

DISCUSSION AS A WAY OF TEACHING

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Teachers College April 24th & 25th, 2011

WORKSHOP RESOURCE PACKET

Please note that I will NOT go through this packet sequentially, nor will I refer to all the items below. They are there simply for reference purposes.

1. Theoretical Underpinnings
2. Why Discussions Fail
3. Discussion Ground Rules
4. Circle of Voices
5. Conversational Moves
6. Conversational Role
7. Hatful of Quotes
8. Quotes to Affirm /Challenge
9. Circular Response
10. Snowballing
11. Newsprint Dialogue
12. Rotating Stations
13. Chalk Talk
14. Mutual Invitation
15. Critical Conversation Protocol
16. Critical Incident Questionnaire
17. Learning Audit
18. What Would it Take?
19. Claims for Discussion
20. Critical Debate
21. Case Study: "The Discussion from Hell"
22. Discussion Inventory
23. Grading for Class Participation Rubric
24. Making Meetings Critical
25. Questioning in Discussion
26. Appreciative Pause
27. Student Self-Evaluation
28. Nominating Questions
29. Discussion Audit
30. The 3 Person Rule
31. The Spiral Conversation
32. Structured Silence
33. Spot the Error
34. Calling on Students
35. Drawing Discussion
36. Musicalizing Discussion
37. Repressive Tolerance
38. Principles of Good Discussion
39. Discussion Problems & Responses
40. The Triad
41. What Do YOU Think?
42. Post-It Plaudit
43. Index Card Debrief
44. Post-It Questions
45. Bibliography
46. 1 credit assignment

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Permission granted for participants to use any of these materials with due acknowledgment.

Workshop Schedule

Because I want to retain some flexibility over the pacing of the workshop I have not timed out specific activities.

As a general guide, however, we will begin at 9.00.am then break for lunch close to 12.30.pm. The class will resume at 2.00.pm and the large group activities will finish at 4.00.pm. A period from 4.00.pm.-4.30.pm. on each day is reserved for individual consultations with those who have problems they wish to discuss in more detail.

Day One

Morning 9.00.am – 12.30.pm.

This morning we will get to know each other. We will consider what we hope to achieve when using discussion, what stops people participating, what it looks like when it goes well & what a good discussion leader does.

Lunch 12.30pm.-2.00.pm.

Afternoon 2.00.pm-4.00.pm.

This afternoon we will explore ways to ground discussion in an examination of texts and how to incorporate useful approaches into discussion. You will then complete a critical incident questionnaire on the day's activities.

4.00.pm-4.30.pm. is reserved for individual consultations.

Day Two

Morning 9.00.am-12.30.pm.

We will begin with a review of the responses to the first day's workshop as recorded on the critical incident questionnaires. We will explore what sabotages discussion & how to create the conditions for good discussion.

Lunch 12.30.pm-2.00.pm

Afternoon 2.00.pm-4.00.pm.

Review of 1 credit assignment

This afternoon we will mostly focus on a case study dealing with a discussion gone seriously awry.

4.00.-4.30.pm. is reserved for individual consultation.

CONVERSATION – AN EXCHANGE OF THOUGHTS & FEELING WHERE GENIAL COOPERATION PREVAILS

DIALOGUE – INTERSUBJECTIVE UNDERSTANDING : PLACING YOURSELF IN OTHERS' SHOES TO SEE THE WORLD AS THEY SEE IT.
MUTUALITY: DEEPENING AND CHANGING UNDERSTANDING BASED ON WHAT WE LEARN FROM OTHERS

DISCUSSION – DISCIPLINED & FOCUSED EXPLORATION OF MUTUAL CONCERNS BUT WITH NO END POINT PREDETERMINED IN ADVANCE

Aims ...

To develop critical, informed understanding

To enhance self-critique

To foster appreciation for diverse views

To help people take informed action

TEN QUESTIONS ...

1. What do you hope to achieve by using discussion?
2. What has stopped you from participating in discussions?
3. What happens when a discussion goes well? What does it look, feel and sound like?
4. What does a good discussion leader do?
5. How can we create the conditions for good discussion?
6. What's the worst discussion you've ever participated in and what made it so awful?
7. What would it take for you to overcome your skepticism & resistance and to take part in a discussion that you initially felt was a waste of your time?
8. Of all the methods, techniques & exercises we've tried, which are the ones you are most likely to use, and why?
9. What are 3 things that are missing when a discussion goes badly?
10. Think about the best discussion leader you've experienced. What did she do that was so impressive to you?

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Jurgen Habermas

Communicative action is a basic necessity of life if we want to live in anything other than a state of constant conflict. It entails two functions – perspective taking (seeing the world through others’ eyes – sometimes called intersubjective understanding by Habermas) and coming to good faith agreements

Communicative Action is Premised on 4 Validity Claims – genuine communicative action displays 4 features that help us engage in perspective taking and coming to agreement.

- * **Comprehensibility** – we try to communicate to others in the clearest way we can
- * **Truth** – we provide the most accurate depiction of affairs as we see them and we provide all necessary information about these
- * **Rightness** (sometimes called appropriateness by JH) – we follow the rules of communication prevailing in our discourse community
- * **Authenticity** (sometimes called sincerity by JH) – we Genuinely wish to do our best to be understood by others and to come to Agreement with them

When we recognize these claims we exhibit communicative competence – we are able to recognize when propaganda and ideological manipulation are being foisted on us.

Ideal Speech Situation

This is an idealized model of the kind of discussion in which true communicative action is evident. In an ideal speech situation “**(a) all relevant voices are heard, (b) the best of all available arguments, given the present state of our knowledge are accepted, and (c) only the non-coercive coercion of the better argument determines the affirmations and negations of the participants**” (Habermas, 1992, p. 260).

If these conditions are followed in discussions in which decisions are being made then whatever decisions result will have democratic legitimacy. This is Habermas’ discourse theory of democracy – the only hope legislators have of their decisions being accepted by the majority of the populace (particularly by those citizens who don’t agree with these decisions) is if they are seen to adhere to something like the conditions of the ideal speech situation.

MICHEL FOUCAULT

Today the main form of power is **disciplinary power**. Disciplinary power is concerned we exercise power on ourselves to keep ourselves in line even when there is no direct coercion to do so. How is this disciplinary power exercised? Through surveillance to enforce a “regime of truth” – a set of procedures that are regarded as legitimate and that we use to judge whether or not certain things are true. Those in power create and control these regimes and these regimes in turn support existing power structures. Embedded in these regimes are ideas of what is normal and appropriate, and these ideas are sometimes enforced by ‘**judges of normality**’ – doctors, teachers, psychiatrists, counselors etc.

Discussion leaders are judges of normality who signal whether or not the regime of truth is being sufficiently observed. Even when supposedly participatory approaches are used – such as the conversation circle – these are often experienced as oppressive, as people feel they are under increased surveillance and forced into mandatory speech.

HERBERT MARCUSE

Marcuse condemned the existence of ‘repressive tolerance’ in higher education – especially in discussion methodology - by which alternative ideas and diverse cultural traditions were celebrated but subtly marginalized by always being positioned alongside the mainstream. He believed that censoring an engagement with the mainstream and only allowing people to engage with alternative traditions or ideologies was the practice of liberating tolerance. If people were offered a smorgasbord of different ideas and traditions their ideological formation would always cause them to view the mainstream as the natural center and the alternative ideas as exotic others.

A crucial component of repressive tolerance is the meta-narrative of democratic tolerance. This narrative is ideologically embedded in the way adult educators think of democratic discussion, where the intent is to honor and respect each learner’s voice. But the implicit assumption that all contributions to a discussion carry equal weight can easily lead to a flattening of conversation. A discussion leader’s concern to dignify each student’s personhood can result in a refusal to point out the ideologically skewed nature of particular contributions, let alone saying someone is wrong. In Marcuse’s view, the ideology of democratic tolerance in discussion groups means that “the stupid opinion is treated with the same respect as the intelligent one, the misinformed may talk as long as the informed, and propaganda rides along with falsehood. This pure tolerance of sense and nonsense is justified by the democratic argument that nobody, neither group nor individual, is in possession of the truth and capable of defining what is right and wrong, good and bad” (1965, p. 94).

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: CONSIDERATIONS

Guided Discussion is an Oxymoron – the process can be guided and the general aims (deepening student awareness of the complexity of an issue, introducing more diverse perspectives etc.) can be pursued, but the content cannot be predetermined.

Counterfeit Discussion – when a discussion appears to be open but in reality is subtly guided by the leader.

Avoiding Summaries – discussions should end with questions the session has raised, not definitive summaries of what we have learned.

Teacher/Leader Intervention is Crucial – discussion leaders must intervene to structure true, democratic participation. Otherwise a pecking order of contributors will quickly develop & those who hold power outside the discussion will move to dominate the conversation.

Discussion Works Best AFTER reflection or reading – discussion works best when conducted after the opportunity for silent thought or reading.

Discussion is Always Culturally Grounded – discussion formats vary with race, culture, ethnicity, class, gender etc. How it happens represents the identities & positionalities of participants.

Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) – the CIQ provides data to help discussion leaders uncover hidden power dynamics and make informed choices.

WHY DISCUSSIONS FAIL

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

UNPREPARED STUDENTS

NO GROUND RULES

REWARD SYSTEMS ASKEW

NO TEACHER MODELING

Discussion Ground Rules

1. Think of the best group discussions you've ever been involved in. What things happened that made these conversations so satisfying? Make a few notes on this by yourself. 5 minutes
2. Think of the worst group discussions you've ever been involved in. What things happened that made these conversations so unsatisfactory? Make a few notes on this by yourself. 5 minutes
3. Take turns in talking about what made discussion groups work so well for you. Listen for common themes shared experiences and features of conversation that you'd like to see present in this group. 10 minutes.
4. Take turns in talking about what made discussion groups work so badly for you. Listen for common themes shared experiences and features of group conversation that you'd like to see avoided in this discussion group. 10 minutes.
5. For each of the characteristics of good discussion you agree on, try and suggest three things a group could do to ensure, as much as possible, that these characteristics were present. Be as specific and concrete as you can. For example, if you feel that good conversation is cumulative and connected, with later themes building on and referring back to earlier ones, you could propose a rule whereby every new comment made by a participant is prefaced with an explanation as to how it relates to, or springs from, an earlier comment. 10 minutes.
6. For each of the characteristics of bad discussion you agree on, try and suggest three things a group could do to ensure, as much as possible, that these characteristics were avoided. Be as specific and concrete as you can. For example, if you feel that bad conversation happens when one person's voice dominates you could propose a rule whereby no-one is allowed to follow a comment they have made with another comment until at least three other people have spoken (unless another group member explicitly invites the participant to say something else). 10 minutes.
7. Try and finish this exercise by drafting a charter for discussion that comprises the specific ground rules that you agree on. If less than a two-thirds majority support a particular rule I suggest that you agree to re-examine this rule after no more than four meetings of the group. At that time, the group may decide to drop or affirm the rule, or draft an additional one. 10 minutes.

OTHER TECHNIQUES FOR SETTING GROUND RULES

Another approach to evolving ground rules is to ask participants to focus on the 'golden rule'; that is, ask them how they would like to be spoken to in a discussion and use their responses to frame a code of conduct for how they will speak to others. Again, our role would be to help students move from general declarations such as "I want people to listen carefully to what I'm saying" to specific behaviors (such as suggesting a weekly circular response discussion period in which students take turns to listen carefully, paraphrase and then respond to each others' contributions).

In their work in co-operative learning Johnson, Johnson and Smith propose the T-Chart, a technique that can be adapted well to help students develop ground rules for discussion. The characteristic of discussion that students desire is written on the top of a large piece of newsprint. Imagine that students say they want their discussions to be respectful. Under the heading 'Respectful' the teacher divides the sheet in two, labeling one side 'Sounds Like' and the other side 'Looks Like'. Students and teachers then suggest items that would fall under each column so that after a few minutes a list is available of how students think respectful discussions look and sound.

Finally, you can use videos of discussion vignettes as a useful way to focus students' attention on how they want their discussions to look. Here's the instructions for such an exercise that you might give to students:-

Video Vignettes of Discussion

You're going to see two 5 minute excerpts of different discussions. Please watch for the kinds of comments, contributions and actions that you think are good, and bad, discussion behaviors. Note these down by yourself. Don't discuss your reactions with others at this stage. You might find it helpful to watch the video with the following questions in mind ...

- (i) In your view which participants made the best, most helpful or most useful contributions to the discussion ? Why were these contributions so worthwhile ?
- (ii) In your view which participants made the worst, least helpful or least useful contributions to the discussion ? Why were these contributions so irrelevant or unproductive ?
- (iii) What changes would you introduce to improve either of these discussions ?

Now, compare your responses with the reactions of others in your group. Look particularly for areas of agreement. Based on these, could you suggest any guidelines that would ensure that helpful discussion behaviors are encouraged ?

When we reconvene we will see if your notes help us decide on the discussion guidelines we want to follow in this course.

The Circle of Voices

Participants form into a circle of about 5. They are allowed up to three minutes silent time to organize their thoughts. During this time they think about what they want to say on the topic once the circle of voices begins. After this silent period the discussion opens with each person having a period of uninterrupted air time. During the time each person is speaking no one else is allowed to interrupt.

People can take their turns to speak by going round the circle in order or volunteering at random. Although the latter arrangement sounds the most relaxed and informal the opposite is often the case. The order of the circle removes from participants the stress of having to decide whether or not they will try and jump in after another student has finished speaking. Not having to decide this is one less thing to worry about. An important benefit of using the circle of voices at the start of a discussion is that it prevents the development early on of a pecking order of contributors. Introverted, shy members, those whose experience has taught them to mistrust academe, or those who view discussion as another thinly veiled opportunity for teachers to oppress or offend, will often stay silent at the beginning of a course. The longer this silence endures, the harder it is for these individuals to speak out. By way of contrast, in the circle of voices everyone's voice is heard at least once at the start of the session.

After the circle of voices has been completed, and everyone has had the chance to say their piece, then the discussion opens out into a more free flowing format. As this happens a second ground rule comes into effect. Participants are only allowed to talk about another person's ideas that have already been shared in the circle of voices. A person cannot jump into the conversation by expanding on his own ideas, he can only talk about his reactions to what someone else has said. The only exception to this ground rule is if someone else asks him directly to expand on his ideas. This simple ground rule prevents the tendency toward 'grandstanding' that sometimes afflicts a few articulate, confident individuals.

To recap the ground rules:-

Begin by going round the circle with each person contributing & no interruptions allowed

After this, move into open discussion, but remember your contributions can only be about, or refer back to, something one of the other group members said in the opening circle.

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CONVERSATIONAL MOVES

Paste the conversational moves listed below on 3x5 cards and randomly distribute them among participants before a pre-arranged discussion session. Ask participants to practice their move during the discussion that follows.

Specific Moves

Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person says
(January)

Ask a question or make a comment that encourages another person to elaborate on something they have already said (February)

Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions (March)

Use body language to show interest in what different speakers are saying

Make a specific comment indicating how you found another person's ideas interesting/useful
(April)

Contribute something that builds on, or springs from, what someone else has said. Be explicit about the way you are building on the other person's thoughts (May)

Make a comment that partly paraphrases a point someone has already made (June)

Make an summary observation that takes into account several people's contributions & that touches on a recurring theme in the discussion (July)

Ask a cause and effect question - for example, "can you explain why you think it's true that if these things are in place such and such a thing will occur?" (August)

When you think it's appropriate, ask the group for a moment's silence to slow the pace of conversation and give you, and others, time to think (September)

Find a way to express appreciation for the enlightenment you have gained from the discussion. Be specific about what it was that helped you understand something better
(October)

Disagree with someone in a respectful and constructive way (November)

Create space for someone who has not yet spoken to contribute to the conversation
(December)

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CONVERSATIONAL ROLES

Devil's Advocate: This person listens carefully for any emerging consensus. When she hears this she formulates and expresses a contrary view. (Jan 1st-Feb. 15th)

Umpire: This person listens for judgmental comments that sound offensive, insulting and demeaning.. (Feb 15th-March 31st)

Connector: This person does her best to show how participants' contributions are connected to each other. April 1st- May 15th)

Appreciator: This person makes comments indicating how she found another's ideas interesting or useful. (May 15th-June 31st)

Speculator: This person introduces new ideas, new interpretations and possible lines of inquiry into the group e.g. "I wonder what would happen if ...?", "I wonder what (major theorist) would say about?" (July 1st-August 15th)

Active Listener: This person tries to paraphrase others' contributions to the conversation ("So what I hear you saying is ...", "If I understand you correctly you're suggesting that ...") (August 16th-Sept. 30th)

Underscorer: This person emphasizes the relevance, accuracy or resonance of another person's comments and underscores why the comments are so pertinent (Oct 1st-Nov. 15th)

Evidential Assessor: This person listens for comments that generalize or make unsupported assertions. She then asks for the evidence that supports the assertions being made. (Nov. 15th-Dec. 31st)

Hatful of Quotes

One question that invariably arises regarding exercises such as the circle of voices and circular response, concerns whether or not teachers should require all students to participate. Mandating speech seems like an exercise of teacher power that stands in direct contrast to the spirit of democratic conversation. However, I believe that there are occasions when it is justifiable to exercise power in this way. bell hooks (1994, p. 41) describes how she requires students to read out paragraphs from their journals in class so that none feel invisible or silenced. To her this is a responsible exercise of teacher power. Always allowing students the option to pass in discussion circles means that those who are shy and introverted, or uncomfortable because they perceive themselves as members of a minority race, gender or class, end up not contributing. The longer this pattern of non-participation persists, the harder it is to break. So what seems like an empathic, benign action by the leader - allowing students the right to silence - serves to reinforce existing differences in status and power. Those who are used to holding forth will move automatically to speak, while those whose voices are rarely heard, will be silenced.

One way through this dilemma is to make the mandated act of contributing as stress free as possible. This is the purpose of the 'hatful of quotes' exercise. Prior to a discussion of a text the leader types out sentences or passages from the text onto separate slips of paper. In class she puts these into a hat and asks students to draw one of these slips out of a hat. Students are given a few minutes to think about their quote and then asked to read it out and comment on it. The order of contribution is up to the students. Those who feel more fearful about speaking go last and take more time to think about what they want to say. Because the same five or six quotes are used, students who go later will have heard their quote read out and commented on by those who spoke earlier. So even if they have little to say about their own interpretation of the quote, they can affirm, build on, or contradict a comment a peer has already made on that quote. This exercise is a good way to create a safe opportunity for everyone to speak. Those who are diffident get to say something, thus building confidence for subsequent contributions.

bell hooks Teaching to Transgress. New York: Routledge, 1994.

QUOTES TO AFFIRM & CHALLENGE

This begins with an assigned text that students read. Their task is to choose **ONE** quote they wish to **affirm** and **ONE** they wish to **challenge** in the text.

In Small Groups

Students form into small groups and each member takes a turn to propose a quote they wish to affirm and the reasons for doing this. The quote does not have to be defended as empirically true. Sometimes a participant will propose a quote because it confirms a point of view she holds. Sometimes she feels the quote states the most important point in the text. At other times the quote is affirmed because it is rhetorically rousing or expressed so lyrically. When everyone in the small group has proposed a quote to affirm the group then chooses one to report back to the larger class.

The 'quote to challenge' portion of this exercise follows the same procedure only this time students choose a quote that they disagree with, find contradictory, believe to be inaccurate, or consider reprehensible and immoral. Each person proposes their quote to the small group and group members choose one to report back to the larger class.

The quote to challenge **cannot** come from the same person who chose the quote to affirm from the group.

The quotes chosen by the small group are then written on a sheet of newsprint and each group posts its quotes at a different place in the room so that the whole class can read each small group quote chosen. Posted next to the quotes are the reasons why the group chose the two quotes they posted.

In the Large Group

Students read the quotes posted around the room that others have affirmed or challenged. They then pick out ONE quote chosen by ANOTHER group that they wish to talk more about.

Students then move to the posting containing the new quote that's been posted by this other group. They meet the other students who have moved to the posting and talk about why they were drawn to this particular quote.

The whole class then reconvenes and, depending on time, students at each posting can talk about the reasons why they were drawn to the particular quotes at that posting.

Circular Response Discussions

The circular response exercise is a way to democratize discussion participation, to promote continuity and to give people some experience of the effort required in respectful listening. In this process participants sit in a circle so that everyone can see each other. The optimal size for this exercise is 8-12 participants.

Like circle of voices, the process begins with each person in turn taking up to a minute to talk about an issue or question that the group has agreed to discuss. Once the 1st person has spoken, the person to the speaker's left speaks for up to a minute. Each speaker is not free, however, to say anything she wants. She must incorporate into her remarks some reference to the preceding speaker's message and then use this as a springboard for their own comments. This doesn't have to be an agreement – it can be an expression of dissent from the previous opinion. The important thing is that the previous person's comments are the prompt for whatever is being said in circular response. What speakers articulate depends on listening well to the preceding speaker as much as on generating new or unspoken ideas. The process ends where it started – with the opening speaker. Only this time the opening speaker is responding to the comments of the person who spoke before her.

Here's the instructions:

Choose a theme that the group wishes to discuss, form into a circle and ask for a volunteer to start the discussion. This person speaks up to a minute or so about the theme chosen. No interruptions are allowed during this first round of talking. After the minute is up, the first discussant yields the floor and the person sitting to the discussant's left speaks for a minute or so. The second discussant must show in her contribution how what she is saying springs from, or is in response to, the comments of the first discussant. After a minute or so, the second discussant stops speaking, and the person to her left becomes the third discussant, and thus the discussion moves all the way around the circle. Once everyone has had their chance to speak in this first round then the discussion moves into open discussion – no ground rules apply in this open conversation.

To sum up:

1. In the first round of talk no one may be interrupted while speaking
2. No one may speak out of turn in the circle;
3. Each person is allowed only a minute or so to speak;
4. Each person, in all comments, must strive to show how his or her remarks spring from, or respond to, the comments of the previous discussant.
5. After each discussant has had a turn to speak, the floor is opened for general conversation, and the previous ground rules are no longer in force.

SNOWBALLING

One way to illustrate how discussions can be developmental and increasingly inclusive is to use a process called "snowballing" or "pyramiding".

Students begin this activity by responding to questions or issues as individuals. They then create progressively larger dialogic groups by doubling the size of these every few minutes until by the end of the activity everyone is reconvened in the large group. At each stage as students move from pairs to quartets, quartets to octets they recap the chief point of difference, or the chief question that emerged, in their previous round of conversation.

Here's the instructions students follow:

We are going to try something a little different today. It's called "snowballing" and it gives you a chance to think and talk about issues in a variety of different configurations. Please begin with some private, solitary reflection in which you gather your thoughts about the questions at the bottom of this sheet. Jot down some notes if you wish.

After about 1 minute of solitary thought join with one other person to continue the dialogue. After about five minutes you and your partner should join another pair to form a group of four. As the two pairs merge, each pair should recap the chief difference that emerged, or a question they raised, in their conversation.

The quartets will continue the discussion for another 10 minutes and then merge with other quartets to create octets - groups of 8. As the two quartets merge, each quartet recaps the chief difference that emerged, or a question they raised, in their conversation. Perhaps they pose the question to see how the other quartet would respond.

The discussion proceeds for 20 minutes this time and continues in 20 minute intervals until the whole class is brought together at the end of the session.

This exercise gets a lot of people talking to one another, while retaining much of the value of small groups. It also contributes a festive quality to the class. People mill about excitedly and greet each other warmly as they meet in new configurations. On the other hand, snowballing can sometimes have a frenetic, disjointed feel.

NEWSPRINT DIALOGUES

Small groups summarize their conversations on large sheets of newsprint or chalkboards. Individual members of the class are then free to wander about the room reading all the responses & adding comments.

Here's the instructions:

In this activity, you will be working in small groups most of the time. I have prepared some questions for you to consider in these groups, but don't follow them too slavishly. Use them as a jumping off point for ideas you find especially worth exploring. You will have 30 minutes in your groups to discuss these questions and to write your answers to these on the newsprint provided.

You should appoint someone to be recorder but don't start writing immediately. Take some time to let your responses emerge from the discussion. Covering all the questions is not important, but you should begin to jot some ideas down on the newsprint provided within 15 or 20 minutes of starting.

When the 30 minutes is up, post your newsprint sheets around the classroom and tour the answers – ON YOUR OWN - recorded by other groups. Look especially for common themes that stand out on the sheets and for possible contradictions that arise within or between groups' responses. If possible, write your responses to others' comments on the same sheet of newsprint containing the point you're addressing. Finally, note any questions that were raised for you during the discussion on the separate sheets of newsprint specially provided for this. We will bring the activity to a close with a short debriefing in the large group.

Attractions of this activity are that it takes people out of groups for a while and lets them act as relatively autonomous free agents. It also reminds people that dialogue can work as a written as well as spoken exchange. On the other hand, it is frequently difficult in the limited space and time allotted for students to explain fully the meaning of the words and phrases on the newsprint. Still, is an interesting alternative way to keep the conversation going.

ROTATING STATIONS

Another way to avoid the usual format of reporting back through a series of summaries is to locate each small group at a station where they are given 5 or 10 minutes to discuss a provocative issue and record their ideas on newsprint or a chalkboard. When this time is up the groups move to new positions in the classroom where they continue their discussion. But now the comments written on the newsprint or chalkboard by the preceding group at the station add a new voice to the mix. Rotations continue every 10 minutes until each group has been at all of the positions and has had a chance to consider all of the other groups' comments. Here's the instructions:

We're going to do another small group activity, but this time you won't be staying in one place for long. Each of you should join a group of about five participants at one of the stations that have been established around the classroom. Together you will have the responsibility of answering some questions by making comments on the newsprint directly in front of your group. You will have 10 minutes to do this. When the 10 minutes is up move with your group to a new station where you will continue your conversation by responding to the comments left behind by the group that has just vacated that station. Record the main points of your discussion at this station and then, after another 10 minutes, rotate to the next station, where you now have the comments of two other groups to consider.

Again take 10 minutes to respond, and then move when the 10 minutes are up. When every group has occupied each station, leaving remarks behind at all of them, break out of your groups and read all of the newsprint comments. Add questions, comments, or criticisms to these news sheets wherever you are inspired to do so. Remember that each station will include comments from all groups, making orderliness a challenge. Write as small and as legibly as you can, please!

Rotating stations encourages students to examine critically ideas that originate outside their group. The safety and intimacy of small groups is retained, yet the diversity of viewpoints experienced in whole class discussion is incorporated. Momentum and excitement tend to grow as groups rotate from one station to another. People feel they have heard from, and responded to, many voices in the classroom in a way that is less threatening than in large group exchanges. On the debit side, the 10 minute period for each rotation is not particularly conducive to deep discussion.

CHALK TALK

Developed by Hilton Smith of the FoxFire Fund

CHALK TALK is a (mostly) silent and visual way to engage in discussion without speaking. It takes as long as it takes and it's over when it's over. I've used it mostly in 10-minute bursts as a reflective 'prep' for spoken conversation. It can also be a good way to unearth the concerns of a wide range of organizational members before building agendas for change. Here's how it works:

1. The leader writes a question in a circle in the centre of the board – for example “What kinds of learning outcomes is the discussion method most suitable for?” She places several sticks of chalk by the board.
2. She then explains this is a silent activity and then when people are ready they should write a response to the question on the board
3. People get up and write something in response to the question whenever they feel ready. Usually there are long silences or pauses between postings
4. The facilitator can also participate by drawing lines connecting comments that seem similar or contrasting, by writing questions about a comment, by adding her own thoughts and so on.
5. When a suitably long silence ensues the facilitator asks if people are done.
6. If the activity is finished conversation then ensues about the postings.

Mutual Invitation

Developed by Eric Law (1993) mutual invitation is a technique designed to promote egalitarian group talk. The facilitator begins a discussion by sharing her views on the topic at hand. She then invites another member of the group to respond to what she has said, or to contribute whatever is on her mind regarding the topic. After that person has spoken she then chooses the next person to speak, and so on until all have had the chance to be involved. If someone does not want to offer a comment she can pass, but she then has the responsibility to choose who will speak next. No-one is allowed to interrupt the chosen speaker. Once everyone has spoken open discussion ensues & the ground rule doesn't apply.

This process is a way of structuring the opportunity for all to speak, and also of giving the participants the power to choose the direction of participation. One advantage is that in classes where students know each others' interests and areas of expertise better than the teacher does, those students are able to make more skillful choices about who should speak next than a teacher would.

If the process is used a second and third time the facilitator does not start off by sharing her view. However, she does start out choosing who will be the first to speak.

E.H.F. Law *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*. St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993 (pp. 79-88).

CRITICAL CONVERSATION PROTOCOL

PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE

A critical conversation is a focused conversation in which someone is helped:-

1. To come to an awareness of the assumptions she is operating under – particularly those having to do with power relationships and hegemonic practices & ideas
2. To investigate whether these assumptions are well grounded
3. To look at her practice from different viewpoints
4. To think about the implications of the conversation for the future

ROLES PARTICIPANTS PLAY

In a process of structured critical conversation I suggest that people think of playing one of three possible roles - storyteller, detective or umpire.

The **storyteller** is the person who is willing to make herself the focus of critical conversation by first describing some part of her practice or life experience.

The **detectives** are those in the group who help her come to a more fully informed understanding of the assumptions and actions that frame her practice or experience.

The **umpire** is the group member who has agreed to monitor conversation with a view to pointing out when people are talking to each other in a judgmental way. All participants in the group play all three of these roles at different times. The idea is that the behaviors associated with each role gradually become habitual.

HOW THE EXERCISE WORKS

1. *The Storyteller Tells the Tale (10 MINUTES)*

The conversation opens with the person who is the storyteller describing as concretely and specifically as possible an incident from her practice or life that for some reason is lodged in her memory. This incident may be one that is recalled because it was particularly fulfilling or because it was particularly frustrating. Most probably it is an incident that leaves the teller somewhat puzzled by its layers and complexities. The storyteller describes the incident in her own words and without any questions or

interruptions. Her colleagues, who are in the role of detectives, attend to her remarks very carefully. They are listeners with a purpose.

The detectives are trying to identify the explicit and implicit assumptions about practice that they hear in the storyteller's tale. Some of these will be general assumptions about what good practice looks like, some will be about how a good professional should behave, and some will be about how to behave in the specific situation described. The detectives are listening particularly for assumptions that pertain to how the storyteller conceives of power dynamics, or assumptions that are hegemonic (i.e. that seem admirable & useful to the storyteller but that actually work against her best interests & support an inequitable situation).

The detectives are also asked to imagine themselves inside the heads of the other characters in the story and to try to see the events through their eyes. If possible, the detectives make mental or written notes about plausible alternative interpretations of the story that fit the facts as they hear them, but that would come as a surprise to the storyteller.

2. *The Detectives Ask Questions About the Event (10 MINUTES)*

After the storyteller has finished speaking, the detectives are allowed to break their silence to ask her any questions they have about the events she has just described. The detectives are searching for any information that will help them uncover the assumptions they think the storyteller holds. They are also looking for details not provided in the first telling of the story that will help them re-live the events described through the eyes of the other participants involved, thereby helping them to understand these events from the different participants' perspectives.

One ground rule they must observe is that of requesting information, not giving judgment. Their questions are asked only for the purpose of clarifying the details of what happened. They must refrain from giving their opinions or suggestions, no matter how helpful they feel these might be. Detectives should ask only 1 question at a time. They should **not** give advice on how the storyteller should have acted. Keep laughter to a minimum, you don't know how it's received.

As the storyteller hears the detectives' questions she tries to answer them as fully and honestly as possible. She also has the opportunity to ask the detectives why they asked the particular questions they put to her. The umpire points out to the detectives any examples of judgmental questions that they ask, particularly those in which they imply that they have seen a better way to respond to the situation than the way that's been described. Examples of such questions would be those beginning "Did you really believe that ...?", "Didn't you think to ...?", or "Do you mean to tell us that ...?"

The umpire brings the detectives' attention to the ways in which their tone of voice and body language, as well as their words, risk driving the storyteller into a defensive bunker.

3. *The Detectives' Report the Assumptions they Hear in the Storyteller's Descriptions (10 MINUTES)*

When the incident has been fully described, and all the detectives' questions have been answered, the conversation moves to the assumption hunting phase. Here the detectives tell the storyteller, on the basis of her story and her response to their questions, what assumptions they think she holds.

This is done as non-judgmentally as possible, as a reporting back exercise. The detectives seek only to state clearly what they think the storyteller's assumptions are, not to judge whether they are right or wrong. They are asked to state these assumptions tentatively, descriptively and non-judgmentally, using phrases like "it seems as if ...", "I wonder if one assumption you might be holding is that?", or "Is it possible that you assumed that ...?" They state only one assumption at a time, do **not** give advice, and watch out for laughter.

The umpire intervenes to point out to detectives when she thinks they are reporting assumptions with a judgmental overlay.

4. *The Detectives Give Alternative Interpretations of the Events Described (10 MINUTES)*

The detectives now give alternative versions of the events that have been described, based on their attempts to re-live the story through the eyes of the other participants involved. These alternative interpretations must be plausible in that they are consistent with the facts as they have been described by the storyteller. When appropriate, detectives should point out how power or hegemony plays itself out in the different interpretations they are giving.

The umpire points out those moments when a psychoanalytic second guessing is taking place. This happens when the detectives start to preface their interpretations with remarks like "you know, what you were really doing", or "what was really going on".

The detectives are to give these interpretations as descriptions, not judgments. They are describing how others involved in the events might have viewed them, not saying whether or not these perceptions are accurate. They should not give any advice here.

As the storyteller hears these alternative interpretations she is asked to let the detectives have the floor so that they can state their case as fully as possible. After they have

described how the situation might look through the eyes of other participants, the storyteller is then allowed to give any additional information that would cast doubt on these interpretations. She is also allowed to ask the detectives to elaborate on any confusing aspects of why they are making the interpretations they are. At no time is she expected to agree with the detectives.

5. *Participants Do An Experiential Audit (10 MINUTES)*

Finally, the storyteller and detectives state what they have learned, what insights they have realized, and what their reflection means for their future actions. Now the detectives can give whatever advice they wish.

The umpire gives an overall summary of the ability of participants to be respectful listeners and talkers, and also gives her perspective on the story.

At each iteration of this exercise the roles change. As each new story is told each person assumes a different role so that all play each of the roles at least once.

Although this is a heavily structured an artificial exercise, the intent is for these dispositions to become so internalized that the ground rules and structure outlined above become unnecessary.

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The Classroom Critical Incident Questionnaire

Please take about five minutes to respond to each of the questions below about this week's class(es). Don't put your name on the form - your responses are anonymous. When you have finished writing, put one copy of the form on the table by the door and keep the other copy for yourself. At the start of next week's class I will be sharing the group's responses with all of you. Thanks for taking the time to do this. What you write will help me make the class more responsive to your concerns.

At what moment in class this week did you feel most engaged with what was happening ?

At what moment in class this week did you feel most distanced from what was happening?

What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class this week did you find most affirming or helpful ?

What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class this week did you find most puzzling or confusing ?

What about the class this week surprised you the most ? (This could be something about your own reactions to what went on, or something that someone did, or anything else that occurs to you).

LEARNING AUDIT

WHAT DO YOU KNOW NOW
THAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW THIS
TIME LAST WEEK ?

WHAT CAN YOU DO NOW THAT
YOU COULDN'T DO THIS TIME
LAST WEEK ?

WHAT CAN YOU TEACH SOMEONE
ELSE TO KNOW OR DO NOW
THAT YOU COULDN'T TEACH
THEM THIS TIME LAST WEEK ?

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO ENGAGE ME (AS A SKEPTICAL, RESISTANT, HOSTILE LEARNER) IN DISCUSSION ?

I would be more likely to participate if ...

The purpose of the conversation was clear, relevant and interesting to me

Former resisters testified to its utility

The leader modeled her/his own participation

I had the right to silence & silent participation

When I spoke people showed they heard me by the way they listened and responded

I knew it was genuinely open & I wasn't being asked to guess the 'correct' interpretation & risk humiliation

No-one was marginalized

The group had developed norms & respected these

I knew that participation counted towards my grade & that a range of indicators had been specified

COMMON CLAIMS FOR DISCUSSION

It Helps Students Explore a **Diversity of Perspectives** (forces them to hear other views)

It Increases Students **Awareness of, and Tolerance For, Ambiguity or Complexity** (leave with questions)

It Helps Students **Recognize and Investigate Their Assumptions** (students serve as critical mirrors)

It Encourages **Attentive, Respectful Listening** (listening is as important as speaking)

It Develops New **Appreciation for Continuing Differences** (continuing disagreement acceptable)

It Increases **Intellectual Agility** (thinking on one's feet to formulate counter-responses)

It Helps Students Become **Connected to a Topic** (increases students' affective concern)

It Shows **Respect for Students' Voices and Experiences** (opinions are taken seriously)

It Helps Students Learn the **Processes and Habits of Democratic Discourse** - inclusionary, collaborative

It Affirms **Students as Co-creators of Knowledge** (new insights are students' responsibility)

It Develops the Capacity for the **Clear Communication** of Ideas and Meaning (giving examples, analogs, metaphors)

It Develops Habits of **Collaborative Learning** (attending to others, inclusionary emphasis)

It Increases Breadth and Makes Students More **Empathic to others' Views and Feelings**

It Helps Students Develop Skills of **Synthesis and Integration** (linking statements, identifying emerging themes, pointing out similarities)

CRITICAL DEBATE INSTRUCTIONS

Find a contentious issue on which opinion is divided amongst participants. Frame the issue as a debate motion.

Propose the motion to participants. By a show of hands ask people either to volunteer to work on a team that is preparing arguments to support the motion or to volunteer to work on a team that is preparing arguments to oppose the motion.

Announce that all those who have prepared to work on the team to draft arguments to support the motion will now comprise the team to draft arguments to oppose the motion. Similarly, all those who have prepared to work on the team to draft arguments to oppose the motion will now comprise the team to draft arguments to support the motion.

Conduct the debate. Each team chooses one person to present their arguments. After initial presentations the teams reconvene to draft rebuttal arguments and choose one person to present these.

DEBATE MOTION: “ THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO BUILD TRUE DIVERSITY OF FOCUS AND CONTENT IN DISCUSSION IS TO EXPLORE ONLY MARGINALIZED PERSPECTIVES AND TO OUTLAW MAINSTREAM IDEAS”

Preparation of Arguments: 10 minutes

Proposing team A presents its arguments 2 minutes

Proposing team B presents its arguments 2 minutes

Opposing team 1 presents its arguments 2 minutes

Opposing team 2 presents its arguments 2 minutes

Rebuttal statement preparation 5 minutes

Opposing team B presents its rebuttals 2 minutes

Opposing team A presents its rebuttals 2 minutes

Opposing team 2 presents its rebuttals 2 minutes

Opposing team 1 presents its rebuttals 2 minutes

Debrief the debate. Discuss with participants their experience of this exercise. Focus on how it felt to argue against positions you were committed to. What new ways of thinking about the issue were opened up? Did participants come to new understandings? Did they change their positions on this issue at all?

Ask participants to write a follow up reflection paper on the debate. Here's the instructions ...

1. What assumptions about the issue that you hold were clarified / confirmed for you by the debate?
2. Which of your assumptions surprised you during the debate ? In other words, were you made aware of assumptions you hold that you didn't know you had ?
3. How could you check out these new assumptions ? What sources of evidence would you consult ?
4. What new perspectives on the issue suggested themselves to you ?
5. In what ways, if any, were your existing assumptions challenged or changed by the debate ?

CASE STUDY: “THE DISCUSSION FROM HELL” (in Gary’s eyes)

“Discussion, the meat and drink of truly democratic pedagogy”. That was the thought in Gary Lofthouse’s mind as he headed to the first class of the semester. Gary had been teaching at Newark University for the past 5 years. NU was an inner city university that prided itself on its commitment to adult students that the system had labeled as failures. Although himself a White male, Gary believed his awareness of cultural and racial diversity meant he could work well with students from a variety of backgrounds. His commitment to diversity meant he was a strong advocate of discussion methods since to him these treated adult students as the mature people they really were. Through discussion people could express their voices and participate fully in the learning process.

Gary was teaching a class on “Introduction to Critical Thinking” to graduate students in the Master’s in Education program. Gary had several years experience teaching undergraduates but working with graduate students was a new venture for him. After learning how his friend David Threlfall had created terrible problems for himself the first night of a similar class at Gotham Community College, Gary was determined to avoid these. Even though Gary’s class was with graduate students he did not assume students would know very much about critical thinking, and neither did he expect them to be able to engage in lively discussion without spending several sessions becoming comfortable with each other. His class contained about 26 students, a little large for good whole-class discussion, but not large enough to stop him from attempting this. Most of the students were women, and most of those were White. This was a little disappointing to Gary, but he reflected that at least there was some diversity.

To start the class Gary introduced himself and talked of the role critical thinking had played in his own life. He gave a definition of critical thinking that focused on two learning processes: (1) the uncovering and questioning of one’s assumptions, and (2) the ability to view situations and ideas from different perspectives. After 20 minutes or so he then introduced a couple of guests to the class. These were former students of his who as undergraduates had initially been skeptical of the value of critical thinking, but who had subsequently told Gary that learning this skill was one of the most important things that had happened to them in Graduate study at Newark U. Gary had learned the technique of beginning new courses with an alumni panel of former students from a workshop he took at Teachers’ College. He asked these students to take no more than 5 minutes each to talk about how they had felt the first night of the “Introduction to Critical Thinking” class and what advice they would like to pass on to the new students. As his guests were speaking Gary was careful to leave the room. He didn’t want the new students to feel he had ‘prepped’ the former students to say only complimentary things about the course.

After 15 minutes Gary returned and wrapped up the first half of the class by taking questions about the course syllabus and assignments. He handed out a sheet of definitions of critical thinking drawn from different books on the topic and asked students to read this over the break. Their task was to choose the definition they most agreed with and the one they most disagreed with. To give them time for this Gary added 10 minutes on the 10-minute break.

During the break Gary spent his time moving furniture so that the chairs were in a circle. He wanted everyone to be able to see everyone else and to feel that they were in some small way a part of a learning community. However, he knew enough of Michel Foucault's work to realize that just rearranging the chairs would not immediately put everyone at ease. So, as the class reassembled he made a short speech about his commitment to discussion but his awareness that this approach was not for everyone. Consequently, he informed them, he would not assume that those who did not speak were any less diligent or intelligent than those who did. He then asked for reactions to the list of definitions he had handed out.

Immediately John, a White male in his 40's spoke up. "Well it seems to me that the definitions you've given come from quite a few different perspectives and traditions. I can see some good old Logic 101 in there and the classical tradition that represents, though when you think about it classic Greek philosophy actually has some overlap with modern scientific methods, doesn't it? And you know if Socrates had been alive today you can be sure he would have been right there in cyberspace asking all kinds of good questions about what effects the internet is having on our thinking patterns, and the degree to which it encourages or inhibits public discourse. And speaking of discourse that reminds me of Habermas and the way his whole theory of communication is based on the ability to think critically – though he talks more about reason of course – which is not surprising because Habermas looks to American pragmatism with Pierce and Dewey and all, as much as he looks to Marx. Of course when Marx ..."

Here Gary cut in. "Thanks John" he said glancing quickly at the nametag he'd asked all students to wear the first night "perhaps we could hear from some other people?"

At this Janet spoke up. Janet was a White woman who was also the oldest student in the class by several years. "Well I remember marching in the South in the civil rights movement and at that time you had to do a hell of a lot of critical thinking if you wanted to survive. I mean we had the State troopers beating us up, the local citizens cursing us out, and very few local supports. I remember my husband Steve arguing with hotel clerks who wouldn't give us a room because we were communists. You know it's funny when I think back to that time I can remember some things so clearly – the smells of the food, which to me, a good New York girl, was so exotic. I mean I never knew what grits were, black-eyed peas, all those kinds of things. But you know the people who were on those marches with us were wonderful human beings. They'd left their jobs, risked their lives, subjected themselves to abuse, violence, hatred, yet they did it cos they knew it was the right thing to do."

Gary listened to this with interest, and respect. Janet had clearly lived a lot of American history. There didn't seem to be too much connection to critical thinking, but at least people were talking. The other students seemed interested too in what Janet was saying.

“Oh those days, those days” she reminisced. “It just seems like nowadays a lot of that old spirit has disappeared. You know we had a lot of hope in those days. Even though we had no money we made good with what we had. That was one of the lessons I learned from my Mom, be thrifty, we were recyclers before that term was invented. We had to be too. We'd recycle clothes, toys, food, we had no money to go and buy TV dinners – course we had no TV either. But I never felt I wanted for anything. I remember ...”

“Thanks Janet” said Gary, “let's bring some more people in. Anyone like to say which definition of critical thinking worked best for them?”

John jumped in again. “Well, to me the definition given by Harvey Siegel makes sense. Is he the one who wrote *Educating Reason*? Siegel is such a well-read guy, his breadth of references is truly amazing. I really like the way he integrates philosophies drawn from so many different intellectual traditions – pragmatism, constructivism, I can see Dewey and even Vygotsky in there, there's a dash of Perry's forms of intellectual and ethical development, you know the stage of informed commitment is it? It's a pleasure to read a definition, and a book, by someone who's so well informed”

“That was one of the things I really appreciated about my husband when I first met him” said Janet, “he seemed so erudite. I remember he always used to carry a stack of books around with him. On our first date he told me he tried to learn a new word a day. He's always been one for self-improvement, has Steve, and I guess that was one of the things that first attracted me to him. You know that first date was so romantic. He didn't have much money but he'd booked a table at a really expensive East side restaurant, it must have cost him a week's wages to pay for that evening. Though I remember thinking at the time that he didn't really need to do that, I'd have been just as happy if we'd bought some food at a local deli and taken it into Central Park or something. That's right, I remember because it was a wonderful summer, the kind you live for in New York. You know hot, but not horribly humid, so that the evening air was like wine. Of course the city seemed a safer place in those days, I remember”

“Can we hear from some other people?” asked Gary. Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet “

There was a pause. Then Carol, a young White women spoke out.

“I disagree with you about the idea that people today are less socially active than they used to be. What about the peace marches against the War in Iraq? Occupy Wall Street? Or the demonstrations at conferences sponsored by the World Bank? There might not be as much TV coverage of protest as there used to be – but that's only the more reason to keep at it. Because the media have been bought and sold we've got to get onto the streets to get our story out, because, let's face it, there's no real free speech any more, just

people thinking what the media tell them to think. I think it's my job to make a difference"

"You know I get really tired of hearing from you White people about how concerned you all are" said Sonia, a Latina woman in her 30's. "You think you've got a monopoly on social justice, but you have no idea what's really going on in the streets. You should walk in my shoes before you start talking about making a difference."

"Listen, if you want to talk about making a difference you should spend a lot more time thinking of racial tension, not the World Bank." Lorraine, a young African American woman got into the conversation. "We've lived with the legacy of slavery for so long now, it's really been the defining feature of my community. No-one should ever forget what my people have been through, or are going through right now."

"I didn't mean to claim a monopoly on oppression" replied Sonia "but you know, there are different kinds of oppression, Brown as well as Black"

"That's right" agreed Carol "and as a woman I know plenty about oppression too. It's not just skin color that causes oppression. There's real gender oppression here in this country too. You know as a White women I can empathize with the kind of racism you live with everyday."

"You have no idea what you're talking about" replied Lorraine, a catch in her voice. You just play at being oppressed. I know what oppression really is"

"But just because I'm White doesn't mean I can't be an ally with you" pleaded Carol. "I can draw on my own experiences to imagine what you're going through"

"Look, I don't want you in my boat" said Lorraine angrily. "You've got your own boat so you can sail in that – leave me to mine"

Gary could see tears start in Carol's eyes. He jumped quickly in. "Alright I don't think we need to get into hierarchies of oppression. Can we get back to critical thinking? Now I know you all read the definitions I handed out over the break. Who would like to talk about a definition that meant something to them?"

Silence descended. People seemed uncomfortable and their eyes were darting back and forth between Carol's and Lorraine's faces. All except Janet's.

"You know one of the things I loved about the early civil rights movement was the way people – Black and White – were united in a common cause. I remember that Steve, my husband, had as some of his best friends Black – I mean African American – men and women. You know that was a wonderful time. People think the rainbow coalition began with Jessie Jackson in the 80's and 90's, and he was with Dr King when he was assassinated of course, but really the original rainbow coalition was in Mississippi in the 1960's. You know one of the things that ..."

“I wonder if we can link some of this to critical thinking” Gary said, somewhat plaintively. “Let’s see now, what do you think were the different perspectives of the people on either side of the civil rights movement in the south? And what do you think some of the assumptions of each side might have been?”

Again, silence. Then John rejoined the conversation. “Well I think that Dr King’s assumptions were drawn from theology and from a really eclectic blend of humanism, Marxism, maybe a dash of Gandhi and his practice of non-violence. You know I think that’s why Cornel West – one of the most profound intellectuals alive today, and African American too – called Dr King an emblematic organic intellectual. Of course in using that term he was drawing on Gramsci, who you probably know has been rediscovered in Marxist scholarship since the 1970’s. In fact Stuart Hall – a Black, I mean British-Caribbean cultural critic has really drawn on Gramsci in the same way West has done. And another who has re-interpreted Gramsci for the modern era is Raymond Williams, the Welsh cultural critic, who is another person that Cornel West frequently cites. Did I tell you that”

“What do you mean by “African American too?”” asked Lorraine

“Excuse me?” answered John.

“You said “African American too”. That Cornel West was brilliant and African American too. What did you mean by that?”

“Well” said John “I was trying to point out that some of the most profound and original critical thinkers today are Black. Right Gary?”

“I think what Lorraine was getting at” began Gary

“I don’t need anyone to speak for me” said Lorraine, “I want to know why John was surprised that someone could be smart and Black”

“Look I was just trying to acknowledge the many rich contributions African Americans make to contemporary culture” John pleaded. “I was trying to help you”

“People are always trying to help us, why do you think that is?” a voice cut in sarcastically. It was Robert, an African American man in his 30’s. “Do you think we don’t know anything? That we need you to get by? Who gives you the right to judge what we need?”

By now Gary was getting alarmed. The last thing he wanted on the first night of a new course was a conversation about the racism some people felt was in the class. They hardly knew one another, how could it have got this far so quickly?

“Well John might not have put it in just the way he wanted to” said Gary. “I think that what he was saying was that White people often think intellectual life is the sole province of Whites and they ignore the vibrant intellectual communities of color that tend to get overlooked. Foucault would call them subjugated knowledges”

“Exactly, that’s in his anthology *Power/Knowledge*” said John, a note of triumph in his voice indicating he felt vindicated “which is still the best anthology of Foucault’s work around in my opinion. And speaking of Foucault, did you know ...”

You know maybe we need a reflective pause here” said Gary. “Let’s just spend a couple of minutes going back and looking at the definitions of critical thinking. Then put a plus sign by the one you most agree with and a minus sign by the one you most disagree with.”

The class fell silent and a few people picked up their list of definitions. As they did so, Carol walked out and John came up to have a word with Gary. Gary motioned him to stay in his seat and whispered to John that he’d take his question after class.

By the time the five minutes were up Gary realized that the end of the class was near and that he needed to do the CIQ, a technique he’d picked up at a Teachers College workshop. The CIQ (critical incident questionnaire) was a 5-question class evaluation sheet that all students filled in anonymously once a week. The questions asked when students were most engaged and distanced as learners, what actions were most helpful or puzzling, and what surprised them about the class. Gary explained they were out of time and that he’d like them to fill out the CIQ before leaving the class. He also promised them he would report back to them at the start of next week’s class the kinds of things they’d put down on the CIQ.

Gary couldn’t help looking at what people had written. Here’s a sample of their responses.

16 mentioned what Gary guessed was John: Typical comments were: “Why does this guy feel the need to show off so much?” “Some people are too impressed with themselves” “The gentleman in the blue sweater seemed to think he was running the class”

12 mentioned what Gary guessed was Janet: Typical comments were: “This is a course on critical thinking, not a life history course”, “There was too much time telling stories and not enough on academics”, “Some people should realize we don’t need to know every detail of their life”

10 mentioned what Gary guessed was himself: Typical comments were “I don’t see why the professor was supporting John”, “I was surprised the professor shut down John so quickly”, “The professor needs to keep a tighter rein on things, we got off track too quickly”, “I didn’t like the way one student was disrespectful to Gary”.

3 mentioned race - “We missed a real opportunity here to deal with race, I hope we get another”, “Why is it always race, race, race?” and “Why can’t we all just get along?” Gary couldn’t decide if this was an ironic comment or a genuine lamentation.

Other random comments: “Kind of disappointing, we never got to critical thinking”, “Can we have a lecture on critical thinking please – we need some background”, “There’s got to be a better way to learn about this”

Instructions for the Case Study Analysis

1. READ THIS CASE STUDY BY YOURSELF (10 Minutes)
2. AFTER YOU HAVE READ THE CASE STUDY PLEASE MAKE SOME NOTES BY YOURSELF ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS (10 Minutes)

HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE?

WHAT SHOULD GARY DO IN THE 2ND CLASS MEETING IF HE IS STILL COMMITTED TO DISCUSSION?

HOW HE COULD CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR GOOD DISCUSSION THE NEXT TIME HE TEACHES THE COURSE?

After you have finished writing down your responses, form a group with 4-5 other people. Take each of the 3 questions above and spend about 10-15 minutes sharing your responses to each question. List on a sheet of newsprint the chief responses and ideas that emerge to all 3 questions. Don’t write only the responses where there is agreement. I want ALL the responses – including differences & disagreements - to be recorded on the posting. There are no right or wrong answers to this case, so get everything down. Where appropriate feel free to build on any insights or suggestions you have picked up during the workshop that might be relevant. Try to be as specific & detailed as you can in your postings.

Time for Case Study - Approximately 1 hour

DISCUSSION INVENTORY

One approach we have found useful is to tell students at the start of a particular class that you will be saving five to ten minutes towards the end of that day's discussion period to give some of your own reflections on the discussion. We view this as keeping a 'Discussion Inventory' that will be unpacked just before students leave. The inventory is essentially a list of the things we want to make sure students are exposed to before they exit the room that day. It is blank at the start of the discussion but fills up as we jot down errors we hear, perspectives that we feel are glossed over or ignored, and important oppositional views that we think are too easily rushed past. A good time to unpack this inventory is immediately prior to inviting anyone in the group to have the last word that day (itself an idea we picked up from Ira Shor (1996)).

In the five-minute inventory time we provide information about perspectives that were missed during the discussion and we offer alternative interpretations that students did not wish to consider. This is also an excellent time for us to draw students' attention to what we consider to be major errors of understanding we have noticed being expressed during the conversation. Sometimes in the middle of a discussion that is going well someone makes a statement that we know shows a complete misunderstanding of a concept, or is clearly factually wrong, but we feel uncomfortable interrupting the flow of talk at that particular time and singling that contributor out as somehow lacking. When that erroneous statement is made we jot down a note on our inventory pad to make sure we address it in the time we've reserved for ourselves towards the end of the class that day. So the discussion inventory allows us to correct mistakes and to tackle repressive tolerance by making sure participants do not leave the room without being exposed to a perspective we feel it is necessary for them to encounter.

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Class Participation Grading Rubric

20% of your grade for this class is based on your participation in discussion. Participating in discussion does not necessarily mean talking a lot or showing everyone else that you know or have studied a lot. Good discussion participation involves people trying to build on, and synthesize, comments from others, and on showing appreciation for others' contributions. It also involves inviting others to say more about what they are thinking. Some of the most helpful things you can do are call for a quiet interlude, bring a new resource to the classroom, or post an observation on line. So there are multiple ways quieter learners can participate.

Below are some specific behavioral examples of good participation in discussion:-

Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person says

Ask a question or make a comment that encourages another person to elaborate on something they have already said

Bring in a resource (a reading, web link, video) not covered in the syllabus but adds new information/perspectives to our learning

Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions & make this link explicit in your comment

Use body language (in only a slightly exaggerated way) to show interest in what different speakers are saying

Post a comment on the course chat room that summarizes our conversations so far and/or suggests new directions and questions to be explored in the future

Make a comment (online if this is appropriate) indicating that you found another person's ideas interesting or useful. Be specific as to why this was the case

Contribute something that builds on, or springs from, what someone else has said. Be explicit about the way you are building on the other person's thoughts – this can be done online

Make a comment on your CIQ that prompts us to examine discussion dynamics

When you think it's appropriate, ask the group for a moment's silence to slow the pace of conversation to give you, and others, time to think

Make a comment that at least partly paraphrases a point someone has already made

Make a summary observation that takes into account several people's contributions & that touches on a recurring theme in the discussion (online if you like)

Ask a cause and effect question - for example, "can you explain why you think it's true that if these things are in place such and such a thing will occur?"

Find a way to express appreciation for the enlightenment you have gained from the discussion. Try to be specific about what it was that helped you understand something better. Again this can be done online if this suits you better

**A CRITICAL APPROACH TO
MEETINGS**

**Use the CIQ to evaluate
each meeting**

Begin with AOB

Assumptions Inventories

What's the decision we've just made ?

What's the chief piece of evidence for the decision?

What results is the decision supposed to effect ?

Structured Devil's Advocacy

Questioning to Keep Discussion Going

One of the best ways to enliven and deepen dialogue is through the skillful use of questioning. Discussion leaders who seem to have a knack for keeping discussion going tend to emphasize their role as questioner and inquirer. They frequently ask questions to get more information from participants, to uncover the sources of participant opinions, and to get clarification on those opinions. They also raise questions to underscore the links between comments and to synthesize or sum up an entire conversation. Questioning is also a practice that embodies respect. It demonstrates that we care enough about others' thoughts to learn more about them through the questions we pose. Furthermore, one of the indicators of a good discussion is the extent to which participants themselves learn to practice the art of questioning. Below are some questions that help to sustain discussion:

Questions that ask for more evidence

How do you know that?
 What data is that claim based on?
 What does the author say that supports your argument?
 Where did you find that view expressed in the text?
 What evidence would you give to someone who doubted your interpretation?

Questions that ask for clarification

Can you put that another way?
 What's a good example of what you are talking about?
 What do you mean by that?
 Can you explain the term you just used?
 Can you give a different illustration of your point?

Linking or Extension Questions

Is there a connection between what you just said and what was said a moment ago?
 How does your comment fit in with Neng's earlier observation?
 How does your observation relate to what the group decided last week?
 Does your idea challenge or support what we seem to be saying?
 How does that contribution add to what has already been said?

Summary and Synthesis Questions

What are one or two particularly important ideas that emerged from this discussion?
 What remains unresolved or contentious about this topic?
 What do you understand better as a result of today's discussion?
 Based on our discussion today, what do we need to talk about next time if we're to understand this issue better?
 What key word or concept best captures the gist of our discussion today?

Questioning to Open Up Possibilities

Open-ended questions, especially those beginning with why and how, are more likely to provoke students' thinking and problem-solving abilities and make the fullest use of discussion's potential for expanding intellectual and emotional horizons. Of course, using open questions obliges the facilitator to keep the discussion genuinely unrestricted. It is neither fair nor appropriate to ask an open-ended question and then to expect participants to furnish a pre-determined or preferred response. Open questions tend to look like this:

- How can we think about this another way?
- Why do we continue to use this particular process?
- How might this idea open up new possibilities for us?
- What are the options available to us in solving this problem?
- What are the advantages of seeing parents as educators and colleagues to teachers? What are the disadvantages?
- Why do you think many people devote their lives to education despite the often low pay and poor working conditions?
- Let's completely revamp this program. How might we go about it?

Good open-ended questions can empower people by:

- Stretching people's thinking
- Challenging taken for granted assumptions
- Approaching old problems with renewed creativity and energy
- Helping people to see the flaws in stodgy, entrenched practices
- Reframing issues with new or underused perspectives
- Bolstering confidence
- Encouraging critical reflection
- Deepening understanding
- Building a new collective or shared consciousness

Once you have asked your questions, keep your own participation to a minimum. In other words, learn to listen. Things to listen for include:

- Understanding the words spoken rather than thinking about what to say next
- Understanding the point being made before either approving or criticizing
- Notes of agreement as well as disagreement within the group
- Points that need clarifying or explaining
- Links to other content already presented or other comments already made
- Engagement, interest, and personal connection to the content
- Comments that extend or deepen the conversation
- The speaker's level of confidence and the degree of support she or he may need

QUESTIONING EXERCISE

Form into Groups of Three. Each one of you will be, alternately, questioner, interviewee and observer.

The questioner's task is to find out about the interviewee's challenges at work – the things that most drain their energy in doing good work. Try and ask a question from each of the CLOSE categories listed above: (Clarification, Linking, Open ended, Synthesis, Evidence)

The interviewee's task is to respond to the questions posed.

The observer's task is to watch for the different kinds of questions posed in the conversation & at its end report to the interviewer which questions fit each category.

**SPEND ABOUT 5 MINUTES ON EACH
ITERATION OF THIS EXERCISE, CHANGING
ROLES FOR EACH ROUND**

APPRECIATIVE PAUSE

One of the least practiced behaviors in discussion is to show appreciation for how someone has contributed to our learning. The appreciative pause is a technique that focuses deliberately on this behavior.

At least once in every discussion the instructor calls for a pause of a minute or so. During this time the only comments allowed are from participants who acknowledge how something that someone else said in the discussion (NOT the instructor) has contributed to their learning. Appreciations are often given for:

A question that was asked that suggested a whole new line of thinking

A comment that clarified something that up to then was confusing

A new idea that is intriguing and had not been considered before

A comment showing the connection between two other ideas or contributions when that connection hadn't been clear

An example that was provided that helped increase understanding of a difficult concept

STUDENT SELF-EVALUATION OF DISCUSSION PARTICIPATION

WHAT IDEAS, QUESTIONS OR INFORMATION DID I CONTRIBUTE TO THE DISCUSSION TODAY?

HOW DID I TRY TO ENCOURAGE ANOTHER STUDENT TO SPEAK TODAY?

WHAT DID I LEARN FROM THE DISCUSSION TODAY?

(New information, a new understanding of something already covered, an idea to follow up after the discussion etc.)

HOW DID I MAKE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN WHAT DIFFERENT PEOPLE WERE SAYING TODAY?

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NOMINATING QUESTIONS

Often when discussions moves from small to large group formats it is difficult to know which of the issues identified by the smaller groups should be focused on in the whole class conversation. The process of involving students in nominating questions gets students to start making judgments on issues of importance within a subject.

Small groups conduct their discussions. They are told that at the end of the discussion period they must list the main questions about the issue, topic or subject that arose during their conversation.

When small groups are called together for a whole class discussion they first list on the blackboard, or a flip chart, the questions that their group identified.

The whole class is then asked to review and think for a minute or so about all the questions that have been put on the board or flip charts.

The students are then given 2-3 minutes to vote for no more than two questions they would like to discuss further as a whole class. They do this by all getting up, moving to the blackboard or flip charts, and individually placing checks against the 2 of the questions (out of all those listed) that they would choose to pursue in the whole class discussion.

When everyone has had a chance to record their vote the top two or three questions chosen becomes the one the whole class focuses on.

Advantages – this gives you as the teacher a chance to see which elements of the topic are either of interest to students or are causing them problems. It is also usually seen as a publicly fair way to proceed with discussion. Finally, it adds a bit of kinetic variety since students have to get up out of their seats to record their vote!

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DISCUSSION AUDIT

When moving from small to large class discussions one way to make the transition is to use a discussion inventory. Here each member of the small groups writes a brief response on a 3x5 card to one of the following questions:-

What was the most important point made in the small group discussion you've just had?

What was the most confusing or puzzling point made in the small group discussion you've just had?

What new learning happened in the small group discussion you've just had?

Based on your small group discussion, what idea do you think it would be good explore more deeply in the next part of class?

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THE THREE-PERSON RULE

THIS SIMPLE RULE IS DESIGNED TO ENSURE THAT NO ONE PERSON IN A DISCUSSION CAN MONOPOLIZE THE CONVERSATION.

THE RULE – ONCE YOU HAVE SPOKEN YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO MAKE ANOTHER CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION UNTIL AT LEAST THREE OTHER GROUP MEMBERS HAVE SPOKEN. THE ONLY TIME THIS RULE IS NOT OBSERVED IS IF SOMEONE DIRECTLY ASKS YOU TO EXPAND ON A COMMENT YOU’VE ALREADY MADE.

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THE SPIRAL CONVERSATION

THIS SIMPLE PROCESS STRUCTURES THE CONVERSATION SO THAT ALL HAVE A CHANCE TO SPEAK.

THE RULE – ONCE YOU HAVE SPOKEN YOU HOLD ANY FURTHER COMMENT UNTIL EVERYONE HAS HAD A CHANCE TO SPEAK. THE FACILITATOR MONITORS TO ENSURE THIS HAPPENS. QUIETER STUDENTS WHO USUALLY GO LATER CAN OPT TO PASS – OR HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO AGREE/DISAGREE WITH COMMENTS ALREADY MADE, RATHER THAN HAVING TO COME UP WITH AN ORIGINAL COMMENT.

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STRUCTURED SILENCE

Every 15 – 20 minutes stop the discussion and call for a period of intentional structured silence of maybe 2-3 minutes. This is a reflective pause when discussion participants are asked to think quietly about ONE of the following questions (you choose which one depending on where the discussion has gone at that session):-

**WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT POINT MADE IN THE
LAST 15 MINUTES?**

**WHAT WAS THE MOST PUZZLING OR CONFUSING POINT
MADE IN THE LAST 15 MINUTES?**

**WHAT NEW INFORMATION OR NEW IDEAS DID YOU
LEARN ABOUT IN THE LAST 15 MINUTES?**

**WHAT ASSUMPTIONS YOU HOLD ABOUT THE TOPIC
WERE CONFIRMED IN THE LAST 15 MINUTES?**

**WHAT ASSUMPTIONS YOU HOLD ABOUT THE TOPIC
WERE CHALLENGED IN THE LAST 15 MINUTES?**

Students make notes in response to the question on 3x5 cards you provide. When they've finished the cards are handed to the front, shuffled and you (or students you choose randomly) read out several of the cards. This helps structure the next 15-minute chunk of discussion, and also gives you a sense of what meanings students are creating about the current discussion.

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SPOT THE ERROR

Tell participants that at some point in the discussion you will deliberately make a contribution that you know to be false. This may be:-

Something new you contribute that is a factual error or displays a conceptual misunderstanding

Agreeing with a false argument made by a participant

A comment you assert as fact with no basis in evidence

An attribution to the text that is unjustified

This models for students a willingness to be the recipient of critical comments and helps create an atmosphere where students are less wary of disagreeing with each other or calling another's comments into question.

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CALLING ON STUDENTS IN DISCUSSION

Used contextually when justified to extend or deepen a discussion, bring in a variety of perspectives, give students practice at thinking and speaking on their feet (not literally, they don't stand up when you call on them!). For example, learning how to do this is justified if students are studying to work in an area of practice where improvised comment is required, where skills of advocacy are important, where clarity of oral communication is a necessity, where verbal participation in problem-solving teams is expected, etc. Also justified if future courses or activities in the student's course of study require her to speak on topics or issues at short notice.

WAYS TO MAKE THIS LESS INTIMIDATING

Be sure you clarify why you will be doing this in both the syllabus and your explanations in class

Allow ample wait time. Don't expect a student to respond immediately. The first few times you do this there will be a tension or embarrassment in the air. But after a while students will become more comfortable with your habit of allowing plenty of wait time for a response

Allow students to table a response if they wish: in other words, tell students that if they wish to take 5 minutes to think about a response while the discussion is continuing, that will be allowed. After five minutes return to the student for her comment.

Allow the option of not speaking when called but instead of posting the response online by the end of the day of the class. Then check and if it's not there remind the student (publicly) that their comment is expected.

Make the initial requests for comments in the form of calls for clarification ("Can you say more about why you think that?" "What's the most important piece of evidence or experience that supports your view") or extension ("Can you think of an example that supports John's argument?")

Negotiate an alternate week arrangement – one week you will call on students the next you won't.

DRAWING DISCUSSION

Groups of six or seven are formed & given a topic to discuss ...

- They are supplied with large newsprint to draw on, plenty of colored markers, pens, rulers, scissors and tape to help them create fairly traditional two dimensional drawings. They also receive magazine photographs, cloth scraps and other textured materials for creating a mixed-media collage creation, if they so desire
- Students individually draw (or create a collage) on a sheet of newsprint their responses to the discussion question. Abstract drawing with no attempt at representation is fine
- Small group members then come together and each person explains their drawing or collage to the other group members
 - * The group then prepares a drawing or collage that represents the conversation that ensued as the individual drawings/collages were discussed. Each person's work is somehow included on the newsprint.
 - * One member volunteers to take notes of what the group is trying to communicate so s/he can interpret the drawing to the large group and respond to any questions they have
- When all of the groups have completed their task, each group displays their work somewhere in the room for all to observe at their leisure. A blank sheet of paper is posted next to each visual posting.

Participants wander the room and on the blank pieces of paper they add their responses – comments, questions and reactions – to the pictures or collages. They can use words to give their responses or use drawings.

The group members then gather as a whole class for the chance to talk about each of the postings and the reactions posted to it

MUSICALIZING DISCUSSION

Prominent elements in most people's notion of good discussion are that each person's voice is heard and that conversation develops collaboratively with different contributions responding to each other. In many ways, discussion is like music with ...

Moments of harmony and dissonance

Periods of silence and crescendo

Solos interspersed with ensemble playing

Variations on a theme

Different musical elements connecting & responding to each other

Every vocal or instrumental element discernible

Conflict between 2 instruments that may or may not be resolved harmonically

We have provided you with kazoos and percussion instruments. You can also use your voices – singing is allowed!!

Your task is to create and perform a musical representation of discussion that incorporates some of the elements listed above. You don't have to come up with original melodies or rhythms, in fact we encourage you to use well known tunes or songs.

**Undermining the Very Democracy We Seek to Create:
Discussion Practices in Adult Education and the Dangers of Repressive Tolerance**
EXCERPT

Stephen Brookfield

STUDIES IN CONTINUING EDUCATION Vol. 27, #2, (2005)

As an adult educator who uses discussion as a mainstay of my practice I try to keep in mind certain theoretical illuminations that have emerged from an analysis of my own experiences. But I also realize that experiential analysis cannot account for everything that happens in my world, and that theoretical insights drawn from external sources can illuminate aspects of discussion practice that are hidden from me. One of the most productively disturbing bodies of theoretical work for adult education is critical theory. And perhaps the most disturbing of all critical theory's ideas for discussion-based teaching is Herbert Marcuse's (1965) analysis of repressive tolerance.

A Vignette of Repressive Tolerance

It is a graduate course on philosophies and practices of adult education. The instructor announces that this semester the curriculum will be broadened to include perspectives on the field that deliberately challenge the liberal/progressive hegemony. To that end the course will include a unit on Africentrism as well as the more expected units on Humanist Adult Education and Workplace Learning. Three teams of students are formed with each team taking responsibility for researching their unit and then presenting their findings to the rest of the course, and to the wider field. The latter objective will be achieved by each group proposing a paper based on their research for presentation at the annual state adult education conference.

As the semester proceeds it becomes clear that some of the groups are having problems gaining access to resources. In particular, some of the core texts for the groups studying Africentrism are either incredibly expensive or unavailable in the university library. The Africentric group spends hours, without success, trying to locate a copy of two out of print texts crucial to their presentation: *Philosophy Born of Struggle* (Harris, 1983) and *Confronting Racism and Sexism* (Hayes and Colin, 1994). As the class engages in a direct discussion of ideas covered in the three units an interesting dynamic develops. Practices derived from Humanist Adult Education and Workplace Learning are discussed at length as participants provide numerous examples of how these do, or do not, fit their own work contexts. Connections are drawn, contradictions are pointed out, and students struggle to appreciate fully the practice implications drawn from these perspectives. After each class meeting the course chat room is full of requests for citations of texts referred to in class. Students also use the list serve to post their reflections on how ideas derived from classroom discussions have already influenced their daily understandings and practices.

When ideas drawn from the Africentric paradigm are discussed, however, the emotional tenor seems to change. Even though participants profess themselves to be open to exploring this tradition, Africentric concepts and practices are regrettably dismissed by participants as inapplicable to the primarily White or Asian contexts within which they work. Africentrism is discussed but the time devoted to this, and the number of questions asked about it, pale in comparison to the time spent discussing andragogy, the learning organization, or self-directed work teams. On the weekly classroom evaluation forms completed anonymously by students the comments regarding Humanist Adult Education and Workplace Learning are substantive, referring to the clear connections between these perspectives and students' practices, or to the difficulties encountered when trying to act on these ideas. On the few times comments appear on the evaluation forms concerning the Africentric paradigm, the main theme is how disappointing it is that such a rich tradition is unfortunately inapplicable to the students' settings.

At the end of the semester the three groups apply for spots to present at the annual state adult education conference. All three paper proposals are accepted. However, when the schedule conference is published it seems the Africentric group is placed in a pre-conference caucus on multiculturalism that is not in the main conference. The groups proposing papers on Humanistic Adult Education and Workplace Learning, on the other hand, find their papers situated in the main body of the conference. When a person from the Africentric group contacts the conference organizer to point out that the group applied to be part of the main conference she is told that the committee assumed a session on Africentrism was meant for the pre-conference multiculturalism caucus. The committee decided that the writers of the proposal must have misunderstood the form. She is also told that all the main conference spots have now been filled but that the committee will agree to the Africentric group preparing a special alternative poster session that interested participants can attend. Unfortunately, the only time a room is available for this session is during the wrap-up plenary session when a major figure in the field has been specially invited to address the conference.

The Concept of Repressive Tolerance

This vignette illuminates a theoretical perspective – repressive tolerance - that is particularly problematic for adult educators committed to using discussion. This perspective is associated with Herbert Marcuse, the highly influential philosopher and public intellectual of the 1960's. Marcuse argued that teachers' willingness to run discussions in which a variety of perspectives are present is much less innocent than it appears. On the face of it this practice hardly seems like a problem. A broadening of discussion to include radical ideas seems an important and obvious part of building a critical practice of adult education. In one of his most famous essays, however, Marcuse (1965) argues that an emphasis on including a diversity of views and traditions in discussion is often repressive, not liberating. When they experience repressive tolerance, people mistakenly believe they are participating in discussions characterized by freedom of speech and an inclusive emphasis on diverse ideas, when in fact those same discussions actually reinforce dominant ideology.

Repressive tolerance is the tolerance, in the name of impartiality, fairness or even-handedness, of intolerable ideologies and practices, and the consequent marginalization of efforts for democratic social change. When repressive tolerance is in place the apparent acceptance of all viewpoints only serves to reinforce an unfair status quo. This is because “tolerance is extended to policies, conditions and modes of behavior which should not be tolerated because they are impeding, if not destroying, the chances of creating an existence without fear and misery” (Marcuse, 1965, p. 82). In a society in which a small number of people hold a disproportionate amount of wealth and power, and in which ideological obfuscation ensures the reproduction of the system, tolerance only serves to legitimize dominant ideology. In Marcuse’s words, “the conditions of tolerance are ‘loaded’ ... determined and defined by the institutionalized inequality ... i.e. by the class structure of society” (ibid. p. 85). When “false consciousness has become the general consciousness” (ibid. p. 110) we have a “passive toleration of entrenched and established attitudes and ideas even if their damaging effect on man and nature is evident” (ibid. p. 85). In this way the apparently benign “ideology of tolerance ... in reality, favors and fortifies the conservation of the status quo of inequality and discrimination” (ibid. p. 123).

Repressive tolerance ensures the continuation of the system by allowing just enough challenge to the system to convince people that they live in a truly open society, while still maintaining the system’s structural inequity. It functions as a pressure cooker letting off enough steam to prevent the whole pot from boiling over. It is what Asante (1988), in his analysis of racism, calls process racism rather than institutional racism. Repressive tolerance allows, even celebrates, initiatives such as Black History month, affirmative action legislation and various diversity programs, but all the time process racism allows White supremacist society to “give the impression of running while standing still” (p. 35). When an alternative idea is included alongside a mainstream one, people’s prior familiarity with the mainstream ensures that the alternative, oppositional perspective is seen as an exotic option rather than a plausible natural center. In classroom discussions repressive tolerance allows, and even encourages, participants to express the widest possible range of views. In the manner of this apparently free expression of views, however, certain centrist views are always given greater credence. They are subtly favored, presented by both participants and leader as more ‘reasonable’ or ‘balanced’. So while alternative interpretations and opinions are pursued, the fact that they are framed as alternatives only serves to support the implicit legitimacy of the center.

One way to illustrate this is to think about what happens when those adult educators who can afford it travel abroad. Typically, when you get to a foreign country you are enraptured with the different aspects of the culture – the cuisine, the music, the clothing, the street rhythms, the language, and so on. You sample the food, go enthusiastically to street festivals, dress like a local – all the time reveling in celebrating the exotic diversity you are experiencing. But your enjoyment comes from precisely the awareness that this is not ‘normal’ not ‘reality’. You know you are on a temporary excursion into another perspective and that lurking behind your engagement is the ‘real’ life you inhabit. So the engagement is not with a truly viable alternative that might displace the center, but a

temporary flirtation with an exotic diversion. In this way celebrating the diversity of your alternative experience serves only to reinforce the enduring legitimacy of your 'normal' way of life. In much the same way inserting the discussion of an alternative idea, concept or text into the consideration of familiar, mainstream materials serves only to emphasize the alternatives as exotic others and to underscore the normality of the center. Learners see their engagement as a temporary flirtation with an exotic intellectual (rather than tourist) locale, an enjoyable diversion before returning to the security of mainstream thought.

How does repressive tolerance work? Essentially, repressive tolerance is hegemonic, a taken for granted notion embedded in the ideology of democracy. Corporations and media perpetuate a social mentality that accepts that things are organized for the good of all. But what counts as truth is pre-defined by these institutions so that avenues of opposition are subtly closed off. Marcuse argues that "under the rule of monopolistic media – themselves mere instruments of economic and political power – a mentality is created for which right and wrong, true and false are predefined wherever they affect the vital interests of the society" (1965, p. 95). Language – in contemporary terms, discursive practices and relations – is controlled to maintain oppression; "the meaning of words is rigidly stabilized ... the avenues of entrance are closed to the meaning of words and ideas other than the established one" (ibid. p. 96). Patriotism, democracy, justice – all these words are invested with only one possible ideological interpretation.

Repressive tolerance masks its repression behind the façade of open, even-handedness. Alternative ideas are not banned in discussions. Critical texts are published and critical messages circulated in those same discussions. The defenders of the status quo can point to the existence of dissenting voices (such as Marcuse's) as evidence of the open society we inhabit, and the active tolerance of a wide spectrum of ideologies. But hegemony irresistibly frames all meaning in an unstoppable manner. As the vignette on repressive tolerance shows, sometimes the power of radical texts is diluted by the fact that the texts themselves are hard to get, or incredibly expensive. More likely the radical meanings those texts contain are neutered in any discussion of them because they are framed as the expressions of obviously weird minority opinion. Marcuse cites Orwell's analysis of language in illustrating how words are used to mean their opposite. For example, the meaning of peace is redefined so that "preparing for war *is* working for peace" (Marcuse, 1965, p. 96). Supporters of the 2003 unilateral American invasion of Iraq frequently used this formulation.

A crucial component of repressive tolerance is the meta-narrative of democratic tolerance. This narrative is ideologically embedded in the way adult educators think of democratic discussion, where the intent is to honor and respect each learner's voice. But the implicit assumption that all contributions to a discussion carry equal weight can easily lead to a flattening of conversation. A discussion leader's concern to dignify each student's personhood can result in a refusal to point out the ideologically skewed nature of particular contributions, let alone saying someone is wrong. In Marcuse's view, the ideology of democratic tolerance in discussion groups means that "the stupid opinion is treated with the same respect as the intelligent one, the misinformed may talk as long as

the informed, and propaganda rides along with falsehood. This pure tolerance of sense and nonsense is justified by the democratic argument that nobody, neither group nor individual, is in possession of the truth and capable of defining what is right and wrong, good and bad” (1965, p. 94).

Under repressive tolerance the airing of a radical perspective as one among many possible viewpoints to be considered in a discussion always works to the detriment of that perspective. This is because discussion participants are disposed to skepticism or hostility regarding new ideas because of their formative ideological conditioning. Thus “persuasion through discussion and the equal presentation of opposites (even where it is really equal) easily lose their liberating force as factors of understanding and learning; they are far more likely to strengthen the established thesis and to repel the alternatives” (Marcuse, 1965, p. 97). In a contemporary analysis of the discourse of multicultural inclusion San Juan Jr (2003) adopts a Marcusean posture by arguing that such discourse (and its related practices of celebrating diversity) only serve to affirm the legitimacy of the capitalist status quo. San Juan Jr is not referring here to the notion of critical multiculturalism expressed by Kanpol and McLaren (1995) amongst others, but to the ‘fun, food and festivals’ multiculturalism that celebrates individual differences as if they were devoid of power relations. Heretically (at least to many educators) Marcuse even suggests that with some people discussion is a waste of time. In his view “there are in fact large groups in the population with whom discussion is hopeless” (1970, p. 102) owing to the rigidity of their opinions. So the best thing to do, in Marcuse’s opinion, is avoid talking to them.

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PRINCIPLES OF GOOD DISCUSSION

USE DISCUSSION ONLY WHEN APPROPRIATE:-

- * When multiple perspectives on content are possible
- * When applications of content to real life settings are being considered
- * When students already have grasped the essentials / basics of what is being discussed – the ‘grammar’ of the activity
- * When there is a genuine openness about where the discussion might lead

THE CHANCES FOR GOOD DISCUSSION ARE RAISED WHEN:-

- * You work with the group to set ground rules for the discussion
- * You distribute criteria and indicators for discussion participation that stress listening carefully to others’ comments, showing how others’ comments connect or differ, & asking questions of others
- * You model the kinds of behaviors you’re looking for in discussion and let students know you’re doing this
- * You provide some scaffolding for students’ participation by assigning roles or conversational moves & using specific techniques
- * You hold discussion **ONLY** after students have read or thought about the topic, have written some reflections on it, and have brought multiple copies of these to class to share with peers. The discussion begins with students reading each others’ reflections on the topic
- * You end each discussion **NOT** by giving a summary of conclusions but by listing new issues and unresolved questions the discussion has raised

DISCUSSION PROBLEMS & POSSIBLE RESPONSES

Generally:-

Use the CIQ to monitor & understand the problem

1. Model the desired behaviors
2. Scaffold conversation by exercises, roles, directions
3. Build incrementally into conversation
4. Check the Reward System

People Won't Talk

Indicators of Classroom Participation Snowballing
 Circle of Voices Conversational Moves Conversational Roles
 Structured Silence Newsprint Dialog Speech Policy

One or Two Talk Too Much

3 Person Role Conversational Role (eg Reflective Analyst,
 Umpire) Circular Response Spiral Conversation
 Nominating Questions

Move From Small to Large Groups Loses Energy

Snowballing Nominating Questions Rotating Stations
 Newsprint Dialogue Quotes to Affirm & Challenge
 Discussion Audit Structured Silence

Discussion Goes Off-Track

Conversational Role – Textual Focuser Structured Silence
 Discussion Inventory Quotes to Affirm & Challenge

Discussion is Just Swapping Personal Opinions

Critical Debate Conversational Roles
 Conversational Moves

Students State Misunderstandings & Errors

Discussion Inventory

THE TRIAD COMMENT THEN QUESTION

The whole group is assigned a topic (such as when are your students or colleagues ever justified in resisting the learning you are urging on them?). The only instructions are (i) to decide who will be the two speakers and who will be the observer, and (ii) for the two speakers to observe the ‘comment then question’ rule – speakers try to follow each comment they make with a question to their partner.

Participants divide into triads. Two people agree to discuss the questions for 5 minutes while the third person observes the conversation. The discussants begin by each giving their opening thoughts on the topic. As they get into the conversation they try to practice the ‘comment then question’ rule – they try to follow each comment they make with a question to their partner.

The 3rd person – the observer - tries to note areas of agreement, differences in viewpoints, and interesting questions that emerge in the conversation the other two members are having.

After 5 minutes or so the observer has the floor to report out how she heard the conversation – areas of agreement, difference & questions – & also what thoughts, comments and questions the conversation prompted in her that were not raised by either of the participants.

The Triad has 2 advantages ...

1. The presence of the observer is more likely to make the participants follow the ‘comment then question’ rule
2. The focus is on asking questions as much as on sharing opinions

What do YOU think?

When students ask you directly for an opinion on an issue, or the correct way to understand or apply a concept, you are often reluctant to state your view for fear of biasing the discussion so that they then parrot your view as the ‘right’ way to think.

One option is to tell the students you will give them two or three possible answers, only one of which represents your actual opinion. You then provide these options and ask the students to vote on which of them they think represents your actual opinion. (Sometimes I stand at different stations in the classroom for each answer and then ask the students to go and stand at the station that they feel represents my actual belief).

You then ask the students to say why they chose answer A or answer B – what was it about that answer that connected back to my earlier opinions, what argument or evidence I gave was most convincing, etc. I then tell them which option represents my actual answer.

In this way I tell students what they want to know but ask them to do some critical analysis to get there.

THE POST-IT PLAUDIT

Participants work in groups to come up with responses to a problem or question. After a suitable time each group posts a record of its discussion and places a blank sheet alongside it.

Post-it pads are distributed around the room next to each posting. Each participant wanders around the room and when they see a comment that they appreciate it some way, they write their appreciation on a post it note. Perhaps they agree with the comment, or maybe it raises some important new information or provides a helpful, different perspective on the issue.

After writing their appreciation on the post-it note they place the note right by the comment on the newsprint they appreciate.

After a few minutes clusters of post-its become discernible at different points on the postings. This gives an immediate visual record of which elements of the postings generated the most comments. Group members read out the post-it notes to the whole group and these themes are then discussed further with the whole group.

INDEX CARD DEBRIEF

Small groups are assigned a discussion question and post their responses on newsprint around the room.

Once responses are posted each small group is given a set of color-coded 3 x 5 index cards. Each person takes a card and wanders around the room reading all the postings.

Students write one or two of three things on their individual cards as they are wandering ...

A common theme that seemed to emerge across the different groups' postings

A new idea, insight or practice that was suggested by reading the newsprint

A question that occurred as a result of reading the newsprint

Students go back to their tables and read out to each other what they've written on their index cards.

They then exchange cards with another table that has a set of differently colored cards. They read out to each other whatever is written on the new set of index cards. The exchange can be continued with new tables as time permits.

POST-IT QUESTIONS

Small groups are assigned a discussion question and post their responses on newsprint around the room.

Post it pads are placed by each newsprint posting. Whenever a comment on the newsprint prompts a question this is written down on a post it note.

The post it question is then placed next to the comment on the newsprint that has prompted it.

After a while clusters of post-its become observable around the room.

In the large group debriefing, the discussion is framed around the most noticeable clusters of questions that are observed around the room.

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ONE CREDIT ASSIGNMENT

Choose **ONE** option below. Due date is Monday November 21st 2011.
Typical page length is 5 pages, double-spaced.

Option (1) Write Up Your Case Study Response: “The Discussion from Hell (in Gary’s eyes)”

This assignment asks you to write up the analysis, responses and suggestions that you and your group members made to the case study on discussion.

Option (2) Reflections on the Workshop

This assignment asks you to write up your reflections on the themes & ideas covered in the workshop. (N.B. Option (2) can be combined with Option (5) of the ‘Helping Adults Learn’ workshop assignments into one paper that is an overall reflection on the two workshops). You could write about what resonated with you & why, what challenged you, what you disagreed with, what new ideas or practices you learned, how the things you learned will, or won’t, fit your work context etc.

Option (3) Independently Arranged Assignment

If neither of the above work for you then you can propose an independently arranged assignment to me during the workshop.

HOW TO GET YOUR ASSIGNMENTS TO ME

You can use either of the options below:

- 1. E-Mail:** Send to sdbrookfield@stthomas.edu no later than Monday November 21st 2011. Let me know if you need an acknowledgment.
- 2. Snail Mail:** Send it **postmarked** no later than 11/21/11 to:-

Brookfield Limited, 695 Lincoln Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota 55105-3534

Please NO FedEx, UPS or recorded delivery. Just US Post snail mail.

ALL ASSIGNMENTS WILL RECEIVE A PASS OR INCOMPLETE GRADE. NO LETTER GRADES ARE GIVEN IN THIS WORKSHOP.

If you would like written feedback on your paper then send it to me by snail mail, along with a self-addressed envelope.