



HARVARD

Office of the Vice Provost for Advances in Learning



HILT CONFERENCE

Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching

2024

# 2024 HILT Conference: “Open Minds in Dialogue”

Friday, September 20, 2024, at Harvard Graduate School of Education

The thirteenth annual HILT Conference, “Open Minds in Dialogue,” underscored the importance of integrating emotional and analytical skills in teaching, navigating the complexities of speech-related pressures, and fostering inclusive environments for open dialogue. Key discussions revolved around how educators can balance personal narratives with academic rigor, the dynamics of speech-related pressures, and the role of faculty in creating neutral and trustworthy classroom environments. The following insights from the event are meant for educators and institutions aiming to enhance academic and professional development through effective communication and inclusive practices.

## Key Takeaways from Breakout Sessions

### Open Minds Within and Across Disciplines

**Session Description:** *This session will delve into productive ways of fostering an open dialogue within and across academic disciplines. What classroom approaches are most effective in increasing student engagement? When and how can those approaches be adapted effectively in other disciplines? Participants will have an opportunity to experience specific pedagogical practices used in various fields and reflect on how they can bring these methods into their contexts.*

- **Affirmative Listening to Foster Better Conversations:** Affirmative listening involves fully understanding and validating the speaker's emotions and perspectives before responding. This method helps create a more empathetic and engaging dialogue, which is particularly important in academic settings where diverse viewpoints and sensitive topics are discussed.
- **Encouraging Deep Engagement with Complex Topics:** Courses that tackle controversial or deeply personal subjects, such as end-of-life care or cultural health disparities, benefit from fostering deep student engagement. This can be achieved by structured discussions that encourage students to explore and express their values, emotions, and beliefs in a safe environment.
- **Multiple Narrative Frameworks for Teaching Contentious Issues:** When teaching about contentious historical or political topics, employing a multiple narrative framework can help students understand diverse perspectives without feeling indoctrinated. This approach emphasizes using primary sources and personal stories to make the learning more relatable and impactful for students.
- **Creating Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments:** Establishing a safe container for learning is crucial when dealing with controversial topics. This includes setting community agreements, differentiating between safety and comfort, and promoting co-regulation among students to facilitate collaborative learning and mutual respect.

- **Utilizing Question Formulation Techniques:** Teaching students how to formulate questions effectively can enhance their analytical skills and promote democratic engagement. Using structured techniques like the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) helps students develop deeper inquiries, understand different perspectives, and engage more effectively in discussions.