



Colleagues at CHS modeling the strategy



CHS seniors employing the strategy

### **Lessons Learned, Lessons Shared: Try a Pinwheel Debate!**

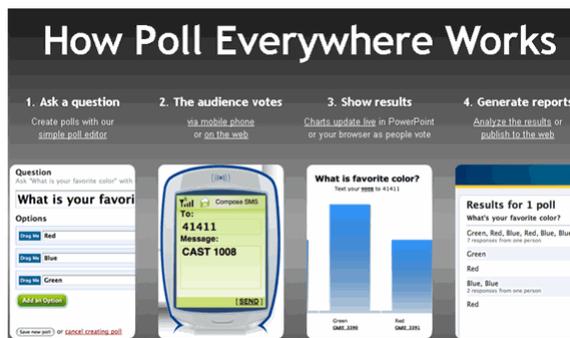
During the Dallas conference, state ToYs were treated to some great breakout sessions facilitated by former national ToYs. These people were great teachers and inspirational both in what they had to say and how they said it.

A great technique used during a session was the “Pinwheel Debate” technique. This technique has numerous opportunities for application at various grade-levels and in different content areas. In this approach, four chairs are set facing one another. Larger groups are divided into four subgroups to represent various perspectives on a topic or text, in our case in Dallas we used educational issues. A representative from each subgroup takes turns in the “hot seat” to make a point and then rotates in and out to allow someone else to speak. As I participated in this activity, I thought to myself “I am stealing this idea!”

When I returned to RI and my class room, I was inspired to teach my EEP Honors English 12 class various schools of literary criticism using this technique. I provided some background information and a practice analytical activity for homework and then I invited four colleagues to visit my class to model the activity for students. Our history department chair spoke from a historicist view; the AP Psychology teacher represented the psychoanalytic approach. Colleagues from the English Dept. represented feminist and Marxist perspectives. Students were asked to align themselves with a preferred approach, to listen to the debate and record key points made while my colleagues discussed issues such as the Super Bowl, the 2012 Presidential Election, and then Lady Macbeth from various vantage points. Students very favorably received the activity! They loved witnessing their teachers debating one another. Several of them jumped in to “help” the cause. The next step of course was to have the students participate in a pinwheel debate. After seeing the format modeled for them, students were assigned a selection from Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant” to read for homework.

I started the class by first having students brainstorm responses to the text’s events from various perspectives: that of the elephant, Orwell, a member of the British Raj, and a Burmese citizen. Then students used the pinwheel debate format to discuss and challenge one another on issues in the text. The elephant opened with a question for Orwell, “Why did you have to shoot me?” and the conversation flew from there. When the debate eventually began to flag, students were then asked to “kick things up a notch” by presenting views on the text from the vantage points of various schools of literary criticism. WOW!

Maria Montessori has said that the best marker of success for teachers is when the children are working as if we don’t exist. This technique allowed me to experience such a moment. Students were operating at the highest order of thinking, and the discussion was entirely student-driven and cooperative in nature. I merely nudged the discourse occasionally.



### Lessons Learned, Lessons Shared: Check Out “Poll Everywhere”

As I am sure most of us do, I work in a school where students are not allowed to use cell phones during the school day. IF they could use them, this website, “Poll Everywhere,” would be something I would often use in my instruction, especially as formative assessments. Do you know the site?

I was first introduced to this site at the ToY Conference in Dallas. It is a tool I have since used with faculty members in Coventry and during some of my professional development presentations and keynote addresses delivered as 2012 RI Teacher of the Year. It allows your audience to provide feedback on issues or to answer questions simply by using text features on their phone. Results are instantaneous and I have found can really advance discussions and help to build consensus with colleagues.