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Interaction Framework for the Purpose of Deepening Understanding (DU)

Social Interaction Ability Department
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Interaction Framework for the Purpose of Deepening Understanding (DU)

I. INTRODUCTION

Many of our interactions in groups can develop and sustain a community of learners. Such discussions, with a history over time, animate continued thought in deep and powerful ways. Thus, one's partners in a discussion become an intellectual community—however small or large. For individuals interested in deepening their understanding, these communities become a source of support and welcomed challenge.

Intrinsic in a college education is the process of becoming involved in the “life of the mind” in which evolving and spontaneous discussions become exciting and rewarding. Often these discussions arise from something we're interested in or that we are following closely. For example, you may become interested in the history of rock music, and you hear someone talking about it. You then find yourself learning things you didn't know, and you want to become involved in the conversation. And then you find out that a faculty member has written about the history of garage bands in Milwaukee, and so you find yourself wanting to learn still more.

You may also find that anything you study deeply you become interested in, and the more interested you become, the more you want to interact with others who are interested in it. Sometimes when you do, you may find some people who engage in interaction only to express themselves without really contributing anything thoughtful. (In fact, sometimes a very thoughtful discussion can lose focus and direction.) And you begin to wonder how you can keep a conversation going that will deepen your understanding and that of others.

At other times you may join a group or be a part of a group that already has a focus on deepening their understanding of something. For example, this could be in a classroom, in a student group, or in a group of friends.

So, what makes these interactions distinctive? A key characteristic, especially in educational settings, is that they are for the purpose of helping us, as individuals, achieve a better understanding of something. These interactions are active, mutual, responsive exchanges of ideas, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions for the purpose of expanding our thinking and perspectives. Although deepening understanding is primarily an intellectual activity, it also often involves an empathetic understanding of others' views. Characteristic of this type of discussion it tends to be open-ended, divergent, comparing perspectives, and has moments of realization.

In contrast to groups who come together to make a decision or complete a specific task, in the Deepening Understanding Framework the purpose is the discussion itself not a final decision or *task* completion as a goal. In using the word *task*, this often includes working toward decisions, although it can also be thought of as engaging and participating in an activity such as a discussion, an issue of the day, or what is on people's minds, without having to come to a group conclusion. In the Deepening Understanding Framework this process begins before the group meets as members prepare for the main focus, the discussion itself. The framework also includes a last stage of evaluation where the

consideration is on what has been learned, contributions made by members, and use of the Deepening Understanding Framework. The desired outcome is for participants to receive and share ideas, broaden their knowledge, and develop their abilities.

II. **ASSUMPTIONS FOR THE DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORK**

These kinds of groups, in which Deepening Understanding is the primary focus of the discussion, have some things in common.

- Everyone can learn to value intellectual discussions.
- Group discussion is a valuable means to learning.
- Active listening is one of the most powerful ways of learning.
- Willingness to engage in discussion is central to deepening understanding

III. ATTITUDES AND CHARACTERISTICS IN THE DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORK

Group members participating in discussion related to Deepening Understanding offer and bring to the group their own attitudes and beliefs that may positively contribute or sometimes hinder group process. Effective groups benefit by having members with positive attitudes and characteristics that include having a meaningful purpose and vision of the goals and of learning.

<u>ATTITUDE</u> Personal way of thinking, organizing individual viewpoints, beliefs, feelings, and stances that may produce behavioral tendencies that are positive, negative, or neutral Some examples:	<u>CHARACTERISTICS</u> Personal distinguishing qualities. Some examples:
Emotional Awareness Noting and identifying the source of an emotion and reflecting on it in order to gain insight into your own and others' perspectives	Courageous Quality of being brave to express your view point or support another when peer pressure is strong to the contrary
Empathy Understanding another at a deep level and appreciating how their situation affects their feelings, beliefs, perspectives	Initiative One's own personal, responsible decision to act, the power or opportunity to act or take charge before others do, involving resourcefulness, self motivation, creativity, originality, and/or imagination
Expectation of Learning Awareness that one's own perspective might change as a result of discussion	Patience One's capacity for waiting calmly
Interest in Sharing Ideas; trust in the goodwill of others	Persuasiveness One's ability to influence others in their thinking and decisions
Openness Readiness to consider other points of view; showing curiosity about new ideas	Risk-taking One's capacity to be venturesome, bold, or adventurous in thinking and action
Respect An attitude that recognizes the value of another person and treats the person accordingly, recognizing their capacity to make their own decision	Reflectiveness One's ability to thoughtfully ponder or contemplate ideas and actions to recognize possible consequences and significance
Tolerance for Ambiguity Willingness to accept that things are sometimes vague; that ideas sometimes best unfold over time; that topics lend themselves to different levels of precision	

IV. THREE DIMENSIONS IN LEARNING THE SOCIAL INTERACTION ABILITY AND IN THE DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORK

Through focused learning opportunities you increase your understanding of how to continuously improve your social interaction ability. The three dimensions of social interaction described below are interrelated and key components in developing and demonstrating effectiveness in interactions for the Deepening Understanding Framework. The three are interrelated throughout interaction when you become engaged and participate, while at the same time, you draw upon and apply analytic frameworks. You also connect all three when you demonstrate your self-awareness from your Preparation Stage, continue through other stages, and end with your Implementation and Evaluation Stage.

1. Willingness to engage

At the most basic level, you are willing to interact with others, no matter how different their personal experiences and opinions, attitudes, world views, cultural assumptions, or particular values may be. You are willing to try different ways of interacting with others, even if these are not what seem comfortable, natural, or effective from your own point of view. In the Deepening Understanding Framework this may include listening with an open-mind without interrupting as you attempt to gain understanding of another group member's explanation of her idea or view point even if you do not initially see the merits in it.

2. Analytic frameworks

Analytic frameworks can guide observations, inferences, and interpretations. In addition to learning to use the of the five social interaction analytical frameworks, you also learn a range of other analytical frameworks that draw on interaction theory and research.

3. Self-awareness

Self-awareness involves first recognizing how your own attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and initial judgments affect your own behavior and reactions to others. It also involves exploring how your ideas for social interaction compare with your actual social interaction behaviors. Opportunities to formally self-assess your behaviors and receive feedback from others supports more insightful self-awareness. The Framework provides a structure to guide you in identifying, recognizing, and reflecting on your emotions and the impact they have on your behaviors, both verbally and nonverbal, in the discussion. This allows you the opportunity to adapt your behaviors as appropriate to be more effective in the interaction.

V. DESCRIPTION OF STAGES

While some brief conversations that deepen understanding are unstructured and freewheeling, in longer conversations, you might be able to recognize several stages as you participate. In each stage you will see *key behaviors* that are important in developing your *Social Interaction* abilities. A *behavior* means observable activities and responses related to the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially toward others, and groups. It can also include responses to environment and other external stimuli.

1. PREPARATION STAGE

Involves developing a commitment to a mutual analytic discussion and preparing for it (e.g., studying the issue or topic, including anything the group has chosen or been assigned to independently review). Some BEHAVIORS key to the Preparation Stage are:

- **Gathering Information**
Compiling preliminary facts, data, evidence, or other material necessary to be informed and organized for the group discussion.
- **Self-Awareness**
Being able to accurately recognize own thoughts and feelings and their impact on one's attitudes and behaviors

PREPARATION STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What **questions** do I have about this **topic**?
- What **interest me**? What might also be of **interest to others**?
- How should I **prepare** for a **discussion** with this group?

KEY BEHAVIORS

Gathering Information

Self-Awareness

PREPARATION STAGE EXAMPLE

Before meeting her new friends at the Inferno Café, Sarah spends a little time exploring the Web for information on the music industry. She finds herself even more engaged in the topic than usual because she has been talking about it with her friends.

2. IDENTIFICATION STAGE

Involves identifying a starting point for a discussion, including how to resume a previous discussion. Some BEHAVIORS key to the Identification Stage are:

- **Active listening**
Knowing where to begin the discussion means identifying what people are interested in and the source of their investment in the discussion: What do they want to talk about and why?
- **Asking pertinent questions**
Choosing one or more good questions can be a good way to structure a discussion. One thing to notice is what assumptions the questions are based on. Coming to agreement on those assumptions will facilitate a mutually satisfying discussion.
- **Nonverbally displaying attention**
You can help set the tone for deepening understanding in the early stages of the conversation by showing interest through your nonverbal behavior.
- **Offering a view**
Getting a conversation started can involve taking a risk to put your ideas “out there.” It is particularly effective to use “I think” or “I believe” with a brief rationale.

IDENTIFICATION STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What might I **suggest** is an interesting **question** about the topic?
- What do **others** in the group seem to be **interested** in?
- What seems to be the **group’s** most compelling **interest**?

KEY BEHAVIORS

Active Listening

Asking Pertinent Questions

Offering a View

Relevant Responding

IDENTIFICATION STAGE EXAMPLE

Sarah offers a view to get a conversation started.

“I think music has become too commercialized. It is really hard for a group to break into the industry these days with distribution mechanisms like ‘iTunes’ – only the most famous musicians can make it with downloads.”

3. SHARING AND ARTICULATION STAGE

Involves sharing ideas, perspectives, beliefs, and/or feelings related to a point of discussion and listening to those of others; the focus is seeking to explore and clarify one's own and others' ideas. Articulation in this stage refers to the act of putting ideas or feelings into words in a way that is clear and coherent to others. Some BEHAVIORS key to the Sharing and Articulation Stage are:

- **Acknowledging**
Appreciatively notes positive qualities of an offered perspective acknowledged to be different from own.
- **Articulating a view**
Explains how key ideas in a view work together and what makes these ideas credible or useful in some content.
- **Challenging**
In a discussion, a key to articulating ideas is respectfully identifying any areas of disagreement and on the sources of those.
- **Checking interpretations**
Conveys an interpretation of what a person just said in order to confirm or clarify the intent of what was communicated and, in doing so, avoids any expression of approval or disapproval.

SHARING AND ARTICULATION STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Have I been **clear** about what my **thoughts** are?
- Do I **understand** what **others** saying?
- What can I **appreciate** or **agree** with?
- What **assumptions** do others seem to be making with which I might **disagree**?

KEY BEHAVIORS

Acknowledging

Articulating a View

Challenging

Checking Interpretations

SHARING AND ARTICULATION STAGE EXAMPLE

Melissa challenges Sarah's view by saying,
"I have heard people say that, but is it not also true that almost anyone can start their own website and get their music out there? They don't have to rely on the music industry to make and sell good music."

4. DISCOVERY STAGE

Involves making connections/distinctions among ideas, perspectives, and beliefs and exploring their relative worth. Some BEHAVIORS key to the Discovery Stage are:

- **Critiquing**
By weighing the benefits and limitations of the proposed perspectives, the group avoids premature closure.
- **Making connections and distinctions**
At this point in the discussion any connections or distinctions are expected to make a contribution to collective understanding.
- **Representing multiple views**
Acknowledging the views of others moves the group firmly into the discovery mode.

DISCOVERY STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How are the various **ideas** offered by different people **related** to each other?
- What are the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of the various **ideas**?
- What are some **key features** in the range of views we seem to have on the topic?

KEY BEHAVIORS

Critiquing

Making Connections and Distinctions

Representing Multiple Views

DISCOVERY STAGE EXAMPLE

Anna enters into the discussion by making connections/distinctions.

“Both of those are features that the new distribution system has brought about, but one is about becoming famous and the other is about staying true to the music.”

5. EMERGING UNDERSTANDING STAGE

Involves sharing new ideas, perspectives, beliefs, or feelings that emerged from the discussion and articulating areas of agreement, while leaving room for differences and anticipating future discussion. Some BEHAVIORS key to the Emerging Understanding Stage are:

- **Reconsidering own views**
A group benefits from having a shared understanding of the discussion and from recognition of the power of the group in developing more informed perspectives.
- **Representing multiple views**
An emerging understanding might not be a consensus view, and it is helpful to acknowledge differing views. Such acknowledgement enriches the group understanding.
- **Summarizing**
A group benefits from being reminded of the major points of the discussion, especially as these ideas reflect an emerging shared view.
- **Synthesizing**
Sharing a moment of insight into how ideas fit together to create a new understanding as a result of the group discussion is one of the most enjoyable aspects of group interaction.

EMERGING UNDERSTANDING STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What am I **learning** from this **discussion**?
- Has **my own** take on this topic **changed** in any way?
- What **insights** if any, have we come to so far as group?
- What else might we want to **explore** as a group?

KEY BEHAVIORS

Reconsidering Own Views

Representing Multiple Views

Summarizing

Synthesizing

DISCOVERY STAGE EXAMPLE

Sarah reconsiders her initial view.

“Now that I have heard your points about alternative ways of groups’ connection directly with audiences, I am thinking differently about this. Maybe there are some ways that musicians can stay true to the music and make a living without breaking into that whole commercial mega thing. Maybe I just need to learn more about how they are doing that.”

6. THE EVALUATION STAGE

The purpose of this stage is to make a careful review of what has been accomplished through the discussion. It allows the group to assess the effectiveness of their process as well as each group member to self assess. It enables the group to apply what they have learned during the process to future group interactions. Some BEHAVIORS key to Evaluation Stage are:

- **Evaluating group process**

Makes judgments about the quality of the group process related to how effectively the topic was addressed and whether all group members were able to contribute by assessing the quality of the interaction of group members.

- **Reconsidering own views:**

A group benefits from having a shared understanding of the discussion and from recognition of the power of the group in developing more informed perspectives.

EVALUATION STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What have I **learned** from this **discussion**?
- How has my **thinking** and **discussion abilities** improved as a result of the group?
- How effective was the group in its discussion using the Deepening Understanding Framework?
- What could I do in the next group to initiate, contribute, and learn?

KEY BEHAVIORS

Evaluating Group process

Reconsidering Own Views

EVALUATION STAGE EXAMPLE

Sarah reflects on her interaction.

"I realize now that I may need to do more research prior to the discussion to understand more concerning the background of this topic. I also see I need to ask more questions of other group members when I am not sure of their point. I want to encourage the group members to participate more by giving them my undivided attention when they are expressing their ideas."

VI. KEY BEHAVIORS FOR THE DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORK

There are certain behaviors that can contribute to a more effective group discussion as members engage in the process and work toward mutual understanding.

- **Acknowledging**
Appreciatively notes *how* an offered perspective that is acknowledged to different from one's own has some distinct positive qualities.
- **Active Listening**
Attentive engagement to both the content and emotional depth expressed in another's speech *and choice of a response* that demonstrates openness by allowing for the speaker's clarification of his or her intent.
- **Asking Pertinent Question**
Actively asks questions related to the discussion in order to identify and clarify issues.
- **Challenging**
Respectfully asks for justification, examples, or evidence that supports an offered view.
- **Checking Interpretations**
Conveys interpretation of what a person just said or did in order to confirm or clarify the intent of what was communicated and, in doing so, avoids any expression of approval or disapproval demonstrating commitment to accurately understanding the group member.
- **Critiquing**
Reviews one or more perspectives and evaluates their worth relative to their scope, consistency, meaningfulness, usefulness, and/or quality of supporting evidence.
- **Evaluating group process**
Makes judgments about the quality of the group process related to how effectively the topic was addressed and whether all group members were able to contribute by assessing the quality of the interaction of group member.
- **Gathering Information**
Compiling preliminary facts, data, evidence, or other material necessary to be informed and organized for the group task.
- **Making Connections and Distinctions**
Identifies how one idea or stated point is similar to or different from another.
- **Offering a View**
Presents an idea related to a topic or issue and conveys that the idea is well grounded and worth consideration by the group.

- **Reconsidering One's Own Views (Revising)**
States how and why one's own views have been influenced by the discussion.
- **Relevant Responding**
Engages ideas and avoids responses that are off topic or otherwise do not advance understanding.
- **Representing Multiple Views**
Describes more than one perspective in relation to one another in a way that can contribute to a different or deeper understanding.
- **Self-Awareness**
Being able to accurately recognize own thoughts and feelings and their impact on one's attitudes and behavior.
- **Synthesizing**
Brings together distinct points or perspectives in a way that coordinates the best of each to form a new and larger perspective

VII. **BLOCKING BEHAVIORS IN THE DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORK**

Some other behaviors displayed in a discussion may undermine the effectiveness of deepening understanding. These are called “Blocking Behaviors” that can occur during any Stage. It is important to identify and try to prevent yourself from using them as you may not easily recognize your behavior as “blocking” (*for example, your concern about forgetting your own idea may cause you to interrupt another*).

BLOCKING BEHAVIORS include the following:

- **Attacking**
Expresses verbal or nonverbal behavior that is perceived, and substantiated by others, to be hostile or derogatory to other group members or the group process. This could include a tone of voice that may indicate lack of respect for another group member or raising your voice to talk over or intimidate another group member.
- **Being Defensive**
Overreacts to another's challenge of one's statements. This behavior can occur when one believes their ideas are not considered, accepted, or valued. When a group member believes they are not being listened to or contributing to the discussion this can be the result. Offense can arise when one perceives a statement, words, or communication styles negatively.
- **Dominating**
Takes power in a group which was not delegated by the other group members or predetermined by outside authority or status. The person who is dominating tends to be the loudest, most frequent speaker and often interrupts others to make a point.
- **Interfering**
Displays any verbal or nonverbal behavior that distracts the group members from the goal. These behaviors could include redirecting attention (interrupting as they express their thought); disrupting attention (leaving the discussion early or arriving late); sidetracking attention (having a private conversation with another or making comments under your breath).
- **Rambling**
Expresses views in a way that leads off topic without clear direction, a perceived related purpose, or value to the discussion.
- **Withdrawing**
Whether motivated by anger, boredom or some other emotion/reason, a person stops participating in the discussion by either fully or partially disengaging. This behavior may be the result of other feelings as well such as shyness, unpreparedness, incompetence, or illness. Also perceptions related to differences in communication styles or conflict management styles may cause a person to feel their contributions are unappreciated, inappropriate, or unnecessary so they respond by withholding their offerings to the group discussion.
- **Wrangling**
Excessively argues over who has the right answer, with the primary goal of winning the argument not trying to understand the issue or others' viewpoints.

VIII. DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORK

These are the stages that lead you through the Deepening Understanding Framework. In each stage there are **Guiding Questions** to consider that will provide assistance in the process of deepening understanding effectively.

PREPARATION STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What **questions** do I have about this **topic**?
- What **interests me**? What might also be of **interest to others**?
- How should I **prepare** for a **discussion** with this group?

KEY BEHAVIORS Gathering information Self Awareness

IDENTIFICATION STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What might I **suggest** is an interesting **question** about the topic?
- What do **others** in the group seem to be **interested** in?
- What seems to be the **group's** most compelling **interest**?

KEY BEHAVIORS Active listening Asking Pertinent questions Offering a View Relevant Responding

SHARING AND ARTICULATION STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Have I been **clear** about what my **thoughts** are?
- Do I **understand** what **others** are saying? What can I **appreciate** or **agree** with?
- What **assumptions** do others seem to be making with which I might **disagree**?

KEY BEHAVIORS Articulating a view Acknowledging Challenging Checking Interpretations

DISCOVERY STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How are the various **ideas** offered by different people **related** to each other?
- What are the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of the various **ideas**?
- What are some **key features** in the range of views we seem to have on the topic?

KEY BEHAVIORS Critiquing Making Connections and Distinctions Representing Multiple Views

EMERGING UNDERSTANDING STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What am I **learning** from this **discussion**?
- Has my **own take** on this topic **changed** in any way?
- What **insights**, if any, have we come to so far as group?
- What else might we want to **explore** as a group?

KEY BEHAVIORS Reconsidering Own Views Representing Multiple Views Synthesizing

EVALUATION STAGE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What have I **learned** from this **discussion**?
- How has my thinking and discussion abilities improved as a result of the group?
- What could I do in the next group to initiate, contribute, and learn?

KEY BEHAVIORS Evaluating Group Process Reconsidering Own Views

IX. DESCRIPTION OF THE LEVELS OF THE SOCIAL INTERACTION ABILITY AND THE DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORK

Level	Description of the Ability	Description of the Deepening Understanding Purpose
1	<p><u>Interaction Self Awareness</u></p> <p>Recognizes analytical frame works as an avenue to becoming aware of own behaviors in interactions with diverse others and to participating full in those interactions.</p>	<p>In a group discussion using the Deepening Understanding Framework, identifies her own behaviors and attitudes that contributes to the group’s work of articulating multiple perspectives on the topic discussed <i>(observes)</i></p>
2	<p><u>Applying Interaction Frameworks</u></p> <p>Gains insights into the affective and practical ramifications of ones interactions, in their social and cultural context, by observing others’ examples, experiencing new situations, and applying analytic</p>	<p>Interprets how own behaviors and others’ contribute to representing and engaging multiple perspectives on the topic discussed <i>(applies)</i></p>
3	<p><u>Interaction Evaluation and Judgment</u></p> <p>Increases effectiveness in group and interpersonal interaction, based on careful analysis and awareness of self and others in social and cultural contexts.</p>	<p>In the context of the group discussion, appreciatively evaluates contributions making relevant connections among more than one view, and/ or articulating relative strengths and weaknesses of more than one view <i>(evaluates)</i></p>
4	<p><u>Interaction Adaptation</u></p> <p>Displays effective interactions in groups and interpersonal situations, reflecting cognitive understanding of social and cultural contexts, and awareness of affective components of own and others’ behaviors.</p>	<p>Effectively contributes to deepening understanding by being open to adapting her own perspective as she recognizes it may change even as she expresses her own informed views with appropriate commitment and elaboration <i>(effectively interacts)</i></p>