

Inclusive Discussions

Belmont New Faculty Orientation

Strategies for Inviting Discussions

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Definition

An inclusive discussion is one where all participants feel invited to speak their thoughts. Note that invitation is not agreement—ideas can and should be challenged and examined.

Challenges

Barriers to inclusion are both visible and invisible:

- Culture (religion, class, personal history, etc.)
- Embodiment (race, gender, sexuality, physical difference)
- Neurocognition (neurodiversity, anxiety/depression, learning difference or preference)
- Experience with systemic oppression and/or trauma
- Experience with education/expectations about the learning environment
- Beliefs and attitudes about the subject and/or about the learner themselves (fixed/growth mindset—see Dweck)

Approaches

- Develop trust and empathy
- Make space for everyone to share their stories
- Encourage growth mindset; reframe failures (cf. Dweck)
- Discuss non-cognitive features of content (physical/emotional/social exploration of content)
- If appropriate, introduce key vocabulary and signal harmful terms (e.g. incarcerated person v. inmate; mental illness v. insane).
- Create and return often to community discussion agreements with students. Consider valuing:
 - Courage over comfortability.
 - Getting it wrong (failure=learning!).
 - “Ouch/Oops”: If someone feels hurt by a comment, say “ouch” and explain. If someone wants to reframe their comment, say “oops” and restate.
 - Make space/take space: Invite talkative students to make space for others. Encourage quieter students to step into the conversation.

Discussion Strategies

Circle of Objects/Treasure Chest (Fetzer Institute; qtd. In Brookfield and Preskill 133)

- Students bring in an object that represents their cultural background.
- Students share about the object using a popcorn-style discussion, limiting sharing time to 3 minutes each.
- As each story is told, the object is placed in a circle in the middle of the room.
- Optional follow-up: Break students into small groups to answer the question “What is at stake?” The intentionally vague question invites participants to interpret what is important about the activity and/or how cultural backgrounds inform the class.

The Believing Game (Peter Elbow; qtd. In Brookfield and Preskill 138)

- When a challenging idea has been introduced, invite the class to believe for five minutes that the idea is true. You might ask students to discuss the following questions:

- What is interesting or helpful about the idea?
- What are some intriguing features that others might not have noticed?
- What would be different—about you or the world—if you believed this view?
- In what sense or under what conditions might this idea be true?
- Optional followup: ask students to reflect on how the believing game helped them consider the idea generously and fully (i.e., redirected their focus from what is “right” or “wrong” about the idea).

Perception Check (Brookfield and Preskill 143)

- If an exchange is feeling heated, describe or ask a student to describe what someone is thinking or feeling: “I sense that last comment might have been hurtful for you. Would you like to share how you’re feeling?” “Your comment seems to rely on the idea that . . . Is that right?”

Standpoint Statements (adapted from Brookfield and Preskill 160)

- Ask students to write down 4-6 demographic traits that define them.
- In small groups, invite students to describe how these demographic factors (or other elements of their identity) inform their understanding about the subject being discussed.
- Optional follow-up: ask students to write about how their thinking might be different if they came from a different background. What might be useful or helpful about holding a different point of view from their own?

Additional Resources

Artze-Vega, Flower Darby, Bryan Dewsbury, and Mays Imad. *The Norton Guide to Equity-Minded Teaching*. Norton, 2022. Free download available:

https://seagull.wwnorton.com/equityguide?utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_7047877_nl_Teaching_date_20230615&cid=te&source=&source_cid=

Brookfield, Stephen D. and Stephen Preskill. *Discussion as a way of Teaching: Tool and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*. Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Dweck, Carol. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Random House, 2007.

Hogan, Kelly and Viji Sathy. *Inclusive Teaching: Strategies for Promoting Equity in the College Classroom*. West Virginia University Press, 2022.

Tobin, Thomas nad Kirsten Behling. *Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone: Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education*. West Virginia University Press, 2018.

Belmont Teaching Center Webinars and Discussions (Available on the Belmont Digital Repository):

- Lunch Discussions (https://repository.belmont.edu/tc_lunch/): Faculty Perspectives on Race for Teaching and Learning, Antiracism Concepts for Enhancing Teaching and Learning, Universal Design: Supporting Learning for Diverse Student Groups
- Teaching Center August Workshops (https://repository.belmont.edu/tc_workshops/): Teaching so Everyone Learns: Concepts and Tips for a More Inclusive Classroom
- Teaching Center May Workshops (https://repository.belmont.edu/tc_may_workshops/): Pillars of an Inclusive Classroom: Belonging and Diversity

Please keep an eye out for upcoming teaching center events on inclusion and equity!