Concentric Circles

Summary

The concentric circles game is simple and active and can be used for many different purposes including as an icebreaker, a guided discussion, paired analysis, activating prior knowledge, summarising, debriefing and reflecting. It ensures that every learner has the opportunity to have their voice heard and to share their ideas.

Steps

1. Identify specific question(s) or statement(s) to discuss based on the topic you are exploring. You may wish to use a video, reading, quote or song as a stimulus to open a discussion on a new topic.
2. Split the class in half. One half forms an inner circle and the other an outer circle. Inner circle learners face outwards and outer circle learners face inwards so that pairs face each other in 2 concentric circles (if you have an uneven number of learners, have one group of 3 or join in yourself).
3. Pose the question or problem. Pairs then discuss, taking it in turns to respond and listen. You can provide prompts to encourage learners to ask follow-up questions of each other, such as:
   - What made you think that? Where did you find that out? Can it be validated? Can you tell me more about that? Are you aware of any opposing/alternative perspectives?
4. Keep the discussion short. The timing will vary depending on the objective of the activity: for example, less than 1 minute for icebreakers and 2-3 minutes for bigger questions.
5. Call out 'Move or Change' and the outer circle moves clockwise one or two spaces so that new pairs are formed. You can pose the same question again, encouraging learners to build on what they have just discussed with their first partner. Alternatively, pose a new question. Repeat this 4 or 5 times or until all the questions have been discussed.
6. Variations:
   - Learners form 2 lines facing one another instead of circles.
   - Alternate which circle responds first to the question or prompt.
   - Learners pose their own questions to discuss with their partners.
   - Provide each learner with a short statement about the topic. Learners take turns to share their statement and discuss it with their partner. Encourage learners to swap the statement cards before they move on to a new partner.
7. Reflection: seek feedback from the class on what they learned on the topic and on the process itself. Feedback can be done orally through another round of the circles for instance, or in a written format. Prompts to stimulate reflection can include:
   - What did you like or dislike about the activity?
   - Did your response or viewpoint change as you moved around the circle? In what ways did it change?
   - Was there anything you heard which was new to you or which surprised you? Was there anything you didn't agree with, or anything you want to know more about?
   - Compare your initial response with your closing thoughts on the issue.

More information

- Concentric Circles from Facing History & Ourselves, step by step description
- Global Citizenship Education: Curious Teachers, Critical Classrooms, edited by Brighid Golden, see page 185 for Concentric Circles
- 1 minute video from Edutopia on Concentric Circles