

Hopes and Concerns

Summary

This activity prepares students for constructive dialogue. Students will have the opportunity to share their hopes and their concerns around engaging in constructive dialogue about issues they care about, and listen to others do the same.

Outcomes

Students will:

- Be able to anticipate the opportunities and challenges of an upcoming dialogue
- Practice the skill of “talking about talking” – or discussing the way the group is having a conversation, rather than the topic itself – in a way that can promote learning and growth in constructive dialogue

Details

For Who?	Any age, any experience level with constructive dialogue
How Long?	20-30 minutes
Supplies Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sticky notes or index cards • Pens or markers for all participants

Activity Purpose

This activity can enable students to plan how they will engage in a conversation. It can also be a great way to have students start to buy into the dialogue process, and could be paired with norm-setting to help students think about the type of learning space they want to create together. For example, once they have established the hopes and concerns they hold around engaging in dialogue, they can begin setting norms by

exploring the questions “How will we make the hopes come true? How will we mitigate the concerns?”.

Detailed Agenda

1. Set the Stage With a Silent Reflection

- a. Invite students to reflect on disagreements they may have encountered in the past through a silent or written reflection.
- b. Suggested language:
 - i. *“Think about a conversation that did not go as well as you wanted or hoped. It could be a conversation from a class, or with a friend, or with a stranger. What happened? How did you feel?”*
 - ii. *“What could you have done differently at that moment? What do you wish the other person did differently?”*

2. Turn To This Group

- a. Next, take a second to pause. Remind students that the goal of this dialogue experience is not to replicate those experiences, but to create a new type of conversation.
- b. Suggested language:
 - i. *“Now, think about our group. When it comes to engaging in constructive dialogue about issues that mean something to you, what do you most hope for?”*
 - ii. *“What do you worry about most when you think about these types of conversations?”*

3. Write Hopes and Concerns

- a. Instruct students to write **HOPES** on one sticky note or index card, and **CONCERNS** on another sticky note or index card, quietly. Students can write as many hopes or concerns as they would like.
- b. All contributions should be anonymous, with no names attached to the cards.

4. Share With Others

- a. There are two possible ways to have students hear one another’s hopes and concerns: a gallery walk or an anonymous share-out.
 - i. **Option 1: Gallery Walk** – Have students post sticky notes on the walls of the room at eye-level. The instructor can set up different spaces for **HOPES** and **CONCERNS**. Students can take 10 minutes

to wander quietly around the room to read what others have written.

- ii. **Option 2: Anonymous Share-Out** – Have students fold their index cards and put them in a bowl, one bowl for **HOPES** and one bowl for **CONCERNS**. Mix the index cards up and re-distribute them in two rounds. Ask students to go around the circle and read what is on their index card, aloud.

Wrap-Up

Debrief Questions

Ask students to share their reflections in the full group or in smaller groups.

- What surprised you about this activity?
- What did you learn about your peers?
- What hopes resonated with you?
- What concerns resonated with you?
- How do you think you'll achieve some of those hopes?
- How do you think you as a group will mitigate, or avoid, some of those concerns?

Tip: While this is a great activity to do at the start of a course or program, it can also be a very effective routine to implement before conversations that have the potential to become heated. It can help lower tension and anxiety before it ever starts to creep up.