PHILOSOPHICAL CHAIRS

It's all about persuasion

OVERVIEW

Philosophical Chairs is a structured form of discussion founded on using evidence to develop an informed response to a controversial prompt. In this strategy, students determine their perspective on the prompt, discuss varying points of view on the issue based on text evidence and actively persuade others to join their position. Students may change their position or perspective on the topic throughout the activity.

For a thorough review of Philosophical Chairs, please revisit the strategy guide provided in the Bronze Current and Controversial Issue Discussion Strategies Course.

Works best when:
- There are clear choices.
- The claims students use are based on evidence (logos).
- Students do not have a personal connection to the issue (ethos), as students may confuse the attempts of their peers to persuade them as attacks on their lived experiences.
- The issue will not be emotionally charged for participants (pathos) so that they will not be upset by the persuasion of others.

How can this be done in remote learning?

Philosophical Chairs can be iterated in virtual learning, provided the right platform. Virtual meeting tools like Zoom, Google Meets, Go To Meeting, Microsoft Teams, etc. can be used to facilitate student discussion. Consider the following adjustments:
- After students have examined the prompt and had individual think time to discern their position, instruct students to show their initial position to their displayed name by adding "Yes", "No" or "Undecided" after the name that appears on the screen
  - Students could also find an object in their home that is green to display to show agreement, red to show disagreement and yellow to show unsure (and you create a fun treasure hunt in the process).
- Next, have students briefly share the reasons for their position. This can be done in the Chat Box, Padlet, Google Jamboard, Doc, or Form.
- As students are writing the reasons for their initial positions, assign students to breakout rooms based on their position. (While Google Meets is promising breakout rooms soon, here is a way to hack the current Google Meet Set Up to create and monitor your own breakout rooms).
- After students have contributed to the common document, launch the breakout rooms. In the breakout rooms, have students organize the ideas shared in the common doc above into "buckets" or categories to craft their position.

Current & Controversial Issue Discussions

- o In the chatbox
- o A backchannel app like [YoTeach!](#)
- o [Using Hand Signals for More Equitable Discussion](#)
- o The [Chrome Extension Nod](#) for Google Meets
- If students change their position, they can indicate this by updating their position in their name or updating the objects from their home that they are displaying to indicate their position.
- At the end of the exercise, students can revise their initial positions in the Chat Box, a Padlet, Google Jamboard, Doc, or Form.
  - o Even if a student's initial position has not changed, they should add more evidence or reasons that help reinforce their initial position.

Related Strategy: Human Barometer

Human Barometer is a strategy that can be iterated online to meet many of the same goals as Philosophical Chairs. In Human Barometer:

1. Give students individual think time to respond to the prompt

2. Students take a "stand" on a continuum of responses that can range from
   a. Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
   b. Consistently, Sometimes, Unsure, Rarely, Never
   c. Strong Yes, Yes, Maybe, No, Strong No

3. Students share perspectives, acknowledging the comments of others

4. Students are encouraged to be flexible thinkers and move if position changes

5. Debrief

Facing History and Ourselves has a [video that demonstrates how Human Barometer can be iterated for remote learning.](#)

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