

Questions to Ask Before Engaging with These Activities in the Classroom

In conversations around personal identity, it's essential to foster a space where individuals are invited to share about their experiences in the way they are able and wish to, even if that may be difficult and require vulnerability. This can build trust, and create opportunities to learn, change and grow.

Reflect on these six questions before engaging with students in the suggested preparation activities:

Why am I engaging in this arts experience or activity, and how do I think it will benefit students artistically?

Examining our intentions as educators can help us prepare to center students and their needs through conversations and experiences around culture.

Some questions to ask:

- Is my reasoning for offering this experience student-centered?
- Am I doing this to check a box?
- Am I assuming anything about this experience or the people involved that I should research or reflect on before moving forward?
- How can I ensure I get to know my students' needs and identities better through this process?
- What are my hopes for students through engaging in this experience? How will I gather feedback about whether these goals were achieved? What will I do if I receive feedback that the outcomes were not as I'd hoped?

How will I create a space where we can take important artistic learning risks and lean into our learning edge?

Learning is not always comfortable. Consider what conversations and strategies can prepare yourself and your students for this reality.

Some examples:

- Trying new conversation structures (think-pair-share, goldfish bowl, turn and talk, etc.), protocols, topics and experiences with students, even if we're not sure how it will go
- Knowing that we can take time to reflect and learn important lessons from new experiences, even if they aren't what we pictured
- Demonstrating the same behaviors we want from our students, including pushing ourselves to learn new things even when it might be uncomfortable or bring up fear
- Persevering, continuing to learn and try again differently
- Being kind to ourselves and others, and framing mistakes as opportunities for growth

How will I create opportunities for critical thinking through this artistic experience?

Questioning is essential to the process of learning about and understanding others perspectives, along with an understanding that culture and identities are complex, nuanced, and ever changing.

Some examples:

- Maintaining an open mind
- Realizing that our own perspective is limited, and that we have a lot to learn from others
- Demonstrating respectful questioning such as "What makes you say that?" and "Could you tell me more about that? I'm not sure I understand."

- Being open to critical questions and feedback by managing our own reactions and emotions before responding, and seeking to understand
- Encouraging honest feedback from students and showing that it is valued by taking the time to process, consider, and make changes based on feedback from others
- Interrupting bias with questioning, such as “I’m curious. What was your intention in saying that?”

How will I create a creative space where vulnerability is not just accepted, but is a superpower?

“Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren’t always comfortable, but they’re never weakness.” Brene Brown (American professor, author, and podcast host.)

Some examples:

- Expressing honestly our emotions and experiences with I statements
- Not avoiding difficult emotions or topics because they might be uncomfortable
- Owning up to mistakes, seeing them as opportunities to learn and grow, and asking what repair looks like for those who have been impacted

How will I create a space where we seek to learn from and understand others perspectives without judgment?

*“I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment...”
Brene’ Brown*

This whole process will involve learning about others perspectives and identities, which may be different from our own. It’s necessary to develop curiosity about others' perspectives, and recognize and honor their truths, to conduct these conversations and experiences with respect.

Some examples:

- Listening to understand deeply, not just to respond
- Taking time if necessary to understand, before speaking or reacting
- Asking questions about things we don't understand, instead of making assumptions
- Speaking our own stories, not those of others
- Creating the conditions for everyone to share, instead of allowing certain voices to dominate the space

How can I prepare myself to truly listen and be present with students during this creative process?

Preparing ourselves to respond with care and sharing these strategies with students creates an environment of mutual respect.

Some examples:

- Taking the time to follow up on any questions or research identified during this reflection before engaging students
- Considering my own emotional state and strategies for dealing with my own uncomfortable emotions and reactions, if they arise
- Considering classroom norms or strategies to share or highlight with students that can help with emotional regulation

Adapted from: [The 6 Pillars of a Brave Space, Developed by Victoria D. Stubbs, LICSW, LCSW-C, Clinical Instructor and Teaching Support Program Coordinator, University of Maryland School of Social Work](#)