

Class Work: The Mending of Economic Divides

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The following format for group dialogue is inspired by and drawn from the work of The Public Conversations Project (PCP).² We will be using this format to open up conversation on the impact of class on our life experience, as well as to bring forward what we are learning in the face of the ruptures created by the present economic challenges. Similar formats have been used in many different contexts to help communities torn by a divisive issue(s) and also to create open space for dialogue that hosts divergent life experiences and perspectives.

The intention of such dialogue is not to convince others of the correctness of our views, or to convert them to our perspective. It is to establish and to deepen a kind of dialogue that is rarely available, that connects our views with our life experiences, and that allows for ambiguity and uncertainty. In these dialogues we are trying to awaken our curiosity and interest in the formative life experiences that affect the development of our advocacies. Rather than re-inscribe a polarized divide, the intention is to bear witness to each other's experience and commitments. We hope to leave the dialogue with a deeper mutual understanding, which may stimulate new ideas for learning and action, and with communication skills that can be used in other difficult conversations. The work is both interpersonal and intrapsychic. In listening in this way to perspectives other than our own, we can begin to move beyond polarizations, admit to ourselves some of our misgivings about our own perspectives, and be surprised and moved by the life experiences that have led others to their political, economic, and social interests and viewpoints.

*Regarding the **spirit** of our speaking and listening,*

1. We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience. We will attempt to speak from our heart.
2. We will also attempt to listen from the heart. We will not criticize the views of other participants or attempt to persuade them.
3. We will listen with resilience, "hanging in" when what is said is hard to hear.

*Regarding the **form** of our speaking and listening,*

1. We will be of lean expression. We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator, and welcome her alerting us if we are going over the specified time.
2. We will not interrupt except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.

¹ For relevant articles by Mary Watkins, see www.pacifica.edu/innerContent/about.aspx?id=1890; Mary Watkins, PhD is the Co-Chair of an MA/PhD specialization in Community Psychology, Liberation Psychology, and Ecopsychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute, www.pacifica.edu/cle.aspx

² See www.publicconversationsproject.org for resources regarding how to conduct dialogues around divisive issues in your community or faith group.

3. We will “pass” if we do not wish to speak.
4. We’ll start with whoever is ready, and then we’ll go around. If your turn comes before you are ready, you can pass and then speak at the end if you’d like to.

I. Warmup:

[Facilitator: When going around the circle, please have a gentle method of alerting the person who is speaking that her time is up. There is plenty to do in your group using the guidelines below. If your group does not finish each piece, that is fine. Groups move at slightly different speeds. Direct co-participants to the following.]

Reflect on your own experience of class in your formative years. You may use the following questions as possible prompts, but do not be restricted by them. Use this sheet, if you would like, to take notes. (8 minutes)

Remember some of the formative experiences of class differences you had while growing up? What did you take from them?

How did your childhood and adolescent class experiences effect
--your sense of self

--your sense of possibility for yourself

--your experience of yourself vis-à-vis others?

--did you experience any shame around class experience, and, if so, in what ways? What were the dynamics of these experiences?

What would you like to share from your reflections with others in your group? Is there a story that you would like to share with others about your experiences?

[Facilitator:

1. Go around the circle giving each person 3 minutes to share their story OR something else they would like to from their reflections.
2. Ask someone to be a scribe and a reporter back to the larger group. In an open discussion what are some of the themes you noted from your small group? What are some of the relations you see between shame and class experience? No more than 10 minutes.]

II. Participatory creation of questions to be explored

[Facilitator: Direct co-participants to the following.]

“Take a couple of minutes to think about an area of class experience that matters to you, one which you suspect there may be others present who hold different perspectives or experiences from your own. Formulate a question for others in your circle that you are truly curious about, a question around some aspect of participants’ class experience or their present approach(es) to their economic lives. Have it be a question that you would like to learn about from the personal experiences of those in your circle. (4 minutes)

Facilitator: “We will now go around the circle and allow each person to simply name their questions. (1 minute each, 5 minutes altogether). As you listen to people, please write down the questions.”

Facilitator: [Once your group has heard from each person, direct participants to the following.]

“Take a moment to review the questions that have arisen. Try on each of the questions. Pay attention to which question(s) helps you begin to hear into your own experience freshly, where new insight begins to happen. Allow yourself to be chosen by that question, and reflect (and write if you like) on what it brings forward. 5 minutes)

[Facilitator: Go around the circle, giving each person up to 4 minutes to share the question they were chosen by and what it brought forth.

Ask the group to name and scribe the important themes that arose that you would like to share with the larger group. 10 minutes.]

III. Bringing Our Insight into the Present

[Facilitator: Direct participants to the following.]

List some of the challenges you have/are facing in the current economic environment, and the deliberations you are involved in with regard to the place of money in your life (4 minutes.)

Share what you would like to from this reflection. (up to 3 minutes each)

Facilitator: “What are the things you are learning about yourself, your life, others as you meet the economic environment you are in?” (5 minutes reflection time)

“Share one of these with your group.” (up to 2 minutes each, 10 minutes max)

IV. Discussion

[Facilitators: Please have participants read the following before beginning, or read it aloud.]

15 minutes
Purpose To allow participants to have a more interactive discussion that makes connections among others’ thoughts and feelings and their own.
Tone-setting comments “We are now at the point in our time together when you can talk more freely. As we move into this less structured time, it’s important to remember why we are here: not to debate or persuade but to speak with sincerity, to listen with open heartedness and resilience, to reflect on our own views, and to seek understanding of other views. “This is a time to make connections between what is on your mind and something others have said. You can identify and pursue a theme, explore similarities and differences, ask questions, or comment on how what you’ve heard has been enriching or, perhaps, unsettling. Be sensitive to allow each person a space to come forward. Fall back if you have already offered something. Come forward if you have not yet spoken.” CONTRIBUTING TO A CONNECTED CONVERSATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note a point of learning Have you heard something that stirred fresh thoughts or feelings?• Pick up and weave a thread Has an interesting theme or idea emerged that you’d like to add to?• Clarify differences Have you heard something you disagreed with? If so, first check to see if you understood it correctly. Then say what was unsettling to you about what you heard and why.• Ask a question Is there something someone said that you’d like to understand better? If you ask a

question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise.

VI. Sharing and Closing in the Larger Circle [We will open a space for some sharing across the small groups before closing. This will begin with a report back from the groups.]

“Our time here is coming to an end. Are there any parting words that you’d like to say to bring your participation to a close?”

“You may want to simply comment on what the experience has been like for you. Or you may want to say...”

- one idea, feeling, commitment, or promising question that you are taking with you.
-or-
- one thing you want to remember about this conversation.
-or-
- something about what came up for you here that you may want to share with a friend, family member, or co-worker, or take out into your life in some other way.