

Count Down (or Count Up) and Stand Up (or Sit Down)

Explanation of Count Down

Count Down is one of the most favoured activities in the early stages of developing a community of inquiry, partly because of its simplicity, and partly because it reinforces the practice of **OOPSAAT** (Only One Person Speaks At A Time), which is essential for effective dialogue. It also develops the sense that everybody in a community of inquiry has a part to play in building success for the whole group.

The aim of the activity/game is for each member of the group to call out one number, counting down from X to 1 (where X is the number of people in the group). So, for example, the first person calls out 10, the next 9, the next 8, and so on down to 1. There are, however, two simple rules:

1. If two people call out the same number, then the whole group has to begin again from X
2. There must be no signalling or patterning, eg going round clockwise – in other words, the order of calling out must be unpredictable.

Anyone can be the first person to call out. To encourage different people to take this responsibility, a third rule is sometimes used, that:

3. No one can begin more than one 'round' or sequence.

Variations of Count Down

- The activity could, equally well, be called 'Count Up', with the counting, going up rather than down. This might be more suitable for very young children.
- If the group tends towards over-excitement, it may be helpful to split them into smaller groups, so that success is more easily achieved, and perhaps lessons learned from the success. But be aware that sometimes this strategy backfires by adding to the excitement – especially if the groups begin to 'compete' with each other. That, however, can provide an opportunity to open discussion about the pros and cons of competition in 'raising standards'. Or, at any rate, participants can quickly become aware that, in order to succeed as a group, their focus has to be on collaboration *within* their own group, rather than competition *against* other groups.
- The process of this activity is very similar to that of Stand Up (or Sit Down) described below. Indeed, it is common for groups to do Count Down first, and move straight on to Stand Up.

Explanation of Stand Up

Stand Up is one of the most favoured activities in the early stages of developing a community of inquiry for the same reasons as Count Down. It is often used after Count Down.

The aim of the activity/game is for members of the group to stand up one at a time until everyone is on their feet. There are, however, two simple rules:

1. If two people stand up – or even move to stand up – at the same time, then all those already on their feet have to sit down and start over again
2. There must be no signalling or patterning, eg going round clockwise – in other words, the order of standing up must be unpredictable.

Anyone can be the first person to stand up. To encourage different people to take this responsibility, a third rule is sometimes used, that:

3. No one can begin more than one 'round' or sequence.

Variations of Stand Up

1. The activity could, equally well, be called Sit Down, with everyone starting on their feet. Some groups naturally attempt to do Sit Down straight after they have succeeded at Stand Up (but few actually succeed in doing both perfectly!) Other groups prefer to start with Sit Down, since it does have the advantage that everyone still 'in the game' can see each other more easily. (When large groups play Stand Up, those still seated sometimes find it hard to see each other.)
2. This activity can be done with people calling out a number (either going up, or going down, as in Count Down, when they stand or sit. It could be worth trying it this way as a variation, and inviting the group to consider whether it makes the activity either easier or harder and, if so, why.
3. Another variation is to do the activity with eyes closed (though eyes may be opened once people are stood up, if only to have movement monitored). This is very challenging, and often the group will subsequently articulate the importance of seeing/reading body language – which is a valuable learning point for developing a community of inquiry.
4. Yet another variation – perhaps best tried once the group has become quite practised at the basic activity – is to remove the second rule (about no signalling or patterning) and see if the group can work out (though still in silence) a pattern/strategy for success.
5. The points about competition and collaboration in Count Down are equally true of Stand Up.

Bridging and community building

A possible lesson to be learned from this is that, though it is important for individuals to think well 'privately', it is also necessary to find good ways of communicating their thoughts publicly. Point 4 above leads very well into discussing ways of encouraging turn taking in dialogues (while preserving a sense of flow), and of finding alternatives to putting up hands and trying to attract the teacher's attention for permission to speak at every turn.

Hopefully, pupils will become more and more aware of the co-operative nature of dialogue in groups and the sensitivity (eg, to other peoples 'body language', facial expressions and vocal queues) that is required for disciplined dialogue to work.

It is worth asking pupils what similarities and differences they can suggest between doing these activities and taking part in a group dialogue.

Another track might be to say things like: It's important to be aware of subtle signals people make when they want speak or are puzzled. 'What should we do if we notice someone looking puzzled?' 'What should we do if we are not sure whether someone wants to speak?'