

# BUILDING SKILLS

## LESSON 10: NAMING, FRAMING, AND ASKING STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

 *Develop skills for naming and framing issues in ways that enable different communities to address problems.*

 *Learn to ask strategic questions.*

## LESSON OVERVIEW

Naming and framing problems are important democratic skills for facilitating change in public work. This lesson introduces these processes through story circles and helps participants learn to ask strategic questions.

## SUGGESTED PLAN [ø 75 minutes]

# LESSON PREPARATION

1. Review the following resources:

- “A Beginner’s Guide to Naming and Framing Issues” video, Kettering Foundation, <https://vimeo.com/118827420>.
- Nicholas V. Longo & Timothy Shaffer, “Naming and Framing Wicked Problems” excerpt from Longo & Shaffer, *Creating Space for Democracy* (Stylus, 2019), pp. 22-25.

2. Familiarize yourself with the story circle approach to facilitating dialogue and prepare to share the principles of story circles with participants. A good overview, from the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, is available at <https://usdac.us/storycircles>.

3. Review the case study used in this lesson, The Campus Speaker: <https://newseumed.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/The-Campus-Speaker-case-study%20v2.pdf>

Note: You can also select an alternative case study that raises complex issues around naming and framing, such as “The Safe Space that Became a Virtual Nightmare” from *The New York Times Magazine* (September 22, 2022) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/07/magazine/arizona-state-university-multicultural-center.html>. If you select an alternative case, adapt the story circle prompts and other lesson elements accordingly.

## STORY CIRCLE INTRODUCTION [🕒 5 minutes]

Introduce story circles as a dialogue process that facilitates sharing first-hand experiences through stories. Share the following guidelines on conducting story circles, from the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture:

- Listening is as important as speaking; each person receives full attention while telling their story. Listen for the essence of what is being shared, rather than mentally critiquing the person’s delivery.
- Each participant has equal time to share a story on a generative theme identified beforehand.
- Attention goes around the circle in either direction. Individuals can pass, and will be given the opportunity to tell a story at the end of the circle. If someone declines, that’s fine. Don’t insist.

- There are no questions, criticisms, cross-talk, or comments on any story while sharing is going on.
- People do not speak from notes and are discouraged from preparing their own stories rather than giving others full attention. Spontaneity is important.

### **PRACTICE STORY CIRCLES [⌚ 20 minutes]**

Introduce a prompt for students to use in storytelling circles. Use a prompt that invites participants to share their own personal stories and experiences, such as, "Share a time when you felt part of a community." To introduce the skills of naming and framing issues, you might also consider using a prompt about voice, such as, "Share a time when you felt powerful and heard, when you were able to share your voice and ideas," or "Share a time when you felt invisible, when you felt marginalized and unable to share your voice and ideas."

Break the class into groups of 6 to 8 to share stories. Groups should give each person 2 minutes to respond to the prompt. It may be helpful to suggest that someone in the group keep time; however, allow for flexibility in sharing personal stories.

### **LARGE-GROUP NAMING, FRAMING, AND STRATEGIC QUESTIONS [⌚ 15 minutes]**

After everyone shares their stories, bring the groups back together to reflect on the experience and stories shared. Have participants reflect on how people named issues associated with themes like voice, power, oppression, and speech and discuss the multiple ways people describe aspects of a given issue.

Prompt students to consider how different ways of naming an issue can invite people to participate and feel a sense of belonging or, conversely, make them feel invisible and excluded. After this discussion, ask the group to come up with strategic questions for future conversations that would be empowering using a story circle format.

### **CASE STUDY [⌚ 5 minutes]**

Introduce The Campus Speaker case study developed by Newseum (or alternative case) and give participants time to review the case:

<https://newseumed.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/The-Campus-Speaker-case-study%20v2.pdf>

### **SMALL GROUPS [☺ 15 minutes]**

Break the class into small groups. Ask participants to discuss how they would lead a dialogue on this case study, using these prompts:

- How would you name the issue raised in this case study? What other ways can the issue be named? What name would you use to engage people in dialogue on the topic—e.g., in the announcement inviting people to discuss the issue?
- How would you frame the issue? What are ways you can frame choices for addressing the issue?
- What strategic questions would you ask at the dialogue? Come up with two or three questions you think each facilitator should ask.
- If you were an administrator on the campus, what would you ultimately do?

### **LARGE-GROUP HARVESTING [☺ 15 minutes]**

Bring the groups back into the larger circle, asking each group to report out on the case study with the other groups. Ask the group reflective questions, such as:

- How did others in your group name and frame the issue?
- Was this different from the way you named and framed it?
- In what contexts or situations do you think this skill would be important? How do you practice this skill in your life now?

