



Curating The Environment for Dialogue

CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ≠ WELCOMING SPACE FOR DEEPER ENGAGEMENT

WHAT IT IS

Curating the environment means thinking intentionally about participants' holistic relationship to the dialogue space + taking action to make that space more accessible physically, cognitively, and emotionally.

WHY WE DO IT

- Signals the transition to a “temporary alternative space” (Priya Parker, *The Art of Gathering*) that operates by its own norms
- Helps build the trust + comfort necessary to reach greater depth + challenge

HOW TO DO IT

Think holistically + within the limits of the space. How do you want participants to feel, to think, to interact during this conversation? What is needed, what is ideal, and what is possible in the space?

Consult participants before the dialogue about their accessibility needs + preferences if possible -- ask about mobility issues, sensory issues, food allergies, chemical + sound + light sensitivities, etc.

Start simple. Pick a few practices, try them, note the effect. Build up a repertoire that works for you.

Check in with participants during the dialogue for consent, input, and feedback on your choices.

Build a kit with a few small items you can use to transform the space quickly (see below). Bring it with you and add to it over time! Including participants in setup strengthens a sense of community.

EFFECTIVE CURATORIAL PRACTICES

Beneficial for dialogue even when not “needed”!

LAYOUT

Make sure participants can see each other. Arrange chairs in a circle, or have them turn in their chairs to face each other.

Make sure participants can access all materials + visuals. Can they see the board? Are all pathways clear + wide? If they need to write or eat, is there a surface for each person? etc.

If going outside, select an area that is shaded + accessible.

TOUCH

Manipulables. Set out fidget toys, small stones, coloring pages, puzzles, origami paper, etc., to help channel energy + maintain focus for listening.

Temperature. If you can, keep it around 72°. If it's cold, bring blankets; if hot, paper fans.

SIGHT

Lighting. Replace harsh overhead lighting with natural light, lamps, or twinkle lights.

Color. Warm up sterile spaces with a colorful hanging or two.

Visuals. Provide all important information (e.g. norms, questions, instructions) in written form, with legibly large font.

SOUND

Music. Play upbeat music to welcome participants. Play low instrumentals during small group dialogue and independent work. Make + find playlists you like, or have participants help.

Silence. If you can, keep it around 72°. If it's cold, bring blankets; if hot, paper fans.

Read out written information or comments shared on screens

TASTE ≠ SMELL

Food + drink. Breaking bread together releases dialogue, even simple snacks or tea.

Aromatherapy. Spritz an essential oils-based room spray to relax or energize

A SAMPLE DIALOGUE KIT

- **Sturdy tote to pack it all in.**
- **Battery-powered string lights.**
- **Portable speaker + phone.**
- **Wrapped small snacks.** Trail mix packets, granola bars, etc.
- **Mix of fidget toys.** Spinners, stress balls, infinity cubes, etc.
- **Room spray.** Lavender, citrus
- **Materials specific to that day.** Agenda, handouts, laptop, etc.