



Getting Everyone to Talk

STRATEGIES FOR MORE DEMOCRATIC + INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE



STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION

Paideia Program

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

KEY PRINCIPLES

COMMUNITY. Without a core feeling of security and trust in the others present, people will not speak up. This doesn't mean everyone needs to agree with or even "like" each other, but they need to be in this together. Invest in building community throughout your time together.

SCAFFOLDING. Participating once makes it easier to do so again. Start the session with a relatively low-stakes, simple question that everyone will respond to. Build to higher-level and/or more sensitive and vulnerable content.

STRUCTURE. As a group establishes patterns of interaction, structures are like a set of training wheels to guide participants, helping to shape the desired dynamic. Once stabilized, try easing off, and if things start to get wobbly, reintroduce more structured approaches.

DIFFERENTIATION. Change up discussion formats + modes both within and across sessions. This engages different personality and learning styles and prevents patterns of participation from ossifying into a dynamic that's hard to change.

EFFECTIVE FACILITATION PRACTICES

Additional guidance is linked where available!

BUILD COMMUNITY

NORMS. Establish community standards for interacting with one another that reflect the group's shared values.

CHECK-INS + CHECK-OUTS. Start & end sessions with low-stakes, universal sharing.

AFFIRMATIONS. Have participants recognize one another through shout-outs, sharing interesting comments others made, expressing gratitude, etc.

SET PARTICIPANTS UP FOR SUCCESS

SCRIPTS. Share dialogue scripts + strategies for participating more effectively and equitably.

QUESTIONS. Craft questions that are scaffolded, aligned to your purpose, and supportive of the dynamic you wish to create.

PREVIEW. Share the question set + agenda in advance, so people can prepare.

PRE-WORK. Have participants complete pre-work to prime their thinking (e.g. reading response; anticipation guide).

THINK TIME. Pose a question, then structure in 2 minutes of processing or journaling time before anyone may respond.

DIFFERENTIATE APPROACHES

FORMATS. Have participants respond to a single prompt in this sequence: independent reflection/journaling → pair or small group conversation → whole group discussion. Hold everyone accountable to *thinking* (dialogue with the self) even if not everyone *speaks*.

MODES. Play with written, visual & embodied modes of interaction, as well as digital & asynchronous modalities.

STRUCTURES. Try a [Socratic seminar](#), a [story circle](#), [speed-dating](#), a [gallery walk](#),...

PACING. Vary the length, depth, and quality that you require of responses.

USE DIALOGIC TECHNOLOGIES

MENTIMETER. Interactive presentation software that allows for anonymous, public sharing. Generates graphic representations in real time.

PERUSALL. Collaborative annotation app that allows for dialogue with + about a text ahead of an in-person session.

MURAL. Interactive digital canvas that allows participant to directly (re)organize their contributions to find patterns.

CURATE THE ENVIRONMENT

SEATING. Arrange chairs in a circle. Have participants turn around to face one another if at immovable tables.

SENSORY. Play ambient music during independent reflection and small-group dialogue. Spritz aromatherapy room spray. Use daylight or gentler lighting. Provide fidget toys, etc to channel nervous energy and help people focus. Bring snacks!

SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY

PAUSE. Halfway through the session, say, "If you have already shared >1 time, push your chair back. Please sit back for the next little while to create space for others to speak."

REFLECT. Have participants self-reflect on their patterns of participation and identify goals + an action plan for themselves. Notice and affirm their progress!

TRANSPARENCY. Share rationale for facilitation choices. Engage participants in identifying issues, seeking solutions, and assessing effectiveness.