

Devil's Advocate Ball

At the heart of my teaching philosophy is the conviction that one certain way to learn is to see the world from someone else's perspective. Students are often comfortable sharing *their own* opinions in the classroom so I make an effort to get students to present ideas that are not their own. Another reason this exercise is useful is because I often see students struggle with conflict during discussions. At times, everyone seems to agree, even during very controversial topic discussions. Students may agree with each other to conserve harmony in the classroom, avoid conflict with others, or due to pressure to conform. This type of discussion rarely leads to critical thinking. However, I understand that it is socially costly for students to go against an entire group of people who agree. In order to allow students to disagree with no social costs I throw a foam "devil's advocate" ball, which signals to the student who catches it that they have to immediately assume the opposite position in their response. At first, students struggle with this but eventually they begin to enjoy perspective-taking and sometimes even ask for the ball to be thrown their way!