

Keira Reid

Mrs. Small

Humanities

12 October 2023

Debates: Preparing Students for the Future

Recall a time you had to present to your peers? Were you nervous speaking in front of everyone? Did you start seeing bored looks of people wishing they were somewhere else? Now think back to a time you were arguing with a colleague. Think how attentively you were listening, and how passionately you responded. While discussions have been widely used in classrooms, debates have only recently grown popular throughout schools. While they may seem similar, debates have a completely different, unique structure that provides many benefits to students. Debates with assigned positions are critical in middle to high school education because they provide the necessary skills to succeed in life. Debates teach students an understanding of complex problems and questions, insight and compassion towards other perspectives, and improves public speaking and argumentation skills.

Debates provide a necessary understanding of complex problems and questions. Middle school is an instrumental age in teaching students and improving their understanding of the world. As Bauschard states, "During this time, children experience the turning point between childhood and adulthood and start to develop the ability to move beyond concrete reasoning to develop abstract decision-making capabilities," (Bauschard 1). Middle school is a crucial learning period, as it is the time students can start to grasp the idea of complex questions, while not all questions have one correct answer, people will sometimes need to make a decision based on multiple factors, middle schoolers need practice in doing this. Teachers need to support this

growth period by teaching their students to develop opinions based on evidence and to be open to counter arguments and disagreements. Teachers can do this by requiring debates in schools. Doing so has students openly argue the importance of some factors as compared to others, learning the intricate parts of important decision making by actively practicing them. These debates should be included in all classes, not solely the humanities. Different students have different interests, and holding debates in multiple disciplines increases the likelihood that a student will partake in a debate topic that interests them. Questions without simple answers are present in every discipline, so no matter what a student wants to follow in their career, debates are relevant. For example, sciences are not classes one would typically see debates in, but in scientific fields there are so many relevant and important debates going on. Students should have their own debates about these to get an experience of the field. Students could debate about the use of genetic testing or appropriate ways to use AI when doing scientific research. Learning the complexity of problems throughout all subjects is important for students later in life when they join the workforce. Debate teaches students that questions will not always have simple answers and that, when trying to answer a complicated question, there are a multitude of aspects to consider.

Teaching kids how to be understanding and considerate of people with different perspectives is a priority in schools, and debates are the solution. Some people believe debates create a competitive atmosphere where students are pit against one another. Although having students argue seems like it would create more competition, debates actually lead to open-minded students and a greater understanding of other perspectives. In 2012, Lilly conducted a study that showed “students were more likely to take on the position that they argued during the debate, regardless of their initial view”. When students are assigned sides or

required to research both sides in a debate, students have to review evidence without their initial biases, henceforth broadening their mindsets. As much as teachers lecture about bias and how to research without it, actively practicing doing so is the best way students learn the effect of bias on their findings. Students do not only have to research without bias, they also have to put themselves in mindsets with different opinions from their own. As they research their assigned side, students have to think both about what makes their side the stronger choice and why someone would disagree. Students learn through debate that disagreement is not always a bad thing, this knowledge is essential when collaborating with others. Throughout life, people are going to have to face disagreement; society needs to teach students how to accept this, and debate is the way to. Debates give students an understanding of other perspectives, giving them a deeper empathy and insight towards other people, through teaching the effect of bias and the acceptance of disagreements.

Debating from middle school provides crucial practice and knowledge of public speaking and critical listening. An article from the Washington Post stated “all schools should teach children the public speaking skills they need for educational progress, for work and for full participation in democracy” (Mercer). Public speaking is one of, if not the most important skill a person can have. Even if someone is good at math or any other subject, not being able to communicate will keep them from ever obtaining success. It is needed in everything including presenting new ideas, showing work, in interviews and more. Not teaching students these skills in school prevents them from achieving success in the future. It also creates an unfair advantage to those who were able to hire a private tutor or go to a private school that taught public speaking. Debate is how schools should teach public speaking because it actively engages the students in a fast paced environment where they can immediately see how their comments were

perceived and need to critically listen while their opponent is speaking. It also teaches them persuasion and argumentation skills. Knowing persuasion and argumentation skills, students are not only better prepared to convince someone of their ideas, but also to see when other people are using persuasion tactics. Therefore, debates give students communication skills and a greater understanding of the world.

Overall, debates are crucial in the education of middle and high school students. For the success of the future generations, students need to learn how to answer complex problems, understanding and empathy, and public speaking and argumentation skills. Debates will teach the future generations these skills, ensuring a successful generation of open minded workers with collaboration skills.

Bauschard, Stefan, and P. Anand Rao. "The Value of Speech and Debate in the Middle School

Years." *Tulane.Edu*,

rhetoric.wp.tulane.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2014/08/Value-of-Speech.pdf.

Accessed 10 Oct. 2023.

Lilly, Emily L. "Assigned Positions for In-Class Debates Influence Student Opinions."

International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 2012,

files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ977172.pdf.

Sanjuan, Renee, and Eleni M. Mantas. "The Effects of Controversial Classroom Debates on

Political Interest: An Experimental Approach." *Journal of Political Science Education*, vol.

18, no. 3, July 2022, pp. 343–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2022.2078215>.

Schwarz, Alan. "A Diverse Mix of Pupils, Learning Civilized Dissent." *The New York Times*, 17

Nov. 2014,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/18/nyregion/new-york-debate-league-includes-diverse-mix-of-middle-school-students.html>.

Shibboleth Authentication Request.

https://shibboleth.gale.com/Shibboleth.sso/Login?entityID=https://idp.wpi.edu/idp/shibboleth&target=https%3A%2F%2Fshibboleth.gale.com%2Fapps%2Fauth%2F%3FuserGroupName%3Dmlin_c_worpoly%26da%3Dtrue%26prodId%3DAONE%26origURL%3Dhttps%253A%252F%252Fgaleapps.gale.com%252Fapps%252Fauth%253FuserGroupName%253Dmlin_c_worpoly%2526da%253Dtrue%2526origURL%253Dhttps%25253A%25252F%25252Fgo.gale.com%25252Fps%25252Fi.do%25253Fp%25253DAONE%252526u%25253Dmlin_c_worpoly%252526id%25253DGALE%2525257CA540114376%252526v%25253D2.1%252526it%25253

Dr%252526ugroup%25253Doutside%252526aty%25253Dip%2526prodId%253DAONE.

Accessed 10 Oct. 2023.

“We Should Be Teaching Kids Public Speaking in School.” *Washington Post*, 7 Oct. 2021,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/10/04/we-should-be-teaching-kids-public-speaking-in-school/>.

“What Are the Benefits of Holding Debates in Middle School Classes?” *ThoughtCo*,

<https://www.thoughtco.com/holding-debates-in-middle-school-classes-8012>. Accessed 10 Oct. 2023.