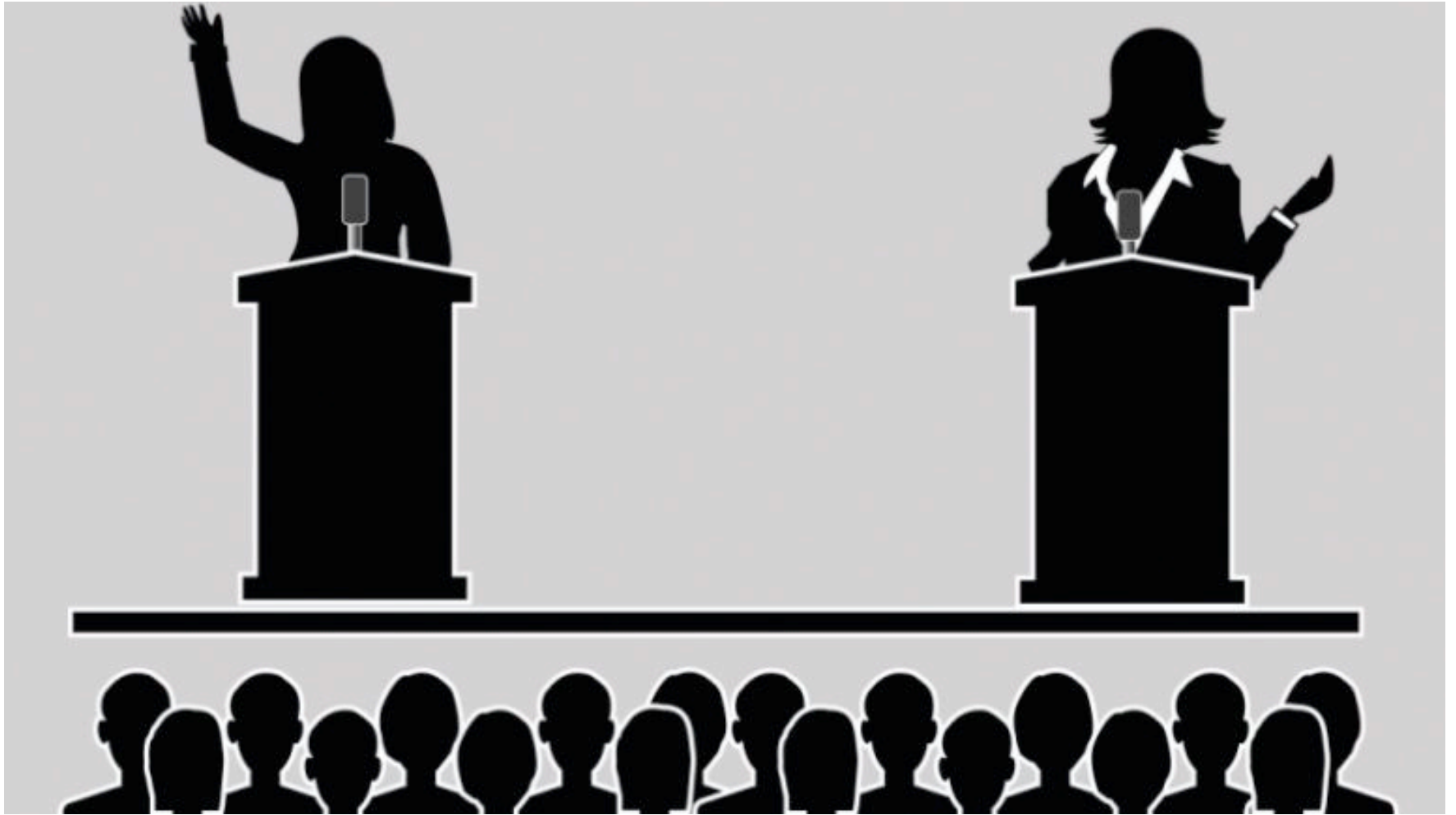
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(Lewin & Wakefield, 1983)

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.**”

(Allison, 2002, p. 13, as cited in Kennedy, 2007)

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
 - (Side-note: <http://www.SignUpGenius.com>)
- Were given some help to get started

Example (Debate 1)

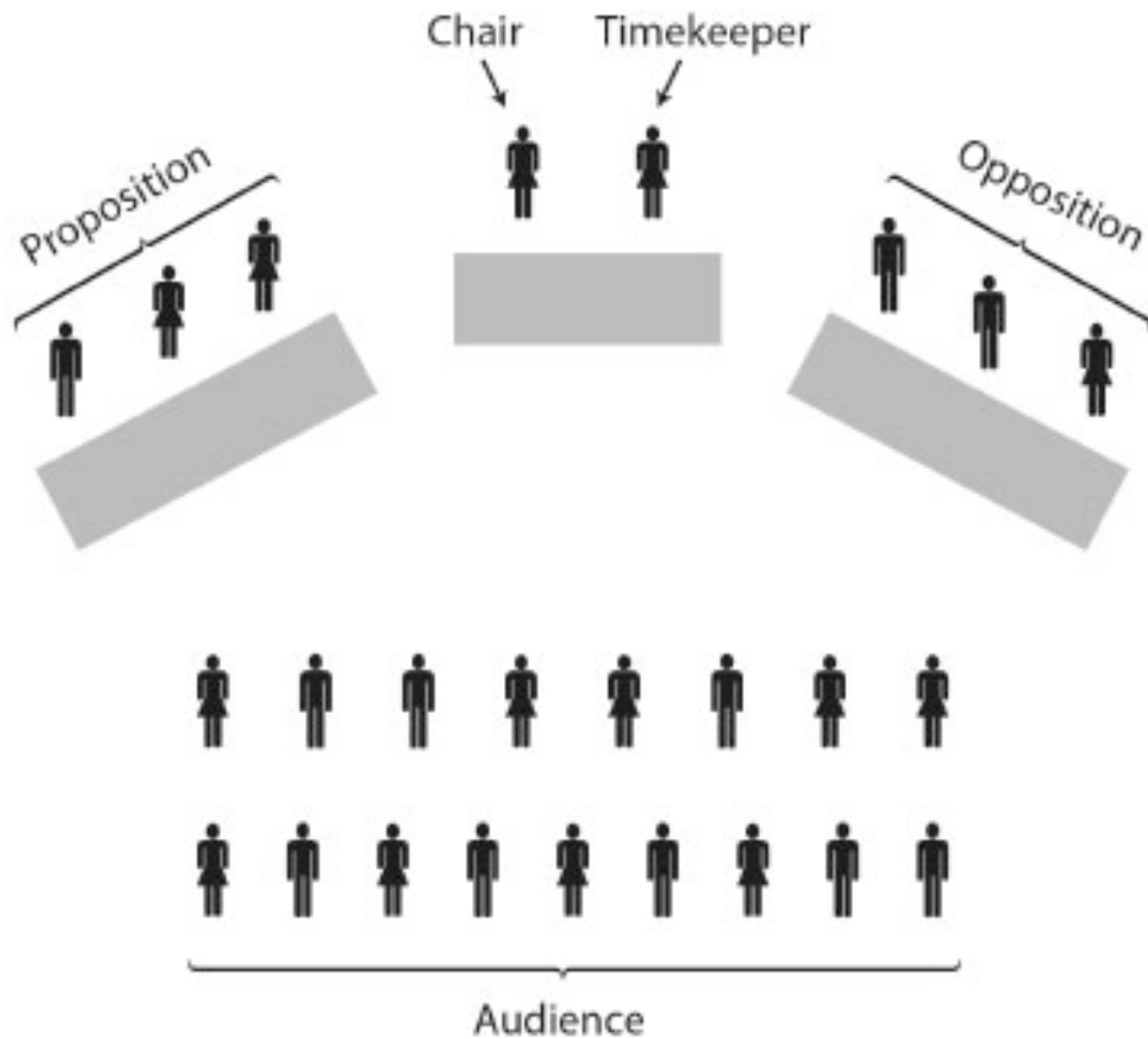
- Proposition: It is possible to know someone better than they know themselves.
 - Definitions: to “*know someone*” means to understand their behaviour and decisions
- *To get you started:*
 - Vazire, S. & Carlson, E. N. (2011). Others sometimes know us better than we know ourselves. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20, 104-108.

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

In-Class Debates in PSY326

- 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)*

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

In-Class Debates in PSY326

- 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:

- Bean, J. (1996). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco : Jossey-Bass.
- Kennedy, R. (2007). In-class debates: Fertile ground for active learning and the cultivation of critical thinking and oral communication skills. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 19, 183-190.