On The Edge Series

ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES

Safe Space to Brave Space

Jeff Witt; Organizational Development Lead
University of Michigan Library
wittjef@umich.edu
Agenda To Guide Our Exploration

Safe Space / Brave Space

Context → Defining → Skill Sets → Crowdsourcing Ideas
Source and Inspirational Material

Hines, S. (2017) From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces
[acrl.libguides.com/c.php?g=899144&p=6468942&t=32809](acrl.libguides.com/c.php?g=899144&p=6468942&t=32809)

NASPA Policy and Practice Series: Safe and Brave Spaces (2017)

The Stanford Daily


Wexelbaum, R. (2016) The Library as Safe Space

Rosener, Frigo, Ponischil, Belanger, Rander & Salazar (2019)
In The Library With The Lead Pipe: Leading from the Center
Context for Safe and Brave Space

- **Safe Space** on college campuses were originally designed as space specifically set aside for people with marginalized or minoritized identities.
  - People of Color
  - LGBTQ+
  - Survivors of Sexual Assault
  - First Generation Students
  - Undocumented individuals and DACA recipients

- **Brave Space**, relatively new - responding to safe space criticism that it is both too much and not enough.
Context for Safe and Brave Space

● “SPACE” can refer to an actual physical space that is purposefully created or it can refer to a conceptual place in time as individuals gather with a shared focus.

● Outreach & Service vs. Internal Engagement

● Creating or operating in a Safe or Brave Space is rarely openly taught
  ○ Emotional Intelligence
  ○ “Soft Skills” or Relational Skills
Context for Safe and Brave Space

Impact of successful Safe Space:
People with minoritized identities are more engaged and less threatened.

Impact of successful Brave Space:
- Organizational values are experienced, not just spoken.
- Increased organizational transparency and authenticity.
- Better decision making and more innovation from including more voices and empowering more engagement.
### Defining Safe and Brave Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAFE</th>
<th>BRAVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Space Created</td>
<td>Environment Created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive (passive)</td>
<td>Equitable (active)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Avoidant</td>
<td>Calculated Risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules of Etiquette</td>
<td>Rules of Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>Multi-Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort in Safety</td>
<td>Discomfort in Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Mass</td>
<td>Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Judgemental</td>
<td>Non-Closure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Default</td>
<td>Responsive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Defining Safe and Brave Space

5 Elements of Brave Space (higher education)
Arao & Clemens (2013) The Art of Effective Facilitation

1. Controversy with Civility
2. Owning both Intentions and Impact
3. Challenge by Choice
4. Respect
5. No Attacks

Safe Space = support services for specific minoritized identities.
Defining Safe and Brave Space

PUSHBACK

- It impedes freedom of speech
- It impedes intellectual freedom
- It creates “snowflakes” and avoids resilience
- Creating space for some and not others is discrimination
- Shared space should be neutral space
- We can’t promise “SAFE”, maybe “safer”
- This allows the dominant narrative to dominate
- Supports the assumption that all viewpoints are EQUAL
- These spaces make targeted identities more targeted
- Success of these spaces require minoritized people to do the work
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAFE</th>
<th>BRAVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Space for Connection &amp; Support</strong>&lt;br&gt;A space of physical and psychological safety for marginalized or minoritized people to feel supported, to be able to openly discuss their experiences and to respite from threat or harm.</td>
<td><strong>Space for Collective Learning</strong>&lt;br&gt;A space where people of varied backgrounds, experiences, beliefs and perspectives can come together to explore and learn together without censure or harm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Community for Justice**

**Community for Freedom**
Defining Safe and Brave Space

SAFE
Space for Connection & Support
Collections, exhibits, events and services are inclusive of marginalized or minoritized voices and experiences.
I can see myself.

BRAVE
Space for Collective Learning
Collections, exhibits, events and services are critically considered through a multi-partial lens, balancing the influence and representation of narratives beyond the dominant.
I can express myself.

Decolonizing the library
Creating / Maintaining Safe and Brave Space

Must be anchored to organizational values.
Creating / Maintaining Safe and Brave Space

Building Skills (and expectations) Around Appreciative Inquiry

○ Assuming actions and choices are coming from good intent.

○ Utilize the Ladder of Inference as a Mental Model

○ Taking a positive approach to gain insight

The Ladder of Inference was developed by organizational psychologist Chris Argyris and used by Peter Senge in his 1990 book; *The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.*
Creating / Maintaining Safe and Brave Space

Building Skills Around **The Intent / Impact Gap**

- Checking In - In the Moment
- A Culture of Assessment (learn the impact)
- Taking Responsibility & Recovering from a Mistake
- Implicit Bias Interruption
Creating / Maintaining Safe and Brave Space

Building Skills Around **Anti-Oppressive Practices**

- Systems Analysis to deconstruct and rebuild systems
- Power & Privilege Dynamics
- Ally Practices
  - Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance
  - Racial Equity Institute
Creating / Maintaining Safe and Brave Space

Building Skills Around Intercultural Competence

ARL: ClimateQUAL.org

- Foster a culture of healthy organizational climate
- Facilitate the ongoing collection of staff feedback
- Enable libraries to interpret and act on data

Intercultural Development Continuum: Primary Orientations

Source: Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), LLC
Creating / Maintaining Safe and Brave Space

Building Skills Around *Emotional Intelligence*

*Source: EDUCBA.com*
Creating / Maintaining Safe and Brave Space

Building Skills Around Trauma Informed Practice

- Recognizing where trauma exists, how it presents and the precipitating factors of the trauma
- Developing and managing a strategic response to the trauma
- Developing anti-trauma practices

San Francisco public library
Denver public library
Folsom public library
Crowdsourcing

Questions about or thoughts to add to the content?

SAFE & BRAVE SPACE
Definitions, Criticisms, Skills Needed
Crowdsourcing

Have you been talking about and/or engaged in Safe or Brave Space practice in your organization?
Defining Safe and Brave Space

**Safe Space**
Inclusive Practices
Org. Climate
- Bias Interruption
- Inclusive Leadership
- Safe Space Dialogues
- Focus Group

**Brave Space**
Equitable Practices
Org. Culture
- Performance Management
- Equity Forum
- Think Tanks
- Supervisor Training/Support
Crowdsourcing

Have you been talking about and/or engaged in Safe or Brave Space practice in your organization?

If not, why not?  If so...

How have you been defining and/or talking about Safe Space or Brave Space?

What practices would be considered Safe Space practice for your organization?

What practices would be considered Brave Space practice for your organization?