Changing the Debate: The Argument for Cooperative Communication

Ian Roth [*]

Abstract: This paper will discuss debate as it is often used to teach the four communicative skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) in EFL classrooms. It will identify problems with this approach, and suggest a shift in paradigm meant to address these problems. It will address the use of competition as a structural element in classroom debate. In doing so, it will present evidence from education and psychology literature to suggest that competition in an educational environment can often prove harmful. In order to address the shortcomings of competition, and more specifically of competitive debate, this paper will present an approach that retains the beneficial aspects of debate activities while replacing the traditionally competitive elements with cooperative ones. After discussing the goals of such a paradigm shift, it will provide examples of how it might be put into practice.

keywords: communication, debate, cooperation, competition, intrinsic, extrinsic

Debate in EFL Education

Debate is widely recognized as a useful activity for EFL classrooms owing, in part, to the fact that, "…all four skills of the English language (e.g. listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are practiced. Moreover, debaters need to master pronunciation of words, stress, vocabulary, brainstorming, script writing, logic building, argumentation and refutation. So practicing debate in English requires many skills which ultimately lead them to learn English" (Alasmari, 2013, p. 148). Debate activities generally take the form of two teams preparing and then presenting arguments related to a topic with each side attempting to prove that its stance is the stronger and its arguments the more potent. Often, the debate is concluded by the teacher or some third party declaring a winner as calculated based upon a scoring rubric. However, the section below presents research into the nature of education and motivation that suggests this method may be less than ideal and, in some ways, even counterproductive.

Literature

This brief literature review will be divided into two sections. The first will focus on the nature of rewards and motivation; the second, on how the research discussed in the first section applies to competition and cooperation. As the application of cooperative learning paradigms to debate is a relatively new idea, it will not be covered in this review of existing literature.

Rewards and Motivation: Types

For educators, one of the most important and illuminating findings distinctions to be understood is that between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Simply, extrinsic refers to rewards that come from outside of us. Examples include money, material goods, status, and praise. By contrast, intrinsic rewards such as

＊愛知学院大学非常勤講師

positive emotions, personal strengths, and social connections are those whose feeling of being rewarding originates inside us. Another way to think about such rewards is that they are active in what are termed *autotelic* or self-rewarding activities (McGonigal, 2011). Based upon these definitions, competition as a system of motivation and reward is firmly extrinsic in nature. As Deci puts it, "The reward for extrinsically motivated behavior is something that is separate from and follows the behavior. With competitive activities, the reward is typically 'winning' (that is, beating the other person or the other team)… [and] is actually extrinsic to the activity itself" (1981, p. 79). It relies on the desire of competitors to attain the status of being better than someone else. It is essentially the creation of a scarce good/reward, the title of winner, where none previously existed for the purpose of having participants attempt to deny that reward to one another (Kohn, 1992).

Cooperation, on the other hand, is an intrinsic motivator. According to Johnson and Johnson, the effects of cooperation during learning activities can be broken into four categories: "1) Students *achieve more in cooperative interaction… 2) Students are more positive about school, subject areas, and teachers or professors*… 3) Students are *more positive about each other*… 4) Students are *more effective interpersonally*…" (1988, p. 3). Each of these effects (achievement, positive feelings, increased effectiveness, interpersonal success) is intrinsically rewarding. Additionally, Kohn states that, "…one of the most powerful motivators is… a sense of accountability to other people. This is precisely what cooperation establishes: the knowledge that others are depending on you" (1992, p. 61). While the role played by others in this situation might tempt one to assume that the motivation involved is extrinsic, this is not the case. As Rosenberg points out, human beings have a need to help other humans. Thus, the positive feeling

most deeply associated with helping others is that of meeting one's own needs (2003).

Rewards and Motivation: Effects

The great preponderance of research supports the idea that intrinsic motivation is superior to extrinsic motivation in terms of both resulting performance and long term effectiveness (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 1988; Kohn, 1993; McGonigal, 2011; Pink, 2011). In fact, a comparison of the two reveals, not that one is more effective than the other, but that, while intrinsic motivators have positive effect, extrinsic ones actually have a negative effect. "…the use of extrinsic motivators actually tends to *undermine* intrinsic motivation and thus adversely affect performance in the long run…. Extrinsic motivators… are not only ineffective but corrosive. They eat away at the kind of motivation that *does* produce results" (Kohn, 1992, p. 60). Part of the reason for this is something called *hedonic adaptation* which is similar in many ways to the tolerance experienced by heavy drug users. The first extrinsic reward need only be very small to produce positive feelings. But, for subsequent rewards to produce a similar effect, they need to be ever increasing in size, value, etc. Intrinsic rewards do not produce the same adaptive behavior. Whereas the first dollar you make means more to you than the 10,001[st], improving your skills, connecting with others, and other such motivators never lose their appeal (McGonigal, 2011).

When discussing competition and cooperation, it is not enough to reduce them to mere examples of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. Competition, for example, adds another element to the standard conception of extrinsic motivation. Whereas extrinsic motivators such as grades or praise do not necessitate the taking away of something from someone else, competition is by definition a relationship in which each participant is attempting to

prevent the others from achieving their goals. One's own reward is contingent upon the taking away of that reward from others. In many cases, the physical reward (a trophy, medal, etc.) is in and of itself unappealing. Its only value is as a symbolic representation of one's willingness and ability to prevent others from succeeding.

By its very nature, this sort of relationship has negative psychological effects on both the loser and the winner. The former must deal with wounded self-esteem and doubts about their self-worth. The latter must face the consequences of having their feelings of self-esteem and self-worth be based on how one compares to others. Unlike the innate self-esteem of well-adjusted individuals, grounding self-esteem in something relative such as this results in greater flux, deep dependence, and lower levels of mental health overall. In order to defend their self-worth, a competitor must always be in a position to defeat someone. This is one of the reasons why many retired athletes suffer from depression and a loss of what is specifically called "sports self-esteem" (Schneider & Cooper, 2013).

A common argument in favor of competition is its ability to promote better performance by competitors. Being essentially a relationship of one-upsmanship, a predictable consequence is that competition pushes people to achieve at ever higher levels. Were this truly the case, some of its negative effects could be considered an acceptable part of the bargain. But the fact of the matter appears to be that this is almost never the case. "Superior performance not only does not *require* competition; it usually seems to require its absence" (Kohn, p. 47, 199). Kohn goes on to say that the major reason for this is that the introduction of competition changes the focus of the activity from doing well to beating others. As a result, competitive scenarios produce more predictable work of lower quality than do situations in which people work alone (1992).

While competition takes more from us than other forms of extrinsic motivation, cooperation gives us more than most intrinsically rewarding activities. Simply put, we perform better when we work together. Not only does collective effort produce something greater than the sum of its parts, but cooperation has the effect of improving each individual's personal performance (Johnson & Johnson, 1988). Additionally, cooperation improves peoples' outlook and how they feel about their situation and those around them (Kohn, 1992).

It is also well worth mentioning that, since educational institutions are very important in the process of socialization, cooperation in the classroom has the effect of increasing the instances of cooperative behavior in society as a whole. Increased cooperation and decreased competition is a direct path to lower levels of inequality, a situation which has been shown among other things to lower crime rates while increasing academic and economic performance, innovation, and mental as well as physical health (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2009).

Competition in Education

For the reasons discussed, the division of the class into winners and losers is a counterproductive and potentially damaging practice. It is not, however, uncommon. Taking into account the extent to which this paradigm of ranking students or of demarcating winners and losers is practiced in education at large, it is not surprising that its validity would so rarely be questioned. It is more than the accepted model. For many, success and winning have are synonymous. McMurty suggests that, "···presuming that the contest-for-prize framework and excellence of performance are somehow related as a unique cause and effect··· may be the deepest-lying prejudice of civilized thought" (Johnson, From Here to 2000, p. 446).

The prevailing educational model, at least as it applies to classrooms, is essentially one of sorting students into a hierarchy of achievement, of creating winners and losers through often dubious tests of ability. Leonard has said that the purpose of this competition is, "…not really to help students learn… but to teach competition itself" (Leonard, 1987, p. 129) while Campbell has gone as far as to say that competition is, "…essential for the kind of institution our schools are… [namely,] bargain-basement personnel screening agencies for business and government…. Winning and losing are what our schools are all about, not education" (1974, p. 145-6).

More locally, systems of reward and punishment are typically the result of teachers attempting to motivate their students. As the literature review showed, such extrinsically based efforts are both misguided and detrimental. These methods tend to be employed because it is an easy solution rather than because it is an effective one (Kohn, 1992). To further paraphrase Kohn: research has repeatedly shown that work produced in a competitive environment is more predictable and of lower quality than that produced in cooperative environments because, among other things, the natural unpleasantness of competition is distracting and detrimental to performance. Additionally, since a paradigm incorporating competition is essentially one of rewards and punishments (of extrinsic motivation) it is apparent that students will lose interest faster and learn less. The introduction of extrinsic motivators has the short term effect of diminishing the gratification experienced by engaging in the activity itself and, as a result of this, the longer term effect of undermining intrinsic motivation and, thereby, adversely affecting performance (Kohn, 1986).

While recognizing the prevalence of competition, both as a motivational tool and as a paradigm that is suffused throughout the structure of most contemporary educational systems, this paper will now take as its subject how competition relates to the practice of debate as a classroom activity.

Debate: The Traditional Model

A good proposition for debate is one that can be either supported or refuted effectively. The rules of the debate game are such that only these two diametrically opposed positions are available. Thus, debaters are asked to argue as though they supported or rejected the proposition without reservation.It is important to recognize that the presentation of a real-world topic in such black and white terms would constitute a dramatic oversimplification of both the complexities of the issue and the potential range of solutions. Thus, debate topics and the positions students are allowed to occupy with respect to them are, by their very nature and construction, artificial. This, in itself, is not a problem. Rather, it is merely a function of the game being designed to isolate and simplify complex issues so that participants can practice and test certain skills more efficiently. In this way, debate is similar to batting practice. It is but one aspect of the larger game, isolated to allow more rapid progress with regards to a particular skill set. It is important to recognize this fact for, should it slip from view, it is possible for both teachers and students to find themselves lost in the altered reality of debate with potentially undesirable consequences.

One such consequence is that participants may become skilled at and comfortable with viewing issues through the specialized lens of debate. This outcome is desirable up until that point at which its use becomes so habitual that it is employed as though it were a way to view reality in its entirety rather than as a tool for skill development. The potential problem lies in the fact that this lens tends to make every issue appear binary in nature.

Real-world issues do not break down so

easily and the solutions provided by such a perspective lack the flexibility, grounding, and holistic appreciation necessary to make them functional. Thus, time spent looking through the debate lens should be tempered with time spent viewing things more systemically.

Judging Debate

Innumerable problems also arise from the tendency to declare a winner. The lessons implicit in this one act are manifold and each takes its toll. Among these lessons is first, the assertion that the winning side was right, because the way to win in the classroom is to be the one with the right answers. Second, by extension of there being a winning side, the losing side must have been in some sense wrong, because they would not have lost unless they were less right than the winners. Third, that the value of debate and its associated activities (critical thinking, research, etc.) is measured by the extrinsic currency of being declared a winner through the act of beating someone else. And, fourth, that since the losing side did not receive a reward but was instead punished, the label of loser being both derogatory and psychologically damaging, the work they did must have been punishment worthy.

In a larger sense, the separation of students into these two categories reinforces a scarcity mindset as well as the notion that education is a competitive endeavor in which learning and knowledge are limited resources to be fought over and hoarded. This notion is fundamentally flawed in that the greater the numbers of students who possess a certain piece of knowledge, the greater its abundance. Any given lesson is by its very nature the combined effort of everyone involved (teacher and students alike). The more any of these actors brings to the lesson, the more is available to all of them. Though the demands of socialization may (or may not) warrant the inclusion of competitive elements

in the classroom, education is, in its most essential nature, an act of progressing alongside others rather than of triumphing over them. Anything of the latter nature would be more accurately termed training, socialization, sorting, reinforcement (in the Behaviorist sense), etc.

As the literature review established, competition has a deleterious effect in almost any setting and is particularly damaging when tied to educational processes. There is no reason to assume that its effects on debate would be any different.

Re-envisioning Debate

This paper will now present three examples of how debate can be approached differently. All of these eschew competition entirely in favor of a more cooperative approach. The strength of these options lies, not just in what they avoid, but in what they encourage as, "···the vast majority of the research comparing student-student interaction patterns indicates that students learn more effectively when they work cooperatively" (Johnson & Johnson, 1988).

Option 1: The Follow-Up

The first of the cooperative debate options is to conclude a debate with the teacher's thoughts on how the debate went. This is a good opportunity for the teacher to raise arguments that the students may not have thought of or did not present. It is also a good chance to ask questions that demonstrate the limitations of a two-sided debate. The teacher might raise issues related to the assumptions underlying the debate topic or suggest a way in which the two apparently opposed sides could be synthesized.

For less lecture oriented teachers/classes, once an example has been provided the students could be asked to work with members of the previously opposing team to identify the debate's underlying assumptions. Another possibility is to create groups

(preferably of students from previously opposing sides) with the task of formulating a plan of action designed to resolve the problem presented in a manner amenable to everyone. This would also allow students to practice shifting lenses by asking them to go from understanding a problem in a binary, debate-oriented way to seeing it as a messy reality. A further benefit could potentially be the realization that the best solutions rarely come from one-sided, dogmatic points of view.

Option 2: The Checklist

Another possibility, for students who benefit from having well-defined goals, is for the teacher to compose an exhaustive list of arguments that could be made during the course of the debate. The students' collective goal would then be to espouse every one of those arguments before the debate concludes. Students would be encouraged to cooperate across what would have previously been the battle lines in order to share what arguments they will be making and to help formulate responses that will, doubtless, be on the teacher's checklist.

This would encourage students to think creatively and to view issues from as many perspectives as possible. The teacher should be sure to include arguments that touch on a variety of elements (e.g. social, economic, racial, gender, ethical, historical, etc.). The goal should be slightly intimidating and substantial cooperation should be, not only encouraged, but required if it is to be achieved.

An interesting element to this approach is the potential educational benefit the teacher may receive. First, the process of formulating an exhaustive list of arguments relevant to the subject should require the teacher to push and, hopefully, expand the limits of his or her own knowledge and understanding. There is also the distinct possibility that the class will formulate arguments the teacher had not thought of. This could

even be a stated goal of the activity. In such an instance, the 'teacher' (now a problematized term) is equally engaged in the learning process. Such a case would be an instance of education as a dialectical process which, according to Freire, is the key element in making the educational experience a liberating one (1970).

Option 3: The Reflection

Finally, the teacher could ask the students to write a piece reflecting on the debate. One possibility is to ask them to choose the best argument their team made, followed by a subsequent request that they attempt to refute that argument. This would encourage flexibility in thinking and help to develop the skill of critical analysis.

Another way to incorporate reflection would be to have them write an initial opinion about the topic before they have done any research, composed any arguments, or presented any statements. Following the debate, the students would review what they said and write a reflection on how their opinion on the topic has changed. Such an activity would help the students learn when and how to put down the debate lens in favor of a more encompassing mindset.

It would, of course, be possible to combine these methods or to develop wholly new ways of engaging students in cooperative debates. The two key things to remember are that the students' main objective should be, not to "win," but to make progress in terms of their understanding and abilities and that, in the real world, the primary function of debate is not to crown a victor, but to arrive at solutions.

Conclusion

Debate is a wonderful tool for getting students to engage with English in a meaningful context. It can help them to develop skills such as critical thinking and the ability to write and present

opinions. But, in order to maximize the efficacy of debate as a learning tool, it must be employed in a manner that encourages exploration and growth. The nature of competition is to cut individuals or groups off from one another, to create scarcity, and, in the process, to engender inequality. On the other hand, cooperation is at the root of a liberating education in which students and teachers "…become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (Freire, 1970, p. 61).

As applied to debate, cooperative learning paradigms also create a more realistic and useful sense of how real-world problems can be effectively dealt with. By emphasizing exploration, flexibility, and understanding along with the ability to coordinate and contribute in both intra and inter group contexts, cooperative debate puts the focus on learning to solve problems rather than on winning a game.

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要約　この論文は，EFL 教育の場において多用されているディベートという教育手法について論じ，その問題点を明示し，その解決策としてパラダイムのシフトを提案します．ここでは教室で行われるディベートの持つ競争の利用という性格に焦点をあて，教育学や心理学の文献からその根拠を挙げながら，教育の場で競い合うことの有害性を示します．競争の問題点，より正確には競技ディベートの問題点の解決策として，この本稿ではこれまでの競争的側面を協力に置き換えることによって，ディベートの長所を活かした教育手法を紹介します．この本稿では，パラダイムのシフトというゴールについて論じたのち，その実践法について例を挙げて解説します．

キーワード　communication コミュニケーション　debate 討論　cooperation 強調
competition 競争　intrinsic 本質的な　extrinsic 非本質的な