Improvisation in Debates

A.Goal of the lesson
Debaters learn how to respond to unexpected contributions from the other side and get comfortable responding to Points of Information

B.Activities

Feel free to pick a few of these exercises, they are ranked in order from least to most-challenging.

Warm-ups and thinking on your feet (15 min)
Goal: to get the participants comfortable with improvising and changing gears.

1. Count to 3 [instructor always shows each step before participants do the step] [5 mins]
   a. Participants are instructed to form pairs. Pairs count from 1-3 and then 1-3, with each participant counting ahead. So A: 1, B: 2, A: 3, B: 1 [etc.]
   b. After 1 minute, participants are instructed to swap out „1" for a hand-clap
   c. After 2 minutes, participants are instructed to swap out „2" for a finger snap
   d. After 3 minutes, participants are instructed to swap out „3" for a foot stamp
2. Any Questions? [10 mins]
   . Students from 2 groups. Groups are standing in a line towards another.
   a. The instructor gives them a setting (the beach, the mall, parliament, etc.)
   b. The first student has to ask a question. Students can only ask questions and cannot say more than one sentence. If you give an answer instead, your place gets taken by the person behind you.
   c. Switch settings every 3-4 person switches and complete 1-2 cycles

Points of Information Storm (20-30 min, depending on amount of repetitions)

This exercise can be done with multiple small groups if you have a larger group.
a. Pick one (or more) participants and give them a motion. The speaker needs to prepare a Prime Minister speech of 5 minutes in 10 minutes.
b. Other participants try to come up with many PoIs as possible to ask the PM.
c. The PM starts giving a speech. Every minute the instructor claps. Students need to immediatedly offer PoIs and the speaker needs to accept a PoI. The instructor does not clap if the speaker is still answering a PoI.
d. If time allows, you can have a second and third PM repeat the process.
e. Debrief: ask the PM how it felt to receive so many PoIs. Which response was best? Why? Which response needed more work? Why? Which PoI was best? Why?

Schizophrenic Debate (40 mins)

a.   Divide the classes in debate teams of 2. 2 teams (4 participants) form a full debate. If needed, you can make 2 teams of 3 (Whip speakers become unique speakers).

b.   Explain the rules of the debate. The debate will follow: Prime Minister (5 minutes) (speaker 1 of team A) – Leader of Opposition (5 minutes) (speaker 1 of team B) – Deputy Prime Minister (5 minutes) (Speaker 2 of Team **B**) – Deputy Leader of Opposition (5 minutes) (Speaker 2 of Team **A**) – Opposition Whip (3 minutes) (Speaker 1 of Team **A**) – Proposition Whip (3 minutes) (Speaker 1 of Team **B**).

c.   Judging rules are standard for this debate, with the addition that judges are instructed at how many contributions each team make into the debate, not necessarily whether they believe proposition or opposition wins the round.

d.   Debrief: how did preparing both sides influence preparation time? How did this influence preparing your speech and choosing which arguments to bring?

Preparing both sides (time of a standard debate in your format)

a.   Divide the group in teams following your standard debate rules and give the motions, but do not give the sides yet.

b.   In between 1-5 minutes before prep time is over you announce the sides.

c.   Proceed and judge the debate in a regular fashion.

d.   Debrief: ask participants how they felt not being able to prepare one side. What strategies did they employ? What benefits and drawbacks did they receive?

Multiple Motion Prep (time of a standard debate in your format)

a.   Divide the group in teams following your standard debate rules and give two motions that are similar to one another. (For instance: THW allow beastiality and THW ban gambling are both about banning or allowing behaviour) Give students a standard prep time, but do not tell them which motion you are going to debate.

b.   In between 1-5 minutes before prep time is over, contingent on students' ability, announce which motion will be run for the debate.

c.   Proceed and judge the debate in a regular fashion.

d.   Debrief: ask participants how they felt having to prepare multiple motions. What strategies did they employ? What benefits and drawbacks did they receive?

Impromptu Debate (time of a standard debate in your format)

a.   Set-up a debate without prep time, and dependent on the level of the students set the debate up as follows:

a.   Have the instructor give a pre-prepared Prime Minister speech;

b.   Clue one student in beforehand and have them give a pre-prepared Prime Minister speech;

c.   Give 1-5 minute of prep time to the first team that gets to speak.

b.   Proceed and judge the debate in a regular fashion.

c.   Debrief: ask participants how they felt having no chance to prepare in advance. What strategies did they employ? What benefits and drawbacks did they receive?

C. Preparation

Prepare motions needed for the exercises you are doing. You should consider easier motions (also due to level of your debaters), but not too easy so improvisation is challenging enough. For example content-heavy motions like „THBT military intervention in Yemen is neccessary" are too much for such short time for preparation, but motions like „THBT cats are better pets than dogs" is not challenging enough in terms of on-the-spot argument-creation.

D. Hints

These exercises all let a student prepare and then provide twists that keep them on their toes. Students will need to feel comfortable providing a basic speech and arguments before trying out these exercises. The activities introduce uncertainty and discomfort to students, so a baseline level of trust within the group is important. Focus on providing positive feedback only. So many basics may go wrong during these exercises that critical feedback can be too deflationary.

E. Verification

For group
-Do not forget to evaluate any exercise you choose. Try to gather feelings of debaters and information they learnt about themselves or could be used after the lesson.

For trainer:
- What activity/example/discussion produced best results at this lesson?
- What was the biggest problem during the lesson? How can I avoid/prevent it in future?
- Did I avoid/prevent the biggest problem which occured the last time? If no, why?