

Curriculum Design Pattern

Global Learning by Design

Name of pattern

Class / Team Debate

Quick look

Students are assigned a question/debate topic on Blackboard with two possible viewpoints and are encouraged to think about and prepare responses on both the affirmative and negative views prior to the class. In class, students are assigned to a team (affirmative or negative) and are expected to present and persuade the class audience and teacher of their view.

Rationale

The Class/Team Debate gives students the opportunity to organise and synthesise information, conduct research, improve critical thinking skills, develop verbal communication skills, cooperate with other students, connect major concepts.

Learners/Context

This learning activity can be used by any course with learners at any level in a face-to-face classroom teaching situation.

Related patterns

Not So Random Groups.

Related category

Active learning, connected learning.

Alignment

This learning activity gives students the opportunity to develop collaboration, presentation and persuasive argument skills as well as explore topic themes in-depth.

Instructions/Process

Prior to class:

1. Select a debate topic.
 - a. If possible, make the debate topic broad and controversial in order to persuade students to consider and evaluate their viewpoint and other possible viewpoints.
 - b. To help formulate a debate topic consider framing a topic around (i) whether or not something is necessary; or (ii) whether or not something is beneficial; or (iii) whether or not something is practical.
 - c. If possible, schedule the debate at the end of the learning of a key concept so that students can call upon information they have learned throughout the topic.
2. Post debate topic or question on Blackboard with two possible viewpoints assigned (i.e. affirmative and negative viewpoints):
 - a. Post links to presentation and debating tips to assist students (see Resources/Technology).
 - b. Ask students to think about, research and prepare responses on the two views prior to the class. This will encourage students to evaluate and critically analyse both sides of the topic being debated.
 - c. Advise students that they will be assigned a position to debate on immediately before the debate. Note: Based on the difficulty of the topic and student circumstances, assigning of position to be debated can be undertaken in advance of the debate/class to allow for extensive preparation in relation to the assigned position. Ensure you provide students with sufficient preparation time.

In class:

3. Assign students to a team and assign one of the two viewpoints (affirmative or negative) to each team.
4. Students, working in their teams, plan for 10-15 minutes the points that they will debate.
5. Begin the debate with a short introduction to set the proper tone and explain the process and rules of the debate.
6. Randomly determine which team will commence the debate (e.g. coin toss) and assign a timekeeper.
7. Each group then has three rounds of three minutes to present and confirm their view and rebut other views. For example, each team has:

- a. 3 minutes to state position (Team 1 & then Team 2)
 - b. 3 minutes for cross-examination and rebuttal (Team 1 & then Team 2)
 - c. 3 minutes for closing remarks (Team 1 & then Team 2)
8. The teacher moderates the debate and following the debate summarises and comments on the key points of the debate.
 9. Optional: All students to reflect and submit a written critique of the debate.

Conditions

Access to Blackboard.

Class size - debate may be difficult to conduct with large groups. Options for conducting debate with large classes:

- Post various debate topics and assign affirmative and negative teams for each topic.
- Use a cross-examination format and allow 'audience' class members to ask questions.
- Have several teams prepared to debate and switch teams after every round.
- Invite students who are not on the debating teams to score the debate and select the winning team.

Resources/Technology

Timer / stopwatch required to time each team's debate contribution.

Presentation tips from Garr Reynolds, author of Presentation Zen: (http://www.garreynolds.com/Presentation/pdf/presentation_tips.pdf)

Debating tips - 'How to Perform Well in a Debate' (wikiphow): (<http://www.wikihow.com/Perform-Well-in-a-Debate>)

'How to judge a debate' (wikiphow): (<http://www.wikihow.com/Judge-a-Debate>)

Alford, K.L. & Surdu, J.R. (2002). Using In-class Debates as a Teaching Tool, ASEE/IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference, Nov. 6-9, 2002, Boston MA, S1F-10 - S1F-15. Retrieved from (<http://www.fie-conference.org/fie2002/papers/1130.pdf>)

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, 19(2): 183-90. Retrieved from: (<http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/pdf/ijtlhe200.pdf>)