



Moving Beyond Polarization

Decoda Literacy Solutions
Annual Conference

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Welcome!

Who are we??

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Today's agenda

- Welcome & introductions
- Overview of the applied research project
- What is polarization?
 - Characteristics
 - How polarization is different from garden-variety conflict
 - How are we showing up in polarized dynamics?

BREAK

- Polarization and trauma/exclusion
- Risks & consequences of not dealing with polarization
- Implications for literacy work



Overview of our applied research project

- Participants
- Funder
- Duration
- Overall aims & objectives
- Methods & phases



What is polarization?

Division into two sharply contrasting groups or sets of opinions or beliefs

- a general sense self-righteousness about one's ideas
- inability to listen to others without defensiveness
- engaging in passive or active social attack in conversation and debate
- a culture of closed mouth avoidance and disconnection.

Activity: Is this polarization??

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Find a partner, paper and pens
- Draw two columns: “polarization” and “garden-variety conflict”
- Think about how polarized conflict dynamics are distinct from ordinary (or healthy) conflict dynamics:
 - Emotional engagement
 - Characterization of problems
 - Orientation to those who think differently
 - Relationship of ideas to our identities

Is this polarization or just garden-variety conflict?

Dimension	Healthy conflict	Polarized conflict
Characterization of problems	Problems are understood with complexity, nuance; shades of grey; multiple positions are seen to be possible	Problems are over-simplified, reduced to two sides - right vs wrong, true vs false, good vs. evil
Orientation to conflict	We can face conflict; difficult topics & people are manageable	We avoid conflict by avoiding certain topics and people; the stakes in a conflict feel very high
Emotional engagement in conflict	Minimal to moderate emotional engagement around differences and conflict	Intense emotional engagement around differences and conflict

Polarization, exclusion & trauma

- Polarization is largely about the stories we are telling about each other. What happens to the people whose stories have historically gone untold.
- In some cases, those who are marginalized are affected in a particularly personal way.
- Many of the ways some people react to polarization are reflective of Trauma responses

What are the risks of not dealing with it?

- Ultimately, we all lose our stories.
- The story of who we are is limited to the stories told on the sides of the bridge we find ourselves on.
- There is a lose in the ability to fix problems



Implications for literacy work: What can we do?

- *When working with funders*
- *When working with participants*
- *When working with literacy task groups*
- *When working with the community*

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS:

- Four small groups (6-7 people in each)
- Circulate to four stations at 3-minute intervals
- Brainstorm implications of polarization for each of the above fields of your work, as you see them.
- Return to station where you began and read what others have contributed
- Full-group discussion

Ways to get or stay involved in the research

- Check out our literature review and annotated bibliography (COMING SOON!)
 - Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College - <https://selkirk.ca/mir-centre-for-peace>
- Participate in a focus group or the social lab (IN DEVELOPMENT)
- Stay in touch through Decoda and CBAL reps in the project:
 - Desneiges Profili, CBAL
 - Carolyn Amantea, CBAL
 - Maureen Kehler, Decoda
 - Margaret Sutherland, Decoda