

➤ CROSSING THE LINE

A Thinking Routine/Discursive Strategy for Controversial Questions

THE LINE: A long rope placed on the floor/ground in a rectangle so that participants can stand within it, single file, & step both over & out of it to either side.

Note: It becomes a circle in the second phase of the strategy!

PHASE 1

1. Create question that explicitly states the controversial issue.
2. Invite students to step inside the rope, single file, facing forwards, and close their eyes.
3. Tell students that they are to keep their eyes closed. You will state the question. On your count of 3, they will step to the right if their answer is yes and left if it is no, then open their eyes and face the middle.
4. Once students have stepped left or right, see which side has fewer students.
5. Invite students on this side to share a reason for choosing yes or no.
6. Next, inform students on 'the other side' that they will now 'cross' the line, one at a time, and offer a new idea to support 'the other side.'
7. When all students are on one side and have shared an idea (no repeats!), starting with the students who initially chose the now unpopulated side, they will now "cross" the line, one at a time, and share a new idea/argument to support the as-yet-undiscussed 'side'.
8. When all students have crossed over, invite them to return to their initial line inside of the rope and close their eyes.
9. Instruct them that you are going to end as you began. However, this time, there is a 3rd option: After you state the question once more, they can:
 - a. Step right if their answer is yes/agree;
 - b. Step left if their answer is no/disagree;
 - c. Stay in the center if they now find their thinking somewhere in the middle!
10. Together, compare/contrast how people configured themselves at the start and end of the exercise. Participants whose position shifted may share why!

PHASE 2

11. Once students have positioned themselves and observed one another's choices, ask them to hold the rope in their hands to form a circle.
12. Moving clockwise, invite students to share an insight or takeaway from participating in this process. Here are some guiding questions:
 - a. What was it like, for you, to go through this process? When were you most and least comfortable? Why do you think this was the case?
 - b. What insights and/or questions do you now have about the topic? Yourself? Our class?

*Crossing the Line Facilitation Strategy, Van Hesteren, S. 2021.
inspired by/adapted from Deep Democracy Facilitation Tools*