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## Debate

Debates as a teaching tool can be traced back to ancient Greece, with the Sophists, Protagoras, and Aristotle as the earliest pioneers (Vo & Morris, 2006). Today, debates exist in countless forms in any society, ranging from government debates, court proceedings, to debates in media and everyday life where individuals present opposing views through social interaction (Fallahi & Haney, 2011). As an instructional method, debating involves students in expressing their opinions from two competing perspectives with the goal of contradicting each other's arguments (Chang & Cho, 2010). An opportunity for decision may be given after opposing views are presented in alternating statements.

Research and practice have shown effective debating in various formats for educational purposes. Examples in undergraduate courses include dividing students into opposing groups that present in turn or discuss in a relatively unstructured, free-flowing form, as well as role-playing or simulations of media and court debates (Berdine, 1984). Much as the format can vary, a classroom debate that serves effective teaching and learning is encouraged to incorporate four conceptual components: (a) *development* of ideas with description, explanation, and demonstration, (b) *clash* of opinions supported by reasons and evidence, (c) *extension* or arguments against criticisms, which again are refuted by the opponent, and (d) *perspective*, the process of weighing ideas and issues to conclude with a logical decision is made, either about the issue or about the presentation of arguments (Snider & Schnurer, 2002).

Successful uses of debating have been reported in a variety of disciplines, including psychology (Fallahi & Haney, 2011), geography (Healey, 2012), marketing (Combs & Bourne, 1994), accounting (Camp & Schnader, 2010), engineering (Chang & Cho, 2010), sociology (Green & Klug, 1990), social work (Keller, Whittaker & Burke, 2001), nursing (Candela, Michael & Mitchell, 2003), and pharmacy (Lin & Crawford, 2007). Recently, debates have been used in online settings, including online forums (Selwyn, 2007; Park, Kier & Jugdey, 2011), games, and communications software (Healey, 2012).

Debating has been shown to facilitate engagement in undergraduate classrooms. It facilitates verbal participation (Fallahi & Haney, 2011) and better involves students in class (Berdine, 1984); instead of passive learning, students take up more responsibility for comprehension of the subject matter (Snider & Schnurer, 2002), and invest more serious study effort (Huryn, 1986). Both participating in the debate process and observing it have been reported to be valuable by undergraduate students (Mooeller, 1985). Debate also leads to more active post-debate discussion (Green & Klug, 1990).

Debating is also found to improve learning outcomes. The immediate positive effects include greater knowledge acquisition by reinforcing already taught materials (Kennedy, 2009). For the learning of controversial subjects in particular, debating enhances students' appreciation for the complexities of the subject matter, and challenges prior beliefs (Bell, 1982). In the longer term, debating helps students acquire better comprehension, application, and critical evaluation skills when presented a complex topic (Omelycheva &

Avdeyeva, 2008). It improves students' listening and public speaking skills (ibid.), and also opens opportunities to develop oral communication skills (Combs & Bourne, 1994), creativity (Vo & Morris, 2006), and empathy (Bell, 1982).

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