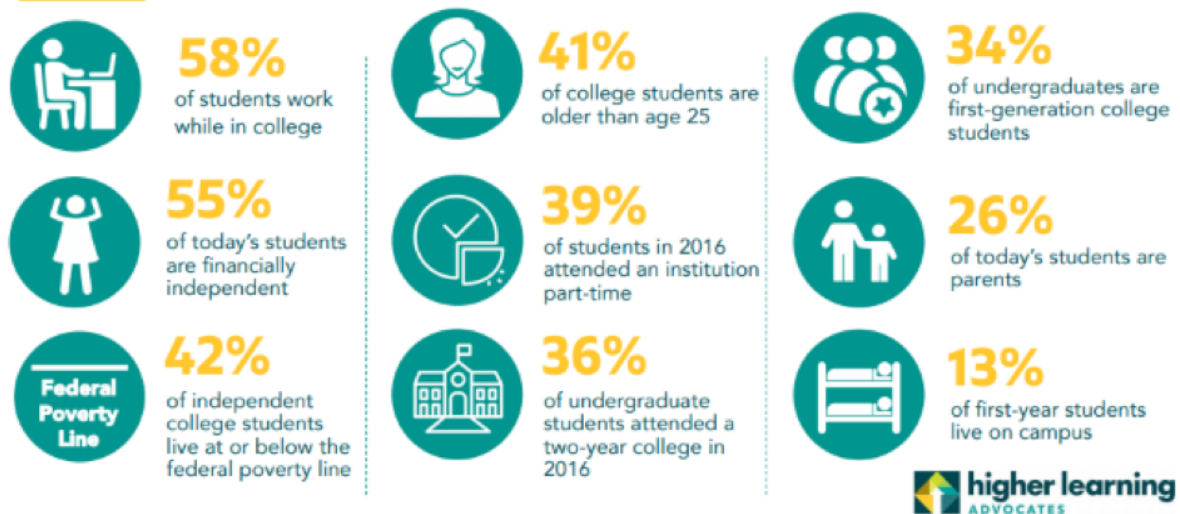# FINAL REPORT:

FACILITATORS AT THE INTERSECTION OF DIALOGUE & HIGHER EDUCATION

Caitlin Salins and Casey Sheahan

CONNECTING LDT TO FACILITATION

As graduate students in Georgetown's **Learning, Design, and Technology** (LDT) program, we spend most of our time studying how education is transforming and the best practices around learning and design. Student demographics have changed greatly in recent years – many more students now come from populations which have been historically underserved, like low-income, students of color, first-generation, and gender minority. Not only have student socio-cultural backgrounds shifted, but so have their needs and expectations; many students are working adults, parents, commuters, or part-time, and want an education that prepares them for jobs of the future and not the past. In addition, technology is advancing exponentially and greatly affecting both the delivery of education and its role in our lives; learning is no longer teaching students to memorize or retrieve information, but to understand systems-thinking, draw interdisciplinary connections, foster creativity, and cultivate a critical, socially conscious mindset.

What Today's College Students Really Look Like:

58% of students work while in college

41% of college students are older than age 25

34% of undergraduates are first-generation college students

55% of today's students are financially independent

39% of students in 2016 attended an institution part-time

26% of today's students are parents

42% of independent college students live at or below the federal poverty line

36% of undergraduate students attended a two-year college in 2016

13% of first-year students live on campus

higher learning ADVOCATES

*From: https://www.aacu.org/aacu-news/newsletter/2018/november/facts-figures*

Part of this sea change in higher education has been in the role of a teacher or educator shifting away from the original lecturer model sometimes known as "the sage on stage," and moving towards an environment where the educator becomes more of a "guide on the side." Based in the cognitive theory of constructivism, which holds that learning is an active process constructed and informed by individuals' unique engagement with and experience in the world, in this model, a professor is a coach, and is there to facilitate the educational experience – not control it. One example of this development is the concept of a "flipped classroom," a pedagogy that reverses the traditional learning environment so that instructional content, like readings or recorded lectures, is delivered outside of the classroom. In the classroom, activities that might previously have been considered homework take place – students actively engaging with the concepts to solve problems, often collaboratively in groups. This approach also moves us closer to Universal Design for Learning, "a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn."

CONNECTING LDT TO FACILITATION, CON'T

Designing educational environments that offer multiple representations of information, multiple ways to engage with that information, and multiple ways to express one's understanding of that information enable students from diverse backgrounds to learn equitably and universally.

This trend we have seen throughout our program is why we ultimately decided to take this facilitation course. We hoped to not only strengthen our own facilitation skills that will be undoubtedly beneficial in future career roles in higher education, but also to understand how the facilitation mindset and process relates to instructional design and pedagogy, and how it might become incorporated into all learning settings to better serve today's students and the complex world which they navigate. Having now had the opportunity to engage with key facilitation theories and practices, and to integrate our perspectives with those from our colleagues in the Peace and Conflict Resolution program, it's clear that are important resonances and parallels between our disciplines, though we may have slightly differing language to describe them.
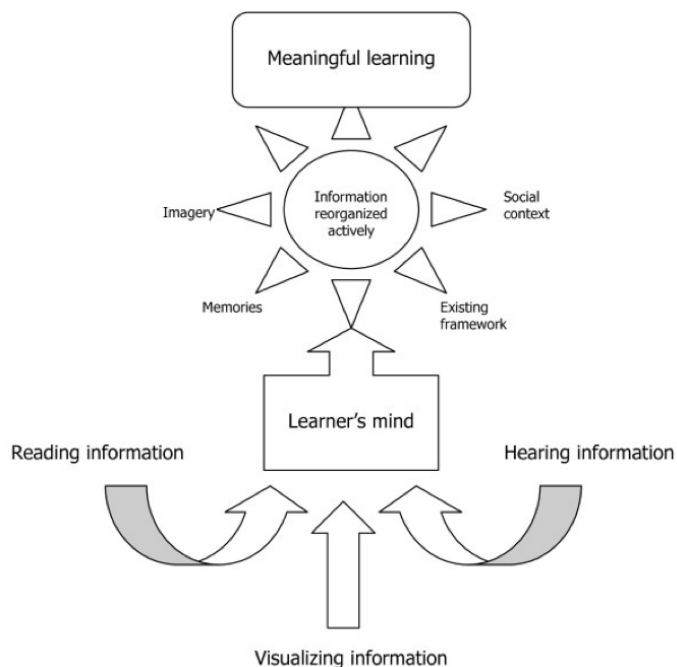
From D'Antoni, Anthony & Zipp, Genevieve & Olson, Valerie & Cahill, Terrence. (2010). Does the mind map learning strategy facilitate information retrieval and critical thinking in medical students?. BMC medical education. 10. 61. 10.1186/1472-6920-10-61.

INTERVIEW WITH MS. ALISHA GHOSH

With that in mind, we sought to interview two facilitation practitioners who navigate the intersection of traditional dialogue training and higher education contexts. One of the experienced facilitators we had the opportunity to interview was Ms. Alisha Ghosh, who has been professionally facilitating for about four years. We were very excited to have the chance to speak with her given all of her facilitation work has been in higher education settings, which falls very closely in line with our work through our program and our career goals. Alisha is currently the Assistant Director for Academic Support within the Office of Student Learning and Academic Advising at Georgetown University School of Medicine. Before accepting this role she held the role of Program Manager for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the School of Medicine.

INTERVIEW WITH MS. ALISHA GHOSH, CON'T

In this role, she not only led student facilitation sessions about topics centered around diversity and inclusion, but also annually taught students how to be facilitators for their Peer Diversity Dialogues that were run through her office. She also was trained to be a Safe Zone Facilitator. The Safe Zone Project was created to increase awareness about sexuality, gender and the LGBTQ+ community. People can become trained to facilitate Safe Zone trainings, so they can take this information back to their communities, which is often school settings, and facilitate discussions on these critically important cultural topics. Outside of her roles in the School of Medicine, Alisha also had the opportunity to facilitate two different courses to undergraduate Georgetown students. One was centered on the topic of sexuality and the other was surrounding the topic of disabilities, and each ran for two hours a week for eight weeks. We asked Alisha questions surrounding her facilitation processes, experiences she has had while facilitating, and what she finds most rewarding about the facilitation process.

Whenever facilitating whether it be staff, peers, or students, Alisha prefers to begin the facilitation with a **community agreement**. She believes community agreements set the stage for inclusivity throughout the facilitation and makes sure that all voices are heard. This aligns with not only our parallel experience in class when practicing group facilitation when we were all invited to contribute community agreements, and after they were submitted, if we agreed with them, but with quite a few points from our readings. The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making notes that "if people don't participate in and 'own' the solution to the problems or agree to the decision, implementation will be half-hearted at best;" that the journey to nurture a sustainable agreement must begin with "gathering diverse points of view," and "building a shared framework of understanding," and that the first key role of a facilitator is to "build a respectful, supportive atmosphere." The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)'s Resource Guide On Public Engagement might categorize the community agreement as a process for, or at least conducive to, the Exploration Stream of Practice: a pathway to for people to learn more about themselves and their community. This practice, if done well, also speaks to the key roles qualities of a facilitator listed in Democratic Dialogue – A Handbook for Practitioners: hosting, modeling inquiry, reframing, summarizing, and recording. Simply by structuring dialogues to begin with a community agreement, Alisha sets the stage for these critical elements. Such a tactic could also quite easily be adopted into pedagogy – on the first day of class, an instructor could start with a community agreement, and then incorporate those agreements into the syllabus.

One key piece of advice Alisha offered, and echoed in our class discussions, was the importance of having a **co-facilitator**, which she does for her two Georgetown courses. A co-facilitator enables balance and support: "you can talk about your trigger points with them ahead of time so that you have a good dynamic, can balance things out well, and share the mental burden." Having the support of a trained sounding board also gives a facilitator the opportunity to reflect after a dialogue, and to ask what went well, and what new processes might work well for the next iteration. In the Methods of Learning and Design course of our LDT program, we discuss in depth the important relationship between an instructional designer and a professor; most often due to resource and personnel constraints, these roles are combined into one individual. But ideally, these can be two people integrating their expertise and viewpoints, supporting each other and sharing the mental burden of facilitating a classroom – structuring both the processes that underlie the learning and conversation, and the interpersonal skills and coaching that shepherd the processes.

INTERVIEW WITH MS. ALISHA GHOSH, CON'T

Additional process activities Alisha has used frequently in her practice are **Step In, Step Out** and the **Crumple Survey**. In step in, step out, her dialogue group stands in a circle while she poses a questions; if the questions apply to members, they step forward. Questions might start with low-risk warm up identifiers, like being left handed, or from the midwest, before moving to higher risk identities or less visible identities on race, sexuality, religion, or cultural beliefs. As opposed to a process like the privilege walk, which might produce feelings of separation, isolation, or shame, the step in, step out process allows everyone to maintain eye contact and form connections over bonds they may not have known existed. Like the community agreement, this activity sets an Exploration stage, enabling feelings of safety and vulnerability, and possibly even moves into the Conflict Transformation Stream of Practice. This coincides with an emphasis from our LDT program on fostering feelings of belonging in students as critical to their capacity to learn.

In the Crumple Survey, dialogue participants anonymously respond to a survey, usually on a touchy or hot topic, like sexuality. They then crumple their survey up, and throw it somewhere else in the room with closed eyes. Everyone then randomly picks up a new crumpled survey and reads it. Alisha might pose questions like, "how many surveys said 'X'?" and respondents answer based on their new survey. Like the Step In, Step Out circle, this activity builds connections while allowing participants to express opinions that they may not have originally felt comfortable sharing aloud. Risk is removed as students report on others' anonymous surveys as opposed to their own, and yet vulnerability is supported as students feel comfortable sharing sensitive personal information. Interestingly, this technique of safety via anonymity followed by discussion corresponds almost exactly to one designed for professors to increase learning for social justice. As described in Sabrina Ross's "Examining the Role of Facilitated Conflict on Student Learning Outcomes in a Diversity Education Course:"

> " A number of instructor facilitated strategies for conflict resolution were utilized to increase opportunities for engagement and learning. For example, the instructor enlarged copies of students' anonymous writings and displayed them around the classroom; students were asked to walk around the classroom, read the displays, and then write reflective papers on the different perspectives…. By actively engaging students' cognitive discomfort over issues of difference, educators can encourage learners to assimilate new understandings of difference into their cognitive maps that are consistent with democratic and social justice aims.

Alisha mentioned that this kind of environment was the facilitation context in which she felt most inspired. On topics like diversity, inclusion, and sexuality, "there isn't a right or wrong: just different viewpoints." As a facilitator, she always tries to come from a place of understanding, not to force viewpoints on participants, and to make people feel comfortable, included, and safe. This sentiment aligns with the repeated lessons from our course readings that a dialogue leader be as unbiased, impartial, and content neutral as possible, while still advocating for certain processes. The rewarding result of setting this groundwork for her is seeing students learn something new, taking on new perspectives, and gradually shifting to dialoguing with each other on their own, with her as the the facilitator eventually taking more of a backseat.

INTERVIEW WITH MS. ALISHA GHOSH, CON'T

Again, this aligns with our readings on using facilitation to foster a **sustainable dialogue culture**, that will evolve and strengthen after the facilitator has left; not just using facilitation tools while in person, but giving those tools to students so that they become their own dialogue and deliberation experts. This deeply resonates with the role of a classroom professor in not just transferring rote information, but truly teaching students how to learn. Along with more formal assessment measures like pre and post evaluations, follow-ups, and surveys, this reflection on a group's internal growth serves as part of Alisha's determination of success.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. EMILY JANKE

The second practitioner we interviewed was **Dr. Emily Janke**, an associate professor in the Peace and Conflict Studies department and Director of the Institute for Community and Economic Engagement (ICEE) at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Emily's work in facilitation began with an interest in faculty development and community engagement. While in school for her doctorate degree at Penn State University, she worked as a graduate assistant and was able to watch her supervisor facilitate meetings with other faculty and administrators on campus meeting about a wide variety of topics, which were often contentious.

Learning from this experience, she gradually became further involved with facilitating in the academic community, including developing (along with a classmate) a professional program for graduate students, wherein faculty members would meet with students durings lunch to discuss topics of their interest.
These first exposures to facilitation and academic engagement led her to where she is now working for the ICEE. Through her role, Emily facilitates discussions around faculty development, like promotion and tenure, as well as conversations about how to engage authentically and thoughtfully with community partners. She helps to mediate internal conflicts that arise, like when a new policy is instated by leadership that results in tension at the departmental or school unit level. She meets with faculty members to facilitate meetings about their concerns and opinions regarding the new policies and then helps them present and address their concerns to higher leadership. She also serves as a co-author of Collaboratory, which is a publicly searchable, online database that shares an institutional story about who, what, what, with who, and to what ends community-university partners are working towards community-identified priorities for shared learning and mutual benefits.

We were able to learn about many of the processes Emily typically uses when facilitating and their contextual benefits. Before diving into these different processes, she emphasized the importance of **gaining the trust of your dialogue group**. Without trust, a facilitator is going to struggle to have the group open up about how they are feeling and what they are truly thinking. Obviously, this is much easier when you meet with a group more than once, but it is a key to facilitating.

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INTERVIEW WITH DR. EMILY JANKE, CON'T

As with so many other aspects of facilitation, the importance of intentionally building trust resonates with tenets of good teaching. Unfortunately, due to the complex and systemic structure of higher education in the United States, professorial position descriptions much more often reward research than these kind of interpersonal skills, an issue of particular concern when we consider new majority students who experience professors who sound, look, and act nothing like them. In contrast, as part of our LDT courses, we've had the opportunity to hone this skill through activities like empathy mapping, human centered design, and personas, all processes that seem to match with those needed for effective facilitation.

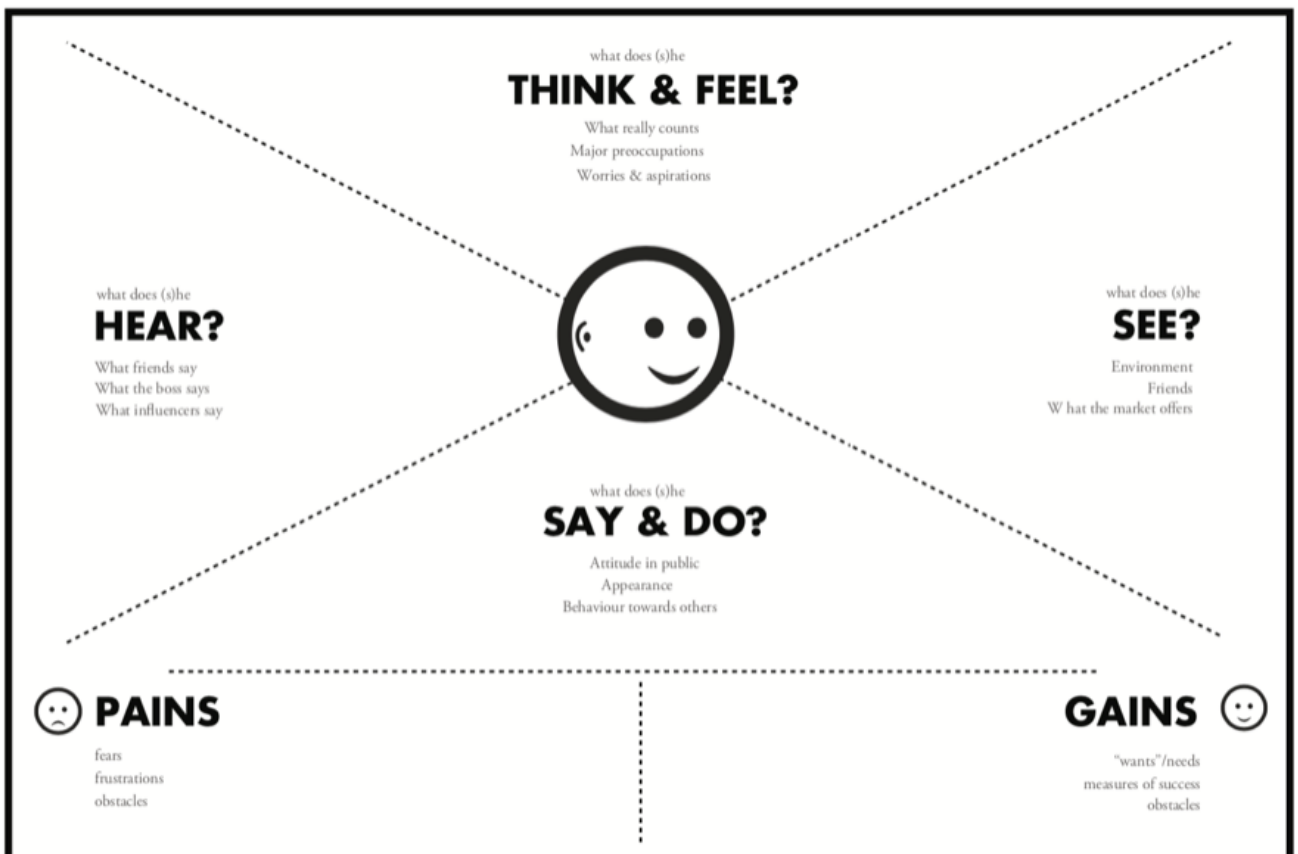**EMPATHY MAP**
Identifying stakeholder behaviour

| Project name | | Stakeholder | | Day | Month | Year |
| Designed for | | Designed by | | Version | | |

THINK & FEEL?
what does (s)he
What really counts
Major preoccupations
Worries & aspirations

HEAR?
what does (s)he
What friends say
What the boss says
What influencers say

SEE?
what does (s)he
Environment
Friends
What the market offers

SAY & DO?
what does (s)he
Attitude in public
Appearance
Behaviour towards others

☹ **PAINS**
fears
frustrations
obstacles

GAINS ☺
"wants"/needs
measures of success
obstacles

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From https://edco.global/empathymap/

When starting a facilitation, Emily usually uses a **circle process**. She pointed us towards two different books about this process: "The Little Book of Circle Processes" by Kay Pranis and "Story Circles," by Roadside Theatre. She begins by everyone seated in a circle facing each other, echoing Alisha's note of the utility of activities where individuals feel connected, included, equitable, and can maintain eye contact. Some guidelines are introduced and then everyone is invited to speak, often following a prompt. Circle prompts are also a great way to check-in at different points throughout the meeting to ensure everyone is feeling included and heard.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. EMILY JANKE, CON'T

Saliently, as we write this paper in the midst of the global pandemic COVID-19, which has disrupted in-person gatherings of more than 10, including all higher education campuses, she talked about the importance of using circle prompts during all of the meetings and facilitations that are happening virtually. "Circle" check-ins now occur via Zoom video chats, and are a simply way to make sure everyone is engaged and their voice heard; a goal which can be difficult given the structure of most online meeting platforms and the distraction of everyone's background environment.

Technology is a key piece of our LDT program, as we consider the implications of technological advancements on the future of learning and meaningful work in a world that may be increasingly supplemented through artificial intelligence. In our Studies in Higher Education course, our syllabus devotes intentional time to techniques of futurism and even science fiction as we consider the global, personal, and ethical implications of these developments. It would be interesting to dive deeper into how technology's advent has historically affected and will continue to affect dialogue and facilitation, particularly as we face new challenges like climate change and pandemics. For Emily, aside from the utilization of Zoom to create virtual dialogue circles, she also has experimented with physical tools like Clickers and platforms like Poll Everywhere in her facilitation. These could be beneficial in that they enable more accessible participation, but also challenges, from the technological (wifi capabilities) to socio-cultural (how much experience and trust does your dialogue population have with the technology?). As with so many other aspects of dialogue and deliberation, facilitators would need to be mindful, intentional, and strategic with how technology might affect the success of their particular topic, goals, and community.

Another process Emily often uses when facilitating is the **Arc of the Dialogue**. This practice was introduced to her by her mentor David Campt, who was working with AmericaSpeaks, a groundbreaking organization devoted to engaged democracy, and which held hundreds of large-scale dialogues across the country. Arc of the Dialogue starts by breaking large groups into smaller groups of around 8 people. Like with Alisha's step in, step out activity, first, identity questions are posed which could be considered low-risk, but are relevant to the dialogue and deliberation theme. For example, if Emily was leading a facilitation about food inequality, she might begin with the prompt: "What was your favorite meal growing up?" This question is still based on the topic that they are there to discuss, but it enables everyone to initiate their participation on something positive, comfortable, bonding, and inclusive, ultimately building community. After everyone answers this question you move on to phase two, gradually inviting participants to share more personal or sensitive experiences, or the "me questions." Phase three then challenges participants to focus on the "we," exploring beyond themselves. They are encouraged to learn from each other and challenge the way they currently think about topics. Finally, phase four is synthesis, impact, and closure. Participants are prompted to reflect how this discussion changed their opinions and how they grew from it. The Arc of Dialogue activity is a beautiful illustration of the theory in our readings coming to practice, incorporating the Art of Powerful Questions and moving from the Exploration stream of practice to Conflict Transformation and potentially into Decision Making, or at least setting the groundwork for it.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. EMILY JANKE, CON'T

Some of the most difficult facilitations Emily has to handle are when faculty members are coming into a facilitation extremely upset about a discussion that has been made by administration. While our fellow facilitator classmates largely come to the topic of facilitation from a global conflict resolution standpoint, this kind of tension over stakeholder authority is much more representative of the issues we might need to tackle as higher education leaders and changemakers. Still, there may be strategies that span the conflict resolution spectrum despite the specific context. For Emily, when this is the case, she often chooses to use the **Marshall Rosenberg Strategy of Nonviolent Communication**. The strategy recognizes four core human motivators, observations, feelings, needs and requests. The goals of the strategy are to: express your feelings and needs with clarity and self-responsibility; listen to others' feelings and needs with compassion and empathy; and to facilitate mutually beneficial outcomes for all parties involved. The chart below helps participants to express how they are and to receive how another is.

Clearly expressing how **I am** without blaming or criticizing

Empathically receiving how **you are** without hearing blame or criticism

OBSERVATIONS

1. What I observe *(see, hear, remember, imagine, free from my evaluations)* that does or does not contribute to my well-being:
"When I (see, hear) . . . "

1. What you observe *(see, hear, remember, imagine, free from your evaluations)* that does or does not contribute to your well-being:
"When you see/hear . . . "
(Sometimes unspoken when offering empathy)

FEELINGS

2. How I feel *(emotion or sensation rather than thought)* in relation to what I observe:
"I feel . . . "

2. How you feel *(emotion or sensation rather than thought)* in relation to what you observe:
"You feel . . ."

NEEDS

3. What I need or value *(rather than a preference, or a specific action)* that causes my feelings:
" . . . because I need/value . . . "

3. What you need or value *(rather than a preference, or a specific action)* that causes your feelings:
" . . . because you need/value . . ."

Clearly requesting that which would enrich **my** life without demanding

Empathically receiving that which would enrich **your** life without hearing any demand

REQUESTS

4. The concrete actions I would like taken:
"Would you be willing to . . . ?"

4. The concrete actions you would like taken:
"Would you like . . . ?"
(Sometimes unspoken when offering empathy)

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When using this strategy, Emily spends some time in the beginning of the facilitation reviewing the strategy and making sure that everyone is on the same page, possibly even having printed handouts available for the participants to reference. She thinks this technique is incredibly helpful when the group starts to veer off course or emotions heat up; the facilitator can literally physically point back to the strategy on the handout (or to accessibly written and visible community guidelines established early on). These tactics match the key qualities of a facilitator from Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook, to summarize and record, creating artifacts that support group memory. She also uses the modelling inquiry approach by continuing to prompt the "whys" of why everyone is there, and what they want the outcome to be.

In the midst of these activities, a key strength is the ability to recognize when your dialogue might need a pause to come back to the guidelines or to reaffirm the safe space where everyone feels like they are being heard and can candidly communicate their feelings.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. EMILY JANKE, CON'T

If there is a facilitation that goes badly for some reason or someone's voice isn't heard, as a facilitator, it may be helpful to follow up with that person individually, both to be certain they feel valued and included, and as a reflexive practice to grow your own understanding. Like Alisha, Emily also noted that having co-facilitators was a critical strategy for navigating difficult conversations. If possible, ideally the two facilitators should be very different in every aspect, (i.e. race, gender, background) to bring more diversity to the conversation. Another tip, again aligned with our reading from The Art of Powerful Questions, was to be sure that no questions be leading, or even come close to insinuating a right or wrong answer. Before going into a difficult facilitation, preparing your questions and making sure they are strong is one of the most important things you can do to support a climate of discovery, appreciative inquiry, and foster shared meaning.

For Emily, the enriching side of facilitating makes up for all the difficult situations you may sometimes have to navigate. She feels fulfilled when she is being trusted in hard conversations by all different types of people. She recently facilitated at Duke University and they had the ability to fly in sixty community partners from across the country to meet. She noted that being trusted in a key role in that process and being personally connected to everyone in the room in that initiative by the end of the process was incredibly rewarding. This feeling of growth and pride in one's ability as a facilitator to lead a group through a contentious topic parallels Alisha's measure of success that she's left a community capable to continue the conversation without her there – that "people have walked away feeling heard and empowered." In some situations, Emily has also been asked to create assessment reports based off of the facilitation. She suggests looking for points of commonality and less points of difference when reviewing your notes.

Emily has had the chance to work with students, faculty members and peers. She states the main difference is students are usually more willing to abide by the guidelines set in the beginning. Faculty, especially, can be difficult to work with, but using the Marshall Rosenberg Strategy, and getting buy in from the beginning can be very helpful. She also suggested having everyone either verbally agreeing to the guidelines or at least giving a 'thumbs up,' so you have some physical agreement from them. Emily also said trying to get participants out of their heads and moving them into their hearts really helps. If you can successfully do this as a facilitator it will often open up much more dialogue and help lead the facilitation to a better outcome.

In the future, Emily hopes to continue facilitating discussions surrounding community/university engagement and mutually beneficial policies, research, relationships and topics. She is very interested in the question of how academia might authentically and reciprocally connect people in the area of community engagement. This mindset of civic consciousness and supporting the public good seems like an integral component spanning both what we've learned in our LDT program of what meaningful, holistic education should be, and as the ultimate goal of facilitation and democratic dialogue: the power to cultivate collaborative, positive relationships enabling people to work together for a better humanity.

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