Clubs Debate Procedure

Please imagine we are team teaching a class of first grade high school students. It is April. We have done a couple of lessons with that class and we would like do a simple debate. We have chosen the topic ‘Sports clubs are better than cultural clubs’.

Let’s begin by asking each student which club they are in. You ask the questions and I will record them on the board. When you ask, we can practice a debate skill (responding to an opinion with a question) by also asking a follow up question. For example: “Taro kun, what club are you in? [Music Club]

...Really? You said Music Club, what instrument do you play?” Or “Momoka chan, what club are you in? Basketball. Really? You said basketball club. What position do you play?” We are going to repeat this process with each student so they can hear the pattern many times.

As you ask the questions I will record the answers in two groups. When we have finished asking everybody we can ask a follow up question to our class. “If I put these clubs in two groups, what can I call the groups?” [sport and culture].

We are now ready to start preparation time. For a simple debate, students will need to brainstorm two good points for both sports clubs and cultural clubs. We can set a strict time limit of 5 minutes.

This is a short time limit especially if this is your student’s first experience of debate. This is why it is important to practice brainstorming with students as part of your normal classroom routine. If both brainstorming and debate are new then the activity is less likely to be successful.

During this 5 minutes we should walk around the classroom. We should be ready to give ideas to students who are having trouble and we should give plenty of praise and encouragement to active students. We should also look out for students with good ideas. We can call on them for their ideas when we ask for feedback from the class. After 5 minutes we can ask for student’s ideas and record them on the board.

If our students find the topic difficult to brainstorm, we should be ready to give individual students ideas they can use (priming the pump). We will begin the feedback phase by asking those students for their ideas. We can then ask the students we saw had good ideas during the preparation phase. We can then ask for volunteers until everybody has 5 good ideas.

Let’s demonstrate how to debate to our class. First we make sure everybody is listening. Next we explain “Today, we are talking about clubs. We are going to speak twice. Please listen and look.” Next, we demonstrate the activity:

You - "I think sports clubs are better because they are healthy"

Me - "You said sports clubs are better because they are healthy. That's true but I think cultural clubs are better because they are inside"

You - "You said cultural clubs are better because they are inside. That's true but I think sports clubs are better because they are exciting"

Me - "You said sports clubs are better because they are exciting. That's true but I think cultural clubs are better because they are relaxing"

Next we are going to ask the students to turn to their friend and janken. The winner should stand up and begin their speech. We can prompt the speaker by saying “Ok, ready go...I think...I think.” and “You said...you said...that’s true but…” Students swop roles and repeat. Students swop partners and repeat.

The key to a first successful debate is to keep the activity moving. Move from one speech to the other quickly and without stopping. Don’t worry if students cannot finish their speech or seem unsure. The goal is to keep everyone busy all the time so that momentum is kept and there is no opportunity for disruptive behaviour. You should be upbeat and enthusiastic during the activity. The speed of the activity keeps the pressure on but our low stress attitude keeps the pressure off.

We shouldn’t expect our first debate to go smoothly. Our goal will always be to simply complete an activity the first time we try it. We will find that our students will be more successful and confident the second time they do something.