GENERATION GLOBAL Dialogue Exchange

TRAINING RESOURCE

Difficult Dialogue in the Classroom

Guidance and activities to give teachers the skills to manage difficult dialogue



Contents

Introduction *3*

Before the Dialogue *5*
During the Dialogue *32*
After the Dialogue *48*

Introduction

Since producing our Essentials of Dialogue resource, we have had a great deal of feedback from teachers around the world that they want to go beyond those resources, and explore additional tools for addressing more challenging topics in the classroom.

Everyone involved with education knows the feeling of being asked questions by young people that are difficult or challenging. Sometimes educators react by closing down those topics of discussion, suggesting that the classroom isn't the place to address them. We believe that a more positive approach is to address them openly and honestly through dialogue in class. If we shut those discussions down, young people will continue looking for the information that they need to make sense of the world, and if they don't get that in school, they will seek it elsewhere. Many of the voices that seek to give them those answers are seeking to inculcate particular values and attitudes that may close their minds, reduce their resilience to extremism, and possibly even place them in danger.

In order to support teachers with materials to address these challenges, we have produced these 'Difficult Dialogue' resources. These are composed of two discrete sections. The first is this book – Difficult Dialogue in the Classroom, which builds upon the work outlined in the Essentials of Dialogue, to outline an approach to addressing such issues using tried and tested dialogue solutions. Each section of this book contains a short theory section discussing and explaining the suggested approaches, as well as a number of suggested activities for practical classroom use.

At Generation Global we have substantial experience developing resources for use in the classroom all over the world to cultivate the skills of dialogue, and to help young people develop an open-minded approach to one another. Our commitment is to ensure that we provide teachers with straightforward easy-to-use resources that will have a genuine impact upon their students.

We present these resources to help anyone who wants an effective approach to addressing difficult issues with young people.

1

Before *the* Dialogue



Chapter 1.0

Before the Dialogue

1.1

WHY DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS CAN GO WRONG

There are many reasons why discussions around difficult issues can become something that we had not intended. While planning these events we may have in our heads a picture of students calmly and rationally discussing the issues from a dispassionate position, with ourselves as teacher serenely overseeing and guiding the discussion. We visualise ourselves helping those in our charge come to new, more nuanced understandings of complex topics. Yet, when it comes to the activity on the day, we find our worst fears becoming a reality as the discussion disintegrates into heated arguments, fallings out, poor behaviour, and even personal insults. If you have not had this experience yourself, chances are you will know a colleague who has. We know that it can leave you feeling emotionally drained, rather shaken, and ultimately a bit of a failure and reluctant to take such a risk again.

What Can Go Wrong?

If you have had one of these experiences, then your own reflections (once you have had a sit down - or lie down - cup of tea, and chat with a trusted colleague, perhaps) will lead you to some obvious conclusions:

- I could not control the direction the discussion took
- Some of the students seemed very anchored to particular positions on the issue
- Students would not listen to one another
- Students treated one another without respect

However, there may also have been less obvious reasons why the discussion did not have the desired results.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. THEORY
WHY DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS CAN GO WRONG
CREATING A SAFE SPACE
THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED GROUND RULES
2. ACTIVITIES
SHOWING RESPECT
WHAT DOES RESPECT LOOK LIKE?
IS IT RESPECTFUL?
DISAGREEING RESPECTFULLY
HOW SURE AM I?
BLACK, WHITE, AND GREY IN-BETWEEN
THE GOOD SHIP 'MY OPINIONS'
RESPONSE VS REACTION
TRIGGERS
INSTABILITY
CONDITIONING US NOT TO LISTEN WELL
CLEAR INTENTIONS
ASKING AUTHENTIC QUESTIONS
3. WORKSHEETS

Below, you will find a brief reflection on why discussions around contentious issues can go wrong in class. These points are elaborated on in the subsequent chapters.

Can These Issues Be Fixed? Yes, With Some Time, Patience And Effort

One thing that we tend to overlook when setting up these kinds of discussions is that the experience for the participants is as much emotional as it is intellectual. For every word uttered out loud in these

conversations there are literally hundreds spoken in the participants' heads. Exploring, understanding and acknowledging this 'self talk' is critical for successful discussion. It is important for the students and the facilitator (teacher) to understand the nature of this 'self talk' before, during and after the discussion.

Adolescents find it difficult to step back from emotional engagement as their brains are not as developed as adults. The prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until the early twenties, and this area of the brain plays a large part in helping us to overcome emotional response with rational ones.

You may already be familiar with the idea of a safe space for dialogue, but this concept is especially important for difficult discussions. It is a term that is often bandied about but poorly understood. If what we really want to achieve through these discussions is for students to come to new and more sophisticated understandings of the issues surrounding the topic being explored, this will require the participants to make themselves vulnerable. This in turn is built upon the building of trust. This involves an investment of time and is not something that can be created overnight. It is important to recognise that in order to deal most effectively with these contentious issues, time invested in building a cohesive, open, and safe classroom culture or climate is time well spent.

Active listening is a fundamental skill for meaningful engagement with the ideas, opinions, beliefs, and values of others.

The guardian of this safe space is the facilitator. Facilitation is different from teaching, and classroom management is not the same as facilitation. The facilitator has multiple roles and responsibilities; from ensuring inclusivity to making sure no one feels threatened; ensuring the dialogue gets to the heart of the matter and does not stay at the sides; as well as handling and making use of the 'heat' as it arises. This is such an important component for successful discussion that we have included a whole chapter to explore this.

Another point is the issue of readiness for dialogue. In order for students to be able to come to new understandings of an issue they must first examine how they think and feel about the issue and explore and acknowledge what underpins these thoughts and emotions.

- Do they arrive to the dialogue with a fixed mindset?
- If they are tied to a particular way of looking at an issue, why is that so?
- Do they associate a position on the issue with their identity in some way?
- Is there pressure in their community to conform to a certain stance?

Helping students to understand their assumptions, their influences, and prejudices, and for them to be transparent about this in the discussion is critical for creating both the safe space for discussion and attitude of openness to new ways of looking at an issue.

In order to minimise the potential for pushing a particular viewpoint rather than exploring the issue, students need to reflect on their intentions for the dialogue. Remember the emotional element to the dialogue? There will be self-esteem issues woven into the intentions of the students entering into these discussions. Having an authentic voice in the dialogue means being able to acknowledge these intentions. Does the student seek to make friends, impress others with their knowledge, seek the teacher's approval by aligning to what they think is an approved standpoint, or to promote an ideology or belief to which they adhere?

You may find that your students do not listen well to one another. Active listening is a fundamental skill for meaningful engagement with the ideas, opinions, beliefs, and values of others. Frequently students are simply 'waiting to speak' as opposed to actually being engaged in listening to and processing what others in the group are saying. It is only when we listen well

that we are able to understand the values and ideas that underpin the opinions of others and this positions us to be able to ask the right sorts of questions that will simultaneously deepen our understanding, while encouraging our interlocutor to explain their perspective more clearly.

Linked to this is the skill of asking questions. When things get heated, students can use questions as ammunition to score points. These questions are often loaded with assumptions, judgments, and even accusations. This can mean the discussion gets polarised and defensive. The best sorts of questions are open, enquiring, clarifying, and use what has already been said to frame the question. We recommend that students spend time analysing the nature and purpose of their questions and learn to ask questions that will deepen their understanding.

It is important to move our students into areas of uncertainty, where they are able to see the issue beyond right and wrong, black and white perspectives. Being able to appreciate the complexities of an issue, to appreciate the 'grey' in-between is at the heart of critical thinking. Similarly, we need to ensure that our young people are able to test the reliability of their sources and help them to move beyond taking things at face value. This goes for what they read, see, and hear online as well as offline. We place so much emphasis on 'getting the right answer' in our educational cultures that being comfortable with ambiguity can be quite daunting for some students.

While the teacher-facilitator does not need to be the 'expert' on the topic, it is important that you feel confident, with a level of background knowledge sufficient to be able to facilitate the discussion. Often, teachers act defensively and are unwilling to explore anything beyond the surface level of the issue if they do not have confidence in their own knowledge and analysis of the issue. To this end, we have created, this year, a set of briefing notes for teachers around contentious issues and with background information and analysis from the *Centre on Religion & Geopolitics*. It is our intention that the advice and techniques from this document are used with these briefing notes to create the right conditions for difficult discussions.

STRATEGIES + INFORMATION = CONFIDENCE

1.2 CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR DIALOGUE AROUND DIFFICULT TOPICS: PREPARING STUDENTS

The roots of the word 'discussion' are the same as 'concussion' or 'percussion'. It involves 'shaking apart'. In discussions about contentious issues we would want to empower the students to 'shake' the issue apart; to test their own and one another's understandings, and to consider a variety of different perspectives.

Dialogue is a little different. The ultimate aim of a dialogue is to understand another person's views and beliefs better. Dialogue does not seek consensus or to convince another of a particular viewpoint. The roots of the term 'dialogue' are from the Greek:

DIA + **LOGOS**
through *words*

Dialogue means 'finding meaning through words'. In our Generation Global school work we describe dialogue as:

> ***An encounter with those who might have different opinions, values and beliefs to my own, dialogue is the process by which I come to understand the other's lives, values and beliefs better and others come to understand my life, values and beliefs.***

You can read more about our approach to dialogue in The *Essentials of Dialogue*. Find a downloadable version here: https://generation.global/eod

In order to be able to do both of the above (discussion and dialogue) well, your students need to learn the skills and competencies of respectful challenge, suspending judgment, and having an authentic voice.

Respect

Respect is such an overused and confusing term. What exactly does it mean and what does it look like? In some cultures and traditions, being respectful often means saying nothing; the requirement to 'respect your elders' can necessitate a younger person holding in what they are really thinking or feeling about an issue. We may be expected to respect a person simply

because of their social standing or authority. Respect can be demanded as well as freely given. Other contexts may interpret respect as a kind of 'gift' given to others when they interact with one another; a freely given gift due to the nature of the interaction or one that is earned by certain behaviours and attitudes.

Thus, talking about respect in a discussion or dialogue on a divisive issue is complicated and can be challenging. It involves thinking about the concept of 'respect' in a new way for many of the participants. In the context of these sorts of dialogues we need to consider respect for different elements of the encounter:

- The space
- The discussion
- The participants
- The self

Before you read on, it is worth you considering what the word 'respect' means to you. Write down a meaning or some key words you associate with 'respect'. In asking our global team how this term translates into their own languages and cultures we learned:

- ***Pakistan:*** Respect in Urdu is *lehtraam*. Culturally it manifests in expectations not to call elders by their names, speak quietly in front of elders, sit properly, listen carefully and obey them. Literally it means admiration felt or shown for someone or something that you believe has good ideas or qualities.

- ***Italy:*** *Respicere* (the verb in Latin) literally means to "watch over someone".

- ***Israel:*** *Kavod* is the translation. Literally it contains the notion of something heavy as opposed to taking things lightly.

- ***Albania:*** *Respekt* is the esteem for somebody based on age, merits or his/her qualities.

- ***Arabic:*** The word for respect in Arabic is *ihtiram*. It is similar in meaning to the English words respect or revere. Its usage can range between respecting yourself *ihtiram nafsu* to considering something to be sacred or sacrosanct. You could use it to refer to respect for the law as well as respect for your own or other people's dignity.

- ***Philippines:*** Respect in Filipino is *galang*. To show respect is to hold another person in esteem. But the different cultural groups among the Filipinos will have different ways of showing it. Most would touch the right hand of their elders to their forehead when they meet them. Most would use *po* and *opo* when speaking, a term that shows deference to the other person that one is talking to.

- ***Indonesia:*** Respect in Indonesian means *menghormati*, literally to honor the elder. It's considered rude to call elders by their names only. To show respect *Bapak* precedes names for a man and *Ibu* for a woman. *Kakak* is used before addressing an older brother or sister and the elder regardless of gender. In Indonesian culture it is not accepted to argue with elders or to look at their eyes when speaking with them.

What Can We Learn from these Global Definitions of the Term?

In English, the origins of the term can be found in the Latin:

RE
back

SPECERE
look at

RESPICERE
look back at, – **RESPECTUS** – **RESPECT**
regard

Respect, in its original form, and for our purposes for difficult discussion, is not about showing deference but much more about ***honest and profound seeing – rather than a casual glance: I am really looking at you again; really seeing you and really listening to you.***

This kind of respect is the ultimate goal in any dialogue, but getting there with our young people is a journey. You will have to spend some time with your group thinking about, defining, practicing, and reflecting on respect as you prepare for your difficult discussions.

David Kantor[1], an American systems psychologist, has a wonderful definition of respect – read this and give yourself a moment to let this really sink in:

> ***"Awareness of the integrity of another's position and the impossibility of fully understanding it."***

Perhaps ask your students what they think of this definition.

Note for teachers: some of your students might say – if it's impossible, why bother? We need to explain that:

- It is a process; it's about moving closer to understanding, and that in doing so.
- It is likely that others will also understand us better, but ultimately.
- We are individual subjects, and we can never share internal states.

Please refer to Activity 1: *Showing Respect*

1 Respecting the Space

Imagine that the space that your discussion takes place in is a 'container'. It is a vessel. In this vessel your students feel safe enough to listen deeply to one another, to suspend their judgment, to be vulnerable and to trust one another to help them to understand an issue better. Imagine a giant chalice, cauldron, boat, or bowl, anything that will hold something within it. This is the 'container' that needs to be protected. The 'container', your vessel, can be stretched, cracked, and dented, but it must not be broken; meaning the discussion can get heated, you can have ideas bouncing off one another, you can have disagreement but you cannot have arguments that get personal or comments that demean groups of people. Neither is the vessel a sacred object that needs to be treated with gloves on: don't impose rules that are so strict that no one feels they can be honest.

The best way to protect your container is to create ground rules together. You are the guardian of the vessel. You can read more about this in the section on ground rules and do the activities together prior to embarking on your discussion.

How you and your students can protect the V.E.S.S.E.L. for the dialogue:

V ***Viewpoints:*** Be prepared to hear different ways of seeing the issue to your own. Your own viewpoints may be challenged.

E ***Empathy:*** Try to understand the values and beliefs that underpin the opinions that others hold.

S ***Speak authentically:*** Make sure you are saying what you yourself believe and you are not saying things just because someone you admire said something similar, or because you want to impress others.

S ***Suspend judgment:*** Be aware of your own prejudices as you enter into the discussion and be conscious of these throughout the discussion.

E ***Emergence of new understanding:*** Be open to changing your mind. Don't dig yourself into an intractable decision on the issue but be open to seeing the issue in a different way as you hear other perspectives.

L ***Listen openly:*** Have your ears, eyes, mind, and heart open to the views of others. Use what you hear to form responses that challenge others without compromising their dignity.

2 Respecting the Dialogue

In addition to respecting the container, the topic and nature of the dialogue should also be respected. Students can show respect for the discussion by:

- Staying on topic
- Presenting facts based on research and evidence and not merely relying on hearsay and myths. You may need to explore these terms with students in advance if they are not familiar with them
- Not seeking to impose their view on others
- Being honest about what they do not know or what they are unsure about
- Changing their minds and showing that they are looking at an issue in a different way.

1 "David Kantor", last modified on 30 April 2016, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Kantor

3 Respecting the Participants

One of the best ways to show that you respect another person, if we are to define respect as I am looking at you, really seeing you and really listening to you, is to be curious about one another's opinions, values and beliefs. We can show that we respect others by asking challenging questions that help us to understand issues and points of view and beliefs better and we can treat those who challenge us in this way as marking us with respect.

William Isaacs[2], the author of *Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together*, writes:

> ***"Treat the person next to you as a teacher. What is it they have to teach you that you do not now know? Listening to them in this way, you discover things that might surprise you. This does not mean being blind to gaps in what they might say and what they do, nor does it mean being overly slavish in pointing out their faults."***[3]

4 Respecting the Self

To ensure that there is the best possibility of success with the discussion in terms of participation and inclusivity, remind students of the importance of them respecting themselves. They need to ensure they:

- Are self-aware
- Know their triggers (things they might hear that might get them agitated)
- Acknowledge their strengths in a discussion situation
- Acknowledge their weaknesses, and are focused on how to improve these areas
- Encourage a positive internal dialogue ('I can do this even though it is frightening' rather than, 'No one will take my view seriously')
- Forgive themselves (and others) when they say or do something in the discussion that they then regret

2 "Isaacs, William", https://www.dialogos.com/who-we-are

3 Isaacs, William, Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together. (New York: Random House, 1999), 117

Please refer to Activity 2: *What Does Respect Look Like?*
Please refer to Activity 3: *Is it Respectful?*
Please refer to Activity 4: *Disagreeing Respectfully*

Suspending Judgment

Suspending judgment is about getting students to acknowledge and identify that they arrive at any given issue with 'baggage'. Chances are they will already have had some experience of the 'issue' to be discussed, whether that be a personal experience, reading about it in the news, online, or hearing family or community members talk about the issue.

For a constructive discussion you need your students to develop an attitude of open-mindedness: this means being open to seeing the issue from different perspectives, appreciating that it might be more complicated than they first thought.

It is easy enough to muddle up 'what we say' with 'who we are'. For some young people, taking a stance and trying to convince others to join their way of thinking is a matter of self-esteem. We can feel that when someone attacks our idea, they are attacking us. So to give up our idea is almost like committing a kind of social suicide (Isaacs). But these positions dam up the discussion and leave no room for gaining new perspectives.

Before embarking on the discussion, get your students to consider the following:

- Have I already staked out a position?
- Do I have a very fixed opinion on this issue? What is it?
- How sure am I that I am right?
- What are my biases on this issue?
- Do I think that there are groups of people who disagree with me?
- What do I think about these people?
- Am I stereotyping them in any way?
- What are my prejudices founded on?
- Am I in a bubble?
- Do my community and my friends hold the same view as me?
- Have I ever considered a different way of looking at the issue?
- Do I only follow people online who have the same views as me?

- Is my position on the issue tied to my identity?
- Is it expected of me by others to hold a certain position on the issue?
- Am I being unpatriotic or unfaithful if I do not take a particular stance?

Comfort with Uncertainty

In an educational climate that prizes 'the right answers' it is hard to get students to be comfortable with what they do not know and what they are not sure about. From the outset, you will need to ensure that your students are comfortable with phrases like, 'I don't know' and 'I am not sure'. To enable them to do this, students need to go back to their sources of information and critically evaluate them for accuracy and bias. This is crucial if your students are going to explore the issue fully and from a multitude of different perspectives.

To help them to understand how their opinions have been formed, you may want to work through Activity 5: *How Sure Am I?*

Black, White, and the Grey In-Between

It is important to explore uncertainty further in order to move your students from a closed-minded to more open-minded mindset. If students dig themselves into a position of certainty, it will hinder their ability to hear openly what others are saying about the issue and to explore what is behind their viewpoints.

Ask your students to complete Activity 6: *Black, White and Grey In-Between*. They should spend more than a few moments on this. Ideally, it should be something that they come back to time and again as they prepare for the dialogue. It may also be a useful tool for them to reflect on during the dialogue or at the end of the dialogue.

Exploring Influences and What Lies Beneath

In order to suspend judgment and speak with an authentic voice your students need to have explored their influences on this issue. They will have begun to do this if they have done Activity 5. The larger question to be asked of the students here is - who owns my opinions?

It is strongly recommended that your students explore the role of the Internet in influencing their opinions. There is an excellent section (Chapter 4) in *Essentials of Dialogue* on this. Student Activity 7: *The Good Ship 'My Opinions'*.

Understanding Triggers

A risk in a difficult discussion is that your students may stop thinking rationally about the issue and start reacting to what they believe is being said. This can lead to a breakdown in the discussion and in turn to arguments and students falling out as the discussion becomes much more about the person and not the issue.

To help your students become aware of this and to protect them against 'reaction' rather than 'response' ask them to complete Student Activity 8: *Response vs Reaction*.

As responses tend to be emotional rather than rational, reacting in this way does not get us very far in understanding the issue(s) under discussion further or understanding why people might hold varying positions. Emotional reactions lead to conflict not understanding. See the diagram on p.36 (and consider sharing this with your students).

In addition to understanding 'response' from 'reaction' it is worth investing some time so that students can also identify what is going to get them into a state of heightened emotion prior to the discussion. What are their triggers with this issue? Are there key words that upset them? Some examples or stories? Certain actors / players associated with this issue?

Please refer to Activity 9: *Triggers*
Please refer to Activity 10: *Instability*

Listening

"You know. I have always prepared myself to speak. But I have never prepared myself to listen."[4]

Listening deeply to others when they are speaking is not only a skill but a discipline. It involves mastering our 'internal commentary' and moving to a state of

4 Isaacs, William, Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together. (New York: Random House, 1999), 83

mind that is calm, quiet, and focused. To listen deeply is to be aware of our internal dialogue and at the same time to be able to challenge ourselves to listen openly to others, to have our ideas challenged, and to appreciate that there might be different perspectives on the issue.

The Chinese symbol 'to listen' can teach us plenty about how to listen deeply:



Moreover, the Indian philosopher Krishnamurti said this of listening:

> ***"I do not know if you have ever examined how you listen, it does not matter to what, whether to a bird, to the wind in the leaves, to the rushing waters, or how you listen in a dialogue with yourself, to your conversation with intimate friends, your wife or your husband. If we try to listen we find it extraordinarily difficult, because we are always projecting our opinions and ideas, our prejudices, our background, our inclinations, our impulses; when they dominate, we hardly listen at all to what is being said. In that state there is no value at all. One listens and therefore learns, only in a state of attention, a state of silence, in which this whole background is in abeyance, is quiet; then, it seems to me, it is possible to communicate."***

Please refer to Activity 11: *Conditioning Us Not to Listen Well*

1 Active Listening Skills

The key is to give the person speaking your full attention. In order to do this, the self must be quieted and as much focus as possible must be given to those who are speaking.

'Quieting' the self: To some extent a lot of this work has been done if students have worked through the activities in 'suspending judgment'. If students are aware of their own 'baggage' and 'triggers' as they come to the discussion then they will probably just need time and reminders during the course of the discussion to refocus on these things. Get the students to practice reading their internal thermometers as recommended in Activity 9.

Listening deeply and active listening: The key to active listening is to demonstrate that you are listening. How can students do this?

- Making sure their body language shows openness and attentiveness
- Letting people finish their thoughts without interruption
- Paraphrasing back to check understanding
- Reflecting emotion – 'you are feeling angry'
- Reflecting content – 'you feel angry because these things have happened to you'
- Asking for more details
- Showing how you agree or disagree
- Showing interest in what they are saying

In the *Essentials of Dialogue* (pp.21 and 22) there is a great mnemonic for listening:

L **LOOK** interested, get interested

I **INVOLVE** yourself by responding

S **STAY** on target

T **TEST** your understanding

E **EVALUATE** what you hear

N **NEUTRALISE** your feelings

If you feel that your students need to practice skills of active listening then spend some time working through activities like *We're all Interviewees*, *Asking Response Questions*, *Active Listening*, and *ASKer Analysis* in the *Essentials of Dialogue*, pp. 25 – 28.

2 Resilient Listening

Encourage your students to become resilient listeners.

Basically, this entails students acknowledging that something said is upsetting or hurtful and responding

in a way that makes this clear but does not derail the discussion.

Students may be too upset to respond straight away to what is said. In this case they should write down how a comment or question made them feel and then raise this later on in the discussion, perhaps when things have moved off the topic or where there is a natural lull in the conversation.

Being resilient does not mean ignoring how something made you feel but being able to listen in spite of what has been said. It means managing emotional responses to what has been said and knowing appropriate times to reflect back on this.

Having an Authentic Voice

Abracadabra: The origin of the word is Aramaic and was in use from around the seventh century CE. It was used by the Kabbalistic tradition[5] as an incantation to remind worshippers of the inherent power of their speech.

Abra: from *bra* to create
Ca: as
Dabra: first person of the verb *to speak*

I create as I speak

Our speech, our voice, is the most powerful tool at our disposal. We can use it to clarify, persuade, challenge, question, explain, expound, cause mirth and joy. We can also use it to deceive, hurt, create conflict, advocate, ridicule, denigrate, and insult.

In a difficult discussion, students need to learn how to use their voices well. Importantly, they need to learn how to be authentic when they are speaking: ensuring that what they say belongs to them and they are not a mouth piece for others; that they are not advocating a position, or trying to influence others; and that their intentions are noble.

Clear Intentions

We know that one of the key things we want to achieve by engaging our young people in these difficult dialogues is to develop their critical thinking skills: that is, to ensure that they will move from positions of certainty to uncertainty; they will evaluate their sources of information; they will appreciate the nuances and complexities of the issues; they will see the issue from varied perspectives and understand some of the reasons why other people hold views different to their own.

In order to have an authentic voice, our students need to understand what their intentions are as they enter into the dialogue.

Please refer to Activity 12: *Clear Intentions*

Advocacy vs Understanding

It is important that both you and your students can identify the difference between someone advocating an opinion and someone seeking to create understanding for others.

Some of your students will arrive at the dialogue wanting to persuade others of something that they have heard or read elsewhere that they believe wholeheartedly to be 'the truth'. There are activities above that are helpful for getting students to question what they are sure about, what influences them, and what is at stake in the dialogue for themselves personally. You might want to take this a step further by encouraging your students to ask themselves:

- What would happen if I let go of my position on this issue?
- What do I risk losing?

Asking Questions for Deeper Learning

"Instead of good answers we need good questions."[6] Many of us live, work, and teach in a world where it can feel unsafe to say 'I don't know'. For students it is the same. And when they ask questions, for many students it is to enable them to 'pass the test' and not necessarily understand the issue better. Is the art of asking good questions disappearing?

What makes a good question and what makes a bad question?

5 "Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism", last updated 2011, Judaism 101, http://www.jewfaq.org/kabbalah.htm

6 Isaacs, William, Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together. (New York: Random House, 1999), 148

An estimated 40% of all questions that people utter are actually statements in disguise. Another 40% are really judgments in disguise.

As a basic introduction to the art of asking authentic questions students should work through the ASKeR Analysis Activity in Essentials of Dialogue (p.27)

Please refer to Activity 13: *Asking Authentic Questions*

1.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED GROUND RULES

Having negotiated and agreed ground rules in place prior to your dialogue is crucial. These should not be imposed upon the students but worded by them so that they feel that they own them. Having gone through the above activities, your students should have a good idea of what is required for a healthy dialogue.

If some of their ideas are 'be respectful' or 'say what you think' then you may not have prepared them adequately well! You must avoid meaningless, throwaway phrases. Your ground rules should address specific skills, attitudes, and behaviours.

Your ground rules will be a protective shield for your container or vessel of the dialogue. Here is a reminder of the VESSEL mnemonic:

V ***Viewpoints:*** Be prepared to hear different ways of seeing the issue to your own. Your own viewpoints may be challenged.

E ***Empathy:*** Try to understand the values and beliefs that underpin the opinions that others hold.

S ***Speak authentically:*** Make sure you are saying what you yourself believe, and you are not saying things just because someone you admire said something similar, or because you want to impress others.

S ***Suspend judgment:*** Be aware of your own prejudices as you enter into the discussion and be conscious of these throughout the discussion.

E ***Emergence of new understanding:*** Be open to changing your mind. Don't dig yourself into an intractable decision on the issue but be open to seeing the issue in a different way as you hear other perspectives.

L ***Listen openly:*** Have your ears, eyes, mind and heart open to the views of others. Use what you hear to form responses that challenge others without compromising their dignity.

At first, when creating ground rules with your students be very clear about the objectives of the discussion. You might want to agree these together (it will help the students focus themselves more on their intentions).

When asking students to frame their ground rules you might want to give them some headings to allow them to formulate the rules. Each heading could have between one and three rules beneath it. For example:

- Regarding respect...
- Regarding how we will prepare ourselves for the discussion...
- Regarding how we will listen...
- Regarding how we will speak...

One point to note regarding ground rules is that as an employee of your institution, you may need to report anything that is said in the discussion on to others. For example, if you consider a point of view to be racist or if you think that someone is at risk by what they have disclosed. If this applies to you, then you need to make your students aware of this obligation.

Once they are drafted, ask the group if any of them have any questions about what any of the proposed agreements mean, and ask if they would like any amendments or revisions.

Once agreed, then as facilitator, explain that you will remind the students of the negotiated agreements if they should forget during the discussion.

Have the ground rules on display at the start of each dialogue.

This should be a living document that is revisited and changed as the group becomes more familiar with the nature of their discussions. Reviewing ground rules can become a part of the review process after each discussion. See Chapter 3.

A ACTIVITIES

OBJECTIVE

By the end of this session your students should understand the principles of respect and know how to disagree respectfully.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The worksheets that accompany the activities below can be found at the end of the lesson.

ACTIVITY 1

SHOWING RESPECT

RESOURCES

Worksheet 1.1: *Showing Respect*

STEP 1

Ask your students to complete worksheet 1.1 as best they can. If they cannot remember ever having shown respect for any of the items in the first column then they can leave this blank.

STEP 2

Explain to students that you are going to approach it in a new way and introduce *Sharing our Ideas* (see page 11) as the method by which they are going to share their answers.

STEP 3

At the end of this activity ask students to share with one another their answers – paired or small group discussion will work best for this.

STEP 4

Ask if showing respect for people is more challenging or not than showing respect for events or objects. If so, why?

STEP 5

Finally, ask the students to come up with their own definition of 'respect' in pairs or small groups.

ACTIVITY 2

WHAT DOES RESPECT LOOK LIKE?

PURPOSE

Students consider the nature of respect in practice through their own experience. The purpose of this activity is to consider a range of ideas around the nature of respect. We strongly suggest that you use your own judgment about your students to inform the options that you choose.

RESOURCES

Worksheet 1.2: *What Does Respect Look Like?*
Worksheet 1.3: *R.E.S.P.E.C.T Principles for Dialogue*

STEP 1

Ask students to work in pairs to fill in examples in the *What Does Respect Look Like?* worksheet. These should be from their own experience:

- Of how they have been treated with respect
- Of how they treat others with respect
- Of how they have seen other people act with respect

STEP 2

After they have completed these, you should encourage a class discussion. It is particularly valuable to explore differences in what people have said, as there are no hard and fast rules here. This is particularly true across cultures where people can have some quite different ideas. (In some cultures it is not respectful to make eye contact with someone that you are talking to, in others it is quite the opposite.) You may also wish to refer to the *R.E.S.P.E.C.T Principles for Dialogue*.

ACTIVITY 3

IS IT RESPECTFUL?

RESOURCES

Worksheet 1.4: *Is it Respectful?*

STEP 1

Using *Worksheet 1.4: Is it Respectful?* Ask students to mark on the scale where they think the comments belong. You could use a class discussion to do this.

STEP 2

Some of the responses to this activity are clear – chatting while someone else is speaking is disrespectful, as is shouting or talking over the top of someone else. Others are clearly respectful, like putting away other distractions and looking at people when they are speaking (if this is culturally acceptable; there may be variations in what is 'respectful' here).

Other comments may need exploring together with the group, like thanking people for their comments and their questions. Even when a comment or response is challenging, students should see this as a sign of respect as it demonstrates that the person who has just spoken has been listening to what they have to say. Hopefully the comment, challenge, or question will help them to explore the issue better themselves.

Note: Allowing there to be silence in the discussion is interesting to explore with your students and can be used to get the students thinking about the importance of silence for thinking time and reflection.

ACTIVITY 4

DISAGREEING RESPECTFULLY

PURPOSE

This is the big question: how can students remain respectful towards someone who says something with which they strongly disagree?

STEP 1

Ask your students to consider:

- Should I have to show respect to someone who has a different viewpoint to mine?
- What might happen if I do?
- What might happen if I do not?
- What might I do or say to show that I respect a person but disagree with their viewpoint at the same time?

It is recommended that you first ask your students to write down their responses to these questions.

STEP 2

The next step is to use the *Listen to Me!* Activity for paired sharing (see *Essentials of Dialogue* p.10).

STEP 3

End with a class discussion, having four scribes write down responses to each of the above questions. It will be useful to keep hold of these and display them at the time of the actual discussion/ dialogue around the contentious issue.

ACTIVITY 5

HOW SURE AM I?

PURPOSE

This activity allows for students to move into areas of uncertainty. Evaluating the reliability of the source to tell the truth means that the students are starting to think critically about the issue and beginning to open their minds. For more information on critically examining online materials see the *RAVEN* exercise in the *Essentials of Dialogue*.

RESOURCES

Worksheet 1.5: *How Sure Am I?*

STEP 1

Choose an issue for your students to discuss, such as 'pets' or 'women's rights'. Have the class identify a number of statements that they often hear about the issue under discussion. The examples in the worksheet are 'most dogs are dangerous' and 'all X treat their women as second class citizens.' Only do one issue per sheet.

STEP 2

Then ask the students to work in groups of four (if possible) to identify where they have heard these statements.

STEP 3

Then ask students to consider why they should trust this source (or sources) to tell them the truth; then conversely, why they should not.

STEP 4

Finally, as a class, collate responses as to what 'makes a source more likely to be reliable' and 'what makes a source less likely to be reliable'.

ACTIVITY 6

BLACK, WHITE, AND GREY IN-BETWEEN

RESOURCES

Worksheet 1.6: *Black, White, and Grey In-Between*

STEP 1

Give your students Worksheet 1.6 and ask them to fill in each column about the issue that you are about to discuss.

Students should spend more than a few moments on this. Ideally, it should be something that they come back to time and again as they prepare for the discussion. It may also be a useful tool for them to reflect on during the discussion or at the end of the discussion.

ACTIVITY 7

THE GOOD SHIP 'MY OPINIONS'

PURPOSE

The main purpose of this activity is for the students to explore how their values are formed and how these feed into their opinions. When their opinions are challenged and they react emotionally to this, hopefully, they will be able to see that what they feel as being threatened are their values. Students need to learn to be honest about articulating this threat to both themselves (internal self-talk) and to one another.

RESOURCES

Worksheet 1.7: *The Good Ship 'My Opinions'*

STEP 1

Give your students a picture of the container ship. In the containers, students are to add some things they would like others to know about the issue and what they would like to say. They can complete as many of these boxes as they want.

STEP 2

In the hold, students should make the link between what they would like others to know and what they would like to say with their opinions and values. These statements should start with:

- I believe that...
- I think that...
- I hold this dear...
- I suppose that...

STEP 3

Then students think about what they have put into their containers and the hold, focusing on what has influenced them in this thinking. If they have completed Activity 5 they can refer to this to help them. Encourage your students to think about how their identity might be tied up with this issue, whether they feel under peer pressure or family pressure to represent a certain viewpoint. They can consider what they read and see online (which YouTube channels they watch, who they follow on Instagram, Snapchat, or Twitter). These thoughts can be added creatively in the form of currents under the sea (long-term influences), rocks (specific events), and sea life.

STEP 4

This may well be an activity that remains personal and that the students do not share in discussion with anyone else. If you do want a discussion at the end of the activity you could ask the students if they learned anything about themselves by doing this activity.

If your class is happy to share with you and with one another this could make a beautiful class display and act as a reminder to be mindful of our influences when discussing difficult topics.

ACTIVITY 8

RESPONSE VS REACTION

RESOURCES

Worksheet 1.8: *Response vs Reaction*

STEP 1

Encourage your students to think about the statements on the worksheet and to organise them into 'reactionary statements' and 'responses'.

STEP 2

Some of the statements on the worksheet are straightforward. Ask your students: which ones were more ambiguous and what else might impact how the statement is meant or received?

STEP 3

In addition to understanding 'response' from 'reaction' it is worth investing some time so that students can also identify what is going to get them into a state of heightened emotion prior to the discussion. What are their triggers with this issue? Are

there key words that upset them? Some examples or stories? Certain actors and players associated with this issue?

ACTIVITY 9

TRIGGERS

STEP 1

Have your students compile a list of words, phrases, terms, people that cause them to react in an emotional way. Get them to focus on their emotional reaction to these words, terms, phrases, or names. Then ask them to describe what happens inside them, physiologically, when they hear this term, phrase or name. For example:

Key Term, Name or Phrase	*Emotional Reactions*	*Physical Reactions*
Example	Proud, happy, superior, disappointment, supported, joy, disgust, righteous, calm, pleased, assured, inferior, attacked, embarrassment, outrage, guilty, undermined, worried, giddy, frustrated, pessimistic, optimistic, surprise, shock, glad, pity, compassion, nervous, shame, anxiety	Heat in face, heart racing or pounding, pulse rate (calm, racing), smiling, sitting tall, upright, arms and legs, spread out, dry mouth, breathlessness, tearful, lost for words, raised voice, pointing, standing, gesticulating, stillness, twitching

STEP 2

Following on from this activity, students should consider ways in which they can regularly 'check their emotional thermometer' during a discussion and manage how they are feeling. The key to understanding how they are reacting to the discussion is to be still and listen to their bodies, then to identify the emotions, and then to engage in some 'positive self-talk'. For example:

My heart is racing and I feel quite breathless while I am listening to this. This tells me that this issue is really important to me. I am afraid some of my key values are under attack. I need to think of how I can explain my opinion and my values in a way that is clear to other people in the group.

Or

I keep pointing at people I am addressing and sitting on the edge of my chair when speaking. I know this is because I think that what X is saying is wrong and this makes me feel very frustrated and angry with her. I need to let her know I am frustrated without being rude towards her. I need to explain my reasons for disagreeing with her point of view without upsetting or intimidating others in the group by my behaviour.

ACTIVITY 10

INSTABILITY

STEP 1

If your students did Activity 7: *The Good Ship 'My Opinions'*, they can add to their diagram their triggers in the form of weather that may cause their ship to become unstable. Then they need to think about what they can do, in terms of self-talk, to navigate themselves through the storm.

ACTIVITY 11

CONDITIONING US NOT TO LISTEN WELL

STEP 1

Explain to your students that we are surrounded with examples on TV, on the radio, and by watching some of our politicians of how not to listen.

STEP 2

Show them a few examples from around the world, either from the below or ones you find yourself to demonstrate how conditioned we are to not listening:

- UK House of Commons: https://youtu.be/mEzA7fH7v1I
- Jordanian politicians in a notorious TV debate: https://youtu.be/2edtLzQeMMY
- US TV interview on gun control: *https://youtu.be/Q2btKEnfuA4*

We are sure you will find lots of examples in your own region.

STEP 3

Issacs quotes someone he knew say, "People do not listen, they reload."[7] Ask your students what is meant by this statement.

STEP 4

Ask your students if they can think of an example from their own experience or from something they have seen or heard, where they felt people were reloading, rather than listening to one another. Being able to identify your own and clarify the intentions of others in a dialogue is an important skill. You may refer to this when facilitating the dialogue – there is guidance on how to do this in the 'handling the heat' section, specifically in Chapter 2.

ACTIVITY 12

CLEAR INTENTIONS

RESOURCES

Worksheet 1.9: *Clear Intentions*

STEP 1

Ask your students to complete Worksheet 1.9: *Clear Intentions* before entering into your classroom discussion. They should note how they feel about the statements in the worksheet by ticking the relevant box.

Tip

It might work best if the responses are not worked on collaboratively but shared afterwards if there is some sharing in pairs or small groups about what they have learned by going through this activity.

ACTIVITY 13

ASKING AUTHENTIC QUESTIONS

PURPOSE

A crucial part of having an authentic voice is being able to ask authentic questions. These are questions that are loaded neither with an assumption nor a judgment. Make your students familiar with spotting assumptions and judgments in questions. Have them consider what is really being asked and how to ask that in a more open way. This activity helps students to turn an assumptive or judgemental question into an authentic question.

RESOURCES

Worksheet 1.10: *Asking Authentic Questions*
Worksheet 1.11: *Asking Authentic Questions Teacher Help Sheet*

STEP 1

Ask students to complete the sections in Worksheet 1.10: *Asking Authentic Questions*. They should find and write out the assumptions or judgments and then rewrite the question so that understanding and is authentic.

7 Isaacs, William, Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together. (New York: Random House, 1999), 19

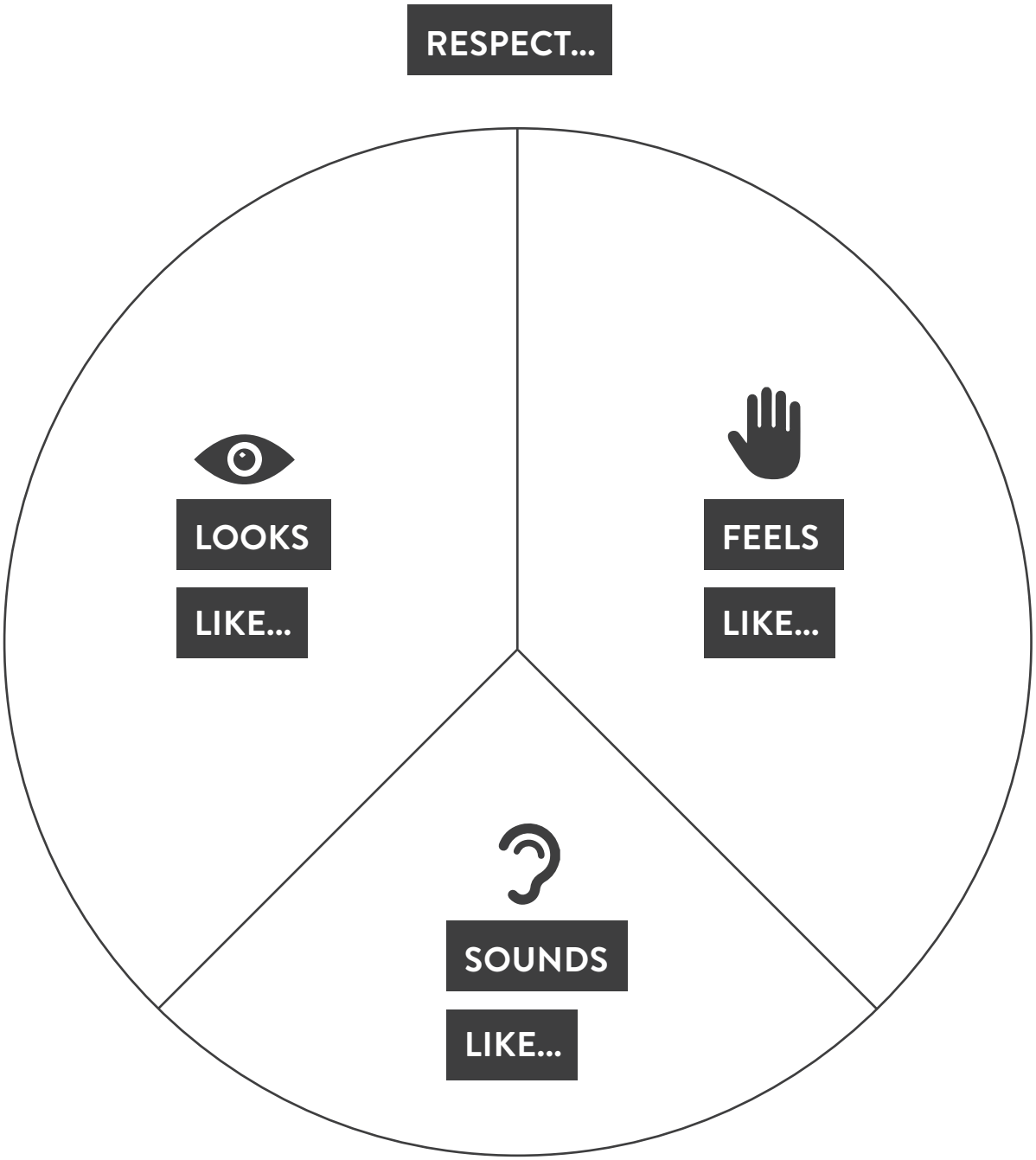
WORKSHEET 1.1

SHOWING RESPECT

RESPECT FOR...	EXAMPLE	WHAT I DO (DID)...	WHY I DO (DID) THIS	WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I DID NOT DO THIS?
A place				
A book				
An object				
An event				
A person of authority				
A person not of authority				
A person with a view different to my own				
A person I think / thought of as my 'enemy'				

WORKSHEET 1.2

WHAT DOES RESPECT LOOK LIKE?



WORKSHEET 1.3

R.E.S.P.E.C.T. PRINCIPLES FOR DIALOGUE

Dialogue enables us to talk about culture and identity, but we recommend that it always emphasises faith and belief, because those two things can play a very positive role in our world, yet are almost always referred to in a negative way. Dialogue emphasises similarity and difference; finding the ways in which we are similar to other people is often easy but discovering the ways in which we are different gives us much more opportunity to learn. Diversity is something that we should celebrate. We have a number of principles that support all our work. These are summed up in the acronym R.E.S.P.E.C.T.

R

RESPECT: We treat everyone with respect; we don't have to agree with one another all the time, but we should always treat one another with respect.

E

EDUCATION: No matter how old or experienced we are, we all continue learning. We can always learn from one another and share a responsibility to teach others about the things that are precious to us.

S

SAFETY: We know that people can only flourish when they are safe. We want everyone who takes part in dialogue to feel safe: students safe to openly share their ideas, teachers safe in the knowledge that they are well-supported, principals and parents safe that the programme is educationally beneficial for all their students.

P

PERSPECTIVE: We want to help people make dialogue work in their individual circumstances rather than forcing everyone to do the same thing. We know that sometimes we have to be patient as schools find the best way to do that.

E

EMPATHY: Being open to looking at the world through someone else's eyes gives us new ways to understand the world and helps us to learn and grow. We don't have to accept everything we encounter; sometimes the thing we learn is that we are different and disagree.

C

COMPASSION: We create opportunities for our young people to actively engage in their communities, working with others of different faiths and beliefs to address pressing issues and make the world a better place.

T

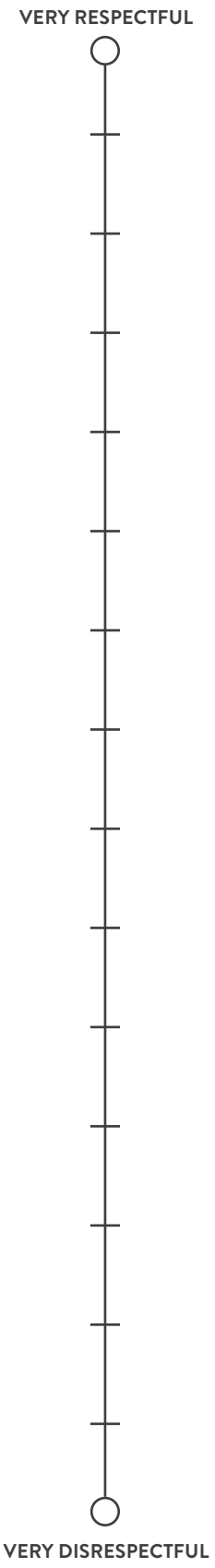
TRUST: The key to any relationship is trust. Dialogue is about building trust that we will always treat one another respectfully, openly, and honestly, and that we will always listen to each other's values and beliefs.

WORKSHEET 1.4

IS IT RESPECTFUL?

Mark on the scale where you think the comments belong:

1. Fiddling with an object while someone is speaking
2. Chatting to someone else while someone is speaking
3. Looking at the person who is speaking
4. Speaking for more than 20% of the discussion time
5. Thanking someone for their comment and/ or explanation
6. Disagreeing with someone's idea
7. Agreeing with someone's idea
8. Telling someone they are an idiot
9. Telling yourself your ideas are not worth saying out loud
10. Shouting
11. Waving your arms around while speaking
12. Saying sorry if someone is offended by what you say
13. Thanking people for their question
14. Talking over the top of someone else
15. Allowing there to be silence in the discussion
16. Putting away distractions like phones



WORKSHEET 1.5

HOW SURE AM I?

STATEMENT ABOUT THE ISSUE	SOURCE OF INFORMATION	WHY I SHOULD TRUST THIS SOURCE	WHY I SHOULD QUESTION THIS SOURCE
Most dogs are dangerous	TV documentary about dangerous dogs	The programme was on a new channel and by a respected documentary reporter	The title of the programme was about dangerous dogs and they did not talk about all different breeds of dogs
All X people treat their women as second class citizens	All my family say this	They're my family. They would not tell me something that is not true	None of us have ever met an X

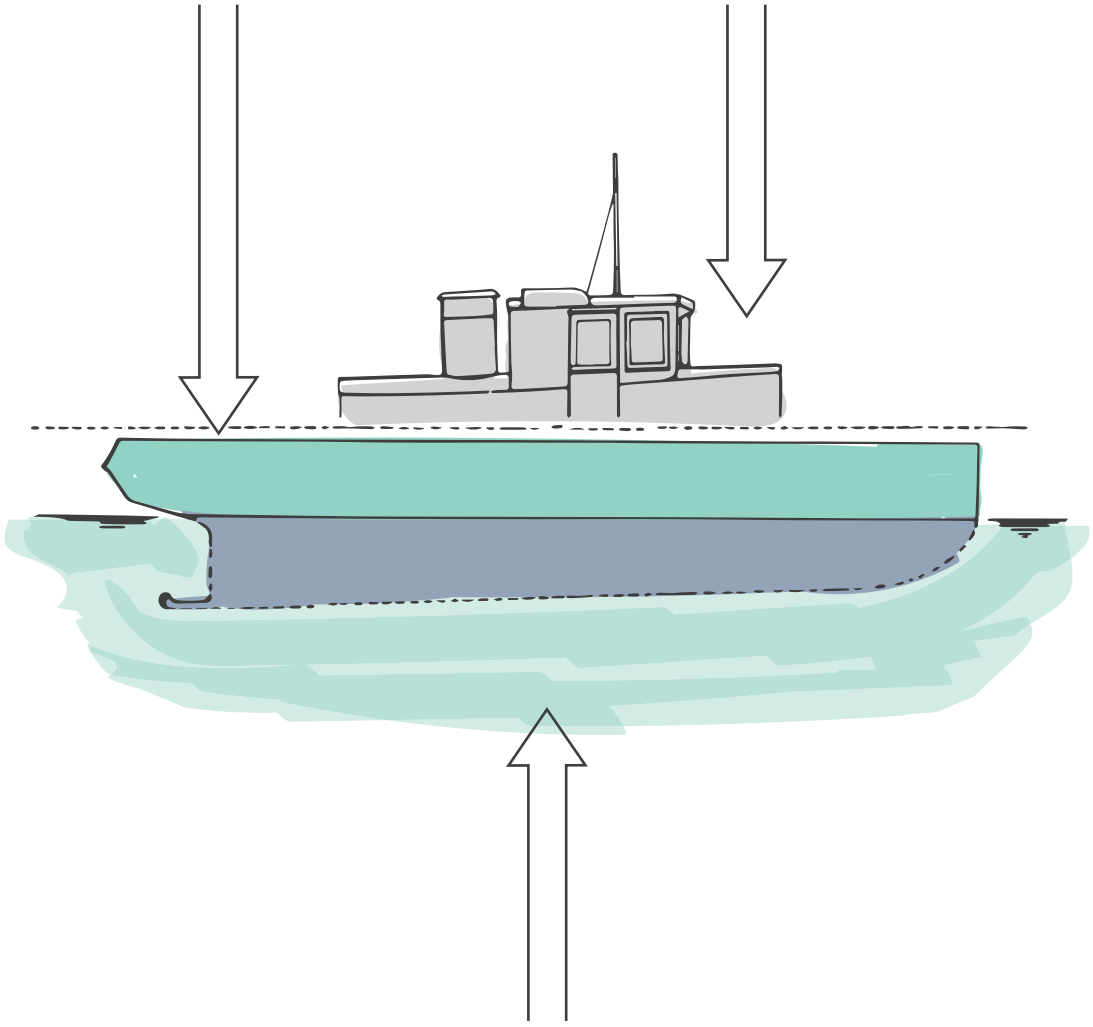
WORKSHEET 1.6

BLACK, WHITE, AND GREY IN-BETWEEN

Things I have heard about this issue that I know to be untrue	Things I am unsure about regarding this issue	Things I have heard about this issue that I know to be true

WORKSHEET 1.7

THE GOOD SHIP 'MY OPINIONS'



WORKSHEET 1.8

RESPONSE VS REACTION

I DON'T AGREE WITH YOU ON THAT POINT	THAT HAS REALLY MADE ME THINK ABOUT THE ISSUE IN A DIFFERENT WAY
THAT IS AN IGNORANT THING TO SAY	I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU JUST SAID THAT
I HAVE HEARD THAT SAID BEFORE BY PEOPLE WHO ARE LIKE YOU	ALL OF YOU ALWAYS SAY THAT
WHAT A STUPID THING TO SAY	YOU'RE STUPID
THAT'S REALLY DIFFICULT FOR ME TO HEAR	THAT'S NOT TRUE

WORKSHEET 1.9

CLEAR INTENTIONS

STATEMENT	I TOTALLY AGREE	I AGREE	NOT IMPORTANT	I DISAGREE	I TOTALLY DISAGREE
I want to learn what others have to say about this issue.					
I want to let others know where I stand on this issue.					
I want others to know how I feel about this issue.					
I want to persuade others in the group that I am right.					
I want my views to be challenged.					
I want others to think that I am really clever.					
I won't say anything that might get me into trouble.					
I want to destroy some people's arguments.					
I want to share what I have read or heard about this issue from people / sources I admire.					
I want to use this discussion to make some friends.					
I want to bring peace when there are tensions in this discussion.					
I want to impress the teacher.					
I don't want to say anything.					
I want to look cleverer than the teacher.					
I don't want anyone to know how this issue makes me feel.					
I want to know what others think about what I believe about this issue.					
I want to upset those who have different views than me.					
I want some answers to questions I have about this issue.					

WORKSHEET 1.10

ASKING AUTHENTIC QUESTIONS

ORIGINAL QUESTION	JUDGEMENT OR ASSUMPTION INHERENT IN QUESTION	REWRITING OF THE QUESTION TO MAKE IT AUTHENTIC
Don't you think it is disgusting that politicians have recently got a pay rise while there are people begging on the streets?		
It's demeaning for women to have to cover their heads, isn't it?		
The US incarcerates more than any other country, why is it such an unsafe place to live?		
No other country cares about refugees as much as we do, do they?		
You do know about the conspiracy behind that, don't you?		
Don't you feel sorry for people who are not true believers?		
When are religious people going to wake up and realise there is no such thing as a God?		

WORKSHEET 1.11

ASKING AUTHENTIC QUESTIONS: TEACHER HELP SHEET

ORIGINAL QUESTION	JUDGEMENT OR ASSUMPTION INHERENT IN QUESTION	REWRITING OF THE QUESTION TO MAKE IT AUTHENTIC
Don't you think it is disgusting that politicians have recently got a pay rise while there are people begging on the streets?	***Judgment***: It is disgusting that Politicians have got a pay rise; this money should be used for social justice issues like helping the homeless.	Do you think it was right for Politicians to get a pay rise?
It's demeaning for women to have to cover their heads, isn't it?	***Judgment***: It is demeaning for women to cover their heads.	Why do some women cover their heads, I wonder?
The US incarcerates more than any other country, why is it such an unsafe place to live?	***Judgment***: Because the US has a large prison population, it must be an unsafe place to live.	There may well be two questions here: Is the US an unsafe place to live? And why does the US justice system send so many people to prison?
No other country cares about refugees as much as we do, do they?	***Assumption***: We take in more refugees; because our country takes in more refugees we care more about them than those in other countries.	Do we take in more refugees than other countries? If so, why do we take in more? Why might other countries not take in more refugees?
You do know about the conspiracy behind that, don't you?	***Assumption***: There was a conspiracy.	Who else has heard about a conspiracy theory about this?
Don't you feel sorry for people who are not true believers?	***Judgment***: Our group holds the 'truth'. Non-believers are to be pitied. You should pity non-believers.	How do you feel about people who do not believe the same as us?
When are religious people going to wake up and realise there is no such thing as a God?	***Judgment***: Religious people are deluded.	Why do people believe in God?

2

During *the* Dialogue



Chapter 2.0

During the Dialogue

2.1 FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

> ***Facilitation is compassionate when it is offered in a manner that gives the benefit of doubt to the participant and minimizes defensiveness.*** (The Public Conversations Project).

In order to understand what a term means it is useful to revisit the origins of the term. Facilitation derives from the Latin *facilis*, 'to make easy'. It is the role of the facilitator to make the discussion or dialogue easier for the participants. This is done by ensuring that the participants feel as comfortable and safe as they can to explore the issues through dialogue with one another, that they are challenged when they say something that may be construed as hurtful to others, that their assumptions and judgments are suspended, that there is fair participation, and that the dialogue remains focused.

At Generation Global we consider the role of facilitator as crucial in getting students to move to more challenging areas of a dialogue and also in ensuring that students are responsible in what they say. Our facilitators are the guardians of the 'safe space', which you can read more about below. We do not believe that a dialogical approach comes naturally to all young people (or indeed adults), we believe that many of the skills need to be taught and practiced. You may be familiar with our dialogue resources in the *Essentials of Dialogue*.

To facilitate a dialogue or discussion is an honour and a privilege. We have facilitated thousands of dialogues between young people on our global programme, and it is always wonderful to assist and witness young people using their enquiring, dialogical skills to learn more about one another and to explore together challenging issues. We see first hand how this approach opens the eyes, hearts and minds of the students to one another and also, critically, to challenge their own understanding and perspectives on an issue and to be open to the possibilities of seeing things from alternate viewpoints.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. THEORY
FACILITATION TECHNIQUES
HANDLING THE HEAT
2. ACTIVITIES
DISCUSSION STARTER
3. WORKSHEETS

This chapter will explore the key facets of excellent facilitation practice, building on the advice from the *Essentials of Dialogue*:

- Impartiality
- Getting Started
- Discerning Reaction From Response
- Promoting Effective Questioning
- Respectful Challenge
- Importance of Silence
- Encouraging Discussion at the Centre
- Techniques for Wider Participation

Impartiality

While there are various types of facilitation modes such as committed or declared interest (facilitator is open about their own views), devil's advocate (a provocative and oppositional role), and advocate (presents varied viewpoints including own),

at Generational Global we strongly recommend that the approach that is taken by the teacher-facilitator for these sorts of dialogues is one of impartiality. For various reasons, this is the most difficult of the models, but it is the one that will help you be the most efficient guardian of the safe space.

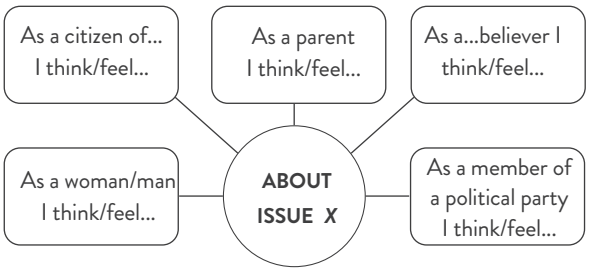
In order to be impartial, you need to take a little time to explore whether you are completely aware of your biases. Some of our biases that we inevitably (all of us) carry around within ourselves are quite obvious and known to us but others may be hidden and involve deeper reflection to allow them to arise to our consciousness.

Take a Moment

Try exploring the issue from the different facets of your identity. For example, take the issue of X and ask yourself how this issue affects you as:

- A woman / man
- An educator
- A parent
- A daughter / son
- From your belief perspective (as a Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Humanist, etc.)
- A citizen of your country
- Someone of your age group
- Add other facets of your identity to the mix...

Explore what makes you fearful about the issue from these different perspectives and also what makes you hopeful about the issue.



Acknowledging our unconscious biases (also known as implicit stereotypes) is trickier. They tend not only to be hidden deep within us but can also make us feel quite uncomfortable when we are confronted by them. These are the biases we have unconsciously absorbed throughout the period of our lives. Each person's biases give rise to their own personal set of values and play a key part in forming our identities. These are biases that require very little thought and we are likely to affirm and defend them fervently as they play a key part in creating our identities.

Another Useful Tool

One tool for helping us to unpack these unconscious biases can be found here: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html (just one note that this is created by an American University and some of the questions at the end seem to be primarily for American audiences, but still can be quite illuminating). Try the tests on religion and race. If you have older students, this is something you could do with them in class to help them to understand their unconscious biases.

To explore your unconscious biases, try doing the first activity again but putting yourself in someone else's shoes (different gender, age, nationality, etc.)

Getting Started

Before you get started on the dialogue spend a little time thinking about how you will set up the room. Rows with students sat behind tables does not lend itself well to these types of activities. The best set up is to have students seated where they can see one another and to remove barriers like tables. Chairs organised in a circle or a horseshoe shape work best.

Ensure that you are all clear and agreed, as far as you can be, about the meaning of the terms that you will use in the dialogue. The way that the dialogue begins is critical in setting the tone for the entire session. As guardian of the safe space, it is important that you remind all participants of the following:

1 The goals of the dialogue

2 The agreed ground rules

3 Your role as facilitator

4 Expectations of the participants. These expectations include:

- Be prepared to have your views challenged.
- Be prepared to examine and evaluate your position on an issue.

- Be open to the views of others.
- Be able to put to one side your assumptions and judgments.
- Be able to recognise and manage your emotional reactions to the discussion.
- Speaking for yourself and not on behalf of others.

5 A reminder about listening and questioning skills

We recommend that rather than ploughing head-in to a whole group discussion that the participants spend some time:

- Quietly reflecting on the issue, or
- Working in small groups or pairs to discuss the issue (use tried and tested methods for this sort of work from our *Essentials of Dialogue* toolkit like *Listen to Me!* or *Sharing Our Ideas*)
- Then move to the whole group dialogue

Students will feel more confident trying out their ideas in smaller groups first and will ultimately help to create a more democratic and inclusive space and encourage a higher level of participation (discussions go wrong when they are dominated by a few personalities).

Discerning Reaction From Response

As a facilitator you need to watch out for the flip from 'responding' to what is said (a rational behaviour) to 'reacting' to what is said (emotional behaviour). This can happen when the discussion is getting heated and/ or some of the participants are threatened by what is said. The signs:

- What is said is aggressive and / or inflammatory Tone becomes aggressive
- Voice becomes shaky or the student shouts
- Students go red in the face
- Defensive body language: folded arms, hunched shoulders, not making eye contact
- Aggressive body language: taking more space than necessary with arms and legs (stretched out), leaning back

At these moments, stop the dialogue and tell the participants what you observe and give them some time to calmly reflect on what is going on in the dynamics of the group. You might want to ask the students questions like, 'how are you feeling right now about this discussion?' and then 'why do you think you are feeling this way?' David Bohm, a leading dialogue theorist maintained that what is going on in the participants' heads is just as important as what is being said in the discussion or dialogue. Asking these sorts of questions gives the participants time to reflect on what is going on in their heads.

If things get really heated then refer to the section below *Handling the Heat.*

Prompting Effective Questioning

Another problem that you might find yourself faced with, as a facilitator, is a discussion that doesn't seem to be getting anywhere. The discussion might fall into one of these traps:

1 ***Repetition of earlier points.*** Students come back to earlier points without elaborating on what was earlier stated.

2 ***Moving off topic.*** One or two students hijack the discussion and move it to another, perhaps unrelated topic.

3 ***Skirting around the issue.*** Because the topic is threatening to some in the group, the discussion stays at the sides of the issue rather than moving towards the centre.

4 ***Superficial comments.*** This could be for a number of reasons. The students might be bored, they might not understand what has been said but are not confident to seek clarification, they might assume that others implicitly know what they mean, or they simply might not have the knowledge or confidence to elaborate and explain.

5 ***Only one point of view shared by the group.*** This can make the life of the discussion rather short. If the group is pretty homogenous, with little diversity, then students might not be able to see the issue from outside their own 'bubble'.

6 ***Students only share their opinions and do not engage with what others are saying.*** So a lot of sharing and telling and not enough questioning.

There are some great questions that you can have to hand that will help you to move the discussion and your students' thinking forward when these moments happen. Some excellent questions to take the learning deeper:

Taking stock:

- Can you note a point of learning?
- Do you want to understand something better?
- Does anything need clarifying for you?
- Are you confused about something?

Bringing the dialogue back to the centre:

- What is at the heart of the matter for you?
- What are the grey areas for you with this issue?
- How has X challenged you?

Building on responses:

- Does anyone want to add to this thread?

Understanding the impact of the issue:

- Has X changed the way you see...?
- Have any of your values been challenged by X?
- What ideas or concerns about X would you like to bring to our leaders' attention?
- Whose responsibility is it to deal with X?
- What strains are there in your local community because of X?
- What fuels the polarizing dynamics around X?
- What have you learned recently or over time that has reinforced your view about X?
- When you listen to the media debate this issue what upsets you or pleases you about the coverage?
- What do you see or hear online about X? How does that make you feel?
- What makes you hopeful?

Seeking a more nuanced appreciation of the issue:

- Have you ever had a constructive conversation with anyone who has a different view to you about X?
- Is there anything about X you have been trying to figure out in your own mind?
- What have you learned recently or over time that has challenged your view of X?
- Can anyone offer another point of view?

Clarifying:

- Can you say that in another way?
- This is what I heard you say... is that what you meant?

Respective Challenge

This is about finding a balance. You want respect in the dialogue, most definitely, but not too much. You want challenge in the discussion, most definitely, but not too much.

Respect is an often-misunderstood concept and so often it is seen as interchangeable with words like 'tolerance' and 'understanding'. For our students we often see respect being muddled with politeness and this can lead to very stilted discussions and dialogue. 'Respect' definitely does not mean that you have to agree with someone else's point of view. In fact, respect really only comes into its own when situations become difficult. It's easy to show respect to someone who holds similar points of view or beliefs, but when faced with a view or belief that is radically different to your own, then respect does not come so easily and is a behaviour and attitude that we need to work hard at. For more information and guidance as well as activities that explore the concept of respect please see the *Essentials of Dialogue*, pp. 36, 39 and 40.

In any dialogue around a challenging issue you will want to see your students challenge one another. Challenging means that they are analysing and evaluating what has been said. Challenge should take the forms of: seeking clearer explanations and examples, seeking alternate viewpoints, scrutinising the evidence and influences attached to a viewpoint, exploring beliefs and values that underpin a point of view. Challenges should never become personal or attack a group of people.

As well as considering respect for the participants in the dialogue, it is important that your students and you are aware of the need to be mindful and respectful of:

- The nature and structure of the dialogue, including the ground rules
- Those referred to in the dialogue but who are not there to defend themselves

Too Much Respect	*The Right Balance*	*Too Much Challenge*
Students are afraid to speak what is in their minds for fear of upsetting someone else. This can be indicative of the space not being 'safe enough' for the participants to speak freely.	Students feel safe enough to challenge what they hear from others in a way that seeks to better understand the point of view and the values and beliefs underpinning that viewpoint. Students challenge ideas not people. Students feel safe enough to speak what is in their minds even if they hold a minority viewpoint.	The dialogue upsets some of the participants (the space is no longer safe). The dialogue becomes polarised with the students aligning to rigid positions and 'digging themselves in' to this viewpoint (closing down opportunities for critical thinking).

Importance of Silence

Silence is an important part of the dialogue structure and it is not something to be afraid of. What you, as facilitator, need to be able to do, is ensure that the participants feel comfortable with silence and that you and them learn how to use these important moments of silence effectively.

Remember that in the discussion, there will be a lot of dialogue going on inside the participants' heads and sometimes the students need some time to listen to this internal dialogue and make sense of it. The nature of this internal dialogue will most likely be:

- Self-talk: for example, why did I say that? I sound like an idiot! I can't speak, no one listens to me. I don't want people knowing I feel differently about this. I'm really clever, I'm sure I've shown that just now
- Emotional responses to what is heard
- Preparing to speak
- Making sense of what has been said

The Indian philosopher, Krishnamurti, commented of silence: "One listens and therefore learns, only in a state of attention, a state of silence, in which this whole background is in abeyance, is quiet; then it seems to me, it is possible to communicate."

As a facilitator, when the group falls into one of these natural stages of silent reflection, the best technique is to acknowledge what is happening and explicitly give the students the permission to have this silent reflection. Say something like, "I can see that you need some time to process what has been said, let's take a minute or two to think about what we have heard, examine how we feel about this, and think about what we want to say next. Let's use this time as a period of quiet internal reflection".

You may in fact need to use silent reflection as a facilitation tool from time to time. If the discussion gets a little fast-paced or looks like it is heating up, you can use silence, or thinking time, to slow the discussion down, to have students reflect and give them some time to form clear responses.

Tip

If there is too much silence and it is difficult to get students to speak, it is probably because they feel intimidated. In this case, you may want to break the larger group into smaller groups or engage in paired discussions instead. There is no point in labouring with a group who are not confident enough to take part in a larger group setting. Students will be more confident in smaller settings as they try out their ideas with fewer peers. Once they have done this a few times, they may develop the confidence to contribute to discussions in larger groups.

Encouraging Dialogue at the Centre

> ***Dialogue, as I define it, is a conversation with a center, not sides. It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channelling it toward something that has never been created before. It lifts us out of polarization and into a greater common sense, and is thereby a means of accessing the intelligence and coordinated power of groups of people.*** William Isaacs, Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together.

There are two facets to this 'dialogue at the centre and not at the sides'. The first is what Isaacs is talking about here. It is about letting go of our own prejudices and assumptions and being open to coming to a new understanding of the issue. You will find a lot more on this topic in the previous chapter in the section on 'suspending' as well as some exercises that you can use to refocus your students if you feel that they are themselves uncentred or becoming uncentered. Uncentered in this context means unable to see what is happening beneath the words that are being spoken and distancing oneself from the content of what is being said. The other is more straightforward and will be more familiar to most teachers: students taking the discussion off topic.

If you feel like your students are getting too focused on their own fears or feelings and hearing only what fits their preconceptions then you may want to consider strategies that will allow them to focus on their barriers to looking at the issue with a more open mind. You might want to say things like:

- It sounds like you have strong feelings about this issue; let's take a moment to think about how this is making us feel.
- Does what X is saying threaten any of you in any way? If so, think about why this might be so.
- Are we all still able to listen? Sometimes the way we react to something that is said can block our ability to listen to one another.

Keep your eye on the direction of the dialogue and make sure that it does not stray too far off track. To bring students back, you might want to ask a question like:

- Can you remind us all how this point you are making fits into this discussion about X?
- What is the link between what you are saying and X?

There are a number of reasons why students might take the dialogue off topic and it is worth considering why this might be the case and then choosing a technique to bring it back.

Reason dialogue is going off topic	*Facilitation technique to draw it back*
Students are not knowledgeable enough about the issue so move the dialogue into an area they think they know more about.	Ask if this is the case and if it is, allow the young people to explore what they think they know, and how they think they know it. You may wish to postpone the dialogue until the students have had time to do some more research on the issue.
Students are uncomfortable with the topic.	If you sense this is the case then stop the discussion and explore with the students how they feel about the topic and the discussion. You will most likely want to do this through quiet personal reflection, rather than as a whole group spoken activity.
Students are bored.	This is tricky. You may need to postpone the dialogue and do some work with the students on 'making the case' for the discussion: using what is in the media about the topic and relating it to how it directly and indirectly affects the lives of the students

Dialogue has 'naturally' drifted off track without anyone really noticing.	It is your responsibility as facilitator to draw the discussion back to the focused topic. Say what you have noted about an interesting deviation but that we all need to get back to the 'heart of the matter'. A recap of what was said, prior to the shift away from the central topic, would be useful at this point.

Techniques for Wider Participation

Taking part in a whole group discussion will be an activity that the extroverts in your class will relish while the introverts may find it threatening.

Generally, extroverts are people who think aloud; the process of speaking helps them to form their ideas, so what they are saying is not necessarily the 'finished product'. Space needs to be given to these people so that they can think and speak clearly. Extroverts may sometimes need help clarifying what they have said, and you as a facilitator can help by paraphrasing and checking understanding.

Generally, the introverts think thoroughly while listening and want to check their hypotheses through before committing them out loud. The big risk for the teacher, and for the class as a whole, is that if these introverted voices are not drawn out in the discussion then valuable comments and insights into the discussion could be missed. Everyone in the room at the time of the discussion is a resource and needs to be tapped into to maximise the potential of the discussion in its ultimate aim of better understanding the nuances associated with the topic.

There are a number of strategies that you can use to ensure that the extroverts are not given too much airtime and that the introverts are drawn out of themselves a little more.

1 ***Check the safety of the space.*** Are those with a minority viewpoint made to feel that their views are welcome and will be respected even when most will disagree with them? Does the group acknowledge that diversity of viewpoints will enrich the discussion and not diminish it?

2 ***Allow for plenty of thinking time /slow the discussion down.*** The introverts need time to formulate their thoughts before speaking them aloud. Give regular two minute breaks for thinking time (get the students to write down their thoughts on a question or particular challenge in the discussion) before asking for more contributions.

3 ***Break out into small group discussions from time to time.*** Introverted people and those who feel threatened in a larger group context will be more likely to speak in a smaller group. Use techniques from *Essentials of Dialogue* like *Listen to me!* and *Sharing our Ideas* to get the students sharing their thoughts fairly in small groups or pairs.

4 ***Create the expectations of listening and speaking for every member of the group.*** You can use speaking tokens (give every participant between two and five tokens and tell them that they must 'spend' every token, meaning speak up during the discussion, but that when all of their tokens are spent that is it, so they must choose wisely when to speak).

2.2 HANDLING THE HEAT

When things look like they are heating up in a dialogue that is when the real opportunities for learning can present themselves. There is, however, a fine line between exploring the issues through this 'heat' and the 'heat' itself becoming the focus of the discussion.

The 'heat' is good because:

- It can mean that students are moving closer to the heart of the matter.
- It means that a variety of perspectives are being considered.
- It can give you the opportunity to assess with the students exactly what is going on with the nature of the discussion, allowing the students to learn something about themselves and how they feel about an issue.

However, if not managed well, the 'heat' can become bad news as:

- Students make the discussion about people and not issues, including personal attacks.
- Students' emotions get the better of them and they can no longer focus on the complexities of the issue.
- Students default to polarised viewpoints and go on the defensive.

If you take the remarks personally, chances are you will not be able to find what there is to learn from them.

But first, be sure that the heat is there for the right reasons. Be wary of the student who wants to railroad the discussion because of their very different agenda, which is not at all related to the dialogue. Make sure that those who are turning up the heat are not motivated by a desire to disrupt your lesson or activity. You might have a classroom management issue rather than a dialogue management issue. If one or two students are disrupting by making what you consider to be inflammatory comments or exhibiting behaviours that mean the dialogue is difficult to facilitate, then take these students to one side to determine their 'intentions' for the discussion. Handle this carefully, as you do not want the students to feel that anything they say within the defined 'safe space' is wrong or naughty, but at the same time you need to exercise your professional judgement about the conduct of the activity.

Managing Yourself

When things heat up in a classroom discussion you can find yourself thinking: 'Oh no, I knew this would happen', 'They're going to fall out now', 'How am I going to control this?' and 'I can't handle this!'

Ideally, you need to move from this negative self-talk to a more positive one where you are thinking and telling yourself, 'Oh good, now we will really get to explore the different perspectives on this issue' and 'This will be interesting' and 'I can help my students navigate through this challenging part of this discussion'.

Harvard University has some excellent advice for their tutors on cultivating a positive approach during a heated discussion. Advice that is equally valuable for the class teacher.

We often forget that a primary task is to find ways to manage ourselves in the midst of confusion.

1 ***Hold steady.*** If you can hold steady and not be visibly rattled by the hot moment, the students will be better able to steady themselves as well and even learn something from the moment. Your behaviour provides a holding environment for the students. They can feel safe when you appear to be in control; this enables them to explore the issues. Your behaviour also provides a model for the students.

2 ***Breathe deeply.*** Take a moment. Collect yourself. Take time if you need it. Silence is useful - if you can show that you are comfortable with it. A pause will also permit students to reflect on the issues raised. Deep breathing is an ancient and highly effective technique for calming adrenaline rushes and restoring one's capacity to think.

3 ***Don't personalise remarks.*** Don't take remarks personally, even when they come as personal attacks. Such attacks are most likely made against you in your role as teacher or authority figure. Remembering to separate self from role can enable you to see what a student is saying more clearly and to actually discuss the issue. It's not about you. It's about the student and his or her feelings and thoughts, though often articulated clumsily and from an as yet unthought-through position. Don't take remarks personally when they are about issues that you feel strongly about, or even about groups of which you are a part. Again, remember that both you and the group will be better served if you can keep some distance from the comments and find ways to use them to enhance people's understanding.

Don't let yourself get caught up in a personal reaction to the individual who has made some unpleasant remark. It's easy to want to tear into a student who is personally offensive to you. To do so is to fail to see what that student and his or her ideas represent in the classroom and in the larger world. If you take the remarks personally, chances are you will not be able to find what there is to learn from them.

4 ***Know yourself.*** Know your biases; know what will push your buttons and what will cause your mind to stop. Every one of us has areas in which we are vulnerable to strong feelings. Knowing what those areas are in advance can diminish the element of surprise. This self-knowledge can enable you to devise in advance strategies for managing yourself and the class when such a moment arises. You will have thought about what you need to do in order to enable your mind to work again.[8]

The most important thing is that you feel calm and in control. You may need to step back from the discussion to be able to analyse what is causing tensions, to analyse what is going on. Once you have identified what is causing the 'heat' then you'll find a strategy for making the best of it.

Lowering The Heat

If you feel that you cannot do anything constructive with the group until you have managed to calm down the emotions in the room, then there are a few things that you can do.

Note that there may be some days where it may be better to postpone the difficult dialogue. If there have been disputes between the students outside of the classroom then these will need resolving prior to engaging them in the discussion so that things do not get personal. Also, if issues arise towards the end of the allotted time, it may well be better to 'park' that issue until the next session where you will be able to devote more time to exploring it. Being clear with students as to why you delay tackling an issue that arises is very important.

1 ***Slow it Down.*** When tensions rise contributions tend to come in at a faster pace. There may well be people speaking over the top of one another as they desperately try to have their say. Acknowledge with the group that you know it is hard to slow down and think things through when tensions are high but you can see that no one is really listening to one another right now so you are going to manage who speaks and when. Once one person has finished speaking insist on at least ten seconds reflection time before allowing someone else to speak.

2 ***Say what you see.*** The students in the middle of the heated discussion will have forgotten most of what they learned about suspending judgement, listening with an open mind, and having an authentic voice. It is worth stopping the dialogue, drawing the group together, describing what you see, and repeating back to the students some of the things that you have heard them say. Then spend some time with the students encouraging them to reflect on how the dialogue escalated.

3 ***Say what you hear***. You can inquire about what you notice, rather than make a quick judgment that may be based on a misreading of the situation. For example, suppose you understand Susan to be saying that anyone who doesn't agree with her is immoral or dangerously unrealistic. Susan hasn't directly criticised another participant or what someone has said; nonetheless, her tone and some of her language makes you uncertain about whether she is implicitly insulting those who have expressed different views. You can express curiosity about the needs of the group by saying, "Susan, it sounds as if you have really strong feelings about this. How are those of you who have different views hearing what Susan is saying? Are you feeling criticised or shut down or are you still able to listen? How is your resilience holding up?" By taking this approach, you remain squarely in the role of servant to the group. You give the speaker a chance to reflect on how she is presenting her point of view. You also give others a chance to give her feedback about the impact of what she said. Finally, you are "walking the talk" by modelling inquiry and resisting the impulse to assume you know how others feel. From the *Public Conversations Project*[9]

8 "Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom", Derek Bok Centre for Teaching and Learning, http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/managing-hot-moments-classroom See Appendix 13.0

9 Maggie Herzig and Laura Chassis, *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides*, Public Conversations Project, Watertown, MA: 2006 http://www.whatisessential.org/sites/default/files/PCP_Fostering%20Dialogue%20Across%20Divides.pdf

4 ***Take a Break.*** Linked to the point above. Once you have said what you have observed about the nature of the dialogue, have the students quietly reflect on the process of the discussion. Have the students pay particular attention to how they are feeling, the nature of their 'self talk', and how they can move themselves away from these feelings and back to the centre of the discussion. Ask students to reflect on "Why is this topic so difficult to discuss?" or "What do you feel like you can't say aloud right now?"

5 ***Remind everyone of the agreed ground rules.*** Direct the group's attention to the previously agreed ground rules and have them identify what is not working well for the discussion at this time and what the infringements have been and how they can be respected in the rest of the dialogue. These rules should address some of the most common infractions such as: no personal attacks, no interrupting, and openness to hearing a range of perspectives.

6 ***Park it.*** As a last resort you can put an issue to one side to be referred to at a later date. This should only be used as a last resort. It is important to acknowledge the importance of the issue and to give a good reason why it cannot be explored at the current time.

7 ***Dealing with an infraction.*** You can suggest a positive direction rather than simply naming an infraction. For example, if Howard begins his statement with a judgment of David's response, he is violating the agreement about refraining from criticism. For example, if Howard says, "Well, David, it's not going to get us anywhere if you just carry on about..." you can say, " Howard, would you be willing to just say what you think makes sense without criticising what David said?" If Howard says, "David, I can't believe you are so blind to..." you can say, "Howard, rather than calling David blind, could you just say what you see that you think is really important? Then, if you want, you can ask David if he also sees what you're seeing and, if so, how he sees it." From the Public Conversations Project[10]

8 ***Find the bigger question.*** You can have the students step back from the issues that are causing the maelstrom to explore what is really at the heart of the matter here, what is really at stake for the students. Usually, the larger issues are around values and identity and this is what threatens the students. For example, if students are discussing ordination of women and the heat rises in this discussion, then widen the issue up to a discussion about the role of women within religious communities, or even wider than that, to women and leadership, or even the role of women and women's rights. Try to get the students to be clear, open and honest about what threatens them about the issues being discussed.

Making Use of The Heat

The key here is to protect the student but to explore the issue. Make this your mantra for facilitating difficult dialogues.

A reminder that when things heat up during a dialogue on a contentious issue there are opportunities for exploring:

- The multitude of different perspectives and what this tells us about the issue.
- The unresolved issues that polarise opinions about this issue.
- The internal dialogue that the students are having about this issue, including why they are reacting the way that they are.

Table 1 includes guidance taken from the University of Michigan's Guidance on Dialogue in Class and from The Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching.

Successful Disagreement

The guidance in this section is largely based on the work of Professor Simon Keyes of Winchester University.

The opposite of conflict is not necessarily harmony. It might be understanding the complexities of a situation or issue. When dealing with disagreement there is a natural human inclination to focus upon making the disagreement go away at all costs. It is just as important to reflect upon what we actually want to achieve instead of disagreement. It is important to remember that it may well be quite unrealistic to expect to replace disagreement with harmony. In fact, a more realistic aim might be to ensure that everyone involved has a deeper understanding of the issues in question, and is better able to explore those.

10 Maggie Herzig and Laura Chassis, *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides*

TABLE. 1 Facilitation Techniques for Making Use of Heat

Technique	*What you might say*	*Why you should do this*
Depersonalise the comments	• Many people think this way. Why do you think they hold such views? • What are different views? Why do you think people hold those views?	You get the students to focus back onto the issue and not on the person asking the question or making the comments. It also makes the person making the comments or asking the question less vulnerable. It is a technique that keeps the space safe for all.
Validate the students' contributions	• Thank you for raising that point. It's a widely held viewpoint, and you provide us an opportunity to talk about it. • You're clearly thinking very seriously about this topic and raising important questions we need to think about carefully.	You acknowledge that the points raised are challenging but worthy of thought and further exploration. You are giving permission for this to be explored but also stressing the need to do this carefully and slowly.
Reflect back	• What do you mean by X? • I heard you saying Y; is that what you meant to say?	Often students say inadvertently insulting or marginalizing things when they are genuinely struggling to understand a new perspective or feel the intellectual discomfort of having their familiar views challenged. If you think a comment is coming from a place of cognitive struggle, you might give the student a chance to explain the questions or confusions behind their remark.
Acknowledge diversity of opinions	• I am hearing a variety of viewpoints on this issue which reminds us of how complicated this issue is and how it can be seen in a number of different ways. Here is what we have heard already...	By stressing the diversity of views presented in the discussion you are reminding the students of the complex nature of the issue and that people arrive at the issue from varied perspectives.
Stepping back	• This discussion is entering an interesting phase which I am keen to support you with exploring but first let's recap what has been said and identify what is at the heart of the matter.	You are in effect regrouping by doing this. You are offering a pause, a recap, clarification of what has been said, and reaffirming the safe space for continuation of the difficult discussion.
Encourage inner reflection	• Let's pause a moment to give you some time to think about how you are feeling right now and what you think is making you feel this way. • Is anything threatening you right now? • Is there anything you feel has not been said, which should have been said? • Have you heard anything that makes you question your original position on the issue? How does this make you feel?	Only by listening to their inner dialogue will the students be able to continue the discussion in a way that they are aware of themselves and able to handle themselves more competently. You are reminding them that it is OK to feel threatened, OK to have further questions, and OK to change your mind and move from certainty to uncertainty about the issue.
Foster understanding	• Ask the students to listen carefully to each other and to summarize what they heard before speaking. • What makes this important to you? • What led you to this point of view?	You insist that they hear what one another are saying as well alongside 're-loading' themselves (so they are not just thinking about what they will say next). Exploring what lies beneath the viewpoints / what has formed the opinions.

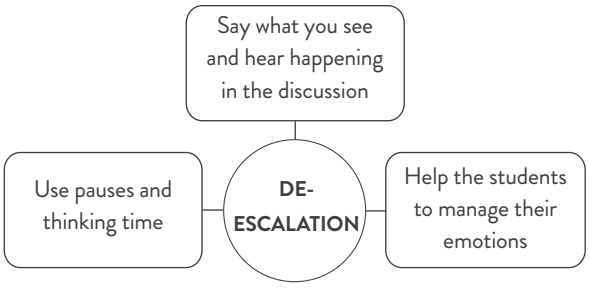
For our students, as with many adults, the basic problem is that if their initial response to something that disturbs or threatens them is to 'dig in' to a certain stance, then they have taken the first step down the path that leads to conflict.

The antidote to this is to develop curiosity: to explore the nature of the disagreement, challenge their own stances, be comfortable with uncertainty, and review their positions. This is the path that leads to successful disagreement.

It is easier to diffuse conflict before it has started. In order to do that effectively and to encourage students to take the path that leads to understanding, even though there might be disagreement, it is important that the teacher, the facilitator, understands the steps that lead to both. In this way, you can then spot the 'red flags' on the path to conflict and the milestones on the path to successful disagreement. The hope is that your interventions will move students from conflict towards successful disagreement. Please see Table 2 which represents 'Pattern of Escalation Towards Conflict'[11].

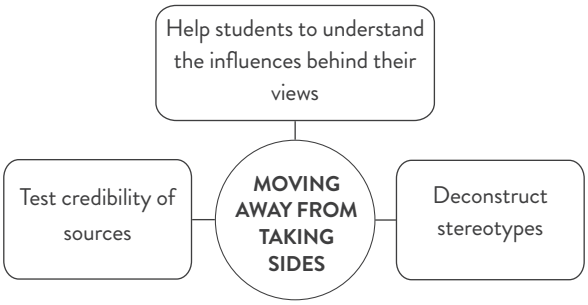
There are some steps you can take to move students towards seeking complexity over seeking conflict:

1 De-escalation



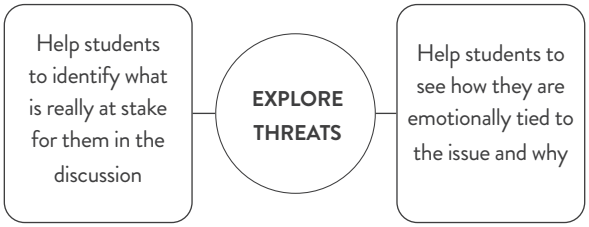
See activities and guidance above and also in Chapter 1 Activity 9: *Triggers*.

2 *Moving Away from Taking Sides*



See guidance and activities in Chapter 1: *Suspending Judgment*.

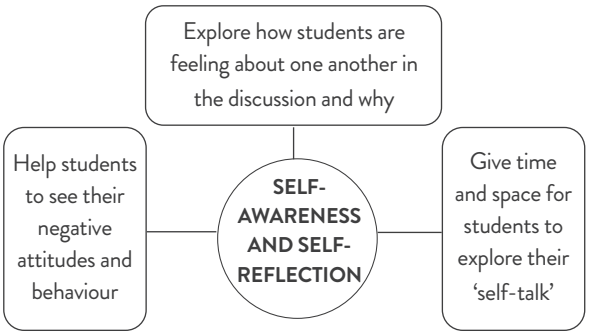
3 Explore Threats



See guidance and activities in Chapter 1: *Suspending Judgment*, especially the activities on *Understanding Triggers* and *Response and Reaction*.

4 Self-Awareness and Self-Reflection

See guidance and activities in Chapter 1 on *Having an Authentic Voice*.



11 Note that Keyes' model has been amended based on the practice and experience of Generation Global

TABLE. 2 Pattern of Escalation Towards Conflict

SEEKING CONFLICT	SEEKING COMPLEXITY
Taking sides Students defend one position rather than exploring the nature of the discussion or disagreement.	***Curiosity*** Students see the causes of the disagreement as interesting.
Select or ignore information to suit the position Students give less value to any information that does not help them to make their case.	***Listen*** Students want to have a clear understanding of the opponent's position.
Assume and attribute (blame) Students make unchecked assumptions about what their opponents think.	***Stay connected*** Students work through their emotions about the person with whom they disagree and remain engaged with them.
Personalise the issue and generalise about the issue The person becomes the problem, not the issue.	***De-personalise*** Students are able to see the disagreement with the issue and not with the person.
Devalue other people and their viewpoints All people who hold this view are seen as the same.	***Seek understanding*** Students explore the reasons underpinning the arguments and opinion of those who disagree with them.
Demonise those who hold different viewpoints Students see the problem is the person's fault and they must be dealt with violently (can include verbal violence).	***Re-evaluate own position*** The emerging complexity of the disagreement leads the students to a more sophisticated understanding of their own position.
CONFLICT	COMPLEXITY

A ACTIVITIES

OBJECTIVE

By the end of these activities your students should know the internet influences them and understand its impact upon their thinking and actions.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The worksheets that accompany the activities below can be found at the end of this lesson.

ACTIVITY 1

DISCUSSION STARTER SHEET

RESOURCES

Worksheet 2.1: *Discussion Starter Sheet*

STEP 1

Explain what the issue is that you will be asking your students to discuss. Then, ask your students to fill in each of the boxes on Worksheet 2.1: *Discussion Starter Sheet*.

WORKSHEET 2.1

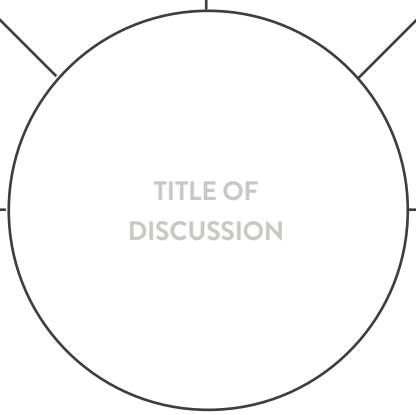
DISCUSSION STARTER SHEET

Fill in each of the boxes.

What makes me proud or hopeful about this issue...

What I know to be true about this issue...

What I have heard about this issue but I know is false...



What upsets or angers me about this issue...

What I think is true about this issue but I have some doubts...

3

After *the* Dialogue



Chapter 3.0

After the Dialogue

3.1 THE DIALOGUE IS OVER. WHAT NEXT?

In the moment of the dialogue there is often too much going on, both externally and internally, for students to make sense of how the dialogue is helping them learn. You might have thought that the discussion went wonderfully well: everyone got on, there was consensus, and you breathed deep and happy sighs of relief when it was all over. But then, on reflection, you might see that there were some missed opportunities for much deeper learning.

Conversely, you might have thought that the dialogue was emotionally fraught, that there was too much disagreement and even some falling out. However, when reflecting on the event, you might find that there were moments of critical insight and challenge that led to deeper learning.

Once the dust has settled, it is time to draw out the learning, reflect on the experience, and consider how managing a similar discussion in the future might be improved; both for the students and for yourself.

3.2 FACILITATION REFLECTION

How well did you do on facilitating the dialogue? Spend some time (at least half an hour) reflecting on these areas:

Key Questions for Facilitators

1 ***Facilitation Competency***

- Was I able to be neutral and appear neutral at all times?
- Was I aware of my own biases before I started facilitating
- Had I set up the room with the interaction of the students in mind?
- Was I clear with the students about the objectives of the dialogue?
- Did I remind students of the ground rules and were these displayed during the dialogue?
- Were expectations of the students clear?
- Were key terms defined?
- Were silence and thinking time used effectively?
- Was I able to be the effective guardian of the safe
- space?
- Was I able to lower the 'heat' when needed?
- Was I able to make use of the 'heat' in the dialogue?
- Was I able to manage myself well and talk to myself positively?

2 ***Did I intervene when...***

- Tone and / or body language became aggressive?
- Students went off topic?
- There was repetition?
- Students skirted around the issue?
- Comments remained at a superficial level?
- There was only one perspective?
- There was little or no curiosity about the issue?

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. THEORY
THE DIALOGUE IS OVER. WHAT NEXT ?
FACILITATION REFLECTION
STUDENT REFLECTION
PREPARING FOR NEXT TIME
2. ACTIVITIES
GO FISHING
3. WORKSHEETS

- Some people seemed reluctant to contribute?
- The discussion seemed to be rushing ahead of itself?
- Students responded emotionally?
- Tensions were apparent?
- Things got personal?

Use Worksheet 3.1: *Facilitation: Teacher Checklist* at the end of the chapter to help with your reflection

3 ***Respectful Challenge....*** Where would I put this dialogue on this scale?

- ***Too much respect.*** Students are afraid to speak what is in their minds for fear of upsetting someone else. This can be indicative of the space not being 'safe enough' for the participants to speak freely.

- ***The right balance.*** Students feel safe enough to challenge what they hear from others in a way that seeks to better understand the point of view and the values and beliefs underpinning that viewpoint. Ideas are challenged and not people. Students feel safe enough to speak what is in their minds even if they hold a minority viewpoint. I had set up the room with the interaction of the students in mind?

- ***Too much challenge.*** The discussion upsets some of the participants (the space is no longer safe). The discussion becomes polarised with the students aligning to rigid positions and 'digging themselves in' to this viewpoint (closing down opportunities for critical thinking).

What needs to happen for the next discussion to improve the balance? Use Worksheet 3.2: *Respectful Challenge* at the end of the chapter to help with your reflection.

Equally, if you feel that it did not go so well this time, next time it may be better.

3.3 STUDENT REFLECTION

In the *Essentials of Dialogue* we suggest that reflection is a process by which students are empowered to intentionally return to review their experiences. This process then enables them to talk about what they have done, expressing the impact of the experience clearly from a personal perspective, as well as being able to abstract key ideas and use them to synthesise new ways of thinking.

The best reflections after these sorts of discussions are ones that enable students to:

- Summarise clearly the key ideas that were put forward in the dialogue.
- Think in new ways, for example, they get students to say things like, "I used to think X and now I think Y" or "I am not so sure about this anymore"
- Acknowledge their curiosity by giving them the opportunity to articulate what they still want to know or what they still do not understand.
- Articulate their feelings about the experience.

Please refer to Activity 1: *Go Fishing*

3.4 PREPARING FOR NEXT TIME

You have completed your first attempt at a difficult dialogue using these resources and the briefing notes provided. No one imagines that having done this once you and your students necessarily know exactly what you are doing. If it went well this time, don't rest on your laurels; on a different issue, with a few different personalities, it could change for next time. Equally, if you feel that it did not go so well this time, next time it may be better. Isaacs[12] maintains that there are a few stages that the container or vessel moves through before a group feels at ease with itself so that there can be open and honest discussions and dialogues.[13]

Phases for the Evolution of the Container

- ***Instability of the container*** is the initial phase when participants have concerns for safety and trust which they must move through, leading to

12 Isaacs, Dialogue: The Art Of Thinking Together, Chapter 10

13 See *Respecting the Space* in Chapter 1

- ***Instability in the container***, when members struggle due to the clash of personally held beliefs and assumptions. It may take a lot of time to surface these conflicts. Suspending these assumptions can lead to
- ***Inquiry in the container***, with people inquiring into difficult issues and engaging in real discussion and dialogue. At this phase participants might experience working through some painful thoughts and questioning assumptions about their own and other's opinions. This phase leads to
- ***Creativity in the container***, where new understandings emerge

Don't think of moving from the first to the last phase immediately but see these dialogues as activities that will move you all forward on this scale each time you prepare, practice and reflect on the dialogue.

You may want to ask yourself how you move from one phase to the next. Refer to the facilitation guidance to help you to work out some incremental steps to move ahead with your group, considering:

1 ***Preparation***. Are there some areas that you need to spend some time addressing with the group such as respectful challenge, suspending judgment, and having an authentic voice?

2 ***Facilitation***. Is there something that you could do better next time with regard to the way you facilitated the dialogue? Pick just a couple of things for you to work on from the audit above (in 3.1) and make these a target for next time.

3 ***Reflection.*** How well were your students able to articulate what they had learned from the experience in terms of knowledge and understanding, changes in attitude, dialogue skills?

Tip

Think of this first dialogue as your baseline, against which to plan for and measure future success. Revisit the advice in this document for the areas that you want to improve on.

Revisiting the Ground Rules

Remember that your ground rules document is a living document. You agreed to the rules together before you even had a go at the difficult dialogue. Now that you and your students have experienced the dialogue, are the rules fit for purpose or do they need to be amended? It is worth revisiting them to see if you or your students feel that any are no longer relevant. Do any need to be amended or do any more need to be added?

Finally, if you are gripped by this approach and want to learn more, do take a look at the reading list provided.

A ACTIVITIES

OBJECTIVE

By the end of this chapter, you should know how to evaluate your ability to facilitate difficult dialogue in the classroom. Your students should know how to reflect upon their learning in a meaningful way, understand that similarities and differences exist and have experienced reflection upon their learning and development.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The worksheets that accompany the activities below can be found at the end of this lesson.

ACTIVITY 1

GO FISHING

PURPOSE

To facilitate reflection about the dialogue.

RESOURCES

Worksheet 3.3: *Fish Feedback Questions*

STEP 1

In a pool shaped container in the middle of the circle / horseshoe have the questions from the *Fish Feedback Questions* worksheet cut up and placed face down in the pool.

STEP 2

The teacher acts as facilitator and invites students to fish out a question and read it aloud to the group for discussion. You might want to make use of the *Discussion* activity above if you think that the discussions might be dominated by some and you are concerned others might not take part.

STEP 3

If you have a flipchart and pens, at the end of each discussion invite students (or one from each group / pair) to get up and move to make a comment with the pens. If discussion is slow then use the *Sharing our Ideas* activity to generate ideas.

STEP 4

Repeat the activity for as long as the discussion is meaningful and fruitful. Encourage students to get involved by prompting them with:

- *Name*, what are your thoughts on this matter?
- *Name*, do you agree with what *name* just said?
- *Name*, do you have anything to add to this point?

Tip

Make sure that students feel safe in making contributions and that their points are valued.

WORKSHEET 3.1

FACILITATION: TEACHER CHECKLIST (PART 1/2)

How well did you do facilitating the dialogue? Spend some time reflecting on these areas:

Facilitation Competency	*Yes or No*	*Comment*	*Next Time*
I was able to be neutral and appear neutral at all times			
I was aware of my own biases before I started facilitating			
I had set up the room with the interaction of the students in mind			
I was clear with the students about the objectives of the dialogue			
I reminded students of the ground rules and these were displayed during the dialogue			
Expectations of the students were clear			
Key terms were defined			
Silence and thinking time was used effectively			
I was able to be the effective guardian of the safe space			
I was able to lower the 'heat' when I needed to			
I was able to make use of the 'heat' in the dialogue			
I was able to manage myself well and talk to myself positively			

WORKSHEET 3.1

FACILITATION: TEACHER CHECKLIST (PART 2/2)

How well did you do facilitating the dialogue? Spend some time reflecting on these areas:

Interventions	*Yes or No*	*Technique Used*	*Comment*	*Next Time*
When tone and / or body language became aggressive				
When students went 'off topic'				
When there was repetition				
When students skirted around the issue				
When comments remained at a superficial level				
When there was only one perspective				
When there was little or no curiosity about the issue				
When some people seemed reluctant to contribute				
When the dialogue seemed to be rushing ahead of itself				
When students responded emotionally				
When tensions were apparent				
When things got personal				

WORKSHEET 3.2

RESPECTFUL CHALLENGE

Where would I put the dialogue on this scale?



TOO MUCH RESPECT	THE RIGHT BALANCE	TOO MUCH CHALLENGE
Students are afraid to speak what is in their minds for fear of upsetting someone else. This can be indicative of the space not being 'safe enough' for the participants to speak freely.	Students feel safe enough to challenge what they hear from others in a way that seeks to better understand the point of view and the values and beliefs underpinning that viewpoint. Ideas are challenged and not people. Students feel safe enough to speak what is in their minds even if they hold a minority viewpoint.	The discussion upsets some of the participants (the space is no longer safe). The discussion becomes polarised with the students aligning to rigid positions and 'digging themselves in' to this viewpoint (closing down opportunities for critical thinking).

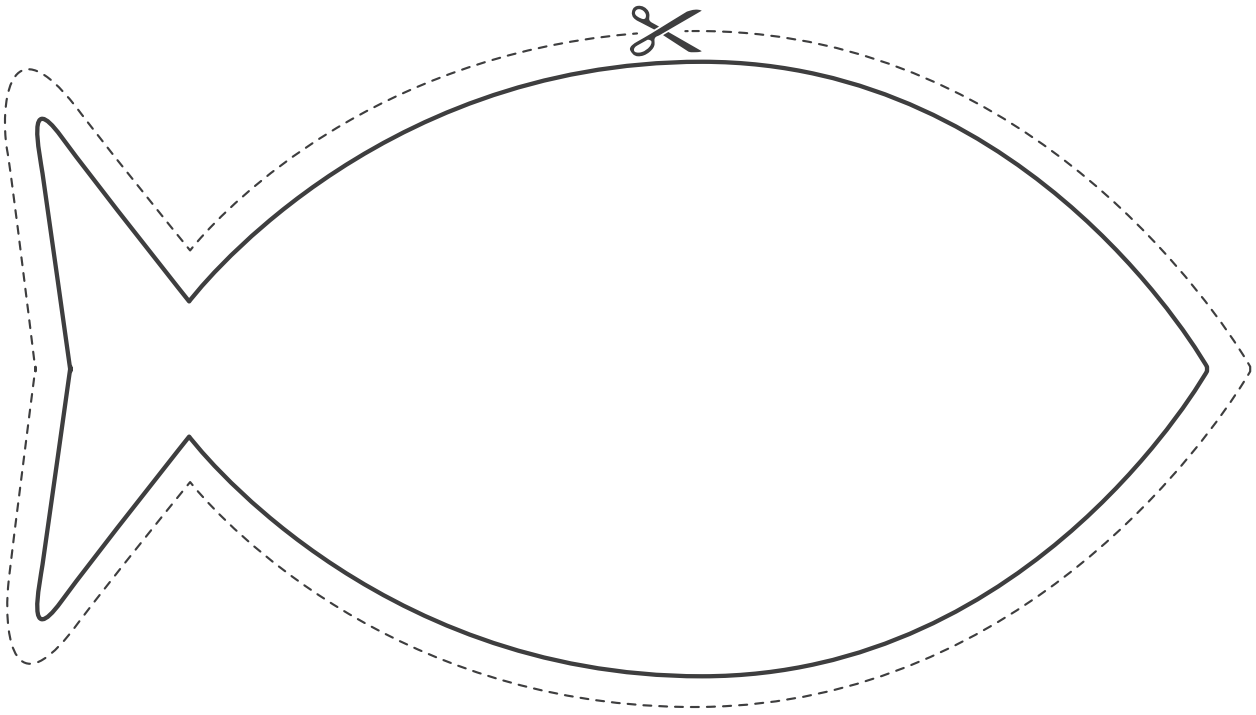
What needs to happen so the next dialogue is better balanced?

WORKSHEET 3.3

FISH FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

Print off the fish template and write questions inside. Some starter questions to include are:

1. The thing that I enjoyed the most about the dialogue was...
2. A comment / information that challenged a perception I had about the other school was...
3. When we do it again one thing I would like to change is...
4. I can see that other people's faith and beliefs help them to understand the world because...
5. Through the dialogue, and preparing for it, I've learned _____ about myself.
6. One thing I was surprised to find out was...
7. How important are other people's beliefs and values when they think about how to act?
8. I've learned that it is important to listen to others because...



FOLLOW US
x.com/gen_global_
instagram.com/gen_global

GENERAL ENQUIRIES
helpdesk@generation.global

Since producing our Essentials of Dialogue resource, we have had feedback that teachers want to go beyond those resources, to address more challenging topics in the classroom.

Everyone involved with education knows the feeling of being asked questions by young people that are difficult or challenging. Sometimes educators react by closing down those topics of discussion, suggesting that the classroom isn't the place to address them. We believe that a more positive approach is to address them openly and honestly through dialogue in class.

Difficult Dialogue in the Classroom builds upon our earlier work, to outline an approach to addressing such issues using tried and tested dialogue solutions. Each section contains a short theory section discussing and explaining the suggested approaches, as well as suggested activities for practical classroom use.

We present these resources to help anyone who wants an effective approach to addressing difficult issues with young people. More on Generation Global can be found at: https://generation.global/

Copyright © October 2017-2025 by the International Baccalaureate Organization

Illustrations by Beth Rydlewski. All rights reserved. Citation, reproduction, and/or translation of this publication, in whole or in part, for educational or other non-commercial purposes is authorised provided the source is fully acknowledged. The International Baccalaureate Organization is a foundation registered in Switzerland, with its office located at Rue du Prédé-la-Bichette 1, Geneva, Switzerland, CH-1202.

FIND OUT MORE
GENERATION.GLOBAL