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Using Structured Academic Controversies in the Social Studies Classroom

Edward Nathan and Christine Kim-Eng Lee

Abstract

This article explores the use of Structured Academic Controversies (SAC) in the teaching of secondary Social Studies. Social Studies as a subject abounds with many controversial issues ranging from local issues such as Singapore's separation from Malaysia and other issues like conflicts in Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland and the United Nations as a world organisation. An example of a Social Studies lesson which has been trialed in a neighbourhood school will be provided. Implications for the use of SAC in Social Studies classrooms will also be discussed.

Introduction

Since the introduction of Social Studies as a compulsory and examinable subject at "O" levels, Social Studies teachers have had to face a slew of issues and problems. Besides promoting National Education, Thinking Skills and IT, the subject also hopes to broaden our students' knowledge about the world around them. Teachers have to deal with new content, a lot of which is different from their normal core subjects like Geography and History which they were trained for. The current practice among many teachers is the "safe", though boring, teacher-centred "chalk-and-talk" method in teaching the subject. This prevalent method used in teaching Social Studies has led many students to perceive the subject as boring and difficult to understand.

In a small survey of 43 students in a secondary school in Singapore, the students identified the following three most common problems in the subject:

Subject is boring/not interesting or does not interest them	57.1%
The workload for the subject is too heavy	11.9%
The subject is too difficult	9.5%

While direct teaching has its place, particularly in helping students learn and understand difficult concepts and important content, the constant use of such pedagogy will only appeal to a limited group of students in the Social Studies classroom. Clearly, Social Studies teachers have to consider alternative ways of

teaching Social Studies other than the “chalk and talk” method in order to improve students’ perception of and generate interest in the learning of the subject. We suggest the use of Structured Academic Controversy (SAC), a cooperative learning strategy as it holds much promise in helping Social Studies teachers deal with the need to generate student interest and at the same time teach for understanding and mastery of Social Studies concepts.

What is Structured Academic Controversy?

Structured Academic Controversy, developed by Johnson & Johnson (1992) to promote thinking in classrooms, comprises the following steps:

1. *Research and prepare a position*

Students work in pairs to develop an assigned position (a pro or a con position), learn relevant information on it, and plan how to best present the case to a pair with a different position. This stage also involves *case building* where pairs of students with the same perspective compare notes to build up their positions.

2. *Present and advocate their position*

At this stage, each pair takes turns to make a presentation of their given perspective with each member of the presenting pair participating. Students are instructed to be as persuasive as possible. In the meantime, the opposing pair is encouraged to take notes, listen carefully to learn the information being presented to them, and clarify anything they do not understand.

3. *Engage in open discussion, refute the opposing position and rebut attacks on their own position*

Students are encouraged to argue forcefully and persuasively for their position, presenting as many facts as possible to support their position. They also attempt to refute the arguments presented by the opposing pair. They are encouraged to assess the different positions based on the logic of the arguments and the extent of supporting evidence.

4. *Reverse perspective*

At this stage, the pairs drop their original perspective, and reverse positions with the other pair. In arguing the reversed positions, pairs are encouraged to include points which the earlier pair did not bring up. The objective of this stage is to aim for understanding and knowledge of the issue from different perspectives simultaneously.

5. *Synthesise and integrate the best evidence and reasoning into a joint position*

At this stage, the four members of the group now drop all debate and advocacy. Instead, they synthesise and integrate all that they have learnt into a conclusion, which is summarised into a joint position which all members can agree on, or at the very least, are satisfied with.

In an SAC, a group of students is confronted with a conceptual conflict as a result of a planned process whereby their beliefs, ideas and perceptions of an issue are tested with evidence of a diametrically opposite perspective. It has been widely proposed that conflict produces an inclination to search for the truth. At this stage, the role of collaborative skills is crucial if negative results, where little or no learning occurs, are to be avoided. In a conflict, the cognitive structure of a person involved in a conflict shifts and moves from one level of cognitive reasoning to another higher level (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1996). This is of course, provided that the major obstacles in such transitions are overcome or at least minimised.

One of the many initial problems that Social Studies teachers face in the classroom when teaching the subject is encouraging the idea that there is no "right answer" to any question but varying degrees of agreement or disagreement. Students, when faced with this problem, have great difficulty also in trying to view any problem or issue from different perspectives. The assessment of Social Studies, both in the Source-Based Questions as well as the Structured Essay questions reward students who are able to provide a balanced view while looking at different alternative viewpoints. In the SAC, students have to drop the egocentric stance taken in debating a conflict to accommodate others' perspectives. This involves a reorganisation of their current cognitive structures in order to incorporate the views of others. This constructivist view of learning, promoted first by Jerome Bruner and also by the social-cultural learning theory of Vygotsky (Patsula, 1999) is ideal for the Social Studies classroom, where students enter with their own experiences and understanding of an issue and leave with a broader and deeper understanding of the issue as a result (Vermette & Foote, 2001).

However, there are some who fear the use of conflict as it can have "negative" results, when students engage in an activity where winning one's argument is the measure of success. In the normal classroom, when faced with conflicting and opposite perspectives, the most common response of a student would be to engage in a debate with another holding a different perspective. However, in a debate, there is only one winner in any outcome (a win-lose situation), that is, the group that has proved to have argued its position the most coherently and logically. In SACs, the "win-lose" outcome of most controversies is avoided. One key feature of the SAC is that the final result must be one where all parties involved are satisfied with the outcome (a "win-win" situation). Another key feature of the SAC is the need to accommodate different perspectives and points of view. The whole structure of the SAC therefore promises greater and higher levels of learning, thinking and understanding.

The SAC is also a cooperative learning activity. The benefits of cooperative learning versus competitive learning or individualistic learning classroom environments are well documented (Johnson *et al.*, 1981). SACs exhibit the five basic elements of true cooperative learning arrangements that

distinguish it from other small group instructional activities and strategies. These are:

1. *Positive Interdependence*
Each member of the group reinforces the success of other members, and mutual encouragement is promoted.
2. *Individual Accountability*
In an SAC, the success of each group of students is dependent of the roles played by each member of the group. Failure of one member very often may lead to less than desirable results.
3. *Face-to-face Promotive Interaction*
Students have to work with each other, and cooperate to ensure that the various steps of the SAC are successfully completed and fulfilled.
4. *The Use of Teamwork Skills*
Teamwork skills, such as conflict management, are vital not only to the success of the activity, but also to minimise, and if possible eliminate, the negative consequences likely to come about from such an activity.
5. *Group Processing*
This requires members to process together the information given to them and come to a mutually acceptable and agreed position (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1998).

The level and quality of learning however, in SACs has been shown to be greater than other learning activities commonly carried out in the classroom such as debates, concurrence seeking and individualistic learning.

Exploring the Use of Structured Academic Controversy in a Social Studies Lesson

An SAC lesson was developed around an issue recommended in the Social Studies Syllabus for schools. This issue focused on the internal conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. It was tried out in a neighbourhood school for a Secondary 3 Express class of moderate ability. The question presented to the class was, "Are the Tamil Tigers freedom fighters or terrorists?" The students were grouped into fours, with each pair researching one of two different perspectives. Teaching the students how to manage conflicts in group discussion was as important as planning and sourcing for materials for the lesson. A pre-SAC lesson activity was also carried out to familiarise students with difficult terminology in the lesson, particularly the definitions of "freedom fighters" and "terrorists". Guided worksheets were also required for pupils to use to record their findings during the presentations by the groups representing the different perspectives.

Pre-Lesson Activities and Arrangements

In order for the SAC to be as effective as possible, it is necessary for teachers to prepare their classes for the activity. Since the activity consists in part of presentation and debates, as well as consensus seeking, it is important for teachers that pupils are taught the rules of conflict management (Stevahn *et al.*, 2002). These rules are based on the research and suggestions of Johnson, Johnson & Smith, (1998) and consist of the following:

1. I am critical of ideas, not people.
2. I focus on making the best decision possible, not on “winning”.
3. I encourage everyone to participate and master all the relevant information.
4. I listen to everyone’s ideas, even if I do not agree.
5. I restate (paraphrase) what someone has said if it is not clear.
6. I first bring out *all* the ideas and facts supporting both sides and then try to put them together in a way that makes sense.
7. I try to understand both sides of the issue.
8. I change my mind when evidence clearly indicates that I should do so.

These rules were written out and clearly displayed so that students, as well as the teachers, could use it for easy reference.

In addition, teachers also have important roles to play at different stages of the lesson development.

Step 1 — Pre-Instructional Role

1. Arranging the room(s) to be used during the SAC.
2. Specifying academic and controversy skills objectives.
3. Arranging the groups to maximise heterogeneity, and assign roles to students.
4. Planning the materials that would have sufficient information for the SAC and that would have a controversy with differing and fairly well-documented perspectives.

Step 2 — Orchestrating

1. Preparing the academic task for students to undertake.
2. Developing a cooperative learning environment in the classroom.
3. Discussing and emphasising the steps for the controversy.
4. Explaining the academic task at hand.
5. Specifying accountability, i.e. group or individual accountability.
6. Establishing the criteria for success and/or failure.
7. Making known to students involved in the SAC the desired behaviours expected of them, as well as the behaviours that are not welcome.
8. Structuring positive interdependence in the classroom, i.e. creating an environment where students find safety and comfort in participation and involvement.
9. Teaching conflict management skills and encouraging the use of the skills until students perform them automatically.

Step 3 — Monitoring and Intervening

1. Observing the interaction and behaviour of students.
2. Ensuring that students follow strictly the expected behaviours and procedures in the SAC, i.e. all students present, advocate, criticise and synthesise.
3. Intervening where appropriate to provide assistance and advice, and teach skills for effective conflict management and resolution, as well as managing controversy.
4. Ensuring a cooperative learning environment with characteristics of positive interdependence, the promotion of interaction between students and their participation, and encouraging the achievement of the social goals of SACs.
5. Providing closure at the end of the activity.

Step 4 — Evaluation and Processing

1. Evaluating the success of the SAC at the point of closure.
2. Evaluating and assessing individual and group learning.
3. Helping individuals and groups in processing group functioning and the success of using controversy skills.
4. Ensuring and promoting celebration of group and individual success.

The Lesson Plan¹

Subject	Social Studies
Level	Sec 3 Express
Topic in Syllabus	Sri Lanka
Duration	Two periods (45 min each)

SIOs

At the end of the lesson, pupils will be able to:

1. Explain the conflict in Sri Lanka, and the motivation behind the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government in the conflict.
2. Use sources to achieve a more insightful understanding of the opposing perspectives behind the conflict in Sri Lanka.
3. Construct an argument using evidence.

Prior lesson requirement

The pupil should be prepared in the following prior to engaging in an SAC:

1. Understanding of the content of the topic of Sri Lanka from the textbook and other reference materials.

¹We want to thank Ms Ng Hian Koon and Ms Sandra Kumar, teaching fellows from the Humanities and Social Studies Education Academic Group, National Institute of Education, for their invaluable input in the development of the lesson.

2. Understanding of the rules and steps involved in an SAC.
3. Some practice in perspective-taking.

Time	Description of Activities	
Pre-Lesson Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Procedures of Structured Academic Controversies explained ● Social rules of SACs discussed ● Prepared charts of social rules/SAC procedure displayed in class for reference ● Wordsplash on “What is a Terrorist?” and “What is a Freedom Fighter?” conducted in previous lesson; wordsplash displayed on class notice-board for reference ● Students have read Handouts A and B as homework as part of Step 1 which is to create their case 	
Time (min)	Description of Activities	Resources
15	<p><i>Introduction — Checking for understanding of the concept Freedom Fighters and Terrorists</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher explains that structured academic controversy will be used to debate this issue, which is, “Is the LTTE a Group of Freedom Fighters or a Group of Terrorists?” ● Teacher explains the procedure involved ● Pupils form groups of four comprising two pairs per group. Pairs take on perspectives A and B 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. OHTs/PPT on examples and non-examples of Terrorists and Freedom Fighters 2. Handouts A and B
10	<p><i>Step 2 — Strengthen Positions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Two similar pairs to work together to share their ideas and arguments to strengthen their positions ● Their ideas will be recorded in prepared worksheets 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Handouts A and B given to the students for homework 2. Share ideas found in worksheets 1A and 1B
15	<p><i>Step 3 — Present Case</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Each pair to present to the other pair ● The listening pair to record main points of the presentations using prepared worksheets. ● <i>Pair A presents to Pair B, and vice versa</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student Worksheet 2

(Continued)

Time (min)	Description of Activities	Resources
10	<p><i>Step 4 — Debate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students openly argue and support their stand using materials from their respective handouts 	
10	<p><i>Step 5 — Reverse Perspectives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each pair to reverse positions and prepare case • Each pair to present changed position to other pair 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students to be given Handouts A and B alternatively 2. Students record their observations and findings in worksheets 1A and 1B 3. Each pair to record findings in worksheet 2 as they listen to the presenting pair
10	<p><i>Step 6 — Group Consensus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups will drop positions and debate and come to a group consensus • They write their conclusions on mahjong paper which are then displayed for the rest of the class to see 	Mahjong paper, markers
10	<p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher invites contributions from different groups on their consensus. • Teacher sums up main points and purpose of activity in relation to answering structured essay questions 	
Post-lesson activity	<p>Pupils to respond to an SAC on the following topic: “The Tamil Tigers are terrorists.” How far do you agree? Explain your answer.</p>	

The handouts and worksheets developed for this lesson are included in Appendix 1.

Implications of the Use of SAC in Social Studies Classrooms

The benefits of using SACs are great. In Social Studies, the Levels of Response Marking Scheme (LORMS) rewards better quality answers which have a wider perspective of the issue or problem being discussed, i.e. answers that clearly show the ability to see or view an issue or problem from more than one perspective. The use of SAC in the Social Studies classroom therefore holds many advantages for teachers, including its emphasis on reaching a consensus agreed to by members of the group given opposing perspectives to an issue or problem.

In addition, the promotion of information mastery assists teachers in the teaching of new content required as part of the curriculum objectives of the Social Studies subject. This is of particular importance since much of a student's success in the subject is also based on the mastery of the content given within the prescribed text as well as outside the text. In the Structured Essay questions, the ability to describe the facts in detail is important in achieving a higher level of marks, in addition to being able to accept and accommodate different perspectives to the given issue or problem.

The advantage of instilling a positive attitude towards the subject, and the higher levels of achievement, productivity, creativity and quality problem-solving would also benefit teachers faced by a serious problem expressed by students who find the subject "boring" and of little interest and use to them, as indicated in the survey. The drive towards promoting creative and critical thinking skills is more than satisfied through the use of SACs in the Social Studies classroom.

If students can enjoy the activity significantly, and as a consequence, also pay more attention and show a higher level of commitment to the subject, this will very often lead to higher levels of performance in the subject as students invest greater effort and time willingly in the course of learning and studying for a subject which they find enjoyable and meaningful.

In addition, as one of the aims of the Social Studies curriculum is the teaching of higher-level thinking skills, the use of the SAC would be able to fulfil these aims and objectives of the curriculum. This is particularly so since the use of the SAC promotes higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, application, evaluation and synthesis.

The SAC also provides teachers with other additional advantages. Teachers are able to look after the psycho-emotional needs of students when establishing a less-threatening environment in the classrooms required for successful SACs. The teaching of conflict management skills would also aid students and help them develop life-long skills. Students who participated in the SAC found the activities different but enjoyable, and several indicated that they had enjoyed the opportunity given to them to mix with their peers.

On the negative side, the activity can generate a higher level of noise compared with other activities that can be carried out in the Social Studies classroom. Teachers, who are unused to higher noise levels in their classrooms or are uncomfortable with it, may find some difficulty in conducting SACs. For such teachers, it is recommended that SACs may have to be held in an enclosed room, or in a room away from the general classrooms of the school. Teachers must be comfortable with such classroom dynamics for the SAC to be run effectively, and for teachers and students both to gain the most from the SAC. As preparation for the SAC, teachers can use simple Kagan structures daily for short cooperative learning activities, such as Rally Robin, Timed-Pair Share and Talking Chips (Kagan, 1994) to encourage students to participate actively in the classroom by sharing their ideas and by listening to others.

At the same time, teachers should be aware of the time required for successful SACs to be conducted, and the required changes and modifications needed for SACs to be conducted in classes of lower ability students such as the Normal Academic classes. One way would be to simplify the sources and materials used for such classes to accommodate their learning abilities. Another would be to use the same set of sources and materials repeatedly but for different activities within the Social Studies curriculum so that students will be more familiar with the sources. A third possibility would be to run the activity over the course of several lessons to allow these students time to internalise the new information.

The Social Studies curriculum lends itself very well to developing SAC lessons. Teachers are free to choose materials from the prescribed texts or to choose materials sourced elsewhere, or both. This will allow teachers to not only cover the necessary content requirements of the subject, but to also encourage students to read beyond the prescribed texts for broader scope and greater depth.

Concluding Remarks

At this point, it should be noted that it is not the aim of this article to prescribe the use of SACs in all lessons, or even in the majority of lessons. It is simply suggested that teachers use SACs as part of the overall pedagogy for the teaching of Social Studies. It is the variety of well-planned and executed lessons that will engage our students and involve them in becoming self-directed and responsible learners, and to develop a learner-centred environment in our classroom.

Teachers, who have the responsibility to develop suitable materials for use in the SAC, can include materials found in the prescribed texts, so that the teaching of concepts and learning of content can be carried out simultaneously during an SAC. It is also obvious that the choice of suitable materials would involve adapting some of the more difficult sources so that students will have less difficulty in understanding them. It is possible therefore, for teachers to paraphrase more difficult words or phrases in the given sources to suit the language ability of the class concerned.

Structured Academic Controversy shows promise as a useful and effective pedagogical tool in Social Studies classrooms. It is our hope that more teachers will experiment with SAC and conduct effective SAC lessons as part of their overall strategy in the teaching of the subject.

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Associate Professor Christine Lee is Head of the Humanities and Social Studies Education Academic Group at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. She has been involved for many years in the professional preparation of secondary geography teachers and primary Social Studies teachers in Singapore. Christine completed her honours degree in Geography at the University of Singapore and obtained her Masters and Doctoral degrees in Curriculum and Teaching from the Teachers' College, Columbia University, USA. Her research interests are in cooperative learning, Social Studies education and ethnic relations at schools.

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Appendix 1

Handout A

(only a few sample sources are included here)

Are the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) a group of Freedom Fighters or a group of Terrorists?

Position A: The LTTE are terrorists.

Source A: Comments made by an American independent organisation to assist journalists, students and interested citizens in the United States and other countries to better understand the world and the foreign policy choices facing the United States and other governments.

Can terrorism be clearly defined?

Even though most people think they can reorganise terrorism when they see it, experts have had difficulty coming up with an ironclad definition. The State Department defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience”. In another useful attempt to produce a definition, Paul Pillar, a former deputy chief of the CIA’s Counterterrorist Center, argues that there are four key elements of terrorism:

It is premeditated — planned in advance, rather than an impulsive act of rage.

It is designed to change the existing political order.

It is aimed at civilians — not at military targets or combat-ready troops.

It is carried out by sub-national groups — not by the army of a country.

What is the difference between a terrorist and a freedom fighter?

Its tough to say, according to experts — largely because they are overlapping categories.

Terrorism is a tactic, and “freedom fighting” describes a motivation, so a person or group could be engaged in both at the same time. Experts say whether one calls a particular group “terrorist” or “freedom fighters” often largely depends on whether one thinks the group’s ends justify its violent means — which in turn, depends on one’s politics. For example, Palestinian suicide bombers are described as terrorists in Israel and in the United States, but many Arabs and Muslims and some Europeans view their attacks as a legitimate part of the struggle for Palestinian national liberation.

Source: <http://www.cfrterrorism.org/policy/guerilla.html>

Source B: Comments by John Bolt, a professor at the Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, 14 November 2001.

Terrorists or Freedom Fighters: What's the difference?

Let us apply this difference to terrorists and freedom fighters. The issue at hand is not whether fighters for a noble cause often act in cruel and destructive ways. Such actions, however, have as their goal acquiring or re-acquiring something valuable, something highly desired. This may be land, sovereignty, or political goals such as liberty or economic equality. Freedom fighters usually come from oppressed or marginalised groups that have been deprived of something important, such as a homeland, and their struggle to obtain it or gain it back.

This is not so with terrorism. Terrorists are less concerned with acquisition than they are with destruction. They are usually clever enough to cloak their motives by hijacking the popular will of an oppressed people, but their wrath is not appeased when they acquire what they want. The real goal of terrorist groups is not acquiring but destroying. Terrorism is thus qualitatively different from armed movement for freedom and liberty.

Source: <http://www.acton.org.ppolicy/comment/article.php?id=60>

Source C: The comments of a British newspaper, The Economist (UK), 10–16 February 1996.

“The trouble with Sri Lanka is that the would be splitters (secessionists), the Tamil Tigers, have failed to establish that even their own people, let alone a majority of Sri Lankans want to see the country broken up. Instead the Tigers are trying to achieve their end by violence. The Government, by contrast, has done its best to satisfy the reasonable demands of both Sri Lanka’s main ethnic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamils. It is time that this was more widely recognized, and the Tigers were seen for what they are: TERRORISTS. Peace is not the Tigers aim unless it comes with secession. It is certainly not the aim of their leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran. Time and again, most recently in December, he has rejected it when it was on offer. The evidence is that he much prefers killing to democracy and has no wish to test the opinion of the people in whose name he commits so much murder”.

Source: http://www.totse.com/en/politics/terrorists_and_freedom_fighters/lte1.html

Handout B

(only a few sample sources are included here)

Are the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) a group of Freedom Fighters or a group of Terrorists?

Position A: The LTTE are freedom fighters.

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Terrorism is a tactic, and “freedom fighting” describes a motivation, so a person or group could be engaged in both at the same time. Experts say whether one calls a particular group “terrorist” or “freedom fighters” often largely depends on whether one thinks the group’s ends justify its violent means — which in turn, depends on one’s politics. For example, Palestinian suicide bombers are described as terrorists in Israel and in the United States, but many Arabs and Muslims and some Europeans view their attacks as a legitimate part of the struggle for Palestinian national liberation.

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Source: <http://www.acton.org.ppolicy/comment/article.php?id=60>

Source C: Excerpts of comments made by Manivannan, Head of LTTE International Coordinating Office, Tamil Eelam.

Are the Liberation Tigers an organisation of terrorists?

The primary motive of the Sri Lankan Government's international propaganda is to portray the Liberation Tigers as a terrorist organisation and its war with the Sri Lankan armed forces as terrorist activities. Its principal objective is therefore to cause damage to the image of the Liberation Tigers in the outside world and thereby belittle the Eelam liberation cause.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is the national liberation movement of the Tamils. It is an organisation with a long history of the Tamil liberation struggle for the past 24 years. It is a national organisation with an infrastructure consisting of military, political, social, economic and legal institutions. It has been forced to resort to armed struggle after all the democratic and non-violent struggle of the Tamil people to win their legitimate rights had ended in failure. The LTTE had been recognised by both the Sri Lankan and Indian Governments at one time or another. And during the recent ceasefire, the Governments of Norway, Netherlands and Canada had recognised it as a national liberation movement and had volunteered their services as observers.

Source: http://www.totse.com/en/politics/terrorists_and_freedom_fighters/libtiger.html

Source D: The leader of the Tamil Tigers, Velupillai Pirapaharan, said this at an interview with *Sunday Magazine*, India, 11–17 March 1984.

Q: *How would you defend your movement from being called a “separatist” one, and that you are all not freedom fighters, but “terrorists”?*

A: It is wrong to call our movement “separatist”. We are fighting for independence based on the right to national self-determination of our people. Our struggle is for self-determination, for the restoration of our sovereignty in our homeland. We are not fighting for a division or separation of a country but rather, we are fighting to uphold the sacred right to live in freedom and dignity. In this sense, we are freedom fighters, not terrorists.

Source: http://www.eelam.com/interviews/leader_march_84.html

Student Worksheet 1A

Is the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam a group of Freedom Fighters or a group of terrorists?

Position A: The LTTE are terrorists.

As you research your position, you can use this form to take notes. In the first column, identify the reasons why you feel that the LTTE are terrorists. In the second column, write your interpretations and justify your stand.

Reasons why the LTTE is a group of terrorists	Supporting evidence

Student Worksheet 1B

Is the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam a group of Freedom Fighters or are they a group of terrorists?

Position B: The LTTE is a group of freedom fighters.

As you research your position, you can use this form to take notes. In the first column, identify the reasons why you feel that the LTTE is a group of freedom fighters. In the second column, write your interpretations and justify your stand.

Reasons why the LTTE is a group of freedom fighters	Supporting evidence

Student Worksheet 2

As you listen to your classmates presenting their positions, record the key points made by them in the first column below. You can also record your reactions to their points made in the second column below.

Main points	Your reactions

Student Worksheet 3

Reaching consensus

After considering the arguments raised from both sides, try to come to a common conclusion on whether the LTTE is a group of freedom fighters or a group of terrorists. Then weigh the factors according to what you would consider the most important reasons in this argument.

Position A — The LTTE are terrorists — main ideas	Ideas that might work for both	Position B — The LTTE are freedom fighters — main ideas