

CLASSROOM DEBATE AS ONE OF THE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN UNDERGRADUATE PAEDIATRICS & ADOLESCENT MEDICINE POSTING: 5 YEARS' EXPERIENCE AT NDUM

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ABSTRACT

A variety of teaching learning activities has been included into the Undergraduate curriculum at Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine posting at National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM) since inception in 2013 till presently. A Debate session has been included once in every posting for duration of 60 minutes. The topics chosen had ranged from areas related to General Paediatrics and Adolescents. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the implementation of Debate sessions at NDUM over a span of 5 years' period and also the literature review on Pros, Cons, Benefits of Debate. The implementation process had provided insights into the merits of using debate as a learning strategy and a useful way in which to help students be enriched in Paediatrics & Adolescent Health. It also proved that the ability of moderator in the Post-Debate feedback and discussion had ensured the pitfalls to be minimal to zero and the opportunity to learn the subject matter was enhanced. However, further research is needed on this teaching - learning strategy not only in terms of faculty perceptions and experiences but also in terms of student perceptions and experiences. This is needed in face of changing faculty and changing educational scenarios.

Keywords: Debate, learning strategy, undergraduate, Paediatrics, Adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Educators are always searching for innovative and effective ways to help students learn. (Park, Kier & Jugdev, 2011). Researchers on pedagogy have described debates as one type of active learning tool that promotes critical thinking (Darby, 2007; Kennedy, 2007).

OBJECTIVE of this paper

- (1) To highlight the implementation of Classroom Debates as a learning strategy in Paediatrics & Adolescent Medicine posting over a span of 5 years' period.
- (2) To review & highlight the PROS, CONS & BENEFITS of classroom Debates in higher education.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION at NDUM

A variety of teaching learning activities (TLAs) had been included in the Paediatrics & Adolescent Medicine postings in Year 3 since its inception in September 2013 till presently. There are 4 groups of students posted in rotation for 8 weeks' duration in one academic session. Each posting is allocated with 320 hours of academic workload. The various TLAs are Lectures, Teaching Ward Rounds, Ward work, Bedside presentation and discussion, Paediatric General Clinics at HATTM, Seminar preparation by students, presentation and discussion, Problem Solving sessions on common paediatric problems preparation by student, presentation and discussion, Tutorials, Peer pair sessions by 2 students in role play for

psychosocial assessment for adolescents, simulated patients sessions between one simulated patient and one student as a doctor doing HEADSSSS assessment, Self- directed learning, clinical skills laboratory (CSL) sessions on core procedures , role play presentation of Medical Ethics related to Paediatrics, On call postings from 5pm till 10pm in rotation . Debate session is included as 60 minutes(Face to face) student learning time (SLT) with post-debate discussion as one of the TLAs once in every posting at Paediatrics. The non face to face, student learning time (SLT) will be $60 \times 2 = 120$ minutes (2 hours)

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF DEBATE AT NDUM

A. OBJECTIVES OF CLASSROOM DEBATES AT NDUM

- i. To foster learning with a unique learning strategy.
- ii. To enable students to develop constructive arguments to support opposing views of the given topic
- iii. To encourage critical thinking;
- iv. To raise students' awareness that most issues are not straightforward and that student should learn to form opinions about their position that they can explain or defend with factual evidence.

B. PRE- DEBATE BRIEFING

Students are given the TOPIC for preparation and the guidelines for adjudicators marking scheme as reference to help them in their preparation for the "Debate" by the HOD/Coordinator upon their arrival to the posting

Table 1. GUIDELINES FOR ADJUDICATORS MARKING SCHEME

NAME OF ADJUDICATOR:

	SPEAKERS A		SPEAKERS B			
	A1	A2	A3	B1	B2	B3
1.DELIVERY (30) Tone, gestures, words, phrases, looking at paper all the time, ad libitum or refer only at times to notes						
2.CONTENTS (30) Outline of presentation to be given Introduction done Definitions given Factual, quotations with references given Systematic and relevant New information added on						
3.REFERENCES (20) Facts and Figures are given Journal or book references Relevant to topic						
4.MESSAGE IMPARTED ACROSS (20) Take home messages given Able to impart the main message						
TOTAL MARKS						
ANY OTHER REMARKS						

SIGNATURE of adjudicator

DATE

C.THE DEBATE SESSION IS CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO THE GUIDELINES.**Table 2. GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCT OF DEBATE BY STUDENTS**

- 1.Students nominate their own CHAIRPERSON and TIME KEEPER
 - 2.Students nominate 3 speakers for the PRO and 3 speakers for the CON side of the TOPIC given
 - 3.Remaining number of students to be runner for miscellaneous works
 - 4.CHAIRPERSON will start the DEBATE SESSION
- He will explain the rules and regulations for this CLASSROOM DEBATE
- Each speaker from one GROUP will have 7 minutes each = 21 minutes but can take more until maximum time given, for each group which is 30 minutes One speaker from each group will speak and alternate with other speaker from other group After all 3 speakers have spoken any speaker from each group can give rebuttals made from other groups remarks and use up remaining time till allocated 30 minutes' time for each group is used up.
- After 60 minutes is over, the CHAIRPERSON will be given the result from the panel of adjudicators and he/she will make announcement for BEST SPEAKER AND BEST GROUP. The prizes are sponsored by Prof Soe Soe Aye Professor/HOD since inception till time of write up = 18 sessions so far

D.POST DEBATE feedback and discussion is done with Prof Dr Soe Soe Aye as the Moderator.

E.THE TOPICS/AREAS included in previous Debate Sessions over span of 5 years, are as listed in Table 3.

TABLE 3. LIST OF THE TOPICS/ AREAS USED IN THE DEBATE SESSIONS.

- 1.Parents of thalassemia should have their own children
 - 2.Breast feeding is mothers' own choice
 3. Regarding sexual health rights, adolescents should not be given the right to make own decisions
 - 4.HPV vaccination is compulsory for 13 years old girls in Malaysia
 - 5.Cow's milk is healthy for baby
 - 6.Sex education should ideally be given during childhood
 - 7.It is compulsory for all mothers to exclusively breastfed her child for first 6months
 - 8.Pregnant teen rape victim should be offered termination of pregnancy
 - 9.The consent for surgery/procedures should be taken from adolescents and not from the parents
 - 10.Advice to quit smoking: go cold turkey or go vaping.
 - 11.Empowering teens in digital age
 - 12.Breastmilk: Feeding mother's milk is BEST for the baby.
 - 13.To be a Lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender is OK
 - 14.Pros and cons of Pokémon Go
 - 15.Pros and cons of Fandom
 - 16.Do not resuscitate (DNR) for paediatrics, should be done or not?
 - 17.Vaccination choices for Mandatory and optional vaccines are not based on parental own choices (made mandatory by government of health)
- (18-20 sessions are upcoming till end of 5 years' period)

LITERATURE REVIEW on PROS & CONS & BENEFITS OF DEBATES

Debates as a teaching tool can be traced back to ancient Greece, with the Sophists, Protagoras, and Aristotle as the earliest pioneers (Vo & Morris, 2006). As an instructional method, debating involves students in expressing their opinions from two competing perspectives with the goal of contradicting each other's arguments (Chang & Cho, 2010). An opportunity for decision may be given after opposing views are presented in alternating statements

Snider & Schnurer, 2002 has said that a classroom debate that serves effective teaching and learning is encouraged to incorporate four conceptual components:

- (a) **development of ideas** with description, explanation, and demonstration,
- (b) **clash of opinions** supported by reasons and evidence,
- (c) **extension or arguments** against criticisms, which again are refuted by the opponent, and
- (d) **perspective**, the process of weighing ideas and issues to conclude with a logical decision is made, either about the issue or about the presentation of arguments.

Successful uses of debating have been reported in a variety of disciplines, including psychology (Fallahi & Haney, 2011), geography (Healey, 2012), marketing (Combs & Bourne, 1994), accounting (Camp & Schnader, 2010), engineering (Chang & Cho, 2010), sociology (Green & Klug, 1990), social work (Keller, Whittaker & Burke, 2001), nursing (Candela, Michael & Mitchell, 2003), and pharmacy (Lin & Crawford, 2007). Recently, debates have been used in online settings, including online forums (Selwyn, 2007; Park, Kier & Jugdey, 2011), games, and communications software (Healey, 2012).

PROS re: DEBATES

1. Debating has been shown to facilitate engagement in undergraduate classrooms.

Fallahi & Haney, 2011 says Debates facilitates verbal participation and Berdine, 1984 says it better involves students in class. Snider & Schnurer, 2002 had said that instead of passive learning, students take up more responsibility for comprehension of the subject matter and Huryn, 1986 said students invest more serious study effort. Mooeller, 1985, had said that, both participating in the debate process and observing it have been reported to be valuable by undergraduate students. Green & Klug, 1990 says that Debate also leads to more active post-debate discussion

2. Debating is also found to improve learning outcomes.

The immediate positive effects include greater knowledge acquisition by reinforcing already taught materials (Kennedy, 2009). For the learning of controversial subjects in particular, debating enhances students' appreciation for the complexities of the subject matter, and challenges prior beliefs (Bell, 1982). In the longer term, debating helps students acquire better comprehension, application, and critical evaluation skills when presented a complex topic (Omelicheva & Avdeyeva, 2008). It improves students' listening and public speaking skills, and also opens opportunities to develop oral communication skills (Combs & Bourne, 1994), creativity (Vo & Morris 2006), and empathy (Bell, 1982).

3. It is said to be, one type of active learning tool that promotes critical thinking (Darby, 2007; Kennedy, 2007).

Critical thinking has been defined in many ways but one comprehensive definition, is "Critical thinking basically involves: (i) a set of skills, such as analysing, arguing,

synthesizing, evaluating and applying; and (ii) the use of these skills to guide behaviors” (Wang, Woo, & Zhao, 2009, p. 97).

CONS re: DEBATES

Debate is not without its critics.

1. Professor Tumposky, (Tumposky, N. (2004).) in her article *The Debate Debate*, had set forth numerous critiques to the use of debate in the classroom.

First, she emphasizes that debates tend toward dualism. Dualism is “the division of something conceptually into two opposed or contrasted aspects, or the state of being so divided.” In the classroom, this means that debate –instead of causing students to consider a multiplicity of perspectives– might persuade students to view an issue as having only two positions (yes or no). Second, debates tend to focus students toward the question of winning or losing. Instead of seeking the best solution to the proposed problem or issue, students focus selectively on aspects that strengthen their own argument.

Third, inherent in the debate format is the need for two sides to validate a point of view; however, most reasonable people will agree that some issues do not have an “other side of the story.”

Fourth, debate fosters a confrontational classroom environment that is not suitable for many students. As such, Professor Tumposky raises good questions about whether debate is a prudent pedagogy to foster genuine peer interaction and learning in universities today.

BENEFITS OF DEBATES

1. Students tend to enjoy debating, and thus they are more likely to be engaged, to remember material, and to use the skills in other aspects of their lives (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; McGraw-Hill, 2009; Tessier, 2009).

2. Budesheim and Lundquist (1999), claim that one of the goals of education is to open students’ eyes to the fact that issues can be complex and that examining different viewpoints objectively is an important skill.

3. Debating triggers higher order learning, such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Paladino, 2009; Roy & Macchiette, 2005; Scott-Young & Samson, 2008).

4. It can help students learn to read critically and also write critically, which is a valuable skills for graduates:

5. The process encourages empathy (Tessier, 2009) in that participants need to understand how others think (Bellon, 2000), helps to increase students’ open-mindedness (Berdine, 1987) and tolerance (Galloway, 2007), and may even decrease incidents of violence (Bellon, 2000).

6. Additional benefits of debates include the likelihood that “debaters come to realize that positions other than their own have value, and that reasonable minds can disagree on controversial issues” (Galloway, 2007, p. 12).

7. It can also help students to realize that sometimes experts do not agree on topics and that topics may not have a right or wrong answer.

DISCUSSION

Going over the topics chosen over a span of 5 years' period and already implemented:

We can say that the debate sessions had fostered learning through a unique learning strategy. It had made possible the link between student engagement and critical thinking. It had invested them with responsibility to investigate, articulate and defend a particular issue. It had encouraged class participation among those students who typically do not talk in class. Prof SSA was pleasantly surprised when she heard few students who had been so quiet in class showing their abilities at presentation and the quality of the material presented. This was particularly appreciated when two topics relating to adolescents had been used - namely Pokémon Go and Fandoms. **Pokémon Go** is a free-to-play, location-based augmented reality game, The PROs were the game's concept and the incentive to be more active in the real world, but CONS were the controversy for contributing to various accidents, as well as becoming a public nuisance at some locations. Both groups had presented well and all became familiar with what the adolescents were doing globally. In fact, one of the speakers was a game player Also one of the faculty, a professor was a game player too. The game was awarded five *Guinness World Records* in August 2016 Regarding Fandoms too, the presentations on PRO and CONs were interesting. Fandom is an informal but organized subculture of worshippers. The object of their adornment are different but most commonly they are focused around a television series, movie franchise or a certain celebrity. They are going by name of fan labor or "fanac"- which is shortened form of fan activity. Once they meet on line, fans have opportunity to negotiate the actual real life event They meet up. Thus there are positive outcomes and negative ones like becoming addicted. Other 15 topics are all centered on General Paediatrics like immunization, breast feeding, nutrition, genetics in Thalassaemia, medical ethics related to paediatrics. One topic of note is "Should parents who are carriers of Thalassaemia have children or should they adopt them" The speakers had done much literature review in prescribed textbooks and internet and had made their presentations to put forward the PROs and CONs. Through exposure to contrasting viewpoints or by the defense of a position to which a student is opposed, students learn to listen to both sides of an argument and to see things from the other point of view. The amazing point was that the team who had argued that the carrier parents should adopt and not have children had won the debate.! They had put forward strongly the reasons why adoption only and why not to have own children .It was heartening to first author, to listen to their rational arguments on this very emotional and challenging topic.

This brings the point put forward by Professor Kennedy (Kennedy R,2007 who had defined Debate as :

"Debate refers to the process of considering multiple viewpoints and arriving at a judgment", and its application ranging from an individual using debate to make a decision in his or her own mind to an individual or group using debate to convince others to agree with them

Most importantly, debate offers an opportunity for students to move beyond the acquisition of basic knowledge in a subject matter and progress into the types of higher order critical thinking skills that good debate requires. This process develops and improves oral communication skills, and at the same time, hones students' listening skills as a necessity to make effective rebuttals at the time of the Debate.

CONCLUSIONS

1. We had gained insights into the merits of using the debate as a teaching- learning strategy and had achieved the set objectives.
2. We had found the debate session to be a useful way in which to help us enrich our courses in areas of General Paediatrics and Adolescent Health.
3. The moderator's (Prof SSA) ability to create a positive classroom environment during Post debate discussion (e.g., emphasizing learning and not only the competitiveness of debate) had ensured the pitfalls of debate to be minimized and the opportunity to learn the subject matter was enhanced.
4. Further research is needed on this teaching-learning strategy, not only in terms of faculty perceptions and experiences, but also in terms of student perceptions and experiences.

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