

Claims and reasons

Introduction

We want pupils to get into the habit of giving reasons for the claims they make. The giving of reasons is an important move in thinking, writing and dialogue. The following activity will enable you to establish, with pupils, related concepts like *opinion, view, conclusion, claim, proposition* and *statement*. It will also help you to emphasise the following notions to the pupils you teach:

- Particular claims and opinions may not be accepted by everyone in a community
- It's uncommon to agree and disagree about particular claims and opinions
- A good way to start evaluating differing views is by examining the reasons or grounds for agreeing and disagreeing with them
- Reasonable disagreement is perfectly acceptable, in fact it is to be encouraged
- It is important to pay close attention to the wording of particular statements one wants to agree or disagree with

The activity will also be useful as a means of exploring questions focusing on a single concept such as *friendship* (below)

The activity

1. Prepare a set of statements and read them out in turn to pupils. Ask pupils to consider each statement for a moment and then indicate their response as either: *agree, disagree* or *not sure*. If you wish, you could make this a paired activity and suggest that pupils agree a response to each statement with a thinking partner. Ask pupils to put their thumbs up if they agree, thumbs down if they disagree or thumbs horizontal if they are not sure.
2. Choose a few people and ask them to give reasons for their responses. You could question their responses for as long as you think appropriate in order to draw out their thinking. You could also open up this short dialogue to the rest of the class and ask for further agreement and disagreement with reasons.
3. A worthwhile variation is to split the class into groups of 3 or 4 members. Each group devises a set of questions on a theme you suggest. Then members of each group, modelling their behaviour on your, carry out the questioning and dialogue with the rest of the class.

Applications

This activity not only gets pupils used to analysing statements, agreeing and disagreeing without rancour and giving reasons for their views; it also provides a model for them to agree and disagree (with reasons) in a future enquiry that is more open. The activity also serves to establish a conceptual language for agreeing and disagreeing. This can be seen in the following example activity on the theme of friendship. The statements are:

- We should always agree with our friends
- We should help our friends if they ask us
- Anyone who is nice to us can be our friend
- Friends feel exactly the same way about each other
- We should always stand up for our friends
- We should never tell our friends' secrets to others
- We should care about people who are not our friends
- We can be friends with people who don't agree with us about everything.
- We can be friends with the environment

- We can be friends with our pets
- Teachers and pupils can be friends

As people start to give their reasons for agreeing and disagreeing with these statements, it will become apparent that some reasons draw attention to the application of words like *always* in a statement such as 'We should *always* agree with our friends'. If people can think of an *example* of a situation where they shouldn't agree with their friends then that will serve as a reason for disagreeing with the statement. If people disagree that teachers and pupils can be friends they will need to *define* what they mean by friends or talk about what is *appropriate* and not appropriate in relationships between pupils and teachers.

So the activity can be fun and engaging but also likely to draw out vocabulary like: *always*, *example*, *define*, *appropriate* and, with some statements *evidence*.