

**Final Project
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Setting the Stage

For my project, I will outline an overview of a semester-long course that I have developed based on the text *Discover Debate* by Michael Lubetsky, Charles LeBeau, and David Harrington¹. My ideas were informed by this source, but the sample activities I provide will be original (although in a real course I would definitely draw from the text; it contains many relevant and well-structured activities).

The classroom situation I propose is hypothetical (meaning I am not currently teaching in such an environment) but could very possibly exist under reasonable circumstances. I am not developing this course merely for this final project; rather, it is for personal reasons. My desire to create my own course arose when I attended the TESOL 2001 Conference in St. Louis this past March. Unfortunately, the parameters of this project do not allow me to go into great detail; however, in the future I hope to refine the results of this project with the purpose of actually implementing it in an IEP or adult education program.

This course is designed for high-intermediate to advanced adults who are studying English either for academic or communicative purposes and whose level is an indication of the amount of time they have been in the U.S., thus indicating cultural awareness and familiarity (one to two years). Students

¹ Lubetsky, M., LeBeau, C., & Harrington, D. (2000). Discovering Debate. Santa Barbara, CA: Language Solutions, Inc.

would be more or less homogenous according to level but heterogeneous with respect to nationality. My lesson plans will be based on a class size of 20. The course integrates all four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing through the medium of debate. I have often wanted to conduct informal or formal debates in my classes but have floundered, wondering where to start. There are so many skills involved, not to mention the highly structured debate format with which to familiarize oneself.

I propose that this can be accomplished in approximately twelve weeks, conducting class three times a week, with two hours for each session. Students would also be required to complete various homework assignments each week, about four hours outside of class to complete necessary preparations (sometimes research) and review. Obviously, these are rough estimates of time that could be modified if necessary.

My rationale for choosing the topic of debate is as follows: Recent studies have shown that successful instruction incorporates critical thinking skills. Apparently, linking linguistic information with higher level thinking (and thus accessing schemata) speeds up the internalization process and increases the retention rate of information. In fact, it seems to be the trend as of late in the TESL/TEFL field. When debating an issue, students are not only required to comprehend what is happening, they are also required to use logic in order to critically analyze and evaluate opinion statements. It doesn't stop there, however! After the analyzation and evaluation process, students must then make sense of what they heard, compared/contrasted to what they actually

believe, and then respond by representing their opinion. The process is a complicated one, but in real situations, each step happens very quickly. Students must learn to keep up with the fast pace; thus, they need to practice each step individually and later synthesize them into one smooth process. The debate format helps students move from a passive, receptive role in the language to a more active, productive one. The interaction patterns embedded in a debate, although more formally and rigidly structured, mirror real-life discussion situations that students would encounter in their everyday lives.

Offensive vs. Defensive

I would devote approximately one week to cultivating each of the following eight skills. Skills one through three deal with taking the affirmative opinion position (offensive), and skills four through eight deal with opposing the negative opinion position (defensive).

Skill 1: *Recognizing an opinion.* This seems very basic, but it is not necessarily so simple. We would explore the answer to the question "What is an opinion?" At this point, I would not yet solicit my students' personal opinions. This would be a mere recognition activity of others' opinions. The first activity would be listening to / watching TV commercials. Opinions are often subtly expressed in commercials, to the extreme that if you are not paying close attention, it is possible to miss the point! The next day would be reading magazine advertisements, with a similar focus as the TV commercials,

just concentrating on a different linguistic skill. We would practice until students mastered extracting and/or decoding explicit and implicit opinions. This is fundamental to the course.

Skill 2: *Having an opinion*. Although everyone has opinions, not everyone has an opinion on every topic! I would communicate to the students the importance of stating what opinions they hold, whether tentative or strong, and establish an atmosphere of respect vital to the success of the course. (Because of the “controversial” nature of some of the topics, I would spend extra time here to ensure that everyone understands that using discretion and sensitivity to others in discussions is absolutely necessary.) I know I cannot *force* anyone to hold an opinion, but what I *can* do is give students a forum to begin considering ideas and formulating their thoughts on issues that maybe they had not considered before. In order to do this, I would create class surveys comprised of various topics that would be addressed in the scope of the course. The survey would ask students whether they are for or against certain issues. I would create two surveys: one to be used in a reading/writing format (individual response) and one to be used in a listening/speaking format (class response). Discussion would follow as we would compile the results on the board and briefly describe each topic. I would clarify any initial questions they might have in relation to the topics chosen. Since my resources would be obtained locally, they might seem “culturally biased.” However, I would take this as an opportunity to share various aspects of the U.S. culture with the students, simultaneously soliciting personal experiences from them in an

attempt to help them establish a relationship to and an interest in the material.

Skill 3: *Explaining and supporting an opinion.* This would include the students simply stating their opinions as well as providing the reasoning behind them. I would guide the students to first discover why they took the stances that they did and then I would encourage the use of reasons that logically and directly support what they believe. These could be in the format of an example, a statistic, or an expert opinion. Unless the students happen to be extremely knowledgeable on the topic or can draw upon specific personal experiences related to the issue, they will probably need to be briefly introduced to research. I would take them to the library and show them how to search for supporting statistics and quotes from experts in the particular field. We would primarily utilize periodicals, the Internet, and microfiche (microfilm?) containing newspaper and magazine articles. Reference books could be a possibility, but it would consume much more time for the students to extract the information they needed from such a long text. Instead, I would select shorter texts suitable for a limited amount of time. I would probably require that the students submit a written assignment here, comprised of an expressed opinion with logical supporting reasons.

Skill 4: *Recognizing contrasting opinions.* This skill would be an extension of skill one, except it would be examining more than one opinion side by side to see how they differ. For this activity, I would use editorials. Many times there are several letters printed that address the same issue. I

would ask the students to read critically and determine the writer's stance. Hopefully, skill one would have prepared the students enough so that we wouldn't have to spend a lot of time here; it should come easily for them at this point.

Skill 5: *Note-taking*. For the following four skills (five through eight), I would use as many resources as possible, such as newspaper and magazine articles, press conferences, radio shows, TV talk shows, political proceedings (Congressional meetings taped off of cable, for example) and the like. This step would serve as a bridge to skill six. Normally, during a debate, there is insufficient time to take exhaustive notes, but one might be able to jot down at least a few key words, and that is exactly what I would have the students do. I would utilize the written texts first, followed by the spoken ones, having the students choose no more than five of the most important words (this involves prioritizing) and then using those words to orally reconstruct the opinions constituting the argument.

Skill 6: *Summarizing an opinion*. This stage would extend note-taking one step further. The reaction time would be less—meaning I would give the students less time to process the information they heard before requiring them to reproduce the information, both orally and written. Here, I would stress the necessity to rephrase by using other words, or the same words used by the speaker but rearranged in a different order (anything but verbatim). The more they practice this skill, the faster they will be able to comprehend and reword as necessary. (I suppose this would be an appropriate time to mention the

issue of plagiarism and giving credit to sources in both spoken and written contexts.)

Skill 7: *Evaluating an opinion.* In this stage, students would closely examine the reasons that support an opinion, one by one. First, they would be forced to decide if the reasoning were true or false. Then, if it were true, they would have to determine if the reasoning is important, relevant, or significant to the argument. These two decisions will ultimately determine whether or not the argument is well supported. If the reasoning included statistics or outside sources, the students would also have to question these in the same manner.

Skill 8: *Refuting an opinion.* Now the students would be put on the spot. They would have to recall any researched information or rely solely on their logic abilities and personal experiences in order to refute an opinion, criticize its supports, and offer an alternative in its place. (Note here to students that “criticizing” an argument is *not* synonymous to “attacking” the person who delivers the argument.) Ultimately, the listener will remain convinced or unconvinced. It is the students’ job to make the argument as convincing as possible. This requires a great deal of anticipatory and critical thinking on the part of the student. It is potentially the most difficult of the eight skills to acquire, but certainly not impossibly so. There might also be some cultural obstacles to overcome. Some cultures do not believe in criticizing others, especially “experts” or “professionals.” As the representative of American culture, I would have to communicate the

importance of the tactful use of critical analysis in discourse and its necessity in college-level literature courses.

The Crux

The final four weeks would comprise the culmination of the course, the reason why we spent the prior eight weeks learning and practicing each of the eight skills. The students would now be required to synthesize all eight skills into a formal debate. Hopefully, I would have achieved the creation of a comfortable atmosphere so that even timid students would have participated in the class activities. However, making the transition would not necessarily be easy for the shy students. Ideally, they would transfer their abilities to the public forum despite any lingering fears, but I might have to coax them into doing it! The first week would be spent on learning the actual format of a debate, mainly in what order the presentations occur. I would initially provide a model, a debate taped at a local high school or college debate team competition (or perhaps, if the timing's right, a field trip to watch one live), and explain each step as it occurs on tape. Because until this point the main focus would have been on content, I would also take some time to teach appropriate language for each section of the debate (how to agree and disagree, formality, courtesy, etc.) and briefly address characteristics of public speaking (posture, eye contact, gestures, slow and clear speech, etc.) Week two would consist of a mock-debate in which I would select a relevant topic, have them perform some basic research and then hold a practice round in

class. (At this point, I would have to address the issue of not necessarily agreeing with the side on which you debate. For example, if it were a for/against censorship issue, students may not agree with the side they're on, but will have to muster their logical forces to create an intelligent argument, which they should be able to do after eight weeks of practice.) I would monitor the students to verify that their proceedings run smoothly and in an organized fashion. At the beginning of week three, I would assign a different (but equally interesting) topic and tell them to prepare independently for a formal debate the following week. I would set up individual appointments for the two groups (for/against) in order to review their arguments and provide any additional necessary guidance. I would love to conduct the formal debate in front of other students in the program so that everyone could benefit (and not just my students). I would advertise this event on the premises and choose someone knowledgeable (and objective!) to be the judge. Imagine the pride that the students would feel after completing such a project! I believe they would gain all the confidence they'd need to successfully conduct themselves in the language! In addition, what an example they would set for other students! They could provide the other students with motivation and a goal for which to strive.

Activities Preface

Now that I have outlined the general flow of the course, I will proceed with the description of several specific activities that can be used throughout

the semester. These activities do not necessarily occur successively, but rather are used in conjunction with teaching certain skills. In addition, let me stress that it is sometimes impossible to separate one skill from another; thus, there may not be an instructional sequence that is completely linear. Some skills can be taught in conjunction with others; also, when teaching a new skill, it is helpful to review old ones so that the students begin to understand the necessity of simultaneous incorporation. The benefit is that activities used in the beginning of the semester can be recycled or built upon later in the semester!

Activity 1: Ads

Skill 1

Materials: a box of magazines, markers, construction paper, glue, scissors, 10 realia objects

Intro (10 min.): Introduce the topic of advertisements. Solicit examples of ads students are familiar with from the U.S. or their countries and write them on the board. Ask students what the purpose of advertising is (to *convince* consumers to buy products). Ask students which ads are successful and why (slogans help people remember). Discuss difference between explicit and implicit opinion statements.

1. (20 min.) The concentration of this class will be on magazine advertisements. Have each student choose a partner, and distribute several magazines to each pair. Have them look through to find one ad they want to work with and tear it out.² Once pairs have chosen an ad, they need to take out a sheet of paper and divide it into three columns. In the first column, they should state the opinion on which the ad is based and whether it is explicitly stated or implied. In the second column, they should list any words, phrases, or illustrations that they think contribute the most strongly to the declaration of the opinion. In the third column, they should speculate whether or not they think the opinion assumption is true and list the reasons why or why not.

² Sample ads taken from People Magazine (Nov. 17, 1997; Jul. 10, 2000; May 7, 2001) can be found in Appendix A.

2. (15 min.) Once pairs have finished, volunteers will present their information to the rest of the class so that everyone gets practice in recognizing opinions.
3. (5 min.) Brief explanation of the connection of the activity to the rest of the semester: that students will have to examine arguments, the reasons on which they are based, and deconstruct them to determine the most logical form possible. Although debates usually explicitly state arguments, this activity is a forum to exercise their higher-level thinking skills by extracting implicit arguments.
4. (35 min.) Collect magazines and distribute 1 realia object to each pair (anything that is possible to sell—best to be creative here to challenge students). Tell each pair they need to create an advertisement and an accompanying slogan. They can be as innovative as they want.
5. (35 min.) Students share their ads with the class, but no explanation is given. The class may ask the pair clarification questions, but the pair should not reveal reasoning behind their decisions. Students then post all ads on the wall so that everyone can peruse them once more. A class vote is taken on which one is the best (secret ballot). Teacher leads discussion on why the class chose the one they did (good supporting reasoning).
6. *Homework:* Choose your favorite ad (even if it differed from the class') and write a paragraph why you liked it the best.

Activity 2: Class Survey

Skill 2

Materials: survey sheets (see Appendix B); small, blank sheet of paper for each student

Intro: to topics students will see the rest of the semester, to get an idea of what to expect during the semester

1. (35 min.) *Running Dictation*³—Divide the class into 10 pairs. Distribute a blank survey sheet to each pair of students. One person in each pair is responsible for listening and writing; the other for reading and speaking. Teacher posts each survey topic on the wall. In each pair, the reader/speaker runs to see what the topic is, then runs back to report the topic to the listener/writer who records the topic on the survey sheet. The reader/speaker may *not* write, and the listener/writer may *not* read! They must spell words correctly, hence focusing on the model, even if they have to run back and forth several times. When each pair has copied it correctly, teacher pauses to verify basic comprehension of the phrase. If someone doesn't understand, teacher gives a brief description. Afterwards, teacher continues to post topics (all 20) repeating the same process, but with students switching roles each time. When all topics have been completed, teacher distributes 10 more survey sheets (so that each student instead of each pair has a copy) and gives them a few minutes to record the topics a second time.

³ This activity idea was taken from a British Council adult ESL education workshop in Medellin, Colombia in Feb. 2000.

2. (25 min.) Students then interview five classmates, asking them whether they are *for/against* each of the 20 topics and recording their answers.
3. (5 min.) Distribute one small, blank sheet of paper to each student. As a whole class, ask each student to rank the most important topic to him/her and write the number (1-20) on the small piece of paper.
4. (5 min.) Teacher collects papers, quickly compiles results, and chooses the five most popular. Teacher creates five columns on the board with the topic as the head of each column.
5. (50 min.) Teacher solicits *for/against* results on the first topic and records them on the board. Teacher then asks students to brainstorm vocabulary related to the topic, words that the students think they might encounter in the remainder of the course in articles, research, etc. Repeat process for each topic.
6. *Homework:* Write 20 personal opinion statements based on the topics on the survey sheet. These statements do *not* have to be straightforward (“I am for” / “I am against”), but should avoid containing any reasoning why.

Activity 3: Media Bias Editorials

Skills 1, 4-6

Materials: 7 editorial letters on the same topic⁴

Warm-Up (10 min.): Discuss the existence of media bias in students' respective countries. Discuss difficult language in newspaper. Emphasize reading for content as opposed to understanding every word.

Vocab Intro (5 min): democrat/republican; liberal/conservative; left/right

1. (20 min.) Divide class into 6 groups of 3 and 1 pair. Distribute a different editorial to each group. Have them preview the title, making a prediction of the author's opinion (for or against media bias?). Students in each group read the entire letter, taking turns reading each paragraph aloud. Then they re-read it aloud stopping after each paragraph to list 2 key words that they think are the most important. Students orally reconstruct the argument using the key words and then discuss to see if their predictions were correct.
2. (40 min.) Groups pass letters and repeat process for 2 more letters (a total of 3 times).
3. (45 min.) Whole-group discussion. Each group returns to the first letter they analyzed to see if they can recall the opinions based on the key words they recorded and presents these ideas to the class. Address the issue of effective vs. non-effective key words.

⁴ See Appendix C for specific examples regarding this activity, taken from the July 21, 2001 edition of the Atlanta Journal & Constitution editorial page.

4. *Homework:* Write a summary paragraph of each of the 3 letters they reviewed in their groups.

Activity 4: Ordering Flashcards

Skills 5-6

Materials: scotch tape; 8 4x6 blank index cards; newspaper article⁵

Intro (5 min.): Inform students that they will be starting with a decontextualized paragraph and working towards achieving the sequence of a whole newspaper article. No information is given as to the topic of the article.

1. (15 min.) Divide class into 4 groups of 3 and 4 groups of 2. Each group receives 1 index card containing 1 paragraph (except for paragraphs 1 & 2, which are together). Students need to read the paragraph and on the back of the index card, derive topic and note key words. Then, they must construct one sentence that summarizes (not quotes!) the main idea of the paragraph. They must predict where they think this article falls in the article (beginning? middle? end?).
2. (20 min.) Match each group of 3 with a group of 2 (hence, 4 groups of 5). Each group shares the ideas on their index card with the other group, and they discuss the relationship of the 2 paragraphs (before/after? next to/far from?).
3. (25 min.) Match 2 groups of 5 together (hence, 2 groups of 10). All 4 core groups share their cards and repeat the previous process, trying to decide order.

⁵ See Appendix D for a specific example of an article for this activity taken from the July 4, 2001 edition of the Atlanta Journal & Constitution.

4. (5 min.) One group tapes their cards on the board in their predetermined order (whether or not they think the paragraphs are side-by-side).
5. (10 min.) The other group then inserts their cards appropriately.
6. (10 min.) The first group verifies and makes any needed modifications.
7. (20 min.) Whole-class discussion about content of article. Collective, teacher-directed effort to create an appropriate title.
8. (10 min.) Distribution of original article. Observation of the title and order of paragraphs. Compared/contrasted to class' predictions.
9. *Homework:* Read article in its original sequence and create 5 questions based on it to prepare for discussion in next class.

Activity 5: Support vs. Criticism

Skills 3, 7, 8

Materials: 20 strips of paper containing topics from class survey

Seating: whole class in a circle

1. (10 min.) Students take out a piece of paper and choose a strip of paper. At the top of the paper, they write their personal opinion statement about the topic they chose, simply stating whether they are for or against ("I believe that..." or "I think that..."). On the rest of the paper, they draw a line down the middle, creating 2 columns. Students label them "support" and "criticism."
2. (50 min.) Once students have finished with their opinion statements, everyone passes their papers to the student on the left. Students then read the opinion statement and think of one reason to *support* the argument (whether they agree or not!), and they write it under the support column. Students are forced to think quickly because time is limited to approximately 2 minutes! Every two minutes, students must pass their papers, encounter a new topic, and write a supporting reason *different* from those preceding. This time limitation requires students to muster spontaneity and think on their feet (just like they would have to in a debate)!
3. (15 min.) When all topics have circulated to each student, teacher collects them and randomly selects 10 for the following activity. (The

- other 10 can be saved for another day of practice!) Students choose a partner and each pair receives one paper. Together, they must read and examine the supporting reasons and create a minimum of 5 critical analysis statements.
4. (45 min.) Each pair presents their paper to the whole class. Based on the supporting reasons and critical analysis statements (*not* personal preference!), the class then votes on whether they agree or disagree with the original opinion statement. An agreeing majority would indicate strong supporting reasons. A disagreeing majority would signify strong criticism. Teacher records information for each topic on the board so that students can view their strengths and weaknesses as a class (because everyone contributes to what the class votes on, as opposed to highly individualized work).
 5. *Homework:* Choose 1 of the 10 topics and write 3 paragraphs: a summary of the supporting reasons, a summary of the criticism, and your personal opinion regarding this topic.

Appendix B: Class Survey

Topic	Student #1	Student #2	Student #3	Student #4	Student #5
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
13.					
14.					
15.					
16.					
17.					
18.					
19.					
20.					

20 Topics

Cursing

Smoking in public

Media bias

Abortion

Premarital sex

U.S. drinking age

Government taxes

Capital punishment

Intercultural relationships

U.S. immigration laws

Vegetarianism

Eating fast food

Gun control

Talking on the cell phone while driving

Free speech

War

Military obligations

Arranged marriages

Democracy

Infrequent vacations

Appendix C

Appendix D