P is for Confidence: Philosophical Questions Build Student Confidence

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Speech and Debate I/Elective/9-12

Keywords: inquiry, confidence, generating questions

Teaching Standards: See Appendix 1 for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis:

This curriculum unit for this Speech and Debate I class focused on building student confidence through philosophical inquiry. For some teenagers, watching the latest influencer or Tik Tok personality share some aspect of his or her life may seem enthralling—they look great, they sound great and the amount of likes and followers they have, in the eyes of today's teenagers—equals greatness! This greatness can for some teenagers spell confidence. Confidence packaged in an emoji data tracker of likes, followers, and retweets. But that is not confidence. Confidence is not based on the approval of people who are considered virtual strangers outside of a video screen; confidence is already within each of them. For this Speech and Debate I course, students will practice using philosophical methods of question generating and inquiry to strengthen their inner confidence, that is, their voice, and their ideas in order to explore issues that require them to generate questions as they search for those answers. Searching for answers to questions that are crafted by them for issues that matter to them is what directly builds their confidence and gives them a clear purpose for communicating with their peers about topics that matter to them. This unit seeks to address building teen confidence through philosophical inquiry.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 29 students in Speech and Debate I /9-12.

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Deborah E. Brown

Introduction

This curriculum unit will teach Speech and Debate I students about building student confidence through inquiry based activities. These lessons resonate with students because they will realize that their confidence is directly tied to what they know, and what they know is a result of approaching texts, topics and tasks with an inquiring mind. Upon completion of this unit, students will understand how to develop their own unique purpose for thinking, reading, writing and speaking through inquiry.

Rationale

Two TED Talks did it. It opened the eyes of my Speech and Debate I students to think about their thinking, in other words, I want students to think metacognitively. In their introspective reflection, the students found they have to stop being afraid of being confident. It was an average Thursday class--or so I thought. I placed an exit ticket question "What did you learn from listening to today's TED Talk?" on the board in order to capture what students learned from two TED presenters. Both topics were on how to be a better communicator. Those exit tickets did more than inform my instruction--those exit tickets told me that students yearn to express their thoughts and beliefs with confidence, poise, and persuasion. Ty wrote, "I learn that you can't always be afraid of speaking." Dante wrote, "What I learned is that don't show that your paying attention, just do it, just pay attention." Another student shared, "The most important way to make a conversation better is by listening." And the response that was most striking to me, the one that seemed to have reached this student in a way that umpteenth teachers have tried and failed at getting across, "You are not listening if you are talking."

These TED Talks, "How to Listen" by Julian Treasure and "How to Be a Better Communicator" by Celeste Headlee resonates well with teenagers--they see that what they think they are doing is not actually what is occurring in the realm of communication skills. Teaching this elective class, Speech and Debate I, gives me the freedom to experiment with all types of text for its inquiry potential. Still images can be used to support imaginative inquiry, informative speech excerpts can support issues-based inquiry, and written text can support argumentative inquiry. Inquiry satisfies curiosity. And curiosity is a hallmark of creativity and innovation.

The Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education voted Oct 13, 2020, to rename Zebulon Baird Vance High School in honor of civil rights attorney Julius L. Chambers. The renaming process followed a wide-ranging community discussion about the history of Vance, a lawyer and Confederate military officer who was twice elected governor of North Carolina and served in the U.S. Senate. Zebulon Baird Vance came from a wealthy Buncombe County family which owned slaves. Three possible names for the school were chosen using an established protocol of creating a committee that included representatives of the community and the school. Students, community members, and the committee voted, and with that information, Superintendent Earnest Winston recommended Julius L. Chambers High to the Board. (Pamphlet)

This unit will be designed for my Speech and Debate I class. This course focuses on an introduction to novice public speaking skills. Students are introduced to basic argumentation, storytelling, and the basics of philosophy. Our school and the English department consist of four levels of English. The Speech and Debate I class, an elective class, dovetails with the reading and writing objectives in English I-IV coursework. As with any of the four English courses, the methods of instruction must be differentiated to meet diverse learning modes.

Demographics

Chambers High School has been partnering with the (EOS) Equal Opportunity Schools initiative to increase the number of students we have taking advanced courses. Currently, our school only has 273 students enrolled in AP courses. Currently, our total school enrollment by demographics are 58.8% female and 41.3% male, 63.1% African American, 2.5% Asian, 28.8% Hispanic, 2.5% Bi-Racial, 3.1% White, 28.8% 71.3% Non-Hispanic, 1.9% AIG, 91.9% Non-EC, 6.3% SWD, 5% LEP, 95% Non-LEP, 98.1% Non-McKinney Vinto, 1.9% McKinney Vinto, 97.5% Non-504 Plan, 2.5% 504 Plan (a 504 Plan is a formal learning plan developed to support students that need special services). This CU will be taught in the spring semester to 29 of my students on an A/B day schedule.

As a CTI fellow, I know that creating a curriculum unit using content material taught by a UNCC college professor for school-based instruction directly grants students access to challenging coursework. As their classroom teacher, it grants me access to high-quality instruction from well-trained professors while considering my content in a more comprehensive and robust way.

Unit Goals

A central goal I have for my Speech and Debate I students is to see inquiry as the steppingstone toward building confidence. Inquiry based discussions is what invites students become curious thinkers. A Common Core Speaking and Listening standard is to have students bring to any discussion ideas and questions…to defend, advance or build on their own or others' ideas. A large part of a Speech and Debate I class is listening well to what classmates are saying in order

to determine fact from opinion, claims from evidence and commentary from conjecture. The evaluation tools from Toastmasters are used to score peer's extemporaneous and formal speech presentations. Toastmasters, a nonprofit international public speaking program, offers its speaker/presenter assessment materials free through the Internet. Using Toastmaster's evaluation materials for a speech and debate class gives students a glimpse into their next level of life if they wish to pursue a deeper engagement with a local Toastmaster's program post high school.

A final goal is for the Speech and Debate I students to tell their stories. I mean, is this not what public speaking is all about? The stories that students tell through their speeches are grounded in an argument—as their central objective through storytelling is to persuade. For this course, Speech and Debate I students will be expected to use their inquiry and research skills to present information in a formal setting during the Spring of 2022 at the Harvey B. Gantt Center in Uptown Charlotte. *Refer to Appendix 1: Teaching Standards for details.*

Content Research

What happens when students in traditional schoolrooms are continually directed to "answer this question...read and answer the questions in the margin...answer the comprehension questions at the end of the story, article or book? When students are directed to answer questions, the metacognitive process decreases, and the recitation process increases. The student begins to read the question aloud, lip-read the question or read the question in their mind. In the search for the correct answer, the process repeats. The student recites the words to respond to what the question is asking and either copies the answer directly to their paper or summarizes the main idea of someone else's words. The processing objective shifts from metacognition to comprehension--reading to understand how to answer the question instead of developing their own unique purpose for reading through inquiry.

In the chapter "The Community of Philosophical Inquiry" Lone and Burroughs write "We engage people in the practice of philosophy rather than (or as a substantial part of studying it)" (53). So, the opportunity for students to generate their own questions for purposeful inquiry and engagement is hijacked for suggested answers designed by the teacher or from the Teacher's Edition of anthologies and textbooks. In the setup of many traditional classrooms, the teacher asks students questions and waits for students to say the right answer instead of inviting students to explore questions they generate for a Socratic style discussion where the answer is not predetermined but discovered. Mark Sanders, Senior Lecturer of Philosophy at UNC Charlotte states that "allowing time for students to come up with their own questions will lead to them clarifying terms which give rise to new ideas" (Philosophical Foundations of Education, CTI Seminar, 10/7/21). I found this an interesting proposition, mainly because I never heard it before--and I wondered if it really was true. I suppose in this instance, I was waxing philosophical, so I tried it with my students and each class did exactly what he said was going to happen. All classes, after generating questions from topics like friendship, illusion vs. reality, or speeches, ended with a question that showed they wanted to clarify the terms through inquiry. I felt like a scientist and a philosopher!

In *Philosophy in Education*, Lone and Burroughs quote Lipman who writes "Questioning is the leading edge of inquiry, it opens the door to dialogue, to self-criticism, and to self-correction." (58). This type of inquiry-based teaching supports the mental development and cognitive thought of students. In a post-pandemic age, this is seemingly a more social-emotional method of instructional practice. It lends itself to philosophical discussions. Embedded in this practice of questioning is according to Sanders "clarifying terms, hypothesis, inference, reflection, critical assessment which is what makes this form of inquiry philosophical." (Philosophical Foundations of Education, CTI Seminar, 10/7/21). Exploring issues that require students to generate questions builds their confidence and gives them a clear purpose for thinking, speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

The next challenge in this inquiry method is creating a setting that supports this type of inquiry exploration. In the book, Lone and Burroughs quote Lipman who writes, "We engage in philosophical inquiry with young people not to bestow our philosophical insights on them, but to facilitate their ability to think for themselves about some of the fundamental aspects of human existence and to develop strong analytic reasoning and critical thinking skills" (58). By discussing and questioning philosophical arguments students can develop strong critical thinking skills like observation, analysis, evaluation, reflection, reasoning, and conceptualizing. Since critical thinking skills are strengthened through classroom conversations, then the focus should be on developing the environment in order to explore this type of inquiry as a best practice. Establishing a CPI or Community of Public Inquiry will allow students to generate questions that build their confidence. For the teacher, establishing the environment for a CPI to take place will allow students to discuss and question philosophical content.

An ideal CPI includes an intellectually safe environment, which is tantamount to engendering student talk. Incorporating bells timers, (a focused timed duration on a writing or reading task to maintain adequate lesson pacing) and less invasive movements which build up to grand classroom conversations to support low-stakes structured dialogue. According to Lone and Burroughs, the students are dependent on each other to understand. So in order to make this an intellectually safe environment—predictable (in order for students to accurately anticipate speaking protocols) short, effective, and emotionally supportive speaking and listening activities need to be embedded during the instructional class period. The reality is that students are dependent on each other to learn social cues, nuances in conversation, and various viewpoints. Structuring dialogue in order for students to generate their own questions encourages them to share their ideas intimately and publicly. In the Lane and Burroughs article, they write "The students' responsibility for choosing the question to begin their discussion enhances the democratic nature of the community and is consistent with the objective that the inquiry be centered around issues that perplex the students" (59). Once the student can talk about issues that matter to them, they will build their confidence.

An important aspect of the Speech and Debate I course is for students to be exposed to the theory of debate, which is philosophical in nature. Grappling with writers like Dewey, Addams, and Rawls has the ability to inform their generative questions and how they construct argument philosophically.

While Addams claims "…the sense of dignity and civic worth" transcends vocation, Dewey posits that philosophy "signified achieving a wisdom which would influence the conduct of life." (Dewey chap 24, Addams Ed Methods chap 4) The claims of both authors reveal that character traits are at the core of philosophical thought. Having a sense of dignity and civic worth implies respect while skillful living is at the core of Dewey's idea. Both philosophical notions support my premise that philosophy builds confidence. Addams discusses character traits as the optimal means for transcending the parameters, boxes and social societal structures. It is like that saying, "shine where you are planted." Regardless of the parameter, box or structure one has been placed in requires confidence, and confidence positively "influences the conduct of life" which improves the conditions of one's life, so that is why, in a Speech and Debate I class, harnessing this character trait is essential (Dewey chapter 24). In Addams view, social values emanate from labor.

From Addams perspective, labor—the ability to work, is what matters most in society, not nurturing or building up the affective domain of children and citizens. In this respect, Addams promotes confidence building through social interaction. In this article, Addams takes the time to discuss the importance of "nourishing the child and citizen for social relations." (Addams 99). What interests me most about this claim is that the central problem Addams sees in the way people were educated during the turn of the century is the same problem that we are facing in the 21st century—the more things change, the more things stay the same. Addams saw the progress the country was making in industry, but she saw a lack of social relational progress. In our time today, this is occurring again with technology as the source of concern. It takes effort to "nourish the child and citizen for social relations" and not through a screen, but through community, through building relationships in-person, through listening, through speaking and through sharing ideas, through building commonalities in order to break down walls that divide (Addams 99).

Through social engagement, social cues are modeled, modified, and adjusted. In my Speech and Debate I class, students are asked to interact with each other through low stakes speaking activities and evaluate themselves and others through writing and speaking lessons. Just as Addams wants people to see value in self-awareness, knowing how to read their audience and confidently respond to people, I want the same for my Speech and Debate I students. Addams wanted to address and refresh the cognitive deficits that she saw in the laborers by "nourishing the child and citizen for social relations"—and I want to do the same through generative questioning. In the high school classroom, generative questioning does not support the current curriculum structure in many courses. Typically, students are asked to answer the teacher's question, not question the teacher's answer. Through low stakes, mid-stakes and high-stakes activities, my hope is to turn the tide of linear thinking to divergent inquiry-based idea exploration.

In my desire to turn the tide of linear thinking to a more divergent inquiry based one, writer, bell hooks, aspired to similar goals. Her book *Teaching to Transgress* she recognizes this linear pedagogical practice as one deeply steeped in the American educational system "Let's face

it: Most of us were taught in classrooms where styles of teachings reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal." (35) Not only is this a myopic perspective of what a well-rounded education should look like, it is a dangerous proposition to effectuate because it leads people to think that their voices, their ideas, their thoughts, and their ways of being that differ from the "single norm" is wrong; therefore, as an individual and a collective group of people, they are wrong.

In my Speech and Debate I class, although students are the inheritors of a Colonized curriculum (a curriculum that presents a white, westernized world view) using philosophical strategies can work to dispel the myths of a "single norm of thought and experience" through inquiry, and encouragement of diverse perspectives. This allows students to build their confidence because their ideas are seen as valuable. hooks echo this sentiment through valuing the liberality of a liberal arts education. She writes, "What we all ideally share is the desire to learn—to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world." (40) Inquiry is what allows students to experience the best thoughts of themselves and of others—inquiry for insight, inquiry for reflection, inquiry for comprehension, and inquiry for thorny conversations. Exploring issues that require students to generate questions builds their confidence because reflection and critical assessment ignites philosophically passionate, and purpose filled students.

Laurie Lapidus explains a way for students to feel the power of their voices more fully in the classroom and building community through building confidence in her article "To Find Yourself, Think for Yourself." The sentiment that runs through this article is overwhelmingly positive about the importance of students self-actualizing the transference of seminar practices to the writing process. The article states "The third-and-fifth grades students in Ms. Lapidus's classes have shown in their discussion during the Socratic seminars and in their writing after the seminar that they think about the text not as how they think their teacher wants them to, but rather as what they perceive the story to be about." (59) It takes confidence to do that. This notion of putting the ideas of the student in charge as they seek to understand the human condition from their own perspective is what hooks, Dewey, Addams and Lapidus believe is central to what makes a more inclusive and civil society. Socratic seminars, a formal text-based discussion where the teacher engages student talk through the use of open-ended questions invites conversation and breeds support. These classroom discussions help shape students' mindsets to see conversations as ways to understand themselves and others better—not as a means to misrepresent or to incite callous conversations.

I like the idea that Lapidus presents, as she set the tone for the grand conversations that were about to take place in her classroom. In the article, she refers to this practice as "Establishing the Foundation." In the classroom, Lapidus "encouraged her students to express their views and to disagree respectfully and appreciate the different perspectives held by their classmates while still holding on to their own perspectives without feeling insecure."(55-56) Lapidus promotes divergent conversations, and seeks to carry out a Freire inspired pedagogical practice described by hooks "…I enter the classroom with the assumption that we must build 'community' in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor." (hooks 40)

Openness, intellectual rigor, community—in an effort to build the confidence level of students in a Speech and Debate I class, this has to be at the center of instruction, or the students will default to reticence, detachment, or compliance. These behaviors will stunt or stall opportunity for enrichment and productive growth.

Julius L. Chambers was a civil rights lawyer and one of the lawyers who worked on the benchmark Swann vs. Charlotte Board of Education Supreme Court Case. Zebulon B. Vance High School was also renamed to honor the legacy of Julius L. Chambers. In a History Makers interview, Chambers was asked by Larry Crowe, independent researcher how he would like to be remembered. After a moment of reflection, Chambers shared that the value of his memory is found in providing opportunities to help as many people as possible. To him personally, his legacy was not important, but the work that is done on behalf of people who are in need should be the constant goal in order to make the greatest difference and promote the most positive force for change in society (Crowe, Larry 12/6/2002).

EJI or Equal Justice Initiative in partnership with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Remembrance Project seeks to provide opportunities to high school students by sponsoring an essay writing contest. (Boone, Gartlan, Walk EJI) The renaming of our school dovetails with the premise of this essay contest for my Speech and Debate I class. This opportunity invites students to reflect on the history of Julius L. Chambers, Vance High School's renaming ceremony and the subsequent impact on their role as a Chambers High School student. This essay contest invites Chambers' scholars to explore through inquiry "a topic of racial injustice and…its legacy today." (Boone, Gartlan, Walk EJI) Whether students choose to use the history of Chambers' legacy or the parallels between the lynching scene in *The Great Debaters* movie to our society today, this essay contest aligns directly with Chambers' hope for people—that opportunities like EJI and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Remembrance Project essay contest invite students to showcase the resiliency of the human spirit--that will to thrive, to shine, to challenge and to influence alternate possibilities to the status quo. And long after the essay contest is over, the idea still remains, how can Speech and Debate I students explore through inquiry topics of racial injustice and write about it, speak on it, or engage with their peers in a philosophical inquiry?

The lessons and activities I have created for this unit address an essential soft skill students need in order to effectively deliver the content for any speech or debate—confidence. It is this skill my Speech and Debate I students yearned to strengthen. And as I thought about this soft skill, I began to think about social media and the smoke and mirrors illusion it creates for content makers, influencers, and people followers—the illusion of confidence. Creating content can get views; however, it does not build nor create confidence within a person. Confidence comes from knowing—not reacting. Through the process of inquiry and question generating students find more than just the answers to their own questions—they find their voice and they use it to speak with and among their peers---with confidence.

Instructional Implementation

Teaching Strategies

As alluded to briefly in the content research section of the CU, using low stakes speaking activities to support student inquiry builds confidence in thought, classroom community, and clear comprehension of student ideas. In general, Speech and Debate I students are reticent to share ideas for a number of reasons; however, inviting students to share their thoughts by building up their confidence through inquiry enables them to take risks in learning environments that call for public expression of their ideas to a wider audience. Building student confidence about issues that matter to them through generative questioning and low stakes speaking activities enables students to self-assess their development, correct misconceptions, and support their peers in more intimate conversations.

The general teaching strategy that I will use for this unit of instruction is inquiry-based learning. Because my central focus is to support and build the confidence level of students through generating questions, I am interested in exploring this method in three ways: low stakes, mid-stakes, and high stakes.

Low Stakes: Generative Questioning in Pairs, Small Groups or Whole Class

This teaching strategy focuses on students working in pairs, as a whole class, in corners of the room, as well as online using Parlay, an online Socratic speaking platform to practice social cues and start a "generative question dialogue" with each other. Parlay invites students to build on, challenge, question, and broach new ideas with their peers with candor and civility. Embedded in Parlay's discussion platform are data markers—online tools that track engagement. Parlay measures student participation in two forms—orally through the live discussion and textually through a discussion board. There is a summary feature on the discussion board that showcases how many times students engaged with each other. Parlay has a bevy of speaking and writing supports to help students strengthen their writing and to assist teachers in providing targeted feedback. Parlay is a useful technological tool for low stakes exercises because of its anonymity feature. This feature creates a "fictious name in history" so the student will not feel judged for expressing a particular viewpoint during the online roundtable. The program stores the students real name so the teacher will be able to identify who spoke for recording purposes. Being allowed to express ideas fully is what strengthens a student's voice and by default increases their level of confidence which is the ultimate goal in this low stakes' communication exchange.

Mid-Stakes: Inquiry with Philosophers: This teaching strategy focuses on student pairs or the whole class unpacking text excerpts through inquiry.

High Stakes: Using Inquiry to Reflect: This teaching strategy focuses on students creating, making, or narrating their ideas about debate and confidence through a choice board activity.

Classroom Lessons/ Activities

Low Stakes "Elbow Partners"

Overview

In this low stakes activity, students are told to work with, turn to or speak to the person seated next to, in front of or behind them as a way to talk through an idea prior to sharing their thinking with the whole class. This speaking protocol is sometimes referred to as Turn and Talk. The premise is the same, a way to meet and speak with students while gaining deeper perspectives about issues that matter.

Why This Works: This activity works because it allows students to orally draft their thoughts to a peer and gain immediate feedback. This low stakes protocol can be enhanced with bell timers, sentence stems or student movement with music.

Low Stakes "Four Corners"

Overview
In this low stakes' instructional activity, one of each letter A-B-C-D is placed in a corner of the classroom. On the classroom whiteboard, an argumentative quotation, idea, or statement is displayed along with directional instructions. The directional instructions, created using a Google table, tell students what each letter stands for A-agree, B-disagree, C-strongly agree, D-strongly disagree. Students are then told to silently read the quote, idea, or statement and upon hearing the music play, they are to move to a corner of the room that tells what they think about the idea expressed on the whiteboard.

The Beta-Test

I beta tested this activity, and I noticed that after students have been given a moment to consider the idea presented on the whiteboard, they will move to a corner of the room. There may be a few students who move based on the choice a friend made, but all students are willing to take a stand at one of the four corners of the room. Also, students are not tied to a corner, they are able to move based on the comments of their peers by "walking on" over to their side if they prefer the position of their peer over their own. Allowing students the freedom to move from one side to the other in this open discussion allows them to see in real time how words can influence and also build the confidence level of their peer by being swayed to agree with and populate their side of the classroom.

What Happened

As in any democratically structured activity, there are some students who did abstain from moving to a corner of the room. For those students, they could not make up their minds definitively. They were "waffling" between total agreement or disagreement, so they found their place in the middle of the classroom. So for this activity, it is a good idea to make sure there is a space for people who are not ready to ascribe to a specific corner so their voices can be heard as well.

How They Did It

This activity is informal. It is meant to get students up, out of their seats and moving around the classroom, meeting, and talking with different students about issues that matter to them. It does not involve the use of paper or pencil, however, after students complete it, they can reflect on the experience with a Post-It, or by writing a one sentence summary and tagging that slip of paper to the classroom door, wall or whiteboard. Keeping the writing exercises brief for this activity is important as they will feel more inclined to participate if it invites them to reflect on the experience and show what they gained from the interaction.

Low Stakes: "Geometric Annotations"

Overview

In this low stakes' activity, student pairs generate questions using geometric shapes (circle, square, triangle) as they read an article.

Here is the Activity

In this low stakes' activity, using geometric shapes to take notes while reading is a creative way to teach annotation and "out of the box thinking" by literally drawing the shapes on the paper. The premise of this idea is to show students that, just like the images they use to make annotations, those same images can be used to talk through a point that was identified by a geometric shape. The three shapes, circle, square and triangle are each given a definition created by the students. The definition is general—how they know each geometric shape functions. The next step is to "talk about" what they identified in the article using the geometric shape as the solution—in other words, they give a figurative interpretation using a geometric shape. These shapes are designed prior to reading any article, and it is posted as an anchor chart in the classroom for easy reference. (See Appendix 2)

Here Is What I Noticed

Since this course does not have a standard textbook, I tend to use magazine articles from Toastmasters or online e-books from the National Speech and Debate Association to deepen their

perspective of the nuances within novice public speaking and debate. Students are given an article and told to number each paragraph in the article. Next, working with an elbow partner, each person is assigned a task. For example, Student A's task is to read the paragraph aloud to Student B. Once the paragraph is read, Student A is to select one sentence that stood out to them and tell Student B to underline it. Once Student B underlines the sentence, Student B glances at the anchor chart of geometric shapes (see Appendix 2) and selects the shape that best defines the underlined sentence. Student B explains to Student A why that geometric shape fits best for the underlined sentence. For instance, Student B might begin their interpretation of the geometric shape by saying, "This sentence is like a triangle because…" or "This sentence is like a circle or a square because even though a person may feel protected because they have already shown they have confidence in what they are doing, they may feel trapped because they have to continually practice a skill they have developed." In this example, they have used the descriptions of the form and function of the geometric shape to talk about ideas presented in an article they read with their elbow partner.

This activity can also be done in a whole class setting. In my classroom, we initially practiced this activity using societal issues, where students had to stand up in front of the classroom and select one issue from the chart paper, then talk through it using a geometric shape. From that point, we branched out to annotating articles. It was definitely awkward for them and for me, so in many respects, I felt like was selling this way of thinking to them and they were quite the skeptical consumer. So feeling and being vulnerable was necessary in order for me to get them to WANT to try talking with shapes—I did not have it all together either, but I wanted them to try something new and lean into the fear—which supports them strengthening the confidence muscle. All in all, this exercise showed students that they were able to use the characteristics of a geometric shape to approach and potentially solve a societal issue while increasing the level of confidence by taking a risk in using geometric shapes to discuss difficult issues.

Here is Why I Think It Works

I think this method of inquiry invites students to be creative problem solvers. Using geometric shapes to discuss hard issues in society presents the situation in a different format. Considering a societal issue in an alternate format has the potential of breathing in new possibilities, ideas, and potential solutions. Not only does the geometric shape add dimension to the description of a conversation, but it also invites alternate perspective while building student confidence to think "outside of the box."

Low- Stakes "Using Parlay" for Online Roundtable

Parlay, an online discussion platform, is another way to engender conversation that is focused, supportive and reflective simultaneously.

Overview

In this low stakes' instructional activity, students are virtually prompted to engage in an online discussion with all of their peers in the room. Prior to participating in Parlay's portal, the teacher must set up the platform for digital engagement. In Parlay, the teacher is given a couple of Roundtable options to start a discussion. The teacher can use prepared discussion topics from the program's universe, or their own portfolio of classroom discussion topics, or build their own discussion topic using Parlay's template.

The Beta Test

I beta tested this activity, and realized the online roundtable is the precursor to the live discussion. So, it is important for students to engage with this part of the program prior to holding the live discussion. The Parlay program includes instructional videos. In the videos, it is recommended that students begin with the online roundtable.

What Happened

Being that we are in the COVID-19 setting and instructing with masks on our faces, I wanted to hear my students talk. I wanted to use the program in the opposite way that it was suggested by the program makers so I could listen to their voices prior to them engaging with the roundtable as a post Canvas virtual class in a school setting. So, I had my students participate in the live discussion first. I would not recommend that teachers begin with students talking. The online roundtable warms students up to talking. It is the virtual "do now" in Parlayland. What happened was students did not "talk" as readily, and initially, I could not understand why they were so hesitant. I realized later that throwing them into talking in a live class while using a computer to monitor the flow and direction of the speaking order without having warmed them up to my live discussion questions using the online roundtable was a "failure" in the making.

How They Did It

I see this activity as a post-COVID 19 way of engaging with peers in the classroom minus student movement. In a traditional Socratic seminar, the students are repositioning their chairs in a whole class circle order to see one another while questioning, challenging, and building on the ideas of their peers. In this setting, students are not moving, and they are using the whiteboard as the visual cue to follow an organized speaking order. I found this to be more valuable, as in a traditional Socratic seminar, the teacher is the data keeper—and this can become problematic because of human error in keeping tally of who spoke and what kind of remarks were shared. Using Parlay, there is still a degree of human error, but it is drastically minimized, and students can see in real time how they are progressing in terms of how many times they seized the opportunity to speak and what kinds of input they brought to the conversation. Seeing the data of their progress in real time was encouraging as it gave them new goals to work towards.

Mid Stakes "Inquiry with Philosophical Videos"

Overview

In this mid-stakes' instructional activity, students are presented with an informational video that introduces a philosopher's philosophical theory. Students are instructed to watch the video in order to question it. From the video, the teacher selects one quote that captures the central idea of the philosopher and include that quote on an instructional slide with a statement that directs them to generate questions.

The Beta Test

I beta tested this activity by using an informational video that gives the gist of philosopher John Rawls theory on "The Veil of Ignorance." At the conclusion of the video, on the instructional slide, I told students two things. I gave them a quote from the video clip "Fairness is the essence of justice" and directed them to "Use what you know to generate questions."

What Happened

I noticed that some students struggled with question generating. For some students, the philosophical topic was foreign, and they did not understand how to engage with the text, so they timidly wrote one question while other students challenged the ideas of the speaker by paralleling the philosophical idea to current social structures in American society. Other students were just afraid to question information. When I probed a bit further, they informed me that they could not think of anything to write. As I reflected on their answer to me, it was more of their right to question the ideology of a source.

How They Did It

Students relied on what they know about American society and its governing structures to generate questions that challenge the current societal system. Most students focused on fairness and justice and wondered how can fairness be applied across the board in a society that has engaged in and created laws based on unjust practices throughout history? Most students had questions about how the veil of ignorance works.

What I Would Do Differently

What may have benefitted the students more and allowed them to feel more comfortable with considering a philosophical idea of a philosopher is if I had framed it around a situation, they could insert themselves in. That way, the student could see how the ideology of the philosopher plays out in a real world scenario and why their inquiry of the philosopher's ideology matters. For the exercise I did, if the student is not strong in history or historical movements, they will not feel that they can comprehend philosophical theory—their access to that level or type of thought is beyond their reach. After viewing the student work, I realized that providing students with a

hook to the activity—something the class has read or plans to read as a whole group so they could juxtapose the theory of the philosopher to what they read instead of studying the theory and expecting the students to make the cognitive leap to connect it to something they already know.

Mid-Stakes Argumentative Inquiry "Unpacking Text Excerpts"

Overview

In this mid stakes activity, students are instructed to locate a perplexing paragraph from an article in order to interpret the author's meaning through inquiry.

Why I Think This Works

I think this activity works with students because it invites them to question the actions or beliefs of the writer while maintaining their own set of beliefs. This activity supports confidence building directly because the student is not in direct contact with the author, but the student is weighing their own beliefs against a set of ideas presented from a writer. This way, the student is indirectly firming up their own views on a topic which will lead the student to search for answers to their self-generated question through additional research.

How to Do It
Once the student has found the perplexing paragraph, they are told to underline the sentences or phrases that are unclear to them. Next, they are told to generate a question about the words, phrases, or ideas they underlined. Finally, they pair up with a partner and share their paragraph and their questions. There is nothing formal to the partner talk, it is just another way to get ideas out and seeing each other as more of a sounding board. The questions that are generated are then used as research questions. These questions are what guides their inquiry as they begin their freewriting process.

High Stakes "A Picture is Worth a 1,000 Questions"

Overview

In this high stakes' instructional activity, students are shown a picture on the classroom whiteboard. Typing "images that show a good argument" in the Google Search Bar will yield a terrific number of possible options for this lesson. Post the image to the whiteboard then, direct students to ask questions about it. Modeling a few questions in order to get their minds warmed up to this inquiry method helps orient the students to a different way of thinking.

The Beta-Test
I beta tested this activity, and I noticed a reticent and hesitancy at full engagement with the thinking exercise. Once I shared a few questions, and provided students with sentence stems,

they were more engaged in trying to ask questions of the image. A few students did not understand why they were asking questions because the image just seemed so strange.

What Happened

What resulted from this inquiry exercise were highly in depth, self-reflective definition, or classification speeches. The students found their voice and their passions from an abstract image that was intended to be used as a way to trigger an argumentative discussion. The speech topics ranged from "Home Environment Influencing Social Interactions," "Types of Guardianship" to "What is Rivalry"? What ultimately occurred was a premise Dr. Mark Sanders. Senior Lecturer, made to our class that when students are given the chance to explore a topic through inquiry, they will do the following: hypothesize, infer, critically assess, and seek to clarify terms—which gives rise to new ideas. Clarifying terms invites students to extend or think about the answer to their question in a way that has not been done before, and for my students that way was through paragraph writing.

How They Did It

Each day, the students were shown the image that engendered the inquiry and were instructed to engage in one part of the writing process each day. For example, on the first day, students were asked to look at the image, then make an inference based on what they see. Stems that I used to support their questioning were the traditional five significant detail questions (who, what, where, when, why and how) and the following stems: *Could it be that… Is it possible that… Predict what could happened if…*

On the second day, students were told to look at the questions that were written the previous day and determine the thematic topic for each question. The thematic topic is the subject of their next speech. Then I provided an example inquiry question and thematic topic on the whiteboard: What is the reason she is holding the girl up? Then I wrote thematic topic, Purpose.

On the third day, students were instructed to circle their thematic topic and free write about it. Now, this part of the speech writing process is not monitored by me. This is an important point to emphasize. In order for students to develop confidence as thinkers, writers, and speakers, we have to trust that they will allow the spirit of the activity to lead them to write with passion, persuasion, and power—three characteristics of a confident writer. Students have to be given opportunities to show and be confident in compiling ideas for their own written expression. The next day, students are instructed to take out their free write. They are told to continue freewriting, but this time, begin the first sentence with the sentence stem "Today, I want to talk about…" In succeeding days, students are provided with a link to sentence stems that guide them through all phases of the first draft of their speech: warm greeting, memorable opening sentence, clear introduction, organized body paragraphs, and a succinct closing.

On the fourth day, students present their speeches behind a podium in front of the class. What I found was a willingness for students to be vulnerable to their peers about issues that not only mattered to them as speakers, but to their peers sitting in their seats! The speeches reflect

their honest interpretation of their issue, and they yearn to share their perspectives with a group that is ready and willing to listen. That is what happened and that is what continues to happen. They see how through their own research about a topic that matters to them from a question they generated that their voice has value to this audience of peers.

High Stakes: Debate and Confidence Choice Board

Overview

In this high-stakes instructional activity, students are given a choice board of activities to either express, illustrate or narrate what they gleaned from two Toastmasters' articles and a clip from *The Great Debaters*, the movie the class previously watched.

Here is the Activity

A choice board supports differentiated instruction which indirectly supports confidence building by giving student voice, choice, and agency in how to present their ideas. With the choice board, the student would follow the learning sequence labeled on the Google slide (Appendix 3), then choose how they wish to present their understanding of it—by writing a poem, making a collage, or recording themselves speaking using Flipgrid.

Here is What Did Not Work

One of the choice board activities is to write a poem. For the poem, I was looking for them to tell me if they saw any association between debate and confidence. My initial set of instructions on the choice board were taken as suggestions by the students. I was surprised to see in the Canvas module submissions a great number of students redesigned the writing task in an effort to suit the way they wanted to express what they learned. For example, one of the options was to make a ten line poem that showed what they learned from the readings, the movie clip from The Great Debaters and the Toastmaster's articles on debate and confidence. Student submissions showed that they wanted to cherry pick and take quote from the movie and incorporate it with quotes from the article and add that to their poetic interpretation.

Here is What I Would Do Differently

One thing I would do differently is not expect students to think like me—that is, not expect them to approach the writing assignment linearly. Even though they were given a choice board with instructions to write a poem, make a collage or record themselves reflecting using Flipgrid, I would still provide the same instructions but be more open minded about the way they want to interpret the choices displayed on the choice board. The freedom in which they approached the assignment told me that they wanted to make choices within the choices on the choice board in order to best express what they learned. This is called synthesis, which is actually a more

sophisticated way of thinking; it also shows me that my students felt confident about how they wanted to display their understanding by retooling the writing prompt to fit their form of expression.

Assessments

With the exception of using Toastmasters material for students to evaluate themselves their peer's extemporaneous speaking (also referred to as Table Topics) and speech presentations, the manner of assessment is following the CMS English IV grading as shown in the chart below:

Score	Description
100	All sections are complete and contain accurate information. Written response demonstrates strong engagement with the task and thoughtful reflection on the learning.

80	All sections are complete and contain accurate information.
60	Some information is inaccurate, or some sections may not be entirely complete.
50	Notetaker may be incomplete.

Appendix 1: Implementing Teaching Standards

Speaking and Listening Standard I [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1] Students bring to any discussion ideas and questions as well as evidence and examples from their readings or research, using specific passages or details to defend, advance, or build on their own or others' ideas.

Low and High-Stakes Activities: Elbow Partners, Four Corners, Geometric Annotations, Inquiry with Philosophical Videos, Debate and Confidence Choice Board. A central goal in these

exercises was for students to see themselves and each other as their greatest resource. Children underestimate the wealth of knowledge they bring with them to the classroom. These exercises invite them to tap into their own and their peers to better inform, strengthen or deepen their own.

Speaking and Listening Standard III [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3] Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Low Stakes Activities: Parlay, Unpacking Text Excerpts. A central goal in these exercises is for students to engage in civil speaking protocol that enhances their perspectives while questioning, challenging or supporting the ideas of their peers. The effective participation of this verbal exchange is best shown through the online features found in Parlay's discussion forum.

Speaking and Listening Standard VI [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.6] Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
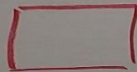
Mid-Stakes Activity
A Picture is Worth 1,000 Questions: This activity takes students through the steps for preparing their own speech using sentence stems in a sequenced format to help shape the big ideas of their message to their audience.
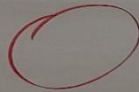
Appendix 2   Anchor Chart

△ 3 sides
edges are sharp > protected
cornered in

▭ has four sides
quadrilateral > multiple ways
all equal   out assuming
              you can leave from
              a corner

◯ enclosed
no way out > It can roll
locked in   to the right side

Issues

gun violence @ football game
police brutality
serial killers
kidnapping
sex trafficking
gun violence @ other high schools

Appendix 3   Choice Board

1 **Watch**

Clip "The Great Debaters"

2 **Read**

Toastmasters Article "Debate Matters" How Classic Debate Helps You Develop Confidence and a Personal Speaking Style.

Press [Esc] to exit full screen

3 **Make**

Q2 Perform Activity: Choose one way to show what you have learned!

Write a 10 line poem that **expresses what you learned about debate and confidence**.

Make a collage of quotations and digital images that **illustrates what you learned about debate and confidence. Include one quote from the movie clip.**

Make a Flipgrid that **tells what learned about debate and confidence**.

Teacher Resources

Websites

A Novice's Guide to Speaking in Public: 10 Steps to Help You Succeed in Your Next Presentation Without Years of Training by Dr. Michael Lawrence Faulkner
https://ptgmedia.pearsoncmg.com/images/9780134193861/samplepages/9780134193861.pdf

I used this e-textbook as my anchor text for the course until mid-way through the course I realized that it was only sample excerpts, and I would have to find additional supplemental material to inform student instruction. The information in this textbook I found to be effective in identifying and describing to students what it means to be a novice public speaker. Students were assigned short sections to read and used an "It Says| I Say" double entry note taking method to record what they learned in their classroom notebooks. One of my activities, Geometric Annotations, was inspired by a section in Dr. Faulkner's book called "Speaking Extemporaneously."

TED Talk "How to be a Better Communicator" by Celeste Headlee
https://youtu.be/R1vskiVDwl4

"How to Listen" by Julian Treasure
https://youtu.be/cSohjlYQI2A

I used both of these videos to show students how to graphically organize a TED Talk. A part of this lesson introduced some students to the SOAPS acronym. SOAPS is used in rhetoric classes or English courses where the student has to identify their audience in order to establish the mindset, they are attempting to pierce using language. I placed the SOAPS in the middle of the double T chart and had students compare and contrast the message from both speakers. For the CU this is a chart that may prove to be helpful as it was the catalyst for this unit on confidence through philosophical inquiry.

Parlay
https://parlayideas.com/

This is an effective online discussion platform for students because it is multifaceted. One of its features is the Word Cloud and I used this word cloud following an online roundtable. It tracks and gathers patterns of words that students use when engaged in the online discussion post prior to the live roundtable. I used the Word Cloud for a student inquiry warmup the following day.

Pro-Con *The Great Debaters* Film Discussion Guide
https://www.procon.org/wp-content/uploads/great-debaters-discussion-guide.pdf

This is a resource that I wish I knew about before I created the Debate and Confidence Choice Board and showed the film to my Speech and Debate I students. I am this film guide can support

some strong conversations around racial and social injustice, framing the historical period as well as the overall storyline of Melvin B. Tolson and his assertive teaching practices.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Remembrance Project/EJI Equal Justice Initiative
https://sites.google.com/eji.org/eji-charlottemeckessay/overview

Although the contest will have concluded at the publishing of this curriculum unit, the prompt is one that can be revisited in succeeding years. I find this to be a watershed moment for our Speech and Debate I students because the topical content is directly in line with the actionable change Julius L. Chambers wanted to make for the students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. This topic that has many branches and can be extended for use with philosophical inquiry, speech topic writing and oral debates.

Student Resources

Website

"Oral Presentation Sentence Starters"
https://library.aut.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/246668/Sentence-starters-for-oral-presentations2.pdf

This resource is used whenever students prepare to write a speech. These effective sentence stems have provided students with the rhetorical direction they want to take their writing.

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