



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA

Inviting Constructive Dialogue to the Classroom

Thursday, May 8th, 2025

9:30am-1:30pm

MN 3230 (CDRS Lounge)



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA

Robert Gillespie
Academic Skills Centre

Equity, Diversity,
and Inclusion Office



Two Framing Quotes

“We miss opportunities because we fear getting it wrong”

“We don’t have to all think the same way – if we did there would be no innovation or invention.”

The Honourable Marion Buller, CM



Symposium Agenda

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 9:15am-9:45am | Breakfast and Registration |
| 9:45am-11:00am | Session 1: Creating Strong Pedagogical Foundations |
| 9:45-10:15am | Presentation |
| 10:15-11:00am | Collaborative work and refreshments: guided case-study scenarios with Educational Development Team |
| 11:00am-11:45am | Session 2: Evidence-Based Toolkit, containing frameworks, practices, resources and how they can work for you |
| 11:45am-12:15pm | Break and Lunch |
| 12:15pm-1:30pm | Roundtable Conversation with Panelists |



Community Guidelines

GUIDELINES FOR ENGAGEMENT:

Mindfulness: Listen with your body, mind and heart and be willing to engage with challenging ideas

Distinguish Safety from Discomfort: Allow yourself to lean in, explore and embrace discomfort as a necessary component of growth

Personal: Share your lived experiences using "I" statements rather than presenting personal views as universal facts.

Embrace Self-reflection: acknowledge positionality/perspective, as opportunities for growth

Accountability: Own your intentions and your impact and be mindful that regardless of your intentions, your words can have an impact on others.

(Adopted from Experience Canada, 2019; Carnegie, 2021)



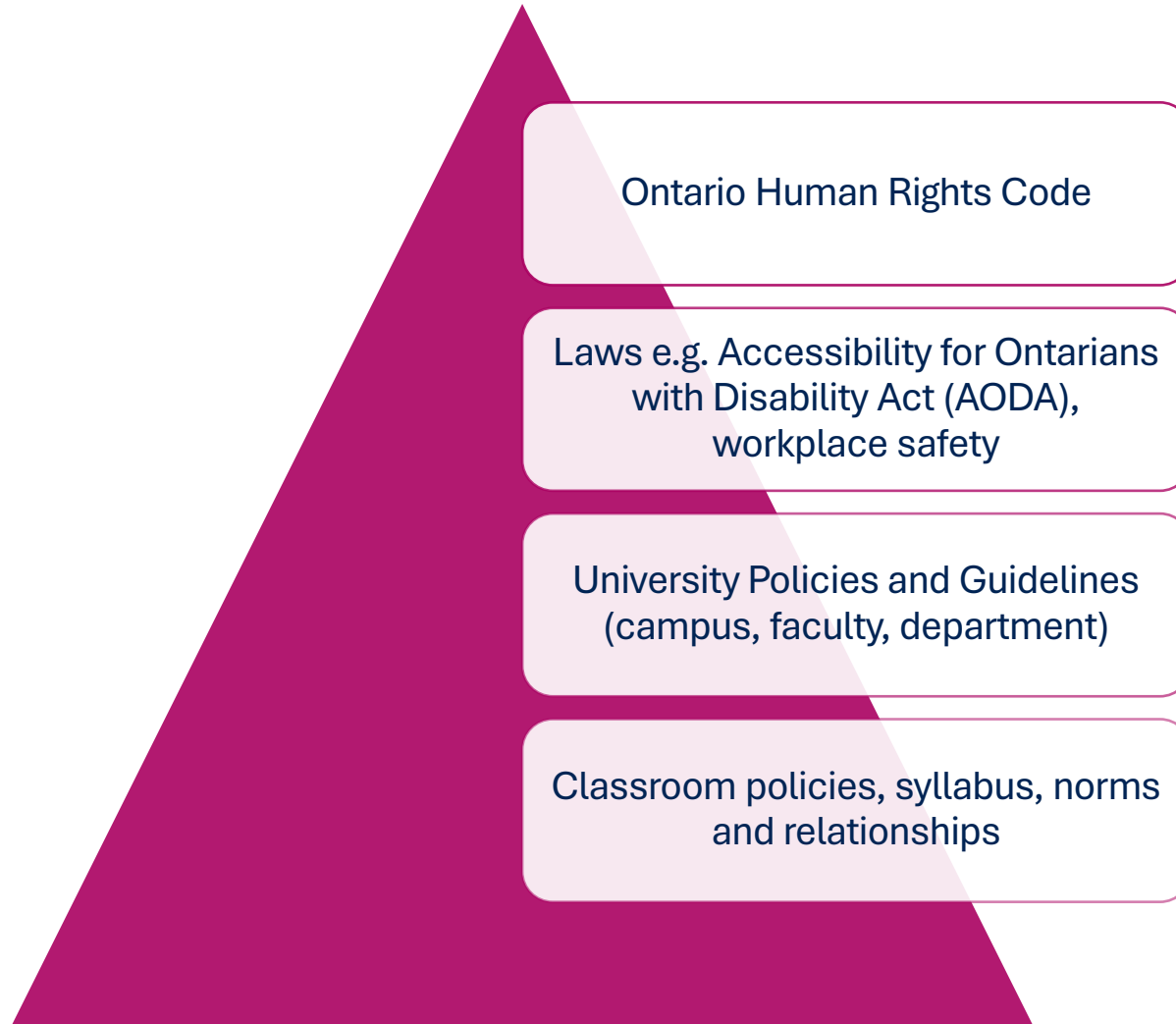
Equity and Leadership at the University of Toronto

“The creation of an equitable community, one that is diverse as well as inclusive and that is respectful and protects the human rights of its members, requires the work of every member of the community, across all our sites and campuses, including students, teaching staff, administrative staff, visitors, alumni, and guests.”

Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Excellence

University of Toronto

Where does EDI Fit?





The Case for “Curious Inquiry”

“Teachers and students must always remain free to inquire, to study, and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding”

Sweezy v. New Hampshire, 1957

Building Strong Pedagogical Foundations

What is a pedagogical foundation/practice?

- Syllabus design?
- Assessment choices?
- Decision between what we choose to do in lecture vs lab/tutorial?



What is the relationship between our pedagogical practice and our discipline-specific content?

- Support?
- Complement?
- Enhance?

Are our pedagogical practices after-thoughts or are they embedded into our course design?



How UDL can help

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) takes a more learner-centered approach

- change the point of view from that of the instructor → learner
- the result is:
 1. greater **communal** shaping in the learning process as advocated by Dewey
 2. avoid **some** of the retrofits/accommodations that can reinforce ableism

This doesn't mean that we no longer need any accommodations.

- avoid interest convergence (Bell, 1980) in which change only occurs for a minority group when it can be shown to be beneficial to the majority as well.





UDL often begins by asking what are the “pinch points”?

- Where do students ask a lot of questions?
- What are the most common errors on evaluations?
- What concept do you usually “re-teach” or try to explain it in a different way?
- What can you do to address these?

What are the “pinch points” in cultivating constructive dialogue?

Constructive Dialogue within the Ethical Space of Engagement

“A meeting place, a neutral zone between cultures where human-to-human dialogue can occur.” (Ermine, 2007)

- A space of reflection
- A guide for relationship
- A foundation for reciprocal learning



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Five Steps of Shaping Ethical Spaces

1. **Acknowledge:** Unique worldviews & histories
2. **Clarify:** Roles & intentions
3. **Surface:** Undercurrents (assumptions, tensions)
4. **Identify:** Boundaries & autonomous zones
5. **Co-create:** Rules of engagement



Elevating the Undercurrent

The **undercurrent** is the hidden layer of assumptions, histories, and power dynamics that shape dialogue, often without being spoken.

The Ethical Space invites us to notice:

- What's beneath the words
- What's felt but unspoken
- What stories and histories are present (even in silence)



Reflecting on the Undercurrent

What are some hidden forces that shape what gets said, and what doesn't, in your classroom or discipline?

and/or

Think of a time you didn't say something in a conversation, even though it was important to you. What held you back? What might you have needed in that moment to feel safe enough to speak?



The background features a vibrant purple field. In the top-left corner, there is a teal square partially overlapping a lime green shape. A dark blue quarter-circle is also visible in this area. A large orange circle overlaps the lime green shape and extends towards the center. At the bottom, a lime green wavy shape spans across the width of the page.

Collaborative Work

SCENARIO A:

During a biostatistics lab session, a student asks their instructor if they could conduct research on a particular racial demographic to determine whether a stereotype associated with the group is the cause of poor health outcomes. The student's question was uninformed rather than malicious. The class went silent, and students belonging to said group were noticeably upset, angered, and embarrassed. Students were heard mumbling and speaking to one another quietly: some confused, some upset, and some finding humour in the scenario. The student realized that their question had a harmful impact, packed up their belongings, and ran out of the class crying.



SCENARIO B:

In a seminar on Canadian literature, a professor, who identifies as a Latinx scholar, is leading a discussion on decolonizing reading lists for English departments. The seminar has attracted engaged students who are expected to contribute to ongoing curriculum reform. As the professor presents research on gaps in representation, one student who tends to dominate class discussions interjects to question the importance of diversity, suggesting it poses risks to academic standards. The student proceeds to assert polarizing political views and use derogatory language. The professor attempts to address the student's concerns with evidence-based research. However, with tensions high and several students visibly distressed, the classroom discussion escalates into a loud verbal fight.



SCENARIO QUESTION:

How would you navigate this challenging classroom moment? Consider approaches and strategies you have used in the past or wish you had implemented when faced with intense classroom discussions. (Feel free to discuss proactive and responsive strategies)



Group Discussion:

In your groups (10 minutes):

- Take turns sharing how you might respond to the scenario.
- Select one person from your group to summarize your key discussion points to share with the larger group when we reconvene.



SCENARIO A: PEDAGOGICAL TIPS

Proactive:

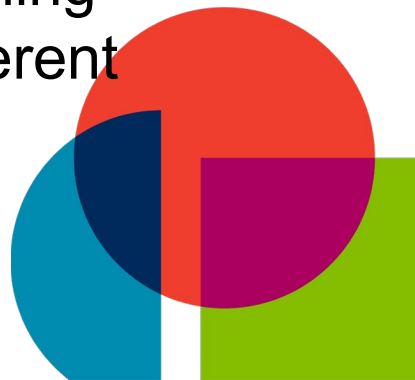
“Interrupt and Redirect” Technique (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005)

- Prepare and practice 2-3 responses for high-tension moments
- Helpful for unexpected/frozen moments

Preplanned Examples:

"I can see strong feelings emerging. Rather than debating who's right, let's identify the principles at stake and how they connect to our learning objectives."

"I notice tensions are rising. Let's pause here and examine what's happening beneath our reactions. What values or experiences are informing our different perspectives?"



SCENARIO A: PEDAGOGICAL TIPS

Responsive:

Learning Opportunity/Teachable Moment

- Positive and strengths-based reframe.
- Pull focus on academic concepts rather than opinion.
 - Social determinants of health, etc.
 - Macro level conversation about implicit bias



SCENARIO B: PEDAGOGICAL TIPS

Proactive:

Shift the mode of engagement (Tatum, 2024):

- **Resort to alternative participation structure(s):** turn-taking, written reflections shared during class, small group discussions before large group sharing, and designated reflection periods.



SCENARIO B: PEDAGOGICAL TIPS

Responsive:

- Acknowledge and name emotions (i.e., 'I see that this topic is eliciting powerful emotional responses,' 'I hear that you are upset')
- De-escalate by asking students to free write about the topic at hand or reflect on their account of the argument.
- Gather student writing and prepare a response for the next class.



Evidence-Based Toolkit



Toolkit: Somatic Practices



Here are the resources designed to address your own self-care when inviting constructive dialogue into the classroom. These can also work for your students.

[Teaching and learning as embodied \(THE Resource\)](#)

[Discomfort as bodily sensation \(PNAS article "Bodily maps of emotions"\)](#)

[Somatic practices can regulate CNS and help you effectively facilitate \(Arizona Trauma Institute\)](#)



Toolkit: Proactive or “Before class” Tools



Here are resources around how to build on a strong pedagogical foundation and take proactive measures to intentionally invite constructive dialogue that were used in our introduction to the symposium.

- [Community Guidelines](#) (TATP Resource)
- [Model separating observation from evaluation](#) (*Nonviolent Communication* by Marshall B. Rosenberg)



Toolkit: “In-the-moment” Tools



What to do when you “freeze”?

Prepare and practice 2-3 responses
(Brookfield & Preskill)

Ask Students to write (Cornell Resource)

Hand squeeze exercise (adapted from
Tara Brach's work)



Toolkit: RAVEN and ACTION Frameworks

- Both RAVEN and ACTION are communication frameworks that can help to address and respond to some forms of subtle discrimination also often referred to as microaggressions
- Provide guidance on communication for difficult conversations or discussion of contentious topics
- ACTION framework encourages "taking action" rather than feeling frozen



Toolkit: **RAVEN** Framework

Redirect the conversation/ interaction

Ask probing questions

Values clarification

Emphasize your own thoughts

Next steps

From Cora Learning:
coralearning.org/how-to-respond-to-racial-microaggressions-when-they-occur



Toolkit: RAVEN Framework

Redirect the conversation/ interaction

- Make decision to intervene, address the comment(s), correct misinformation, provide clarifying details, and/or discuss aside with individual(s) making comment(s)

Ask probing questions

- "I think I heard you say... could you tell me more about what you mean?"
- "I want to make sure I understand what you were saying, were you saying [paraphrase your understanding]?"

Values clarification

- "At the beginning of the session, we developed community guidelines, I would like to remind everyone of what we agreed to in how we engage in conversations as a class."
- If need to revisit comments or behaviours a 2nd or 3rd time, could reference specific guideline: "We had agreed to use non-personalizing examples and language, what I am hearing does not align with this guideline. Please work to rephrase the example you just gave about [blank topic]."



Toolkit: RAVEN Framework

Emphasize your own thoughts

- "When I hear your comment, I think/feel/understand..."
- "Many people might take what you've said to mean..."
- "In my experience... (your own thoughts and feelings)"

Next steps

- Suggesting to the person perpetuating harm what they could do to reconsider/revise their comment or behavior moving forward.
 - "I would be glad to discuss more and share some resources that could help to learn more about the history of this topic/ this term"



Toolkit: **ACTION** Framework

Ask clarifying questions to assist with understanding intentions.

Come from curiosity not judgment.

Tell what you observed as problematic in a factual manner.

Impact exploration: ask for, and/or state, the potential impact of such a statement or action on others.

Own your own thoughts and feelings around the impact.

Next steps: Request appropriate action be taken.

From Faculty Focus:

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/responding-to-microaggressions-in-the-classroom/>



Toolkit: The Risks and Rewards of Constructive Dialogue

What resources can I consult? How do I know which resource is right for me?

Begin building a pedagogical library which focuses on constructive dialogue, with this curated resource from Corinne.

- [Link to LibGuide](#)



Toolkit: Constructive Dialogue within the Ethical Space of Engagement

With special thanks to Louis Busch (Special Projects Officer, Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogies) for "Constructive Dialogue within the Ethical Spaces of Engagement"

Here is the article Louis referenced in his presentation:

[Ermine, W. \(2007\). The ethical space of engagement. *Indigenous Law Journal*, 6, 193.](#)

You can connect with Louis directly on embedding Indigenous Knowledge Systems into your courses, exploring culturally-grounded pedagogy, or reflecting on your teaching through an Indigenous lens.



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- Equity and human rights related resources
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RGASC

- Confidential one-on-one consultations about teaching
- Resources
- Workshops
- Teaching observations
- Teaching dossiers
- Pedagogical reading groups

email: eddev.utm@utoronto.ca





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Dialogue to the
Session Feedback for "Inviting
Constructive Dialogue to the
Classroom" (EDIO x RGASC)



ROBERT
GILLESPIE
ACADEMIC
SKILLS
CENTRE

Thank You!

