Overview:

This is a simple exercise for students to practice exchanging views with people who have different perspectives and opinions.

Learning Outcomes:

- Knowledge: greater awareness of different points of view.
- Skills: ability to listen, ability to express one's own views
- Attitudes: willingness to consider the validity of other perspectives and to modify one's own views.

Information for the Instructor:

- Questions should be carefully crafted in advance. The instructor may wish to set up the discussion with some reminders/pointers of engaging in respectful conversation.

Instructions:

- Give each student/participant a small piece of paper or card.
- Read a controversial statement to the class/group that is appropriate for the setting.
- Ask students/participants to choose their position on this statement and write the corresponding number on their piece of paper:

  1 – strongly agree
  2 – agree
  3 – neutral, or not sure
  4 – disagree
  5 – strongly disagree

Explain to the class/group that if they change their opinion at any point during the exercise, they can cross off the old number and write a new number on their paper.

- Ask each student/participant to find someone who has a card with the same number and discuss their viewpoint for three minutes.
- Students/participants then move on to find someone whose position is one number removed from their own and discuss the statement for three minutes.
- Finally, students/participants find someone whose position is two or more numbers different from their own. Again, they discuss the statement for three minutes.
- At the end, everyone comes together as a class/group to discuss the process.
- How many students have found that they changed their position?
- What led them to change their mind?
- What have they learned from this process?

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Applications:

This exercise can be used with a range of issues; it can work for units in history, geography, environmental science, literature, leadership, and government. It works best when there is a range of opinions on an issue. The activity can be used as part of a plan to introduce a controversial issue, or it can be used when controversy arises spontaneously. Having students discuss content in this way helps them to formulate arguments and provide reasoning, as well as understand the counter points that must be considered. This is a great closure activity for a unit and also a good activity to help students brainstorm a position before writing a paper. The activity could also be repeated throughout the year with different units and topics.

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