

A Human Graph: Activity

The human graph activity is designed to introduce participants to the different issues raised by a controversial issue. It is also designed to help participants realize how they feel and where they stand on this issue.

Participants are presented with a continuum of possible attitudes or approaches on a controversial issue, and are asked to determine which element of the continuum most approximates their own attitude. Issues that are clearly controversial and characterized by polar positions are suitable for using this method.

The selected issues should have legitimate opposing viewpoints. Issues beyond debate, such as the morality of genocide or the sexual abuse of children, clearly should not be used.

Procedures

- § Explain the purpose of this activity. Then create a line – either by pointing from one end of the room to the other or by drawing one on the board. One end of the line is “Agree Very Much,” the mid-point is “Not Sure/Undecided,” and the other end of the line is “Disagree Very Much.”
- § Ask for five volunteers from the group. Tell them that they will serve as a “human graph.” Explain that you will ask them a series of statements and that they will react to each statement by standing in front of the part of the graph that corresponds to their opinion.
- § Instruct the class that the members of the human graph are not allowed to speak; therefore, the class will have to interpret their thoughts for them.
- § Present a several [4-6] brief statements about the issue. Use simple and direct statements – not “trick questions” – to help the participants in the graph. After each statement, allow time for the “human graph” to understand the statement and react by physically moving to a position on the line. Then ask the rest of the group to explain why they think the participants in the human graph are standing where they are. You may choose to let the human graph students explain their position after all of the students have commented.
- § The human graph students should feel free to move about on the line, changing their opinion based on what they are hearing or if an argument seems persuasive to them. Continue with this process until all statements have been evaluated and discussed. Select additional groups of five for other questions.
- § *Note:* This activity can also be done with the entire group along the line. When the whole class is the graph, ask questions of different members about why they chose to stand where they stood.

Follow-Up Questions

Following the human graph, put students into pairs and ask one student in each pair to identify the strongest statements in favor of the issue; the other student should identify the three strongest statements against the issue. Allow three minutes for each side to share their ideas.

Debrief as a large group using the following questions:

- § In your pair, what were the strongest statements in favor of the issue? The strongest statements against?
- § What surprised you about the human graph? How did the participants in the graph shape your thinking about the issue?
- § What might be an alternative policy choice on this issue?