**Transformational Conversations:**

***Moving from Fear to Curiosity***

Workshop with Debby Irving

**Suggested Follow Up:** [**21-Day Better Listening Challenge**](https://www.debbyirving.com/better-listening/) **©**

“There is no social change fairy. There is only the change made by the hands of individuals.”

*Winona LaDuke*

“If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see**.”** *James Baldwin*

“The first duty of love is to let suffering speak.” *Cornell West*

“For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrong doing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?” *bell hooks*

“There’s a connection between social justice and science fiction -

we are creating a world that does not yet exist.”

*adrienne maree brown (paraphrased)*

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**Transformational Conversation Cheat Sheet**

*“…for the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.”*

*Audre Lorde*

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| --- | --- |
| **8 Dominant Culture Habits** | **8 Transformational Interventions** |
| Rush | Pace, pause, breathe, check in, mirror |
| Control | Navigate, explore |
| I know best | What can I learn from you? |
| Talk at | Ask sincerely curious questions, then LISTEN |
| Disconnect, we’re not alike | Connect, where do we overlap? |
| Bravado & Perfection | Risk and model vulnerability |
| Punish, threaten | Reassure |
| Predictable Outcome | Infinite Possibilities, where can we go? |
| **Goal: Win / Dominate** | **Goal: Build Relationship/Community** |

*“\*Insanity\* is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.”*

*Albert Einstein*

Anti-Ableism Pro Tip: Unless quoting someone else, I try not to use terms such as insanity that diminish the severity of mental illness.

**RePlay and PrePlay Exercises**

* REPLAY: Think of a conversation (race or not) that did not go well.
  + Were any of the dominant culture norms in play on your part?
  + Name (to yourself) just one that was in play.
  + Now circle it’s transformational counterpart
  + Shut your eyes and replay the conversation in your mind with just that one element being different. This is YOU making the change, not the other person.
* PREPLAY: Use your imagination. This is the same kind of visioning athletes use.
  + Pick ONE Transformational Intervention
  + Envision it going well
  + Notice the feeling in your body
  + Notice the other person’s response
  + What’s your body language?
  + What theirs?
  + Repeat the above steps for each habit/intervention until you are able to embody, in your imagination, the possibilities of each and all of them together

**Setting Transformational Conversations Up For Success**

***Take some time to get ready***

**Lean into your feelings**

What are you feeling with regard to this conversation you’re getting ready to have?

Google feelings wheel and write down every single feeling you’re experiencing

How will you manage the feelings that are hard for you as they surface/potentially intensify during the conversation?

**Know your goal/s – pro tip: unrealistic goals backfire**

Change the world

Keep open the possibility for more, future conversations

Win this argument

Show how awesome I am

Make this person feel like they don’t know anything

Figure out where this person’s thinking/feeling is

Grow our relationship or at least keep it intact enough for future growth

Co-set boundaries and expectations within the relationship

Something else

***Bring along a few tools to navigate (not win!) the conversation***

**Risk and model vulnerability + Reassure right from the start**

I’m feeling nervous to have this conversation, yet I know if I don’t at least try it will start to get in the way of our friendship/relationship/me wanting to hang out. I care a lot more about staying connected than how nervous I am! No pain, no gain, right?

**Great simple lines to dig deeper**

Tell me more

Can you say more about that?

*Pro Tip: this also slows the pace which will help you self-regulate and stay present*

**Mirror what you think you heard**

Can I check out what I think I hear you saying? (repeat back the main idea/s in your own language) (Be open to having heard incompletely or incorrectly) Thank you, that’s helpful.

*Pro Tip: this also slows the pace which will help you self-regulate and stay present*

**Ask sincerely curious questions**

How does this idea/belief fit into your values? I’m not challenging you, just really wanting to understand.

**Connect, where do we overlap?**

I’m trying to figure out where our ideas/values/goals overlap and where they don’t. We both want our kids to be caring and community-minded, right? Keep going with questions to check out where the connection is until you find where you start to depart.

**Three great questions to have in your back pocket**

1. How long have you felt this way?
2. Did something cause you to feel this way?
3. Can you imagine someone feeling differently/having a different perspective on this?

**Sample Equity and Inclusion Conversation Norms**

Co-creating group norms is a great way to design a space and process where everyone feels included. Most of what we need to effectively navigate equity and inclusion initiatives are not what we learned in dominant culture.

Stay engaged encourages those who may seek comfort by checking out or falling into blame and judgment towards self and others when discomfort is experienced. Ideally, we can notice that tendency and pivot to stay connected.

Take space make space seeks to avoid having some dominate the conversation while unknowingly silencing others. Inclusion conversations, by definition, must seek to level the conversational playing field. A common pattern we want to shift is people from privileged groups (including extroverts) dominating the conversation while people from marginalized groups (including introverts) are talked over and ignored.

Be patient with self and others serves as a reminder to slow down and use the process as a process, not a test, which is a 180% turn from what the dominant culture teaches us is in our product-oriented society. We are all stretching to try being in spaces together. Showing one another grace breathes some oxygen into the process.

Speak your truth strives to have us each speak from our own perspective and to be honest about it. This is very different than the “look good, look smart” norm that is often valued and rewarded in dominant culture. What are you struggling with? What are you feeling? How is what you’re hearing different than what you believe and/or what you were taught? Are old memories coming up for you?

Notice your judgements acknowledges that everyone has judgments towards self and others. Noticing, instead of buying into, dismissing, or denying those judgments can help us explore the biases we’ve internalized. Unexamined bias is a major contributor to the perpetuation of inequity, so examining it serves as an antidote.

We are all teachers and learners reminds us that hearing multiple perspectives is the whole point of inclusion work. Everyone has something to teach. Everyone has something to learn. There’s no such thing as the smartest person in the room.

Expect unfinished learning seeks to counter a lifetime of agenda driven meetings, 30-minute sitcoms, and Walt Disney movies can create the illusion that all issues are solvable in short periods of time. Developing a tolerance for the ongoingness of inclusion work is essential. Enjoy being IN IT!

**WHAT DOES EQUITY CURIOSITY LOOK LIKE**

**AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL?**

**Integrating inclusion/belonging into the institution**

* What are our goals?
* Who decides what our goals are?
* Whose voice/perspective is missing in setting our goals?
* What do we measure?
* Who decides what to measure?
* Whose voice/perspective is missing in that decision?
* Who interprets our data?
* Whose voice/perspective is missing in that process?

**The Language of Social/Racial Justice**

**Social Justice:** Working for fairness for myself and others in society, institutions, and groups; working against bias, prejudice, and discrimination

**Bias**: Preference for or against something be it Positive, negative, or neutral.

**Unconscious Bias (aka Implicit Bias):** Unintentional associations that the mind forms that connect skin color, gender, or other identity markers to inherent traits such as intelligence, morals, or athleticism, or to social roles such as leadership, menial laborers, etc.

**Prejudice:** A prejudgment, attitude, opinion—usually negative—about socially defined group (racial, religious, national, etc.) or any person perceived to be a member of that group, formed with insufficient knowledge, reason, or inquiry.

**Discrimination:** Intentional or unintentional barriers to access that impact a group’s ability to access rights, resources, representation, and respect including involvement in mainstream economic, political, cultural and social activities.

**Diversity:** Variety. Diversity itself is a limited goal. Populating a space differently is only one piece of creating just communities. If populating the space differently were the end goal, we could say plantations were diverse. Understanding power dynamics, bias, and systems, and how to create change around each, is a necessary part of the endeavor.

**Inclusion:** Inclusion articulates the intention to not exclude and instead make efforts to include diverse groups of people in an organization. Baked into the term is a power implication – who is doing the including?

**Power**: Access to individuals, social groups, and institutions that own and/or control the majority of a community's resources, as well the ability to define norms and standards of behavior.

**Privilege:** Lack of discrimination, based on one or more identities, that results in unearned advantages due to privileged access to rights, resources, representation, and respect. Though privilege cannot be given away as long as discriminatory systems exist, members of privileged groups can leverage his/her/their privilege to disrupt status quo attitudes and behaviors and lobby for equity and equality.

**White Privilege:** Lack of racial discrimination that results in unearned advantages materially and/or psychologically based on nothing more than skin color and other physical indicators of racial classification.

**Marginalized and Dominant Groups:** Names for populations at the opposite ends of the privilege and power continuum. Members of marginalized groups experience discrimination; members of dominant groups, if willing to conform to dominant group social norms, experience the privilege of discrimination-free access rights, resources, representation, and respect, including involvement in mainstream economic, political, cultural and social activities.

**One-Up/One-Down:** Language that captures the impact of intersected identities. For instance, I (Debby Irving) have only a single one-down identity (female) and multiple one-up identities. The more one-up identities one has, the fewer barriers to access one will experience. Conversely, the more one-down barriers one has, the more barriers to access one will experience.

**Equality:** Giving members of an organization the exact same access to rights, resources, representation and respect regardless of individual needs and/or unequal starting points.

**Equity:** Taking stock of differential historical and current access to rights, resources, representation, and respect, and seeking to achieve equilibrium by coordinating institutional resources around differential needs.

**White Supremacy:** Often confused with KKK or White Nationalism, white supremacy is the ideology brought to the US by European colonial settlers and those who followed them. The ideology believes that white, male, Protestant, elite (once land-owning), heterosexual people are superior to all others and should therefore dominate all living things. The ideology is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of domination that includes the exploitation of people of color by white people, and which maintains white, male, Protestant, heterosexual, elite peoples’ position of relative wealth, power, and privilege.

**Whiteness:** The set of attitudes and behaviors created and valued by people who identify as “white” and who are primarily connected to white dominant neighborhoods and institutions. Foundational to whiteness is the idea that people of color are “other” and most often also “less than.”

**Colonization:** When one group violently subjugates another group in order to exploit land, labor, and resources, while violently forcing its cultural norms (including language) on and withholding resources from the subjugated group as a means of total control.

**Decolonization**

The active resistance against colonial powers, and a shifting of power towards political, economic,

educational, cultural, psychic independence and power that originate from a colonized nation’s own indigenous culture.

**White Fragility:** Due to the racially insular lives most white people live, they have not had to build the stamina to endure racial discomfort. Thus any challenge to a white person's racial worldview, position or privilege can trigger a range of defensive responses, including arguing, claiming to have been misunderstood or attacked, and withdrawing. These responses function to repel the challenge and maintain white racial equilibrium and dominance.

**Cultural Competence:** To understand the cultural values, beliefs, and practices of both marginalized populations and the dominant culture in order to understand how they interact with one another; and to have the language and skills to navigate cross culturally in ways that at the very least minimize harm and at most create vibrant collaborative communities and relationships.

**Microagressions:** The slights, insults, and insinuations that people from historically marginalized groups weather daily. Microagressions are often delivered by well-meaning people, sometimes even in the form of an intended compliment.

**Racial Literacy:** Antiracist training parents in African American families used toteach children and adults how to identify routine forms of racism and develop strategies to counter and/or cope with it.

**Intersectionality**: A framing that argues that classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they intersect, interact and impact individuals’ lives in the workplace and larger society.

**Oppression:** Systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people are denied something of value, while others have ready access.

**Ethnicity**: social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, beliefs, values, and behaviors.

**Race:** A socio-political construct (with no biological validity) that divides people into distinct groups by physical characteristics like skin color, eye shape, nose shape, mouth shape, and hair texture.

**Racial Stereotype:** An image, attitude or judgment, applied to an entire group of people.

**Racism:** Most people use the word "racism" the way they used the term "prejudice." But anti-racist activists see racism as "race prejudice PLUS power," in other words, discrimination based on racial stereotyping (conscious or unconscious, active or passive) that is backed by significant institutional power (race prejudice + power = racism).

**Institutional Racism:** The ways in which institutions—social, political, educational, financial, religious, medical, housing, government, food supply, criminal justice—create and/or perpetuate policies, practices, laws, and traditions that advantage white people at the expense of people of color.

**Systemic racism:**The institutional, historical, cultural, and interpersonal structures and systems in place that prevent people of color from fairly accessing wealth, power, education, healthcare, and other opportunities.

**"Reverse Racism":** A term commonly used by white people to equate instances of hostile behavior toward them by people of color with the racism people of color face. This is a way of ignoring the issue of who has the power.

**Internalized Racism:** The conscious or subconscious acceptance of the dominant society’s racist views, stereotypes and biases of one’s ethnic group, leading to finding fault with oneself or members of one's own group, while valuing the dominant culture (**internalized inferiority**). Another form of internalized racism is when a white person mistakenly believes s/he is better than people of color (internalized **superiority).**

**"Non-racist":** Term used by those who consider themselves "color-blind," a claim that in effect, denies any role in perpetuation systemic racism, or any responsibility to act to dismantle it. Institutional racism is perpetuated not only by those who actively discriminate, but also by those who fail to challenge it (silence = consent).  
  
**Anti-racist:** An anti-racist is someone who makes a conscious choice and persistent effort to challenge white supremacy, including her/his own white privilege, and to actively oppose forms of discrimination against people of color.

**Radical:** Designed to remove the root of a disease.

**ISMs:** The above seven definitions can be adapted to classism, sexism, homophobism, religious intolerance, adultism, ableism, and other discrimination/privilege continuums. The ISM indicates the presence of oppressive beliefs and attitudes that dominant group leadership embed into policies, practices, laws, and systems consciously or subconsciously.

**Indigenous (or Tribal) Sovereignty:** Arises from Indigenous Traditional Knowledge, belonging to each Indigenous nation, tribe, first nation, community, etc.  It consists of spiritual ways, culture, language, social and legal systems, political structures, and inherent relationships with lands, waters and all upon them.  Indigenous sovereignty exists regardless of what the nation-state does or does not do.  It continues as long as the People that are a part of it continue. *(from Indigenous Environmental Network)*

**Liberation:** Collective and individual freedom from all ideologies, systems, and culturally enforced forms of oppression.

**Minority:** I (Debby) don’t use this term as it encourages the idea of a majority which does not exist. Some DEIJB practitioners use the term **“minoritized”** to emphasize the system that otherizes, and not the individual.

*This list was co-developed by The Privilege Institute and Debby Irving*

**Exploring Cultural Values & Habits**

*This is not a good column/bad column exercise. That would be falling into either/or thinking (#10)!*

*This is cultural competence and humility tool to develop the self-awareness necessary to know when and why to move beyond dominant cultural habits, which many of us have* ***over practiced,*** *and instead choose transformational tools, which many of us have* ***under practiced.***

**Cultural Beliefs/Behavior Habits Cultural Beliefs/Behavior Habits**

**Engrained in Dominant U.S. Culture of Transformation and Connectedness**

1. transactional relational
2. hierarchical, authoritative, controlling collaborative, engaged, navigating
3. one-up / one-down, better / worse than interconnected, diverse web of life
4. otherize, disembody, dehumanize engage, embody, humanize
5. dominate, manipulate & control co-navigate, reciprocity
6. one right way, one right perspective multiple approaches, multiple perspectives
7. Eurocentric, American exceptionalism global community, global citizenship
8. mine ours
9. formal education is best knowledge lived experience is essential knowledge
10. either/or both/and
11. emotional hiding and fragility emotional honesty and resilience
12. polite, compliant authenticity, feedback encouraged
13. conflict avoidance conflict navigation & resolution skills
14. linear, one-dimensional thinking complex, interwoven, critical analysis
15. intellect over intuition intellect with intuition
16. my comfort is more important than yours capacity for discomfort is required for growth
17. time is scarce no such thing as wasting time
18. be busy be present
19. sense of urgency, quick fixes pace to project, invest in long term outcomes
20. quantitative over qualitative quantitative with qualitative
21. “rugged individual,” self-sufficiency interdependence, community
22. equality equity
23. one size fits all differentiation
24. talk at, be the knower ask & listen, be the learner
25. thick skinned, competitive open, compassionate, cooperative
26. assumption & judgment curiosity & listening
27. product/outcome is only goal process part of the product
28. poor disadvantaged/inferior you what can you teach me?
29. be more like me i want to understand you
30. deny, defend, deceive, justify acknowledge and own impact
31. blame and shame reflecting on own role
32. interrupt settle down to observe and listen
33. punishment reconciliation
34. bravado humility and vulnerability
35. prefer absolutes can tolerate ambiguity
36. perfection learning from mistakes
37. withholding (empathy, trust, $, knowledge) generosity (empathy, trust, $, knowledge)
38. winners & losers/zero sum game abundance/collective advancement
39. individual status group functionality
40. permanence, status quo, more of the same adaptability, growth, vitality

* This list, created by Debby Irving, was inspired by the work of Peggy McIntosh, Milton & Janet Bennett, Margo Adair & Sharon Howell, and Tema Okun.
* Dominant cultural values and habits (whiteness) can be internalized by people of all colors as we all need to know and use them to navigate and survive everyday life in the United States.

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