Using Debate to Teach about Advocacy and Deliberation

Anand Rao
Pedagogy Colloquia
October 22, 2019

Don’t miss!

- Oct 30th 12 – 1 p.m. – Leslie Martin
- "Civic Learning & You: What is civic learning and why might it be relevant for your course"

Call for Participation: UMW Advocacy, Deliberation, and Civic Engagement Learning Community

• Proposals due November 8, 2019

Using Debate to Teach about Advocacy and Deliberation

Advocacy
Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy

Deliberation
Long and careful consideration or discussion

Debate
An (in)formal discussion on a particular topic in which opposing arguments are put forward

What is debate?

A debate includes:

• A resolution, or topic
• Presentation of more than one perspective on that topic
• Ongoing discussion about that topic
What makes for a true debate?

Development
Clash
Extension
Perspective

Plan for today:

• Advocacy
• Critical Thinking
• Perseverance
• Deliberation
• Constructive Controversy
• Argumentativeness vs. Verbal Aggression

What does debate have to offer?

What does debate in the classroom look like?

Advocacy
• Improves communication skills
  • Not just public speaking but also interpersonal (Colbert & Biggers 1985)
  • Debaters are “significantly better at employing the three communication skills (analysis, delivery, and organization) than students who have not had debate experience.” (Semlak & Shields 1997)

Critical Thinking
• Students with argumentation training “significantly outgained the control students in critical thinking scores”
  • Debate > argumentation class > general communication class

Perseverance
• Debate “appears to strengthen students’ ability to persevere… Remain focused, and work toward challenging goals. … Debaters have a heightened capacity to hang in and struggle – often in the face of disappointment and defeat.”
  • Melinda Fine, writing about the NYC UDL

Deliberation
• Encouraging students to speak in a debate forces them to “confront learners with viewpoints different from their own” and therefore to achieve “an openness to the world and to others”
  • Sam Gross
Incivility in political discourse

- 90% reported they are concerned about the “uncivil and rude behavior of politicians”
  - [Gtown – April 25, 2019]
- 83% believe that behavior that used to be seen as unacceptable now accepted as normal
  - [Gtown – April 25, 2019]
- 78% think that incivility and political dysfunction prevent our nation from moving forward
  - [Natl Institute for Civil Discourse]

Constructive Controversy

- “Controversy can arouse conceptual conflict, subjective feelings of uncertainty, and epistemic curiosity; increase accuracy of cognitive perspective-taking; promote transitions from one stage of cognitive and moral reasoning to another; increase the quality of problem solving; and increase creativity.”
  - BUT to be managed properly, must also promote cooperative learning and intellectual disagreement
  - Johnson and Johnson (1979)

Argumentativeness vs Verbal Aggression

- “Argument involves presenting and defending positions on controversial issues while attacking the position taken by others on the issues. Verbal aggression, on the other hand, denotes attacking the self-concept of another person instead of, or in addition to, the person’s position on a topic of communication.”
  - Dominic Infante and Charles Wiggins
- Debate gives students greater self esteem and debaters “appear to assign higher value to resolving their conflicts through dialogue rather than force.”
  - Melinda Fine

Assertiveness Training

- What does debate in the classroom look like?
What makes for a true debate?

Development
Clash
Extension
Perspective

Short Debate (approx. 10 minutes)

• 2 minute affirmative
• 1 minute cross-examination
• 2 minute negative
• 1 minute cross-examination
• 1 minute affirmative rebuttal
• 1 minute negative rebuttal
Longer Debate (approx. 30 minutes)

- Aff constructive – 7 minutes
- C-X – 2 minutes
- Neg constructive – 7 minutes
- C-X – 2 minutes
- Aff rebuttal – 4 minutes
- Neg rebuttal – 4 minutes
- Aff closing statement – 1.5 minutes
- Neg closing statement – 1.5 minutes
- 2 minutes of prep time for each debate

Impromptu Town Hall Debate

- Provocative opening statement
- Speakers follow in volunteer order
- Agree or disagree – speak for 2-3 minutes
- Graded on:
  - Basic presentation skills
  - Connection to a previous speech
  - New contribution to the discussion

Prepared Town Hall Exercise

Discussion