'Community' Defining Activity

Concepts

Concepts are the building blocks of thinking. They help us to name and share our thoughts about abstract ideas. Things like love and fairness and community.

The important thing to know about concepts, such as community, is that we each have subtly different internal definitions of what they mean because we all have different lives, experiences and knowledge. That's why it's so important to take the time to talk about what we think things mean; to share and negotiate our understanding, so that when talk about these ideas, we are talking about the same things.

Activity

This activity is designed for you to explore personal experiences and ideas about the notion of 'community' with a group of students. The examples illustrate possible parts of a community to discuss and share experiences about and hopefully reach a shared understanding of what community means to the group.

Undertaking this activity develops several core critical thinking skills with students, developing **criteria**, or characteristics, making **distinctions** between things, sharing appropriate **examples** to illustrate a point, giving **reasons** and ultimately developing a working **definition**.

When asking questions, it is important to stay **neutral** and **curious** about the responses. Students can often look to you for hints about what to say and it's important that they are not influenced in their responses and that they share genuinely felt ideas. Always be sure to ask why students think something and gently ask follow up questions that elicit more thinking. Try to think about their responses from different perspectives and ask, "*what if …?*" kinds of questions.

A Class Dialogue

This is a teacher led dialogue to help students to build the framework for their definitions. As the class comes up with their ideas write them into useful lists on the board, including **criteria** and **qualities**. With the criteria, students are essentially trying to develop a checklist of characteristics that are needed to define 'community', such as in the school example, the people who participate in the community etc. The qualities list is those ideas, like 'shared purpose' that hold the community together.

The Questions

Use these as baseline questions to begin the thinking process. Feel free to include more, but try not to ask leading questions. Let students find their own meanings.

- What is a community? Let's use the example of a school community...
- What are the parts of a community? These are our 'criteria', the parts you need to have to make a community.
- Are some more important than others?
- What makes this community different to a collection of strangers? Or are they the same? Is there anything unique about our example that can give us an idea about what could be different about a community?
- Can we identify 'qualities' that are important for a community? (shared purpose/ideas/location).
- Can we think of some examples that show what this looks like?
- Do you think there are different kinds of communities? What do they have in common?
- What holds communities together? (love/laws/traditions)
- What **isn't** a community?

Procedure

After the class has developed a few ideas about the criteria and qualities for community they then work in groups to come-up with a definition.

1. In groups of 4 have a conversation where everyone is included to create a definition of community that brings all the ideas on the board together to make sense.
2. Someone in the group can make notes.
3. After 5 minutes each group can share their definition with the class.
4. The teacher helps everyone to compare the definitions and combine them to create a final class definition.

Reflection

After completing the activity, it is important to spend time helping students reflect on their experience. Metacognitive reflection is an important skill and starting to develop this early benefits students greatly. Students reflect on doing the activity and how well they engaged in their thinking skills.

Ask students to respond with thumbs up or thumbs down in response to your questions. Use these questions to get started:

Did you find this activity easy? Was it tricky to work out some of the answers? Do you think you listened well to others? Did you come up with good ideas? Did you get a chance to share? Do you think you will share more next time? – final thoughts....