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Difficult Dialogues at LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

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Summary

This document summarizes the process of leading a difficult dialogues workshop. Supplemental files are attached, which include a script and slides. We recommend following the script to ensure the workshop is organized and follows the methods outlined below. These materials have served as the basis for an ongoing series of workshops at LaGuardia Community College in a variety of contexts, from faculty and staff discussing gender identity to student interactions at the College. Most recently and frequently, the workshop has been held for Student Success Mentors to help them navigate their relationships with the students they supervise and the professors they work with and report to. The text in this document and the attached files can be found at the following website: https://guides.laguardia.edu/difficultdialogues.

Start Here

Welcome to our Difficult Dialogues LibGuides! This tab is for you to reference if you ever forget where to find something in our LibGuides. If you still have questions, please do not hesitate to ask (Click here to go to the **Contact Information & Resources Tab**)!

What will you find on the LibGuides tabs? This LibGuide contains four tabs that contain information to help guide you through the different stages of facilitating a workshop. They include tabs on the preparation, implementation, and post-reflection process of the workshop, as well as a tab with contact information and resources.

- **"Before the Workshop" tab.** Here you will find information about the workshop timing, communication, recommendations about co-facilitation, and guidelines for respectful dialogues. We recommend reviewing this material well in advance of hosting a workshop. Use this tab to plan the logistics of your workshop, and/or revise materials so they best suite your objectives and audience. Please note that, although you will need to review all the LibGuides tab in preparation for the workshop you are hosting, this tab will focus on the logistical elements.
- **"Workshop" tab.** Here you will find a general outline for a Difficult Dialogues workshop, a PowerPoint file to guide your Difficult Dialogues workshop, and a Word document with more detail about the Workshop. You will also find the materials you will need for a workshop. These materials may be used as is, if they fit your dialogue goals and audience, or revised for your needs.

- **"After Workshop" tab.** Here you will find follow-up workshop information and feedback surveys you may use. We recommend reviewing this tab upon completion of your workshop. It contains materials to help you reflect upon what occurred during the workshop, as well as tools for collecting feedback from your attendees.
- **"Contact Information and Resources" tab.** Here you will find contact information, as well as links to key resources for hosting Difficult Dialogues, and connecting with various groups and organizations. Please feel free to reach out to any one of us if you need help.

To get started, please click on the "**Before the Workshop"** tab above to begin your planning!

What are Difficult Dialogues?

These Dialogues and materials are adapted from the work of [Essential Partners](#).

Dialogues are:

- A structured way of discussing difficult issues
- A way to work successfully with different people
- One tool of many that you can use when interacting with different groups (e.g., colleagues, professors, students) to promote a positive environment and create connections

What is the purpose of a dialogue workshop?

This workshop is meant to provide you with the opportunity to:

- Gain a better understanding of an issue
- Learn about others' perspectives
- Engage in and learn tools for guiding respectful discussions

What are the expectations and outcomes?

By the end of this workshop, you should be able to:

- Consider how navigating conflict or difficult situations is part of every work environment
- Identify strategies that create positive environments versus challenging environments
- Create agreed upon ground rules for discussions, such as in Studio Hour, the classroom, or the work environment
- Learn dialogue techniques you might use when conflict arises
- Use surveys to get feedback on the workshop you hosted

Before Workshop
Two Keys
There are two keys to a meaningful workshop, **Respectful Communication** and **Skilled Facilitation**. We all have an idea of what respectful communication looks like, but there are

specific methods that should be included in any dialogue workshop. Skilled facilitation might take some practice, but good preparation will help the workshop run smoothly. Guidelines for both of these keys are presented below.

Respectful Communication

Respectful communication is key to any dialogue, and the facilitator(s) are always role models for the participants.

Respectful communication is built by:

- Building in space for active listening
- Speaking from one's own experience
- Agreeing to ground rules
- Ensuring that the group is not too big

Building in space for active listening: Listening is one of the most important skills for a dialogue to be successful, yet it doesn't happen on its own. One can create a space for active listening by agreeing to time limits on how much each person can speak and building in space after a person speaks for silent reflection. Rather than responding immediately, participants can jot down their thoughts on a piece of paper so that they can ask them later when the conversation is opened up.

Speaking from one's own experience: Phrases that make categorical assumptions, like "People always..." or "You think..." always shut down a conversation. At the end of the day, each of us can only speak with authority of our own personal experiences, and this should be the basis for a successful dialogue. Phrases that begin "For myself..." or "My experience..." allow people to see into each other's worlds and to become familiar with each other's perspectives.

Agreeing to ground rules: Ground rules are necessary for a conversation to stay focused, but these should not be set by the facilitator(s). The facilitator should propose ground rules as examples, and afterwards ask for modifications to them by the group. Only after the group has agreed to the ground rules should the dialogue be started. Common ground rules are: speaking from personal experience, setting speaking limits, building in listening time, and agreeing on the overall format.

Ensuring the group Is not too big: Dialogues with 5–8 people are about the right size for effective communication. If the group is bigger, then it's wise to break it into smaller groups during the actual discussion providing there are enough facilitators.

Skilled Facilitation

Facilitating a workshop is not hard, but it does take planning and preparation to ensure that it is a positive experience for everyone.

In order to facilitate a workshop, one should:

- Prepare the dialogue outline in advance

- Decide on speaking parts if there is more than one facilitator
- Practice the dialogue beforehand
- Print out any materials and purchase any items that are needed
- Prepare a survey to deliver after the workshop

Preparing the dialogue outline: A sample dialogue outline is provided on the "Workshop" tab. A good outline should have both the structure as well as the timing of events. It is a facilitator's job to make sure that the workshop stays on time, which may require respectfully asking that participants adhere to the agreed on schedule.

Decide on speaking parts: If more than one person is facilitating, then speaking parts should be chosen beforehand. Facilitators should have approximately equal time speaking.

Practice the dialogue: It is very important to practice the dialogue at least one day before the workshop so that there is time to make any changes if necessary. The practice workshop should mimic the real workshop as closely as possible so that the facilitators can get comfortable with their parts. This will also help ensure that the timing is right.

Print out any materials and purchase any items: Each participant should have an outline of the planned dialogue to which they can refer. a list of basic ground rules, and If time is allotted for listening and jotting down notes they should be provided with paper and pens or pencils. Besides these items, snacks and drinks are always welcome at a dialogue. Spending time conversing over coffee and snacks at the beginning of a workshop helps participants relax and build trust before the formal dialogue has started.

Prepare a survey: Facilitating a workshop can be a wonderful experience, but it is difficult to know how participants felt about it unless they are asked. A short survey that is delivered at the end of the workshop allows the facilitator(s) to receive feedback that can be used to refine their skills and develop future workshops.

Workshop
Overview
Welcome to the Workshop tab! This tab will provide you with an overview of a Difficult Dialogues style workshop. Each component of a workshop is broken down, and an example script is provided. If you still have questions, please do not hesitate to ask (Click here to go to the **Contact Information & Resources Tab**)!

Basic Structure: A workshop is typically about 1.5 hours. In order to successfully facilitate a workshop, you will need to consider the timeline for each section, how best to work within the format (e.g., online/in-person), who the participants are, and what type of feedback is important and how you would like to collect it.

Each workshop should have an **Opening Section**, a **Core Content Section**, and a **Conclusion Section**.

- **The Opening Section** introduces the facilitators and participants, explains the format, includes an activity to help everyone feel more comfortable, and sets the ground rules.

Getting food and drinks beforehand can be considered part of this section because it can function as an informal ice breaker.

- **The Core Content Section** is where the material is presented and the participants take part in the activities. Most of time should be spent on activities and discussion, and only the minimum amount of time necessary to explain the concepts should be spent on presentation. Different types of activities can be incorporated, but the gold standard for these types of workshops are: 1) reflective discussions that focus on a single question and provide time for participants listen to each other, and 2) role playing activities that allow participants to practice techniques in real time. A good strategy is to incorporate one of each into the workshop, which should take about 1 hour total.
- **The Conclusion Section** allows participants to feel a sense of closure, make connections, and address any last minute confusions or concerns. Providing enough time for real discussion allows participants to feel satisfied with the experience and valued. Providing a survey as part of this section is a good idea.

Below is an example of a 1.5 hour workshop on the topic of ground rules using an online for Student Success Mentors (SSMs) participants. The full workshop script, as well as other materials, can be found in the side panel.

Example Workshop (time: 1.5 hours, format: online, participants: SSMs, topic: Ground Rules)
Opening Section (approximately 15 minutes)

- *Introductions*: Each facilitator introduces themselves. Each facilitator's background information, preferred pronouns, and experience can be briefly provided.

- *Context and Goals*: Explain the reason for the workshop and the principles of the Difficult Dialogues, which are that deep listening and structured interactions greatly help us to understand each other better.

- *Share*: If there is time and the facilitator(s) feel comfortable, then it is beneficial to share a personal experience around the effectiveness of the workshop material.

- *Propose Group Agreements*: Propose to the group some basic agreements that have worked in the past. The group can modify these by adding or subtracting from them, but they should be agreed upon by everyone before moving forward. Respectful communication cannot occur without every person's consent, so if the group cannot come to a consensus on the agreements, then the workshop should not be ended. Basic agreements are listed below.

  o We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience.

  o We will not criticize the views of other participants or attempt to persuade them.

  o We will listen with resilience, "hanging in" when what is said is hard to hear

  o We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator.

o   We will not interrupt except to indicate that

Core Content Section (approximately 1 hour)

- *Warm-Up Activity (15 min for activity and 5 min for reflection)*: The first activity should be something that activates the participants' memories, feelings, and thoughts on the topic of the workshop. Often this can be done by asking them to reflect on a past experience, and then these can be collected through a whiteboard or a Jamboard (or something similar) if online. A good time frame is to allow 15 minutes for the activity and 5 minutes for reflection. The first activity of the SSM workshop asks participants to reflect on past experiences, one positive and one difficult, and to provide specific examples.

- *First Main Activity (30 min)*: The main activity is where new learning is introduced. Now that the participants are emotionally and mentally focused on the topic, the facilitators can present them with new ways of thinking about these types of situations and techniques for successfully managing them.

    o   Explain the basic material, in this case ground rules (5 min). Explain what they are and how they are created and implement. Share examples. Do not spent too much time on explaining.

    o   Break the participants into small working groups and assign them a task (10 min). In this case, the task was to create model ground rules for FYS studio hour.

    o   Discuss as a group (5 min). Review what each group developed, in this case ground rules. The facilitator(s) should make sure that key points are highlighted during this discussion if the groups missed some of them.

    o   Practice (8 min): All activities that introduce new materials and ideas should incorporate time for practicing them. This can be done through role-playing, but in this case the facilitators used a "collectively create" model, in which participants practiced making ground rules as a group by coming up with methods for introducing them to FYS studio hour.

    o   Summary (2 min): Finish the activity by summarizing key points.

- *Second Main Activity (30 min)*: The second activity should complement the first. They should both be tried together conceptually and expand in different ways on the same basic idea. In this case, the second activity was on the topic of what to do if a conflict arises in spite of ground rules. This was explored using the PAIRS model (Pan, Ask, Interrupt, Relate, Share). The second activity follows the basic format of the first activity, although slight adjustments can be made for timing, and a different practice activity should be used so that the participants have a range of experiences.

    o   Explain the PAIRS concept (5 min). The time frame in the script file assigns 20 minutes to these first two steps, but it does not make clear that most of the time should be spent on the second step in a group interactive discussion of each step.

- Interactively discuss each step as a group (13 min). For each step, the participants should come up with examples from their experiences after the facilitator(s) present them.
- Practice (10 min): For this activity role-playing was used for the practice portion of the activity. The role-play scenarios that were given to the participants for this activity were:
  - Scenario 1: SSM with student who has camera on
  - Scenario 2: SSM with student who has camera off
  - Scenario 3: SSM with professor
- Summary (2 min): Finish the activity by summarizing key points.

Conclusion Section (approximately 15 minutes)

- *Concluding Remarks (5 min)*: Summarize the most important ideas from the workshop.
- *Questions and Answers (5 min)*: It is a good idea to leave some time for participants to ask question activity.
- *Feedback (5 min)*: This is a good time to administer any survey while the material is still fresh in everyone's minds.

Workshop Materials (see attached files)
This workshop script is from a 1.5 hour online SSM Training implemented by 3 facilitators. Please consider how you might need to revise this outline based upon your timeframe, location, audience, and number of facilitators.

These slides are used during Difficult Dialogues trainings for Student Success Mentors

After Workshop
What Happens After a Workshop?
After a workshop, it is time to solicit feedback and analyze where the workshop was successful and where it could be improved. No workshop is so good that there is not room for improvement, and facilitators grow with practice and reflection.

Following the workshop, the facilitators should:

- Solicit feedback
- Discuss and reflect on the results

Soliciting feedback: Feedback from participants is vital to developing a successful set of dialogue workshops. Informal feedback, such as what participants say afterwards, is certainly useful, but anonymous feedback that is guided through questions is usually the most important. A simple paper survey can be delivered immediately following the workshop, or a

link to a survey online can be used with a more flexible time frame. However, the sooner participants take the survey, the fresher the experience will be in their minds.

Discussing and reflecting: Collecting survey results is not helpful unless they are analyzed and reflected upon. It is helpful if the survey is designed so that it can be analyzed statistically, but this is not always necessary. Just providing a space for thoughtful comments is valuable. The reflection process should be done with honesty and a willingness to listen to constructive criticism. Make note of what went right and what could have been improved, and then make the changes in the workshop for the next time. If possible, make the changes within two weeks of the workshop so that everything is fresh in your mind.

Contacts and Resources

Community Resources

Emails

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Resources

This work is based off the work of Essential Partners: https://whatisessential.org/