

RIT | Division of Student Affairs

Year One Programs

Best Practices for Facilitating Dialogue Dialogue encourages purposeful depth and responds to class needs.	
Best Practices	What it looks like
Activity serves as a catalyst to dialogue, rather than delivering content	Planned activity is a starter to student dialogue. This activity does not contain learning points.
Pose open-ended questions that go “below the surface” and encourage students to think critically	Encourage students to question assumptions, consider multiple perspectives, and be aware of biases
Encourage reflection, not just feedback	Students internally analyze experiences, learning and making connections to oneself and the world.
Embrace silence and allow it to serve a purpose	Sometimes your room will be quiet as students have “thinking time” to formulate their answer(s).
Explore student comments which have potential to move dialogue into deeper meaning	“What makes you think that?” “Can anyone add how what they just said impacts you?” “Does their thought/POV resonate with anyone else?” “What would that look like for you?”
Listen for understanding, ask clarifying questions, and rephrase what students say	“What I hear you saying is....Does that sound right?” “I’m not sure I quite understand....” “Can you tell me a bit more about that...?”
Center on the students’ experience, values and needs	Students take dialogue into unintended territory while facilitators continue active listening and adding related questions. Center on the students, not ourselves.
End class with a debrief to share themes, experiences, perspectives, values, and feelings that emerged from the activities	“As we end our class today, what thoughts will you bring with you this week?” “What stuck with you from our time today?”
EMPHASIS ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT Supports students as co-learners and the mutual sharing of perspective.	
Bridge connections to feelings, values, and experiences between students	“I hear J saying nature is a soothing place and important place while K is saying it can be scary. How do you all think the same thing can be so different for different people?”
Validate and honor student contributions	“Thank you for sharing your POV, it’s one we haven’t heard in this space before and it’s really important we understand multiple perspectives”. “I appreciate you also sharing that POV J.” Thanks for bringing that into the space as well.”

Engage all students to encourage a positive impact on the class community	“Can we hear from someone new today? All voices are important in our space.” “How about we begin with thoughts from the back row or left side of the room today?” Encouraging students to work in small groups until they are ready to share large group.
Encourage students to consider the perspectives of others in the community space	“OK I’m hearing you think xyz, can someone offer a different perspective on that to consider?” “Let’s remember to speak from the ‘I’ out of consideration for other perspectives”
Structure the space intentionally for student engagement	Circle up student chairs/desks whenever possible. Get students moving around the room. Intentionally assign student groups to encourage engagements and exposure to different perspectives.
Give the role of expert to students who will determine the direction of the conversation	Same example as center on students. There is not a set agenda; go with the flow of the conversation.
Encourage students to respond and question each other rather than responding only to the Facilitators	After a student shares, “Does anyone have a question or comment for J?” “Does anyone have a question, comment, or similarity to share with J?”
CO-FACILITATION STRATEGIES Facilitators demonstrate supportive encouragement, flexibility, responsiveness and collaboration with/for each other.	
A shared role in moving the dialogue forward	Facilitators seem to be in a conversation with the class and with each other
Support each other during class through open communication and giving space to build relationships	It’s evident that Facilitators are equals who are both invested in the class community.
Add to Co-Facilitators comments in ways that are helpful to the class dialogue	Facilitators seem to be in an easy conversation with each other, modeling how to form connections.
Participate in activities and experiences with the students (as possible).	Sharing out when it’s your turn. Both facilitators move around the room and check in with groups as they work, or monitor activity. Being Co-learners.
Model vulnerability and curiosity	“I didn’t know xyz, can you share more about how.....” “I realize what I just said sounded judgy, can I rephrase that to be kinder?” “Wow, that’s a different perspective J, let’s dig into that a bit more.”