



Critical Hope

An approach to environmental
education

By Keren Bromberg & Rebecca Niblett

Activity Title: **Open Sentences**

Appropriate for: **Hope in Environmentalism**

Type/goal of activity: **Experiential** to voice despair for the condition of the world and environment; see below.

Age Level: **Youth and Adult**

Adjustable to other age groups? Yes No

Physical Activity Level: High Moderate Low

Materials needed: Script with sentences to be read to participants

Time Needed: Approximately 30-50 minutes.

Source: Adapted from: Macy, J. & Young Brown, M. (1998). *Coming Back to Life: Practices to reconnect our lives, our world.* British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 98-100.

Activity Instructions:

“Purpose:

This exercise provides a swift and easy way for people to voice their inner responses to the condition of our world. Its structure



helps people both to listen with total receptivity and to express thoughts and feelings that are usually censored for fear of comment or adverse reaction. The sequence of the sentences generally move *from* thoughts and views *to* feelings.

Description:

People sit in pairs, face to face and close enough to attend to each other fully. They refrain from speaking until the exercise begins. One is Partner A, the other Partner B- this can be determined quickly by asking them to tap each other on the knee; the one who tapped first is A. When the guide speaks each unfinished sentence, A repeats it, completes it in his own words, addressing Partner B, and keeps on talking spontaneously for the time allotted. The partners then switch roles. Depending on the material, they switch after each open sentence or, more usually, at the end of the series. The listening partner- and this to be emphasized- keeps silent, saying absolutely nothing and hearkening as attentively and supportively as possible.

If the partners switch roles once, after a series of sentences, invite A to convey without speaking his appreciation to B for B's supportive listening, and invite B to express- again nonverbally- her respect for A's concerns and his courage in sharing them.

For the completion of each open sentence allow a minute or two- or longer, if the momentum is strong. Give a brief warning each time before it is time to move on, saying "take a minute to

finish up," or 'thank you.' A clap or a small bell can bring people to silence, where they rest a few second before the next open sentence.

Here is a sample series of open sentences that we have used a great deal. Feel free to make up your own to address the particular interests of the group, remembering to keep them as unbiased and non leading as possible.

1. I think the condition of our society is becoming...
2. I think the condition of our environment is becoming...
3. What concerns me most about the world today is...
4. When I think of the world we will leave our children, it looks like...
5. Feelings about all this, that I carry around with me, are...
6. Ways I avoid these feelings are...
7. Some ways I can use these feelings are...

Variations

The Open Sentences format adapts easily and effectively to different time spans and situation.

-With groups of organizational or professional colleagues, the sentences can help articulate difficulties without beating around the bush, as well as renew inspiration. For example:

1. What first inspired me to work for the Environmental Protection Agency (or become a physician or canvasser...) was...
2. What I find hard in this work is...
3. What keeps me going in this work is...
4. What I hope can happen for us in this work (or organization) is...

-Working with teachers or parents, this exercise can include:

- If I hide my concerns for the future from the children, it is because I feel...
- In talking with the children about the news, what I would like them to know and feel is...

-Instead of the seven-part series given above, Joanna often uses this shorter three sentence format, allowing more time for each response:

1. To be alive now in this time of global crisis, what is particularly hard for me is...
2. What I appreciate about living in this time of crisis is...
3. As I look at my life, it seems that some of the ways I take part in the healing of my world (or the Great Turning) are...

-In working with teens, we face special challenges, for it seems even more difficult for them to talk about their feelings, due to social pressure and their strong need to fit in. When Molly used this exercise in a high school classroom, she had the students complete the sentences first in writing, and then share in groups of three. Writing first helped the student to reflect more deeply, before "going public" with their thoughts and feelings. The written work also provided feedback for the teacher in planning future lessons." (pp. 98-100)

Variation:: This activity can be combined with the "I don't care!" activity.

