



Personality Psychology Common Ground Activity

MARINO MUGAYAR-BALDOCCHI

Purpose of Activity

- ▶ The purpose is to allow the students to get to know each other on a deeper level.
- ▶ Students become more familiar with one another
 - ▶ Students feel more comfortable sharing their ideas and participating in other class activities.
- ▶ Students look forward to coming to class
 - ▶ Students are able to see familiar faces with whom they will actually have the chance to interact;
 - ▶ decreases feeling of alienation in class.
- ▶ Students see meeting other people as an opportunity to learn
 - ▶ Students can look around the room and see others as people with many things in common, or interesting differences; breaks down stereotype barriers.
- ▶ Students feel respected and safe in an environment where everything they share stays in the classroom but the experience leaves with them.
 - ▶ Changes their expectations of the nature of the course by doing this activity in the first period of class.

Description of Activity

1. Common Ground begins with the students pushing the chairs/tables to the side and forming a standing circle.
 1. Instructor stands in the middle of the circle with question sheet. Instructor makes sure that students know this is a safe space- anything said will stay in the classroom but experience will leave with them.
2. Instructor begins with low-impact questions. The question is asked and, if it applies to the individual, then he/she is to step into the circle. A follow up question is then asked and students volunteer to answer it while having the option to remain quiet.
 1. E.g. Low-impact question: "Are you an only child?" "If so, how has this benefitted/not benefitted you?"
3. After finishing with a question, students return to their original position in the circle. Further questions are asked, repeating the process.
 1. Instructor is also able to contribute his/her own experiences to encourage students to share theirs.
4. After a number of low-impact questions, instructor informs students that questions have progressed to a deeper level and are now moderate-impact questions.
 1. E.g. Moderate-impact question "Have you ever been in love and been hurt in the last 5 years?" "If so, what have you learned from this and what would you change if you could?"
5. After a number of moderate-impact questions, instructor informs students that questions have progressed to an even deeper level and are now high-impact questions.
 1. E.g. High-impact question "I have witnessed a racial, sexual, sexist, religious slur that made me feel uncomfortable " "What did you do about it and how did you feel? Do you wish you had done anything differently?"
6. Always end activity on a positive note (usually by asking a question on love). Debrief students by asking each one to share one adjective about how they felt regarding the activity.
 1. Explain to students the purpose of the activity and what you hoped they would take away from it.

Appropriateness of Activity

- ▶ This activity is appropriate for every class level and every subject type.
 - ▶ I have successfully carried out this activity with first year undergraduate students at the College of Charleston as well as in a 3000 level class (Personality Psychology) at Baruch college.
- ▶ Ideally, you would have no more than 40 people doing this activity at the same time.
 - ▶ If you are trying to do this in a jumbo class, then perhaps splitting the class into groups of 40 and having your teaching assistants carry out the activity will greatly increase its impact.
 - ▶ The larger the group (especially when it exceeds 40 people), the less likely the students are to participate and the less likely a variety of students are to participate.