



Trainers Times

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Discussion: An Effective Means, an Important End

This issue of *Trainers Times* has a very specific focus—discussion of controversial issues in the classroom. Why do we believe discussion merits such attention? Because discussion is both an effective means and an important end in civic/law-related education.

Discussion of current local, national, and international issues—especially those having relevance for today’s students—is one of the research-based promising approaches recommended in *The Civic Mission of Schools* (Carnegie Corporation and Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2003; www.civimissionofschools.org). That recommendation is based, in part, on the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement’s Civic Education Study of 90,000 students in 28 countries (www.wam.umd.edu/~iea/). According to that study, discussion of controversial issues in an open classroom climate appears to be an effective means of reaching such important goals as:

- Civic knowledge
- Support for democratic values
- Participation in political discussions
- Political engagement

The ability to take part in discussions and deliberations on controversial issues is also an important end of civic/law-related education. For a democracy to flourish, citizens must be able to talk and make decisions about issues on which they disagree. With the current public models of discourse being largely negative, educators play an increasingly critical role in helping students develop discussion and deliberation skills.

IN THIS ISSUE

Discussion: An Effective Means, an Important End	1
Discussion in Social Studies: Is It Worth the Trouble?	2
Using Research to Improve Practice	6
Professional Development on Discussion: A Starter Kit of Tools	7



OJJDP Administrator J. Robert Flores (center) with two panelists who participated from Washington, DC, via video-teleconference in the 2005 Illinois Youth Summit. Youth Summits were created in 1995 as a national violence prevention initiative by Youth for Justice with funding from the United States Department of Justice through OJJDP.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Administrator J. Robert Flores is also convinced of the importance of civil discussion of controversial issues. In addition to participating in Youth for Justice’s national symposia, he has effectively moderated discussions between students and resource experts via video-teleconference as part of the annual Illinois Youth Summit (www.crfc.summit2005.html).

Mr. Flores views discussion as a critical way to help prevent violence, and he welcomes the opportunity for opposing views to be heard, understood, and challenged respectfully. He is committed to encouraging teachers throughout the nation to hold similar discussions in their classrooms, and he sees in Youth for Justice a potential delivery system.

As an important end and a means to achieving other goals of civic education, discussion is worthy of our attention. We hope the articles in this issue of *Trainers Times* will provoke conversation and reflection on this important topic.



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Discussion in Social Studies: Is It Worth the Trouble?

By Diana Hess, University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Even though many social studies teachers value classroom discussion, it is rare in most social studies classes. The difficulties teachers encounter when trying to promote high-quality discussion among students undoubtedly contribute to the brevity and rarity of such discussions. Teachers report that discussions fail because only a few students have usually completed the necessary preparatory work for effective participation, because some students persistently monopolize while others are silent, because their own facilitation skills are weak, and, most significantly, because what students say is often of low quality and off topic. Given these problems, it is not surprising that teachers question whether discussion is worth the trouble.

Here, I address that question by drawing together research that (a) defines discussion, (b) clarifies the problems of implementing discussion in classrooms, (c) specifies the benefits and characteristics of effective social studies discussions, and (d) suggests what teachers can do to facilitate good discussions. My conclusion is that discussion is particularly important in social studies courses because it is uniquely able to help students learn what social studies courses should be teaching.

What Is Discussion?

One of the central concerns of the literature on classroom discussion is how to define discussion. Consider the following definitions developed by scholars with expertise in

the theory, research, and practice of discussion. Discussion is:

- “the free exchange of information among three or more participants (which could include the teacher)” (Nystrand, Gamoran, and Carbonaro 1998).
- “an alternately serious and playful effort by a group of two or more to share views and engage in mutual and reciprocal critique” (Brookfield and Preskill 1999).
- “a particular form of group interaction where members join together in addressing a question of common concern, exchanging and examining different views to form their answer, enhancing their knowledge or understanding, their appreciation or judgment, their decision, resolution or action over the matter at issue” (Dillon 1994).
- “a kind of shared inquiry the desired outcomes of which rely on the consideration of diverse views” (Parker 2003).

Notwithstanding the differences among these definitions of discussion, there are common features that help distinguish discussion from other forms of classroom talk, such as lecture and recitation. First, discussion is dialogue between or among people. It involves, at a minimum, the exchange of information about a topic (a controversy, a problem, an event, a person, etc.). Second, it is a particular approach to constructing knowledge. The approach is based most fundamentally on the idea that something positive can occur when people are expressing their ideas on a topic and listening to others express theirs. Beyond that, the multiple definitions in the literature illustrate one fundamental area of consensus about discussion: it takes many forms and is used for many purposes.



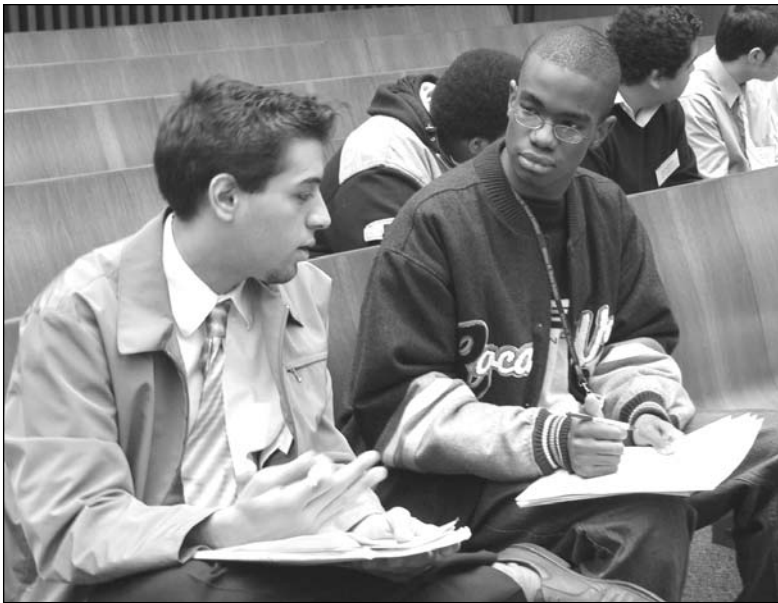
Youth for Justice is the national coordinated law-related education program supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the United States Department of Justice and is a collaboration of the American Bar Association, the Center for Civic Education, the Constitutional Rights Foundation, the Phi Alpha Delta law fraternity, and Street Law, Inc. Youth for Justice provides national leadership for sustainable, high quality LRE programs for at-risk youth and their communities. It provides program models, materials, training and technical assistance to educators, students, and parents in schools and in community and juvenile justice settings. Youth for Justice delivers these services in cooperation with its national network of State LRE Centers.



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Moreover, this research found that a helpful factor in creating discussion was a type of questioning called “uptake,” in which teachers ask students questions about what they and other students said.

Another reason why discussions fail is that students’ contributions often do not add up to a focused or in-depth analysis of important ideas. In weak discussions, it is common for students to skip rapidly from point to point, with few addressing specifically a comment or question previously raised. Because high-quality discussion depends on a thorough analysis of only a few ideas, discussions that meander or move rapidly from idea to idea tend to be superficial.

A fourth problem commonly associated with classroom discussion concerns not content but participation. In too many discussions, a few students monopolize while others remain silent. While it is not necessary for all students to participate at the same rates and in the same ways in discussion—imagine how dull that would be—most teachers and students are likely to consider a discussion more successful if many students are participating verbally to some extent (Hess 2002, Wilen 2004).

Why Discussions Fail

Teachers and researchers who specialize in discussion report four central problems: the tendency of teachers to talk too much, to ask inauthentic questions, as well as the lack of focus and depth in students’ contributions, and the unequal participation of students.

In an insightful study of discussion in high school classes, Simon (2001) identifies the powerful role that teachers play in creating meaningful discussions. Simon reports that discussions often fail when teachers shut them off prematurely, whether because they fear losing control of the discourse, are wary of the controversy that authentic discussion may create, or because they are simply not willing to cede the floor to students. Simon’s findings illustrate a significant barrier to quality discussion: it is impossible to create good discussions if teachers talk too much. Not only does teacher monopolization of talk prevent students from having an opportunity to participate, it also communicates to students that their ideas are not valuable. In another study focusing on how high school students in social studies courses view classroom discussion, 80 percent of the students reported that they would speak less in discussion if they felt that their ideas wouldn’t be valued (Hess and Posselt 2002).

This is not to suggest that teachers should remain silent in discussions. Nystrand and his colleagues (2003) reported that the type of questions teachers asked accounted for whether discussions took off in the first place. Teachers who asked “authentic” questions that elicited students’ ideas instead of merely the recitation of information were much more likely to spark discussion and keep it going than the more typical “test-like” question with one correct answer. Because an authentic question is one for which the “asker has not prespecified an answer,” it communicates to students that the teacher values what students think, and not just their ability to recite back what others think.

Benefits of Discussion

Notwithstanding the difficulties of discussion, its absence in a classroom suggests a learning climate where all knowledge worth having is located in the teacher (who may just dole it out in lectures) and where the teacher is not just a central figure in the classroom but the only person who has a meaningful role to play in developing ideas. The benefits that accrue from high-quality discussion not only democratize the classroom but also help students themselves play with ideas and develop the skills of critical thought.

Because many of the questions that are most significant in social studies courses have multiple and conflicting answers, a form of classroom discourse is needed that teaches students how to sift through and evaluate competing claims and the evidence on which they are based. Discussion can teach students how to articulate their arguments, listen to how others think through the same question, and challenge others’ responses. In short, discussion can help students think through the complicated dimensions of a complicated world.

Classroom discussion can also help students to better learn content knowledge. Nystrand and his colleagues (1997) measured the relationship between the amount of classroom discussion and student performance on knowledge exams and found a positive correlation.

Another benefit of discussion in social studies courses is that it can improve students’ abilities to dialogue across difference. Although young people can learn how to

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engage in public discussion in a number of venues, schools have a special capacity to teach these skills: they contain more diversity than one would expect to find in a family, church, synagogue, mosque, or club. Parker writes in *Teaching Democracy* (2003) that this diversity is not less than “the key” to unlocking the potential of schools to educate democratic citizens, but only if it is cultivated in discussion.

Evidence supports these claims. For example, research shows a positive relationship between discussion of complex policy issues (especially involving civil liberties controversies) and the development of tolerance as well as an understanding of why tolerance is necessary in democracies (Avery 2002).

Participation in discussions of controversial issues appears to influence other forms of political engagement as well. An International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement (IEA) study of 90,000 students in 28 countries found that discussion of controversial issues in an open classroom climate is a significant predictor of civic knowledge, support for democratic values, participation in political discussion, and political engagement (Torney-Purta 2001). Also, there is evidence that suggests participating in discussions in school has a positive influence on students’ civic behavior after they leave high school (Andolina et al 2003).

Characteristics of Effective Discussions

Research shows that good discussions are more likely to occur when they revolve around interpretable topics or questions, involve careful preparation by students, occur in open classroom climates, and require skillful planning and facilitation by the teacher.

One of the hallmarks of discussion is sharing, analyzing, and critiquing multiple perspectives. It stands to reason then, that an opening question for which there is a single right answer is not discussable. By contrast, questions that elicit and depend upon students’ diverse perspectives are more likely to spark high-quality discussions.

Virtually all of the case studies of high-quality discussion in the literature share as their central feature a problem, text, topic, question, or issue that provokes multiple interpretations.

Researchers find consistently that the quality of a discussion is likely to be higher when students have prepared to participate. Whether preparation is done in class or as homework is immaterial; what matters is that students become acquainted with the discussion topic and engage in enough initial thinking about it to have something to say. Evidence from students about what causes them to participate in discussion lends credence to the teachers’ insistence on pre-discussion preparation. More than 90 percent of students indicated that they would be more likely to speak in a discussion if they came into it with knowledge about the topic (Hess and Posselt 2002).

Even with a highly interpretable question and careful preparation by students, much of the success of discussion depends on a classroom atmosphere that encourages students to participate verbally. When teachers are perceived by students as judgmental, they are much less likely to participate verbally in discussion. Their perceptions of how their peers view their contributions also affect participation rates; 78 percent of the students surveyed in one study indicated that encouragement from classmates would make them more likely to speak during discussions. If students believe their classmates talk too much, they are more likely to respond with silence. Not surprisingly, direct criticism by their peers was even more likely to cause them to withdraw from discussion (Hess and Posselt 2002). These findings suggest that it is especially important to teach students how to critique ideas without engaging in personal attacks, to encourage each other to participate without undue pressure, and to monitor their own participation levels so as not to dominate or remain silent.

Finally, two central features in effective discussions are that the teacher has planned them carefully and that he or she facilitates or monitors them skillfully. Just as students need to prepare for discussion, teachers need to prepare themselves and their students for effective participation. Teachers who do this well think carefully about what will be discussed, which discussion model is best for the topic and purpose, what students will do to prepare to participate, and which skills students need in order to create quality discussion.

Becoming a More Skillful Discussion Teacher

I know of no teachers who believe that discussions in their classes are perfect. Just the opposite, teachers ask what they can do to more effectively teach their students to participate in discussions. My recommendations are:

- Study discussion.

Research Supports the Importance of Professional Development

Does professional development matter? Readers of *Trainers Times* would undoubtedly answer the question with a resounding “Yes.” Now there is a new fact sheet from CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) that provides research-based support for that answer.

Judith Torney-Purta and her colleagues examined the information available from teachers in the IEA Civic Education Study to determine whether teacher preparation was related to students’ civic knowledge and civic engagement (as measured by students’ intention to vote). While home educational resources accounted for the largest difference in student knowledge and engagement in the United States, teachers’ preparation did matter. Both a degree in a civic-related subject and inservice professional development affected student knowledge and engagement, but inservice professional development showed the greatest impact.

How Teachers’ Preparation Relates to Students’ Civic Knowledge and Engagement in the United States: Analysis from the IEA Civic Education Study is available at www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_IEA_Teacher_prep.pdf.

- Experiment with discussion in your courses.
- Reflect on these experiences.
- Solicit feedback from students and colleagues.
- Plan your curriculum around discussion.

Teaching students how to participate effectively in discussion is challenging, as is designing a social studies curriculum that provides ample opportunity for discussion. However, the benefits are substantial enough to point clearly to this conclusion: discussion in social studies is worth the trouble.

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Using Research to Improve Practice

Powerful civic/law-related education programs use hands-on, active teaching strategies, particularly strategies that foster true student interaction and provide opportunities to share and develop respect for different points of view. Two key teaching approaches recommended in the CMS report as best practices are classroom discussion of current controversial issues and participation in simulated democratic processes, which give the school curriculum a “real-life” connection. Other characteristics of sound instruction (sharing objectives with students, drawing on students’ existing knowledge and linking that knowledge to new information, multiple opportunities to practice skills, etc.) are also important.

These words, familiar to those who are part of the Youth for Justice network, represent one important way that research is used in civic/law-related education—to identify practices that allow us to achieve the important outcomes we have identified for our programs (see the box below for a complete list of the YFJ best practices in abbreviated form).

Research can also provide guidance in honing our practice. Reviews that synthesize a number of studies, like the article by Diana Hess presented in this issue of *Trainers Times*, provide an efficient way for busy practitioners to glean important ideas and insights from educational research. The research section of *Social Education*, where this article originally appeared, is one place to find such reviews; general education journals, such as *Educational Leadership* and the *Kappan*, also provide regular syntheses of research.

So, given the availability of research reviews, should we take time from our busy schedules to read specific research studies? Obviously, most people who read *Trainers Times* do not have time to keep up with all of the research relevant to our field. However, reading specific studies from time to time can spark our thinking in ways that improves our work. And, it is important to remember that everyone brings their own meaning to the results of research; as O.L. Davis has written, “research never says”... the reader creates their own interpretation of researchers’ findings. That process can spark creative thinking about new approaches and solutions.

Let’s consider an example. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) in February 2005 published a paper by David E. Campbell titled, *Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Environment Facilitates Adolescents’ Civic Development* (www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP28campbell.pdf). In the paper, Campbell reports on his re-analysis of the IEA Civic Education Study data. One of the questions Campbell pursued through his analysis was: Where do we find students who report that their school has an open classroom environment? Campbell laid out two hypotheses about the conditions in which teachers encourage discussion of controversial issues: 1) an open classroom environment is more common in schools where students hold conflicting views and 2) an open classroom environment is more common in schools where students are more homogeneous in their views. Campbell used a measure of ethnic and racial heterogeneity as a proxy for heterogeneity of views in the classroom. The measure reflected the inter-

Best Practices in Civic/Law-Related Education

The national evaluation of law-related education conducted in the early 1980s identified six best practices (then called “prescriptions” or “essential elements”), which have been updated and expanded to reflect more recent research in teaching and learning, prevention, and civic education. Particularly influential in revising these best practices for the 21st century was the *Civic Mission of Schools* report and the research on which it rests. While best practices are always evolving, current research suggests the following are key elements of powerful civic/law-related education programs:

- Deliberate focus on outcomes related to student engagement in civic and political life.
- Focus on essential civic/law-related knowledge and skills.
- Judicious selection and presentation of issues and materials.
- Sufficient quantity of instruction.
- Use of hands-on, active teaching strategies, particularly strategies that foster true student interaction and provide opportunities to share and develop respect for different points of view.
- Repeated opportunities for students to interact with community resource persons or connect with the community through service learning specifically designed to address civic education outcomes.
- Active involvement of administrators.
- Support networks and high-quality professional development for teachers.

action between students' experiences and the school's racial environment. The following is Campbell's summary of his finding:

. . . as the percentage of white students increases [in schools with larger white populations], black students are less likely to report that their teachers encourage political discussion in class, and as the percentage of black students increases, white students report less discussion in schools with a larger black population. In other words, the second hypothesis is supported—teachers appear to shy away from the discussion of political and social issues in schools where students have divergent views. . . . black students are more likely to experience an open classroom environment as the percentage of black students rises. White students appear to say the same about schools where whites have a larger share of the population, but the coefficient misses the conventional threshold for statistical significance.

Understanding that this is a much-simplified account of the study, consider the following questions:

- What questions do you have about the study? Include questions of fact, methodology, and interpretation.
- How might you interpret the finding reported by Campbell differently? What does your own professional experience suggest about where open classroom environments occur—in homogenous or heterogeneous schools?
- Why might teachers “shy away from the discussion of political and social issues in schools where students have divergent views”? How might you informally test Campbell's conclusion among the teachers with whom you work?
- If teachers “shy away from the discussion of political and social issues in schools where students have divergent views,” what are the implications for professional development with respect to discussion of controversial issues? How might you, as a facilitator, address this challenge?
- How and for what purpose might you explore the study findings with teachers?

If you found the exercise of interpreting and considering the implications of a particular research study stimulating, you may want to sign up for the CIRCLE monthly update, which highlights studies funded by CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org/index.htm). By scanning the update, you can identify studies that you want to read and think about in greater depth. Try it. . . you'll like it.

Professional Development on Discussion: A Starter Kit of Tools

For the past year, the Constitutional Rights Foundation has focused a great deal of time on working with teachers to include more discussion of controversial issues in their classrooms. Much of this work has been conducted under the auspices of Youth for Justice; much has also taken place as part of a project called Deliberations in Democracy, which is a collaborative of the Constitutional Rights Foundation and Street Law, funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Here, we share a number of tools that we have used in workshops, institutes, and seminars around the country and internationally. These tools are:

- A checklist for selecting issues for deliberation. Teachers are often wary about whether issues are worthy or “safe” for discussion. This tool identifies criteria for selecting issues, allowing teachers to think carefully about the issues that are most likely to spark productive discussion.
- A form for use in observing a classroom deliberation. Teachers can use this form to gather information for reflection on how discussion is going in their classroom. Teachers can also ask others to observe discussions and then dialog with the teachers about what they observed.
- A brief introduction to the three discussion or deliberation models mentioned on the observation checklist. The research suggests that successful teachers use discussion models to provide structure for discussion in their classroom, but many teachers have never been exposed to such models. Thus, we believe a key element of professional development on discussion is introducing teachers to such models and giving them an opportunity to experience discussions using those models.
- A sample agenda for a professional development program on discussing controversial issues. We provide it not as the perfect agenda, but as an idea for adaptation and experimentation.
- A planning guide for teachers as they leave a professional development workshop on discussion of controversial issues.

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Selection Criteria for Choosing Issues for Deliberation

Directions: In the column headings under “Issues,” write three issues you are considering using in your classroom. For each, use the criteria listed on the left to rate the issues based on the following scale:

2 = clearly meets criterion **1** = meets criterion **0** = does not meet criterion.

SELECTION CRITERIA	ISSUES		
The issue reflects a clear tension/conflict between competing democratic values such as equality and liberty or security and freedom			
The issue is age-appropriate for your students			
High quality, age appropriate materials about the issue are available			
Examining the issue helps you meet important goals of your curriculum			
Students will be interested and/or concerned about the issue			
Discussing the issue increases knowledge about important democratic principles			
The issue is not too inflammatory so as not to impede a healthy exchange of view and perspectives by students			
Opportunities exist for further examination and civic action in the community and/or school			
Other			

Classroom Deliberation Reflection Form

School _____

Teacher's Name _____

Date _____ Number of students in the observed class/group _____

Deliberation Model (check one):

Civil Conversation Philosophical Chairs Structured Academic Controversy

Characteristics of a successful classroom deliberation are listed below.

As you think about the deliberation in your classroom, indicate how each characteristic was represented.

1. Students had an opportunity to speak and used the opportunity.

All Some None Not observed

2. There was a focus on an interpretable text, issue, or idea. (Summarize or attach text)

Often Sometimes Not observed

3. Open-ended (authentic) questions were asked—ones for which there was no obvious answer. (List examples)

Often Sometimes Not observed

4. Participants used relevant background knowledge, including life-experiences, in a logical way. (List examples)

Often Sometimes Not observed

5. Different opinions were expressed, heard, respected, understood, and analyzed. (List examples)

Often Sometimes Not observed

6. Participation was widespread—not centered on any one person, especially the teacher.

Often Sometimes Not observed

7. Students were engaged intellectually and emotionally. (List examples)

Often Sometimes Not observed

8. Students developed reasoned positions using ideas and arguments presented in the discussion.

All Some None Not observed

General comments:

Discussion Models

A number of discussion models are available. The models may have slightly different outcomes and involve somewhat different skills—but all can be beneficial. The following are three models:

- **Structured Academic Controversy.** This model was developed by the cooperative learning gurus Roger and David Johnson. It is a small group (four-person) model. Each pair is assigned an advocacy position and either receives supporting documentation or researches the topic. Each student pair then presents their position to the other pair in their group. The students listen and take notes but are not permitted to ask questions, disagree, or debate. After the presentations, the students discuss their positions and provide more supporting evidence. With their notes as a guide, the students switch advocacy positions and prepare and give a new presentation. Finally, students drop their advocacy role and generate a consensus report. For more information: www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed409828.html
- **Civil Conversation.** This model, developed by the Constitutional Rights Foundation, is a text-based model. That is, discussion is grounded in a shared reading (or viewing—visuals can also be used as “texts”) experience. Students prepare for the discussion by completing a reading guide. The reading guides provide a launching point for the discussion, but discussants also are asked to refer to the reading throughout the discussion. For more information: www.crf-usa.org/DID/civil_conversation.doc.
- **Philosophical Chairs.** This model, developed by philosophy professor Zahary Seech, includes a movement component, which can be particularly beneficial to some students who are kinesthetic learners. Students prepare for the discussion by reading material on an issue and deciding which position they will take. The chairs in the classroom are arranged in a U shape. Students at the end of the zone are those who are neutral or undecided. Students on opposing sides of the issue sit across from each other. Students can move at any time during the discussion (in fact, they are encouraged to do so). A student on one side of the issue begins by explaining why he/she is taking the pro or con position. A student on the other side then briefly summarizes the previous speaker’s point before beginning his/her comments. The discussion continues with students on the two sides taking turns speaking, always summarizing the previous speaker’s point before providing their own comments. After a student speaks, he/she must wait until two students on his/her side have spoken before speaking again (this number could be raised if necessary to keep students from dominating). The teacher can call time-out to clarify, reflect on the process or content, or refocus students. Students in the neutral zone must take notes on both sides of the argument and can ask questions of students on either side. When students move, they should be able to explain why their views changed. At the end of the discussion, one student from each team summarizes the viewpoints presented by that team during the discussion.

For a resource with information about various models, see Evans, Ronald W. and Saxe, David Warren, ed., *Handbook on Teaching Social Issues*, NCSS Bulletin 93 (Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies, 1996).

Teaching About Controversial Issues Seminar

Sample Agenda

9:00 Introductions

Participants will introduce themselves and respond to a conundrum regarding discussion of controversial issues: If research shows it to be an effective approach to developing civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes, why do so few teachers employ this strategy?

9:15 Defining *Controversial Public Issue*

A definition of *controversial public issue* will be presented. Participants will apply that definition and consider whether it is important to consider different categories of issues in planning for instruction.

9:45 Getting Started: Establishing Norms and Selecting Issues

Participants will discuss how to establish a classroom climate conducive to analyzing and discussing controversial issues. They will be introduced to criteria for selecting issues and apply the criteria to a list of possible issues.

10:30 Break

10:45 Structured Academic Controversy: What Is the Proper Balance Between National Security and Individual Rights?

Participants will learn about the structured academic controversy model and take part in a SAC on a current national issue: What is the proper balance between national security and individual rights? Following the SAC, we will debrief the strengths and weaknesses of this model, and participants will have the opportunity to think about how they might use this model in their classrooms.

12:00 Lunch

12:30 Civil Conversation on a State Issue

In this session, participants will be introduced to a second discussion model, the Civil Conversation. Participants will take part in a civil discussion on a current issue of particular concern in their state. Following the civil conversation, we will debrief the strengths and weaknesses of this model, and participants will have the opportunity to think about how they might use the model in their classrooms.

1:45 Other Instructional Models

Additional discussion models and other classroom strategies for engaging students with controversial public issues will be briefly described in this session, with an emphasis on simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

2:00 Break

2:15 Engaging Reluctant Students in Discussion of Controversial Issues

Every classroom has some students reluctant to take part in classroom discussion. In this session, participants will discuss the varied reasons for this reluctance, as well as strategies for encouraging participation.

3:00 Evaluating Discussion

Tools and strategies for evaluating discussion will be shared in this brief session.

Planning for Discussion in the Classroom

1. Which discussion model will you use?

Structured Academic Controversy

Civil Conversation

Philosophical Chairs

2. What topic do you plan to explore using this model?

3. What important outcomes (or standards) will the discussion help students reach?

4. What materials will you use to prepare students for the discussion? If you don't have materials on this topic yet, where/how will you find them?

5. How will you know whether students have made progress toward achieving the outcomes you identified above? What evidence will you collect? How will you communicate your expectations to students?



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