

Streitgespräch / Debate – An Instruction Guide

“Streitgespräche!” – in English “Debates!” – is an event format based on the Socratic method, by means of which insights are achieved through dialogue. It is a format that is exceptionally well suited for instruction. The fruits of the strenuous course work are shared with the public at an event at the end of the semester. Questions about a specific subject are dialectically answered and discussed by experts from a wide variety of disciplines.

Objective:

The objective of a Streitgespräch is to present the contents of a seminar to students in an interactive form. To be able to formulate meaningful questions, a basic understanding of the material is required. Students attain this understanding during the semester and can then pose the questions that were left unanswered during the seminar to a variety of experts in the field. In the process fascinating insights and new perspectives are revealed to everyone!

Subject:

The subjects can be quite diverse. “Pain”, “Mixed emotions – schadenfreude, horror films and humour” and “Consciousness – myth or mystery?” are the titles of some past events. Here neuroscientists sat alongside communications experts, marathon runners alongside body artists together. Chronic pain patients, representatives from the fields of ethics and the philosophy of technology as well as other experts were also involved. The more diverse the fields represented, the more interesting the event.

“Streitgespräche! What would ... have said about that?” offers a different twist to the format. Here the speaker is told from which perspective he or she is to argue. In this way it is possible, for example, to have different philosophers take the stage, whereby each represents a historical figure and her or his opinions. This allows a group from a single discipline to discuss a subject that extends beyond the boundaries of their field or the present time period (figures from the past or even forms of artificial intelligence can be personified).

Hybrid Format

Debate

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Preparation:

In the course of the seminar students will write a paper on the subject or engage in another form with the content of the course. There is no final exam, instead students are required to prepare both an introduction to the subject of the event and a series of questions for the experts. These questions will be passed on to the moderator(s) and provide a framework for the evening. The speakers will be given the questions in advance so that they know how to prepare, but no answers will be exchanged or discussed prior to the event. This takes place on stage together with the audience.

On the evening itself the moderator(s) will introduce the event and the speakers and lead the discussion. The thematic introduction and questions will, however, be presented by the students. When these prepared questions have been worked through, the conversation will be opened to the audience, which can now participate in the discussion. To keep the evening as interesting as possible, the formal part will be ended at a specific time and the informal exchange will begin (over drinks).

Guests:

Every event thrives on its guests. These will come from a great variety of age groups and disciplines and stimulate exchange, as they add their own focuses and questions to the debate. Accordingly the attempt should be made not only to spread the invitation via the established channels of one's own field but also to use, for example, the university's social media platforms and to publish the event on external event websites as well. The more the merrier – and the more diverse the better!

This format is based on the teaching and event concepts of Teresa Geisler. She has examined the above mentioned subjects "Pain", "Mixed emotions – schadenfreude, horror films and humour" and "Consciousness – myth of mystery?" in the manner of a Socratic dialogue in the framework of her courses. A special Streitgespräch event involving philosophers is currently in the works.

The Hybrid Plattform is a project platform of the Berlin University of the Arts and the Technische Universität Berlin in the heart of the Campus Charlottenburg, Berlin. The platform serves the cross-disciplinary exchange of art, science and technology.