

How “Tug of Thought” keeps groups focused

Working in small groups gives more people a chance to speak. It allows less confident children to rehearse their ideas before bringing them to the full group. And it helps to generate new ideas.

But when you look around the circle, some children are more involved than others. Some groups may be dominated by one or two children, and some are present in body only. It defeats the object of independent group work if you have to go round nudging people to get involved. So how can you help groups to stay on task without compromising their independence?

Introducing “Tug of Thought”

Something I’ve found works powerfully to make groups cohesive and focused is to have questions written down on paper, with answers to the question written on the sides or round the edge. See the attachment. These can be ones you’ve written, or the group have written, and you can use it either as a warm-up or half-way through a whole-group enquiry to allow you to focus on different threads of thought that have arisen.

Ideally, spread the questions out on the floor. People who feel strongly about a particular question pick it up, holding the answer for which they are going to argue. Others join in, on the same side or a different one. Anyone who has no strong opinions either way about any of the questions on offer can hold the paper on the side between the opposing answers, and move back and forth to show how they are being swayed by the argument.

They then start arguing over the question, both literally and metaphorically! Because everyone is holding on to the question, they are held together in a close space with good eye contact. You get a good sense of playful argy-bargy. Of course, if they get overexcited, just have them sit down to reduce the physical energy of the activity.

People also quite naturally move around to hold different parts of the question as they are swayed by the arguments of others. So it fits the Thinkers’ Games sequence of “Think, Commit, Justify, Reflect”.

The game works with questions that have two, three or several answers under consideration. You could also experiment with a follow up question written on the reverse, as with the two examples “What is..” And “What should be the biggest factor in a celebrity’s success”.

If you have questions that groups enjoy using for this game, please send me photos of them and I’ll create an album for redistribution.

Should a woman
YES < take her husband's
name when she marries? > NO


yes

Should you have
to earn your pocket
money?

no



MAYBE

NO  Should voting
be compulsory

 YES

MAYBE



LUCK

EFFORT

TALENT

What is the biggest factor in a celebrity's success?

LOOKS

CONNECTIONS

MARKETING

LUCK

EFFECT

TALENT

What should be the
biggest factor in a
celebrity's success?

LOOKS

CONNECTIONS

MARKETING