

Want to engage students using

academic controversy?

Also known as Cooperative Controversy, Structured Controversy, or Structured Academic Controversy, Academic Controversy is a cooperative learning technique in which learners are grouped to debate two opposing views on an issue before attempting to reach a consensus on the issue.

Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheeplike passivity and sets us at noting and contriving ... Conflict is a sine qua non of reflection and ingenuity.

Dewey (1916)

How does it work?

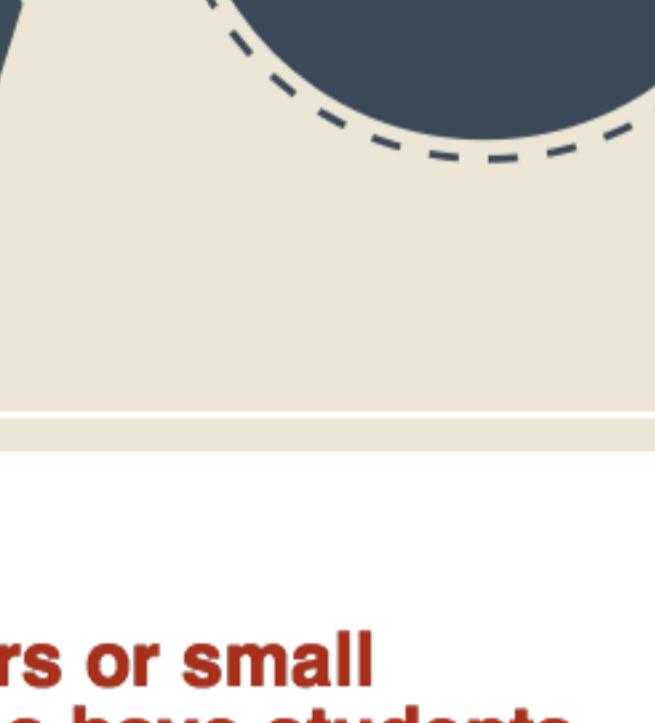
By arguing both sides of contentious issues students can safely and candidly explore multiple perspectives free from the pressure of only expressing politically correct or popular perspectives.

I find a controversial topic to present to the class.



The Teacher

We debate for and against each side, before proposing a solution.



The Students

Highly collaborative

Focus on reading and discussion

Done in a single session

Transferable to online setting

Craft controversy into mini-case and hand out instructions.

A good topic will be:

- Thought provoking
- Generate opinions
- Relatable
- Not too contentious

In small groups students present both sides of the argument. Each side listens then asks questions.

Then have students switch sides of the argument.

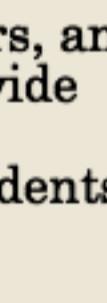
Encounters with a range of views on a complex issue can lead students to re-examine and possibly revise their own ideas.

Piaget (1975)

Reconvene ask a group to debrief and discuss.

Sources:

1. Barkley, E.F. (2010) Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
2. Jacobs, G. M. (2010). Academic Controversy: A cooperative way to debate. *Intercultural Education*, 21 (3), 291-296.
3. Piaget, J. (1975) Equilibration of cognitive structures. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
4. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
5. Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education: An introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (1966 ed.). New York: Free Press.

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Possible Academic Controversies

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