Professional learning activity: Civic discussion and deliberation – pedagogies for controversial issues

**Activity suggested duration:** 50 minutes

**Activity description:**

In this activity, participants will have the chance to explore strategies and protocols for classroom dialogue in Civics and Citizenship using a co-pilot strategy for civic discourse developed by the Civic Engagement Research Group.

The co-pilot strategy is a structured conversation protocol where each participant gets the chance to be the ‘pilot’, with two ‘co-pilots’ assisting them in framing a contribution to a whole-class discussion. The role of pilot changes so each participant gets a chance to contribute to the whole-class discussion.

**Learning leader preparation:**

* Read 3.1.
* Read [Bill of Rights Institute: Setting classroom expectations for trust, tolerance, and civil discourse](https://billofrightsinstitute.org/e-lessons/setting-classroom-expectations-for-trust-tolerance-and-civil-discourse).
* Read argument in favour of debates as learning activities – [Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning: Classroom debates](https://www.niu.edu/citl/resources/guides/instructional-guide/classroom-debates.shtml#:~:text=Using%20debates%20in%20the%20classroom,and%20put%20knowledge%20into%20action.).
* Read argument against debates as learning activities – [Peachey Publications: Why we should stop doing debates in the classroom – and what we should do instead](https://peacheypublications.com/why-we-should-stop-doing-debates-in-the-classroom-and-what-we-should-do-instead).
* Read [Educating 4 Democracy: Civic discussion and deliberation](https://www.ed4democracy.org/topics/civic-discussion-deliberation).
* Watch [Civic Engagement Research Group: Student-centered civic discussion and deliberation (YouTube video)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phYAWDKRk0o).
* Bring laptops to professional learning to be able to access online resources.

**Participant preparation:**

* Read 3.1.
* Watch [Civic Engagement Research Group: Student-centered civic discussion and deliberation (YouTube video)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phYAWDKRk0o).
* Bring laptops to professional learning to be able to access online resources.

Activity steps

1. Participants form groups of three. The person with the shiniest shoes is Pilot 1.
2. Learning leader ask participants to consider the question ‘How do we establish supportive classroom norms with our Civics and Citizenship classes?’ Participants can explore a [classroom expectations protocol](https://billofrightsinstitute.org/e-lessons/setting-classroom-expectations-for-trust-tolerance-and-civil-discourse) as a conversation prompt in their groups. The pilot for each group will be contributing to a whole-group discussion in step 3. (10 minutes)
3. Pilot 1 of each group contributes to the whole-group discussion on behalf of their group. (5 minutes)
4. The person to the left of the first pilot becomes Pilot 2.
5. The next prompt is ‘Does classroom debate set up students to be more adversarial?’ Pilot 2 reports back after this discussion. (10 minutes, plus 5 minutes)
6. The final person in the group becomes Pilot 3.
7. The next prompt is ‘What kinds of scaffolds can make our classroom conversations substantive, supportive and engaging?’ (10 minutes)
8. Pilot 3 engages in a whole-group discussion. (5 minutes)
9. Reflection question: How did the co-pilot protocol change the dynamic of this conversation? (5 minutes)