Mindful Facilitation Training for the Educational Community

HANDOUTS & EXERCISES

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21 Ways to Stop a Conversation about Diversity

(Circle the ones you’ve said and put an X by the ones you can’t understand why they would stop a conversation on diversity.)

1. I don’t see color. We’re all just human beings.
2. We have more similarities than differences.
3. I think deep down we’re all the same.
4. Racism/sexism happens all over the world.
5. I think some people use diversity as an excuse.
6. I think identifying into groups only further divides us.
7. There are lots of other diversity issues besides race and gender.
8. I’ve never seen that happen before. Are you sure it happened?
9. Why does everything have to be so politically correct?
10. I was just joking.
11. Things are a lot better than they used to be. Don’t you agree?
12. We’d hire more women and people of color, but are they qualified?
13. I love everyone.
14. Do you really think it’s that bad?
15. I’m so glad you’re not like one of them.
16. You know, you’re a credit to your people.
17. You don’t see other races complaining.
18. I think it’s reverse racism/sexism.
19. America is the best place to live.
20. Some of my best friends are colored.
21. You speak such good English, where did you learn it from?
Recently, Senator Jeff Flake’s [R-AZ] fifteen year old son, Tanner, tweeted that a “faggot” stole his bike. He also used the moniker of ‘niggerkiller’ in an online game and tweeted that Mexicans were the “scum of the earth.” Senator Flake issued an apology that he was disappointed at his son’s insensitivity. The Senator also went on to say, “I’ve spoken to him about this, he has apologized, and I apologize as well. This language is unacceptable, anywhere.”

At first glance, everything seems quite sincere and upfront. We might even be urged by our friends and colleagues to move on since they both apologized and took responsibility. But, there are real issues here that remain unanswered and questions that still need to be asked. For example, from whom and where did Tanner ‘learn’ about these groups? Is this simply Tanner’s personal opinion or is it symptomatic of his community, school and/or family? What is the extent of his exposure to Mexicans, African Americans and gays? Is it simply Tanner’s ‘insensitivity’ or rather that he is racist towards African Americans and Mexicans and heterosexist towards gays? What is Tanner actually apologizing for? That he got ‘caught’ and embarrassed his father (who happens to be a senator) or that he truly understands how painful and derogatory his remarks are to each of these groups? And while we’re at it, to whom is he apologizing? Why was it just to his father? Additionally, if these types of remarks are ‘unacceptable anywhere,’ then why did Tanner feel safe enough to send them to his friends and classmates? And how long has this been going on without anyone even noticing or feeling that something was morally and socially wrong?

What is needed from Tanner is a ‘meaningful apology’ that has long-term significance, takes responsibility and demonstrates learning and application for him, his family and his community. I would like to propose that Tanner is merely reflecting a nation that lacks the training and the modeling of what makes an ‘apology’ truly sincere and heartfelt. So, here are some useful pointers for Senator Flake and Tanner, as well as for Paula Deen:

9 MEANINGFUL WAYS TO APOLOGIZE

1. Communicate what you are apologizing for and what you’ve learned.
2. Reflect on your stereotypes/biases prior to the incident.
3. Take responsibility for the ‘impact’ of your actions, words and perceptions Avoid defending your good intentions or past history.
4. Be curious about the ‘impact’ of your actions and remain open to hearing reactions from others.
5. Feel and express sincere remorse, empathy and compassion.
6. Follow through by changing your behavior/attitudes at home, in your community and at work.
7. Share what you’ve learned with your family, colleagues, and community.
8. If possible, apologize to that particular group you’ve offended and enter into on-going conversations with them.
9. Be willing to hear from those groups that were targeted by validating their concerns, experiences, hurt and anguish.

“If you acknowledge and accept your mistakes, what I see are not your faults, but your goodness. If you make excuses for your mistakes by claiming your goodness and good intentions, then all I see are your faults.” (Author Unknown)
HOW WE HAVE FAILED OUR WHITE STUDENTS

As has happened in classrooms all across this country, when racism is brought up, often white students become defensive, adversarial and in many cases, in denial that racism even exists. I would like to propose that rather than labeling them as racist, that we look at how educators and society as a whole have failed our white students. A society that is too often ready to blame others, rather than to look at ourselves and how we might be a part of the problem. Here are some of my thoughts on how I believe we have failed our white students:

A society preoccupied with our similarities and not our differences

When I have asked audiences to define what ‘diversity’ means to them, they almost always say ‘honoring our differences’. Yet, when I pair everyone into dyads as a way for them to get to know each other, in the debrief they only mention what they had in common, never about their differences. Why? Because as a society, we have never really integrated our cultural, social and economic differences into our workplaces, our schools, or even into our business practices. We are better at honoring and celebrating our differences than putting them into practice. That’s why I believe we are more multi-holidayed than multi-cultural, because there is more emphasis on our commonalities. However, in the United States, that ‘commonality’ often means adopting a ‘white, male, Christian, English-speaking (without an accent), heterosexual, upper class model’ to be fully accepted as an American. The consequence of that model is that many white students are unconsciously taught to see themselves as the ‘norm’ (real Americans) and all others who are different as ‘those people’ or immigrants or non-whites.

By not identifying with their European heritage

Often, when the issues of whiteness and white privilege come up in classrooms, many white students often become defensive and nervous, even irritated and angry. Why? Because most of their lives, having lived in predominantly white communities, they have not seen themselves or been seen by their parents or friends as being ‘white’ or EuroAmerican, let alone had prolonged and intimate discussions about their white privileges or whiteness. What has compounded this ‘bubble’ is that most of their instructors and role models are also white and have rarely had these experiences and discussions, either. So, when they enter into new environments, like college or a diverse neighborhood or workplace, they lack the wider perspective, experience and words to relate to others who are different from themselves. They do not know what they don’t know. Like a fish doesn’t know it’s in water, thinks this is the whole world. And so, to hide their fear of not knowing and and no longer feeling in control, they are taught by other whites to be defensive, adversarial and in denial. Hence, a vicious circle of wanting to know, but not wanting to know too much.

This is a four part series on how we have failed our white students and our students of color. Included in each article will be suggestions on how to create a culturally responsive classroom.

HOW WE HAVE FAILED OUR WHITE STUDENTS (PART 2)

As has happened in classrooms all across this country, when racism is brought up, often white students become defensive, adversarial and in many cases, in denial that racism even exists. Faculties of color and even white instructors have often talked about being accused of ‘reverse racism’ and creating ‘divisiveness’ for even bringing up the issue of race or racism. I would like to propose that rather than labeling these white students as racist, that we look at how as educators and society as a whole have been a part of the problem. Here are some of my thoughts on how I believe we have failed our white students:

**We only talk about inclusion and not exclusion**

As a society we are constantly talking about inclusion—that we are “one people” and “one nation”. We have been trained and rewarded not to talk about exclusion—what divides us and how our schools, neighborhoods, workplaces and government play a part in that daily exclusion. So, when white students are faced with the discussion of slavery and the institution of white privilege and racism, their first reaction is that this is ‘dividing us’ or a ‘thing of the past’. Many white students become defensive and adversarial, as they have been taught to see themselves as having earned their privileges as individuals and not because of their skin color or as the result of a white-dominated society. Someone once said, “When the truth becomes too hard to bear, we make up another.” The work here is to help our white students see that even though they didn’t actually create these inequities of privilege, they benefit from them everyday and so will their children, simply by virtue of the color of their skin, their gender, their religion, their sexuality and their class status. As Virginia Wolf once wrote, “We are all different. It is the value we place on those differences that divides and separates us.”

**White students have not been taught how to emotionally connect or to be aware when they are disconnected**

Many white students are often not taught how to emotionally connect or to notice when they are disconnected from their feelings in moments of grief, anger or hurt. As a consequence they often do not understand the relevance in their own lives of empathy, self-reflection, and taking responsibility. They haven’t learned how to authentically apologize, to notice the intent and impact of their communications, or to be curious about how they have been dipped into their ‘whiteness’ by society, their families and teachers. This lack of knowledge keeps them from fully participating in diversity conversations and relationships because they have often been taught to be defensive, in denial or adversarial when confronted with what is missing in their relationships, especially with those who are different from themselves. Will Amado Syldor-Severino has labeled this the ‘privilege of numbness’: the ability to objectify and detach from the emotional trauma of racism by simply going ‘emotionally numb’ or by saying, “I don’t know.”

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Looking for ways to begin diversity conversations in your classrooms and workplaces? Join our mailing list today to receive free handouts.

http://www.stirfryseminars.com/resources/handouts.php
A growing number of students of color drop out of college every year, not just because of finances or grades, but because of a lack of ‘connection’ with other students, faculty and the community around them. I believe that before we can ‘remedy’ this situation, we must first explore the ways we have failed our students of color:

A lack of color on campus

One of the major ways we’ve failed our students of color is that they often can’t ‘see themselves’ in the student population or within the faculty or administration. When students of color can’t see professionals looking like them, they lose in many ways. First, they are taught that leadership is a ‘white privilege’ and that few professionals of color qualify. Secondly, they come to realize that white administrators and faculty rarely ‘understand’ what it is like to be a minority in a sea of whites nor are they willing to bring the issue up. When students of color attempt to breach this veil of silence, they are often trivialized and told that there just aren’t enough qualified faculty of color to choose from or that as whites, they too, are ‘concerned’. However, that ‘concern’ seldom leads to any change or sense of responsibility. The third loss is that in not seeing and experiencing faculty of color, students of color often emulate whites in terms of their ways of being ‘professional’, their speech, dress, and ways of seeing the world, including folks of color. This ‘loss of self’ is profoundly sad because folks of color can never be ‘white’ enough or lose themselves. There is no PhD that can shield a person of color from the inevitable pain of racism.

Not knowing how to create a ‘safe container’

Most white faculty do not know how to create a ‘safe container’ to talk about diversity because they have not been trained on how to mediate conflicts or how create a sense of community amongst diverse groups. Students relate about how when white students become defensive and adversarial with students of color who try to talk about their experiences, their instructors often change the topic or end the discussion because it’s becoming too emotional and appearing ‘out of control’. Another failure is that most white faculty are unprepared to talk about white privilege as it affects people of color on a daily basis because they have seldom had to look at their own white privilege. They often relate to diversity through a ‘white lens’, which is often about celebrating, eating, or dancing. Another ‘blind spot’ occurs when white faculty often view discrimination as an individual rather than as a group or institutional experience. Much like a student of color once observed- when talking to another white student about racism, the white student demanded that he see him as an individual, but insisted on seeing, the student of color, as a group. This disconnect often goes unnoticed and leaves both groups feeling frustrated and incomplete.

This is a four part series on how we have failed our white students and our students of color. Included in each article will be suggestions on how to create a culturally responsive classroom.

10 Ways to Begin a Diversity Conversation in the Classroom

1. Have students introduce themselves by name and ethnicity and share one thing about themselves that isn’t outwardly apparent to others.

2. Have students bring pictures of their family (including themselves) and say something about each picture. Then have the group share one thing that they remember about what they heard.

3. Request that everyone have lunch with someone who is different from themselves and who they don’t know at least once a week. Then have each pair share what it was like for them and what they learned. Encourage the group to ask the pair questions.

4. Have students sit with someone new, so that different folks get to meet each other and break up old alliances.

5. Have students share in their native language how to say, “Good morning” and “Thank you”. If they don’t know, have them do some research or look around to find someone who might know. Have the group repeat each saying and have an oral quiz with prizes to reward those who remember.

6. Have students share three things that are special about their culture and why.

7. Have each student share about a famous writer, poet, artist, dancer, musician etc. from their culture and what this person means to them.

8. Have each student interview their parents/grandparents about what it has been like living and surviving in this culture. Ask the group to share what was similar and what was different about each story.

9. Ask the class to share the many ways ethnic groups are different and similar.

10. Ask students to share what is special about their neighborhoods.
9 Ways to Begin A Diversity Conversation with Teachers & Staff

1. Have everyone share their ethnicity, when they first discovered they were different and how it affected them then and now.

2. Have each teacher and staff member share their ethnicity and one thing that is special about their culture and why.

3. Have everyone share what their definition of diversity is, how they actualize that in their classrooms/work settings, in specific and tangible everyday practices in their relationships with the students, and how they integrate diversity into teaching practices and curriculum.

4. Have each teacher/staff share what is good and what is hard in talking about race/racism with their students and peers.

5. Have each teacher/staff share their experiences and what they notice about how racism plays itself out in their school site amongst students/staff/teachers.

6. Have each teacher/staff share how racism has affected their lives and what it has taken for them to get to this room.

7. Have each teacher/staff share how race/racism affects a student’s attitude, self-esteem, behavior, and classroom performance.

8. Have each teacher/staff share what they think are effective ways to talk about racism, to deal with the issues of racism and to unlearn it. Also, have them mention what kinds of trainings they would need to sharpen their skills and knowledge.

9. Fill each classroom and hallway with quotes/pictures from all cultures and discuss what they mean with students, teachers, and staff.
HOW TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL TOWN HALL MEETING
(Now that we’ve, hopefully, learned how not to have one!)
Part One

When the mayor of Ferguson declared that there was no race problem in their town, despite the killing of Michael Brown by Deputy Darren Wilson, as well as deep racial divisions between the city government, law enforcement and black residents, I knew it was going to be all downhill from that moment on. Sadly, I was right. Weeks later, after continuous protests and daily confrontations with police and residents, the mayor finally declared that there would be a town hall meeting to find a way to calm things down and to allow residents to voice their concerns. He set up some guidelines that would eventually be his downfall and further polarize the city. Here are some of the reasons why the town hall meeting failed and also some ways it could have succeeded:

Panels are distancing and often not representative of the community. In the case of Ferguson, the panel was comprised of almost all white men. The use of tables immediately gave the impression of “them versus us.” Get rid of all the tables. Have everyone sitting together in the audience. Request that there be no uniforms and invite everyone to bring their families. In short, make the main objective equal voices and provide the opportunity for all involved to speak. Now, how do you assure that hundreds of people have equal time to speak? Simple—everyone pairs up with someone they don’t know and who is different from themselves. Now what? Read on….

Hire a professional Diversity Facilitator/Mediator who understands diversity issues, can create a safe container for community discussions, and has mediation experience to deal with any conflicts that might arise. Once everyone is paired up, have them share their real name, what it means and where it came from, their ethnicity and their favorite ice cream. After both have shared, allow time for the pairs to talk to each other.

Before you begin the next exercise, provide questions on a card that encourage curiosity and caring instead of adversarial and defensive statements, as they are discouraging and create distrust. StirFry Seminars has created “The Art of Mindful Inquiry” cards, which are available for purchase, with the following questions and statements: 1) “What I heard you say was…” 2) “Tell me more about…” 3) “What angered you about what happened?” 4) “What hurt you about what happened?” 5) “What’s familiar about what happened?” 6) “What do you need/want?”

Now, you can have the pairs play the Assumptions Game. Each participant thinks of three assumptions that they’ve made about the person in front of them. Then each person shares one of their assumptions and checks to see if it is true or not. Each person only shares one assumption at a time until they have both finished their lists. The listener can respond or ask any questions that might come up, such as, “Tell me why you thought that.” Or, “I can’t believe you said that!” The objective is to have everyone ‘check out’ their assumptions instead of holding them in and making judgments that ‘stereotype’ someone or keeps them from getting to know who someone really is.

This is Part One of a two-part series on how to have a successful town hall meeting. In the coming months, StirFry Seminars will be conducting Town Hall Community Gatherings all over the country in an effort to create a national conversation on race. Don’t you think it’s time we have this conversation, not just because someone has been shot, but because we need to find a way to generate a more authentic and honest relationship, to face our fears of each other and to embrace our differences as a community and as a nation? James Baldwin once said:

“If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don’t see.”
ONE OF THE MOST GLARING MISTAKES THAT THE MAYOR OF FERGUSON MADE DURING HIS FAMOUS TOWN HALL MEETING DEBUT WAS TELLING THE AUDIENCE THAT HE AND THE REST OF THE PANEL WOULD ONLY LISTEN AND NOT RESPOND. I REMEMBER A CEO OF A TOP OIL COMPANY TELLING ME THAT COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES WAS EASY – ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS LISTEN. THAT IS ONE THE MOST POPULAR MISGUIDED MYTHS IN DIVERSITY WORK: THAT ALL IT TAKES IS ACTIVE LISTENING. MY SENSE IS THAT THIS ONE-SIDED PERSPECTIVE ALLOWS WHITE MALES AND WELL MEANING NEW AGE GROUPS TO AVOID HAVING TO DEAL WITH THE DEEP EMOTIONS AND RAGE THAT TALKING ABOUT DIVERSITY ISSUES CAN OFTEN ENGENDER. IT ALSO SILENCES ANY CONFLICTS OR ANYONE HAVING TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY OR TO HAVE TO SELF-REFLECT ABOUT ANY OF THEIR ACTIONS/COMMENTS. HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS THAT MIGHT HELP:

**Curiosity is the Gateway to Empathy**

What this Buddhist saying conveys is that curiosity helps us to have more compassion once we learn more about the context of another’s life and experiences. The only way that can happen is to notice two very important aspects of curiosity: learning about the person in front of us and how that enhances our learning about ourselves in the process. Being curious about another person requires asking questions and being open to hearing the answers. It also means noticing if we are trying to understand from their perspective rather than trying to make sense of their world through our own biases and cultural lens.

What can help in this process is noticing the impact of our words and actions as well as our intentions. When we enter into this relationship, is it an equal one? Do we value their perspectives in the same way as we value our own? And if we do not, then are we willing to explore why and how that might affect our level of trust and intimacy with each other?

**Some of the ways to ‘open up’ a conversation from the perspective of curiosity:**

a. Tell me more about what happened…

b. What makes it unsafe for you to tell the truth to…?

c. What would you have liked to have said?

d. What do you leave at the door when you come to work/school?

**Or maybe even using empathetic responses such as:**

a. That must have been so painful to see…

b. You were so young to have gone through all that…

c. As you were sharing, I couldn’t help but feel for you as a parent myself, how hard that must have been to see your child…

d. How frustrating that must have felt to see that no one did anything or said anything…

Perhaps the secret to all good communication and relationships is to begin with ourselves. As I wrote many years ago...

“To become connected with each other, we need to be truly alive to what is happening around us - to notice what lies before us, within us and in the moment. The clues are all around us, in the words that are spoken and in the silences that deafen a room.”
"We are really only one question away from being connected; from learning about one another’s journey. And that one question only comes about when we are willing to be open to hearing another truth outside our own."

— Lee Mun Wah