A debate about education

How to prepare a debate? A debate about education. 2-3 session of 60 minutes

In the first session, the students would be handed a photocopy with useful vocabulary on the topic of education. Students and the teacher would have a look at it and would review the words.

Many of these words should already been known by the students, but others may be new for them. So, it is a good idea to ask them to learn by heart or be familiarised to these words so that when they would participate in the debate, they would accurately use this language. During the debate, it is up to the teacher to give them permission to have the photocopy or not.

The teacher also asks the students to prepare arguments in favour or against school, educational results (PISA), the preparation of school and the work world...Their ideas should be discussed briefly during this session but they must be deepened at home.

SECOND SESSION. THE DAY OF THE DEBATE

First of all, the teacher will explain students that they are going to debate about the latest educational results. He/she explains the mechanism of the activity.

In the first place, the teacher will chose one student as a moderator. The rest of the students will be divided into groups. Each group is going to play a role of the main people participating in education, that is, the first group represents STUDENTS, the second group is TEACHERS, the third group plays the part of PARENTS and in the last group the POLITICIANS/INSPECTORS/HEADMASTERS are represented.

The teacher explains that they are going to discuss the following questions (he/she may give a card with the questions to each group or write them on the board):

1. Why are the results in the PISA exams so disastrous? Causes and possible solutions
2. Is education important? Why? Why not?
3. Is the role of each “participant” in education well played? Do students really study? Are teachers prepared? Do politicians and the family help?
4. Is necessary to invest money in education? Why/Why not?
5. Is the curriculum old? Should the educational system be changed? How would you change it?
6. Other suggestions...

Then they will have 10-15 minutes to prepare their speeches, their arguments, their points of view. They can brainstorm their ideas and write their arguments down. After that, they decide who is going to defend some arguments and who is going to present others. It is advisable that students learn them rather than read from
the notebook... To achieve that everyone participates, each member of the group must speak at least twice, either replying or rebutting to one of the adversaries or giving his/her opinion.

THE START OF THE DEBATE

Each group must also chose one representative who will give their introductory points of view and by the end of the debate, this representative must summarize the group's opinion after the discussion is almost finishing. The main goal in this last step is to convince the others group and the moderator or teacher that their point of view is the only correct one.

Meanwhile, the student chosen as the moderator of the debate will prepare the introduction of the topic explaining briefly the educational system (he/she could draw a diagram), the moderator will give the information about the last results in the PISA exams and then, he/she will give the word to each representative of each group.

Once, the representatives have done their initial arguments, the moderator could ask directly to the different members in a group to give their opinion to introduce the different points to deal with in the debate.

If the teacher has set up the debate format properly, the students should be able to monitor one another and carry out the debate. This allows students to practice how to handle interruptions and turn taking negotiations. During the debate the student who is speaking has a fake microphone and when this speaker finishes he/she passes it to another student. Another possibility is to have a platform from where the students give their initial speech.

The role of the teacher is limited to observe because at this point it is quite possible that the students have already started an open debate, replying each other and the role of the moderator is just to give the word to the different students, to try to order the debate in case of a big discussion and about all to introduce other questions. The more autonomous the students can be, the more they will learn from this exercise in each aspect of their future lives.

Ten minutes before the session finishes, it is time for each representative to give a summary of their group point of view according to the evolution of the debate. He/she must have taken notes during the debate and this representative must give the most convincing arguments in order to win the debate.

It is recommended that the teacher does not interrupt students while they are talking. The teacher notes down the mistakes and addresses them when the activity has finished. The teacher focuses on the main mistakes made by students in general. It is also advisable to give a good feedback for students if the teacher also mentions the good points or interventions made by them during the debate. In this way, the students' confidence is reinforced and they will not associated the debate activity with a negative experience but with a positive one.

Finally, the teacher together with the conductor will decide with group has performed the best role and, therefore, who is the winner of the debate. Usually in debates, the winner is the one who has presented the strongest case and the most convincing arguments. The overall purpose of speaking is more important than the specific outcome of the debate.

It could be possible that more than one group perform it well, so it is not necessary to name a winner or a loser as the purpose of the activity is to make students to communicate. As long as the students are able to communicate, use good grammar, and have good pronunciation, the debate has been a success.
As an extra task, the teacher can ask the students to write an essay about the debate, from their group point of view and evaluate the debate activity. The students also evaluate this kind of activity whether they think it is a useful activity or not.

CONCLUSION

This kind of activities requires students to be participative. It is a good method to achieve that shy students take part during the lesson. Even though they do not have a great time performing the debate as many students are worried about their grammar, accent or many other mistakes, it is a good opportunity to achieve confidence in speaking a foreign language.

The teacher has provided the students with the vocabulary; he/she has explained the activity and how does it work and finally, the students have performed it in a higher or lower degree.

Speaking is the most difficult skill to master. It requests more practice and a lot of confidence as it involves real time comprehension and reaction. With lower lever or shy students more patience is needed to give them that little push in the right direction.

Besides, each time we use the debate in class, it is a good opportunity to create students’ opinion about one topic. Even though the point of view that they have been asked to defend it is not theirs. The debate encourages empathy, the fact to listen to others, to respect others turn of word, their opinion. Furthermore, it teaches them how to participate in a debate. In short, it prepares students to get used to take part in debates that they must face in their future life.

Bibliografía

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