



## Agreeing and Disagreeing

### Why?

To agree with someone's contribution and perhaps to add to it is a **collaborative** act that builds on and strengthens an idea. Agreeing might be seen to be 'polite' – it offers affirmation to someone; it is a constructive act. Disagreeing, however, can be seen as a destructive act in the sense that it seeks to tear down an idea or argument, but that doesn't make it impolite. When someone disagrees with me they are offering me a different perspective and helping to test the strength of my ideas and arguments. It is an act of **critical** thinking, and we need to develop the disposition to welcome this just as much as an agreement. However, we do have to be **caring** when deciding when and how to disagree with someone. Disagreement is a skill, and one that is worth practising.

It is also worth noting here that we can rush too quickly to agree or disagree. Perhaps the first thing is to make sure we have understood what another person is trying to say (see the *Supporting / Seeking to Understand* sheet).

### Useful Questions for Facilitation

- Who agrees with / disagrees with X?
- X, are you agreeing / disagreeing with Y?
- Is there a challenge to that?
- Is there a different point of view?

### Relevant Moves of Facilitation

When contestable statements are made, encourage the group to ask questions that will help them to better understand the speaker's point of view before deciding whether they agree or disagree with it (see the *Supporting / Seeking to Understand* sheet).

When signalling their desire to speak, ask participants to use a signal that indicates their desire to agree with a previous speaker (thumbs up, for example) or to disagree with a previous speaker (thumbs down, for example).

When a contestable statement has been made (and properly explored / understood), ask the whole group to indicate whether they agree or disagree. This is a useful way of bringing everyone into the enquiry – even if they are not speaking they have made a contribution. You can then take some thoughts from both those who agree and disagree to develop an argument. You could use a 'Treasoning' type-graphic to record and evaluate the argument (see the *Reasons* sheet).

When a contestable statement has been made (and properly explored / understood), ask people to place themselves in a horse-shoe shape representing a continuum from those who strongly agree round to those who strongly disagree. Split the horse-shoe in half and line the two halves up opposite each other (with the most strongly agreeing person opposite the most strongly disagreeing person or the other way around). Ask them to pair up with the person opposite them and explore

their different positions on the statement. Ask if anyone has changed their position and why? (This could be run as a skills builder or a follow-up activity).

## Example of a Skills Builder

### Hot Seating

- Sit in a circle and place an empty chair in the centre of the circle facing you
- Make a contestable statement (e.g. 'Some animals are more important than others'). Perhaps you could write this on the board (or in the centre of a Treasoning graphic)
- Invite people to come and sit in the 'hot seat' and either agree with you, stating their reasons, disagree with you, stating their reasons, or ask you a question aimed at better understanding your position)
- You could record the agreements / disagreements on a Treasoning graphic and later evaluate the reasons / arguments
- I sometimes 'ham it up' and express shock that someone has been rude enough to disagree with me, leading to a discussion about when and how it is OK to disagree (this usually has the effect of encouraging everyone to disagree with me!)

### Offensive or OK?

This activity is adapted from **Generation Global's** freely available resource '**The Essentials of Dialogue**'. Here's how it could work:

- Get people into pairs and give each pair a copy of the speech bubbles below
- Ask them to have a discussion. This could be about a philosophical question, or something like their favourite books, films sports teams etc.
- During the discussion, ask them to try out as many of the sentence stems in the speech bubbles as they can. Tell them that some of the statements will seem offensive / rude, but this is OK as people are only playing a role.
- Ask the pairs to reflect on how the stems made them feel when they were 'on the receiving end'
- Ask the pairs to sort the statements into two groups – offensive or OK
- Get the pairs into fours and ask them to compare their sorting. Have they disagreed about any of the stems?
- Can they suggest other stems that might be useful when disagreements arise?

## Offensive or OK?

Do you honestly believe that...

I see what you are saying, but...

I see that differently...

That's rubbish!

You must be joking!

I'm not convinced by that...

That just doesn't make sense!

I disagree with you because...

I hate...

I think that's a bit silly.

You're wrong about that.

I think a weakness in your argument is...