

Dialogue tools for educators

Approach: the phases of dialogue

Phase 0 - preparation and finding your own values

Before engaging with young people in the classroom, it is important to prepare for the dialogue. First, delve into the topic. You do not have to be an expert, but you should know the basics. Secondly, it is important to investigate your own, personal perspective in order to be able to guide the dialogue properly. Ask yourself the following questions: what are your thoughts on the topic? What values/standards does it touch on for you, and why? Which perspectives do you personally struggle with? By exploring your own values first, you can avoid being caught off guard when your values are challenged and learn to hold back your own opinion. By preparing properly, you will be able to introduce your own opinion and share new perspectives.

Phase 1 - become an interlocutor

In the first phase of the dialogue, it is important that the pupils/students begin to see you as an interlocutor. Use the tips and tricks below to really grow into this role.

Phase 2 - facilitate dialogue

By the time the dialogue has gotten started or is gradually picking up pace, the facilitator can start to withdraw. In this phase, focus on the input provided by the participants and ask them to respond to each other.

Phase 3 - summarise and recap

The goal is to prevent the participants from feeling unheard, to make sure that all relevant perspectives are shared and to avoid a sense of unrest or tension when certain matters are left undiscussed. Proper closure is very important. Take your time, even if the dialogue is suddenly brought to a halt by the school bell. If necessary, make clear arrangements on when the dialogue will be resumed.

Approach: tips and tricks to foster open dialogue

Tip 1: Have an open mind

- Do not reject the worldview and emotions of the young people participating in the programme. If you reject their beliefs and sentiments, they will feel unheard.
- Instead, cast participants as experts. Allow them to explain their side of the story and actively question their sources.
- Keep the conversation open by including as many diverse perspectives as possible.
- Provide a personal example when appropriate, when it brings in a new perspective or when it supports a minority opinion.

Tip 2: Explore discordant perspectives

- Encourage participants to question each other critically to increase participation and engagement.
- When different views collide, stress how important it is that we are allowed to have different perspectives and opinions.
- Broaden your pupils' or students' worldview by introducing them to perspectives that they might not be familiar with. Make use of case studies, sources, and/or vivid examples.

Tip 3: Be normative when necessary

- Defend the values of our democratic society firmly and resolutely when you find that pupils or students do not respect them. Draw a clear line and act. Next, do engage in conversation.
- Actively strive to foster a safe environment at all times. Intervene and offer support and assistance if you find that some participants are afraid to speak up or when participants are attacked for having a minority opinion. For example, you can share your own perspective to provide support and reset the conversation.

Disinformation and polarisation - establishing boundaries

Many young people are exposed to polarising content, disinformation and conspiracy theories in the rapidly changing online media landscape. This can lead to growing distrust in mainstream media and institutions and, subsequently, to polarisation and isolation. This can, in turn, affect our democratic society and democratic values such as freedom of the press and freedom of expression. Make sure to establish clear boundaries when participants violate the rules and values of democratic society, but also encourage them to discuss. What motives or experiences direct young people's views and convictions?

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