Faculty Professional Development as Shared “Brave Space”

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How can academic professionals engage in Brave Spaces in our own professional development?

Why might that be of benefit to our students?
FPD as Shared “Brave Space”

- Strategic choice to risk together:
  - Professional growth and satisfaction
  - Richer learning experiences
  - Greater student success
Faculty professional development affects how students are taught and how they learn.
FPD as Shared “Brave Space”

Colleges benefit from a diverse faculty.
FPD as Shared “Brave Space”

Discrimination exist within the academy.
There is an unequal distribution of labor among our colleagues.
Open discussions of diversity at work are a "conversational third rail"
FPD as Shared “Brave Space”

Professional networks require diversity.
Respect for diversity requires a collegiality that builds resilience.
Innovation is the integration of risk into practice.
FPD as Shared “Brave Space”

The faculty trust their colleagues.
FPD as Shared “Brave Space”

Faculty are impacted by their pedagogy.
FPD as Shared “Brave Space”

Brave spaces provide structure for conversations about controversial topics.
How can academic professionals engage in Brave Spaces in our own professional development?

Why might that be of benefit to our students?
Considerations while Developing Ground Rules for “Brave Spaces”

Common Rule 1: Controversy with civility rule (instead of “agreeing to disagree”)

Creation of a rule that “inspires courage in the face of conflict and continues rather than stops the dialogue process,” to honor different views but stay committed to understanding the “sources of disagreement and to work cooperatively toward common solutions” (Arao and Clemens 144).

Pitfalls of “agreeing to disagree”: “Can be used to retreat from conflict in an attempt to avoid discomfort and the potential for damaged relationships” and inhibits learning for everyone—but also reinforces privilege of agent groups (Arao and Clemens 143).

Common Rule 2: Own your own intentions and your impact (instead of “don’t take things personally,” “no judgments,” or “it’s okay to make mistakes”)

Own your intentions and your impact rule allows the person who caused the emotional impact to become aware of the harm, to understand how and why they caused harm, and then to reflect upon what role their privilege plays in “creating the gap between intention and impact” (Arao and Clemens 146).

Pitfalls for “don’t take things personally”: Emotional restrain serves to shift responsibility of the emotional impact of what is shared onto the people who are experiencing the emotion, and those people who are experiencing the emotion are expected to hide their feelings in order to protect the people who caused the impact. In addition, the person who caused the impact is denied the opportunity to “carrying a share of the emotional load and preclude the possibility of meaningful reflection on her or his actions” (Arao and Clemens 145).

Common Rule 3: Challenge by choice

Challenge by choice “means individuals will determine for themselves if and to what degree they will participate in a given activity, and this choice will be honored by facilitators and other participants” (Arao and Clemens 146).

Engagement cannot be forced, and sometimes the engagement is occurring internally and cannot be seen on the outside (Arao and Clemens 146). The authors also urge facilitators to “be especially attentive to the degree to which their agent group memberships inform their decision about whether and how deeply to engage is a challenging activity or dialogue” (Arao and Clemens 147).

Common Rule 4: Respect

This one is easy, and everyone is quick to agree that it is an important ground rule, but the authors encourage groups to spend time discussing what respect looks like, which can help to “mitigate assumptions [that] participants bring with them about what kinds of behaviors are respectful” (Arao and Clemens 147 – 148).

In the course of the discussion about respect, the authors encourage groups to return to the idea of “conflict with civility,” to give examples of how “they might challenge the views of someone else in a respectful manner” (Arao and Clemens 148). Then, when conflict arises, we can return to these examples as a way of navigating the difficult terrain of disagreement.

Common Rule 5: No attacks

The authors ask that facilitators lead participants in a discussion of the difference between “a personal attack on an individual and a challenge to an individual’s idea or belief or statement that simply makes an individual feel uncomfortable” (Arao and Clemens 148).

Pointed challenges are not necessarily attacks, but the possible defensive response can lead to another fruitful discussion of the root of the defensive response, which the authors explain is usually “a sense of threat to the privileges of one’s agent group membership.” (Arao and Clemens 148 – 149)
If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.
—African proverb
Thank you!

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Works Cited


