

Group Work(ing) Definitions

Goal: develop a working definition of key terms and ideas

General Concept: students work in groups to develop a working definition of key words to be used throughout the course.

Process:

1. Break students into equal sized groups.
2. Assign each group to a specific word – usually a word that can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people (e.g. peace, war, violence, conflict, justice, truth, etc.)
3. Have each group generate a list of words or short phrases that they associate with the original word. For example, those assigned to the word “peace” might write down words like love, tolerance, friendship, coexistence, nonviolence, etc.
4. Once each group has generated a decent sized list have all groups rotate to their left so they are standing in front of a new word, although this time the word is accompanied by the list of other words and phrases provided by the previous group.
5. Each groups is now responsible for stringing together some of these words and phrases into a working definition of the original word. For example, those who were working with the word “peace” could write, “peace is the existence of love in a community where friendships are developed and conflicts are addressed nonviolently.”
6. Once each groups has developed their working definition have a member of each group read their definition to the rest of the class.
7. Ask follow up questions. How do other members of the class feel about the working definitions that were created? Would anyone change, edit, or delete anything from these definitions? What was it like working as a group to define a complex idea using words phrases provided by a different group of people?

Ideal for: verbal-linguistic learners because the activity allows students to get creative with various words and phrases; interpersonal learners because the activity requires groups to discuss their thoughts on complex ideas and come to consensus on how to define those ideas; visual-spatial learners because the working definitions are written up on the board or on flip chart so everyone can view them; bodily-kinesthetic learners because the activity requires student to move to different stations.

Important for peace education because the field of peace studies involves a lot of complex and misunderstood words and ideas. Therefore it is important for all students to be on the same wave length and of a similar understanding when using these words and evoking these ideas in conversation. The role of defining words also gets students more interested in seeing how others define those very same words.

Modifications:

- Have the group stay with their original word instead of rotating to a new word to build the definition.
- Have groups create with acronyms with their word