

USING THE IDEA OF DEBATE THROUGH THE INTERNET

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Level: Pre-Intermediate and above

Time: 90 minutes

Aims:

- To be able to enunciate English words at the sentence level in way that a partner will be able to understand your opinion.
- To broaden their perspectives from different point of views
- To be able to find what you look for on the Web.

Technical requirements: Computers with the Internet connection

Notes:

This activity uses the idea of debate, two parties with opposing views (pros and cons) about a topic. It is not easy to figure out what to do with the innovative CALL classrooms and computer equipped classrooms. This is one of the ideas you can use when you are in that kind of situation. You can also assign parts of the activity for self-study. This activity is designed to cover reading and oral skills. It works if you use this activity in a group rather than pair work at first.

Preparation:

It is often the case that students don't know what debate is and how it works. It makes sense to teach the system of debate beforehand to avoid confusion. It probably works best if you explain it in Japanese. Here are the useful websites for teachers to use.

<http://www2u.biglobe.ne.jp/~kurapy/debate.html>, where the rules of debate are explicitly explained in Japanese.

<http://www.kings.edu/debate/rules.htm>, with debate format from American Debate Association Rules (in English).

Procedure:

1. Choose a topic for debate (5-10 mins)

You can choose almost any topics you want, such as death penalty (capital punishment), greenhouse, school uniform, smoking, gun control and so on. You can also let students decide the topic. (It works well if you choose a topic which they are familiar with at first.)

2. Students discuss it in pairs. (10 mins)

For example, if they choose school uniform as a topic, they will talk about things like "Is it good to have school uniform or not? Why? What is the common problem you encounter if you have school uniform?" Students sometimes don't know what to talk about, so teacher should give some questions to start with. In addition, almost all of the junior-high and high school students in Japan wear a school uniform. The teacher has to remind them of the days when they wore a school uniform and what they thought of their friends who went to different schools with no school uniform.

3. Class brainstorming (15-20 mins)

Once they finished talking in pairs, brainstorm the good points and bad points of the topic as a class. The teacher takes notes of what students discussed on the white board. In this phase, they will see different opinions.

4. Go to the website (20-30 mins)

Go to <http://www.debatatabase.org/>. Suppose you choose "school uniform" as a topic, tell students to type the topic in the search space. Then, you will see the topic "school uniform" and subtopic "Should school require their students to wear a school uniform?" Clicking on it will lead you to the next page where you will see pros and cons about the topic. Tell students to read them and gather different opinions. If you scroll down and go to "Further discussion", you will be able to find more opinions on this topic from around the world. Please give them ample time to read the entire opinions so that they will be able to grasp the flow of the debate. They might need a dictionary to comprehend some of the words. They may also go to other websites if they think they need more information on something to support their opinion. One of the main focuses in this activity is that they will see many opinions and can go to other websites to look for supporting arguments right on the spot if they have the internet. You could also go to <http://www.debate-central.org/> to see other topics. In this website, you can see past debates topics dealt with from 1996 to 2002.

5. Check with the class (20-30 mins)

Try to figure out what they can add to the list of the things they brainstormed. Discuss them with the class if necessary and see which party has better arguments.

Conclusion

It may be a good idea to teach students a list of vocabulary or phrases they need to express their opinions.

A. I agree,,,

B. I disagree,,,

C. I understand your point, however,,,

Students enjoy this activity once they are familiar with the task. What they enjoy is that they have to think about the topic and not only learn English, but also learn to see things in many different perspectives.

Please note that you need to get to know your students and familiarize them with the pair and group work before you try this activity. It is also difficult for low level students to do this activity.

It sometimes takes a lot of time for students to read the parts of pros and cons about a topic. Therefore, it is very helpful if you make a list of vocabulary items they need to read the parts of pros and cons when you try this activity for the first time. As a further activity, ask your students to do research about a topic and come up with more reasons to support their position after the class. They can gain more knowledge about the topic if you try to discuss it again in a group. The one who lost in the previous class might have a better argument this time. You will be surprised to see how much information they gather.
