

Practical Tips: Variety in Enquiry

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Each stage of the enquiry process has many alternatives; each alternative can have very interesting (and often subtle) effects on the enquiry and its outcomes. If facilitators are aware of more alternatives, they will have more tools to use in helping their communities to mature.

For example, you might wish to improve your community's abilities to **listen well**. If pupils can't listen well, their learning is very limited; their listening skills are, therefore, a 'process priority' for you as facilitator. How could you use each step of the enquiry process to target and improve their listening skills in different ways? What stimulus could you use? Might you pause after pupils have shared reflections and ask "Who listened to you best in your group? How do you know? What could you do next time to improve your listening skills?". Could you ask them to start each enquiry contribution with "I agree with" or "I disagree with" to ensure that they listen and follow on from the previous speaker? What else could you do during the enquiry, or in the voting process perhaps?

Here are a few activities or techniques that may bring some fresh approaches to your enquiries. They are merely suggestions! Some you may already know, some may not be appropriate for your particular communities, but some may invite some interesting and helpful results! The suggestions are listed under eight steps of an enquiry (stimulus, private reflections, sharing reflections, creating questions, airing questions, voting, enquiry, reflections on process / content).

Stimulus

- 1) Appeal to different learning styles (visual, audio, kinaesthetic, etc.)
- 2) Try using experiences, activities or emotions
- 3) Ask the pupils to pick stimuli?

Private reflections

- 1) See how long the reflection period can be extended; will deeper thoughts arise? How could you tell?
- 2) Target types of reflection; a feeling, a thought, a cartoon with a speech bubble, 5 key words, or a sketch? A selection of these?
- 3) Ask for 'quick-fire reflections' to be expressed as a whole group (contrasted with individual reflections in silence).

Sharing reflections

- 1) Emphasise good listening skills; body language, eye contact, no interruptions, next speaker briefly summarising last speaker's reflections etc.
- 2) Try silent sharing; passing written comments, key words, or sketches around their group
- 3) Ask for each group member to share one reflection in depth, or several reflections briefly

Question creation

- 1) Ask each group member to create their own question first, and then negotiate a single question between them; a contrast to all members making one question

- 2) Ask each group to check if their question is open or closed (the latter inviting 'yes' or 'no' answers), and if they all agree that it's philosophical
- 3) Target the kind of question; one about emotions or ideas, for example?

Airing Questions

- 1) Ask "Do you think these are all philosophical questions? / Are these all open (vs. closed) questions? / Are there any links between questions (+ give your explanation)?" Discuss to sharpen their question creation skills.
- 2) Invite each group to explain or clarify their question for a minute.
- 3) Ask pupils to reflect on how airing questions might help the enquiry to follow. Why is it useful? What might 'linking questions' do for the community or the enquiry process? Etc.

Voting

- 1) Try 'secret voting' where pupils shut their eyes or turn around during the voting process. Reflect on what difference this might make to an open vote.
- 2) Try giving pupils a total of 3 votes each, to be used on one, two or three questions (as they choose). (Do you vote as the facilitator?!)
- 3) 'Omnivote' – pupils can vote once on as many questions as they like.

Enquiry

- 1) Ask pupils "are there any *definitions*, different *interpretations* or *assumptions* in this question we should look out for?" as a starting point. (Here's a practical chance to introduce pupils to this terminology if they don't know it already!)
- 2) Once the question is chosen, ask pupils to reflect for a minute and then jot down their "gut reaction to the question". At the end of the enquiry, get them to write their updated response; good for seeing changes of mind / refinements of thinking / the benefits of enquiry / 'before & after' assessments. Post the written responses on a Thought Wall in the classroom for all to reflect on.
- 3) Ascribe roles to some pupils; scribe, idea linker, someone to keep a check on 'whether the question is being answered' / whether everyone who wants a say is getting one' etc. Useful for the facilitator to ask them for specific community feedback during or at the end of the enquiry. (Dominant or loud pupils often go quieter if they are made a 'scribe' to chart the enquiry on the board... they have a key, but quiet role!)

Reflections on Process / Content

- 1) Ask pupils to go and stand next to someone who listened to others / gave good reasons / showed caring thinking (etc.) really well
- 2) Use home (work) time... encourage pupils to discuss an enquiry question with parents, survey different age groups, find information that might help on the web etc.
- 3) Ask "what went really well today in our enquiry, & what could we do better next time?" If there's a problem they identify (e.g. not all of us could speak when we wanted to), challenge *them* to find a solution to try next time.

KEY POINT: Try using these techniques, but take a careful note of their effects. Perhaps ask the community to reflect on any differences, and ask them for their reactions. Did the change help? How? If not, why not? Could they use such methods themselves? Etc.