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# A Moderated and Scored Debate: What is the role of lecture in teaching social studies?

Elliot E. Georgiadis

*The University of Akron*, eeg15@zips.uakron.edu

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A Moderated, Scored Debate:  
What is the Role of Lecture in Teaching Social Studies?

Elliot Georgiadis  
The University of Akron  
Honors Research Project

In September of 2014, the Ohio Council for the Social Studies had their yearly conference which was themed, *Civil Literacy: Taking Informed Action*. It emphasized the need for civic education as well as ensuring teachers provide the knowledge, attitudes, and skills students require to, “mature and grow into their role as informed, engaged, and contributing members of our republic and the market place.” This theme also aligned with the Council’s mission to support the social studies teaching professionals and promote standards that will help them reach the goal of “*Educating Ohio’s Citizens for Tomorrow’s World*.” My contribution to this event was through planning and participating in a moderated and scored debate that dealt with ideas concerning what kind of role, if any, lecture had in teaching social studies.

The overall focus of the session was to look at the ways in which students are traditionally taught in the social studies and encourage a discussion on the use of alternative methods. So the goal was not only to engage in a substantive conversation concerning appropriate disciplinary tools and instructional strategies (i.e. lecture), but also to model what a moderated, scored debate looks like to our audience of teachers. In-class debates are one of many tools at a teacher’s disposal that encourage collaborative thinking and creativity. When talking about varying classroom strategies, debates can be a valuable option available to educators. Steven Nolan (2012), a Youth Education Leader at the English-Speaking Union, has worked with training programs that teach educators how to implement this kind of strategy for years. Beyond the organization and research strategies gained, he says debates, “also present an opportunity to have your students engage with the material they are studying in different ways, forming and deconstructing both the

opinions of others, and their own.” (Nolan, 2012) His statement adds to the positives of incorporating this into one’s curriculum.

For our debate, the resolved statement was as follows: “Teacher Lecture should take precedent over other instructional strategies when teaching history.” The developer of this program was Dr. Brad Maguth, a professor at the University of Akron in the Department of Curricular and Instructional Studies. The other participants were Bethany Vosburg-Bleum, a professor in the Department of Education at Otterbein University, and her middle-level social studies student, Billy Oiler. Both Mr. Oiler and I (a secondary social studies student) were to be the ones planning and participating in the debate, and working collaboratively with our respective professors on our arguments. We also collaborated together as a group to finalize the structure of the session. I took the affirmative, choosing to argue in support of the statement (e.g. lecture).

While many educators adamantly believe that lecture is a poor, ineffective way of teaching students, and should be dropped from classroom practices altogether, I still believed there was something to be said for the idea of teacher-based instruction. This is why I chose to take on the challenge of, to put it quite simply, defending something so many despise. Is it truly possible for learning to be entirely student centered without direction from the teacher? And if so, is it completely without fault? These are a few of the questions I answer throughout the debate as I attempt to defend the idea of, “good lecture.”

Below, I am including a transcription of the debate as it happened on September 30<sup>th</sup>. You’ll notice that while Mr. Oiler’s research and commentary are in opposition to using lecture in teaching the social studies, I draw from research in support of good teaching – which includes good lecture. Please note that all italicized text denotes speaker,

Mr. Billy Oiler. Also, in the appendix I've included a copy of the structured debate format as well as the scoring devise used during the debate to determine a winner.

A. Introduction

-Affirmative (3 min): Hello. My name is Elliot Georgiadis and I will be speaking in support of the proposed statement . . . Sounds like I am asking for trouble doesn't it? Well what I am really going to be asking, is for you all in the audience to be open to maybe changing some of your ideas about what it is you typically associate with the word "lecture". I believe the way for students to be most successful on their path of learning *is* to be guided by a knowledgeable, charismatic, and caring educator. Now this does not mean a teacher spoon-feeding students information while speaking from a PowerPoint for 45 minutes, which is a typical lecture scenario. No, that is not what I stand for. What I do stand for is the idea of positive, teacher-lead instruction. I am in defense of good lecturing. And that is what I will be speaking on today. This idea of good lecturing was actually written about in *Social Education* by Jason Stacy. As a professor who supports and practices interactive lecturing, his ideas have been both admired and criticized. While I cannot even say whether or not I 100% agree with his views, I know I do believe there is a version of lecturing that exists and can and should be used in the classroom. The hurdle to overcome here is re-structuring what we believe good lecturing to be, and what we believe good lecturing can achieve. If used appropriately, it can have tremendous results and help students be successful learners.

-Constructive (3 min): *Teacher Lecture should not take precedent over other instructional strategies when teaching history. Lecture and teacher centered instruction is exactly that, it is a teacher centered method, not student centered. Lecture is a passive learning experience. Michael McCurry notes that modern brain science suggests that human beings are not wired to learn passively (McCurry's Corner). Lecture was first known to be used in medieval Europe in the 11th century due to education limitations of the time period (The History Guide). Technology has changed over time and educators have a variety of resources at their disposal, and they need to be utilized. Engaging students during lectures is difficult to attain because of short attention spans, especially with kinesthetic learners. The constructivist model of learning views the teacher's role as the "guide on the side". As teachers, it is okay to direct and facilitate learners in instruction but it is not okay dictate instruction to the learners. Dr. Maguth has helped us define what exactly lecture is. I found another appropriate definition. The youth regulated website Urban dictionary defines lecture as, the art of transferring information from the notes of the lecturer to the notes of the students without passing through the minds of either. (Urban Dictionary) This definition of the term seems more accurate.*

## B. Body

### -Arguments

-Affirmative (4 minutes): As I have said, I am in defense of good lecturing. What does that look like? Good lecturing actually allows the opportunity for student discussion, inquiry, and reflection. This happens by

the teacher taking on not only a leadership role in learning, but a facilitator role as well. In interactive lecture, opportunities for student involvement are built into the lesson plan. The teacher allows time for student discussion, questions, reflection, and application. In doing so, the teacher can ensure that students have the proper knowledge base needed to expand their learning to the next level and do so with the correct information at hand. They are able to oversee the process, guide students, answer questions and correct inaccuracies right then and there.

The final and most important aspect is this . . . interactive lecturing requires a charismatic, energetic, and enthusiastic teacher. While we hope that is what we can always expect from educators, we have all seen examples of those who just give straightforward, monotone presentations. Because just as with anything else, this is something that can be done correctly, but also something that can be done poorly. To avoid what we don't want to see, have we ever thought the focus shouldn't be on discouraging educators to use this kind of teaching as a tool in the classroom but rather on teaching them how to use it properly? There is an art to storytelling, and we in the social studies curriculum have a unique opportunity to do just that. So much of the time our field is thought of as simplistic and boring, nothing more than memorizing people, places, and events. But obviously, we know it is much more than that.

We share with students information about diversity, religion, and the rich cultures of the world; which are things that make us wonderfully unique, yet similar at the same time. We open their eyes to things around them,

broadening their horizons and enriching their knowledge of the globe. We get to educate students on events that have had a profound impact on their lives today. Showing them who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. We strive to prepare them to be active and engage citizens of their community, and give them the knowledge and skill set it takes to be prepared for an ever-changing society. Any person can recite facts, but it takes a true enthusiast to tell a story and prepare the leaders of tomorrow.

Yet, of course, teacher discretion for this type of tool is key. There needs to be a balance present – knowing how long to speak, how long to listen, and how long to facilitate can only come from experience and personal knowledge regarding what it is your particular students need. Beyond that, being able to captivate and hold an audience's attention is a challenge that maybe not all are suited for. And unfortunately, it is these educators that have given "lecture" a bad name. To quote a professor of Molloy College in New York, "Lecturing is not power point script reading. It is actually writing the essence of history from one's own perspective and then relating it to student comprehension and learning." (Howlett, 2010) Even though I believe that to be true, it seems we have allowed the idea of lazy teaching to perpetually exist in connection with lecture. Lecture should be used as a form of organized information delivery, and can be done in an exciting and beneficial way.

-Constructive (4 minutes): *Lecture is no longer an appropriate method of instruction in today's ever changing, increasingly global, and*

*exceedingly technological world. I agree that lecture still has its benefits, be them few and far between, but I disagree that it should be a relied upon method of instruction. Students need to be prepared to succeed in the real world and lectures simply do not allow educators the opportunity to do that. Dr. Sandi Mann suggests that almost 60% of students find at least half of their lectures boring. (The Guardian) It is understood that some academic content may be "boring" by nature; it is the teacher's responsibility to add relevance and appeal to social studies topics. The importance of differentiated use of learning modalities in the classroom cannot be overstated. A study conducted at the University of Illinois notes that students learn best through movement and manipulation (learning styles). Lecture is based on a "teacher speak, student listen" mentality. The same study found that only 10 percent of students learn best verbally. If only 10% of our class is learning what about the other 90%? The National Teaching & Learning Forum cited a study in regards to human attention and retention that concluded students only have 10 to 18 minutes of optimal focus during lecture. (Time) In April of this year a journal edited by Bruce Alberts of the University of California meta-analyzed 225 studies that demonstrated active learning led to increases in examination rates by half of a letter grade when compared to learning driven by lecture (PNAS). As I stated before, lecture has been around since the 11th century, some records indicate dates as early as 1445 (The History Guide). Don't we think it's about time to say goodbye to this outdated form of education? For instance, how many of the facts I spoke of today, can you recall? Everyone ready for their test?*

-Rebuttal

- Constructive (4 minutes): *Students may not have an opportunity to question or disagree with what the teacher is explaining. Students with weak note taking skills may have trouble remembering and retaining what they are learning in the classroom.*
- Students may have poor organizational skills, and managing their notes may be a challenge.*
- Teachers may not get a true feel for how much their students understand due to limited opportunity for exchange.*
- Students may not pick up on verbal clues from the teacher and know when to write down valuable information and know when to listen to the teacher explain the information.*
- Flipped Classroom rebuttal: this method still takes the lecture out of the classroom environment to help student get more hands-on learning time and practice with content*

-Affirmative (4 minutes): My fellow future educator has of course made some good points, and they are ones to be expected. However I feel that what he is criticizing is not what I am supporting. Students should be a part of the learning process. They should be afforded the chance to respond, question, and analyze the information on their own time.

But here is a question I have, why does good teaching just mean “student-centered” instruction? When was it decided that the best way for a teacher to teach was to actually allow the students to do it themselves? Now

please do not misunderstand what I am saying, obviously as *educators*, our purpose is to *educate* students. And as students are a key part of our objective, as I said it is important for them to be part of the process. Yet too much time for independent learning without more clear teacher guidance can have its disadvantages.

For example, whether or not students are correctly interpreting information is a concern. When looking to expand understanding of a particular subject, it is crucial that their knowledge base is solid and accurate. If they do not have that foundation, then future learning could be jeopardized. Teachers play an important role in providing the correct information to students and ensuring that they have an appropriate grasp of the material. If you allow students to move directly from self-driven education to application, unchecked, you may find yourself spending a large amount of time needing to reteach things they should have already learned. Things then can become repetitive. Of course, repetition is a part of teaching. However there is a difference between review and application and unnecessary repeating of information. Students who have already gained an understanding will need to be pushed to expand that knowledge in new ways, but you could have to take away from that time to catch up others.

Also, independent learning time can allow unmotivated students to somewhat drop off the grid if left to their own devices. Sometimes students need that extra push and direct encouragement from their teachers to achieve at the level they are truly capable of. Educators need to be aware of

how their students are learning and at what rate they are absorbing information, therefor requiring more of a direct involvement in their education.

This is why good lecturing, the kind that allows interactive learning under the guidance of the teacher, can be so beneficial for a classroom of varied learners. It tries to meet the needs of everyone. While audio and visual needs are met through delivery of information, it also allows for hands on experience through the opportunity of interactive learning time. And again, a key part of this will always be in teacher delivery, counting on the fact that the educator is well equipped and able to inspire excitement and intrigue out of their students.

#### D. Conclusion

-Affirmative (3 minutes): I do not believe "lecture" has a place in the classroom. The kind that does not engage students, does not involve students, and certainly does not benefit students. What I still do believe is the idea of good lecturing, or an interactive style of teacher-lead instruction. As educators it is our job to inspire our students, to share our passion for our subject and encourage creativity and enthusiasm. We get to share with them the story of the world, and including the idea of story telling along with the opportunity for self-discovery and the practice of real world applications can be such a wonderful and powerful thing, creating a truly wonderful learning environment.

That is what good lecture is, and that is what we should be teaching future educators. We need to change the things that stereotypically are associated with this form of teaching and encourage educators to play an active and positive role, rather than passive, in their students' learning. Because at the end of the day, we need to always do what is best for our students, keeping in mind that we are there to serve them. We are there to motivate them, to guide them, and provide them the best possible opportunities for success. If that is not our number one goal, then we have lost our way. Just because we have this idea of how we see ourselves allowing learning to be done in our classroom does not mean it is the only way, or the best way. We must continue to push ourselves to be better versions of who we are, so that we may better meet their needs.

*-Constructive (3 minutes): The biggest benefit of lecturing students is easy time management for the instructor because it requires less comprehensive lesson planning for the teacher. PowerPoint presentations are also "quick and easy" to prepare. What is the common theme to these benefits? They all benefit the teacher and NOT the student. Based on inquiry learning principles (<http://www.thirteen.org>), lecture should not be used as the main teaching method because students aren't given the opportunity to find the answers for themselves. Instead, the information is handed to them and it does not require deep thought. When students have a chance to find the information for them they are automatically engaged and then student's can be given the opportunity to share the information with their peers. This then creates an*

*opportunity for peers to collaborate to add or subtract info in order to make it more relevant. This leads to student's taking an active role in his or her own learning. Something direct lecture does not allow. Students must actively participate to achieve teacher expectations and create their own self-made goals. There are many alternatives to lecture and teacher-centered instruction, some examples are:*

- *Discussion Groups in which students actively learn from each other*
- *Socratic Seminars based on the thought that students are responsible for their learning.*
- *Role Play can add spice to a classroom and also improve on social aspects of the class as well.*
- *And of course, debates, that encourage exploration, much like we are doing here today.*

*In closing, lecture creates passive learners, it is not authentic and in most accounts, it's is boring to many students. Teaching efforts need to be focused on more effective methods. For social studies instruction, lecture is simply an appetizer, not the main course.*

#### A Reflection After My OCSS Presentation on the Role of Lecture

While the two-person judging panel appreciated my style, passion, and logic, a lack of statistical evidence supporting the pros of lecture caused my opponent to be named the winner. This shows what a great need there is still for more research on this topic. The role of lecture in the classroom is obviously a controversial topic and is one that many in the field of education have debated far beyond the example provided. Typically, the word has a

negative connotation to it; it is associated with a lackadaisical style of teaching where the instructor piles on the information to students without providing opportunities for discussion, feedback, or overall growth. However, the affirmative aimed to paint the picture of a different kind of lecture style of teaching, one that inspires all the things others say it does not. Someone who adequately describes this is Jason Stacy. Mentioned previously in the debate, he is an educator who published his findings in 2009 on the topic in an article entitled, *The Guide on the Stage: In Defense of Good Lecturing in the History Classroom*. In this article Stacy defended his idea of “good lecturing”, or what he considers a teaching style that engages students, challenges students, and motivates students. In his own experience, this is what has allowed his students to be most successful (Stacy, 2009).

Something Stacy mentions is Alison King’s writing entitled, “From the Sage on the Stage to the Guide on the Side”. King is someone who has served as a strong advocate for student-centered pedagogy, and her ideas have been influential in the way teachers are trained to instruct their students. In her article, she says that lecturing creates passive learners and, “. . . such a view is outdated and will not be effective for the twenty-first century, when individuals will be expected to think for themselves, pose and solve complex problems, and generally produce knowledge rather than reproduce it” (King, 1993). However, it would appear she neglected to think of the positives that varied strategy use has, which is what Stacy describes and promotes.

Another advocate for lecture style teaching is Mike O’Connell. One who also disagrees with the ideas expressed by King, and whose opinions Stacy uses to aid his argument, he is the author of *The Sage for the Ages*, published in 2007. A high-school teacher turned college professor, O’Connell described the challenges he faced as the

education culture shifted from lecture to student-centered instruction. He viewed small group projects or peer-review time as a sign that a teacher was overworked and simply not up to the challenging task of teaching (O'Connell, 2007). While he admitted that might be a bit harsh, he stuck by his assessment. He did because to him, that is the job he was hired to do; his job was to stand in front of his students and educate them with gusto, passing down what information he possesses to them. He described the ideal sage as a professor who is knowledgeable and worldly, clear and concise in their reasoning, captivating of their audience to the point that they hang on every word they say (O'Connell, 2007). O'Connell then ended with this question, "If Will Rogers or Robert Frost or Margaret Atwood came to your campus as a guest speaker, how would you and your students feel if, after five minutes of introductory remarks, one of them said, "Now let's all divide up into small groups for further discussion?" (O'Connell, 2007)

Stacy and O'Connell make some excellent points to support their argument that lecture can and should be how educators teach in the classroom. Others who have studied this style of teaching and its effects more closely are Hardy Ernst and Kay Colthorpe. In 2007 they published their study entitled, *The Efficacy of Interactive Lecturing for Students with Diverse Science Backgrounds*, which highlighted the potential success that can come from using lecture. The two found when a lesson began with a ten to twenty minute lecture followed by small group and whole class discussion, there was a 20% increase in test scores (Colthorpe & Ernst, 2007). So why do so many adamantly stand against it?

The problem is this: people have a misconception about what lecture is, or at least, what it can be. Society has allowed the negative stereotypes to perpetually be what this teaching style is defined as. The unfortunate reality is that bad teachers have given it a bad

rap. Just as with anything else, it can be done well, or it can be done poorly. However, something that can be done to address this problem is shifting what the focus is. Rather than placing emphasis on refraining from using this style, educators should be taught how to use it properly. Nothing can ever truly be fixed if a negative cycle is continually allowed to repeat itself. Lecture is a tool and good lecture is a great tool, and it is one that should be used. This is a statement that can ring particularly true when speaking in regards to the social sciences.

Social studies educators continue to advance their profession as the world places an increasing demand on students. They must always be reflective and search for new ways to stay current, while at the same time providing students opportunities to be successful individuals. This is because they are tasked with preparing the citizens of tomorrow. Social studies educators teach students about the world around them. They teach them how people, events, religion, and culture have influenced one another, bringing them together to create the world they live in today. They explain how society was built, how it functions, and the ways that individuals are expected to be a part of it. Above all, they have the unique and wonderful opportunity to be storytellers, enlightening students in a creative and charismatic way. Good lecturing is a wonderful way to do just that, which is why it can have a positive use in this subject field.

A final point Stacy makes that is worth mentioning is, "It is wrong to assume that certain methods of teaching are inherently poor pedagogy, or, for that matter, to go through the motions of carrying out best practices without considering the ways in which practices (even those supposedly the best) can be executed poorly" (Stacy, 2009). Why is it assumed that any one strategy is better than another? At the end of the day, it is the

responsibility of the individual educator to be able to assess their own students and meet their needs. What may work for a teacher in California may not work for a teacher in Ohio, which is why all practices should be examined and reflected upon after use. Regardless of how educators choose to teach, their ultimate goal is to help students be the most successful they can be, by whatever means necessary.

#### Moving Forward From My OCSS Experience

This debate, more than anything else, made me think more deeply about my future as an education professional. As I considered and researched the different ways in which I could teach my students someday, I had to think about what kind of teacher I wanted to be and ask myself this: What did I hope for my students? What did I want their attitudes about coming to class to be, how did I want them to feel during class, and most importantly, what did I want them to remember even long after class was over? I have now solidified my ideas about how I would answer these questions through this experience. I want to play an active role in my students' education. I want to inspire creativity, hard work, and a passion for learning. I want to create an environment where students feel comfortable voicing their opinion, asking questions, and have the freedom to apply what they have learned in new ways. Ultimately, I hope to use my enthusiasm for the subject to spark their enthusiasm. To do this, I know I will use an interactive style of lecture, and am confident in my ability to do so in a positive way.

Beyond the debate and preparation for it, there were so many other valuable things to take away from the experience. The information gained while attending was truly valuable, and in just a short amount of time I learned how to better serve students and give them the best possible opportunities for success. For example, one of the other sessions I

attended had to do with economic education and how we teach our students in the area of financial literacy. Learning life skills such as how to balance a checkbook or manage a bank account, are critical components to citizenship education. This particular meeting provided more information on how the State of Ohio addresses the field of economics in our curriculum, while also providing many great resources available to educators to use as a tool in the classroom.

Finally, attending and participating in the conference allowed me to be reflective on my time at the University of Akron, particularly, with regards to the College of Education. From beginning to end, it has been a wonderful journey. I have grown in my knowledge of the education profession and have been able to develop my own ideas on management styles, forms of assessment, and behavioral management plans. But more than that, I have had countless opportunities to put what I have learned to practice. Having so many meaningful interactions with students has been incredible, and I have learned things that will I remember throughout my career. I feel more than adequately prepared to enter the next chapter of my life because of the guidance I have received, and for which I am forever grateful.

## References

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### OCSS Debate Overview and Format

**Title:** A Moderated, Scored Debate: What is the Role of Lecture in Teaching Social Studies?

**Session Description (The abstract should include the content and purpose of the session. Description must be 30 words or less as it will be printed in the conference program.) \***

This session will be formatted as a scored, moderated debate between two scholars on the role of teacher lecture when teaching social studies.

**Resources Needed: Stop Watch, Notecards, Teacher Handouts- Rubric and Resources; Recruit and Train Two Judges Ahead of Time**

#### Overview:

1. Introduction: Bethany (3 mins.)

-Welcome & Introduction of Participants

-Resolved Statement: **“Teacher Lecture should take precedent over other instructional strategies when teaching history”**

-Rationale and Importance of Debates (pedagogically and content)

2. The Debate Moderator: Brad (3 mins.)

-This is but one example in how teachers can arrange debates in the social studies classroom

-The debate format & structure described (see below)

-Four selected audience members will be asked to score the debate using a provided rubric.

-Debate is associated with “teacher-centered instruction”, “Sage of the Stage”

-Defined: An exposition of a given subject delivered by a teacher to advance student understanding.

2. The Debate (20 mins.): Elliot & Billy

-As the debate begins the moderator will keep time and keep the debate on script. Moderator will raise hand at 30 second warning.

A. Introduction

-Affirmative (2 min): Elliot

-Negative (2 min): Billy

B. Body

-Arguments

-Affirmative (3 minutes): Elliot

- Negative (3 minutes): Billy

-Rebuttal

- Negative (3 minutes): Billy

-Affirmative (3 minutes): Elliot

D. Conclusion

-Affirmative (2 minutes): Elliot

- Negative (2 minutes): Billy

3. Scoring the Debate (5 mins.) & Audience Reflection:

-Two selected audience members will use the provided debate assessment tool during the debate to score the debate (See below).

-While judges are deliberating, audience members will write a question on their provided index card concerning A. The Role of Lecture in Social Studies, B. The Role of Debates in Teaching Social Studies

-Judges will share how they scored the debate.

Affirmative	Negative	
<b>Team Member Names</b>		
<i>Introduction</i>	Stated Name and Greets Opponent	
	Stated Team's Position	
	Defined Key Terms	
	Stated Thesis	
<i>Body (Argument &amp; Rebuttal)</i>	Described Controversial Issue	
	Stated points of agreement and disagreement	
	Supporting Evidence 1 from literature	
	Supporting Evidence 2 from literature	
	Supporting Evidence 3 from literature	
<i>Conclusion</i>	Summarizes position	
	Says Thank You	
<b>TOTALS</b>		

**X** = This component was entirely demonstrated (2 points)

 = The component was partially demonstrated (1 point)

4. Reflection (17 mins.) and Q&A

-Billy and Elliot will present what it's like to participate in a debate (the time/resources in planning & what it was like debating)

-Audience members will be allowed to comment on and ask questions pertaining to the use of debates in the social studies.

5. Conclusion (2 mins.)