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Structured Controversy: Inquiry-Based Learning in Place of Traditional Group Presentations

Beth Archer-Kuhn
University of Windsor, kuhnd@uwindsor.ca

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Summary
Knowledge is constructed through active and deep learning (Brew, 2003; Fougner, 2012). Inquiry-based learning (IBL) can facilitate active and deep learning, as it is "a self-directed, question-driven search for understanding" that affords students the opportunity to explore a subject and develop central questions through their exploration (Hudspith & Jenkins, 2007, p.9). The purpose of inquiry is to "develop the skills needed to bring research to bear on the understanding of a central question" (p. 10). To this end, Hudspith and Jenkins (2007) have used this teaching method to incorporate group work into the classroom in the Faculties of Social Science and Humanities and the Faculty of Science at Western University in both core courses and special topic interdisciplinary ones. Furthermore, Justice et al. (2007) describe IBL as a process "about discovery and systematically moving from one level of understanding to another, higher level" (p.202).

Structured controversy is an active learning activity that helps to prepare students for inquiry-based learning. This occurs when students are encouraged to explore a theme (through research) as a member of a group/ team who then present or argue against an opposing team's arguments. Structured controversy works well in a community practice or macro course as a teaching strategy that fosters social action. This active and deep learning activity goes beyond the achievement of learning outcomes from traditional group presentations and "help the student get some background in a particular area, become familiar with disputed issues, and to spark starting points for inquiry" (Hudspith & Jenkins, 2007, p.27). This workshop will provide the instructor with activities used to facilitate a structured controversy and an opportunity to experience this teaching method in order to appreciate the power of this exercise for student learning.

Keywords
structured controversy, inquiry-based teaching and learning, group presentations

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SUMMARY

Knowledge is constructed through active and deep learning (Brew, 2003; Fougner, 2012). Inquiry-based learning (IBL) can facilitate active and deep learning, as it is "a self-directed, question-driven search for understanding" that affords students the opportunity to explore a subject and develop central questions through their exploration (Hudspith & Jenkins, 2007, p.9). The purpose of inquiry is to "develop the skills needed to bring research to bear on the understanding of a central question" (p. 10). To this end, Hudspith and Jenkins (2007) have used this teaching method to incorporate group work into the classroom in the Faculties of Social Science and Humanities and the Faculty of Science at Western University in both core courses and special topic interdisciplinary ones. Furthermore, Justice et al. (2007) describe IBL as a process "about discovery and systematically moving from one level of understanding to another, higher level" (p.202).

Structured controversy is an active learning activity that helps to prepare students for inquiry-based learning. This occurs when students are encouraged to explore a theme (through research) as a member of a group/team who then present or argue against an opposing team's arguments. Structured controversy works well in a community practice or macro course as a teaching strategy that fosters social action. This active and deep learning activity goes beyond the achievement of learning outcomes from traditional group presentations and "help the student get some background in a particular area, become familiar with disputed issues, and to spark starting points for inquiry" (Hudspith & Jenkins, 2007, p.27). This workshop will provide the instructor with activities used to facilitate a structured controversy and an opportunity to experience this teaching method in order to appreciate the power of this exercise for student learning.

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- articulate the benefits of inquiry-based learning;
- justify how structured controversy can be used as an alternative to group presentations;
- engage in a social action activity and relate this activity to learning outcomes in micro and macro practice; and
- facilitate a structured controversy within your classroom.

REFERENCE SUMMARIES

Healey, M. (2005). Linking research and teaching: Exploring disciplinary spaces and the role of inquiry-based learning. In Barnett, R. (ed) 2005. *Reshaping the University: New relationships between Research, Scholarship and Teaching*. McGraw Hill, Open University Press, 67-78.

Healey (2005) indicates a preference for student development of research skills through opportunities to experience these skills within the classroom, noting, "students are likely to gain most benefit from research, in terms of depth of learning and understanding, when they are also involved in research, for example, through various forms of active learning, such as inquiry-based learning" (Healey, 2005, p. 67). Consequently, Healey (2005) points to discrepancies between disciplines in how research and teaching are conducted to explain the differences in student access to opportunities involving research. In his review of the literature specific to disciplinary research and teaching, Healey (2005) found support for the position that IBL is the most effective way for students to learn research skills in the classroom.

Hudspith, B. & Jenkins, H. (2007). Teaching the Art of Inquiry. *Green Guide No 3. Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. University of Western Ontario. London, Ontario.

Hudspith and Jenkins (2007) explore inquiry-based teaching and learning from their experiences as teachers in higher education institutions. Inquiry-based learning (IBL) can facilitate active and deep learning as it is "a self-directed, question-driven search for understanding" as it affords students the opportunity to explore a subject, and through this exploration, a central question will be developed by the student (Hudspith & Jenkins, 2007, p.9). The purpose of inquiry is to "develop the skills needed to bring research to bear on the understanding of a central question" (p.10). In this article, Hudspith and Jenkins profess their support of inquiry based learning (IBL) to students of all disciplines and across disciplines because people are a part of a complex world and no one discipline has the answers to all questions. The authors have developed and changed their IBL strategies over the years based on input from students. Inquiry provides deep learning experiences that allow students the opportunity to create new knowledge and, according to the authors, it is an approach or path to life-long learning (p.9).

Hudspith and Jenkins (2007) argue that inquiry is an art and a creative process that requires critical thinking skills. They contend that IBL differs from Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in that, "a) the student explores a subject or theme and chooses a focus for the research; b) a central research question for inquiry is formulated; c) the student develops a plan of research, based on critical questioning and the attempt to anticipate findings; and d) these research findings are brought to bear on the central question" (p.10). This helpful *Green Guide* takes the reader through an example of inquiry and then considers ideas for teaching IBL including the use of this teaching method in groups to encourage greater learning for the students through diverse perspectives.

The section *exploring a theme* offers a description of the 'structured controversy' strategy used in this workshop. Structured controversy has a very specific approach used in the classroom. For a complete description of the structured controversy strategy and its in-class execution, please review Appendix B, C and D.

Justice, C., Rice, J., Warry, W., Cuneo, C., Inglis, S., Miller, S., & Sammon, S. (2007). How we know inquiry makes a difference in the way students learn. *Experiences With Inquiry Learning*. Edited by Christopher Knapper, 2007. Centre for Leadership in Learning, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

Justice et al. (2007) are interested in exploring whether teaching an IBL seminar course to first year social science students would make a difference in the way that students learn. To make this determination they first developed what they termed as *lofty goals*, for example, "to foster a broad range of intellectual and academic skills" (p. 47), and then identified specific objectives for these goals, for example, "encourage students to discover an issue that concerned them, identify a question within this issue and investigate what needs to be known" (p. 47). The objectives were translated into teaching activities to help students achieve the objectives including "tasks for building inquiry-related skills, and opportunity and guidance for conducting their independent inquiry" (p. 47). The authors viewed learning holistically; comprised of knowledge, abilities, values, attitudes and habits of mind (Justice et al., 2007) and then set out to measure learning in a multidimensional way.

The results of their study included both objective measures and student self-reports in addition to comparators over time. They concluded that students who have completed the first-year IBL course have demonstrated long lasting beneficial changes, improved writing skills and self-reflective skills and a deeper approach to learning, all of which they classified as "modest improvements in student performance" (p.56).

Foreman, J. (2011). What is the impact of inquiry-based learning instruction in a group setting? *Studies in Teaching: 2011 Research Digest*. Presented at Annual Research Forum, Wake Forest University, Department of Education, Winston-Salem North Carolina, June 15, 2011,19-24.

In her study of inquiry-based learning in a group setting, Foreman (2011) proposes that group work provides a real world environment for students, allowing them to make connections between the classroom and outside world, becoming citizens of a 'global society' through the skills they develop within the group environment. It is the interaction or engagement with other students that is of significance in this study. Foreman (2011) found that the size of the group determined the amount of student engagement and this related to the success of the teaching method in terms of student achievement. The more student engagement in the group activity, the higher the student grade in the inquiry based activities. Foreman (2011) suggests the ideal number in a group for inquiry-based learning activities is three to four, with each member having an assigned role. She identifies that lower group participants provides higher group member engagement. Additionally considerations discovered in this study are attention to varying the abilities and

personalities of the group participants. This small sample study is based on sixteen mixed race and gender students in a grade nine history class in the United States.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Duration [min]	Subject	Activity and Purpose
1	Introduction	Introduce facilitator to participants and describe the purpose of workshop. See Appendix A for a sample agenda to distribute.
5	Pros and Cons of Group Presentations	Brainstorm the positives and negatives of group presentations. Have participants reflect on their experiences with group presentations as a learning tool.
10	Overview and Benefits of IBL	Conduct a lecture using Powerpoint to highlight key information. See Appendix H for a sample of powerpoint slides to include. In this section, participants will see that inquiry based learning (IBL) addresses many of the experiences that they described during the previous brainstorming exercise. For example, IBL requires a level of engagement, collaboration and diversity of views not necessarily found in traditional group work
5	Structured Controversy: Introduction and Explanation	Distribute a handout on learning outcomes (see Appendix B) and review the information together. This section helps introduce participants to structured controversy as a teaching and learning tool
12	Social Issues	Provide participants with examples of how advocacy skills can be used to address issues faced by a vulnerable population and use material in video to learn the skills of a structured controversy. See Appendix C and D.
45	Structured Controversy in Process and Action	Divide larger group divided in two. Ideally, groups will compromise of 12-30 students. If there are too many participants, divide groups into 4 teams (or as many teams as necessary) with an additional step that incorporates the extra groups. Or, if preferred, the two groups could have small sub-groups of 2-4 students assigned to each task. Through participant planning, teamwork, organizing, research, negotiation and performance of structured controversy, participants will gain an appreciation of the skills students will need to use in this activity and how the learning goes beyond that of the skills learned in group presentations; for example:

		communication, negotiation, research, planning, advocacy, teamwork, argument. See Appendix D and E.
10	Reflections on Group Learning Experience	Give participants five minutes to answer some reflection questions. See Appendix F for a sample handout to distribute. Afterwards, facilitate a large group feedback session. Give the participants the opportunity to reflect on their learning (leading to deep learning) and the benefits and challenges for students. This will help participants identify the supports required for students in their role as facilitator.
2	Workshop Evaluation	Distribute an evaluation form (Appendix H) and provide participants an opportunity to give feedback on their workshop experience including what was and was not helpful.
Total Time: 90 minutes		

PRESENTATION STRATEGIES

This workshop is designed to provide the instructor, through an experiential learning opportunity, the process for the use of an IBL method of a structured controversy. To do this, the participants will be presented with a rationale and benefits of IBL through a Power Point presentation, and will then perform the structured controversy through small and large group work activities. The strategies used in the activities provide opportunity for multiple learning styles to excel and facilitate skill development in individual, small and large group work, research, collaboration, advocacy and presentation.

The following list of appendices includes several handouts for distribution at various intervals in the workshop.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Agenda
Appendix B: How To Explain the Model
Appendix C: Steps of Structured Controversy
Appendix D: Steps of Alternate Structured Controversy
Appendix E: Example Rubric for Structured Controversy
Appendix F: Reflections on Your Experience
Appendix G: Evaluation of Workshop
Appendix H: Power Point Slides

APPENDIX A: Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Overview of workshop
3. Description of Inquiry Based Learning (IBL)
4. Explanation of Structured Controversy
5. Participant Feedback
6. Evaluation of workshop

APPENDIX B: How to Explain the Model

"Like a debate, structured controversy requires students to explore a variety of positions, but here students on each side of a controversy are required to summarize the other position to the satisfaction of those who presented it. This means students are to listen carefully to hear exactly what is being said and not just what they think is being said. Structured controversy can be extended by asking students to find common ground and to identify the issues about which they still differ" (Hudspith & Jenkins, 2007).

The specific steps of the Structured Controversy are outlined for you. The final argument is to take into account both your own team's position and at a minimum, an acknowledgement of the other team's position. The idea is that each team wants to convince the other that their position is correct. The trick for you is to do so in a manner that is clear, concise, supported by research, and convincing. You can choose to be demanding or collaborative, using a social action or asset building approach. The value of your strategy is discussed at the end of the activity as a large group.

A number of learning objectives can be achieved through this activity including;

Knowledge

1. Apply theories and models of social and political advocacy, community planning and development and internal organizational change with vulnerable populations.
2. Apply knowledge from an evidenced-based advanced practice perspective.
3. Identify resources within organizations and communities in the planned change process.
4. Acknowledge the relevance of removing barriers that prevent individuals, groups and communities from maximizing their full participation in societal institutions and resources.

Values

5. Strengthen professional commitment to the use of evidenced-based practice.
6. Display values and ethics in practice with vulnerable populations.
7. Utilize ethical decision-making with client systems and other helping professionals.
8. Develop enhanced self-awareness and critical use of self in practice.
9. Commitment to understanding and challenging social injustices affecting organizations and communities.

Skills

10. Critical analysis, assessment, research, planning, teamwork, negotiation, argument

APPENDIX C: Steps of Structure Controversy

1. Divide into two groups/teams.

2. Each group will argue a position on a particular issue with a vulnerable population: homelessness. Using the video *A Call To Action*, one group will take on the positions presented by the Homeless Coalition and the other group will take on the position of the Community Leaders. Pay particular attention to the time limits in each section of this activity. The course instructor will be the time-keeper.

3. Each side/team is provided time to research their position from the material provided, approximately 10 minutes. With your team, spend 10 minutes planning your arguments. You will then spend 5 minutes as a group confirming who will be your spokesperson and what arguments they will make. The instructor can be used for consultation by both teams.

4. Team one chooses a spokesperson and has 3 minutes to make their argument. Team two listens intently to and documents team one's argument. Team two then has 3 minutes to make their argument, with team one noting team's two positions. The teams then have 5 minutes to meet separately to discuss the opposing team's arguments and research data. At the end of that time, team one has 2 minutes to reflect through a spokesperson what they heard team two's position to be. Team two must be satisfied that team one has heard them correctly, both content and intent. Once team two is satisfied, they reflect for team one in 2 minutes what they heard team one argue. Once team one is satisfied each team has 2 minutes to gather for their final arguments. Team one then argues in 1 minute or less, their final position and team two then does the same.

APPENDIX D: Alternative Structured Controversy with Increased Time

Allows students opportunity to research their own arguments and develop their own advocacy strategy. Requires a minimum of two hours and works best with 2 ½ hours.

1. Divide into two groups/teams.
2. Each group will argue a position on a particular issue with a vulnerable population: homelessness. Using the video *A Call To Action*, one group will take on the positions presented by the Homeless Coalition and the other group will take on the position of the Community Leaders. Pay particular attention to the time limits in each section of this activity. The course instructor will be the time keeper.
3. Each side/team is provided time to research their position requiring a few of you in each group to have access to a laptop. With your team, spend 15 - 30 minutes planning your arguments. You will then spend 45 min. researching on the internet, your agreed upon arguments. You will have 15 minutes to regroup and discuss your findings and provide your team members your research. At the end of the hour and a half, each team will be ready to present. The instructor can be used for consultation by both teams.

(Break for 10 minutes)

4. Team one chooses a spokesperson and has 10 minutes to make their argument. Team two listens intently to and documents team one's argument. Team two then has 10 minutes to make their argument, with team one noting team's two positions. The teams then have 10 minutes to meet separately to discuss the opposing team's arguments and research data. At the end of that time, team one has five minutes to reflect <u>through a spokesperson</u> what they heard team two's position to be. Team two must be satisfied that team one has heard them correctly, both content and intent. Once team two is satisfied, they reflect for team one in five minutes what they heard team one argue. Once team one is satisfied each team has 5 minutes to gather for their final arguments. Team one then argues in 3 minutes or less, their final position and team two then does the same.
5. The final argument is to take into account both your own team's position and at a minimum, an acknowledgement of the other team's position. The idea is that each team wants to convince the other that their position is correct. The trick for you is to do so in a manner that is clear, concise, supported by research, and convincing. You can choose to be demanding or collaborative, using a social action or asset building approach. The value of your strategy is discussed at the end of the activity as a large group.
6. Each team then takes 10 minutes to submit the role each student contributed to the structured controversy to consider the distribution of the workload when assigning the student grades. The rubric can be used to help you understand how you will be assessed.

APPENDIX E: Example Rubric

Domain/ Criteria	Specific Criteria Present	Specific Criteria Missing	Comments
Delivery/ Clarity	• Concepts are clearly presented • Appropriate contributions among group facilitators • Coordination between team members, with seamless, flowing teamwork • Well structured/organized/planned.	• Concepts are not clearly presented • Inequitable contributions among group facilitators • Poor coordination between team members, without seamless, flowing teamwork • Disorganized or not well structured or not well planned	5 marks
Engagement of Participants	• Each participant engaged in group planning • Each participant identified and researched one of the following factors related to their topic– historical, social, cultural, political or economic	• No evidence that each participant engaged in group planning • No evidence that each participant identified and researched one of the following factors related to their topic– historical, social, cultural, political or economic	5 marks
Content	• Group thesis and issue introduced • Demographics, literature search and statistics presented • Relationship between need and social justice clearly articulated and argued • Implications for community identified	• Group thesis and issue introduced • Demographics, literature search and statistics presented • Relationship between need and social justice clearly articulated and argued • Implications for community identified	10 marks
Timing of presentation	• Arguments were made within the allotted time periods for each section of the structured controversy	• Arguments ran over the time limits allotted for some or all of the sections of the structured controversy	5 marks

Note: 5 marks are reserved for the individual one page summary handed in by each student

APPENDIX F: Reflections on Your Experience

1. What was helpful to me as a participant of the structured controversy activity was:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. What I would do differently when using this activity as a teaching and learning tool is:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. The advantages I observed using this T/L tool in place of a group presentation were:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX G: Evaluation of Workshop

1. In today's workshop, I learned:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. I will continue doing:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. I will stop doing:

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX H: Powerpoint Slides