

**Creating dialogue and collaboration in student affairs using
world cafés:
Insights from the research project ‘Violence and wellbeing
in the context of the South African student movement’**

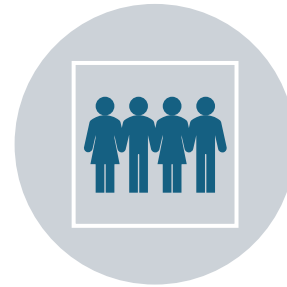
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Purpose



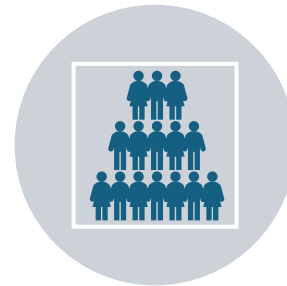
To promote the use of the world café method as promoting a ‘safe’ and ‘brave space’ for discussing student concerns within the university.



Safe spaces promote trust and mutual support.



Brave spaces are learning environments within which the truth is sought (Palfrey & Ibarra, 2017).



Brave spaces unlike safe spaces encourage controversy; however, accountability, civility, and respect are crucial.

Student protests: An overview

2015/ 2016 rise of #Fallism at South African universities.

- Dissent typical to university (Luescher, 2011).
- Fresh perspective of youth.

Challenges:

- Disruptions of the academic year (configuring academic year and associated tasks)(Chiliza, Asewumi, & Ntshangase; 2022).
- Mental health issues especially among activists (Luescher et al., 2021).



World Café: A brief

- PAR method, founded in 1995 by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (Estacio, & Karic, 2015).
- World café is an inclusive, dialogical, and solution-driven research method that **promotes social change** through mutual **understanding and learning** (Löhr et al., 2020).
- Process of **human, warm and meaningful conversation** of a group to discuss questions, generate innovative and creative ideas, agreements and plans of action, in a **welcoming and friendly space** (de la Mata 2012)

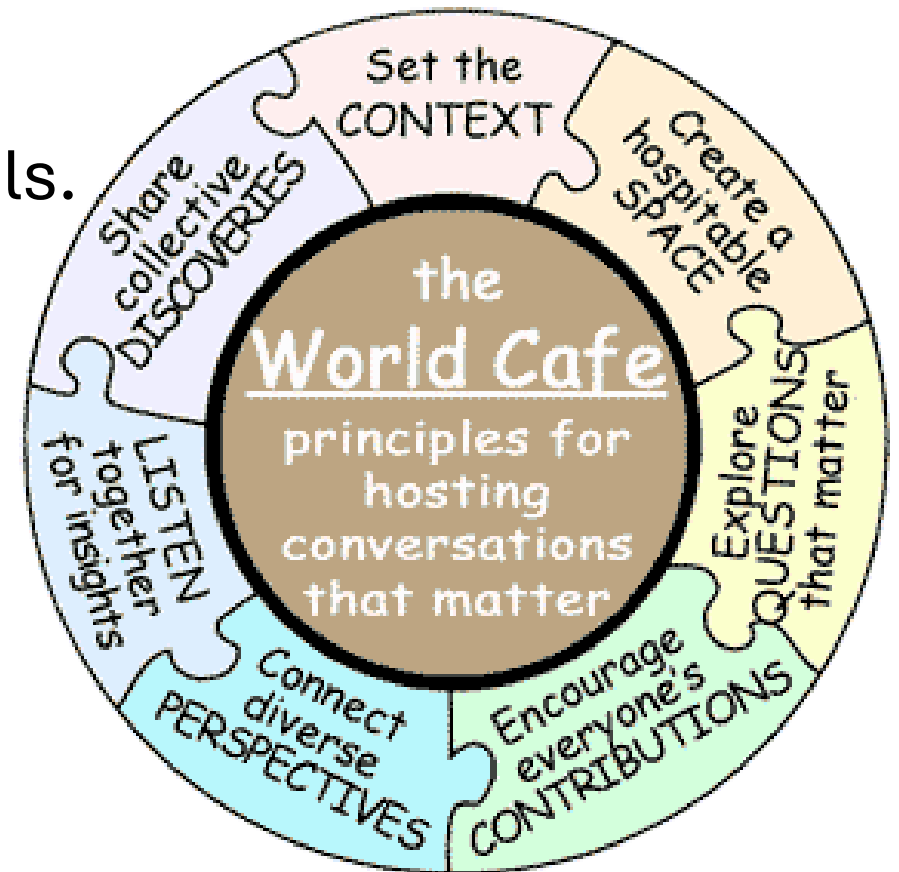


About the setting

- The setting is an artificial café to sit, meet, and chat.
- Spaces are enclosed with drinks, music /other aesthetics that mimic a café.
- Each table has four to five participants, each with a table host.
- Participants move for three successive rounds, each lasting 20 minutes.
- The host's task is to convey the discussion to new participants.
- The same or different questions can be discussed, with such recorded.
- Group conversation starts to identify common patterns, collective knowledge, and possible plans of action.

Benefits of the World Café

- Co-creates knowledge.
- Respects the voice of the participants.
- Fosters dialogue among different individuals.
- Enhances mutual and reflective learning.



World Café and FDG

- Atmosphere (informal v/s informal).
- Data generation (hosts v/s moderators).
- Depth (diversity).
- Size (varied v/s limited).
- Synchronicity (one setting v/s subsequent).

Why the World Café?

- Universities are hierarchical.
- Student voices marginalised, despite being critical mass (Luescher-Mamashela, 2011).
- #Fallist movement signalled fractured relations.
- Promotes student-authority dialogue.
- Enhances collaboration.

Restoring Wellbeing World Café Process

- Thirty-five student activists and staff from three campuses (academics, SAS personnel, and administrators), and students.
- Information booklet shared as part of the recruitment phase.
- Permissions and ethical principles adhered to.
- Rapid Photo Voice Campus-based exhibition conversation catalyst looking at these questions :
 - What roles can SAS professionals play in preventing violence?
 - What roles can SAS professionals play in promoting the psychological wellbeing of students in the aftermath of violence and aggression on campus?

Implementation

- Opening: welcoming student activists and invited staff, and a brief.
- Interacting with the exhibition: Orientation of staff on Rapid Photovoice findings.
- Engagement: Discussion to elicit answers to questions posed.
- Connections and reflections:
- Debriefing and closure.

World Café format changed to adapt to the number of participants.

Discussion

World café provided safe and brave spaces for both students and the university staff to explore their issues.

- **Acknowledging vulnerability**

20 to 50 students who surrounded the car and threatened us with bricks- SAS staff.

- **World café promoted dialogue**

Conversations like this- SAS staff.

- **Diverse perspectives**

Council is not playing its role- Student Activist

- **Reflective for both parties**

We have not done enough to train the students- SAS staff.

We have such normalised violence- Student Activist.

Respect

I'm sorry, I have nothing against you, mother-Student activist.

Conclusion

World café is proposed as a suitable, innovative method to create safe and brave spaces for dialogue and collaboration between student leaders, student affair practitioners and other members of the university community, while also having the potential to act as a method to create knowledge in student affairs.

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