

OPTIONS FOR CAUCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

[ADAPTED FROM TDSJ2, APPENDIX 13B]

This is an option for initiating discussion about family class backgrounds and experiences in small group discussions where the groups are homogeneous, based upon social economic class backgrounds (and where possible cutting across race and ethnicity). What follows are two options for setting up homogeneous groups (“caucus groups”) for discussion of class background.

Caucus Group Options

Forming Class Caucuses

Option 1: Take three or four class indicators and name four different class positions with respect to the indicator. Put a poster in each corner with numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. Then ask students to go to the corner (number) that they visited most often and form a class caucus with the others there.

Some examples of class indicators and four different positions.

- Education: High school diploma or less; some college; graduated four-year college; graduate or professional degree
- Housing: homeless or intermittent housing; rent or own trailer/small house; own house in “nice” neighborhood; own multiple houses
- Occupation: intermittent unemployment, government assistance, or minimum wage; manual or service work; professional job; no need to work

Option 2: Participants may feel more comfortable talking about class issues if they are with others with whom they share another aspect of identity, for example, middle-class suburban, working-class Jews, upwardly mobile, first-generation Americans. Encourage students to only name other groups if there is not one that already fits for them. After everyone says there is at least one group that would work, take a straw poll. If at least two people raise their hand, make that a caucus group. Stay with this process until everyone has a place to go.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND REPORT TO THE WHOLE CLASS:

Once the homogeneous groups have been formed, participants discuss questions listed in bullets below. Small groups should spend their final 10 minutes agreeing on what parts of their discussion they want to “report out” to the whole class, so that the class will get a feel for their discussion. During the discussion, one group member prepares a newsprint poster of the main points the group wants to report out to the whole class. A second group member will explain the poster during the whole-class discussion. During the small group discussion, a third group member manages equal air-time for all participants and makes sure that all group members participate during the caucus group discussion.

- When you were growing up, what was your immediate family’s source of income? Did this change at all over the years?
- When you were growing up, did you feel your immediate family had less, the same as, or more than: Other people in your extended family? Other people in your neighborhood? Other people in your school?
- Describe some of the ways that you felt, when you were growing up, about your family’s status, compared with that of other people you knew. (Be as specific as you can about specific people you compared yourself with.)
- Describe your living space when you were growing up: Owned or rented? Stayed in one place or moved a lot? Apartment or house? Lots of room or crowded? Safe neighborhood or dangerous neighborhood?
- How did these aspects of your own living space compare with other people in your extended family? In your neighborhood? In your grade school, or middle school, or high school?
- When did you first become aware of large differences in the amount of money, resources, wealth that different families had? Did you have specific feelings about these differences (surprise, pity, envy, other feelings)?
- How does your present-day education compare with that of your parents when they were your age? Of your grandparents when they were your age? Does everyone in your family have a higher degree? Are you a first-generation college student? Something in between?
- Do you and your family have leisure time? If so, how much leisure time do you have in a week? In a year? How do you spend your leisure time? If not, what prevents you and your family from having leisure time?
- Do you and your family have the health care that you need?
- Has anyone in your extended family, or in your neighborhood, or someone you know, been “laid off” during the past year? Do you or your family worry about this?
- Has anyone in your extended family, or in your neighborhood, or someone you know, lost their house due to foreclosure during the past year? Do you or your family worry about this?

NEWSPRINT “GALLERY”

Instead of group members presenting their newsprint reports to the whole class, another option is for group members to “post” their newsprint around the room – and once they are posted, all class members walk around the room to read the posters. When all class members have read all the posters, the facilitators ask for observations about the different newsprints, how it felt to have conversations about class and classism in Caucus Groups, what observations participants want to make in the whole class, what questions they have.