

Speedy Techniques

What Would [Bob Dylan] Do?

Creative disruption for group tasks

CATEGORIES: GROUP WORK, DIVERGENT THINKING, IDEA GENERATION, DESIGN

This very simple technique sparks divergent thinking during group tasks, and will probably get you some laughs too. It is based on City University's ["Bright Sparks" tool](#) (itself based on Michael Michalko's "hall of fame" technique from [Thinkertoys](#)), which is intended specifically for design challenges. But this simplified version will work for almost any group activity – even quick group discussions of a text or idea.

Steps

1. Set up the group activity. Warn students that they can expect someone else to be joining their group later on.
2. After an appropriate interval (how long depends on the overall task length), call a pause and announce, "[Bob Dylan] has now joined your group. What new ideas or perspectives will [he] bring?"
 - a. It doesn't have to be Bob Dylan; you can choose any famous person to join the team – but they should, ideally, be someone sufficiently well-known that most students will know who they are, and with well-recognised traits, characteristics or skills – problematic traits are good here; the more disruptive the better!
 - b. Optionally, you can extend the pause by sending the students to research their new hypothetical group member for a very limited amount of time (e.g. three minutes on the relevant Wikipedia page), before restarting the task.
3. After another appropriate interval, call another pause and announce, "[Princess Diana] has now also joined your group. [She] disagrees with most of [Bob Dylan's] inputs. What will [her] ideas be? How will you balance them with [Bob's]?"

4. You'll need some convergence at the end, so call a final pause and announce, "Time to come to a conclusion, so stop [Bob] and [Diana] arguing; try to draw elements from both their inputs into your final position/idea/concept".

Variations

- This is the most basic and universal version of this technique, but you can modify the celebrity inputs to fit the specific group activity. For example, if it is a design task, you could announce that [Bob Dylan] is now the client, and [his] particular demands should be taken into account. And you can add as many extra celebrities as you like.
- You can also assign parts of the group to each celebrity team member: divide the group between A and B (and C and D if you want to add extra inputs); the As take [Bob Dylan's] position; Bs take [Princess Diana's] position.
- You could introduce the celebrity to the group at the very start of the task, but the idea is to maximise the idea-generating disruption, so it is better to bring them in when the task is already underway.

ONLINE? YES – THIS WORKS WELL IN AN ONLINE CLASSROOM WITH BREAKOUT ROOMS. CALL STUDENTS BACK OUT OF THE BREAKOUT ROOMS TO INTRODUCE THE CELEBRITY GROUP MEMBERS, OR SIMPLY BROADCAST THE INTERVENTIONS THROUGH THE MESSAGING SYSTEM.

PHYSICAL RESOURCES? NONE REQUIRED, BUT YOU COULD CREATE HANDOUT PROFILES OF THE DISRUPTIVE CELEBRITIES WITH BULLETPPOINTS COVERING THEIR ATTRIBUTES.