

# Creating Principled Spaces of Learning

Inclusive Education, Eden Centre for Educational Enhancement  
*Support and guidance for educators interested in cultivating principled  
and inclusive learning environments.*



Inclusive Education  
Eden Centre

# Focus on creating principled spaces of learning



Inclusive education involves a shared commitment to values that shape how we learn, work, and relate.



A principled space is one where equity is practiced, care is intentional, and accountability is collective.

# This resource will help you:

- Deepen understanding of safe, brave, and principled spaces — and how they differ in purpose and practice
- Equip you to co-create principled spaces through values-led design and ground-clearing practices
- Share adaptable activities to help embed principled space with your students
- Explore common teaching scenarios and how principled space may guide your response and support inclusive engagement.





# Building Principled Spaces

- The concept of '**safe spaces**' typically refers to environments where individuals feel secure enough to express themselves without fear of judgment or harm.
- It was originally part of the 1970s women and LGBT movements and was initially used to describe physical meeting places where individuals could gather and share experiences in what was considered a safe environment (see Flenser et al 2019) .



## Brave Spaces: Arao and Clemens (2013)

The goal for educators should not be to avoid discomfort, but rather to embrace it as a part of the learning process, and in the paper "From **Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces**" (2013) they shift the focus from creating environments that shield students from discomfort, to fostering spaces where challenging and courageous conversations can take place. Brave spaces encourage students/participants to engage with difficult topics, take risks, and learn from their experiences and mistakes



# Principled Spaces (Hanalei Ramos)

A **principled space** is one where the values of inclusivity, respect, and equity are upheld, and where all participants feel empowered to share their experiences and perspectives. This concept is crucial in fostering a learning atmosphere that not only respects diversity but actively engages with it in meaningful ways regardless of disciplinary field or knowledge of inclusive education. It involves the continuous adaptation of teaching practices to ensure that they are responsive to the evolving needs and identities of students.



According to Ramos:

Principled spaces are brave spaces where we practice showing up in a way that is respectful, supportive and celebratory of every person's humanity.



The principled space is attributed to artist and activist **Hanalei Ramos** and it recognises that it isn't possible to fully guarantee safe spaces because we cannot control how people behave, think and speak.





## Towards principled spaces:

- **Clarify the purpose and tone of your space** by distinguishing between *safe*, *brave*, and *principled* spaces — each offers different affordances for dialogue, risk, and care.
- **Co-create the space intentionally**, inviting participants to shape shared norms, expectations, and values through collaborative design and *ground clearing practices*.
- **Use structured activities** to help surface values, build trust, and embed principles into your teaching.
- **Prepare for complexity** and consider how principled space can support you in responding with integrity, empathy, and clarity.






# Ground clearing practices:

- Intentional prompts, or activities that help a group pause, reflect, and align before engaging in shared work
- Surface assumptions, emotions, or power dynamics that may affect participation
- Establish boundaries, and expectations
- Create space for open discussions and reflection.




# Examples of Ground Clearing Practices:

1. **Discussion of privilege or postionality:** for teachers and students to fully participate in the classroom we may wish to acknowledge and discuss privilege. An important and useful resources in this area is Peggy McIntosh's (1989) work on white privilege and unpacking the invisible knapsack. The invisible knapsack is a powerful metaphor that illustrates how white privilege functions as an unseen collection of special provisions, assurances, tools, and blank checks that white people carry with them daily, often without awareness or acknowledgment of these unearned advantages in navigating society. McIntosh has provides a useful toolkit for teachers to use in discussing privilege and will support and enable students to work through discomfort.
2. **Active listening to each other:** there is a wealth of literature on active listening in teaching and learning (see Newton, 2024, Canpolat et al 2015) which have shown the benefits of teachers and students of active listening. It enables empathy and compassion.



**3. Reading and reflecting:** alongside active listening it is important for teachers and students to spend time reading as part of any class, but it should form an integral part of the principled space. Reading materials should be diverse and inclusive, representing multiple perspectives and voices, particularly those that have been historically marginalised. Reflective exercises, such as journaling or group discussions, can help students process what they have read and connect it to their own experiences and the broader social context. By reading and reflecting we arrive with a diverse viewpoint and open to difference.

**4. Addressing discomfort:** It is important for both individuals and educators to experience varying degrees of discomfort. Research has been exploring the role of comfort in diversity policies in UK higher education (see Ahmet, 2021). By focusing on the experience of being uncomfortable, we can be aware of our own positionalities and engage fully in practices one to three.



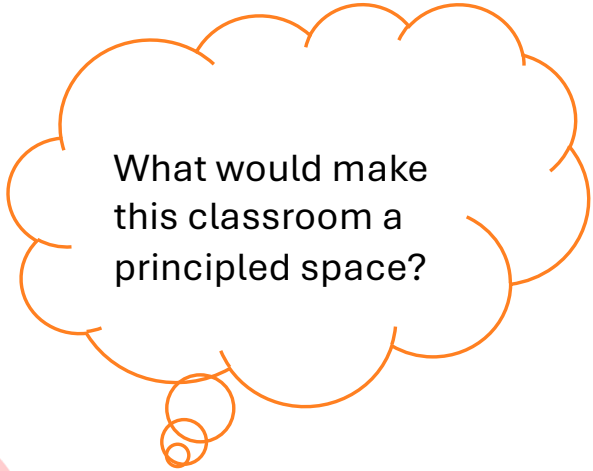
**5. Enabling action and change:** we want our students to leave university as actors of change, and this must be embedded into our learning spaces. This involves continuous evaluation of the classroom and curriculum.

# Summary: To create a principled space, you need to discuss ground clearing practices


1. Consider our privileges and positionalities both teachers and students
2. Actively listen to peers and teacher
3. Actively learn through your readings and resources
4. Reflect and work through any discomfort by thinking about questions to ask to help understand different viewpoints
5. Work together as a community in the classroom.

# Digital tools and questions you may consider to co-create ground clearing principles:

- Mentimeter: <https://www.mentimeter.com/app/home>
- Microsoft White Board: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/microsoft-whiteboard/digital-whiteboard-app>
- Questions you may ask:



What would make this classroom a principled space?



Let's talk about ground clearing practices in our classroom



# Teaching Scenarios



## Teaching scenario one

Sam teaches a small seminar class with a group of undergraduate students. During the first three sessions of the term on socio-political factors in emerging economies, one student in particular challenges their choice of examples that show emerging economies from a deficit perspective. Sam has started feeling a sense of trepidation when teaching this class - what new issues are the students going to find fault with? Sam has tried to explain to the students that it is out of their control as these are the readings prescribed on the course. The attacks are starting to become more personal, and Sam feels that not only is their credibility being challenged, but also their identity. **What would you advise Sam to do?**



## Possible solutions:

- **The Principled Path Forward**
- In a principled space:
- Sam's struggles are valid
- The student's critiques may have merit
- Personal attacks are not acceptable
- Growth opportunities exist for everyone
- The goal isn't to make the discomfort disappear but to transform it into collective learning while maintaining everyone's dignity..





**"You're raising important critiques about how these economies are framed. I'm required to use these texts, but let's work together to read them critically. What counter-narratives or alternative sources could we bring in to challenge these deficit perspectives?"**

- This validates the student's concerns
- Shares power rather than hiding behind institutional constraints
- Models intellectual humility
- Creates shared ownership of the learning

## Teaching scenario two

You are presenting data on stop-and-search statistics disaggregated by race and neighbourhood. The data shows significant disparities, with Black young men being stopped at 5 times the rate of white men in the same neighbourhood.

You open the class up for discussion with a question around what people think the data is telling us.

- **Marcus** (Sociology BSc): "This clearly shows racial profiling. It's exactly what we experience in our communities. These numbers prove systemic racism in policing."
- **Emma** (Social Policy BSc): "But we can't conclude that from this data alone. What about crime rates in those areas? Maybe there are other variables we're not considering. Correlation isn't causation."
- **Jamal** (Maths BSc): "Are you seriously suggesting we deserve to be stopped more? This is our lived reality!"
- **David** (Economics) : "I think we need to be objective here. Maybe there are socioeconomic factors—"
- **Sofia** (Anthropology): *visibly tenses, stops taking notes*
- **Wei** (Management): *looks uncomfortable, glances at door*
- *The room energy shifts palpably. Some students lean forward, others shrink back. Side conversations start.*



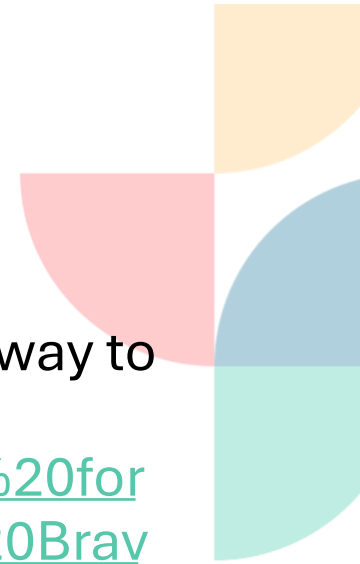
# Possible solutions:

- **Step 1: Acknowledge What's Happening**
- "We're encountering different interpretations of data that connect to lived experiences, academic training, and personal beliefs. This is challenging AND valuable. Thank you all for engaging."
- **Step 2: Return to the Principles you co-created at the start of the course**
- **Step 3: Create Structure for Dialogue**
- "Let's try something. Rather than debating who's right, let's explore what different perspectives can teach us. I'll offer three reflection prompts. Choose one and write for 3 minutes:
- What life experiences shape how you interpret this data?
- What questions does this data raise that we need to explore?
- What feelings are coming up, and what might they teach us?"



## LSE Resources:

- Inclusive Pedagogies Podcast with Prof Shakuntala Banaji, Prof Michael Mason and Dr Jillian Terry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFJRJBALL1w>
- Education Forum on Principled Spaces: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pa4TmI1NNlk>
- Inclusive Education Hub: <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Eden-Centre/Inclusive-Education-at-LSE>
- Ahmet, A. (2020). What exactly are inclusive pedagogies? LSE Higher Education Blog: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/highereducation/2020/06/29/what-exactly-are-inclusive-pedagogies/>
- Building Principled Spaces: <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Eden-Centre/Resources-to-support-your-practice/Creating-and-negotiating-a-principled-learning-space>
- Student Services and Cause for Concern: <https://info.lse.ac.uk/current-students/student-wellbeing/cause-for-concern>



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