

Using Student Dialogues as a Summary Activity When Teaching About Slavery in New York and the United States

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Democratic Dialogues employ many of the practices advocated by progressive and transformative educators (Apple and Beane, 1995; Banks, 1991; Bigelow, 1988; 1990). The success of the dialogues and the experience in democracy both depend on the gradual development of caring, cooperative communities over the course of a year (Noddings, 1992; Kohn, 1986). To encourage these communities, teachers work with students to create an atmosphere where they feel free to expose their ideas, feelings, and academic proficiencies in public without risking embarrassment or attack and being pressed into silence. Dialogues are not debates. As students learn about a topic the entire class “wins or loses” together.

The student dialogues are highly structured. Structure maximizes student freedom by insuring that all students have an opportunity to participate. It also helps to insure that classes carefully examine statements, attitudes, and practices that may reflect biases and demean community members.

While the dialogues are used to conclude units; preparation for the dialogues takes place all the time. At the start of the semester, students decide on the procedures for conducting dialogues so that everyone in class participates and on criteria for evaluating team and individual performance. Usually students want the criteria to include an evaluation of how well the team works together; the degree to which substantive questions are addressed; the use of supporting evidence; the response to statements made by the other team; whether ideas are presented effectively; and whether individual students demonstrate effort and growth. These criteria are codified in a scoring rubric that is reexamined before each dialogue and changed when necessary. Students also help to define the question being discussed. After the dialogue, students work in small groups to evaluate the overall dialogue, the performance by their team, and their individual participation.

The goal of a dialogue is to examine all aspects of an issue, not to score points at the expense of someone else. Teams are subdivided into cooperative learning groups that collect and organize information supporting different views. The teams also assign members as either opening, rebuttal, or concluding speakers. During dialogues, teams “huddle-up” to share their ideas and reactions to what is being presented by the other side. After dialogues, students discuss what they learned from members of the other team and evaluate the performance of the entire class.

An important part of the dialogue process is the involvement of students in assessing what they have learned. Students help develop the parameters for class projects and decide the criteria for assessing their performance in these activities. The benefit of this involvement for students includes a deeper understanding of historical and social science research methods; insight into the design and implementation of projects; a greater stake in the satisfactory completion of assignments; and a sense of empowerment because assessment decisions are based on rules that the classroom community has helped to shape.

From the dialogues, students start to learn that democratic society involves a combination of individual rights and initiatives with social responsibility, collective decision-making, and shared community goals. They discover that democracy frequently entails tension between the will of the majority and the rights of minorities and that it cannot be taken for granted. It involves taking risks and is something that a community must continually work to maintain and expand. Another benefit of the dialogue process is that it affords students the opportunity to actively generate knowledge without relying on teacher-centered instructional methods.

References

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Sample Rules for Student Dialogue

Choosing Teams: Students will select teams based on their opinions. Your teacher may reassign some students so the teams are equally balanced.

Preparation: Student teams will be divided into study groups of three or four students. Each study group will research a topic. Using the research, individual students will prepare regents style essays supporting their position. Study group members will edit each others' essays before the dialogue.

Procedure: There will be four rounds during the dialogue. Before round one, teams will meet together and plan their presentation. Students from each team will take turns speaking. In Round 1, five students from each team will introduce the team's views. After Round 1, teams will “huddle up” to think about what the other team said. In Round 2, students will take turns responding to the ideas of the other team. Teams will huddle up again after Round 2 to plan how to conclude the dialogue. In Round 3, three students will summarize the main ideas of their team. After Round 3, teams will meet again to evaluate what students have learned. In Round 4, students will discuss what they learned from the other team.

Nine Things to Do During the Dialogue:

1. Students should respect each other.
2. Students should not attack or interrupt each other.
3. One person speaks at a time. Everyone must participate.
4. After your turn to speak, take notes and share them with your teammates.
5. The discussion should be as free and open as possible.
6. Students should speak loudly and clearly.
7. Team members should take turns. Don't speak too long.
8. Teammates must make sure that everyone speaks.
9. Some people who are comfortable speaking to the whole class should wait until the end.

Nine Things to Remember:

1. People must listen to each other.
2. People must give reasons for their opinions.
3. People must present facts.
4. People have to believe what they are speaking.
5. People need to talk about the things that other people say.
6. Express your ideas clearly.
7. Learn and understand the ideas of other people.
8. Share opinions.
9. Discussion is more important than winning. There are no right answers.

Dialogue: Is the U.S. responsible for reparations to descendants of enslaved Africans?

Documents:

A. 1842-1844. Reparations - Clues from the Dust-Bin of History

Source: *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 26, 1842

Legislature of New York

In the House a memorial of citizens of Williamsburgh, Kings Co., in reference to slavery was presented. The same having been read, in part Mr. Davezac moved that the farther reading be dispensed with. He proceeded to characterise it as a fire brand thrown into the House &c. &c. - but was interrupted by the speaker who declared that it was not in order to make a speech at this time upon this question.

Source: *New York Tribune*, March 30, 1844, p. 8, col. 3

New-York Legislature, Albany, Wednesday, March 28 (1844)

In Assembly, . . . (a) curious petition was presented from Wayne County, to pay the black citizens of the State for loss of services while in a state of slavery prior to 1827 - the sum fixed by the petitioners as due to these persons is \$25,000,000; (laid on the table, after an unsuccessful motion by Mr. Youngs to refer the same to the Committee on Ventilation.)

B. Major General William T. Sherman, in the Field, Savannah, Georgia, Special Field Orders, No. 15, January 16, 1865

Source: http://www.sewanee.edu/faculty/Willis/Civil_War/documents/Sherman115.html

I. The islands from Charleston, south, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. Johns River, Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the negroes now made free by the acts of war and the proclamation of the President of the United States. . . .

III. Whenever three respectable negroes, heads of families, shall desire to settle on land, and shall have selected for that purpose an island or a locality clearly defined, within the limits above designated, the Inspector of Settlements and Plantations will himself, or by such subordinate officer as he may appoint, give them a license to settle such island or district, and afford them such assistance as he can to enable them to establish a peaceable agricultural settlement. The three parties named will subdivide the land, under the supervision of the Inspector, among themselves and such others as may choose to settle near them, so that each family shall have a plot of not more than forty acres of tillable ground, and when it borders on some water channel, with not more than 800 feet water front, in the possession of which land the military authorities will afford them protection, until such time as they can protect themselves, or until Congress shall regulate their title. . . .

IV. Whenever a negro has enlisted in the military service of the United States, he may locate his family in any one of the settlements at pleasure, and acquire a homestead, and all other rights and privileges of a settler, as though present in person. . . .

C. Bill Introduced by Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, H.R. 29 First Session Fortieth Congress March 11, 1867: A Plan for Confiscation

Source: <http://www.nathanieltturner.com/reparationsbill1867.htm>

www.directblackaction.com/rep_bills/hr29_1867.txt

Be it enacted. . . That all the public lands belonging to the ten States that formed the government of the so-called "confederate States of America" shall be forfeited by said States and become forthwith vested in the United States. . . Out of the lands thus seized and confiscated, the slaves who have been liberated by the operations of the war and the amendment of the Constitution or otherwise, who resided in said "confederate States" on the 4th day of March, A.D. 1861, or since, shall have distributed to them as follows, namely: to each male person who is the head of a family, forty acres; to each adult male, whether the head of a family or not, forty acres; to each widow who is the head of a family, forty acres. . . .

D. The Brooklyn Slavery Class Action: More Than Just A Political Gambit

by Anthony J. Sebok (Apr. 09, 2002) writ.news.findlaw.com/sebok/20020409.html

On March 26 [2002], a group of lawyers filed a lawsuit in federal court in Brooklyn, New York, that comprises one of the largest class actions ever filed in America. The case asks for relief for every descendant of African slaves brought to the United States. It was filed against three corporations - Aetna, CSX, and FleetBoston - but more names are promised. It seeks both injunctive relief (that is, a court order asking the companies to do, or refrain from doing, certain things) and damages.

E. Reparations Resolution for Descendants of Enslaved Africans in New York City

Resolution 41: Queen Mother Moore” Reparations Resolution for Descendants of Enslaved Africans in New York City:

Be it resolved: That a “Queen Mother Moore” Reparations for Descendants of Africans of New York City Task Force be established, and,

Be it further resolved: That this Queen Mother Moore Reparations Task Force be created by individuals and organizations of the New African Community of New York City in conjunction with the Black and Latino Caucus of the City Council, and,

Be it further resolved: That the Queen Mother Moore Reparations Task Force be funded by the City of New York for the duration of time deemed necessary by the Task Force to hold hearings, conduct research and recommend compensation to the New African Descendant Community of New York City for the debt owed for the enslavement of their African Ancestors during the colonial and post-colonial periods in New York City.