

# *DIFFICULT DIALOGUES*

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**Available Resources.** Helpful background material and bibliographic resources are presented in the CD ROM produced by this project, *Diversity, Distance, and Dialogue* . For information on obtaining it contact "The Annenberg/CPB Project"

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**Purpose of Tape.** Difficult Dialogues is a trigger tape for faculty reflection, inquiry, and discussion in a workshop format. The focus is on faculty engaging their students in dialogues about and across race, culture, gender and sexual orientations. There are no “sure-fire” strategies or implied “successful” student responses presented here. Rather, we hope you will use this introductory tape to stimulate your own thoughts, feelings, and discussions about difficult dialogues.

**The Faculty.** The faculty highlighted on the videotape are experienced in teaching multicultural curricula. We look in briefly on three difficult dialogues in progress, each dealing with a different topic: Race and homosexuality; Language and identity; and Affirmative Action. Additionally, the faculty explore the challenges they experience when facilitating these dialogues.

**The Context.** Each of the classroom dialogues take place at 2-3 sites simultaneously. Teaching multicultural curricula in 2-way interactive classrooms was part of the larger study, funded by “The Annenberg/CPB Project.” However, we do not directly address the strategies for teaching at a distance. We emphasize the dynamics of difficult dialogues and assume that they are essentially the same as in the single classroom--only heightened when in multiple sites.

#### OBJECTIVES

- Identify most common fears about engaging in difficult dialogues in the classroom;
- Identify what makes difficult dialogues difficult;
- Identify ways in which faculty facilitate and thwart dialogue;
- Identify issues/attitudes that can trigger faculty defensiveness;
- Inquire into the necessary knowledge, comfort levels, and process for integrating cognitive content into difficult dialogues; and

- Inquire into the needs of faculty for feeling competent when dealing with emotional content.

## GETTING STARTED

Write your responses to the following questions. These responses are for your own self-reflection and you can choose when or whether to disclose the information.

1. How do you identify your:
  - Race\_\_\_\_\_
  - Culture\_\_\_\_\_
  - Gender\_\_\_\_\_
  - Sexual Orientation\_\_\_\_\_
  
2. In what ways do you engage issues of race, culture, gender and sexual orientation in your course(s)? Why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What do you experience when discussing these issues in:
  - Homogenous groups?
  - Heterogeneous groups?
  
4. Identify 3-4 of your most common fears about engaging difficult dialogues.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. In class discussions involving race/culture, (or gender, or sexual orientation) identify one example of a difficult dialogue for you?
  - What makes it difficult?

- What shuts you down or causes you to cut off discussion?
  - What triggers your anger and/or defensiveness?
  - How do you handle these reactions internally?
  - How do you manage the dialogue with the class when these responses are triggered?
6. How knowledgeable are you about:
- The history of race and culture in the US?
  - The current socio-economic situations for the various racial/cultural groups within the US, and how they differ within each group?
  - The psycho-social identity literature?
  - The race, culture and gender issues in your discipline?
7. List the 5 most recent books (fiction or non-fiction) you've read, and/or movies or plays you've seen, by and about people of a different ethnic group than your own.

<b>ENGAGING THE QUESTIONS</b>
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## VIDEOTAPE: DIFFICULT DIALOGUES

### Notes/Observations

1. How would you like to respond to students' feelings during difficult dialogues?
2. What is your take on whether or not a faculty member should disclose his/her own feelings first or at all?
3. How do you create a safe environment for students to take conversational risks during difficult dialogues?
4. What have been your experiences with how your own race, culture, and gender influence dialogues about race in the classroom?
5. In the video with which teacher's style, did you most identify?
6. Which teacher's style would you most like to emulate? Why?

7. How would you have facilitated the discussions on:

- Affirmative Action
- Homosexuality and Race
- Language and Identity

8. What more would you like to know or discuss regarding facilitating difficult dialogues in the classroom?

### ENGAGING THE QUESTIONS

Divide up into small groups of 3-5 and choose a facilitator, timekeeper and recorder. Discuss the questions. This process models one type of cooperative learning structure that supports group dialogue.

- The facilitator's role is to make sure all participants share the speaking and listening time equally. The recorder takes notes so that he or she can report to the large group. The timekeeper reminds the group of time limits.
- The recorder of each group to report to the large group.