

Activity 4.3 Understanding Perspectives on a Continuum

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Last Updated 09/07/2023



Description

This exercise makes visible a range of views on an issue as well as how hard it is to take on the view of someone else. It helps participants become aware of how strongly held views can lead them to be dismissive of the views of others.

Learning Goals

- Identify views or perspectives as a continuum and not as a binary.
- Develop a deeper appreciation for how hard it is to actually take on the view of someone else.

Instructions (60 minutes)

Set Up	Prepare for the Activity	
	<p>Make it easier for participants to move around and visualize by taping paper signs to indicate a letter for each position and lanes on the floor for each place in the continuum (refer to this Continuum Map).</p> <p>On one end of the room/space, draw a large “A” on a piece of paper and tape it onto the floor to represent position A and, on the other end, draw a large “B” on a piece of paper and tape it onto the floor to represent position B.</p> <p>Take 6 sheets of paper, and write “Strongly Agree with A”, “Agree with A”, “Somewhat Agree with A”, “Strongly Agree with B”, “Agree with B”, “Somewhat Agree with B” on each sheet respectively.</p>	

¹ **Citation for this activity:** Janice McMillan (2023). Understanding Perspectives on a Continuum. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-4>

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	<p>Tape these sheets of paper down in between the position A and position B signs, so in the end, the sheets mark lanes in the following order: Strongly Agree with A, Agree with A, Somewhat Agree with A, Somewhat Agree with B, Agree with B, Strongly Agree with B.</p> <p>Use long pieces of masking tape to create a lane for each position.</p>	
Step One	<p>Get Ready to Start</p> <p>Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.</p> <p>Start with all participants in position somewhere on the Continuum Map drawn on the floor, ready to move.</p>	5 min
Step Two	<p>Choose Positions - Lightning Round</p> <p>As the facilitator, read statements that indicate two very different positions on one topic, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you rather eat for lunch? A) a burger or B) a veggie wrap • Development is about: A) the alleviation of poverty, or B) increasing people's capabilities • Freedom means: A) having choices, or B) being left alone to do as you like <p>As each statement is read, ask participants to take a moment to think about where they want to stand and then indicate their position on the continuum by physically moving. They can choose any position between the two extremes.</p> <p>Try to encourage participants not to pick a position directly in the middle line, i.e. have no view or claim they are neutral on a topic.</p> <p>Participants will not be asked to justify their positions, yet. Instead, ask them to remember their thoughts about the statements for the next step of the activity.</p> <div style="background-color: #e6f2ff; padding: 5px;"> <p>Facilitator Tip: Start with fun statements and work towards more serious ones. Also, it is useful to think about statements that link to the topic of the group gathering. This first round might include approximately 3-5 choices.</p> </div>	5 min

<p>Step Three</p>	<p>Choose and Discuss Positions</p> <p>The next set of statements should be tailored to the area of concern for the group. For example, take the topic of “development.”</p> <p>Read a more complex statement, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were the head of the United Nations, would you A) prioritize projects focused on the provision of medicines, OR B) prioritize the education of young girls and boys? <p>Invite participants to think about their opinion and choose a position on the continuum. Invite participants to discuss why they are standing at a particular spot. Even though they are sharing a location, they might be there for very different reasons.</p>	<p>10 min</p>
<p>Step Four</p>	<p>Share and Reevaluate Positions</p> <p>Select representatives from each spot to share their thoughts. Engage in a discussion, switching back and forth from one end of the continuum to the other, as opinions and responses are shared.</p> <p>If participants feel swayed by an argument on the opposite side from where they are standing, they can switch positions. For those who switch, invite them to offer a brief explanation of what persuaded them to move on the continuum.</p>	<p>10 min</p>
<p>Step Five</p>	<p>Practice Perspective Taking</p> <p>Repeat the activity with another statement, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were a starving and politically oppressed citizen, would you rather be given A) food daily or B) the right to vote? <p>Ask participants to think about their opinion and choose a position on the continuum.</p> <p>This time as participants discuss with their new group, ask them to develop an argument for the opposing view. Ask them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are people on the other end of the spectrum thinking? • What argument would they put forth to explain why they are on this end of the spectrum? <p>Participants will have to think from the other side’s perspective and put forth the strongest argument for the opposing view.</p>	<p>10 min</p>

Step Six	<p>Discuss with the Full Group</p> <p>Take turns sharing between groups. Make sure the full group takes the discussion far enough to come to a conclusion about what they believe as a group and/or individually. Clarity-seeking questions and examples can aid in this.</p>	10 min
Step Seven	<p>Debrief as a Full Group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which place on the continuum was easiest for you to occupy and why? Extreme ends or middle spaces? • When imagining what other groups thought or believed, which spaces were easiest/hardest to imagine? 	10 min

Reflection Journal

- How did you experience taking a point of view and being asked to articulate it versus another view? Think about not just your thought process, but what you felt as well?
- If you changed your view, what did you take into account in making the change?
- What is important to think about in terms of having strong views on issues of importance? And in the context of collaborative discussions?

Practice Journal

This week, think about an issue that you feel strongly about. Write the strongest argument you can for the opposing perspective. Do this in good faith. Try your best to understand and defend the opposing perspective. After writing this up, reflect on what you learned about yourself and the other perspective.

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [Ernesto Sirolli's TED Talk](http://www.ted.com/talks/ernesto_sirolli_want_to_help_someone_shut_up_and_listen): Sirolli, Ernesto. "Want to help someone? Shut up and listen!" *TED*, Sep. 2012, www.ted.com/talks/ernesto_sirolli_want_to_help_someone_shut_up_and_listen.

Activity Cluster

4.3 Understanding Perspectives on a Continuum

[3.4 Developing Comfort with Ambiguity](#)