

# **CRLA Proposal Summary**

## **Engaging Learners: Texts, Conversations & Communities**

### **Type of Presentation:**

1 hour session

**Title:** From Research to Debate: Collaborative Groups Broaden their Perspectives  
Issue Based Debates in the Critical Thinking Classroom  
Research Project: Collaborative Group + Controversial Issue = Debate  
Six Students + Controversial Issue + Research + Critical Thinking = Debate  
Debate: A Critical Thinking Project that Motivates, Stimulates and Encourages  
Student Success, Through Issue Based Research.

### **Presentation Description:**

From issue to debate: The presentation will explore the steps taken to enhance learning in the Critical Thinking classroom by engaging students in collaborative group work, technology based research, formal outlining, and reflective judgment to create an issue based debate. Participants will work through the steps in small collaborative groups.

### **Program Strand:**

Instructional Theory and Practice

### **Equipment Requests:**

Overhead projector and screen

### **Intended Audience:**

Instructors of Critical Thinking courses

### **Summary:**

Session: The purpose of the presentation is to share the value of debate as a collaborative group project in the critical thinking classroom. The presentation will explore the steps taken to enhance learning by engaging students in collaborative group work, technology based research, formal outlining, and reflective judgment to create an issue based debate. Students will gain a deeper respect for the process of establishing research based opinions and understanding why people agree to disagree.

As presenters, we will use a step by step approach, providing handouts for each step taken in the classroom, culminating in the final project. As we discuss the steps, session participants will have the opportunity to gather in groups and participate in the process our students go through, however, with already supplied research materials. They will leave the session with an easy to follow instruction guide for introducing their students to issue based debates. The instructional materials are very specific, organizing a weekly agenda for students to follow to stay on task. The guide will include the ten objectives that are met by implementing the project in the critical thinking classroom. Two of those objectives are 1) identifying the relevant evidence and experiences needed to make a decision, solve a problem or create new knowledge and 2) evaluate the quality

and sufficiency of evidence and other forms of support for a position. Participants will leave the session with the materials necessary to implement this project in their own classrooms with success.

Research reveals the value of debate in the classroom for purposes of enhancing students' thinking and learning. Worthen stated "When a debater critically views facts, languages, hypotheses, beliefs, and assumptions or arguments systematically, many goals in critical thinking are achieved." (1992) In addition, in the article *Teaching Critical Thinking and Writing Through Debates: An Experimental Evaluation*, Green and Klug stated "Debating the "arguments" enhances critical thinking skills as well as the ability to "take a stand" while articulating non-emotional or non-inflammatory points of view. As an interactive strategy, debate develops techniques of persuasion and is a method for confronting problems. To debate effectively individuals must present concise points of view, listen attentively or read carefully the opposition's point of view, use non-inflammatory language and back-up their own statements with facts or references." (1990) Furthermore, "Debates can provide students the opportunity to synthesize course information, conduct related outside research, improve critical thinking and develop verbal communication skills." (Alfred and Surdu, 2001)

Through reading the research, students will discover for themselves their own position on an issue rather than haphazardly choosing a side or adopting a position based on hearsay. Students will also improve their critical thinking skills and their ability to listen to their peers while respecting their opinions. The skills involved in the process of debate are many with students increasing their self-confidence when sharing their research based stance on an issue.

This year's Conference Theme, *Engaging Learners: Texts, Conversations and Communities*, is most appropriate to the issue based debates. The project encourages collaboration in a community of learners through conversations and texts. Students are engaged and motivated to learn when discovery is initiated by them.

The learning objectives covered with this project include the following:

- Identify the relevant evidence and experiences needed to make a decision, solve a problem or create new knowledge.
- Clarify the facts, concepts, evidence, and relationships that contribute to addressing questions and solving problems.
- Evaluate the quality and sufficiency of evidence and other forms of support for a position.
- Revise arguments and findings based on critical reflection.
- Assess accurately similarities and differences in points of view and values.
- Be organized, persistent, and focused in thinking, inquiry, and communication.
- Locate, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information and to integrate knowledge across discipline boundaries.
- Develop a habit of intellectual inquiry and reflective judgment and an awareness of one's thinking, perspective and biases.
- Organize one's thoughts and communicate clearly and effectively in speaking, listening, and writing.
- Develop strategies of information competence (reading, writing, speaking, listening) with state-of-the-art technology.
- Work effectively in collaborative and group settings.