

Academic Debate: Improving Student Performance One Speech at a Time

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Abstract:

I study the introduction of a compulsory argumentation and debate program into Czech high school curricula. I measure the impact of the program on three main outcomes of interest. First, critical thinking, as measured by scores on a standardized test of general academic aptitude (OSP in Czech) and students' ability to analyse news articles. Second, competitiveness, as measured by self-reports and the standard Niederle and Vesterlund competitiveness task. Third, behavior towards people who disagree with the student, as measured by a variation of a prisoner's dilemma while being paired with a person who reports disagreement on items from the European Values Survey. I hypothesize that regular debating makes students better thinkers, more competitive, yet also more tolerant and trusting of people who hold opposing views.

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