

# ***BECOMING A CRITICALLY REFLECTIVE TEACHER***

**Stephen Brookfield**

## **SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCE MATERIALS**

(Please note I will not go through this packet sequentially, nor will I address every item.  
These materials are to be called on as appropriate during the workshop)

### **Teaching**

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| 1 Assumptions of Skillful Teaching | 2 Treating People as Adults  |
| 3 Building Commitment to Learning  | 4 Credibility & Authenticity |

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# ASSUMPTIONS OF SKILLFUL TEACHING

GOOD TEACHING = WHATEVER  
HELPS STUDENTS LEARN

BEST TEACHING IS CRITICALLY  
REFLECTIVE - CONSTANT SCRUTINY  
OF ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT TEACHING  
/CONDITIONS FOSTERING LEARNING

MOST IMPORTANT KNOWLEDGE  
TEACHERS NEED TO DO GOOD  
WORK - HOW STUDENTS  
EXPERIENCE THEIR LEARNING

TREATING PEOPLE AS ADULTS  
AN APPROACH TO TEACHING

( 3 'R's )

*R E S P E C T*

*R E S E A R C H*

*R E S P O N S I V E N E S S*

BUILDING COMMITMENT TO  
LEARNING

R E S E A R C H

F O R M E R R E S I S T E R S

M O D E L I N G

S I M U L A T I O N

V A R I E T Y

P R A I S E

F A I L U R E P R O O F

C O N V E R S I O N A L  
O B S E S S I O N

CREDIBILITY

MASTERY

EXPERIENCE

RATIONALE

CONVICTION

AUTHENTICITY

CONGRUENCE

FULL DISCLOSURE

RESPONSIVENESS

PERSONHOOD

ERROR

**MISUNDERSTANDINGS**

N E G A T I V E

F R E E Z E S   Y O U

C L E A R   O U T C O M E

P R O B L E M   S O L V I N G

C H A N G E

## CRITICAL TRADITIONS

### IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

(Marx, Frankfurt School)

Critical = analysis of  
hegemony & oppression

### PSYCHOANALYSIS / PSYCHOTHERAPY

(Freud, Jung   Rogers, Gould)

Critical = analysis of  
inhibitions / distortions of  
childhood in adult life

### ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

(Ayer, Wittgenstein, Searle)

Critical = argument analysis  
& language games

### PRAGMATIST CONSTRUCTIVISM

(Pierce, Dewey, Vigotsky)

Critical = understanding how  
experience is constructed

## CHALLENGES

Gendered Knowing : The Doubting Game

Eurocentric Rationality

Modernist Illusion

Exclusionary Language

Classroom Critical Thought =  
Transformative Action ??

Radical Pessimism & the Death of the  
Transformative Impulse



# **GUIDELINES**

## **MODELING**

### **BUILDING A CASE**

#### **PEERS AS REFLECTIVE MIRRORS**

#### **SPECIFIC EXPERIENCES**

#### **INCREMENTAL MOVEMENT CLOSER**

**EXERCISES**

SCENARIO ANALYSIS

CRISIS DECISION SIMULATIONS

HEROES & VILLAINS

CRITICAL INCIDENTS  
(CONVERSATIONS ON CLINICAL  
PRACTICE)

GOOD PRACTICES AUDIT  
(COLLABORATIVE ANALYSIS  
OF EXPERIENCE)

## DESCRIPTIONS OF EXERCISES

**Scenario Analysis** – learners imagine themselves in the position of the chief actor in a fictional scenario. They try to uncover the implicit and explicit assumptions the actor is operating under, to assess how these assumptions might be checked, and to come up with plausible alternative interpretations of the scenario

**Crisis Decision Simulations** – in small groups learners discuss how to resolve a crisis in a short time (eg. The nuclear bubble).  
In debriefing assumptions underlying the decision are examined and inferential ladders uncovered

**Heroes/Heroines & Villains/Villainesses** - learners choose a work colleagues they particularly admire (despise) and identify an example of that person's behavior that encapsulates what's so admirable/despicable about him or her.  
Their choice reveals many of their own assumptions

**Critical Conversation** – a focused conversation in which one person's experience (storyteller) is examined sympathetically but critically by colleagues (detectives). An umpire watches for judgmental comment

**Good Practices Audit** – an exercise involving at least a couple of days. Workers identify problems that impede them and then work collaboratively to examine their own experiences as practitioners and learners, and the experiences of their colleagues, in a structured and critical way. The intent is to propose responses and possible resolutions to the problems initially identified

## CRITICAL DEBATE

In critical debate, learners are asked to explore an idea or to take a position that they find unfamiliar, unsympathetic, even objectionable. They do this as members of a debate team, rather than in a full role play. Here's how critical debate works:

1. Find a contentious issue on which opinion is divided amongst participants. Frame the issue as a debate motion.
2. Propose the motion to participants. Ask people to volunteer by a show of hands to work on a team that is preparing arguments to support the motion, or one that is preparing arguments to oppose it.
3. Announce that all those who have volunteered to work on the team to draft arguments to support the motion will now comprise the team to draft arguments which oppose it. Similarly, all those who have offered to work on the team to draft arguments to oppose the motion will now comprise the team to draft arguments that support it.
4. Conduct the debate. Each team chooses one person to present their arguments. After initial presentations the teams reconvene to draft rebuttal arguments. A different person presents these.
5. 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?
6. Ask participants to write a follow up reflection paper on the debate. Students should address the following questions
  - \* What assumptions about the issue were clarified or confirmed for you by the debate ?
  - \* Which of these assumptions were you surprised by during the debate ? Were you made aware of assumptions that you didn't know you held ?
  - \* How could you check out these new assumptions ? What sources of evidence would you consult ?
  - \* What new perspectives on the issue suggested themselves to you ?
  - \* In what ways, if any, were your existing assumptions challenged or changed ?

# **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 evidence we based the decision on?**

**What's the most important assumption influencing the  
decision ?**

**What results / consequences is the decision supposed to  
effect ?**

## **Structured Devil's Advocacy**

# **MODELING CRITICAL THINKING & CRITICAL REFLECTION**

TALKING OUT LOUD

C. I. Q.  
(Performance/Instruction/Meetings)

TALKING PRACTICE  
- taking the lead

JOURNALING  
& public airing

INSTRUCTION  
assumption analysis  
devil's advocate  
questions unanswered  
group participation

## 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.

## 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.
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.
3. Now form a group with 3 other people. 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 a majority of you would like to see in the course
4. Take turns in talking about what made discussion group work so awful for you. Listen for common themes, shared experiences and features of group conversation that a majority of you would like to see avoided in this course.
5. For each of the characteristics of good discussion you agree on, try and suggest three things a group could do to ensure that these characteristics were present. Be as specific and concrete as you can. For example, if you feel good conversation is developmental, with later themes building on and referring back to earlier ones, then you could propose a rule that every new comment made by a participant is prefaced with an explanation as to how it relates to an earlier comment.
6. For each of the characteristics of bad discussion you agree on, try and suggest three things a group could do to ensure 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 then you could propose a rule whereby once someone has spoken they are not allowed to make a second comment until at least three other people have spoken (unless another group member explicitly invites the participant to say something else).
7. Try and finish this exercise by drafting a charter for discussion that comprises the specific ground rules you agree on. We will make each group's rules public and see if we can develop a charter for discussion to guide us in the coming weeks.



## **Creating Discussion Ground Rules through Video Vignettes**

### **Instructions to Students**

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 can help us decide on the discussion guidelines we want to follow in this course.

### **Making Ground Rules Specific**

Our role as teachers in these exercises is not to suggest images of how we think good discussants behave. That's the business of group members. However, when it comes to translating these images into specific rules of conduct we have found that students do need some help. If the class agrees that good discussions involve lots of people talking then we'll work with them to suggest ways to make this more likely to happen. We'll suggest some specific possibilities such as putting a time limit on individual contributions or regularly calling for a circle of voices where each person in turn is given the floor. "I want people to listen carefully to what I'm saying" can be accomplished by suggesting a weekly circular response discussion period in which students take turns to listen carefully, paraphrase and then respond to each others' contributions).

# 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, and each person in turn takes up to a minute to talk about an issue or question that the group has agreed to discuss.

Speakers are not free, however, to say anything they want. They must incorporate into their 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. Participants are also asked if at all possible to point out anything the previous speaker said that was particularly interesting, resonating or important. The optimal size for this exercise is 6-8 participants. 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. 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. To sum up:

1. 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. each person should try to show appreciation for something the previous speaker raised

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.

## 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.

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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.

# CONVERSATIONAL MOVES

Paste the conversational moves listed below on 3x5 cards and randomly distribute them among participants before a pre-arranged discussion session. Ask students to practice their move during the discussion that follows. When the discussion is over distribute the entire list of moves so people can see the wide variety of ways that questioning, listening and responding can be practiced. Point out to students that virtually all the moves listed are designed to strengthen connections among group members and to reinforce the notion that discussion is truly a collaborative process. Ask participants to recap how they tried to make the moves they were allocated.

## Specific Moves

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

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

Make a comment 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

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

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

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

Disagree with someone in a respectful and constructive way

# CONVERSATIONAL ROLES

## **Problem, Dilemma, or Theme Poser**

This participant has the task of introducing the topic of conversation. She draws on her own ideas and experiences as a way of helping others into conversation about the theme.

## **Reflective Analyst**

This member keeps a record of the conversation's development. Every 20 minutes or so, she gives a summary that focuses on shared concerns, issues skirted, and emerging common themes.

## **Scrounger**

The scrounger listens for helpful resources, suggestions, and tips that participants have voiced as they discuss how to work through a problem or situation. She keeps a record of these ideas that is read out before the session ends.

## **Devil's Advocate**

This person listens carefully for any emerging consensus. When she hears this she formulates and expresses a contrary view. This keeps group-think in check and helps participants explore a range of alternative interpretations.

## **Detective**

The detective listens carefully for unacknowledged, unchecked and unchallenged biases that seem to be emerging in the conversation. As she hears these she brings them to the group's attention. She assumes particular responsibility for alerting group members to concerns of race, class and gender. She listens for cultural blindness, gender insensitivity, and comments that ignore variables of power and class.

## **Theme Spotter**

This participant identifies themes that arise during the discussion that are left unexplored and that might form a focus for the next session.

## **Umpire**

This person listens for judgmental comments that sound offensive, insulting and demeaning, and that contradict ground rules for discussion generated by group members.

## **Textual Focuser**

Whenever assertions are made that seem unconnected to the text being discussed, this person asks the speaker to let the group know where in the text the point being made occurs.



## 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:-

1. Begin by going round the circle with each person contributing & no interruptions allowed
2. 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.

# 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 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.

# 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 they will merge with other quartets to create octets - groups of 8. . As the two quartets merge, each quartet should recap the chief difference that emerged, or a question they raised, in their conversation.*

*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.*

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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.

## QUOTES TO AFFIRM & CHALLENGE

Here students choose quotes from a text that they wish to affirm or challenge.

### **Quotes to Affirm**

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 choice of which quote to report back to the whole class can be done randomly or through deliberation. Using the random approach the small group members each type out their quote beforehand. At the end of the small group conversation group members hand all the pieces of paper to one person who then randomly selects a quote. This quote is read out to the whole class with everyone (not just the student who originally chose the quote) trying to explain what it was about the quote that was so compelling. In contrast to this random approach, the small group can simply report the quote which drew the greatest support.

### **Quotes to Challenge**

The 'quote to challenge' activity 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. One thing that has surprised us in this reporting back phase is the unexpected advantages of randomly choosing a small group quote. Because group members don't know which quote will be drawn out of the hat, they have to stay alert to hearing the merits of, or objections to, all the quotes proposed. When a quote is chosen by consensus in the small group we have noticed that groups often pick one quote early on and then spend their time rehearsing a presentation on all the reasons why it's terrific or appalling. This ensures an impressive small group report, but it also means that the opportunity for fruitful discussion of the merits of diverse, even contradictory, quotes is lost.

## 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. They avoid the feelings of shame and anger that come from feeling excluded from the discussion while lacking the confidence to break the prevailing pattern and project their voice into the mix.

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

# 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.

## Class Participation

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.



## 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!

## 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.

### **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 and come to see that one powerful way to add to a conversation is by asking questions of others.

Below are several types of questions particularly helpful in maintaining discussion momentum, with a number of examples under each type:

#### **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?

# 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 were you 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 about your own reactions to what went on, something that someone did, or anything else that occurs).

**WHY C.I.Q.'s ?**

*PROBLEMS WARNED*

*GROUNDS ACTIONS*

*STUDENT REFLECTIVITY*

*BUILDS TRUST*

*DIVERSE METHODS*

*CRITICAL THINKING*

*CLASSROOM RESEARCH  
TECHNIQUES*

C. I. Q.

MUDDIEST POINT

ONE-MINUTE PAPER

AFTER CLASS GROUP /  
CLASS ADVISORY PANEL

VIDEO

PEER OBSERVATION

TEAM TEACHING

LEARNING AUDIT

## 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 ?

*"THE MUDDIEST POINT "*

WHAT WAS .....

THE MOST CONFUSING IDEA

THE MOST POORLY  
EXPLAINED IDEA

THE MOST POORLY  
DEMONSTRATED PROCESS

THE LEAST CLEAR  
IDEA OR TECHNIQUE



ONE MINUTE PAPER

WHAT WAS ....

THE MOST IMPORTANT  
IDEA / INSIGHT

THE QUESTION THAT  
MOST NEEDS ADDRESSING

## LEARNING STYLES

*Kolb – Adaptive/Learning Style Inventory*  
*MBTI Syllabus Bound/Free*  
*Convergent/Divergent*  
*Field Dependent/Independent*

**Pre-assessment**

**Group learners by style**

**Use varied modalities – individual, group,  
visuals, presentations, kinetic – based on  
5 senses**

**Talk out rationale for varied modalities**

**Team teaching**

**Negotiate projects & assignments based  
on different modalities**

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