

Constructive Controversy Instructions

Participants work in small groups to consider numerous perspectives on an issue. As they gather information, each group ultimately will seek consensus on the most reasonable decision(s) for dealing with the controversy.

1. Form groups of four and divide into two pairs in each group. One pair will argue the “pro” side of the given issue and the other pair will argue the “con” side of the issue. (Eventually pairs switch sides, so eventually each pair will argue both sides.)
2. Each pair is given 30-60 minutes to research its position and gathers as much supporting information as possible. The goal is to be able to argue persuasively the position assigned. Each pair organizes its information into a persuasive argument with a primary claim, rational support, and a logical conclusion.
3. Each pair argues its position using whatever media will help in presenting its position. Each group is given up to 10 minutes to argue its position.
4. As one pair presents uninterrupted, the other pair listens and takes notes.
5. After both pairs have presented they discuss their respective arguments. Pairs take turns, analyzing and attempting to refute the other’s position. The intent is to attack positions, not each other. The facilitator calls time after 10-15 minutes.
6. The pairs switch positions and repeat the process researching and arguing the other side of the issue. Reversing perspectives increases available information about the issue.
7. Finally, the team of four comes together and considers all of the information that has surfaced through the debates seeking to reach consensus on the most reasonable way(s) to deal with the issue. Data are synthesized to find a combined position that all in the group can agree upon. The facilitator moderates this discussion, ending the process after a suitable time.

Debriefing

Each participant completes the Reflection Questionnaire.

The facilitator invites participant to share comments about the process.

Reflection Questionnaire rubric adapted from D.W. Johnson and F.P. Johnson (2009). *Joining together: Group Theory and Group Skills* (9th ed.), pp. 332-333. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2009). Carolyn Poterek. Effects of Constructive Controversy in Theological Education. Unpublished dissertation. Seattle University, 2015.