

Continuum Strategy

Rationale:

This teaching strategy helps students share their opinions by lining up along a continuum to represent their point of view. This is a useful activity to discuss issues in a structured manner that enables students to hear different perspectives.

Procedure:

Step one: Preparation

- Identify a space in the classroom where students can stand in order to create a line or a U-shape.
- Place signs with the words, "Strongly Agree" and "Strongly Disagree" at opposite ends of a continuum in your room. Be sure to leave enough space between the signs so that can easily position themselves on an imaginary line that connects the two signs.

Step two: Explain the activity

- Direct the students' attention to the signs and explain that you will make a statement that they will likely have an opinion on. Explain that they might strongly agree with the statement, partially agree, partially disagree, strongly disagree or have any other reaction that falls between these sentiments.
- Explain that after hearing the statement they must determine what spot on the "Continuum" best represents their reaction and when told to do so they should stand at that spot on the continuum.

Step three: Review the rules for the activity

- Students must show respect for the views of others
- Only 1 student may speak at a time
- Students may only speak when recognized by the instructor.
- Students may only state the reasons for their position. They may not criticize the view of someone else or try to debate with others.
- Periodically students will be given an opportunity to move on the continuum if they have changed their views, even if only a little bit

Step four: "Take a Stand"

Ask students to stand on the spot of the line that represents their opinion - telling them that if they stand on either extreme they are absolute in their agreement or disagreement. They may also stand anywhere in between the two extremes, depending on how much they do or do not agree with the statement.

Step five: Explain positions

- Once students have lined themselves up, ask the students to explain why they have chosen to stand where they are standing.
- Encourage students to refer to evidence and examples when defending their stance.
- It is best to alternate from one end to the middle to the other end, rather than allowing too many voices from one stance to dominate.
- After several viewpoints are heard, ask if anyone wishes to move. Encourage students to keep an open mind; they are allowed to move if someone presents an argument that alters where they want to stand on the line. Ask students who move to explain why they moved.
- To avoid a debate among the students, call on each student only once (unless they have moved their position).
- Run the activity until you feel most or all voices have been heard, making sure that no one person dominates.

Step six: Follow-up

There are many ways you can follow-up on this exercise. Some of the choices you might use are:

- You can have students reflect in writing about how the activity changed or reinforced their original opinion.
- You can chart the main for and against arguments on the board as a whole-class and discuss.
- Students can meet with partners and small groups to discuss what they learned from the activity.

Variations:

Forced Decision: Yes, No, or Undecided - Read a statement aloud. Rather than have a continuum for agreement, require students to make a decision that they either “agree” with a statement, “do not agree” or “are unsure”. If students agree with the statement then instruct them to move to one side of the room. If students disagree with the statement then instruct them to move to the other side of the room. Also, distinguish a place for students to stand in the middle if they are undecided or unsure. Have students explain why they are standing where they are standing. If after hearing a student’s position, a student would like to move across the room, allow for this movement.

Post-it notes continuum: Draw a continuum line on the board. Ask students to place a post-it note on the spot along the continuum that represents their opinion. Then have students discuss what they notice. This variation is less about individuals explaining their point of view than about illustrating the range of agreement or disagreement in the class.