



# The good example

## - Activate Learning in Group Work

### Continua

#### Using Continua to develop rationales, identify misconceptions and clarify thinking

A continuum is a line which represents the possible range of responses to a statement, e.g. Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. When we work in pairs or groups deciding how strongly we agree or disagree with a statement, using continua can help us be aware of complementary and contrasting perspectives.

It is this awareness of where we stand in comparison with others which can in turn help us clarify our rationale and '[w]e can talk about a *collective consciousness*, an awareness of others' ways of seeing things, as linking individual consciousness to each other' (Bowden and Marton, 1998, p.14-15).

A continuum provides the visual record of a position at a particular point in time. However it is the process that leads to that decision, articulating the rationale for holding that position and being open to constructive questioning that are critical to the collaborative learning process.

See the example below:

*First we will check we have a shared understanding of the statement. Then you will discuss where you stand for each statement and mark your current position on each continuum. Try to reach a consensus with your partner but if this is not possible record both positions. Be prepared to have a rationale for each position. What is informing your decision? Do you know of any supporting evidence and counter-arguments?*

**'For learning to occur, the learner has first to be engaged with the object of learning'. Claxton (2002, p.19)**

Strongly agree-----Strongly disagree

**Socratic questions** lead us to deeper thinking and by coaching the class in how to frame a Socratic question and how then to think about its impact we move towards a learning environment that is conducive to autonomous learning.

### In short

#### Ways to use Continua:

1. Select a list of statements relevant to your course and prepare a Continua Sheet.
2. Group the students in pairs or small groups; give each group a Continua sheet.
3. Check there is a shared understanding of the statements.
4. Groups discuss each statement and record their positions on each continuum with a cross.
5. Group representatives provide a rationale for their position or positions.
6. The rest of the class uses Socratic questions to help each group clarify their positions and their rationales.

**This can provide effective preparation for assignments and developing arguments.**

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