

Dialogue Facilitation Tips

Tips/Skills for Facilitating Dialogue:

This document is a short list of notions to keep in mind when facilitating. By focusing on these and trying to successfully act in these ways, the expectation is that participants will feel more comfortable and willing to participate fully. By creating that atmosphere, conversation will reach a new depth and people will take more from the opportunity. Some of these tips/skills are more difficult to do than others, and some take lots of practice to perfect.

Sample Ground Rules for Dialogue:

It is always a good idea to start by establishing ground rules. If time allows, you might want to ask participants to make a list of rules as a group. Whether they make the list or you simply supply it, here are some suggestions of rules that consistently work well. What is the value of establishing ground rules? Often, individuals enter a dialogue not feeling completely safe or comfortable participating. Maybe, they're nervous about being judged, or about having what they share repeated throughout the residence hall. Ground rules like these are meant to help participants feel more comfortable, and also to be very clear about the ethical expectations of being a part of the conversation.

There are two different types of ground rules in this packet. The document "Multicultural Ground Rules For Dialogue" is effective when you are talking about diversity and or multicultural topics and issues. The second document "Ground Rule For Dialogue" is a general set of expectations when having a dialogue or conversation in a group.

Other Suggestions:

- In addition to starting with Ground Rules, it's also beneficial to include an icebreaker in the beginning. This is especially, but not only, important when people don't know each other. Icebreakers are also useful for starting conversation and getting participants comfortable talking.
 - Examples:
 - Roses & Thorns: Each person names something positive and something negative about their day/week/course/term.
 - Hopes & Fears: Each person goes around and gives one hope and one fear for the dialogue.
- Pose lots of questions. When you do, you may feel like no one is going to respond. It is important to recognize that what may feel like a long time to wait for you, feels less short for everyone else. Be patient. People, in general, don't like silence. If you wait, they will most likely say something.

Tips on Co-Facilitating:

Before going into a workshop or meeting, it is imperative that co-facilitators meet beforehand to discuss each of their expectations and techniques. These handouts will help to guide the facilitators through this process.

Debate

Assuming that there is one right answer and that you have it

Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side wrong

About winning

Listening to find flaws and make counterarguments

Defending assumptions as truth

Critiquing the other side's position

Defending one's own views against those of others

Searching for flaws and weaknesses in other positions

Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position

Dialogue

Assuming that many people have pieces of the answer and that only together can they craft a solution

Collaborative: participants work together toward common understanding

About learning

Listening to understand and find meaning

Revealing assumptions for reevaluation

Reexamining all positions

Admitting that others' thinking can improve one's own

Searching for strengths and value in others' positions

Discovering new opinions, not seeking closure

Adapted from "What makes dialogue unique" in *The Magic of Dialogue* by Daniel Yankelovich, pp. 39-40 and provided by The Program on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan.

FACILITATION TIPS

1. Encourage trust and respect among participants. Be aware that everyone has the right to a voice and to be treated with respect. Also, encourage openness and honesty. Some ways of doing this are being supportive of members, acknowledging contributions of members, and respecting each member's way of "being" in the group.
2. Recognize the limits of your role. You are not responsible for everything that takes place in your group.
3. Have a sense of how you define your role.
4. It is helpful to "set the stage", going over ground rules, going over goals, going over expectations.
5. Encourage group members to listen to each other.
6. Try to be observant of what is happening in the group and for each individual group member. This may be hard. Try to key into what is being said, what is not being said, who is saying certain things, silences, underlying reasons for certain statements, etc. Be aware of what is going on between, and within, the total group.
7. Feelings may happen in this process and you will have to deal with them. It is important for you to clarify the role of feelings in the learning process. Feelings can be an important source of information for people and a avenue of learning.
8. Find a reasonable balance of challenge and support. Be willing to push, so that risks can be taken. Also, support people in this process, as this can be scary for some people.
9. Be aware of the tensions people experience between "individual needs" and "group needs." It is helpful to acknowledge that both are present and look for similarities/differences, etc. Key into the impact this has on the total group process.

MULTICULTURAL GROUND RULES FOR DIALOGUE

1. Our primary commitment is to learn from each other. We acknowledge differences amongst us in backgrounds, skills, interests, values, scholarly orientations and experience.
2. We acknowledge that sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination (based on religion, age, ability, language, education, size, geographic location etc.) exist and may surface from time to time.
3. We acknowledge that one of the meanings of discrimination is that we have been systematically taught misinformation about our own group and members of devalued groups (this is true for both dominant and dominated group members). The same is true about elitism and other forms of prejudice or bias - we are taught misinformation about others and ourselves.
4. We will try not to blame people for the misinformation we have learned, but we hold each other responsible for repeating misinformation or offensive behavior after we have learned otherwise.
5. We will try not to blame people for oppression they have experienced.
6. We will trust that people are always doing the best they can.
7. We will share information about our groups with other members of the class, and will not demean, devalue, or "put down" people for their experiences or lack of experiences.
8. We will actively pursue opportunities to learn about our own groups and those of other groups, yet not enter or invade others' privacy when unwanted.
9. We each have an obligation to actively combat the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can break down the walls that prohibit individual development, group progress and cooperation and group gain.
10. We want to create a safe atmosphere for open discussion. Members may wish to make a comment; therefore, the instructor and participants will agree not to repeat the remarks outside the session that links a person with his/her identity.
11. Challenge the idea or the practice and not the person
12. Speak your discomfort.

GUIDELINES FOR DIALOGUE

- 1. Confidentiality.** We want to create an atmosphere for open, honest exchange.
- 2. Our primary commitment is to learn from each other.** We will listen to each other and not talk at each other. We acknowledge differences amongst us in backgrounds, skills, interests, and values. We realize that it is these very differences that will increase our awareness and understanding through this process.
- 3. We will not demean, devalue, or “put down” people** for their experiences, lack of experiences, or difference in interpretation of those experiences.
- 4. We will trust that people are always doing the best they can.**
- 5. Challenge the idea and not the person.** If we wish to challenge something that has been said, we will challenge the idea or the practice referred to, not the individual sharing this idea or practice.
- 6. Speak your discomfort.** If something is bothering you, please share this with the group. Often our emotional reactions to this process offer the most valuable learning opportunities.
- 7. Step Up, Step Back.** Be mindful of taking up much more space than others. On the same note, empower yourself to speak up when others are dominating the conversation.
- 8. Maintain a safe atmosphere.**