



Creating Engaged Spaces



A GUIDE

TOPIC:

Building Agreements

NOTE ON RESOURCE:

A guide about classroom agreements, conditions, expectations and group intentions

Creating an Environment of Engagement

To create a dialogic classroom, start by talking with your class about the way you want to communicate. You might ask your students what conditions would allow them to fully participate in a conversation about a tough topic. What will let them disagree respectfully? Or ask a question about a sensitive subject? Take the time to imagine together what you could all agree to about the way you communicate with each other that will allow you to have the kinds of conversations that will get to the deepest level of learning.

Think of agreements as a kind of living contract that your class will make together that will guide the way people learn together. The kinds of agreements that you create at the beginning of a semester sets the tone for those conversations - they create a level of expectation for collaborative learning - and they become your best tool for helping a group get back on track when a difficult topic comes up.

Some teachers find it helpful to distinguish between kinds of agreements that have different purposes or functions and to keep a separate list for the communication or discussion agreements a facilitator might refer to when intervening in a dialogue. Those definitions and examples of classroom agreements are found below.

Discussion or Communication Agreements

Objective and observable behaviors mutually agreed upon by the class/group that the students agree to adhere to in order to create a space for people to engage and share openly.

Examples:

- *We will not interrupt or engage in side conversations.*
- *It is OK to "pass."*

Intentions

Internal orientations or pledges made by individuals. An aspirational state of mind.

Examples:

- Be respectful
- Be non-judgmental



Conditions

Things the facilitator or teacher can do so that the space fosters engagement, learning and supports the communication agreements and intentions.

Examples:

- Giving students time to think before responding to questions
- Give some time for an activity that promotes building relationship or connection between students

Class Expectations or Standards

Non-negotiable expectations of the class established by the teacher. These would not be created in conjunction with the class.

Examples:

- No cell phone use in class
- Be on time

Collaboratively Creating the Space with Your Class

We suggest that you collaboratively work with your class to determine communication agreements, intentions and to surface conditions. This can be done a variety of ways, including exercises such as, “Moments of Dissent.”

Often there are 4-5 core Communication Agreements that serve as a foundation to build from, and off of, together as a group. Below a few agreements that we think of as core agreements to begin with that can help you hold the space for discussion.

Core Communication Agreements:

- It’s okay to pass
- Share air time
- Do not interrupt

Sample Sets of Agreements

It can be helpful to see what other classes have come up with so that you can note things you might not want to forget and add for your own purposes. Below are some examples of agreements from classrooms:

Conflict Mediation: Theory & Practice PCS 325

Agreements

- Confidentiality
- Speak to be understood
- Listen to understand
- Speak with care—especially when emotionally charged
- Ask for clarification rather than making assumptions

Intentions

- Disclose your needs—if it would help
- Make space for your emotions and others’
- Difference is OK
- Remember there is a story behind every person

Expectations

- No cheating or plagiarism
- Come to class
- Come prepared so you don’t leave your classmates hanging
- Be present in class—no technology/social media, sleeping

Problems in the Philosophy of Religion PHIL/RELI 3302

Classroom Agreements

- Look for common ground
- Listen respectfully (put your opinions on hold)
- Listen with resilience
- Don’t interrupt
- Don’t jump to conclusions
- Separate people from ideas
- Ask clarifying questions
- Speak to be understood/listen to understand
- Speak for yourself and ask questions of individuals
- You can pass/pass for now



Other Example Agreements

Below are some other interesting phrases and agreements that other classes have come up with over the years.

- Allow people to finish their speaking: don't interrupt or talk over another
- Keep the conversation among you and about you
- Speak for yourselves, not on behalf of a group or anyone else in the room (So, as an example, I would avoid saying, "Well, Christians think_____." Or, "What she is really trying to say is....")
- Keep the contents of these meetings completely confidential, that is, agree that outside of this room you will speak only about your own experience, not about anyone else's, even in a disguised fashion, unless you have explicit permission to do so.
- Use considerate language. For example, to refer to others in terms they prefer to have used to describe themselves (e.g., pro-choice and pro-life, rather than anti-life or anti-choice).
- Refrain from attempts to persuade or convert.
- Talk to rather than at one another
- Check the accuracy of your assumptions about what others' words mean. Avoid attributing thoughts or feelings to people that they have not previously stated they have.
- Maintain a single focus. Avoid side conversations.
- Avoid rhetorical questions.
- What happens in class; stays in class
- Laugh with, not at
- Challenge your viewpoint