

Lesson 1

Classroom Atmosphere and Moral Questioning

Activity 6

Activity: How are we Going to Talk to One Another?

Perhaps for this important question, we should consider what de Tocqueville, writing about his visit to America from France, calls the “Tyranny of the Majority.” What does he mean by that? What is the problem with the democratic procedure of voting? What is the problem with majority rule? Why and when might we not want majority rule?

Decision by consensus has a long tradition in Quaker Meetings. Is it possible for a class to come to a consensus? Let’s try an exercise with consensus.

1. First decide as a class: What does consensus means? It means more than just everyone coming to an agreement, doesn’t it? In groups, discuss what you will do to invite minority opinions and honor them towards consensus. How long do you think it will take to arrive at a consensus? Why is consensus important? In terms of fairness? In terms of respect? In terms of harm?
2. Next, individually write down on a note card in large block letters any word that could possibly come up in a class talking about sex. The teacher will read them out loud.
3. Notice which ones you laugh at when your teacher reads them out loud. Stop at the funny ones and talk about why you’re laughing.

On the board, the teacher will put up three columns:

FIND A SUBSTITUE

DEPENDS ON THE CONTEXT

OK

As a class, place each word in a column based on what the majority of the class decides by voting. The class will vote on each word. After the voting is done, divide the class into groups of three and have them argue a minority opinion about each of the words. Then come together as a class and vote again. (Note: If there is full consensus on where a word should be placed, you do not need to vote on that word again.)

There will be some conflict over particular words. The class then must decide how they might go about gaining consensus in an ethical way.

If the class cannot come to a consensus, they can decide to talk again during the next class period and should be encouraged to use the situation as an opportunity to work together, compromise, and find a solution that everyone deems acceptable.