



Structured Academic Controversy: Building Consensus Step by Step

Pre-Discussion:

1. Students are given the question (with a for/against response)
2. Students are given common text to read (news articles, etc.) that express different sides

Part 1: Small Group Conversations

3. Students break into groups of 4.
4. Within the groups of 4, pairs chose one or the other side of the controversy to discuss
5. Each pair prepares with their partners:
 - a. Evidence that supports your position
 - b. Three reasons for your position
 - c. Why this issue is important to you
6. Pair A shares their results with Pair B. Pair B restates what they've heard from Pair A (with Pair A clarifying if needed).
7. Then they switch and Pair B shares their results with Pair A. Pair A then restates what Pair B shared.

Part 2: Small Group Consensus Building

8. Group of 4 abandons their roles and they discuss together where they have agreement and where their differences lie. They can use 5-finger voting to build consensus around a position they can all live with. Their consensus should have some evidence they can point to. Consensus means that everyone can live with the conclusion, even if they're not completely happy or didn't get all that they wanted.

Part 3: Whole Group Consensus Building

9. Groups of 4 share out their ultimate consensus decision with the whole group.
10. Teacher or facilitator scribes on a board or screen the consensus positions.
11. The whole group then finds commonalities and where the differences lie between the groups of 4.
12. A whole group consensus is attempted using 5-finger voting.
13. If consensus can't be reached, further conversation around where the sticking points and challenges are can be helpful or harmful depending on where the teacher believes the conversation may go.
14. If consensus can be reached, the whole group should try to form a shared statement that reflects the consensus decision.

Part 4: Reflection

15. Each student writes a reflection on the process and the issue and how they felt about the outcome and what their own feelings are on the issue after having gone through the consensus process. Did they change their mind at all? What new ideas, facts, or positions did they learn?