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## **APC: Alternatives, Possibilities, Choices**

### **FOCUS ON ALTERNATIVES**

**APC is a crystallisation of the process of deliberately trying to find alternatives.**

**In taking action or making a decision there may seem to be few alternatives, but a deliberate effort to find alternatives can change the whole situation. The APC operation is an attempt to focus attention directly on exploring all the alternatives or choices or possibilities - beyond the obvious ones.**

**In looking at a situation it is unnatural to go beyond an explanation which seems satisfactory and yet there may be other possibilities which may be even more likely if only an effort is made to find them. The most likely alternative is not necessarily the most obvious.**

**This deliberate search for alternatives applies not only to action but also to explanations. When an obvious explanation presents itself it is very unnatural to look beyond it to try and find other possible explanations. That is why it is useful to have a device which can take one beyond natural inclinations**

**The APC is an antidote to emotional reaction. Whenever a student seems to be looking at something in a rigid way he/she can be asked to do an APC. If the student can do this then the result is either a change in view or an adherence to the original view now, however, due to preference. APC can be applied to other subjects.**

**As in the CAF lesson the emphasis in teaching is on what has been left out. That is to say the groups try to find different alternatives and choices for the same situation to demonstrate that even when you are sure that there cannot be any other possibilities you may still find some if you make a deliberate effort to look for them. As with the CAF lesson it is all too easy to suppose that one naturally looks at all possible alternatives anyway - but it is not true. To go beyond the obvious and the satisfactory possibilities one needs a deliberate device like the APC.**

(\* APC = Alternatives, Possibilities, Choices)

**When you have to make a decision or take action, you may at first think that you do not have all the choices at your disposal. But if you look for them, you may find that there are more alternatives than you thought. Similarly in looking at a situation there are always obvious explanations. But if you look for them, you may find that there are possible explanations that you had not thought of.**

### **EXAMPLE**

**A car is found in a ditch and the driver is dead. What could have happened?**

**APC:**

- The driver had a heart attack or fainted.
- The car had a puncture, blow-out or mechanical failure.
- The driver was drunk.
- The driver misjudged the curve of the road.
- The driver was attacked by a wasp and lost concentration.
- The driver fell asleep.
- The driver was murdered and then placed in the crashed car.)

## **PRACTICE**

*(see Practice section of student's notes (B))*

Normally practice items 1, 2 and 3 are used one after the other. But for any one of these a teacher may choose to substitute practice items 4-7. Project items could also be used. The Students work in groups as usual.

(\* 4. The brightest girl in the class starts making mistakes in her work on purpose. What possible explanations are there?

5.\*\* Fewer people want to be scientists. What possible explanations are there for this and what possible action can be taken?

6. Do an APC on all the different ways in which you could listen to rock music.

7. You want to get to sleep but a neighbour is playing very loud music. Do an APC on your alternatives:

1. What can you do right at the time?
2. What can you do to prevent it happening again?)

## **PRACTICE ITEM 1.**

(\* A man goes into a bar and asks for a drink of water. The woman behind the bar gives him a drink of water and then suddenly screams. What possible explanations are there?)

Here, the groups are not allowed any actual thinking time. Instead, groups or individuals suggest possible explanations until someone hits on the suggestion given below. The other explanations can be listed. If no one guesses the explanation, the teacher can reveal this.

**Suggestions of possible explanation:**

- The man was hiccuping which is why he asked for a glass of water.
- The girl knew that hiccups were often cured by a sudden fright so she screamed to frighten the man.

## **PRACTICE ITEM 2.**

(\* You discover that your best friend is a thief. What alternatives do you have?)

Groups work for 3 minutes on this. At the end of this time the teacher asks a group for the first alternative and then another group for another alternative until no more are forthcoming.

**Suggestions:**

- Tell him you know he is a thief.
- Report him.
- Threaten to report him.

- Drop him as a friend after telling him why.
- Drop him without telling him why.
- Say how much you hate stealing without saying that you know him to be a thief.
- Get someone else who is not a friend to talk to him.
- Leave a note in his desk, etc.

### **PRACTICE ITEM 3.**

(\* The Post Office is losing a lot of money. If you were running it what alternatives would you have?)

Time allowed is 5 minutes. At the end of this time one group is designated to give its alternatives. Other groups and individuals are then invited to add to these one at a time.

Suggestions:

- Charge more for postage or telephones.
- Employ fewer people and have a slower delivery service.
- Introduce more automation.
- Make people collect their own letters from a central place.
- Charge more for certain types of mail such as business mail.
- Offer more money-making services.

### **PROCESS**

(see *Process Section of student's notes (A)*)

(\* Discussion

- What is the point of looking for more alternatives?
- How do you tell which is the most likely or best alternatives?
- When do you stop looking for other possibilities?
- When is it most useful to find new choices?)

Open discussion with the class as a whole, acting as individuals rather than groups.

- What is the point of looking for more alternatives?
- How do you tell which is the most likely or best alternative?
- When do you stop looking for other possibilities?
- When is it most useful to find new choices?

### **PRINCIPLES**

(see *Principles section of student's notes (A)*)

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- A. If you cannot think of any alternatives yourself, you should ask someone else.
- B. You go on looking for alternatives until you find one that you really like.
- C. There is almost always an alternative, even if there does not appear to be one at first.
- D. You cannot know that the obvious explanation is best until you have looked at some others.
- E. To look for alternatives when you are not satisfied is easy but to look for them when you are satisfied requires a deliberate effort.)

The groups look at the list of principles given in the student workcards. They are asked to pick out the principle they think is most important. The groups can also be asked to criticise any one of the principles or to make up a principle of their own.

**PROJECT**

(see *Project section of student's notes (B)*)

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1. A factory owner knows that if he pays the wages his workers demand and probably deserve he will lose money and will have to close the factory and then there will be unemployment in the area. What choices does he have?
2. A boy wants to get married but has to stay at home to look after his ageing father. What alternatives does he have?
3. \*\*In dealing with pollution, what alternative courses of action are there?)

When only a single period is allowed for the lesson there will not be time for this section. The project items can be used as essay topics or given to the students to work on in their own time. In longer lessons the groups can work on a project item chosen by themselves or the teacher as described in the standard lesson format section.



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