

HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT!

Activity Overview

The aim of this activity is to provide a fun and interesting introduction to the holism and reductionism debate and provide an excuse to have some cake in the classroom. The activity provides a fun starter and a series of scenarios to get your students really thinking about this important debate. This activity has been designed to link with the following point from the specification: **Holism and reductionism: levels of explanation in psychology. Biological reductionism and environmental (stimulus-response) reductionism.**

Resources Required

The number of resources required will depend on your class size. This activity works well in groups of 4/6, with each table receiving a whole cake, or a set of cake ingredients (e.g. bag of flour, bag of sugar, box of egg, etc.) There is an accompanying PowerPoint that you can use to save time when using this resource.

Teacher Instructions

Activity 1

Provide each table with a set of ingredients for a whole cake. Show the students slide 2 of the PowerPoint, which provides the definitions for holism and reductionism and the task. The students are required to work in a group and explain why their item (the cake or the set of ingredients) is the best and why. Refer back to the definitions on screen. Give your students five minutes to consider the question before starting the discussion. Once the five minutes has passed, ask your students to justify why their item (the cake or the set of ingredients) is better. Watch the arguments unfold.

Reductionism



Holism



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Activity 2

Then provide the students with the following scenarios (on slides 3, 4 and 5 of the PowerPoint) and ask them to justify, as a group, whether holism or reductionism is better.

The first scenario is deliberately non-psychological to get the students thinking. The second and third scenarios are psychological and can form the basis of an excellent in class discussion on holism and reductionism. You may wish to use these immediately after the cake activity, or save them for a later in the lesson after you've covered the debate in more detail.

- If I want to understand why my car has broken down, is it better to take a holistic or reductionist approach?
- If I want to understand why a person is suffering from depression, is it better to take a holistic approach or a reductionist approach?
- If you want to understand why people obey authority figures, is it better to take a holistic or reductionist approach?

Holism

Holism comes from the Greek word 'holos', which means 'whole' or 'entire' and is the idea that human behaviour should be viewed as a whole in its context, and not as separate parts.



Discussion: If I want to understand why a person is suffering from depression, is it better to take a holistic approach or a reductionist approach?

Reductionism

Reductionism is the belief that human behaviour can be explained by **breaking it down into simpler component parts**.

PowerPoint Slide 4

Following the discussion, you can ask your students whether some behaviours are best explained using a holistic approach and whether some are best explained using a reductionist approach, just to see if they come up with any new examples.