

Debate & Empowerment

**What is debate?
What is empowerment?
How does debate empower?**

Debate

**Exchange of arguments (claim, warrant, supported by evidence & reasoning)
Formalized exchange of arguments**

Competitive (winner and loser)

**Debate occurs over a controversial issue (issue must be controversial,
wording must invite controversy and have 2 sides)**

Styles of debate

- 1. Research/Preparation intensive**
- 2. Less specific preparation**

Formats of debate

- 1. Policy debate**
- 2. Lincoln-Douglas debate**
- 3. Public Forum Debate***
- 4. World Schools/BP Debate**

Forms of resolution/Motion

- 1. Proposition**
- 2. Statement of fact**
- 3. Statement of value**

A strong resolution is well-worded and has strong arguments on both sides

How Does One Succeed in Debate?

- 1. Research (secondary source) on topics (learn arguments, choose arguments (best, arguments important to a person, arguments persuasive to an audience))**
- 2. Read policy-based literature + philosophical assumptions (interdisciplinary)**
- 3. Persuasive (substance AND style – all elements of public speaking)**
- 4. Desire to win (more arguments, more research, more responses)**
- 5. Strong coaching (arguments, training)**
- 6. Own strength & weaknesses of opponents (just like a sport)**

Other notes about debate

1. **Dialectical – thesis, antithesis, synthesis)**
2. **Students compete against the best (school vs. school, best students vs. best students (bracket))**
3. **Time pressure – efficiency, quick speaking, rhetorical choice**
4. **Students debate both sides of the topic**

What is Empowerment?

“ability to change one’s own life and one’s community”

Meriam Websters’s “to enable; to promote the influence of self-actualization of”

“In the most basic sense, empowerment entails a sense of personal control, or agency, including the belief that one’s actions will result in a desired outcome” (Shellman, 2014, p. 21).

Self confidence (Shellman, 2014)

Perseverance (Shellman, 2014)

Resilience (Shellman, 2014)

Developing the individuals’ capacity to exert an influence in the cornerstone of becoming (Shellman, 2014)

Overall personal development (Shellman, 2014) -- “The essence of empowerment lies in building one’s capacity (e.g., motivation to approach a task) and enhancing one’s attributes (e.g., problem solving skills) in a way that facilitates positive development of the individual as well as a collective society.”

“Develop a capacity to contribute to their communities” (Association for Experiential Education)

“curriculum designed to empower students must be transformative in nature and help students to develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics” (Shellman)

Having options from which to make choices (Chamberlin)

Learning skills important to the individual (Chamberlin)

Process of increasing assets and capabilities (World Bank)

How Education & Educators Empower?

- 1. Students choose goals (Brennan 2012) (have decision-making power in the area of the curriculum (Edutopia))**
- 2. Students choose materials (Brennan 2012)**
- 3. Students reflect on what they are doing (Brennan 2012)**
- 4. Students function as teachers (Brennan 2012)**
- 5. Students self-assess (Brennan 2012)**
- 6. Put yourself in the sand box “Jump in and work with students” (Edutopia)**
- 7. Encourage meaningful technology use**
- 8. Involve students in important issues**
- 9. (Students) must be able to listen carefully to a point of view, examine it strong and weak points in a dialectical way, and then chose for themselves their own beliefs about a subject” (Shor, 1992, p. 17)**

How Does Debate Empower?

*****Easy to find quotes -**

Melissa Wade - “empowers students to take control of their own lives”

Let’s look at the definitions & evidence

Self confidence (Shellman, 2014) -- Britt Clark, young (early 30s) Administrative Law Judge

“I feel forever in debt to UTD and the debate program for the incredible, positive changes in my life,” Clark said. “Debate turned me from an introverted, insecure kid into someone who has no fear of speaking in front of others.”

13/30 students in RDFZ questionnaire said debated improved their confidence. One debater said debate helped him become “more confident” when he “argue(d)” and another said it helped him be “confident (to) speak out loud.”

Brill-“I was extremely shy,” Brill said. “I couldn’t talk to more than three people at a time without blushing. I then got better with public speaking practice.”

Perseverance (Shellman, 2014)

“Debate is an academic discipline and requires hard work, perseverance, and dedication to excel. Through practice rounds, critiques, lectures, and a variety of other learning opportunities you will have the chance to grow as an individual as well as a debate competitor” (Union University, <http://www.uu.edu/org/debate/>)

Resilience (Shellman, 2014)

Marie Dzuris -- Debate is personally empowering because it provides you with a way to put your brain to use - especially if you live in an environment where being educated is not embraced
. It gives you a way to feel good about yourself even when others try to take that away. It gives you a way to stand strong.

Developing individuals' capacity to exert an influence in the cornerstone of becoming (Shellman, 2014)

Debate is activity thick with motivation and laden with drama, meaning, and purpose. Because debate is at once inviting and challenging, it is an activity that has a unique appeal to students who have been alienated by the bland pedagogical fare served up in the frequently routinized and programmed classroom discussions of the present age" (Mitchell, 10)

"But debate goes beyond moving the pieces. It demands presentation – a connection to one's audience – and offers research opportunities far greater than what any high school curriculum could give. Even after months of researching one topic, I feel as though I've only begun learning what I ought to know. The constant push to find smarter arguments and better strategies is riveting – and it's why I keep debating."
(Daniel Taratovsky)

Personal growth

I think debate is largely why I was accepted to college. In a brief note, the Harvard officer who read my application mentioned that she'd enjoyed reading my essay about overcoming stubbornness through debate (believe it or not, debate also taught me when not to argue). She also mentioned that success in debate – and personal growth as a result of my involvement – set me apart from other applicants. (Daniel Aguin)

Community change

Priten Shah -- Being around the motivated and talented youth of the debate community was the impetus for involvement in many other activities. Besides participating in debate, I run my own non-profit organization, the [Teach to Learn Foundation](#), which aims to increase educational opportunities for the underprivileged. The [StandUp For Kids](#) organization recruited me to serve as Co-Executive Director of their New York City branch, which works with runaway youth. Additionally, I was elected president of Regional Youth Leadership Organization and vice-president of Spanish Honor Society.

Indians4socialchange.com

*****Think about what debate is, how empowerment occurs in education and you'll understand how debate empowers**

1. **Choose curriculum**
2. **Chose materials**
3. **Reflect**
4. **Self-assess -- [Bryon Gill](#)** If I had to give a 15 second elevator pitch, here's what I'd say: Debate first teaches you the confidence to speak your mind as you learn to perform, second teaches you the mental agility to hone and improve your thoughts as your individual arguments stand and fall, and third imparts the wisdom to see the big picture as you learn to put it all together.
5. **Teach**
6. **Coaches jump in the sand box**
7. **Use technology**
8. **Involve students in important issues**
9. **Listen to others point of view, analyze it, chose for themselves**
10. **Material change**

Debate is a student performance – give speeches, respond to speeches, grade (not always) key

Empowerment Beyond Academic Theory

Josh Zive – humility and self-evaluation

[Joshua Zive](#) FWIW, from my perspective there is nothing more empowering than learning how to stand next to someone, disagree with them, argue intensely, and accept the inevitable judgment after the argument. It is an act of courage and respect to disagree in person, and an act of humility to submit to evaluation. To me, combining courage and humility is a core aspect of personal empowerment.

Dan Shalmon- understanding complexity and indeterminacy

I have been thinking about the question Stefan posed on and off for most of this season.

I am in mid-school stuff, but have some thoughts.

A good chunk of what I think about debate as generally empowering - admittedly in a very rah-rah and inattentive-to-power-relations sort of way - is in the talk I gave at our alumni reunion some years back.

<http://globaldebateblog.blogspot.com/2008/06/cal-berkeley-debate-reunion-speech.html> The fact that I was wrong about the path my disease would take - this was actually well shy of the mid-point of my cancer stuff - should not undermine the message.

To the contrary, I believe what I said about how debate cultivates strength in the

face of painfully lopsided and scary situations even more given subsequent events. I still think that I owe a very large portion of my ability to deal with the unknown and unknowable - which often drive cancer patients and chronically ill people into mental spaces that put their lives at risk - to debate. Plenty of medical personnel can tell you that I don't process information or react the way other patients do - and since they treat every kind of person you can imagine but usually only know one (ex)debate coach (me), I think that is good evidence for debate's unique status. *The capacity to endorse reasonable decisions in the face of conflicting, uncertain evidence, and to live with the inevitability of imperfect results is something I learned early and re-learned often, and would not be sane without. I agree, as usual, with what Josh Zive said about learning how to be self-confident, strong, respectful and humble simultaneously. I would add that leaving out one of those parts of the equation yields a result unworthy of the term 'empowerment' and is a frightful and awful thing.* Leave true respect and humility out and you begin to describe a highly capable, manipulative sociopath. Power, especially for the misfit, the unpopular/nerdy, the otherwise-disadvantaged, can very easily become misidentified with the capacity for retribution, and the 'spectacle of fearsome acts.' Great debaters, and great debate teachers, teach and display the difference between power and intimidation. We all want to push our opponents hard and inspire awe and an occasional frisson of fear, but I think that most debaters capable of doing so - and taught well - learn that doing so in a way that hurts someone utterly incapable of turning the tables is self-debasement, not triumph. I had to learn this, repeatedly, and at cost (to others, certainly, but myself as well) and I'm grateful that I did, both because it helps me feel strong even in a deeply weak and flawed body, and because it would have been much harder to contemplate my end if I had not. Beyond the inter-personal and inter-communal, debate, debaters, and debate teachers teach humility before the complexity of the social world. That is, debating ought to teach us that most issues worth arguing about for any length of time are incredibly, stupefyingly, beautifully and/or terrifyingly complicated, and yet, somehow, occasionally subject to elegant explanation and resolution. I'm not a religious person by training or inclination, but the combination of simplicity and bewildering complication one finds in the matter we debate, the art, craft and science of what we do, reduces me to a state that I cannot describe without comparison to the awe Believers find in worship. For me, this is paradoxically empowering, because people like me don't usually believe that there is a Plan, a Just Universe, a benevolent Watchmaker, or, alternately, that we mere humans can fully control our destinies. Fatalism is not an attitude we tend to applaud in the West, but it is a rather common disposition in global terms, and among the beaten-down - something it is easy to forget in certain places/spaces. Many people skeptical about controlling their fate deal with the resulting terrifying questions with religion. Debate can give a different answer (though it need not, as a humble and inquisitive turn of mind is also often appropriate for Believers, and a number of folks on my personal list of great debate minds have deep faith). Debate's non-spiritual/supra-material answer to this dilemma is about struggling together to understand, and to do, whenever we can, what is best - without forgetting that it, and we, are necessarily imperfect. That humble disposition towards a world and a humanity that stubbornly eludes simple answers is an antidote to many, if not all,

kinds of megalomania and demagoguery. It also calls us to recognize that terrible outcomes often result from good intentions, universal imperfections (which we share), and ubiquitous stupidity. This helps cultivate the seemingly irreconcilable strategic pragmatics of great leadership - forgiveness for missteps and error whenever possible, and swift, effective retribution for deliberate malevolence when needed. I find that although the debate people I met vary tremendously and disagree with each other dramatically in nearly uncountable ways, they almost universally share a distaste for dangerous bullshit artists. I like, when all is said and done, virtually all the debaters I meet because I value that approach to 'clear, simple and wrong' answers to hard problems enormously - perhaps more than any other, besides kindness: http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/the-dangers-of-certainty/?_php=true&_type=blogs&r=0

Lynn-Robbins -- But there is something more basic than any of those things, and it is that something that came home to me again today. Debate reinforces - if it does not teach for the first time - that there are at least two reasonable sides to virtually every topic. One does not spend long in competitive debate and retain the idea that there are many absolutes that face us in daily life. Note: I do not at all mean that there are not certain moral, religious, and scientific absolutes - there clearly are - but I do mean to say that quantitatively the number of absolutes is relatively few compared to the number of subjects with which we deal - personally, professionally, ethically, politically - on a daily basis.

What I Haven't Discussed

1. **Debaters as agents of social change**
2. **Redistribution of wealth**
3. **Challenging norms and practices within communities (including education and debate) through empowerment**
4. **Empowerment can be raced, cultured, gendered (and, therefore can be racist and sexist). How debate communities are constituted and developed will impact the type of empowerment that occurs**

Practical Considerations

- (a) **research-based**
- (b) **competitive**
- (c) **coaching**
- (d) **encouraging**
- (e) **multiple tournaments and competitions**

Bibliography

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