Walking Debate

Summary

Debates are a great way for learners to express opinions on an issue, to see different sides of an argument and to develop communication skills. In a walking debate, the agree-disagree continuum allows learners to change their minds according to arguments made. Positions are fluid, which means that as learners actively share opinions, argue respectfully and reflect on the debate, they may change their minds and move along the spectrum.

Walking debates can be used at the start of a topic to establish learners' initial views, or towards the end when they have more knowledge to bring to the debate.

Materials required

Classroom walls and space to move around.

Large print outs of the words 'Agree' and 'Disagree'.

Steps

1. Identify 'statements' to debate based on the topic you are exploring. This can be done by the educator, or learners can suggest a list of statements to debate.
2. Make sufficient space in the classroom so that learners can move around.
3. Put the word 'Agree' at one end of the space and 'Disagree' at the other end.
4. Read out a statement.
5. Ask learners to move towards 'agree' or 'disagree', or somewhere in between based on their opinion or position on that statement. Encourage them to ignore others' positions and stick to their own opinion.
6. Give learners 1-2 minutes to discuss their position with others near them.
7. Call on individual learners to explain their position.

   Prompts to encourage debate:

   - Why did you stand there?
   - Tell us why you feel/think that?
   - Can you give an example of what you mean? Or a reason why you agree/disagree?
   - Has anyone changed their mind? Or wants to move up or down the agree/disagree continuum?
   - What influenced you to change your position?
8. Encourage learners to move positions if they change their mind during the debate.
9. Use a reflection exercise to close the activity. This can be done individually in a reflective journal, or as a whole class through a reflection circle, adding Post-its to the agree/disagree continuum, writing a reflection on a piece of paper and the teacher reading them out anonymously etc.

   Prompts to encourage reflection:

   - Did you learn anything new about the topic?
   - Did you hear any opinions or ideas which you had not considered before?
   - Did your own opinion change? In what way?
   - Was the debate useful/informative/worthwhile? What made it useful?
   - Are there any unresolved issues?

More information

- What is a Walking Debate: Video (1.41mins) by Powtoon
- JCT: Walking Debate Strategy Sheet - includes learning outcomes, key skills, instructions.
- Muinin Catalyst: Supporting Skills Walking Debates - includes instructions, variations and reflection prompts.
- See our WWGS Doing GCE in Junior Cycle Wood Technology 'Manu National Park p.27.
- For variations of debate activities, including speed debates, 'yes and…' debate and walking debates and spectrum debates see Teaching Controversial Issues in the Citizenship Classroom page 45.

"Don't raise your voice, improve your argument."

Desmond Tutu *(1931-2021) South African Anglican bishop, theologian, anti-apartheid activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner.*

"It is better to debate a question without settling it, than to settle a question without debating it."

Joseph Joubert *(1754-1824)*
French moralist and writer