Using Speed Rounds to Balance Classroom Debate Participation across Personality Types

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Using Speed Rounds to Balance Classroom Debate Participation across Personality Types

This paper recommends incorporating speed rounds into a traditional debate format to balance class participation across personality types (extroverts, introverts, ambiverts) in an undergraduate classroom. Debates are a strong example of active learning and simultaneously improve critical thinking skills (Proulx 2004, Lantis 2004) and oral communication skills (Allison 2002). In addition, the debate is a natural way for students to practice applying economic concepts to current event topics. A well designed debate prompt elicits a strong reaction on both sides of the issue while also giving students a strong incentive to investigate a timely issue not just on an emotional level, but an economics one as well (Tessier 2009; Pernecky 1997). In fact, a survey of undergraduate economics majors found that 63 percent of students wanted more discussion of real-world issues (Jones et al. 2009) and a debate is a natural fit for this desire.

The instructor bears the responsibility of preparing a debate that reaches higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy discussion (Pace 2010; Tessier 2009), though debates are not required to reach the evaluation level to be successful. Debates often help undergraduates move beyond the remember stage to better explain their ideas, use classroom information in new situations, and analyze statements to decide whether they are fact or opinion and/or compare and contrast ideas (Treme 2018).
Speed Rounds

The effectiveness of a debate can be diminished when all of the energy and learning is limited to a few students. This leaves the remaining students passively absorbing information and does not encourage participation among a variety of students. In many debates, only two to six students actively participate in the debate (Kennedy 2007) and this can contribute to a listless debate environment for the majority of students. The use of speed rounds increases the involvement of all students in the classroom and can be inserted either between traditional debate rounds or after the traditional debate has concluded. During a speed round, students are given either a predetermined time (such as 20 seconds) or a predetermined sentence limit (such as 1 sentence) to respond to the opposing team’s key point. Students raise their hand and the instructor alternates the side that they select to speak. Once a student has spoken in the speed round, they are not eligible to speak again until the remaining students have spoken or another speed round is put into place. If a student makes a false statement, students on the opposing team have an immediate chance to counter that statement.

Certainly the use of a debate in the classroom is not new, but the incorporation of speed rounds makes the debate a useful tool even in larger classrooms and evidence presented in this paper suggests that debate participation is balanced between extroverts, introverts, and ambiverts whereas extroverts are significantly more likely to speak in a typical class.

The normative nature of a debate is an opportunity for students to practice merging their personal views of an issue with economic principles and for the instructor to observe both the strengths and weaknesses of student arguments. The real time observations
allow an instructor to assess how to respond to the weaknesses in a much more efficient manner than assigning a paper to all students, grading the paper, and then handing the paper back days after the student has stopped thinking about the topic. This is why student reflections are absolutely critical to include following a debate.

**Implementation**

In-class debates with speed rounds was introduced at a four-year public university in the southern United States. The course, U.S. Agricultural Policy, is a required 400-level course in the Agribusiness Management major with a prerequisite of Intermediate Microeconomics. The debates were implemented in the fall of 2017 and the spring of 2018 with roughly 50 students in each section. Each section was comprised of 65% males and 35% females. Each course participated in one in-class debate in the semester.

The topics were chosen in a specific manner. The class was presented with three broad topics in which they could choose to debate: sugar industry, cotton industry, and the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). Each topic had already been covered in the course, so students had a substantial amount of preparation regarding each program. PollEverywhere, a polling software that allows students to vote on a question anonymously, was used to determine which broad topic was chosen. Given their choice, the class was then presented with three narrow topics based on SNAP and PollEverywhere was again used to narrow down the choices. In both semesters, students chose “Should convenience stores be allowed to accept benefits under the Supplemental
Nutritional Assistance Program?” and the students were split 50-50 on the issue in the fall of 2017 and 51-49 in the spring of 2018.

Following the selection of the topic, students were required to submit a paper to the learning management system. The assignment was due at the beginning of the class prior to the in-class debate. The assignment required students to read two instructor assigned readings and answer questions based on content and how the paper could be used during the debate. In addition, students were required to select five additional readings of their choosing: 3 should support their position and 2 should support the alternative. The three papers supporting their position must have an explanation for why they think it will support their argument and how they would use it during the debate. The two remaining papers supporting the other side were required to have an explanation for how they might respond to the article’s arguments in a debate.

In the class preceding the in-class debate, students were asked to sit on the side corresponding to their debate position. Within each side, students were asked to form groups of 5. In the last 25 minutes of class, students were given a chance to outline their debate strategy within their group and Padlet, an online virtual “bulletin” board and collaboration tool, was used to help each side organize the arguments of the small groups. The students were then told that one small group from each side would be randomly selected to give the opening statement during the in-class debate.

On the day of the in-class debate, students noted the key points made by either side during the opening statements and the points were organized in either Padlet or Google Docs. The class then used PollEverywhere to determine which of the key points they wanted to first use in a speed round. In the speed round, students stand up and face
each other in a circle (or move their desks in a circle if the furniture permits). The instructor alternates the side that they select to speak and once a student has spoken, they cannot speak again until everyone has had a chance to speak or another speed round begins. Students must respond to the key point in the speed round. Once no one raises their hand, a new key point can be opened for speed round debate. Typically, students debate an average key point for 10 minutes in a speed round. Making a list of key points keeps the debate on topic and attention squarely focused.

Grades were assigned based on the pre-debate paper, a small group peer review on the quality of contribution both in the class prior to the in-class debate and during the in-class debate, and a reflection paper following the debate, in which students outlined the strengths and weakness of the arguments presented on both sides, whether they were surprised by information learned during the debate, and how their initial response to the debate prompt changed following the debate. Students were not required to speak during the debate, though they were peer reviewed based on their small group contributions.

I distributed an IRB-approved survey to 104 students over two semesters in the 400-level U.S. Agricultural policy course both before and after the debate that assessed their pre-debate anxiety, their knowledge prior to the debate and after the debate, the likelihood that they would speak in the debate, the likelihood that they would speak in a typical class, the number of times they actually spoke during the debate, how active they were in participating with their group in planning the group response, and personality characteristics, including whether they would classify themselves as an introvert, extrovert, or somewhere in between (ambivert).
Results

I directly measured the self-reported gains to student knowledge using the pre and post survey questions. I observed statistically significant large effect gains in self-reported knowledge, as reported in Table 1.

A self-reported personality question classified students as either extroverts, introverts, or ambiverts.\(^1\) The personality characteristics were distributed according to Figure 1. More than half of students self-identified as ambiverts. In some ways, this is not surprising, as being an introvert can be associated with a negative stigma: quiet, reserved, and shy. On the other hand, identifying as an extrovert can also have negative connotations: loud and pushy. An ambivert is someone that exhibits an equal number of traits and tendencies from both groups. Students that self-reported as “in between” were classified as self-reported ambiverts. While this method is not fool-proof, it is a first step in assessing how self-reported personality traits impact class participation.

Given the personality traits, I then tested whether there were differences in the likelihood that a student would speak in a typical class and the results are reported in Table 2. In the pre-debate survey, students were asked how likely they were to speak during a typical class. Extroverts were significantly more likely to speak in a typical class than both introverts and ambiverts, though there was no significant difference between introverts and ambiverts. Students were also asked to rate their debate anxiety in the pre-debate survey. Prior to the survey, the format had been explained to students and students had the chance to ask questions regarding the speed round format.

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\(^1\) I also distributed a personality survey adapted from *Quiet* by Susan Cain, based on characteristics of introversion commonly accepted by contemporary researchers. This data is not reflected in this version of the paper.
Interestingly, there was no statistically significant difference between extroverts, introverts, or ambiverts pertaining to debate anxiety (see Figure 2). One interpretation of this is that the debate format relieves the pressure of forced participation and allows more introspective learners to reflect on what is being said before contributing to the discussion. However, extroverts did rate themselves as more likely than introverts to participate in the debate, though the mean differences were smaller in magnitude as compared to how likely a student rated themselves to speak in a typical class.

Students also self-reported the number of times that they spoke during the debate, not counting how many times they spoke during their small group discussions. 45 out of 105 students voluntarily spoke at least one time during the debate and 25 students spoke at least two times. On average, students voluntarily spoke 1.42 times. Compared to a typical debate, the speed round format generates more spontaneous participation from a greater number of students. Given that extroverts rated themselves as more likely to participate in class as compared to introverts and ambiverts, it is notable that the number of times a student spoke during the debate was not statistically different across personality types. Figure 3 shows the percentage of each personality type that spoke during the debate.

Students were also asked to rate their view from 1 to 10 on the topic both before and after the debate and there was no statistical difference between the pre-debate mean and the post-debate mean (see Table 1). This could be suggestive of the fact that students tend to become more firmly entrenched in their view during the debate in an effort to win and therefore do not allow their view to change even when confronted with alternative evidence. An alternative to the more competitive structure of a debate is
structured controversy. Structured controversy requires students to work in small groups to argue for or against an issue with students reaching a decision that is supported by evidence presented in the class (Millis and Cottell 1998). This method can result in students being more willing to change their position as compared to a traditional debate format.²

**Conclusion**

In summary, the speed round debate gives less outgoing students a chance to contribute. Debates in large classrooms make it difficult for every student to speak and students frequently complain of stage fright and exhibit an unwillingness to participate in stating their group’s position. The introduction of the speed round has increased the total number of students that participate in large classroom debates and many of these students come from the population that previously complained about stage fright. They report that they felt more comfortable making a voluntary short statement after observing the debate arguments as opposed to a compulsory statement.

An instructor that has never incorporated a debate in their course can be intimidated because of the fear that the debate will be dominated by a small number of students while the majority of students are not actively engaged. Indeed, self-reported extroverts rated themselves as more likely to participate in a typical class than either introverts or ambiverts. However, speed rounds balance classroom participation among

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² Each class also participated in structured controversy, but the data is not summarized in this paper.
self-reported extroverts, introverts, and ambiverts and offer an alternative classroom format that may result in a larger cross-section of student class participation.

While the debate format can balance classroom participation while merging both content and pedagogical goals, the evidence presented is limited in a few ways. First, the students self-identified as extroverts, introverts, or ambiverts and the results of self-identification could yield different categorizations as compared to whether students filled out a more structured survey to determine where they fall. Second, student knowledge gains were self-reported and therefore I was unable to measure whether the students achieved the desired learning outcomes. Future research will include a common exam question with a grading rubric to test for critical thinking gains.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debate Assessment of Knowledge of Topic</th>
<th>Pre-Debate Mean</th>
<th>Post-Debate Mean</th>
<th>Probability of Difference</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate your knowledge of the debate topic on a scale of 1-10, with one being not very informed and 10 being very informed.</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>+0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate your view on the debate topic on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being you strongly disagree with the topic and 10 being that you strongly agree with the topic.</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Personality Characteristic</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>F-statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference in Reported Knowledge Pre and Post Debate</td>
<td>Introvert</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extrovert</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambivert</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How likely are you to speak during a typical class, with 1 being extremely unlikely and 10 being extremely likely?</td>
<td>Introvert</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>5.57***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extrovert</td>
<td>7.58</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambivert</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How likely are you to speak during the debate, with 1 being extremely unlikely and 10 being extremely likely?</td>
<td>Introvert</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extrovert</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambivert</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many times did you speak during the debate? (not counting the discussion in your small group)</td>
<td>Introvert</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extrovert</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambivert</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1

Personality Characteristics (n=104)

- Extrovert: 21
- Ambivert: 55
- Introvert: 28

Figure 2

Distribution of Debate Anxiet
Figure 3

Percentage of Category that Spoke

- Extrovert: 0.4762
- Amibert: 0.6000
- Introvert: 0.5714
Bibliography


