

Activity 1.10 Designing Inclusive Discussions

Submitted by Sarah Pruet, Scott Pruet, and Eric Schmucker¹

Last Updated 9/27/2024



Description

We must intentionally design discussion spaces to create a supportive environment for all participants to show up authentically and feel like they belong. This activity helps participants consider key design principles and take ownership of creating inclusive discussion spaces.

Learning Goals

- Identify factors necessary for inclusive discussion design, including universal vs. specific design principles.
- Practice designing inclusive discussion spaces.

Instructions (65 minutes)

| | | |
|----------------------|---|--|
| <p>Set Up</p> | <p>Prepare for the Activity</p> <p>Invite participants to complete the Discussion Style Questionnaire from Activity 1.8 Evaluating Your Discussion Style. Prepare a summary of the group's collective results.</p> <p>Organize participants into small groups (3-4 ppl).</p> <p>Make sure participants have a writing surface.</p> | |
|----------------------|---|--|

¹ **Citation for this activity:** Sarah Pruet, Scott Pruet, and Eric Schmucker (2024). Designing Inclusive Discussions. In Hartman and Byrd (Eds), The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/activities/module-1>

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

| | | |
|------------------------|--|----------------------|
| | <p>Provide them with copies of the Designing Inclusive Discussions Worksheet.</p> <p>Begin by introducing the learning goals of this activity.</p> | |
| <p>Step One</p> | <p>Design a Kitchen</p> <p>Participants will work in pairs or small groups (3-4 ppl) to design a kitchen for a fictional client with specific needs. Assign each group a person using a specific descriptor. For example, someone who...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● is extremely tall ● is extremely short ● uses a wheelchair ● has complete loss of sight ● has difficulty reaching, lifting, or carrying items ● has difficulty bending, kneeling, etc. ● has limited stamina ● has limited balance <p>The fictional clients you choose to assign to groups should have conflicting needs. For example, designing for an extremely tall person versus an extremely short person. Participants will likely make designs specific to that one client's needs and these designs might actually create difficulties if other people were to use the same space without the same needs.</p> <p><u>Remind the groups to not describe their client to each other.</u></p> <p>Invite each group to use the worksheet to design a kitchen for their particular client. Share the following prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How will this client make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich? What would the steps be? ● What would your client interact with in the kitchen when doing so? How does the kitchen need to be designed to help them do so? ● For example, where is each ingredient kept and how do they access them? How far apart are they? What is the surface like that they are making the sandwich on and where is it? Where and how do they clean up their plate and utensils? ● Tip: Think of someone you may know who is similar to this client to help you visualize how they might move through the kitchen to do the task. ● You can change the kitchen layout and can include or adapt kitchen tools as needed for your client. <p>Facilitator Tip: There are different categories of how a kitchen can be modified in regard to the design (ex. location of elements, counter heights, etc.) but groups can also modify the task itself by changing the tools involved (ex. cutting boards that don't slide, built up handles, or jar openers, etc.). The task could be made easier either by completely changing the environment or by using different tools. Pay attention to how the groups approach the task.</p> | <p>15 min</p> |

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|----------------------|
| <p>Step Two</p> | <p>Showcase Designs</p> <p>Return to the full group and invite a representative from each small group to <i>briefly</i> describe their client and the design elements of their kitchen. While each group is reporting, record notes on their design elements on a shared surface visible to everyone.</p> <p>After all the groups have shared, introduce the concepts of universal design and specific design by sharing the following definitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Universal design is design that’s usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” –Ron Mace (an architect with polio who coined the term in the 1980s) • Universal Design asks “can multiple people exist in a space and have it work for them simultaneously?” • Specific Design asks “are there elements of the design that are unusable for some people?” <p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In thinking about universal design, where do we see areas of overlap or design elements that could be supportive to all of our clients? • In thinking about specific design, where do we see areas of contradictions, or elements of the design that only work for one client? (One possible example is really high countertops.) • What modifications could we make so that all of our clients could comfortably use this kitchen? • What modifications could we make to the tools we use that could meet universal needs without completely redesigning the kitchen? For example, cutting boards, jar lids, etc. <p>Facilitator Tip: If there are no areas of contradiction you can ask how one of the clients would use this design if they suddenly had a new impairment? Would it still work?</p> | <p>20 min</p> |
| <p>Step Three</p> | <p>Explore Discussion Design</p> <p>Share the following prompt: Just as everyone has different needs and considerations when using a kitchen, people have different needs and considerations when engaging in a discussion. One of the main considerations is how to create a discussion environment that can fit many different discussion needs to the greatest extent possible.</p> <p>Invite participants to review the collective feedback from the Evaluating Your Discussion Style Questionnaire and discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of these results, what stands out? What surprises you? • What are some general discussion participation trends? • What are some common fears or points of anxiety? | <p>15 min</p> |

| | | |
|------------------|---|---------------|
| | <p>Invite participants to individually reflect and write down their thoughts on the worksheet to the following prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we create a discussion environment and process that best supports all members in this group? • What should it include? Is there anything we should avoid? • What elements or tools do we need to include? • How should the room be set up? • How might we modify or adapt the space or tools that we currently have to be more universally supportive? <p>In either a large group or in small groups, invite participants to discuss their responses to the above questions and work together to design a discussion that would work best for the entire group.</p> <p>Facilitator Tip: You can review the group's feedback from the Evaluating Your Discussion Style Questionnaire and facilitate this step based on the method of discussion the majority prefer. If they record that they prefer small group discussion, then do this as a small group. If the majority record that they prefer a large group, then lead the activity as a large group.</p> | |
| Step Four | <p>Showcase Designs (If the activity was completed in small groups)</p> <p>Return to the full group and invite a representative from each small group to <i>briefly</i> describe their discussion elements and room setup.</p> | 5 min |
| Step Five | <p>Debrief as a Full Group</p> <p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the time, when designing a discussion, you do not know participants' discussion styles or preferences ahead of time. How can you still design an inclusive discussion without that information? • Some people may need additional considerations or adaptations for them to participate (specific designs). What are some examples of specific designs that you may need to consider? • Should we always design a space for the comfort of the majority? When should we focus on designing a space with specific design, even when it is not necessary for the majority? Even when it is uncomfortable or inconvenient for the majority? | 10 min |

Reflection Journal

Think about a time when you experienced or participated in a discussion or meeting where inclusive design was not adequately considered.

- What were the effects? How did this impact the discussion?
- What would you change to make the discussion more inclusive?

Practice Journal

This week, organize a meeting or discussion with a group you are part of, such as friends, colleagues, neighbors, etc. and practice creating an inclusive space.

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- [Universal Design](https://universaldesign.org): “The Universal Design Project.” *The Universal Design Project*, Pruett & Co., 2019, <https://universaldesign.org>.
- [Inclusive Design](https://maze.co/guides/inclusive-design/inclusive-design-principles/#principles): “8 Inclusive Design Principles You Need to Know.” *Maze*, Maze, 11 Oct. 2023, <https://maze.co/guides/inclusive-design/inclusive-design-principles/#principles>.

Activity Cluster

[1.8 Evaluating Your Discussion Style](#)

1.10 Designing Inclusive Discussions

[4.7 Recognizing Power Imbalances in Decision Making](#)