



# Curating the Environment for Dialogue

## CREATE AN INCLUSIVE + WELCOMING SPACE FOR DEEPER ENGAGEMENT

### WHAT IT IS

Curating the environment means thinking intentionally about participants' holistic relationship to the dialogue space + taking action to make that space more accessible physically, cognitively, and emotionally.

### WHY WE DO IT

- Signals the transition to a “temporary alternative space” (Priya Parker, *The Art of Gathering*) that operates by its own norms
- Helps build the trust + comfort necessary to reach greater depth + challenge

### HOW TO DO IT

**Think holistically + within the limits of the space.** How do you want participants to feel, to think, to interact during this conversation? What is needed, what is ideal, and what is possible in the space?

**Consult participants before the dialogue** about their accessibility needs + preferences if possible -- ask about mobility issues, sensory issues, food allergies, chemical + sound + light sensitivities, etc.

**Start simple.** Pick a few practices, try them, note the effect. Build up a repertoire that works for you.

**Check in with participants during the dialogue** for consent, input, and feedback on your choices.

**Build a kit** with a few small items you can use to transform the space quickly (see below). Bring it with you and add to it over time! Including participants in setup strengthens a sense of community.

### EFFECTIVE CURATORIAL PRACTICES Beneficial for dialogue even when not “needed”!

#### LAYOUT

**Make sure participants can see each other.** Arrange chairs in a circle, or have them turn in their chairs to face each other.

**Make sure participants can access all materials + visuals.** Can they see the board? Are all pathways clear + wide? If they need to write or eat, is there a surface for each person? etc.

**If going outside,** select an area that is shaded + accessible.

#### TOUCH

**Manipulables.** Set out fidget toys, small stones, coloring pages, puzzles, origami paper, etc., to help channel energy + maintain focus for listening.

**Temperature.** If you can, keep it around 72°. If it's cold, bring blankets; if hot, paper fans.

#### SIGHT

**Lighting.** Replace harsh overhead lighting with natural light, lamps, or twinkle lights.

**Color.** Warm up sterile spaces with a colorful hanging or two.

**Visuals.** Provide all important information (e.g. norms, questions, instructions) in written form, with legibly large font.

#### SOUND

**Music.** Play upbeat music to welcome participants. Play low instrumentals during small group dialogue and independent work. Make + find playlists you like, or have participants help.

**Silence.** Pause music during instructions, presentations, whole-group dialogue, etc.

**Read out** written information or comments shared on screens.

#### TASTE + SMELL

**Food + drink.** Breaking bread together releases dialogue, even simple snacks or tea.

**Aromatherapy.** Spritz an essential oils-based room spray to relax or energize.

#### A SAMPLE DIALOGUE KIT

- **Sturdy tote to pack it all in.**
- **Battery-powered string lights.**
- **Portable speaker + phone.**
- **Wrapped small snacks.** Trail mix packets, granola bars, etc.
- **Mix of fidget toys.** Spinners, stress balls, infinity cubes, etc.
- **Room spray.** Lavender, citrus
- **Materials specific to that day.** Agenda, handouts, laptop, etc.

