DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 943 CS 508 986

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TITLE Formal Debate as a Pedagogical Tool in the College Classroom.
PUB DATE Mar 88
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the National Seminar on Successful College Teaching (Orlando, FL, March 6-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Classroom Techniques; Critical Thinking; *Debate; *Debate Format; Higher Education; Student Evaluation; Student Motivation; *Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS Cross Examination Debate Association; National Debate Tournament

ABSTRACT

By understanding the values and goals of debate, the applicability of debate to all disciplines, the logistics of setting up a debate and the judging and grading procedures, college instructors in all disciplines can use debate to stimulate student interest and increase conceptual skills. Debate functions to develop skills in critical thinking, analyzing, synthesizing, and impromptu speaking. Though both types of debate are useful, Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) debate is more easily and appropriately adaptable to the college classroom than National Debate Tournament (NDT) debate with its stress on policies. Six major areas of concern arise in preparing students for formal debate: the topic and resolution, research, developing affirmative and negative cases, the general format of the debate, cross examination, and rebuttals. By using active listening skills, developing a flow chart of the arguments presented in debate and casting votes for one of the teams, the audience becomes an integral part of the classroom activity. Some of the factors considered in grading include the amount of time and effort students seem to have put into the debate, overall use of good reasoning and critical thinking skills as applied to the subject matter, and the sincerity and effort put into the debate. (Contains eight references. Appendixes discuss structure of the debate, judging criteria, and grading criteria, and contain a sample flow chart.)

FORMAL DEBATE AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

by

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Presented at the National Seminar on Successful College Teaching
Orlando, Florida - March 6-9, 1988

The noted educator and chairman of Encyclopaedia Britannica's board of editors, Mortimer J. Adler, once said that teaching is a lot like the arts of agriculture or medicine. Adler observed that teaching "is one of the three great cooperative arts." The other two are "farming and healing - the arts of agriculture and medicine. All three are 'cooperative' because they must work with nature to produce the goods they aim at. The cooperative art of the farmer consists in making the best use of seed, soil, and weather to produce the livestock, grains, or fruits... The cooperative art of the physician consists in employing the body's own resources for healing - for maintaining or regaining health. The cooperative art of the teacher depends on the teacher's understanding of how the mind learns by the exercise of its own powers, and on his or her use of this understanding to help the minds of others to learn" (Adler 60).

Perhaps one of the best ways we as instructors help the minds of others to learn is to allow those minds to exercise their own powers through debate. Today's college students are faced with the task of dealing with a world fraught with controversial issues. As college instructors, we are given the challenge to help these students approach such issues from a well-educated perspective. Whether we are teaching courses in political science, history, English, philosophy, natural science or business, we constantly deal with issues that lend themselves to debate.

In order to demonstrate why and how we should use debate in the college classroom, I would first like to examine the values and goals of debate, both in and out of the classroom. Next, I will explain how debate can be applied to courses in nearly all disciplines. I will also briefly outline the logistics of formal debate in the classroom, including the development of a topic and resolution, research, the creation of affirmative and negative cases, the general format of debate, cross examination and rebuttals. Finally, I wish to show how you can involve the entire class in each debate and establish appropriate guidelines for judging and grading the debate.

I. VALUE AND GOALS OF DEBATE

The ancient Greek sophist Protagoras is usually credited as the "father of debate." Unfortunately, Protagoras is held in disrepute by many critics. One of Protagoras' greatest critics, Socrates, noted that Protagoras used debate to help "make the weaker argument defeat the stronger one "(Plato 53). Socrates felt that if one is to engage in debate, or dialectic in the Greek sense of the term, the goal should be to discern the truth about the subject being debated. It is in this spirit that I would like to view debate in the classroom. It is important that debaters or members of group discussion share such a spirit. As Austin J. Freeley points out, "[d]ecisions may be reached by group discussion when the members of the group agree that a problem exists, have compatible standards of value, have compatible purposes, are willing to accept the consensus of the group and are relatively few in number" (Freeley 7).

Likewise, debate as an educational classroom activity should have as its ultimate goal the pursuit of the truth.

In a more general sense, debate can be viewed as an activity that develops skills in numerous areas vital to the liberal education of everybody. Like the ancient Greek Trivium of logic, rhetoric and grammar, debate functions to develop skills in critical thinking, analyzing, synthesizing and impromptu speaking. It assists the student in developing skills needed to play an active role in a democratic society where communication is so vital. Since a democracy can only function with informed and active citizens, exercises such as debate serve as a perfect complement to the education of our students. Debate lends itself to all the liberal arts and challenges students to critically evaluate the subjects they study.

II. APPLICABILITY OF DEBATE TO THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

When I say that debate can be used in all liberal arts, I am arguing that debate can be applied to most classes taught in all disciplines. It's important to note here that my use of the term liberal arts is more in line with the ancient notions of paideia or humanitas than the contemporary view of liberal arts as encompassing the non-scientific subjects. The Greek word paideia, meaning the upbringing of a child and the Latin term humanitas, signifying general learning is what I am refering to when I speak of "liberal arts." Debate can be used effectively in all disciplines including natural science, mathematics, business as well as courses in philosophy, English and political science. One reason that I advocate a specific type of classroom debate is its stress on values.

Values influence all disciplines. A political scientist who is a Marxist will look at a situation with a much different perspective than an ethical naturalist An existentialist and a logical positivist hold opposing views as to the basic function of philosophy. The natural scientist, as Thomas Kuhn pointed out in his now classic work The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, sometimes holds so dear to a certain value that the progress of science is impeded. And with the rise of Cartesian mathematics, Descartes has demonstrated to the modern world the impact that values in mathematics can have on numerous other seemingly unrelated disciplines. Classroom debate is a universal activity that can enrich the learning environment of all classes.

In order to demonstrate how formal debate can be applied to the classroom, let me identify the two most prominent types of academic debate in America today: the National Debate Tournament or NDT, and the Cross Examination Debate Association or CEDA (Sheckels 317-319). Traditionally, NDT style of debate, with its stress on policies, dominated intercollegiate debate up until the early 1970's. Developed in 1971, CEDA emphasizes values within debate (Wood and Midgely 15-22). If you were to view both styles of debate, you would recognize other differences including terminology, delivery style of debaters, uses of evidence, and judging criteria. Though both types of debate are useful, CEDA style debate is more easily and appropriately adaptable to the college classroom. CEDA stresses values vital to all disciplines, always allows for cross examination, requires less extensive research than NDT debate and is easier to teach in a limited period of time.

III. LOGISTICS OF FORMAL DEBATE IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

In preparing students for formal debate there are six major areas of concern: the topic and resolution, research, developing affirmative and negative cases, the general format of debate, cross examination and rebuttals. For the debate to be a successful educational activity, the instructor must make clear to all participants what is expected of them. Outlining these six main areas

on a sheet to be distributed to students will clear up much confusion and alleviate a great deal of tension that usually accompanies exercises involving speaking before a class.

A. Topic and Resolution

The first item of concern in any debate is the general topic area to be discussed. The subjects covered in your course will determine the general topic areas for a debate. Given a general topic area, a resolution must be established. The resolution, also known as the proposition, "is what the speakers talk about. It is the proposed change, the suggested solution, the alleged truth, or the verbalized belief of value that the debate will examine critically" (Thompson 14). The resolution must be clear and accurate in all participant's minds. Arriving at a good proposition is crucial to a successful debate. Wayne Thompson identifies five guidelines for the selection of a good resolution (20-21). The proposition should be debatable, have one central idea, be worthwhile, be timely and be adapted to the participants in the audience. In addition, the wording of a proposition should be a simple, declarative sentence, avoid "loaded language, and be positive and free of ambiguity" (Thompson 22-23). Adhering to these guidelines will assure that the resolution has the potential for creating a good debate and a rewarding educational exercise. For instance, a class in world literature may yield the following proposition: Resolved: That Oedipus is personally responsible for his own grief. A chemistry class may debate over the proposition that Lavoisier was the first person to scientifically discover oxygen. In a mass media class, students may grapple with a different proposition: Resolved: That American television has sacrificed quality for entertainment. Students of political science may address the proposition that the method for conducting Presidential elections in the United States is detrimental to democracy. And learners in a philosophy or theology class can argue over the existence of God. In all cases, students become engrossed in the topic of discussion and are forced to focus on the one resolution being considered during that class period.

B. Research

Students and instructors alike must realize that the success of the debate rests, in part, on how well prepared the debaters are. Students should be given ample time to research their topics and must understand both sides of the issue. Research time varies with resolutions, but in all cases students should be required to go beyond their knowledge of the subject covered in the class lectures and readings. The affirmative team must know the negative team's position and must determine how they will attack this position in debate. One of the most important points to remember in any debate is that there must be a conflict between both sides; no conflict, no debate. In intercollegiate academic debate, debaters are required to debate both for and against the resolution throughout the competition. As planners of classroom debate, you may wish to assign positions by a simple toss of a coin at the begining of the debate. This makes the activity more challenging and is not appropriate for all students, especially those in lower-division classes. In their research, students should gather evidence in the form of direct observations, experimental data, common knowledge, primary documents, testimony and other forms of support for their positions. Most of this evidence is readily available in the colllege library in the form of books, periodicals, government documents, newspapers and scholarly jounals (Patterson and Zarefsky 31-41). Such research will enhance the student's understanding of the subject matter under discussion and give the student more confidence going into the debate.

C. Developing Affirmative and Negative Cases

A large part of debate preparation involves developing the affirmative and negative cases. These cases, or constructives, consist of the arguments and evidence the student will use to initially establish his or her position on the resolution. Many debaters take the time to carefully write this position out in

the form of a speech. These speeches are read by both sides at the beginning of the debate. These position papers serve as the basic material of the debate and all subsequent discussion should extend, support or reject these initial arguments. Instructors may even wish to evaluate these student papers in the grading process.

D. General Format of Debate

Once a topic and resolution are established and students have completed their research and constructed their position papers, students are ready to begin the actual debate. An effective classroom debate should consist of four debaters, two debaters on one side of the podium affirming the resolution and two on the other side negating the resolution. The two debaters on each side will work as a team, assigning each other various tasks. The team members are designated as "1st Affirmative Debater" and "2nd Affirmative Debater" on the affirmative side and "1st Negative Debater" and "Second Negative Debater" on the negative side. Both first speakers construct position statements, or constructives, explaining where they stand on the resolution and giving good reasons why they take such a stand. The designated second debaters on each side will have to extend the arguments put forth by their partners and begin the critique of their opponents' arguments. Following each of these first four oral presentations, each debater is asked questions by his or her opponent, a process known as cross-examination. After the constructives and cross-examination, each debater is given the opportunity to overcome any objections to his or her statements and sum up his or her position. This last part of the debate, known as the rebuttal stage, concludes the debate.

In intercollegiate CEDA competition, such a debate may last up to ninety minutes. In fairness to all involved and with concern for the time constraints of the typical fifty minute college class, strict time limits are placed on each activity. The time limits are maximums by which the debaters must abide. A time keeper should be appointed to assure that the speakers do not go beyond their alloted time. In addition, each team should be given a total of six minutes to prepare throughout the entire debate. For instance, when the first affirmative speaker finishes speaking, the second negative speaker may wish to take some time to determine some good questions with which to cross examine this speaker. The time keeper should keep track of this preparation time. Once either team uses all of its preparation time, no member of that team is allowed to delay their cross examinations or speeches and must move to the podium immediately when his or her turn arises. The structure presented in appendix 1 allows for the entire process to take place within a fifty minute period.

E. Cross Examination

Let me briefly explain what happens during the periods of cross examinations and rebuttals. In most cases, cross examination is the most exciting part of the debate. Cross examination involves critically questioning an opponent in order to clarify a point made or to establish the groundwork for creating new arguments or for refutation (Wood and Midgley 105-119, 193-200). As a lawyer in a court room interrogates a witness, so each debater is permitted to pose questions to his or her opponent. During this part of the debate, debaters should pose questions to their opponents that will demonstrate that their opponent's position is flawed. Information gathered during this questioning stage should be used when the questioner is given time to construct arguments and rebuttals. The opponent, during the cross examination period, is allowed to answer the questions and is not permitted to ask questions at this time. Questioners should ask questions that necessitate more than a simple "yes" or "no" answer. A good cross examination period will help students evaluate their positions and will force participants to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter.

F. Rebuttals

Finally, all debaters are given "one last word" at the end of the debate. These statements of refutation and summation are called rebuttals. By this time in the debate all major arguments should have been stated. The purpose of the rebuttal is to respond to any attacks which opponents have made. By overcoming these objections, each debater hopes to convince the audience that his or her position has been defended against all attacks. During this rebuttal period, debaters take time to briefly restate their positions and conclude with a request that the other members of the class vote for their position.

IV. CLASS INVOLVEMENT AND GRADING

Throughout the semester all members should be able to become debaters. But even when they are not debating, students should take an active part in the debate process. By using active listening skills, developing a flow chart of the arguments presented in debate and casting votes for one of the teams, the audience becomes an integral part of this classroom activity. In addition to carefully evaluating the arguments in their own minds, members of the audience should outline the major arguments and evidence given in the debate. By using a flow chart similar to the one found in appendix two, an active listener can identify the major points of the debate and defend his or her vote. Such an exercise keeps everybody actively involved and helps to increase the quality of group discussion that should follow a debate. Since this group discussion may take place during another class period, the flow chart also serves as a reminder of the specifics of the debate.

Finally, let's address the crucial role of grading. As a graded exercise, students are more apt to take the debate seriously and spend time preparing for debate. As a judge, evaluator and educator, there are several important points to keep in mind. As Patterson and Zarefsky point out, the two main roles we play as evaluators are that of judge and critic (294-305). The role of the judge is to determine which team debated the best. Austin J. Freeley gives us four basic principles that should guide judges in determining which team did the better debating (261-264). Judges must apply their total knowledge of argumentation and debate, must set aside their special knowledge of the subject for the duration of the debate, must base their decision on the debate as it is presented and must take comprehensive notes during the debate. The critic, on the other hand, must evaluate each team against ideal standards. In this sense, we correct student's misconceptions about the subject matter, reasoning skills and give suggestions for improvement. Some of the factors considered in grading, as outlined in appendix one, include the amount of time and effort students seem to have put into preparation, the application of material learned in lectures and readings to the debate, overall use of good reasoning and critical thinking skills as applied to the subject matter, and the sincerity and effort put into the debate.

Debate, a complex subject which involves the application of argumentation theory to reach decisions, can be used effectively in the classroom. By understanding the values and goals of debate, the applicability of debate to all disciplines, the logistics of setting up a debate and the judging and grading procedures, instructors in all disciplines can use debate to stimulate student interest and increase conceptual skills. Formal classroom debate helps the mind of every student to learn by its own powers and allows instructors to contribute to successful college teaching.

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Appendix One

STRUCTURE OF DEBATE

I.	FIRST AFFIRMATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE (1st affirmative debater presents case)	5min.
	CROSS EXAMINATION (1st Affirm. & 2nd Neg.)	2min.
II.	FIRST NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE (1st negative debater presents case)	5min.
	CROSS EXAMINATION (1st Neg. & 1st Affirm.)	2min.
III.	SECOND AFFIRMATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE (extends arguments, advances new arguments, responds to 1st Neg. speaker)	5min.
	CROSS EXAMINATION (2nd Affirm. & 1st Neg.)	2min.
IV.	SECOND NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIVE (extends arguments, advances new arguments, responds to 1st & 2nd Affirm speakers)	5min.
	CROSS EXAMINATION (2nd Neg. & 2nd Affirm.)	2min.
V.	1st NEGATIVE SPEAKER REBUTTAL (& summary)	2min.
VI.	1st AFFIRMATIVE SPEAKER REBUTTAL (& summary)	2min.
VII.	2nd NEGATIVE SPEAKER REBUTTAL (& summary)	2min.
VIII.	2nd AFFIRMATIVE REBUTTAL (& summary)	2min.

TOTAL PREP TIME FOR EACH TEAM: 6 minutes

JUDGING CRITERIA (for instructor and students)

1. A "tabula rasa" approach should be used in judging. Only arguments and evidence presented in the debate should be used in judging. Judges must set aside their special knowledge of the subject matter being debated.
2. The use of sound arguments and identification of fallacies of reasoning are key factors in judging.
3. The quality of evidence presented should enter into the judging decision.
4. Careful attention should be paid to how each team responds to the opposing team's arguments.
5. The team that defends their case and responds to the opposition's case should be awarded the win.

Note: After a secret ballot vote, class discussion will take place.

GRADING CRITERIA

1. Amount of time and effort students seem to spend on the assignment.
2. Application of material learned in lectures and readings to the debate.
3. Overall use of good reasoning, critical thinking and oral communication skills.
4. Argumentation and evidence employed in the debate.
5. Ability to work as a team member with partner.
6. Sincerity in working to make the debate exercise a successful educational activity.

Appendix Two

A flow chart, usually written on an 8 1/2" X 14" legal pad, helps the judge keep track of the arguments and evidence presented in a debate. Two color pens may be used, one for the affirmative team, the other for the negative team to help in identify remarks made by each team.

An example of how an argument is recorded and traced on a flow chart is given for the following proposition: Resolved: That membership in the United Nations is no longer beneficial to the United States.