

COACHING SKILL:

BETTER BRAINSTORMING¹

Duration of Activity: varies

Age Range: any

WHAT IS IT?

- PA teams often use brainstorming to generate with ideas. By following some simple guidelines, brainstorming can help students learn creative problem solving and analytical skills. With these skills they will be able to think through issues or problems thoroughly so that they learn the most from their experience.

MATERIALS: Board or flip-chart

ACTIVITY 1:

1. Discuss brainstorming rules. Almost everyone knows how to brainstorm but often it is less successful than it can be because important rules aren't followed.

Brainstorming rules:

- a. Defer judgment. The goal is to generate a large number of ideas. During the idea generation phase ideas should not be judged or discussed. The focus should be only on generating ideas.
 - b. Quantity breeds quality. Try to generate as many ideas as possible. The greater the number of ideas, the better chance of quality ideas. The teacher might even set an idea quotient, telling their students "I want you to come up with at least 10 issues you are passionate about."
 - c. Hitchhiking is encouraged. Students should build off each other's ideas. Thus, all ideas should be written down on a large sheet of paper so everyone can see them. As students look at the list of ideas, new ideas will come to them.
2. Brainstorm an issue, problem or project that students are dealing with.
 3. Incubation: An incubation period is an important part of the creative process. That is, once the conscious mind has explored a problem, it is helpful to deliberately stop thinking about the problem. Most people get their best ideas not when they are sitting at their desks thinking about a problem directly but when they are taking a shower, driving their car, taking a walk (i.e. doing something else so that their subconscious can work). This natural process can be harnessed deliberately.

¹ Developed by: Erika Walker, University of St. Thomas

- a. Coaches should ask students when they get their best ideas and then explain how the subconscious can also work on problems. Encourage students to carry a small notebook so they can write down any ideas that come to them. Just by paying attention to these ideas, students will find they get more ideas.
- b. Come back to brainstorm sheet with new ideas. Discuss where people got their new ideas.

OTHER BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUES:

Mind-mapping:

This is a form of visual note-taking which is very effective for generating new ideas. A central topic is selected and written in the center of a large sheet of paper. As students brainstorm ideas related to the topic, these are written down, circled, and linked to the central idea.

Step into Someone Else's Shoes:

Ask your students to imagine themselves to be someone else, for example, President Bush, Martin Luther King, their school principle, etc. Then, from the vantage point of this other person, ask them to identify important issues.

Wishful Thinking:

Similar to brainstorming, Wishful Thinking encourages students to stretch their imaginations. First, students state the question, goal, situation or problem. Then, imagining anything is possible, they brainstorm their ideal solutions to the problem. With any perceived obstacles removed, new and innovative options surface. Finally, after all the new ideas are generated, these are examined one by one to see if components of these ideas may be adapted for use in solving the actual problem at hand.

EVALUATION:

1. Have students look at list and write down the two best ideas (or most surprising, most creative, most interesting, etc.).
2. Have them explain why they picked these two.
3. Students should reflect on how they see this issue differently as a result of brainstorming.