



thinking space

JUST ONE INSTRUCTION

WHAT IS IT?

'Just One Instruction' is an activity designed to help students and teachers become more comfortable about working in an open-ended way.

The facilitator can choose any instruction they like but their role is to give just one instruction and no more! Even if the groups ask further questions the facilitator mustn't give anything else away.

The participants in this exercise work in small groups with a collection of objects within a set period of time. What they do with these resources is entirely up to them.

Once the time has elapsed the whole group comes together to reflect: they report back on what they did, why they did it and how it felt to work without set parameters.

RECIPE

- **No. of participants:** 8 – 60 in total (sub-groups of 2 – 8)
- **Age of participants:** 14+
- **Preparation time:** 10 minutes
- **Delivery time:** 10 minutes - 1 hour
- **Materials:** A collection of miscellaneous props in a suitcase or box

HOW DOES IT WORK?

It's important that you begin this activity with a minimum of background information. You might tell the participants that they're going to play a game or take part in an exercise but don't give much else away.

First divide the group into a minimum of two sub-groups. Invite members of each group to take it in turns to select objects from a suitcase (or box) of props. Don't give the participants any criteria for choosing, even if they ask.

Next explain to them that they will have a set period of time (e.g. 20 minutes) for this activity and a designated place, away from the other group, to work. Explain to them that there is just one instruction for this activity, and this one instruction is all the guidance you're going to give them.

HOW DOES IT WORK? (cont.)

Then give them their instruction, and start the clock.

You can choose any instruction you like but you'll probably find that instructions which deal with broad philosophical concepts make for rich experiences. For example your instruction might be "Be Human", "Be Creative", "Be Yourself" or "Be Free" etc...

Once the time is up invite the groups back together to talk about what they've done. This might be an opportunity to analyse the concept they've been exploring, as well as the experience of working in a collaborative, open-ended way. They might want to present something to the other group, but every group will be different.

TIPS

- Avoid implicitly laying out any expectations, e.g. 'At the end of the activity we'll feedback' which might suggest to the students that you want them to perform or present.
- Objects to put in the box might include: an old photograph, postcards, a perfume bottle, costumes, a hat, ornaments, a pot plant, a cuddly toy etc.
- The first ten minutes or so will involve a lot of confusion and perhaps even some frustration. Avoid the temptation to intervene, to give any hints or to tell the participants that they have to do something. Even though it's uncomfortable, this initial experience is one of the most valuable for the participants on reflection.
- You might find it useful to move between the groups making notes. Through observation you implicitly suggest that whatever they're doing is interesting and constitutes the activity, this can also improve their focus. You can then bring your observations to the discussion afterwards.
- During the discussion at the end of the activity, make it clear that you weren't expecting anything in particular from the groups and that no response is the 'right' one.

FIND OUT MORE

- See 'Concept Building' Tool

YOUR NOTES...

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