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## Ten classroom activities to encourage democratic talk

### **Alleyway debate**

Alley debates are a flexible, informal debating format that you can adjust to a group of any size. They work best when students have one or two specific goals to work towards in that alley debate.

The whole class will be divided into two, with half arguing for a position and the other half against. After five minutes of preparation time students form “alleys”. Each alley debate consists of up to 30 students, in two lines of equal number, facing each other. The first speaker from the “for” side begins. Then a speaker from the “against” side. The debate continues, alternating between for and against, until everyone has spoken.

### **Balloon Debate**

This is a fun and interactive competition where a group of characters engage and persuade an audience. A good tool for analysing people and issues and also useful for introducing concepts students will use in more formal debates.

Five or six students each take on the role of an historical or fictional figure. (They may alternatively advocate for concepts, causes or other variations.) In the first round, each character gives a short speech justifying their continued involvement, after which the audience votes off the least persuasive. In following rounds remaining characters cross-examine each other and respond to the questions of the audience with the least persuasive being voted off each time until the group is reduced to a final winner.

### **Collaborative exploration**

Collaborative explorations allow a class to take the lead in guiding a philosophical exploration of a concept. This communal control of direction allows material to be related directly to the experiences and interests of a group.

The collaborative explanation begins with students engaging with a given stimulus and discussing their responses to it in small groups. From these groups students will produce a set of open, philosophical questions, one of which will be selected by vote for further discussion. This whole class discussion is teacher-facilitated and should be encouraged to pursue deep, exploratory avenues of thought.

### **Deliberative debate (Citizens' Jury)**

As a Citizens' Jury the class will debate, amend and pass a resolution on an important topic. In groups, students research and discuss particular aspects and case-studies relating to an issue about which they are going to debate. The whole class is then given a proposed resolution. The groups then engage in the stages of passing a resolution, proposing amendments, attempting to persuade others and discussing whether their views are changed. Final proposals are made and voted on and the class reaches a final amended resolution. The class may then reflect on the positions they reached.

### **Extended Mace format**

The Extended Mace is a competitive debate format which engages a question from two clear sides. It allows students to develop arguments in depth and to deliver formal public speeches on a topic. It is ideal for analysing topics and issues where students have significant knowledge and for concluding an area of study.

Students prepare in teams of three to speak either in support of or opposition to a given motion. Each team prepares two constructive speeches in which they will present arguments for their side and rebut claims made by their opponent, while their third speaker will give a summary speech that rounds up the clashing ideas from the debate. The four constructive speeches are delivered in alternating order, at which point the audience has a chance to ask questions and raise points during the 'floor debate'. After this the summary speakers finish the case for each side.

### **Goldfish Bowl**

A fluid form of discussion with 'speaking' and 'audience' roles interchanging, goldfish bowls are ideal for engaging large groups in evolving and engaging discourse around issues.

A number of chairs form an inner circle of 'goldfish bowl' with the rest of the class seated in concentric circles around the outside. Students seated inside the goldfish bowl begin discussing a given topic while the audience listens carefully and considers their reaction. Audience members may substitute into the goldfish bowl and add their perspective to the discussion by tapping a participant on the shoulder and swapping into their seat.

### **Simulation - Court trials**

A structured way of considering a case study using a simulation of a court, where pupils take on the roles of prosecution, defence, witness, jury and court officials. The inclusion of witnesses allows pupils to explore and present aspects of a case in more detail than in other discussion formats such as competitive debate.

### **‘Jigsaw’ groups**

An approach that allows students to become familiar with a case study whilst working in a group. Groups are then mixed up so that a new group of students is able to compare across the cases and this facilitates more conceptual thinking.

### **Town Hall**

This activity is a non-adversarial way to encourage students to explore multiple perspectives and challenging viewpoints. It also serves as a good introduction to using the consideration of stakeholders’ interests to generate ideas for a more formal debate or policy discussion.

The Town Hall will consider a debate motion and students are divided into five or six groups, each of which represents a different stakeholder group impacted by the topic. Each group considers their response to the topic and prepares a short presentation to deliver to the class. After the presentations students are formed into mixed groups representing all stakeholders and then discuss presentations and try to reach a compromise position on the motion.

### **Where do you stand?**

This exercise involves students identifying where their beliefs place them on a spectrum and debating their position relative to their peers. It provides a powerful tool for conceptualising many issues and it is also a good way to show students how a debate (with two sides) differs from a discussion (multiple perspectives).

A line is drawn across the classroom covering the spectrum from ‘strongly agree’ at one side to ‘strongly disagree’ at the other. A topic is called out and students move to the point on the line which reflects their beliefs. Students are then called on to justify their positions, both in discussions with like-minded people near them and in responding and debating with those who disagree. Throughout the exercise students who are persuaded may move along the spectrum, demonstrating persuasion in real time.