

## 【研究ノート】

# Group Debate as a Method of Final Assessment: Process and Observations

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この論文は高校でEFL英語のグループディベートについて書いた研究ノートである。グループディベートは生徒が様々な課題に挑戦する。更にこのディベートは期末試験の一部としても利用された。尚、授業の中でこれらは全て外国語で行われる。以下、ディベートの方法についてはもちろん、グループ内での個々の役割分担と教師による評価方法について深く考察する。

## Abstract

This paper will discuss the advantages of using group debate in a high school classroom setting and using that as a framework for final assessment within an EFL communication class. The paper will talk about debate itself, debating as a member of a group, and the challenges of using this method within the context of an EFL class. The paper will also offer the author's own observations and conclusions about the process and the results of using this teaching method in their own classes at an English-intensive high school in Osaka, Japan.

## Introduction

Debate is a challenging task for communicating ideas and exploring the merits of a particular point of view. When utilized successfully as a teaching tool, it allows the debaters to more deeply understand how to support their own ideas and how to challenge their opponent's points. Good debaters are able to anticipate the challenges that will be brought up against their own points and strengthen their ideas beforehand. Time is limited within debate so it also teaches quick thinking and active response. For EFL students, debate can be particularly challenging due to the addition of having to present in a second language.

## Previous Studies

First it is important to define the idea of debate itself. Krieger comments: Debate is an excellent activity for language learning because it engages students in a variety of cognitive and linguistic ways. In addition to providing meaningful listening, speaking and writing practice, debate is also highly effective for developing argumentation skills for persuasive speech and writing (Krieger, 2005). Within the EFL context then, debate is a

particularly useful tool and skill to develop as it allows learners to use the aforementioned English skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening to engage with material in a comfortable yet structured learning environment.

Moreover, as stated by Makiko Ebata: When learning a new language for global communication, students are required to confidently express their thoughts. In order for students to be vocal, critical thinking skills are essential. The use of debate has been an effective technique for strengthening my students' speaking and critical thinking abilities (Ebata, 2009, p. 35). Debate therefore allows for students on opposing teams to actively work together and put forward ideas and deliberate statements in an effort to win over their opponents. They must utilize their English ability to make opening statements, share their opinions and defend their positions. The framework of debate then gives ESL students a comfortable guide that they can easily apply to the key aspects of pronunciation, lexical context, research, argumentative and persuasive speech. Participants are also afforded opportunities to engage with controversial topics and present a point of view that they would otherwise keep to themselves.

In the article, "Attitudes towards argumentation in college EFL classes in Japan," (Fukuda, 2003, p. 417-418), a debate study conducted with Japanese students, found that "before the debates only 30.8% of the students were not afraid of expressing their opinions when they were not the same as others'. After the debate this figure rose to 56.7%." He went on to say that "the knowledge or skills which came from the practice in the debates led the students to become more accustomed to expressing opinions." This research demonstrated that in those particular classes, the framework of debate gave the students the confidence to express themselves even though they were using a second language.

### Background

The authors of this paper were teachers at a municipal public high school with an English-intensive program in Osaka, Japan. The students in this program have a challenging entrance exam they must take to gain entry to the high school, which has resulted in a high-level student body that is very motivated and serious about their English studies. The students have several English specific courses each week and, for communications classes, are divided into groups of 10 and placed in a classroom with a native English speaker in order to maximize their direct English speaking time. Each year as the students become more skilled at English communication, it is important to give them more useful and meaningful challenges for improving their abilities within this environment. Due to this high level of class time directed towards English study, these students are not necessarily representative of the abilities of typical EFL high school students.

### The Process

The final goal of this project was to have a group of four or five students challenging another group of four or five students in a debate. There are a lot of elements involved in this kind of communication exercise so we

had to break down the different aspects of group debate and teach these to the students over time. We also had to give them opportunities to practice and prepare for their final debate presentation.

The specific schedule of classes leading to the final assessment included the following steps listed in the table below. Before the start of the term the students were introduced to the project. At this time they were given handouts with a simplified explanation of group debate and its basic structure as well as the class schedule and details about grading. There were five full classes dedicated to different aspects of debate technique.

1. Gestures and Responses
2. Clarification Request
3. Note Taking and Follow-Up
4. Inviting Others to Discussion
5. Summarizing

fig. 1

Within each of these classes, the beginning part of class was spent teaching these debate techniques within the specified debate structure. At the end of every one of these classes, homework was assigned. This homework assignment asked the students to research an assigned debate topic and find some sort of information, data, graph etc. that would support both sides of a debate resolution. They would then bring that data to the next class and use that, with their teammates, to support one side of a debate against the other half of their class. Lessons 2 through 5 had the latter half of class dedicated to practicing a full debate, using the students' homework as support. After these five classes there was a review class which covered everything learned up to this point and had time for two full debate practices. The last class was the group debate final assessment.

The main topics of discussion for this class and the final test were: smartphones, education, globalization, environment and career choices for women.

In the beginning of this term it was important to teach them about the basics of debate. A traditional format typically contains affirmative and negative speeches. These are followed by negative and affirmative rebuttals. We included discussion and planning time which is particularly necessary for EFL students who need to translate their ideas as well.

After both groups were assigned to either the affirmative or negative side of the debate topic, the debate structure used for all of the practices and the final assessment was as follows:

example topic: Globalization is good for Japan.	
<b>affirmative team</b>	<b>negative team</b>
two minutes of preparation time: Students in each group show their teams their prepared data and decide which points are best and student speaking order.	
two minutes of presentation time	note taking
note taking	two minutes of presentation time
two minutes of refutation preparation time: Students discuss their counterarguments and plan their refutation.	
	two minutes of refutation time.
two minutes of refutation time.	

fig. 2

We had to teach them about finding and bringing data to support their ideas. This involved informing them about how to find and cite credible data and give them assignments to bring data to class before each debate practice. We asked them to bring data that was visually presentable so that their classmates could understand and discuss what they had brought. In order to give students a broader view of the assigned issues they were asked to find data to support both sides of a debate topic. They were only informed which side they would be supporting right before the start of the group debate. The students learned from their own research and were able to see a lot of good examples of effective supports brought to class by their peers as well.

After that, teamwork was essential. One of the challenges of group work that we wanted to deal with from the beginning, was about our highest level students. There are a handful of students who are very adept speakers and very good at this kind of activity but we needed to make sure that those highest level students weren't taking too much of the allotted speaking time. If one or two students were dominating the discussion it could leave the less confident students with little opportunity to participate themselves or give the teachers a chance to evaluate everyone.

One way we dealt with this challenge of higher level students using too much speaking time, was by teaching them techniques of using English words and phrases about how to bring others into the conversation to present their own points. We also taught everyone to respond naturally to things that were said by their classmates. Interjections were an important aspect of keeping everyone active and engaged. Finally, we made it very clear that students who didn't share speaking time would actually lose points.

In order for the students to be able to prepare as completely as possible we gave them an assessment sheet that included a checklist of the important points of group debate that the teachers would grade them on. This assessment was also the final group debate test criteria rubric.

Group Debate Test Criteria Rubric		
2 points	1 point	no points
<input type="checkbox"/> could make effective reactions more than once to what other students said	<input type="checkbox"/> could make an effective reaction	<input type="checkbox"/> could not make effective reactions
<input type="checkbox"/> could ask clarification requests more than once	<input type="checkbox"/> could ask a clarification request	<input type="checkbox"/> could not ask clarification requests
<input type="checkbox"/> could ask follow-up questions to what other students said more than once	<input type="checkbox"/> could ask a follow-up question	<input type="checkbox"/> could not ask follow-up questions
<input type="checkbox"/> could effectively challenge something another group said more than once	<input type="checkbox"/> could effectively challenge something another group said	<input type="checkbox"/> could not effectively challenge anything
<input type="checkbox"/> could invite other students to discussion more than once	<input type="checkbox"/> could invite another student to discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> could not invite other students to discussion
	<input type="checkbox"/> could summarize someone's idea / a group's idea	<input type="checkbox"/> could not summarize someone's idea / a group's idea
	<input type="checkbox"/> could speak in a loud voice so that everyone could hear him/her	<input type="checkbox"/> could not speak in a loud voice so that everyone could hear him/her
	<input type="checkbox"/> could make effective eye contact with other students	<input type="checkbox"/> could not make effective eye contact with other students
<input type="checkbox"/> could state their opinions clearly <b>with</b> reliable statistics, referring to the source	<input type="checkbox"/> could state their opinions clearly <b>or</b> had reliable statistics, referring to the source	<input type="checkbox"/> could not state their opinions clearly or have reliable statistics, referring to the source

fig. 3

For the practice debates in class the teachers served not only to assess the students, but they also judged the winner of each debate. Sometimes the teacher would declare the winner based on the content of their data and supports. Sometimes the teacher would declare a winner based on teamwork and correctly following the structure of the debate. The students weren't graded on whether or not their team won the debate but it was up to the teacher to decide what comments would best reinforce good debate habits and what comments would teach students how to improve their performance.

## Observations

For debate practice, the students were successful from the beginning in presenting their opinions and data. There were however, lots of gaps in different aspects of the whole of their debate presentations. Students would often forget to include an introduction and clearly state which side they were on. When the teachers said "Start" they would often jump right into their first discussion point. The students took turns presenting their points very well and listening quietly while the others spoke. Part of our instructions for students included English reactions and requests for clarification, however, students were slow to get into these habits. They were habitually too polite and not as aggressive as we had asked them to be in this structure of debate. We had to remind them that this was an English course and even if they understood everything they should ask for clarification somewhere, at some time, in order to get full points. This was also important for the speaker being asked to clarify so they could show their language abilities to explain and summarize.

By giving the students checklists of the points of assessment we were able to get the students to fine-tune these points. Immediately after the debates, we would give the students a checklist and ask them to honestly fill it out themselves for the purpose of self-reflection. We would then give them another checklist that the teacher had filled out, so they could compare to see if their own assessment was in line with their instructor's. These practice assessments were not part of their class grade but the students were informed that their end-term final test would be graded following this exact assessment checklist.

Through the repetition of this debate activity using the same structure and assessment checklists, the students were able to gradually get more points to different categories of assessment and they were able to actively improve their weaker points.

As a teacher, these practice debates were important for us as well. Having up to ten checklists for ten different students talking without a set order and script was logistically a bit challenging, at first. After the first couple of practices it was easier for the teachers to get a routine method set up to listen, check and make relevant notes.

## Conclusions

The students performed admirably. Almost all of the students were able to make effective arguments within the guidelines of the debate criteria they were asked to use. They performed sufficiently so that even the lowest scoring students were able to fulfill the requirements necessary to earn passing grades on the final assessment. There were clear improvements to the students' English abilities, confidence and logical organization. The consensus of all the teachers involved was that each student had effectively learned the techniques and structure of group debate and were able to apply those skills appropriately.

After the original implementation of this practice and testing program, the teachers decided that the group debate procedure was a success and it was utilized for the English students the following year as well. The authors of this paper recommend group debate as an effective teaching tool and a strong method of final assessment for courses of high-level EFL students.

#### References

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