



INCLUSION 2.0

Move beyond power, politics, and political correctness

Session 4: Shadow of Inclusion Dynamics: Avoiding the back eddy of inclusion dogma

Recap of teaching points covered so far:

In the first two sessions, we focused on sameness and the soothing quality it brings, while in the following two sessions (including this one), we began exploring the stimulating/activating quality of difference. It's important to keep in mind that when difference arises, excitement in the nervous system can rapidly turn to threat. Adrenaline, cortisol, and norepinephrine are designed to excite your nervous system so you can run for cover or fight for your life. So, unless we learn to work with this highly evolved fight-or-flight response, we won't be able to make progress in conversations about diversity and inclusion.

There is an important distinction between 'inclusion' (which is equated with sameness/everyone having a voice), and 'diversity' (which speaks more to our ability to recognize, honor, explicate and express our differences). We are more habituated to sameness because the tension created by difference is so unpleasant. The more we as facilitators or leaders can tolerate difference in our own nervous systems, the more we can model our comfort with difference in groups.

Core teachings for Session 4:

Even if we as a culture have a desire to be inclusive, for the most part, we haven't yet learned how to 'be with' difference.

In Buddhist teachings, the first noble truth is that *suffering is unavoidable*. Much of human suffering comes from this experience of separation. We want to feel a part of a group, one with nature, or at home in the universe. As facilitators, we want to create psychological safety that support a deep sense of belonging and *also* includes our differences.

When we are able to acknowledge differences and work with them, differences are no longer simply different - they become integrated into sameness. The human brain evolves in the same way. As it learns and grows, it sends out differentiating neural pathways, and then the brain evolves to include them. Bringing out the differences in groups creates a movement towards including them. Then, as these differences are integrated, the system becomes more complex, and is more robust and vigorous as a result.

The better you are in working with difference within your own system, the better you'll be able to work with difference in the room. Two common responses when it shows up in groups is 1) withdrawing or 2) trying to control the conversation. When people withdraw, it's not so much the conversation itself they are trying to distance from, but their own embodied experience. To the degree that you can model your own comfort with difference and say 'It's OK to feel that way', you will be able to offer others that same sense of relaxation.

Skills for Working With Difference:

- 1) Do your inner work (first and ongoingly!) Work with shame, guilt and anger. Taking responsibility for yourself and learning to deal with strong feeling sensations.
- 2) Use listening skills to defuse and soothe. (Use the primary process inside yourself, listen first, find a way to join, only then bring in difference).
- 3) Use expressive skills: Bring your observation. Be congruent. Stay with your perceptions.
- 4) Make requests. I.e. 'Would you reflect what you heard me say?' Or, 'What is the impact on you of what I just said?'
- 5) Make any challenge from your first person, practice your ability to challenge others (and know when to do it). Stay open to the impact of your challenge.
- 6) Practice toughness: Being willing to take a stand, and being willing to receive feedback.
- 7) Develop role awareness, role transparency: Be clear about roles from the outset; clarifying them when you realize they are murky. Understand how your role informs your interventions and allow it to empower and guide your moves.
- 8) Shadow work: Integrate your enjoyment of power and dominance; and victimization.

Modeling, practicing and debriefing a short conversation that brings out difference:

The topic: The Quebec government ban on religious symbols (like hijabs or turbans) worn by civil servants.

Skills/elements: Setting up the container, ground rules, creating a bond and sameness by listening, bringing forward and integrating differences, conveying a sense of calm in the face of difference, in order to help set a tone that it's OK for people to have different points of view.

A few questions/reflections from participants:

- *What can I do when I'm experiencing difference in conversations that in some ways are designed to create difference (ie with job interviews)?*
- *What can I do if I am the only one who is willing to sit in the discomfort of difference while the rest of the group moves solidly toward sameness?*
- *Many third-person arguments seem to be actually first-person pains that are getting flipped into structural views. When is it best to focus on someone's personal pain in the larger cultural system issues, and when is it more useful to focus on the actual logic of the third-person perspectives?*
- *I notice that a lot of times, people don't acknowledge that an issue (racism or sexism) is happening. How does that difference get worked out?*

