

Finding Dialectic Spar (DS)

Hey SCJFL coaches,

I told the kids right off the bat that I didn't know how to do this event, I had never seen this event, and I had no handouts or models. Then, Mike made a 30-minute lunch visit one day and pitched the event; the kids were intrigued. Next, I scared the heck out of them by saying that DS was more like "policy" and only advanced debaters would be doing it! Finally, I had to back-track, eat my words, and beg some of them to try it!

I have 6 kids on our DS squad now: 1 PF debater (8th), 2 former SPAR debaters (6th and 7th), and 3 brand new novices (all 6th graders).

What we have discovered in our five brief sessions together is that we are finding it together – nothing is top down and the coaching is very dynamic. They DO understand the goal and they are helping find the way. Discoveries-R-Us, I guess. The cool thing is that there are no old, carved-in-stone conventions to adhere to – just the rules, clear and sparse as they are.

I would like to share a new "best practice" from our Emerson S&D club program. I am approaching DS in a group setting - a step-by-step process in order to build a skill set for the event. This includes...

- Pooling background knowledge for common current events
 - Making arguable resolutions
 - Developing sound reasoning to support a clear point of view
 - Listening well & note-taking
 - Careful questioning for clarification
 - Compromising & creative problem solving
1. I give them a few broad topics for whole group discussion. For example, immigration, fast food, military budgets.
 2. We brain-storm whole group: what do we know or think we know about this. I call on kids quickly for a bullet. I clarify as necessary. (group note-taker uses white board or overhead projector – students bullet notes)
 3. I ask, finally, can you see how this topic is arguable?
 4. Begin break-out sessions: I assign partners – 2 on each topic. They are charged to come up with 1-2 arguable resolutions. I give them 1-2 minutes.
 5. Whole group again: I call on each group to state their thesis on their broad topic. The group tweaks each statement as necessary to make it clearer/more debatable.
 6. When all groups are done, I call first couple up, assign AFF/NEG, begin time, and run the DS.

I hope we can use this blog to share what is working for us. I hope to make a new entry later this weekend. Lily 1/31/19