thinking space

CONCEPT BUILDING

WHAT IS IT?

Analysing abstract concepts can be tricky. This tool promotes the exploration of ideas around abstract concepts through nonverbal activities such as model-making, drawing and tableaux.

Working in this way provides a new vocabulary for learners grappling with difficult ideas. The products of this creative activity then provide a concrete starting point for rich conceptual analysis through group discussions.

RECIPE

- No. of participants: 100 (split into subgroups max. 8 per group).
- Age of participants: Suitable for any age
- Preparation time: However long it takes to source the materials. Once you have chosen the concepts there is no preparation time.
- Delivery time: 5 minutes 2 hours
- Materials: Lego bricks; Plasticine; Musical instruments; Drawing materials; Piles of assorted rubbish; Collection of miscellaneous items.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The facilitator chooses a concept they'd like the group to explore. Alternatively they can provide a bank of concepts (e.g. peace, boredom, justice, beauty) and each group can pick a different one at random. Each group are given their method (model-making, soundscape, tableaux etc.) and a time limit: they have x minutes to create a model of their concept starting... Now!

Model-making: The group use plasticine, lego-blocks or equivalent to create something that represents their concept.

Soundscape: A soundscape can be any collection of sounds – which might include words or song lyrics – made from the materials to hand. They could use the chairs, their bodies or some instruments if you have some available. The finished soundscape can last for any length of time but ideally not longer than 3 minutes.

Tableaux: The tableaux is a static arrangement of bodies to represent a scene or picture. When they show the finished tableaux they should hold the pose for at least 30 seconds so that everyone in the room can really take in all of the poses. (See 'Dramatic Devices' Tool for a way to extend this process.)

HOW DOES IT WORK? (cont.)

Visual Arts: Any collection of materials can be used to construct a sculpture and any sorts of drawing materials can be used to paint or illustrate their idea of the concept.

Once the time is up each group takes it in turns to show the rest of the groups their creation. If you've chosen different concepts for each group it is fun for everyone else to try and guess what concept was being represented after the presentation of each one.

A group discussion around each concept can follow. In the discussion it can be interesting to draw upon the contrast between those groups who have taken a more literal approach (e.g. to depict a situation or object) and those who have chosen to be more abstract (e.g. to evoke a feeling). How well do the group think these different approaches represent the concept?

TIPS

- As the facilitator try and give as little guidance to their activity as possible. After the concept has been explored everyone can discuss as a group how well they think the concept has been represented.
- For surprising results try using lots of different methods to analyse the same concept or use lots of different concepts with just one method.
- The participants might find the models distracting so ask them to put them to one side during the discussion.

FIND OUT MORE

- See 'Just One Instruction' Tool
- See 'Dramatic Devices' Tool

YOUR NOTES	
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