

Organizing, Evaluating, and Inquiry Activities and Techniques

Theme Sort

Category

Organizing or Grouping

Time

10-15 minutes (per round)

Group or Individual

Group

Why do it?

Work collaboratively to make sense of a lot of information by grouping ideas together and learning from the perspectives of others.

Overview

When brainstorming or working with a group on an activity that generates lots of information, clustering that information helps themes to emerge. Asking that participants share their ideas with the group and why they are grouping ideas a certain way aloud as they group information facilitates conversation and understanding of differing perspectives, and allows for other themes and ideas to emerge.

Directions

1. Make sure you have a large surface or wall available.
2. Give participants 2 minutes to address a prompt and ask that participants add one note or idea per sticky note.
 - a. The facilitator will give them a prompt of some kind, maybe they are identifying concepts that they are struggling with, maybe they are furthering their learning, maybe they are identifying ways to engage with a certain population in a professional field, the possibilities are endless.
3. When time is up, participants take turns placing their sticky notes on the large surface or wall, reading them aloud as they do so.
4. As the sticky notes are shared, participants place them on a wall or in the center of a table and group them according to theme.
 - a. Participants should ask themselves the following:
 - i. Is this related to a previous note? If so, place it near the existing note.
 - ii. If it is the same, place it behind or on top of the existing note.
 - iii. If not, begin a new grouping
 - b. When all the notes have been read and clustered, write a title for that grouping. These are your themes.

5. Once the groupings are established and titled, participants will look back to review any remaining outliers to determine if they belong in any of the smaller groups or if they should remain apart.
6. When it makes sense, the group can then look at the themes and determine which is the most important to the group.
7. Repeat the steps as necessary.

Note: In a virtual space? No worries. Use a virtual whiteboard, slides, or a simple shared document to facilitate and gather ideas.

References

Pip Decks (2022). <https://pipdecks.com/themesort>

Rose, Thorn, Bud

Category

Evaluation

Time

30 minutes

Group or Individual

Group

Why do it?

Evaluate an idea, project, or process and parcel out what you like, what you don't, and what opportunities for growth may exist.

Overview

This is often used in business to evaluate an idea or around the dinner table to discuss the day, but it can also be used in the classroom in various ways. Use this strategy to evaluate an idea, project, or process as a group. Maybe you want to give and receive feedback on a project from your group or from the whole class; maybe you want to gain perspective as an instructor on how a new class or experience went. Use this strategy to determine positives, negatives, and opportunities.

Directions

1. Identify the idea, project, process, literary or media work, etc. you want to evaluate.
2. Write up a short description or display an image of the thing and place it in a location where everyone can see or access it (and ensure accessibility best practices are followed).
3. Explain the strategy and assign columns or sticky note colors to each.
 - a. Rose = positive aspects
 - b. Thorn = negative aspects or potential issues, questions, or concerns
 - c. Bud = opportunities for growth or learning
4. Give participants a set amount of time to add as many ideas to each section as they can.
 - a. Note: you may break this up into a time for rose, a set time for thorn, and a set time for bud, or you may choose to do a single time limit to post notes for each section.
5. Once time has passed, participants should share out what they posted.

*Note: You may consider using the **Theme Sort activity** with this strategy to identify themes.*

Note: In a virtual space? No worries. Use a virtual whiteboard, slides, or a simple shared document to facilitate and gather ideas.

References

Pip Decks (2022). <https://pipdecks.com/rose>

Five Whys

Category

Inquiry or Problem Solving

Time

30 minutes

Group or Individual

Group

Why do it?

Dig into a problem to find a potential root cause – the issues causing the issues.

Overview

Often used in business to examine why a product or process or service issue may be arising, this technique can also work well in the classroom to have students dig into content, concepts, cases, the course itself, etc. The strategy asks that we look beneath the surface to determine larger issues that may be the actual cause of the problem. For example, instead of saying there is a lot of plastic in the ocean, one might instead say, we use too much plastic. The resulting actionable item then becomes less about cleaning up the ocean and more about making sure it is not polluted with plastic in the first place, which is a much more sustainable strategy.

Directions

1. Define the problem or issue, writing it in a space where all can access it.
2. Ask why in relation to the posted problem or issue and, just as a toddler might, keep asking why in response to each suggestion until you have asked and answered “why” at least five times.
 - a. Note: Include the previous answer in the question to make sure it continues to narrow the focus and stays on track.
3. Review the questions and answers and then look at the identified root cause.
 - a. Note: You may now want to use a brainstorming activity to begin outlining an action plan.

Note: In a virtual space? No worries. Use a virtual whiteboard, slides, or a simple shared document to facilitate and gather ideas.

References

Pip Decks (2022). <https://pipdecks.com/fivewhy>