Confirmation Facilitation Environment

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Confirmation. How Do You Apply It?

The Confirmation facilitation environment speaks to your first steps at the start of the course, when your students first come together for a class learning experience. Many educators intuitively take a certain set of steps at the start of a learning experience that helps ground the class and prepare them for a learning experience that focus on the learners' needs. While these approaches are more familiar for some, they are not always familiar for all educators. It is often the case that inclusive facilitation practices have not been a part of one's formal training, or have not been role modeled.

Because of the diversity present within any one group, students often bring into the classroom a range of beliefs, assumptions, perspectives, and different ways of understanding and making meaning from the interactions and information that they are presented with. When such differences are not considered as a part of the learning, some students are left to feel excluded, not represented, misunderstood, or silenced during classroom dialogue.

Design Features of Class Learning Experience in **Confirmation Phase**

Below are specific design components of the course experience that the facilitator leads when a class has been convened:

➤ **Do Classroom Introductions**

This can be approached in a variety of ways, but it is also an opportunity to learn more about who your students are and what is important to them. Aside from asking name and class year in opening activities, helpful prompts may include:

- Why is this research important to you?
- How do you see this course helping you attain your goals?
- What are some important health issues you believe need more attention?

And always make sure that sufficient time is allotted for such activities.

You can also create space for learning about the unique experiences and identities of each person, which can signal that these experiences are important and have value in the learning environment. For example, a journaling activity or discussion board assignment early in the course may allow you to gain more in-depth understanding about your student through a shared personal narrative. Such insights can be beneficial to approaches you take as a facilitator as questions, comments, or concerns emerge in real time during discussion.

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➤ Review Learning Outcomes and Expectations

Be clear about what students will leave with as a result of the course—what will be covered and what you will not cover. Take this time to speak to your intentions for the type of learning experience you want them to have. In discussing expectations, there is a chance to name ahead of time any key dynamics that tend to arise and speak to how you plan to navigate those moments. This may include dynamics you have encountered in dialogue, or items that have been well documented as a part of cross-group dialogue on matters of identity. It can be a good opportunity to allay any fears or mis-perceptions related to the pending conversations at this point in the course.

➤ Co-Create Group Agreements, or Group Norms, for Dialogue

It can be helpful to spend time exploring the various cognitive or emotion-based dynamics that can emerge within a group of students as it relates to having discussions on diversity, identity, power and privilege. Co-creating with your students a set of mutual expectations or agreements for how you want to engage as a group can be helpful. With group agreements, you can never assume that shared understanding is present within a group of learners without probing for it.

You can start by asking the group "What do you need in this class for an inclusive learning experience?" Listen critically to what the group shares regarding what issues are most salient for them. This process is also an opportunity for you to contribute to the group agreements your own thoughts on differences with communication styles, approaches you have found helpful, and steps the group can take when encountering conflict, for example.

Take the time to unpack and explore the group agreements in more depth. Even terms like "respect" and "safe space" can mean different things to different people. Not only may they be interpreted differently, but students may have different perspectives on how they look in practice. Ultimately you want to arrive at a place of shared understanding and commitment to these items. This should be an ongoing tool for you to use with your class as time progresses—revisit and unpack as needed.

➤ Using Activities or Discussion Prompts That Establish a Supportive Environment

It can be helpful to begin with lower risk activities or discussion prompts that do not feel so "high stakes". This is especially true when a new group of students is convening for the first time. Using pairs or small groups can help establish this tone and you can build over time to deeper levels of dialogue, particularly in the large group. In these moments, try to use discussion prompts or activities that start to normalize sharing and perspective taking. Students can begin to practice open dialogue and speaking from a place of their own lived experience in a "low-stakes" setting at first.

"Low-stakes" Prompt Examples
- What are your hopes and fears for this learning experience this Fall?
- What is an example of a public health community based research project you feel embodies an antiracist or inclusive approach?
- What is one thing you hope to leave with following today's discussion on gender?
- Given our topic today on structural racism in science, how are you feeling entering the discussion today?

It can be helpful for you as the educator to model such sharing, and to also affirm and validate contributions and perspectives of others that are often unheard or that may be new to others.

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Helpful Facilitation Strategies To Know for **Confirmation Phase**

Set and Model Tone

Students are always observing our approaches—what we say and what we do. Throughout the course remember to role model the type of engagement you want the class to aspire towards and demonstrate the group agreements when you interact with the group.

Model Self-Disclosure

When you are able to model the appropriate levels of personal story telling, self-disclosure, and the types of responses sought, it can assist your students with how to make personal connections to the content, and assist them in feeling more comfortable and confident in doing so themselves.

Support Risk Taking

When students are sharing their views and perspectives tied to either an identity they hold or a lived experience, it can be difficult to do this in a group when you are one of a few, or the only, person of a particular identity (e.g., the only person of color, the only transgender individual, or the only woman). Use such opportunities to validate and affirm what has been shared. The process of "joining in" and validating others, allows them to feel valued and supported in the group.

Allay Fears and Concerns

There are often many fears students bring into the classroom that can both shape their perception on how discussions should proceed and limit their ability to participate. During the introduction, group agreements and review of expectations, you can touch on these items. But you can speak to these issues when they emerge as well, which can include: fear of not knowing the right or inclusive language; using silence out of fear of microaggressing others; feeling that one must be perfect and not make mistakes; encouraging accountability for one's own learning, and more. There are many possibilities here, but as you become more familiar and aware of salient feelings in your class, attempt to speak to them proactively.

Three Next Steps Moving Forward

1 Implement and practice using these tools with your students.

2 Debrief your experience with the Office of Educational Programs professional staff.

3 Follow up with the Office of Educational Programs, where needed, for more support.

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