



Value Continuum

This rather technical-sounding term describes a strategy, which encourages people to express their views in complete emotional comfort.

HOW?

1. Clear the desks and arrange the class in a semi-circle.
2. Across the open end of the semi-circle, ask people to imagine a line (or use chalk, masking tape or a rope) and place a chair at each end.
3. Introduce the issue to be discussed (e.g. vegetarianism) and outline the two opposite positions. Do this by sitting on one chair and speaking as if you held this extreme view: *"I never eat meat. Meat eating is an abomination - unhealthy, unnatural and uneconomical. I campaign day in and day out to persuade others to give up this immoral habit. A law should be passed banning the eating of meat, on pain of death".* Then sit on the other chair: *"I am a devotee of meat ..."*.
4. Ensure that the two views are **extreme** and **balanced** - one is not obviously more right (in the teacher's eyes) than the other. Explain that everyone's view will fall somewhere on the sliding scale between the two chairs.
5. Explain the rules: *"You choose whether to participate or not. The person who is on the line is guaranteed that her view will be listened to. There will be no agreeing or disagreeing (there will be time for that later) - no reaction, verbal or otherwise from the audience. Honesty is expected"*.
6. The teacher sits down in the semi-circle and anyone may begin by taking her chair and sitting in a position on the continuum that represents their view. The volunteer is expected to say a few words to the class about her position and then stays in her chosen spot.
7. The process is repeated, with volunteers going out and speaking, one after another. If one person's view is identical to an earlier speaker, she can sit in front of him.
8. If, after the first few brave souls, the rest of the students are reluctant to take part, then you might change the rules: *"Come and stand on the line, but you don't have to say anything"*. If there is further reluctance you can say: *"Stay where you are and just point to your position on the line"*. This way everyone makes a statement of some kind. These options might be needed with shy or fearful students initially, but the aim is to encourage bolder participation in future which is why protective ground rules are so important.
9. The process is likely to come to a natural end.

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APPLICATIONS

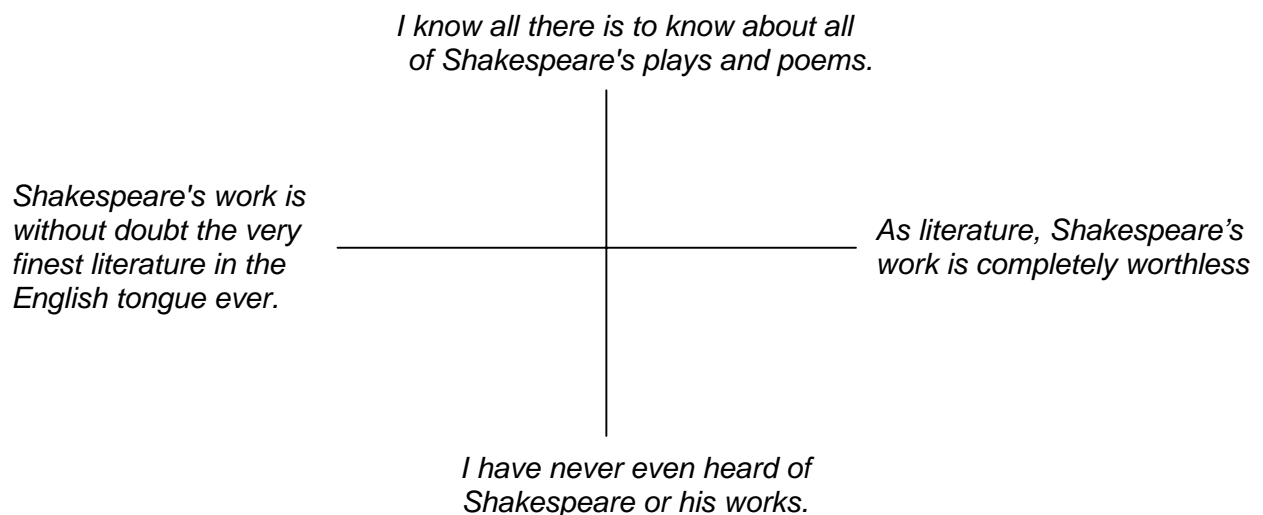
- ◆ To discuss any issue about which there can be polarised, but equally plausible, views.
- ◆ English, RE and Personal and Social Education are obvious contexts.
- ◆ Science: ethical dilemmas e.g. genetic engineering, nuclear energy, animal experiments.
- ◆ History: questions of judgement e.g. *Was Catherine the Great an enlightened despot?*
- ◆ In any subject, to assess what people know about a topic before it is begun (*I know absolutely everything there is to know about this topic ... I know nothing at all about it*).
- ◆ To assess how much support there is for a proposal.
- ◆ In any subject, to evaluate learning (*This was the best possible way to solve the problem / fulfil the brief / learn the topic ... This method was completely useless, it had no merit at all*).
- ◆ Try conducting the exercise in a modern foreign language.
- ◆ Use it to establish a time line, in which case each student will be given a card with an event / invention / breakthrough / character / clue.

WHY DO IT?

- ◆ It is good training in self-discipline and group co-operation.
- ◆ It develops listening skills.
- ◆ It raises self-esteem when conducted in strict accordance with the rules - this translates into increased confidence to speak and participate.
- ◆ It asks people to consider a range of opinions and is excellent preparation for the art of debate.

VARIATIONS

1. A 2-Dimensional continuum might be used to explore two related issues at once. In this case students will need to sit in a circle and a cross is marked on the floor using chalk, masking tape or string. For example:



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2. When all or most people are 'on the line', you can 'break' the line in half and make two debating teams. The teams face each other (as in Parliament) and take turns to make points. It might be helpful to give each team a different object with the rule that you can only speak if you are holding it. The same person cannot make two consecutive contributions. The aim is to persuade people to change sides and the team, which has most converts at the end 'wins' the debate. In the process of course, the finer points of the arguments should emerge. Part way through, teams could go off and research their arguments in more depth and detail.

3. The *Value Continuum* could be the culmination rather than the initiation of research.