

TYLA CIVILITY *for All*

Civility For All Classroom Activity – What’s the Ground Rules?

Time

50 minutes (one class period), plus preparation.

Materials

Large adhesive notepaper or butcher paper and markers for small group work. You could also use different sections of the dry erase board or smart board

Summary

Students work to draw up a list of “ground rules” for classroom discussion through whole class and small group work.

Procedure

- Begin the exercise by telling the students that one of your goals for the class is to help them learn to participate in discussion with each other. Tell them that they will be participating in discussions and conversations of different lengths and different purposes. Ask the class to brainstorm the characteristics of a good discussion.
- Write their ideas on the board, encouraging students to explain more as appropriate. It will be helpful to ask leading questions such as:
 - “What’s the difference between discussing and fighting?”
 - “Is it a good or a bad discussion when people yell? Why or why not?”
 - “Should we interrupt each other when we discuss? Why not?”
 - “Are discussions better when people have reasons and evidence to support their ideas?”
 - “When do you feel the most comfortable about expressing your opinions?”

- When do you feel uncomfortable?”
 - “How can people show that they respect each other in discussions?”
 - “Are good discussions cooperative or competitive?”
- Once you have filled the board with content, give the “good discussion” characteristics numbers. (These numbers are for identification not ranking.)
 - Tell the class that you will all be working together to create “ground rules” for classroom discussions. Break them into groups of three or four and give each group a large adhesive note, piece of butcher paper and markers, or a portion of the board. Tell the students that their group’s job is to come up with a list of rules for discussion.
 - Each group should come up with eight rules and write them on the paper. They should try to make sure that the rules are linked with the good discussion characteristics on the board.
 - Once all groups have finished the rules, ask each group to come to the front of the class and share its rules. After each group is done, hang the group’s paper on the wall.
 - After all groups have presented, ask each student to turn in a piece of paper with the best 10 rules for discussion.
 - That night, review the students’ submissions and tabulate the “top ten” rules. Feel free to modify or combine rules so that all groups feel their contribution was meaningful.
 - Write the rules on a poster for permanent display in the classroom beginning the next day and review the rules with students.
 - As you begin to have more discussions, part of the reflection process should be

Moderating a Discussion

Using the “Ground Rules”, encourage the class to go through a moderated discussion.

1. Pick a topic for discussion. This is mainly for practice, so feel free to start with something more engaging and less serious. Here are a few suggestions :
 - Who is the GOAT in professional sports?
 - Does grammar still matter in the age of social media?
 - How important is knowing a foreign language?
 - Should parents track their teenager’s location?
 - Are youth sports too competitive?
 - How should you spend your senior year of high school?
 - Should the U.S. do away with daylight savings time?
 - Do kids need recess?
 - Should everyone go to college?
 - Does online public shaming or censure prevent us from being able to grow and change as a society?
 - What are the most critical changes that we as a society must make to face the future effectively?
 - What’s the subject you are most tired of hearing about, and what would you do about it so you never have to hear it again?

2. Begin the discussion effectively and fairly. The discussion leader is responsible for introducing the topic of the discussion and reviewing the “Ground Rules” for the discussion.
 - To begin the discussion, it may be useful for the moderator to deliver a provocative opening statement or pose a series of questions.
 - The moderator should have a list of questions and facts about the issue (or, if the discussion is about a specific text, a selection of quotes from the text) to prompt discussion if it stalls.
3. Keep the discussion moving. Good discussion leaders try to encourage everyone to take part in the discussion. If there are participants who dominate the discussion to the exclusion of others, the moderator is responsible for trying to move the talk to other people, often by introducing new topics or points of view.
4. Summarize and encourage reflection. Discussion leaders should periodically summarize the path of the discussion to help participants get a sense of where they’ve been and what remains to be discussed.
5. Keep track of time. The moderator is responsible for timing the discussion, including informing participants about remaining time. The moderator should try to help the group use its time effectively, including saving time for closing thoughts or votes, if those are planned parts of the discussion.
6. Summarize the discussion. At the end of the discussion, it will help the group reflect on its progress if the moderator summarizes the course of the discussion, including major points, action items and resolutions.
7. Designate a recorder. All of these tasks can be challenging for even the most seasoned moderator. It is useful to designate someone in the class to function as a recorder during the session so that there is a set of consistent notes to reflect on. The recorder’s job is to track the most important points and decisions that feature in the discussion; taking notes will help to clarify any confusion among participants on these points as well as help the moderator to summarize what has already been said.

Experiment with Discussion

As you integrate discussion into your classroom, experiment with different lengths, goals, and topics for discussion.



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