Ready Set Teach

Inviting Constructive Dialogue in the Classroom

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
MISSISSAUGA

Robert Gillespie
Academic Skills Centre

Welcome

ACCESS CHECK

Access is a shared responsibility among everyone in this space, and we have worked proactively to remove barriers to participation.

- Technology
- Resources
- Pace

Please feel free to stop me at any time if you have any comments or suggestions to make our environment more inclusive.
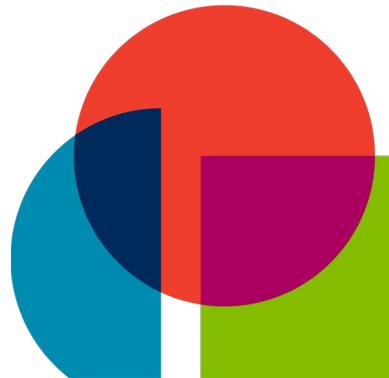
LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

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 Arao & Clemens 2013; Experience Canada, 2019; Carnegie, 2021)
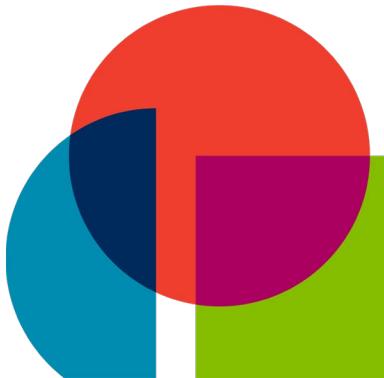
AGENDA

- 9:30 - 9:35 am -   Welcome and Opening Remarks

- 9:35 - 9:45 am -   Introductions (Participants)
                       What is Constructive Dialogue?

- 9:45 - 10:00 am -   Equity Policies and RAVEN Framework
- 10:00 – 10:10 am -   Introduce Case Study and Group work
- 10:10 - 10:20 am   Debrief
- 10:20 - 10:25 am   Wrap-up and resource information

Introductions

- **Name**
- **Department**

How do you define constructive dialogue in the classroom?

Describe what effective classroom dialogue look like to you?

What is Constructive Dialogue?

"…a form of conversation in which people who have different values, beliefs, and perspectives seek to build new ways to understand and interact with each other, even as they sustain commitments to their own principles and perspectives."

Rather than aiming to persuade or win, the goal is **shared exploration and mutual understanding** guided by respectful, reflective, and inclusive discourse.

(Constructive Dialogue Institute, 2025)

Equity Policies and R.A.V.E.N Framework

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?

Classroom policies, syllabus, norms, and relationships

University Policies and Guidelines (e.g. campus, divisions, faculty, department)

Legislation e.g. Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act (AODA); Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)

Ontario Human Rights Code

Toolkit: RAVEN

- RAVEN is a communication framework 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

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
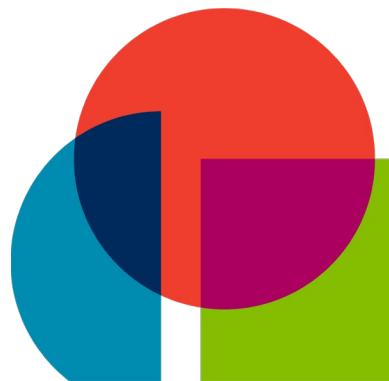
Toolkit: RAVEN Framework

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."

RAVEN Framework (continued)

**Values clarification (continued)**

- 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]."

Emphasize your own thoughts:

- "When I hear your comment, I think/feel/understand..."

- "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"
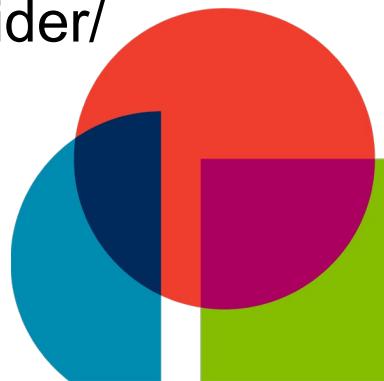
Case
Studies

SCENARIO QUESTION:

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.

Group Discussion:

In your groups (10 minutes):

- Read the scenario
- 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: PEDAGOGICAL TIPS

What NOT to do (Sue, 2015)

Do nothing or sidetrack the conversation

- Remain silent
- Divert to another topic

Instead: Acknowledge the discomfort and make it a teachable moment

Proactive Measure:

"Interrupt and Redirect" Technique (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005)

- Prepare and practice 2-3 responses for high-tension moments

Preplanned Example: "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."

SCENARIO: PEDAGOGICAL TIPS

Responsive:

Learning Opportunity/Teachable Moment

- Positive and strengths-based reframe.

- Pull focus on academic concepts rather than opinion.
  - Macro level conversation about implicit bias

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 Corrine.

- [Link to LibGuide](#)

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)

RGASC Programming Fall of 2025

- UDL & Accessible Pedagogy Workshops:
    - Trauma-Informed Pedagogy
    - Neuroinclusive Classrooms

- **Anti-racist Pedagogies Learning Series: From Intention to Meaningful Action**
    - 5 Sessions
    - Starts: October 7, 2025
    - Registration Opens: September 9, 2025

LEAF Grant Opportunity

The Office of the Vice-Provost, Innovations in Undergraduate Education and the School of Graduate Studies welcome proposals for a special [Learning & Education Advancement Fund Plus (LEAF+)](#) funding stream focused on civil discourse. This stream supports projects focused on fostering civil discourse in curriculum and classroom settings at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in all divisions.
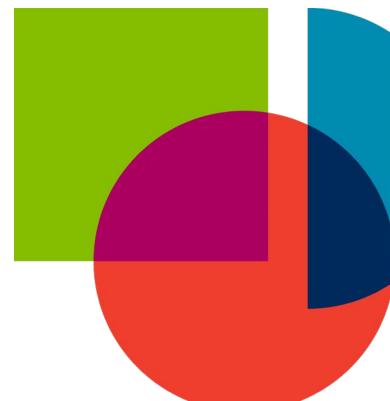
HERE TO SUPPORT YOU.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION OFFICE

- Advises on equity and human rights topics for classroom and course development

- Confidential consultations on human rights related concerns in the workplace

- Equity and human rights related resources

- Workshops

Email: edio.utm@utoronto.ca

EDI Events and Education Calendar:

https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/edio/events-education

ROBERT GILLESPIE ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTRE

- Confidential one-on-one consultations about teaching

- Resources

- Workshops

- Teaching observations

- Teaching dossiers

- Pedagogical reading groups

Email: eddev.utm@utoronto.ca

HERE
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