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DEBATE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM:

SEEKING IMPROVEMENTS IN STUDENT PERSPECTIVE-TAKING SKILLS AND GROUP COHESION

RELATORE

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1. Introduction

This research investigates the efficiency of debate to improve students’ perspective taking skills and cohesion in the language classroom. Its purpose is to understand how this technique can be beneficial in fostering student empathy and, specifically, to develop their perspective taking skills—the ability to consider the needs, feelings and points of views of others. The lack of such attributes in society at large negatively affects the quality of everyday interactions, as notably indicated by Leslie Wade Zorwick, social psychologist and expert in prejudice studies. Zorwick argues that “we increasingly live in a world where people can surround themselves with media and social interactions that do not require consideration of different perspectives” (Zorwick 2016, p. 114). Zorwick’s work underscores the changing nature of social interaction. Zorwick makes clear the urgent need to reconsider the role of emotional perspectives in interpersonal relationships, with an aim to encourage group cohesion and improve the quality of social intercourse.

Van der Graaff et al., researchers in the development of empathy in adolescence at Utrecht Universtiy, argue that “perspective taking rapidly grows from the ages of 13 to 18” (Van der Graaff et al. 2014, p. 885). For adolescents, school is where formative interactions occur, so high school seems the ideal place to develop and increase the capacity for understanding others’ points of view. This capacity can improve the quality of students’ interpersonal interactions and modify classroom dynamics. In fact, social psychologists Chartrand & Bargh argue that:

people who are naturally inclined to adopt another’s perspective [...] are more likely to unconsciously mimic another person’s behavior during social interactions, and this mimicry increases liking and a sense of cohesion between interaction partners.


People who are adept at perspective taking, therefore, also display the ability of unconsciously simulating their interlocutors’ behaviors, which strengthens interpersonal cohesion. The significant role of perspective taking in social cohesion is further expanded upon by Professor of Philosophy Karsten Stueber, who argues that empathy is the psychological basis of social cohesion (Stueber 2006).

Previous research claims that classroom debate offers a significant opportunity to help students develop their perspective taking skills (Budesheim & Lundquist 1999; Goodwin 2003; Yang & Rusli, 2012 as cited in Zorwick 2016, p. 108). Education specialists, Brookfield and Preskill, point out that
discussing a standpoint on a complex subject helps students valuing the others’ opinions as well as their own:

Discussions that involve students who speak in different voices, express varied viewpoints, and use different expressive forms, help students learn about the contested nature of knowledge. Being exposed to different perspectives helps students develop a general tentativeness towards their own (and others’ intellectual claims).

(Brookfield & Preskill, 2005, Chapter 2, Section 2, para. 2).

Discussion, therefore, appears to lead to greater student receptivity of other views and, as a consequence, to placing a greater premium on their own.

Two reasons guided me in the choice to investigate the field of debate as a tool to foster perspective taking and improve classroom cohesion. First, as a teacher, I strongly believe that consideration of diverse points of view is increasingly important in society. Students must be prepared to navigate heterogeneous multicultural contexts as a necessary means of engaging with the world. They are required to be open-minded and to see the world through multiple lenses. Second, I think that the ability to “cognitively step into the shoes of another person” (Zorwick 2016, p. 108) is the key for successful communication. In order for students to meaningfully engage in conversations, even with those with whom they disagree, empathy and, perspective taking, in particular, plays a crucial role.

I conducted my study in a third-year class of 20 students at the Liceo in Mendrisio. Prior to beginning the experiment, students are asked to answer specific questions about their interpersonal relationships with classmates. Students are then exposed to various introductory activities on discussion and debate. Finally, students begin to debate controversial topics. After the didactic experiment, students are asked to respond again to the initial questions. As a means of evaluating the degree to which the debate technique is effective, we examine the influence of this method on students’ social interaction patterns.
2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Research question

As the intent of this paper is to analyze whether the debate technique can improve students’ perspective taking skills, leading to enhanced classroom cohesion, the research question is formulated as:

*How effective is the use of classroom debate in developing students’ perspective taking skills and in improving classroom cohesion?*

2.2 Debate in the classroom

The *Piano quadro degli studi di maturità*, the basis of all the cantonal liceo study plans, asserts that the development of young people’s democratic skills is extremely important, but that it cannot be based solely on theoretical notions about how a given political system works. This early encounter with democracy is a chance for students to learn about expressing themselves and to hear a variety of views. Liceo students emerging from school are called upon to be active citizens and social decision makers. At the very least, they choose, consciously or not, the degree to which they will engage with the society in which they find themselves. The school environment is an optimal place to prepare them for their future role in society. Precisely, the *Piano quadro*, maintains that:

> A un certo momento tutti i giovani ottengono i diritti civici. Come vi sono preparati? Una semplice conoscenza dei meccanismi delle istituzioni della Stato non è sufficiente. Integrarsi in una società richiede la possibilità di sperimentare attivamente le regole del gioco e il funzionamento politico. L’obiettivo finale è quello di formare un cittadino attivo, capace di prendere parte alla vita politica, di capirne la posta in gioco e di contribuirvi personalmente.

*(CDPE, Piano quadro 1994, p.13)*

Students need to grasp that behind an ostensibly simple issue lies a wide diversity of views, and that conceptions of right and wrong carry a degree of relativity. It is not always necessary to resolve differences of opinions.

Discussion is conducive to the creation of “minidemocracy”, a construct in which all participants have an opportunity to voice their views and devote their attention to others (Brookfield & Preskill,
Learning how to approach an issue from multiple perspectives changes the way students perceive the world around them, expands their horizons and promotes mutual sustained understanding, all of which can have wide-ranging and long-lasting positive benefits.

Debate is a highly-constructed, organized form of discussion. To perform well in a debate, it is necessary to generate a claim, a warrant and supporting evidence for both (Davis et al., 2016). Debaters are obligated to find evidence, rather than make unsubstantiated claims, and this process “makes these ‘reasons why’ more powerful” (Davis et al. 2016, p. 3). Using debate in the classroom, guides students towards the realization that no matter how different their opinion is from others, it has value, and must be defended. Debate also opens students to the possibility that the opinions of others might change their own, and that this is an added benefit, rather than a source of fear.

In numerous schools worldwide, debate is currently a highly consolidated practice. The World Universities Debating Championship, the world's largest debate contest, has contributed to acceptance of debate as a valid educational method. In their “Introduction to Classroom Debate”, Davis et al. cite comments from American middle-school, high-school, and college teachers who utilize debate in their classrooms. Although these teacher comments reflect different points of view, they concur that in this present era, it is crucial that students find a way to “cultivate their voice, intellect, and capacity to see things from a variety of perspectives” (Davis et al. 2016, p. 4).

In order to find evidence of the efficiency of classroom debate in fostering a broadening of student perspectives, we do not need to look outside the boundaries of Switzerland. A national project aimed at encouraging debate in schools, “La Gioventù Dibatte”, is currently underway. The assumption behind this project is that through debating current, controversial issues, students improve oral expression, acquire confidence in public speaking, practice active listening, and are encouraged to respect each other². Available data shows that this project has been well received by many Swiss schools. In fact, more than 1500 teachers have applied this method in their classrooms, indicating a belief in the effectiveness of debate for improving students’ linguistic and transversal competences. In the following paragraphs, as a subset of this inquiry into students’ perspective taking and class cohesion, I examine the impact of debate on both linguistic and transversal skills.

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² This information is taken from the project’s official website, namely: <http://www.jugenddebbiatt.ch/it>
2.2.1 The impact of debate on linguistic competences

Discussing the rationale behind debate in education, Professor Želježić maintains that debate is commonly held as a “structured and regulated communicative event” on a debate motion that enables a confrontation of two opposing views” (Želježić 2017, p. 42). Recently, the development of communicative competences has been declared one of the most important aspects of language learning. The Piano cantonale degli studi liceali sheds light on this link between communicative competence and language learning3, pointing out that language learning at the liceo level has a twofold value. On one hand it focuses on the communicative and structural functions of the language, on the other it calls attention towards its cultural aspects:

Le discipline del settore lingue hanno come oggetto di studio da un lato la rispettiva lingua nelle sue funzioni comunicative e nei suoi aspetti strutturali, dall’altro la rispettiva produzione letteraria e, più in generale, la cultura di cui essa è espressione. (DECS, Piano cantonale, 2001, p. 19).

According to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, prevalent in language acquisition since the 1980’s, language learners must be communicators and, as such, interaction is essential for the development of their linguistic abilities. The main assumption which lies behind this method is that “language is best approached as action and interaction rather than a set of rules” (Hughes 2010, p. 149). To improve their linguistic skills, students are encouraged to engage in “copious amount of spoken language in the classroom”; teachers, on their part, are asked to always consider the importance of classroom talk “to promote good language learning environments” (Hughes 2010, p. 149; p. 148). Didactic methods, such as debate, facilitate ample interactions and are therefore deemed highly beneficial to language acquisition.

Strictly linked to CLT for its form and purpose, another teaching method, which has recently become extremely popular in the English Language Teaching (ELT), is the Content Based Instruction (CBI) approach. The CBI strategy, according to the research of Mahasarakham University Professors Kwangsawad and Yawongsa (2009), has now entered EFL classrooms around the world, and integrates language and content in the classroom, providing students with a motivational tool for language learning. A key assumption of CBI is that linguistic skill improvement is enhanced when exposed to authentic, interesting topics. Director of the ‘US Air Force Academy Debate Program’ Iberri-Shea states that “there are three vital characteristics of a CBI program: the core of the course is based on content, the course includes authentic text, and the course is adapted to the needs of a

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3 Hereafter the Piano cantonale degli studi liceali will be called simply Piano cantonale.
particular group of students” (Iberri-Shea 2013, p. 130). Learning about authentic, engaging subject matters while being exposed to a second language is what makes this holistic educational approach so effective. Debate fits perfectly in a CBI lesson since it is content-relevant, reflects a real-life, authentic situation and is easily adjusted to the proficiency levels and necessities of students.

Debate aligns well within both CLT and CBI communicative approaches. We see this alignment in the demands places on students to both acquire “conceptual knowledge”, while at the same time, employing language in “meaningful” uses (Iberri-Shea 2013, p. 129). The degree of knowledge and functional language used in debate makes it an ideal component of the EFL classroom.

Not only is debate beneficial to the development of speaking skills, but it can also improve reading, writing and listening abilities. In fact, debate participants must prepare the subject they are going to discuss. This preparation entails extensive and intensive reading, demanding the use of both skimming and scanning techniques, as students seek specific information, or the key points of a text. In the preparation phase, debaters taking notes or writing argumentative essays to support their thesis, realise an improvement in their writing skills. Listening skills too, are developed, as students engaged in debate are obliged to actively listen to classmates’ opinions (Iberri-Shea, 2013).

Debate represents an ideal strategy for accessing all four language competences. Moreover, if we consult the Piano quadro, specifically the section regarding the English language, we find that liceo students need to “sapersi esprimere con fluidità, ascoltare attivamente, essere pronti a scambiare informazioni, idee e manifestare disposizione al dialogo” (CDPE, Piano quadro 1994, p. 86). The debate experience, as it promotes a wide range of applicable skills, is highly complementary to the EFL classroom and meshes seamlessly with the stated purposes of the liceo.

2.2.2 The impact of debate on perspective taking skills and classroom cohesion

In the 20th October 2011 edition of The Guardian, in the section devoted to teaching issues, Lisa Fidler, assistant Director of the charity organization CfBT Education Trust, wrote that “debating activities in schools can contribute not only to educational achievement, but also to a range of wider outcomes that work towards developing more confident and well-rounded individuals” (Fidler, 2011, para. 5). In fact, not only can debate improve linguistic skills, but it can also favour the development of transversal competences. When debate is carried out in teams, as is usual in classrooms, it can enhance collaboration and cooperation. Students are compelled to work together, and this facilitates cross-group and intergroup interactions. Students are presented with the opportunity to fully consider
the perspectives of others. Brookfield & Preskill (2005, p. 550) state that “discussion is […] premised on the idea that only through collaboration and cooperation with others can we be exposed to new points of view”, further reinforcing the conception of debate as a suitable didactic strategy for the development of students’ perspective taking skills.

Debate promotes critical thinking, another prerequisite for perspective taking. In fact, debate participants must critically consider issues in order to explore them from different angles. Critical thinking is held to be fundamental for the education of responsible liceo students. The crucial role of this transversal competence is confirmed by the Piano quadro:

> Nel campo della riflessione epistemologica, [l’allievo] deve imparare a porre domande sul senso e sui limiti della scienza, la responsabilità e la libertà scientifiche, la trasparenza e la critica dei punti di vista implicati, la trasmissione e la distribuzione del sapere.  
> (CDPE, Piano quadro, 1994, p. 16).

Debate fosters open-mindedness, which contributes to overall empathy. While engaged in debate, students explore first-hand a wide range of points of view. For them, this is one of the most direct means of grasping the concept of empathy in a concrete way. In fact, although teachers might introduce their students to different perspectives on a subject, Brookfield & Preskill argue, nothing is as impactful as peer learning:

> Discussion is one of the most effective ways to make students aware of the range of interpretations that are possible in an area of intellectual inquiry. Teachers can introduce these diverse perspectives themselves through lecturing or pre-reading, but that is often dismissed as “second-hand” exposure. There is nothing like students’ hearing from each other’s lips the diversity of interpretations that can be made of the same apparently objective facts or the same apparently obvious meanings.  
> (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005, Chapter 2, Section 2, para. 1).

Zorwick maintains that debate does not always facilitate student consideration of other opinions on a subject, as debates might deal with large-scale global issues, rather than the concrete experiences of a single student. However, debate always presents students with an opportunity to “consider the context, the background and the external and internal forces that shape individual’s positions about complex social issues” (Zorwick, 2016, p. 109). Students who debate, are therefore prompted to take into account the nuances of perspectives which differ from theirs, building skills which can help them avoid conflicts and misunderstandings which might directly influence their well-being.

Developing the capacity of seeing the world through multiple perspectives can be beneficial, but students can also benefit from the awareness that someone comprehends, even temporarily, their point of view (Zorwick, 2016). Perceived perspective taking, in fact, allows people to feel understood, and
enhances bonding. Both active and passive perspective taking improve the quality of relationships and thus reinforces interpersonal cohesion.

Debate can teach students to reduce their reliance on stereotypes and their tendency to focus on their own pre-existing beliefs. Zorwick (2016) argues that when perspective taking, people are more likely to recognize that discrimination is one of the major sources of social disparities. Because debate is an activity that implies strict connections, it fulfills “The Contact Hypothesis”. According to this hypothesis, for prejudice reduction to occur, there must be “supportive authority figures, equal status between groups, opportunities to develop friendship, and a shared goal that groups must work together to achieve” (Brown 1995, as cited in Zorwick 2016, p. 111). Since all these social aspects are touched by debate, this technique can be considered a powerful strategy for the elimination or reduction of prejudices. Being able to collaborate, assume the perspectives of others, and eliminate pre-existing beliefs or prejudices are all stated as objectives in the Piano quadro:

Un’attenzione particolare sarà data alla capacità di assumere responsabilità e di lavorare in gruppo, alla capacità di superare situazioni conflittuali, di affermarsi, di rispettare la libertà degli altri, di difendere le proprie opinioni, di analizzare modelli di comportamento sia familiari che estranei, di sapere assumere un mole proprio e nello stesso tempo di saper assumere un atteggiamento distaccato, infine di essere aperto anche a nuove forme di comportamento sociale (per es. alla modificazione dei moli tradizionalmente attribuiti ai due sessi).

(CDPE, Piano quadro, 1994, p. 13).

The various advantages of employing debate in a classroom setting are apparent: debate has an impact on many linguistic competences, and represents an efficient strategy for compelling liceo students to look outside of themselves. Being able to have regard for the world outside of their own experience strengthens students’ interpersonal relationships and reinforces class cohesion. As a teacher, I feel a sense of urgency to promote altruism and empathy, not only because they are crucial prerequisites for a relaxed and healthy classroom climate, but also because I strongly believe that this is something that will help students in future settings.
3. Context of the experiment

3.1 Definition of “action research”

Teaching is a holistic profession, which requires diverse, yet complementary areas of competence to be acted out together. The teacher must adapt and transpose their disciplinary knowledge, creating materials and situations which allow the students to develop particular competences. While presenting these materials to the class, the teacher also nourishes their relationship with students. In doing so, they obviously experience various situations first-hand and therefore develop professionally (DECS/UIMS/CDPE, *Il profilo del docente SMS*, 2011). However, for this development to be efficient, a teacher also has to constantly question their methods, as meta-reflection plays an important role in the improvement of teaching skills. Regarding this need for reflective self-improvement, the *Profilo del docente SMS* (2011, p.1), describes the competences necessary for a high school teacher, noting that the liceo teacher should always keep a watchful and critical eye towards professionalism. Through researching the effects of classroom practices, the teacher is able to define the didactic methods most suitable for the context, thus improving the quality of the educational process. This kind of inquiry, in which the teacher researches their settings first-hand, is called “action research”.

The present study is based on this type of research, which Losito & Pozzo define as

> Un’indagine riflessiva condotta dall’insegnante ricercatore in prima persona nel proprio contesto, a partire da una situazione problematica, con lo scopo di migliorare la comprensione della situazione in cui opera e la qualità dell’azione attraverso un coinvolgimento di tutti gli attori, mediante un controllo sistematico dei processi”


In action research there is a strict correlation between theory and practice, as research creates action, which in turn creates further research (Felisatti & Mazzucco, 2013). This circular process means that the practical dimension is the teacher’s main source of investigation, allowing for direct intervention into their educational practices. Ideally this dynamic allows for teacher improvement. Precisely, action research “ha radici in situazioni concrete e i risultati ricadono direttamente sulla pratica, sia che la ricerca venga svolta per capire meglio una data situazione al fine di migliorarla, sia che si debba risolvere un problema specifico” (Losito & Pozzo, 2005, p. 30). For adequate action research to be implemented, the teacher considers the class situation, verifies what, if any issues need to be addressed, introduces necessary changes to the teaching methods and reflects on their effects. In the present study, the investigation begins with the verified presence of selected students’ interpersonal relationship problems in my classroom. These relationship issues will be further analysed in the next
chapter, accompanying an examination of the effectiveness of the proposed educational approach, the debate technique, in solving these problems.

3.2 Participants and settings

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a teacher might undertake action research in order to address a dysfunctional dynamic within the class. In my case, this dynamic is related to class cohesion and climate. In fact, one of the classes I am currently working with is a mixed-group, comprised of students from different classes. These pupils have very different interests, as they come from various OSs. Of the 20 students in this class, ten males and ten females, six students are taking Spanish as OS, nine are attending a law and economics program⁴, and five come from a scientific OS (FAM). The English lesson represents the first and only occasion in which these pupils are gathered together.

Almost all of these students are intermediate learners in their fifth year of English language learning, although some are repeating the class and currently find themselves in their sixth or seventh year. One student is a native English speaker. All of these students show an interest in the English language, however the results are heterogeneous. Some pupils obtain very high marks, others are weaker and have difficulties with the minimal linguistic objectives required by the Piano cantonale for a third class.

Observing this class during the first term of the school year, I noticed that students belonging to the same OS tend to work together and have seldom interactions with others. Moreover, some of these students, mainly boys, have very strong personalities, and tend to overlook their classmates, ignoring their interventions and often giggling or chatting loudly when someone belonging to a “sub-group” is speaking. Sometimes, they even intervene without raising their hand, compelled to state that they consider the others’ opinions wrong. It seems this behavior stems from interpersonal issues rather than the need to state a divergent opinion in a civil manner. The various private talks I’ve had with my students recently, have confirmed this. In fact, some students told me that the main reason they remain silent in class is because they fear the continuous assessments by their classmates. Obviously, the fact that “leaders” are present in the class does not promote group harmony, as Caruso, Epley & Bazerman underline: “group members who assess responsibility egocentrically are not particularly appreciated by their fellow group members, so disagreements about the actual allocation of work often increase conflict and decrease group cohesion” (Forsyth, Berger, & Mitchell 1981; Forsyth &

⁴ Hereafter the « law and economics program » will be called simply « economics program ».
Mitchell 1979 as cited in Caruso, Epley & Bazerman 2014, p. 9). As a consequence of this dynamic, the classroom cohesion is compromised, leading to a negative and dysfunctional learning environment.

During the school year, I tried to explicitly discuss the issue with the class, but to little effect. Even in moments when the most influential students seemed to have learnt to raise their hands, civilly state their opinions and listen quietly to their classmates, after a few weeks, the classroom situation regressed. For this reason, I feel the urgency to address this issue in a more efficient way. I have considered many different strategies, concluding that in order to improve classroom cohesion, we need to foster acceptance of the diversity present in the classroom. Implementation of the didactic strategy of debate appears, for the reasons discussed in chapter 2, to be the most suitable solution for overcoming student conflicts. Debate demands that students hear opinions outside of their normal social sphere, which in turn should lead to an augmentation of classroom cohesion.

3.3 Didactic experiment

3.3.1 Time-frame and objectives of the didactic project

Students worked on the didactic project of debate during the course of four lessons of forty-five minutes, and one lesson of ninety minutes. They were assigned individual reading activities, a research, and a writing exercise to do at home. Overall, the project lasted five weeks.

Each lesson had a different objective centered on didactic activities, incrementally building towards a full debate. The first two lessons were introductory, and aimed at introducing students to the core concepts of debate from both structural and linguistic points of view. The third lesson reinforced the use of persuasive/argumentative language, and served as an initial exploration into diametrically opposed views on a given subject.

The difference between this initial class and the subsequent two was the scale. During the third lesson, debate was implemented in a reduced format, with students debating in pairs. In contrast to this reduced format, the fourth and fifth lesson debates were carried out in groups, with the very final lesson culminating in the other students assuming the role of judges. The final objective, at the end of five weeks, was for students to improve their perspective taking abilities, demonstrate more tolerance for their classmates, and to collectively improve classroom cohesion. It is worth noting that
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though the focus of the research was not linguistic, the project provided the added benefits of improved fluency, controlled speech, listening, writing and reading skills (see chapter 2.2.2).

3.3.2 Introductory lessons

As previously mentioned, the first two lessons were introductory. I found it worthwhile to introduce the topic of debate, refreshing students’ memory on what a debate entails, as well as presenting useful terminology, before engaging in actual debate. As an initial step, I asked students if they had previously participated in debates. Most students told me they hadn’t. Some students had encountered the subject in their philosophy classes, and were familiar with logos, pathos and ethos. Nobody had first-hand debate experience.

After this initial question about debate experience, I asked students, in pairs, to discuss the debate as form, in order to activate their pre-existing knowledge of the topic. In particular, I encouraged them to define debate in their own words. The most recurrent words emerging from the definition exercise were points of view, arguing, politics, discussion, and opinions. I observed that, for students, it was difficult to grasp the difference between a simple discussion and a debate. To make this distinction clear, I underscored the fact that a debate was a well-structured discussion, in which participants present points supported with evidence.

To make the organization of information clearer, I provided students with a “model house” to help them structure their thoughts and frame them in a powerful way\(^5\). The roof of the house corresponded to their opinions. The pillars represented the reasons for stating their opinion because, as pillars are essential to support a roof, reasons are fundamental to support an idea. However, in order to be highly persuasive, they needed to provide evidence, represented, in this case, by the foundation of the house. I provided examples of opinion, reason and evidence (see Appendix A), and I asked students to bring the house worksheet along the following lessons.

In the second introductory class I focused on the language of argumentation. Third-year students are already familiar with this kind of language, since it is introduced in the previous year (or two years

\(^5\) This “model house” was found on the internet, and precisely here:

<https://mycourses.aalto.fi/mod/resource/view.php%3Fid%3D152721+%26cd=1+%26hl=it+%26ct=chnk+%26gl=ch+%26client=safari>
prior for repeating students) in the eleventh unit of their course book. In their second year of English at liceo, students had to write a short opinion essay on the following statement: “there is too much football on TV. Do you agree?” I verified that all of the students remember writing about this topic, but most of them could not remember what kind of language they needed to use. So I decided to have them read an opinion essay on the future role of computers (see Appendix B), as a means of focusing on opinion/persuasive essay language (see Appendix C) and, further on, on the language of debate, for which I provided a handout (see Appendix D).

Students then had to write, as homework, their own opinion essay on how the costs of flying by plane will change in the future, a topic proposed by their course-book (see Appendices E-F). The topic fit perfectly with what the class was currently studying, namely future changes in society (unit 3 of the coursebook). However, I told them that, if they did not feel able to engage with the topic, they were free to choose another one, and I provided them with a website containing a large amount of input. In fact, I reiterated the fact that to compose a successful argumentative essay the writer has to find the topic appealing in the first place.

3.3.3 Lesson three

This third lesson served to introduce the material and approach to the forthcoming, central lessons. During this class, in fact, students, in pairs, were asked to engage in a short debate on the role of technology in modern families. The main objective of this lesson was for students to reinforce the language of argumentation, familiarize themselves with a critical approach, and move towards a particular point of view on a subject, regardless of how the view aligned with their preexisting beliefs.

I chose this small-scale activity because I did not want students to immediately face a full-class debate, in which they would be in the spotlight for ten minutes. I preferred to have students gradually approach wider debates, so as to acquire more confidence in both the language and the structure of debate.

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8 The website, which I uploaded on my students’ Moodle page, is the following: <https://learningblogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/04/200-prompts-for-argumentative-writing/>.
To begin, I arranged the desks into five clusters of four desks each so that the twenty students formed five teams of four (see fig. 3.1). For this activity, students were free to choose their seats.

To activate students’ pre-existing schemata, I provided each group with four images to discuss (see Appendix G). These four images depicted the role of technology in modern families. Each student had a different image which they needed to describe to their group. Next, the four students were tasked with finding commonalities among the pictures, and briefly discuss the role technology has assumed within their family.

After the discussion, I handed out four brief newspaper article extracts, featuring opposing perspectives on the role of technology among families. Two of these articles argued that technology is positive because it strengthens family bonds, while the other two deemed technology negative and a source of family fragmentation (see Appendix H). Given that the students had so little time to prepare, the topics were appropriately straightforward. I also provided students with a glossary of the most difficult words.

Specifically, these extracts were based on a survey carried out by UK Office of Communication, revolving around the role of technological devices within family dynamics. Before starting the main activity, I deemed it useful to briefly explain what this survey was about and its results.

Within each group, students A and C received an extract in favour of technology, while students B and D received an extract against. Once the pairs had finished reading, they were instructed to use their “model house” to identify opinions, reasons and evidence in their extracts (see Appendix I). I told them that, since their texts were so short, they only had to fill-in one pillar and one piece of the foundation. Next, they began explaining the focus points of the text to their classmates, using
argumentative language and practicing taking turns. While one pair was speaking, the other pair was listening and vice versa. At the end, the “external students”, who had witnessed both argument and counter-argument, chose the most convincing students. Debate participants were able to hear an external observer critically weigh-in on, providing meaningful feedback. The added element of competition provided further incentive for discussion.

3.3.4 Final lessons

The fourth and fifth lessons constituted the crucial elements of this didactic project. There are a wide range of possible classroom debate formats, but I chose to implement the version proposed by Zorwick (2016 p. 110). However, I slightly modified the debate form, adding the element of peer evaluation, anticipating an increased possibility of cross-group interactions and active listening, as well as offering students further training of their perspective taking skills.⁹

In these final sessions, I divided the pupils into five teams of four students each. However, during these two classes, I selected the groups, aiming to blend students from different OSs, trying to nudge students beyond their comfort zones. In one group, there were two students from the Spanish programme, one student from the economics OS, and one student from the scientific OS. The other four groups were composed of two students attending the economics program, two Spanish OS students and two FAM OS students.

The focus of the fourth, forty-five-minute class was the right to wear the burka in public places. This issue has been hotly debated over the last few years, since the Ticinese people voted to ban burkas in public, so I thought it would be engaging for students to discuss a controversial topic located close to them. The previous week, students A and B had received the same newspaper article, presenting arguments in favour of the 2010 French ban to wear the burka in public places, while students C and D had received an article presenting arguments against the ban (see Appendix L). I decided which pair of students would deal with which article, without taking into account their extant points of view on the subject. Students were asked to read these assigned articles at home, look for the main

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⁹ Zorwick proposes the teacher act as external judge, observing and evaluating the debate. However, in this case, the listening role of the other classmates would be negated. From my point of view, a sound strategy is to have the other groups engaged, even when not debating, through the use of peer evaluations.
arguments in favour or against the ban, and complete their “model house” with opinions, reasons and evidence as expressed in the text (see Appendix M).

I was certainly aware that both the articles, being authentic materials, were fairly complicated from a linguistic point of view, so I provided students with a glossary of the most difficult words and structures. Furthermore, since these articles dealt with personalities that my students might not know (for example, France’s former President Sarkozy), I deemed it necessary to briefly introduce these personalities and their positions on the issue of burka ban before handing out the articles.

Prior to debating, students were allowed 15 minutes of preparation, in which they compared with their neighbour (student A with B and C with D) the arguments in favour or against burkas in public, based on information derived from their assigned reading. I encouraged them to summarize what they had read, merge their points, and provided them with a new “model house” in which they were invited to write their respective common arguments (for students A and B), and counter-arguments (for students C and D). Once they had finished this task, students A and B were to debate against C and D, assuming the perspectives of the two authors. The only recommendation I made was that each student should communicate their key points for at least one minute, and that debates were to last around seven minutes. During this activity, I circulated through the classroom to encourage them to speak only in English, to manage their time and to ensure that everyone had their turn.

For the second debate lesson, lasting 90 minutes, the procedure closely followed the format of the preceding lesson, except that this time, groups did not receive debate materials to prepare in advance. The previous week, each group was given a different topic, such as gun control in the US, climate change, the death penalty, the relationship between video games and violence, and the benefits of childhood vaccination. I proposed these controversial topics because students had already had a chance to become familiar with them through a previous exercise on newspaper articles (December 2017). I decided which pair of students had to be in favour and which against the issue and asked them to research information on their position at home, and complete their “model house” for the class debate (see Appendix N). In this way I sought to reinforce autonomous work as a complement to group work.

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10 I actually provided students with a website in which they could find useful information on the proposed subjects, which is: <https://www.procon.org>.
In class, after 15 minutes of preparation, all groups came, in turn, to debate in the centre of the room. In this way students were also exposed to the evaluation of their peers. In fact, while their classmates were debating, the other four groups had to listen quietly, and were invited to take notes on the arguments and counter-arguments. At the end of each debate I gave each “external group” one minute to decide which side was more convincing. In this way, just as in the pairs’ debate, I intended to promote inter-group collaboration, and make the whole activity more challenging. Moreover, student opportunities to train their perspective taking skills could be further increased with exposure to several external points of view. According to Zorwick there are three effective opportunities for perspective taking in such a scenario, namely inter-group, cross-group learning, and learning from the external judges:

Students can first learn from the other students in their group. In fact, co-operative problem solving within the team can invite new perspectives into the conversation and there is a profound incentive for discussion that allows the strongest arguments to emerge. Students can then learn by watching the debate in which they are not participating. By watching the other debate and witnessing the arguments and counter-arguments, students can strengthen their understanding of the likely position on both sides and practice the cognitive skills of anticipating and taking on the perspective of the opposing team. Finally […] by hearing a critique of the debate, which typically involves a discussion of the most persuasive and least persuasive arguments, students can begin to practice taking on the perspective of someone critically evaluating a debate.

(Zorwick, 2016, p. 110).

In this debate format then, students are presented with a wide range of opportunities to improve their perspective taking skills and reinforce other transversal competences. In fact, students are obligated to practice inter-group cooperation, explore a wide range of points of view and seek efficient strategies to defend their argument, even if what they are arguing is not consistent with their actual opinion. Also, they are compelled to listen carefully to their fellow group members in order to reply to their arguments in a convincing way. They even have to collaborate with the other group’s members to reach a final agreement on which debaters are the most persuasive. For this purpose, they are obliged to listen actively to every classmate, even to those outside their social sphere of interaction, in order to finally assess them. Furthermore, students witness other group evaluations, and thus gain further critical perspectives on their performance. Through active listening, critical thinking, and acquiring different perspectives, students’ tolerance and respect for diversity is fostered and, in theory, should lead to an improvement of class climate and cohesion.

Throughout the project, I closely observed pair and group work. All the groups worked together in a productive manner. Nobody tried to dominate their group, and in almost every group, each member had a role, and co-operated and collaborated with others, except for when students were asked to
collect information about the debate topics at home on their own. In fact, on this occasion, not all students arrived with a prepared “model house” and in order to construct their arguments, had to rely on the information found by their partners. Overall, I noticed that a mild competitiveness was present among students, but nobody tried to damage or denigrate the work of the others. On the contrary, everybody seemed to look forward to the debates of other groups. So, in general, the classroom atmosphere was constructive.

3.4 Method and analysis of data

Before explaining the research method used in the present study, it is important to underscore the fact that this research was carried out as a pilot study, which aims at complementing and deepening the theoretical framework with data collected in real situations of teaching and learning. In fact, the sample of participants and the data collected are limited. The results, therefore, cannot be considered statistically relevant and are not to be deemed representative for every EFL classroom.

In order to evaluate whether classroom cohesion had increased due to debate, I compared students’ interpersonal relationships before and after the didactic experiment. In particular, I used research sociometry, a quantitative method which assesses the degree of relatedness among people belonging to a group. The term “sociometry”, coined by psychiatrist Levy Moreno, is a methodology for researching interpersonal patterns in a group. California educational psychologists, Leung & Silberling, underscore the twofold value of sociometry as a classroom research method. Measuring relational patterns can be useful for behaviour assessment within groups, and can also be used to intervene, to bring about positive changes, and to determine the range of change (Leung & Silberling 2016). Sociometry aligns well with the purpose and form of the present action research.

Prior to the experiment, I distributed questionnaires to my students in which both the functional and the affectional dimensions of classroom interactions were investigated (see Appendix O). Students had to write the name of the classmates they wanted to establish a relationship with in both school and extra-school activities. They had to first indicate names of the people they would, and would not, want to collaborate with in a hypothetical “Lavoro di maturità”. Students were then asked to identify the people they wanted, as well as the people they did not want, to accompany them on a hypothetical city trip. For every question they could indicate up to three names. Immediately after the experiment was over, I asked students to answer the same questionnaire. I examined the visual representations of the collected data. Specifically, I employed sociograms – a visual charting of network establishment
in a group – and histograms. In order to evaluate whether classroom dynamics had changed, I compared the pre- and post-test results.

Certainly the use of debate carried ethical considerations for both myself and my students, and needed to be handled with care. Before handing out the questionnaires, I asked my students if they agreed on filling them out. Once I received student consent, I explained that their responses would remain strictly confidential and be used for research purposes only.
4. Results

As discussed in detail in chapter 3.4, students were asked to select among their fellow students for in-school and out of school purposes. In this chapter I present the results of both functional (lavoro di maturità) and affectional (extra-curricular) classroom dynamics before (indicated as T1), and after (indicated as T2) the didactic experiment. As a means of evaluating the degree to which the debate technique has been effective in improving class cohesion, I discuss four sociograms related to T1, and four related to T2, which first illustrate the extent to which a student has been chosen or rejected, and second, indicate by whom is chosen and by whom he is rejected. In this way, the possible reciprocity in students’ relatedness is highlighted. In these eight graphical representations, students have been visually grouped by OS. Also, four histograms presenting a comparison between the number of functional/affectonal choices and rejections per student will be presented.

All collected data is presented in a way that preserves anonymity, and a code has been assigned to each student. However, to make the present research more accurate, gender identification is retained: in all graphics, “F” stands for “female student” and “M” for “male student”. The student gender, the frequency with which a student has been chosen, and the interaction between OSs are the primary factors taken into consideration in the presentation and analysis of this study’s results.

4.1 T1: Preliminary questionnaire

4.1.1 Functional dimension

Figure 2 shows students who have been chosen for school purposes prior to the didactic experiment. A striking initial aspect evident in this sociogram, is that the situation is not cohesive—we can clearly see several clusters. Among them, three “cliques” appear, namely F9, M6 and M9; F1, F4 and F8 and F2, F7 and F10\(^{11}\). The clique which appears most detached from the central network, is the FAM students. In fact, apart from M10, who is chosen by F8, a female student belonging to the Spanish OS, all other FAM students are reciprocally connected, and selection does not exceed the boundaries of their OS. Notably, the most disruptive students of this class, whose behaviour was described in detail in chapter 3.2, are within the group of FAM students. In particular, M5, M9 and M10

\(^{11}\) In the analysis of sociograms, a “cliques” is a group of three or more students who have selected each other.
consistently intervene without raising their hand, compelled to negate the opinions of their classmates.

The majority of both the economics pupils and the Spanish OS pupils seem to prefer to work with those belonging to their respective fields of study, yet they seem more open to interacting with students belonging to other OSs. Spanish OS females F2 and F7, especially, seem fairly integrated among the economics students. It is interesting to notice that, in the classroom, F2 and F7 sit next to two economics students, and often do partner-work together. F1 is the student most often selected in this network. We can see that she is connected with a significant portion of the network, and can be defined as a star\(^\text{12}\). Not surprisingly, she is the only native speaker in this class. In contrast with the case of F1 is that of M1, who was not selected by anyone. This student belongs to the “disruptive sphere” of the classroom. Overall, functional choices are equally distributed among female and male students.

**FUNCTIONAL CHOICES (T1)**

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\(^{12}\) In the analysis of sociograms, a “star” is a person who has been chosen by many.
Figure 3 shows that, contrary to the patterns displayed in functional choices, functional rejections do not occur among the same OS, but are primarily identified among students from different sectors. Some reciprocal rejections are observable, but rarely occur within the same OS group. The exceptions are M6 and M10, who mutually reject each other. This might be explainable by their two very disparate behaviours, one very shy and the other more extroverted.

What is apparent, is that FAM students occupy a central position in the rejection network, being represented by the biggest bubbles (M6, M9, M10). As stated earlier, two of these students (M9, M10) are those who tend not to listen to their classmates, and often display disruptive attitudes. Student M6 is a highly introverted student, who rarely interacts with anyone. Students M1 and F5 are also identified in the rejection category. In particular, M1 was not chosen by anyone, yet was rejected many times.

Overall, males seem to be functionally rejected more than females. In fact, with the exceptions of FAM student F9 and economics student F5, all other females are quite marginal in the rejection scene. Student F1, the native speaker, is completely excluded from the rejection network.

**FUNCTIONAL REJECTIONS (T1)**

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*Fig. 3: visual representation of functional rejections among students (represented by bubbles); bubble sizes are proportional to the number of time that a student has been chosen (time period T1).*

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4.1.2 Affectional dimension

The pathways of affectional preferences displayed in fig. 4 show that females seem to be chosen more than boys in the context of leisure purposes. In particular, Spanish OS girls F1, F4, F6, F7 and F8 seem to be well-received in this classroom, from an affectional point of view. Several months of classroom observation seems to confirm that these girls are highly popular in the classroom, especially among boys, and this status is mirrored in the sociogram (M2, M3, M7, M8 have chosen them).

In general, it seems that students prefer to establish affectional relationships with those belonging to their OS. Except for Spanish OS girls F7 and F2, who seem well immersed within the economics students’ cluster, three distinct groups of affectional choices emerge clearly in this sociogram, corresponding to the three OSs. FAM students results show them as further excluded from the centralised network of relationships. In fact, they are not chosen at all by other students, with the exception of M5 who is chosen by M1. As for the role of M1 in this classroom, it appears quite ambivalent. While he is highly rejected for his functional role (see fig. 3), at the same time, he has neither been chosen nor rejected in the affectional sphere. In spite of his disruptive behaviour, he is not affectionally excluded from the class.

**AFFECTIONAL CHOICES (T1)**

![Fig. 4: visual representation of affectional choices among students (represented by bubbles); bubble sizes are proportional to the frequency a student has been chosen (time period T1).](image-url)
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Iadarola Sara

Fig. 5 portrays the networking of affectional rejections. Even in this case, we can see that a centralised grouping of rejected students is not present, but that students tend to reject those outside of their OS. This tendency is displayed, for example, in the cases of F5, M6 and M9, who are highly rejected by classmates outside of their OS. FAM students are highly rejected by the whole class but never reject each other. Overall the rejection network situation does not seem to present particular disparities between boys and girls.

**AFFECTIONAL REJECTIONS (T1)**

![Diagram](image)

Fig. 5: visual representation of affectional rejections among students (represented by bubbles); bubble sizes are proportional to the frequency a student has been chosen (time period T1).

### 4.1.3 Comparison of functional/affectional choices and functional/affectional rejections

As a final step in this preliminary analysis, figures six and seven illustrate the comparison between functional and affectional selections and rejections, respectively, in the pre-test situation. These histograms reconfirm F1 and F6, and include F10, as the most popular female students in the classroom, both from a functional and an affectional perspective. They were frequently chosen, and rarely, if ever, rejected. The data which emerges from figure 4.1.6 shows M10, described as one of the leaders of this classroom, is highly rejected for a hypothetical school collaboration, yet is accepted in the affectional dimension. These histograms also point to the exclusion of M6 from both an
affectional and functional point of view, as he was chosen once for school, and once for extra-school purposes, yet rejected in both dimensions ten, and eight times respectively. M1 is perhaps the most prominent figure in these two histograms. In fact, it is clearly shown that he has not been chosen by anybody (neither in the functional nor in the affectional dimension) and has been highly rejected as far as his functional role is concerned.

Figure 6: comparison between frequency of affectional and functional choices per student (y-axis); student gender is indicated by a capital letter (x-axis); time period T1.

Figure 7: comparison of affectional and functional rejection frequency per student (y-axis); student gender is indicated by a capital letter (x-axis); time period T1.
4.2 T2: Final questionnaire

4.2.1 Functional dimension

Based on the students’ post-test answers concerning the functional dynamics of this classroom (fig. 8), it is immediately clear that the situation has not varied much. F1 has retained her position as the most selected student for functional purposes, followed by F2, whose frequency of selection slightly increased after the didactic experiment. It should be noted that F2 belongs to a group of very shy female Spanish OS students who rarely speak unless called upon. Yet, during debates, F2 seemed highly-engaged, and actively cooperated with her classmates.

The functional rejections of M6 decreased in frequency, as he has been chosen slightly more often. The status of all other student situations, including those taken into account in the previous chapter’s analysis, (for ex. M1, M9, M10) has remained more or less stable.

As far as the grouping by OS is concerned, just as in the pre-test situation, the three cliques remain graphically distinct. The FAM students F9, M6, and M9 maintained their status as the most isolated cliques. FAM disruptive student M10, who was chosen by two female students belonging to a different OS, namely F8 and F6, was subsequently chosen only by F8. Also, M5 and M7 are now reciprocally connected, in contrast with their previous one-way relationship. Overall, functional choices are equally distributed among female and male students, just as prior to the experiment.

![FUNCTIONAL CHOICES (T2)](image)

Fig. 8: visual representation of functional choices among students (represented by bubbles); bubble sizes are proportional to the frequency a student has been chosen; time period T2.
The fact that the class is always divided into groups and that dynamics have not significantly changed from an affectional point of view, is further shown by figure 9, which portrays functional rejections after debates. This sociogram shows that disruptive FAM students M6, M9, M10 continue to be the most rejected pupils, just as prior to the experiment. Also, in this case, three different OSs constitute three different spheres of interactions. In terms of classroom function, it is evident that students struggle to choose someone outside the boundaries of their OS. However, it seems rejections almost always happen outside of OS borders.

The larger bubbles belong to male students, which means that functional rejections mostly occur within the population of males, just as before the experiment.

FUNCTIONAL REJECTIONS (T2)

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 9:** Visual representation of functional rejections among students (represented by bubbles); bubble sizes are proportional to the frequency that a student has been chosen; time period T2.
4.2.2 Affectional dimension

In fig. 10, we can see that the situation in the affectional dimension has not significantly changed. In fact, females are always chosen more than males, and none of the students is notably altered in terms of affectional choice or rejection frequency. However, the two prominent disruptive figures, M1 and M10, have varied results in affectional choice and rejection frequency. In fact, M1 was chosen by one of his classmates, FAM student M9, in contrast to the situation prior to the experiment, where he was completely isolated. In contrast, after the debates, M10 was no longer chosen.

As far as the grouping by OS is concerned, from an affectional point of view, FAM students mutually chose one another, but were excluded from the central network of choices. FAM students M5 and M10, however, seem to have retained their affectional connections with students belonging to outside OS groups.

Fig. 10: visual representation of affectional choices among students (represented by bubbles); bubble sizes are proportional to the frequency a student has been chosen; time period T2.
In the sociogram regarding T2’s affectional rejections (figure 11), FAM male students M1, M6, and M9 notably increase in frequency of rejections, along with female students F2 and F5. Taking into account both affectional choices and rejections, we can say that, in this case, rejections occur mostly outside of students’ spheres of interaction (i.e.: mainly OSs) while selection occurs from within. Additionally, just like in T1, gender does not appear to play a role in rejection.

**AFFECTIONAL REJECTIONS (T2)**

![Fig. 11: visual representation of affectional rejections among students (represented by bubbles); bubble sizes are proportional to the frequency a student has been chosen; time period T2.](image)

4.2.3 *Comparison of functional/affectional choices and functional/affectional rejections*

Considering the relationship between students’ functional and affectional choices, fig. 12, shows the situation after the didactic experiment remaining approximately stable. In fact, comparing fig. 6 and 12, we can see that the gap between functional and affectional choices is fairly equivalent for nearly all students. It is therefore assumed that debate hasn’t changed the relationship between functional and affectional preferences among students. However, debate might have had an impact on the dynamics concerning students held in low regard by their classmates. In fact, if compared to fig. 7, which depicts the situation prior to the didactic experiment, figure 13 shows that for a few students,
this gap has widened (M10, for instance, was initially rejected only for school purposes, now also under an affectional perspective) or reduced (M1, for example, now has been additionally rejected from an affectional point of view). It is significant that students whose gap between affectional and functional rejections varied the most, are those who display disruptive behaviours.

Figure 12: Comparison between number of affectional choices and functional choices per student (y-axis); student gender is indicated by a capital letter (x-axis); time period T2.

Figure 13: Comparison between number of affectional rejections and functional rejections per student (y-axis); student gender is indicated by a capital letter (x-axis); time period T2.
5. Discussion

As the pre- and post-test situations are similar, it is not possible to definitively state that the debate technique can be effective in order to improve students’ perspective taking skills and classroom cohesion. Overall, in fact, there have been slight quantifiable variations in students’ interaction patterns, but none significant enough to conclude that debate has augmented cohesion among students.

Following the debates, students have mostly maintained their original patterns of interaction. Students belonging to different OSs mainly establish functional and affectional relationships among their groups. Clusters and cliques are clearly displayed in all eight sociograms presented. Cliques mostly correspond to the FAM and Spanish OS designations.

In particular, FAM students are shown to be the most excluded group both before and after the didactic experiment. This isolation can, in my opinion, be due to the fact that OSs carry social connotations and, in some cases, prejudices. In fact, students choose their OS from the first class of liceo and this “label” remains with them until their fourth class. The FAM students are generally considered “hard workers” and overachievers, in comparison with the other OSs. Their results are, at least in English, very good. Although debate, fulfilling the characteristics of “The Contact Hypothesis”, should lead to prejudice reduction, in this case, the five week implementation period may have prevented this result.

Looking more closely into the position of certain students in the sociograms, M6 is always the most rejected FAM student. His role within classroom patterns of interaction has not noticeably changed post-debates. Only the frequency of his rejection in the affectional sphere has been slightly diminished. As previously stated, M6 is a very shy and quiet student who seldom speaks and, perhaps for this reason, remains rather excluded from this classroom’s social dynamics. Debate might have provided him with an occasion to speak, which in turn might have led other students to reconsider him from an affectional perspective. Also, the situation of F2, a very shy Spanish OS female, has slightly changed after the debates. In fact, she has been chosen more frequently in the functional dimension (see figure 8). Debate then, might have represented an occasion for her to speak more freely, leading to a reconsideration of her role within classroom’s dynamics.

With the exceptions of the previous individual cases, the classroom dynamics have generally remained the same. The situation for both girls and boys pre- and post- experiment, shows that
selection and rejection patterns have remained approximately the same. Although male students seem more frequently rejected, a neat division between boys and girls cannot be identified in this classroom. This is notable, when we consider that all debate groups were mixed-sex groups. It seems that being together in the same group has not affected cross-sex dynamics.

Another factor which emerges from the results analysis, is that if we consider the choice and rejection dimensions separately, we can see that debate has had a much wider impact on rejections, rather than on choices. In fact, the comparison between figures 7 and 13 displays some slightly deeper gaps in data than the comparison between figures 6 and 12. For instance, M10, one of the “disruptive students”, post-debates is no longer rejected from an affectional perspective. The fact that debate has had a significant impact on rejection patterns is further underscored by the fact that, although each of the 20 students answered both the preliminary and final questionnaire, some of them left blank spaces on some questions, both before and after the didactic experiment. However, the amount of names indicated before and after the didactic experiment slightly changed. In fact, in T1, students indicated 231 names, and in T2, 234 names. The three extra names were added to the the functional rejection sphere after the experiment, meaning that two students, that previously had not rejected anyone, now felt the need to express their negative assessments of two of their classmates. This might have been caused by the competitiveness established during the debates. In fact, although this competitiveness, seemed constructive and contributed to a challenging classroom climate, it might have actually caused rivalries among some students, leading in turn to negative changes in students’ patterns of interactions.

5.1 Limits

The examination of this project’s various weak points can yield valuable insights. First of all, the didactic experiment was carried out after students had already been together for seven months. This fact might have contributed to creating a solid intra-group bonding, which was then revealed as difficult to uproot. As Petersen, Dietz & Frey argue, in fact, “interacting groups [display] a stronger intergroup bias than [...] individual group members acting in isolation” (2004, p.108). When mixed with other extra-group members, individuals belonging to the same group tend to discriminate against the outsiders more than if they were on their own. The sense of belonging linking students of the same OS, therefore, might have led to the creation of three extremely cohesive groups, and this fact has certainly not aided in fostering cross-OS interaction.
The fact that the duration of the experiment was only five weeks is likely one of the main reasons the desired results were not achieved. In fact, in such a short time, it is likely that students did not have the chance to improve their perspective taking skills. Consequently, prejudice reduction and an increase in classroom cohesion were not observable. In fact, students have only had the chance to debate three times (once as an entire class). Implementing a longer didactic project might have produced different results.

I am also certainly aware that any variations displayed in the sociograms might be due to other factors outside of the scope of this study, thereby affecting student perspective taking skills and classroom cohesion. In fact, it is important to keep in mind that classroom dynamics change on a daily basis, and that the interpersonal relationships among students are constantly exposed to a wide number of external and internal input unrelated to the improvement of perspective taking skills.

5.2 Possible further developments

Although the experiment described here did not prove effective, I am glad to have carried out this action research because it has allowed me to better understand the usage of the debate technique in the EFL classroom, and to discover sociograms as a research method. In fact, sociometry has proved a highly useful means of understanding the various types of interactions in the classroom. I believe this is an adequate strategy for a teacher who wants to carry out action research in their school context, with the aim of overcoming dysfunctional classroom dynamics and promoting a safe and relaxed learning environment. In a future repetition of the present experiment, I would use sociograms in a more efficient way. For instance, I could use the data which emerges from T1 questionnaires as a basis for the formation of debate groups. In this way, groups would be comprised of students belonging to different OSs, just as in the present research, but with the addition of students who do not get along. Initiating the process this way, it would be possible to measure the impact of debate on perspective-taking skills and classroom cohesion on a deeper level.

Moreover, in this study, sociograms are used to only group cohesion, a general aspect of the classroom. Further research could expand sociogram use in order to employ a more holistic consideration of students. Additional information on the lives of students could yield actionable information in regards to why a specific student is frequently rejected or selected.

Just as additional information on students could better inform the formation of the study, a study with a longer duration may better reflect the natural ebbs and flows of student social life. Therefore, it
might be more efficient to implement a longer didactic experiment, perhaps implementing other debate formats, so as to increase student engagement. It could even be possible to implement cross-subject debates during the same school period, in order to develop students’ perspective taking skills in a more efficient way.

Another significant change I would carry out would be to solicit student opinions on the didactic method employed, perhaps through another questionnaire. In this current study, I was only able to focus on students’ interpersonal relationships and did not provide students the opportunity to respond to the debates I had proposed. I regret not having asked their opinions on the didactic experiment, because I think teachers should always consider their students’ perspectives about what they introduce in the classroom, in order to improve their teaching competences in view of their professional future.
6. Conclusion

The foundation for this study is the attempt to determine whether debate is beneficial in the EFL classroom in promoting the development of students’ perspective taking skills and to increase class cohesion. Having taken into account multiple studies confirming the importance of debate both in and out of the framework of school, I decided to implement the debate technique in one of the classrooms where I am currently working. The students in this particular features students belonging to different groups, with disparate interests. The aim of the experiment was to establish whether there is a connection between the use of debate technique in the language classroom, and an improvement in students’ perspective taking skills, leading in turn to improved class cohesion.

Prior to the experiment, I closely examined student interactions patterns through sociometric research, which, for the vast majority of cases, confirmed the problems that I had perceived myself. The results of the preliminary questionnaire, in fact, showed that students tend to primarily select other students within their OS. This selection phenomena applies to both functional and affectional dimensions. Once these preliminary results were obtained, I conducted the experiment over a five week period. Each classroom session featured a lesson centered on didactic activities, incrementally building to a full debate.

The results of this research action were fairly disappointing. Based on analysis of the data collected from the final student questionnaires, it becomes clear that classroom dynamics have not significantly changed. After the experiment, in fact, the most frequently excluded group of students remains outside of the central network of relationships. Indeed, while a few students have widened their sphere of interaction, generally, the relationships between students in the classroom has not noticeably changed. As for the most disruptive students, their classmates’ perception of them has not considerably changed (and vice versa). Students did not widen their perspectives to a significant degree, likely due to the various limits presented in chapter 5.1. We can therefore say that debate has not led to improved perspective taking skills or classroom cohesion.

Still, it is worth pointing out that debate has proved itself an effective communicative strategy to encourage students, even those belonging to different OSs, collaborate and cooperate in an engaging subject. For more introverted students, debates provided a possibility to freely participate and to voice an opinion in a safe environment. I believe that this has been an experience which will ultimately prove beneficial for future students both in and out of school settings.
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DECS (2001). *Piano cantonale degli studi liceali*.


Debate in the EFL Classroom


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8. Appendices

Appendix A: Examples of Opinions, Reasons, Evidence

CLAIMS, REASONS AND EVIDENCE

In order to successfully debate on a given issue, you need to know the three basic parts of an argument. Here below you will learn the definitions of these parts and why you need them in an argument.

A claim is your **Argument**. Claims are statements of belief that can be argued against. For instance, here is a claim:

Bob should be elected class president.

Why is this a claim? Because it is arguable – someone can disagree with it.

A reason is your **Logical Support**. Reasons are statements of logic that support your statement or belief (i.e. your claim). For instance, here is a reason:

Bob should be elected class president because he’s a natural leader.

Why is this a reason? Because it logically supports the claim and makes the claim stronger – more difficult to disagree with.

Evidence is your **Proof**. Evidence comes from sources, fieldwork, and research. It proves that your logical support (i.e. your reasons) is valid support for your statement or belief (i.e. your claim). For instance, here is some evidence:

When we got lost in the Smoky Mountains on our class trip, Bob took control and navigated us back to civilization.

Why is this evidence? Because it proves the reason (i.e. Bob is a “natural leader”) that supports the claim (i.e. “Bob should be elected class president”), and makes the claim even more difficult for someone to disagree with.

Ask these questions about **Claims**:
- is it arguable?
- is it obvious?
- is there a bias?
- is there a specific agenda the writer is working towards?
- is the claim general?

Ask these questions about **Reasons**:
- is it logical?
- is it connected/related?
- is it a consequence of sound thinking?
- is it fair minded & not biased?
- is it tangible (it isn’t purely conceptual & requiring the reader to assume certain knowledge they do not have)?
- is it reasonable?
- is it in support of the claim?

Ask these questions about **Evidence**:
- is it relevant?
- is it convincing?
- is it specific?
- is it general?
- is it connected to the reason?

Appendix B: Reading an Opinion Essay

1. Without doubt, computers and the internet are becoming more and more important in all our lives. In the future, the development of technology is bound to have an impact on our lives and leisure time. However, it is uncertain whether technology will mean that we have more or less leisure time.

2. Some people argue that computers will start to do more and more for us in the home and at work. We have already seen examples of this with the invention of cleaning robots such as the Roomba, and smart devices which enable us to turn appliances on or off from a distance.

3. Others feel, however, that although computers may help us with our daily tasks, this will not necessarily mean that we have free time. They argue that employers may simply expect us to have time to do more work. In addition, wearable technology may mean that we are expected to be available to our employers at all times.

4. Personally, I doubt that we will have more leisure time in the future. Back in the 1970s, it was predicted that more technology would mean that people in the future would have a five-day weekend. This has certainly not happened yet, and I don’t expect it to happen in years to come. In fact, it seems that the more technology we invent, the harder we are expected to work and the more we are expected to produce.

5. In conclusion, while employers may not expect us to be constantly available in the future, I believe that they will continue to demand more of us.

Appendix C: Language of Opinion/Persuasive Essay

Writing an opinion/persuasive essay

In order to write an opinion/persuasive essay you need to plan and organize your thoughts in advance. The expressions listed below are meant to help you structure your essay in a logical and coherent way. Use them to write your own essay.

1. Stating an opinion
   - In my opinion/As I see it/In my view… we should all grow fat and be happy!
   - I know that you believe in ghosts. Personally, I think it is all nonsense!

2. Developing your ideas

   a) Sequencing
      - Point one
        - First/First of all/To begin with cities have become too big to control
      - Point two
        - Second/secondly the city environment is a completely unnatural way of life
      - Additional points
        - Moreover/besides/in addition to this city life imposes its own living conditions on people, and not the opposite as it should be
      - Conclusion
        - To conclude/In conclusion/To sum up, I believe that blood sports must be prohibited as no civilized society should allow the pain and suffering just for fun.

   b) Contrasting
      - All this is interesting, but I still prefer living in the city centre because…
      - What you’re saying is right. However, modern people need the facilities of large cities.
      - I am still not fully convinced. After all, there are millions of people who live in large cities all over the world. They can’t all be mad!
      - While country life is certainly more relaxing, more and more people leave it every day to move closer to the city.
      - Country life is certainly very relaxing. In fact, it is very boring!

   c) Showing the relationship between cause and effect
      - Because of the high crime rate, city life is really dangerous.
      - A possible cause of pollution in cities is the excess of private cars.
      - High rents in city centres are linked to/a consequence of the great demand for accommodation near people’s workplaces.

   d) Balancing pros and cons
      - On the one hand, city life is undoubtedly tiring and expensive. On the other hand, it offers better services and more opportunities.

Appendix D: Language of Debate

Useful Debate Vocabulary

In order to debate properly and be convincing you need to plan and organise what you say about a given topic. The expressions listed below are meant to help you structure your talk and express your ideas in a logical and coherent way. Learn them and try to use them as much as possible every time you are discussing a subject with your classmates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Stating an opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I (don’t) think that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The way I see it…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If you want my honest opinion…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My position is the following…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• As far as I am concerned…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Sequencing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Firstly, secondly, my third point is that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The first good reason to…is that…; next; what’s more; moreover…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To begin with, I think that; in addition, you have to know that…; last but not least…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The first point I would like to raise is this…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I’d like to deal with two points here. The first is…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Signaling you are listening to the other side</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I see your point, but I think…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Yes, I understand, but my opinion is that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• That’s all very interesting, but the problem is that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I think we’ve got your point, now let me respond to it…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Disagreeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sorry, I just have to disagree with your point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Let me just respond to that, please.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I’d like to take issue with what you just said.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>5. Summarizing – Concluding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• My opponents have claimed that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To recap the main points…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Let’s sum up where I stand in this debate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In summary, I want to point out that…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: http://crl.u-paris2.fr/polelangues/documents/ang/Eco/L2-DebateVocab.pdf
Appendix E: Writing an Opinion Essay

**TASK** You are going to write an essay. Look at the following essay question and plan out what you are going to write in the style of the five paragraphs given in exercise 6a. Try to think of a main idea and some supporting information or examples for each paragraph. Write your essay in about 250 words.

In recent years, the number of people travelling by air for business and pleasure has increased dramatically. Some people believe that air travel will continue to grow and that it will become easier, faster and cheaper. Others, however, believe that due to environmental pressures, flying is likely to become too expensive for most people.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

Appendix F: Some Opinion Essays Written by Students

Should the private lives of famous people be off limits?

Without doubt, the concept of private life has changed a lot in recent years, because of social networks. There many people post a lot of photos of what they are doing and photos about their every day private life. We can almost say that many people no longer have a private life, precisely because they always want to share everything with everyone. However this does not involve everyone: the situation is different for famous people. They are constantly followed by paparazzi who work for various magazines and who tell us almost everything about them. We know everything about their lives, even if they want to keep their lives secret.

Some people argue that it is not important to know everything about a famous person, also because they don’t care. They believe that is right to know, for example if we are talking about a politician, only what could affect their lives.

Others feel, however, that it is right that magazines investigate so much because they want to know everything. In fact there are gossip people and who like to know the secrets of others, especially famous people.

Personally I don’t care about the private lives of famous people, in general I don’t care about private lives of others. If a friend wants to tell me something personal, I’m happy to hear it, but otherwise I’m not a gossip person.

In conclusion I think magazines should stop spying these people. I don’t say that their private lives should be off limits, I think it’s up to them decide what to let others know and what not.
Do you think men and women should have equal rights?

Some people believe that women should have the same opportunities as men. However, there are still many people who don’t agree for cultural and religious reasons.

Without doubt, women must have the same privileges as men because there is no natural truth that justifies the inequality. In course of stay, they have suffered unfairly for reasons that I consider irrational and foolish.

In addition, these things still persist in some countries today in an extreme way. For example, in Saudi Arabia women can’t do something because their religion prevents them from doing so. By doing the middle of the Christian belief that the women was inferior because Eve had deceived Adam originally.

Personally I believe we shouldn’t even discuss whether women and men should have the same rights. Unfortunately, we have to resign ourselves to the fact that is real and fight to defeat.

To sum up, women and men deserve equal opportunities, but it must be understood that the society views and expects different things from both sexes. Women deserve the same education and work opportunities, but this isn’t happening in some countries. Instead of thinking about that distinction between men and women, we must consider that, first of all, we care people who are entitled to fundamental right of life, right and freedom right.
The use of cell phones during school

In these days the cell phones are no longer just used for calling or texting, they have become indispensable for our lives. In consequence to this observation shouldn’t students be allowed to use cell phones in schools? Many people believe that bringing cell phones to schools may cause distractions, but I think that using our mobile phone during class can be really productive.

In my opinion cell phones should be allowed in schools because it’s important that scholars have a way to communicate with their parents and friends, especially in an emergency, and it’s also a way for parents to keep track of their kids. For example a student can call home and ask a family member to bring them a forgotten book or lunch money.

Secondly the cell phone could be a learning resource. The student can do researches and find educational websites. They can also use tools like calculator, dictionary, calendar, etc… on their phones. Cell phones are a quick and easy way to incorporate technology in the classrooms.

In addition to this the using of phones during schools can encourage the responsible use of technology. The pupils learn when and how they have to use their phones, they can learn to make choices and accept the consequence and they are all treated like young adults.

For example: When a student is texting instead of paying attention to the teacher, the teacher should take the cell phone temporary away. There is nothing wrong, the student have to accept the consequence.

In conclusion, people who are against the use of cell phones can’t recognize the potential of this technology, they only see the negative side of permitting cell phones. But we have to realize that we live in a world of technology where we depend from our phones. To avoid the abuse of the cell phones in class the teachers could introduce new rules in order to clarify the appropriate use of cell phones during school.
Appendix G: Lead-In Images: Technology in the Family
Appendix H: Excerpts: Technology in the Family

1. Jim Shelley, TV critic and columnist ➔ technology positive

The survey has "revealed" that families across the land are gathering in the living room again, united by their love of watching television while occupying themselves with their smartphones/tablets/laptops. I love this kind of supposition. It makes all our lives richer – literally so in our case.

Obviously, it sounds ridiculous. Two years ago iPads and iPhones were the ruination of family life, causing mass juvenile alienation.

But such claims always need some (surprise) foundation. The new technology means fewer and fewer children want (or receive) a TV in their bedroom. SkyPlus and iPlayer are all very well but some things have to be experienced live. Come Saturday night, everyone really does gravitate into the living room to watch "event television", if only to tweet or text their friends about it. Like it or not, *The X Factor* really is the superglue holding family life together.

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

2. Peter Stanford, writer, journalist and broadcaster ➔ technology negative

There is something deeply cynical about the way this research tries to dress up the fragmentation of family life by technology as the opposite. All it tells us is that families are sitting in the same room, doing all sorts of different things on their iPhones and iPads while the TV is on. This may be better than each member sitting in their bedroom glued to their technological devices, but it does not mean that it encourages the coming-together of the family unit.

Technology is getting in the way of a shared experience, not facilitating it. How about all doing the same thing at the same time – embracing the collective. That's what family life is about for me.

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

3. Jim Shelley, TV critic and columnist ➔ technology positive

There is – obviously – an argument to say it would be better if the nation's families sat around discussing Jane Austen. But sadly, like every generation before us, we're better off embracing what is already here.

Why should we sit experiencing mediocre/awful television, obediently watching the adverts, without doing something else at the same time? Doesn't "all doing the same thing at the same time, embracing the collective" encompass tweeting about *The Voice en famille*?

At least if you watch *The X Factor* with your kids you can talk about it with them. Then you can tell them they wouldn't know decent music if they heard it afterwards.

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

4. Peter Stanford, writer, journalist and broadcaster ➔ technology negative

I'm with you on familial negotiation, but technology makes that tougher, especially when my kids' generation is so much more good at it than mine. We negotiate a compromise and then I struggle to monitor it because they know my skills don't match theirs.

When I was a teenager, there was one phone in the hall of the family home, so my parents could overhear my plans and conversations. Now with smartphones, mine could be planning a rave in the back garden while I was out on my allotment, and I would not know. And you are making my point for me with your reference to Jane Austen.

From: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/03/technology-good-family-life.
Debate in the EFL Classroom

Glossary:

Extract 1

juvenile (adj.): of young people
alienation (n.): a feeling of isolation or separation from one's surrounding
superglue (n.): a glue which creates a very strong bond
(to) hold together (v.): (to) cause to remain united

Extract 2

(to) dress up (v.): (to) put on clothes and pretending to be something different (figurative in this case)
coming-together (n.): gathering
(to) embrace (v.): (to) accept willingly

Extract 3

(to) embrace (v.): (to) accept willingly
(to) encompass (v.): (to) include completely

Extract 4

negotiation (n.): discussion / agreement
(to) struggle (v.): (to) find it difficult
allotment (n.): portion of garden
Appendix I: Model House: Technology in the Family

Opinion: Technology is negative

Reason 1: The family unit is weak with everyone engaged in different activities.

Reason 2: Technology does not encourage social interaction.

Reason 3: Evidence

Reason 4: Evidence

Extract number: 2

Evidence: Family is sitting in the same room doing different things,Phones/PCs/TV
Technology in the family is positive

Reason 1: It is better to supervise what is already here.
Evidence: If you watch something with your kids, you can talk about it with them.

Reason 2: 
Evidence:

Reason 3: 
Evidence:

Reason 4: 
Evidence:
Appendix L: Articles : Burka Ban

Article 1 (Students A and B)

After having read the following article fill in your “model house” with the main opinions, reasons and evidence emerged from the text.

Is France right to ban wearing the burka in public?

Mona Eltahawy, *The Observer*, Sunday 21 March 2010

**Egyptian-born columnist and lecturer on Arab and Muslim issues**

As a Muslim woman and as a feminist I support banning the face veil, everywhere and not just in France where they are to vote on a resolution and possibly a ban on wearing the garment in public places [hospitals, schools and public transport, but not in the streets] after regional elections end.

I am appalled to hear the defence of the niqab or burka in Europe. A bizarre political correctness has tied the tongues of those who would normally rally to defend women's rights but who are now instead sacrificing those very rights in the name of fighting an increasingly powerful right wing.

Every time I return to Cairo from New York City, where I now live, I wonder what Hoda Shaarawi, the pioneering Egyptian feminist, would say if she could see how many of her sisters are disappearing behind the face veil. Returning from an international women's conference in Italy in 1923 – yes, we had feminists that early in Egypt – Shaarawi famously removed her face veil at a Cairo train station, declaring it a thing of the past. We might not have burned our bras in Egypt but some have described Shaarawi’s gesture as even more incendiary for its time.

And yet here we are, almost a century later, arguing over a woman's "right" to cover her face. What is lost in those arguments is that the ideology that promotes the niqab (the total body covering that leaves just the eyes exposed) and the burka (the garment which covers the eyes with a mesh) does not believe in the concept of women's rights to begin with. It is an ideology that describes women alternately as candy, a diamond ring or a precious stone that needs to be hidden to prove her "worth". That is not a message Muslims learn in our holy book, the Qur'an, nor is the face veil prescribed by the majority of Muslim scholars.

It is instead a pillar of the ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam known as Salafism. It is associated with Saudi Arabia, where I spent most of my adolescence and where it is clear that women are effectively perpetual children, forbidden as they are from driving, from travelling alone and from even the simplest of surgical procedures without the permission of a male "guardian". I detest the niqab and the burka for their erasure of women and for dangerously equating piety with that disappearance – the less of you I can see, the closer you must be to God. I defend a woman's right to cover her hair if she chooses but the face is central to human interaction and so the ideologues who promote its covering are simply misogynists.

I abhor the rightwing Muslim ideology behind the veils but I equally abhor the political rightwing xenophobes of Europe. The European political right – be it President Nicolas Sarkozy, his ultra-right rival Jean-Marie Le Pen (who did alarmingly well in the first round of those regional elections) or Dutch provocateur Geert Wilders – do not care about Muslim women or their rights: they are merely using the issue in an attempt to win votes.
The racism and discrimination that Muslim minorities face in many countries — such as France, which has the largest Muslim community in Europe, and Britain, where two members of the xenophobic British National party were shamefully elected to the European parliament — are very real. But the silence of the left wing and liberals isn't the way to fight it. The best way to support Muslim women would be to say we oppose both the racist right wing and the niqabs and burkas which are products of what I call the Muslim right wing. Women should not be sacrificed to either.

**Article 1 Glossary:**

para. 2: appalled (adj.): shocked
para. 2: (to) tie the tongue of (phrase): do not let somebody express themselves freely
para. 2: (to) rally (v.): to support/come to the assistance of somebody
para. 2: right wing: the conservative members in a political party
para. 3: bra (n.): a woman's undergarment, worn to support the breasts
para. 3: incendiary (adj.): arousing conflict
para. 5: pillar (n.): support
para. 5: ideologue (n.): a person who zealously advocates an ideology
para. 6: (to) abhor (v.): detest
para. 7: left wing: the non-conservative members in a political party
Article 2 (Students C and D)

After having read the following article fill in your “model house” with the main opinions, reasons and evidence emerged from the text.

Is France right to ban wearing the burka in public?

Stephanie Street, The Observer, Sunday 21 March 2010

British Asian actor and playwright

Over the last five years I interviewed 43 British Muslim women for my play, Sisters, a verbatim piece constructed from those interviews. My intention was to dispel the ludicrous notion that there is a single, fixed Muslim female identity. As a non-Muslim who grew up in Singapore surrounded by Muslim women, I was shocked by the mainstream response to 9/11 and 7/7 which was, obliquely, the polarisation of "us" and "them". Probably the most offensive thing about it all was how few commentators and analysts in the media, or people in positions of power, had ever spoken in person to a Muslim woman.

I wonder how many niqab-wearing French citizens Nicolas Sarkozy has sat with and talked to. I imagine not many. Because if he had, he could not with a clear conscience say that "the burka is not a religious sign (but) a sign of subservience, of debasement". He is right to assume that there are significant problems with the status of women in certain Muslim communities. This, however, is not oppression on religious grounds but rather, cultural. And the hypocrisy of what he is doing is surely transparent – he, in condemning what he sees to be a symbol of oppression of women by men, is oppressing women's rights to practise their faith as they choose.

To whatever extent a Muslim woman chooses to practise it, modesty is a central concern within the religion (for men as well, although this is often ignored). Everyone I spoke to who wore Islamic dress did so because this issue of modesty is sacrosanct, and they felt liberated not being judged on their appearance. And those who choose to wear the niqab are doing that to an extreme.

Only one character in my play wears the niqab, but the issue of Islamic dress came up in every interview I did. Azra (not her real name), who wore the full covering, was young, had a job and wore it against her parents' wishes. They felt that she would be discriminated against for wearing it. She took it off when she went to work because she had to, knowing she was "going to get the reward for the time I was wearing it, making God happy by fulfilling his covenant to me". She related to me an incident that took place when she had her photo taken for her university ID. They requested she remove her niqab, so she asked for a female photographer. When the male photographer at the adjacent booth asked if she'd like the men to look away, she told them not to worry about it, not wanting to cause a scene. And when he did still turn away, she was touched: "I thought, I just wish people could be kind like that."

France clearly needs to address why immigrant Muslims and French converts are rejecting western identity so demonstratively, but this proposed ban is not the way. There is the not insignificant problem that it might contravene articles 8 and 9 of the European convention on human rights which protect the individual's right to a private life and personal identity and freedom to manifest one's religion.

There is no denying that in certain countries the burka is a manifestation of the oppression of women, but in the west it is nearly always worn out of choice. It is an issue of how a person chooses to practise their faith, and in a democracy we cannot deny any human being that.
Article 2 Glossary:

para. 1: verbatim (adj.): corresponding word for word
para. 1: (to) dispel (v.): eliminate
para. 1: ludicrous (adj): absurd
para. 2: subservience (n.): submission
para. 2: debasement (n.): degradation
para. 4: covenant (n.): agreement/promise
para. 4: adjacent (adj.): nearby
para. 4: booth (n.): stand
para. 6: there is no denying that (phrase): used for saying that something is clearly true
Appendix M: Model House: Burka Ban

The Muslim woman is: an oppressed, human being whose rights and dignity are violated. She has no voice and no rights to be heard. The Burka Ban is a violation of human rights and freedom. It is a symbol of the oppression of women in society. It is a violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls. The Burka Ban is not a religious issue, but a human rights issue. It is a violation of the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of thought and belief. It is a violation of the right to equality and non-discrimination. The Burka Ban is a violation of the right to education and the right to work. It is a violation of the right to health and the right to social security. The Burka Ban is a violation of the right to family life and the right to have a child. It is a violation of the right to participate in public and commercial life. The Burka Ban is a violation of the right to freedom of movement and the right to nationality. It is a violation of the right to privacy and the right to honor and dignity. The Burka Ban is a violation of the right to freedom from discrimination and the right to freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. It is a violation of the right to equality before the law and the right to an equal and dignified treatment in the courts.
Debate in the EFL Classroom

Iadarola Sara

Reason 1:
The article is against the ban of Chador.
The women are being treated unfairly by people.

Reason 2:
Thebi-bi condemned a symbol of oppression by Muslim women.

Reason 3:
The women don't keep just to their own opinion, by people.

Evidence:

Article number: 2

Evidence:

Human rights.
Appendix N: Model House: Gun Control (Research at Home)
Topic: LESS GUN CONTROL

Opinion
LESS GUN CONTROL LAWS

Reason 1
GUN CONTROL LAWS VIOLATE THE RIGHT TO SELF-DEFENSE

Reason 2
GUN CONTROL LAWS GIVE TOO MUCH POWER TO THE GOVERNMENT

Reason 3
MORE GUN CONTROL BECAUSE FEW PEOPLE ARE KILLED BY GUNS

Reason 4
GUN CONTROL LAWS DO NOT PREVENT SUICIDE

Evidence
GUNS USED FOR SELF-DEFENSE 2.5 MILLION TIMES A YEAR

Evidence
57% OF ROLE SAID THAT (SURVEY)

 evidence
AGG 9- 2013! 21.5 TIMES; HEART DISEASE, 18.7 TIMES

Evidence
LITUANIA: WORLD'S LOWEST GUN OWNERSHIP RATE BUT suicide RATE

Evidence
TUMORS & DIABETES HIGHEST GUN DEATH
Appendix O: Sociometric Questionnaire

Questionario sul gruppo classe SAD

N.B: I dati emersi dal questionario verranno trattati dalla docente in modo assolutamente confidenziale.

1. Immagina di dover realizzare il lavoro di maturità in coppia con un altro studente / con un’altra studentessa del tuo gruppo-classe di inglese.

Con chi ti piacerebbe lavorare? (indica fino a tre nomi di compagni/e)

1. ______________
2. ______________
3. ______________

2. Con chi NON vorresti lavorare? (indica fino a tre nomi di compagni/e)

1. ______________
2. ______________
3. ______________

3. Uno dei prossimi weekend vorresti organizzare un’uscita tra amici/amiche per andare a visitare una città che ti sta a cuore. Chi, tra i tuoi compagni / tra le tue compagne del tuo gruppo classe di inglese vorresti invitare? (indica fino a tre nomi di compagni/e)

1. ______________
2. ______________
3. ______________

4. Chi NON inviteresti di sicuro? (indica fino a tre nomi di compagni/e)

1. ______________
2. ______________
3. ______________
Debate in the EFL Classroom: Seeking Improvements in Student Perspective-Taking Skills and Group Cohesion
Paolo Jacomelli

This project investigates the efficiency of debate in the EFL classroom as a means of developing students’ perspective-taking skills, and increasing classroom cohesiveness. It aims to determine the degree to which debate can be beneficial to the quality of students’ interaction in class, as well as general improvement in group cohesion.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of debate, a five-week experiment was carried out in a third-year class at the Liceo in Mendrisio. Each lesson featured a different objective centered on didactic activities, culminating in a full classroom debate. Students were first introduced to the core concepts of argumentation and debate, from both structural and linguistic points of view. This introduction was followed by exploration of diametrically opposed views on a given subject, which in turn led to a debate in pairs, a group debate and a subsequent full-class debate.

Questionnaires were provided to the class, (pre-test and post-test), as a means of assessing patterns of student interaction before and after the didactic experiment. Results were inconclusive, suggesting that debates did not demonstrably improve perspective taking abilities and class cohesion, yet not necessarily disproving the value of the debate-centered activities. In fact, while there have been some post-debate variations in the students’ patterns of interactions, there are not enough changes to conclusively state that debate increases student cohesion.

Key words: debate, argumentation, classroom cohesion, perspective-taking, social interactions