

Writing Spaces

Assignments & Activities Archive

Collaborative Problem-Solving: Deliberative Discourse toward Group Consensus

Sarah Moon

This activity guide is a selection from the *Writing Spaces* Assignment and Activity Archive, an open access companion resource to the Writing Spaces open textbook series.

To access additional selections, visit: <http://writingspaces.org/aaa>.

Assignment and activity selections © 2024 by the respective authors. Unless otherwise stated, these works are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) and are subject to the Writing Spaces Terms of Use. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>, email info@creativecommons.org, or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA. To view the Writing Spaces Terms of Use, visit <http://writingspaces.org/terms-of-use>.

All rights reserved. For permission to reprint, please contact the author(s) of the individual articles, who are the respective copyright owners.

Collaborative Problem-Solving: Deliberative Discourse toward Group Consensus

Sarah Moon

Overview

This activity is inspired by work done at the Parrhesia Program for Public Discourse Faculty Seminar and the National Issues Forum approach to deliberative discourse. The activity goal is to provide opportunities to channel research and rhetorical education toward live, extemporaneous speech, not in a debate format but in a discourse that works toward a class consensus on a topic of interest chosen by the class. The assignment is completed live in class with two days of group preparation provided beforehand. As a class, the first step is to generate a list of potential issues (local, regional or national) from which the class will select their focus topic for the discourse. The class then generates a list of potential stances on this topic and students then vote on which stance they would like to take, forming class groups representing the different stances. Groups then work together inside and outside of class to generate support for their stance that comes both from their personal experience and research. After 120 minutes of discussion across two class periods, we determine a consensus on which stance or combination of stances offers the best approach to the issue.

Time Commitment

Two class sessions

Materials

Desks that can be arranged in a circle

Activity Process

Preparation

- Students will first generate a list of potential topics to serve as our focus for the deliberative discussion.

- As a class, students will vote on their topic.
- Students will generate a list of 3-4 potential stances on this topic.
- Students will select which stance they would like to take, forming 3-4 class groups. (Groups may be different sizes, but each group must have at least four members.)
- Through discussion, free writing and research, group members will work together inside and outside of class to generate support for their stance that comes both from their personal experience and research. Groups should meet at least once outside of class either in person or in a remote meeting.

The Deliberation Day One:

One group member will deliver the **group statement** which summarizes their reasoning for their stance.

Each group member should prepare a **one-minute** opening statement. This can be a first or second hand story related to the issue *or* research-based information about the issue.

After the opening statements, any group member can respond to another discussion participant with a question, explanation/clarification, or challenge.

The Deliberation Day Two:

Groups will have 10 minutes at the beginning of the second day to plan and prepare for the second half of the discussion including an opening statement sharing what they feel is most important to add to the discussion after Day One. Each group will have just one person speak, then the discussion will open for free exchange.

The instructor will call for closing comments at the five minute to ending point. Each group can have one group member provide a closing comment: groups should decide ahead of time who this group member will be. The person selected should be different from the one who delivers the opening statement on either day of the discussion. While this group member can prepare ahead of time, they should also try to take into account new points and perspectives that come out of the second day of discussion, so this should be someone who is comfortable composing “on the fly.”

Finally, the class will work together to come to a consensus on the best course of action for addressing the issue. This could be one of the existing stances, some combination of the existing stances or an entirely new stance.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity/assignment will:

- Gain an understanding of preparing comments in support of a defined stance for a specific audience
- Gain an understanding of cultivating identification in an audience
- Gain an understanding of the effect of different rhetorical techniques
- Practice “listening rhetoric” and become more aware of their listening habits
- Weigh and compare information and perspectives on an issue in real time
- Practice working collaboratively to determine a course of action based on the totality of a discussion

Learning Accommodations

- Students who are less comfortable speaking in front of groups may compose material for one of their group members to deliver on their behalf.

Further Reading

National Issue Forum. *National Issue Forum*, <https://www.nifi.org/>. Accessed 24 Aug. 2024.