



My Language, My Choice: Words Mean Things – Facilitator's Guide

In 2012, Pacific Lutheran University launched the *My Language, My Choice* (MLMC) campaign.

MLMC was a passive poster campaign that advocated for individual responsibility and action in our language, word choice, and usage. PLU students, faculty, staff, and alumni are photographed tearing up a word or phrase they choose not to use. Participants also provide context as to why they choose not to use the particular word or phrase, thus stressing the importance of taking responsibility for the impact we have on others.

As we continue to assess our diversity and equity commitments and efforts to actualize our mission of valuing diversity as intrinsic to the vitality of learning, resilience, and growth, the *My Language, My Choice: Words Mean Things* (WMT) campaign emerged.

The *My Language, My Choice: Words Mean Things* campaign focuses on taking responsibility for the words we use, understanding their meanings, and using words appropriately and in context. The campaign aims to give folks the tools needed to explore how we experience words in our everyday lives. While there are many words and phrases that deserve intentional examination, understanding, and dialogue, the words we're focusing on for the first round of the campaign are *Anti-Blackness*, *Anti-Racism*, *Decolonization*, and *BIPOC* (*Black, Indigenous, People of Color*). Using definitions as well as dialogue, PLU staff, faculty, and alumni will explore the history and meaning of these words in context.

At the heart of the WMT campaign is individual responsibility, personal choice, and investigation into how our choices may impact others, regardless of our intent. There are three major components to the campaign: **LEARN**, **CLAIM**, and **DIALOGUE**.

Recognize that words mean things

We choose the words that we use to communicate with others. These words can be experienced differently given their context—and, intentionally or unintentionally, they can have a negative impact on others. We must have the courage to **LEARN** in public.

Understand your impact

We must be cognizant that our actions have positive and/or negative consequences. Our decisions and our language impact those in our communities, so we must **CLAIM** and take ownership of the impact that we have on others.

Take responsibility

We must acknowledge the power of our words to celebrate, praise, comfort, and honor others. But our words also have the power to demean, offend, belittle, and hurt. It is our responsibility to **DIALOGUE** with others, in order to continue our growth as an inclusive community.

The *My Language, My Choice: Words Mean Things* campaign would not have been possible without the vulnerability and courage of our Pacific Lutheran University alumni, faculty, and staff who shared their personal and academic relationships and stories around *Anti-Blackness*, *Anti-Racism*, *Decolonization*, and *BIPOC*.



Sponsored by Pacific Lutheran University and the Office of Diversity, Justice, & Sustainability

Discussion Questions

• What is your understanding of:

- Anti-Blackness?
- Anti-Racism?
- Decolonization?
- BIPOC?

• Provide examples of Anti-Blackness...

- In media?
- In schools?
- In our personal lives?

• There was a lot of discussion around the role of Black women's hair in society and culture. How can we be curious about people's qualities and differences without impeding on the personal space and the humanity of others?

• What are some examples of ways that you can decolonize...

- Your language?
- An institution or system (e.g., a class or a policy)?

• We were challenged in the video to decolonize how we introduce ourselves. What are some different forms of introduction, besides name and title?

• How can the term BIPOC be both inclusive and exclusive?

• Do we have a responsibility to introduce these words into our vocabulary? Why or why not?

• What questions do you still have about...

- Anti-Blackness?
- Anti-Racism?
- Decolonization?
- BIPOC?