

Title

Prove It Too!

Time

30 minutes

Preparation

This exercise is a more-advanced version of the Lesson Plan ProveIt!

Materials

White Board, Pen

Prior Knowledge

This exercise is useful in the context of post-modernist concepts such as “metanarrative”. Students need to have had at least a good introduction to the difference between “modernist / post-modernist” thought. They will also require an understanding of the theoretical basis of both “science” and “religion”

Objective

When discussing / introducing the post-modernist concept of “metanarrative”, students will quite happily(?) accept the critique in terms of things like religion and various sociological “ism’s” (Functionalism, Marxism, Feminism, etc.), but they tend to balk at the idea of “science” as just one more “Big Story”.

The concept of relativism in post-modernist theory (often misrepresented as a kind of “anything goes” moral relativism) can be a useful way of illustrating the argument that “even science” is underpinned by subjective judgement.

A simple way of applying this idea is to get students to think about and demonstrate how concepts like “better” and “superior” (as in “science is a superior form of belief system to religion because...”) are inherently subjective.

1. Either in groups or as a class, ask the students to list every possible reason that supports the argument that “science” is better than / superior to “religion”.

You can, if you wish, suggest things like: Testing, Experimentation, Objectivity, Subjectivity, Faith, etc.

3. Put three headings on the White Board (Reason, Science and Religion). Beneath “Reason” write the various categories of “superiority / inferiority” the students’ suggest. Beneath the Science heading, briefly note why it is superior and beneath the Religion heading briefly note why it is inferior.

For example:

Reason	Science	Religion
Faith	Not acceptable as proof	Acceptable as proof

4. Once this has been completed tell the class that, according to **their judgement** about “**value**”, the science is “superior”. Then tell them that, since **you** are the most **powerful** individual in the room, you will now assess the relative worth of the two items according to **your judgement of “value”**.

In this respect you simply **reverse** whatever the students decided. For example, if they decided that “faith” was a distinguishing feature and they valued the idea that faith was not an acceptable basis for proof above the claim that it is an acceptable basis for proof, you now decide that “acceptable as the basis of proof” is the most important aspect of “faith”.

5. After you’ve finished you can debrief the class in a number of ways:

- a. By discussing the idea that questions of value are subjective. How you decide to “judge value” (using what criteria) is social in origin.
- b. By assessing the idea that any claim to superiority is always underpinned by subjective judgement (even when, as in the case of “science”, it **appears** not to be...).
- c. By discussing the post-modernist concept of relativism, as it can be applied to a theoretical critique of metanarratives such as science.
- d. By introducing the ideas of writers such as Kuhn, Polyani, Kaplan, etc. as part of a tradition of scientific criticism.