



Setting up Agreements in a First Year Seminar



An Example Lesson Plan from Fall 2018
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I. Lesson Plan to Establish Agreements

- a. Invite students explore the differences between dialogue, discussion, and debate, using the Kachwaha and Huang Nissan (2002) handout, distributed by the Intergroup Relations program at the University of Michigan.
- b. Working in pairs, ask students to identify classrooms where they have engaged with these three forms of discourse. Report out to large group.
- c. Have students engage in the “Questions of Persuasion vs. Questions of Curiosity” exercise with their partner. Debrief exercise.
- d. Based on what they learned in the exercise, have students share what kind of environment they would need in order to feel comfortable getting a question wrong or risk saying the wrong thing.
- e. Offer the group the following set of dialogue agreements:
 - Allow people to **pass/pass for now**
 - **Honor confidentiality** (not share what you hear in a way in which the speaker could be identified without the speaker’s permission.)
 - **Speak for ourselves** (not speak for others, nor ask anyone to speak for anyone other than themselves)
 - Express our different viewpoints in a **thoughtful and respectful** manner
 - **Listen with resilience** (hang in when something is hard to hear)
 - **Share the airtime**—make space for everybody to contribute
 - **Not interrupt** except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker
 - **Devices off or on silence.**

I also handed out the little orange Essential Partners cards that have an abbreviated version of these agreements – I ask the students to pull out these cards each time we are engaged in dialogic moments or when we may move between dialogues and discussions.

The little orange cards state the following:

- Work together to find the right time and place.
- Let people finish speaking
- Speak for yourself
- Let others speak for themselves
- Think about your assumptions
- Pause—take time to reflect
- Share the airtime—take turns.
- Stay curious—ask honest questions.
- If you want the conversation to remain private, say so.

I’m discovering that with first year students, I have to focus on some of these individual bullets with greater intentionality each class period.