Engaging in Tough Conversations: Creating a Culture for Healthy Discussions in the Classroom

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AGENDA

- INTRODUCTIONS
- EXPERIENCES
- CREATING COMMUNITY GUIDELINES
- NAVIGATING TOUGH TOPICS
- HEALTHY VS UNHEALTHY DISCUSSIONS
- Q&A
Introductions

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Our Community Guidelines

Be Present

Everyone has a Voice

Listen Actively

Be Open-minded

Mutual Respect Promotes Creative Thinking

Generate Light, not Heat

Off-topic comments will be “Parked”
Responses to Healthy Relationships Lesson

After Healthy Relationships Lesson:

“Talking about our relationships, and what we do in them has no place and is extremely inappropriate for the classroom.”

Impact of Language Session Scenario

In the Cultural Politics class, students were asked to bring a cultural object to display that meant something to them and share it for introductions. Student W brought a traditional head covering that has been passed down in her family and is very special. Prior to sharing, Student Y picked up the covering and pretended to wrap it around herself like a top. She said "Look at my new blouse! Just kidding, this rag looks so old. Who even brought this?"

And laughed back to her seat.

How do you feel & what would you say/do?
What experiences have you had?

What unexpected or difficult topics have come up?

What are you anxious about experiencing?
Creating Community Guidelines for the Classroom

Purpose of Community Guidelines
1. Set the expectations & foundational rules for the space
2. Acknowledge that everyone is included and valued in the space

How to Create the Guidelines
1. What would make you feel safe and encouraged to help create these guidelines/ speak in class?
2. Vocalize you want contribution in creating the guidelines and actively listen to ideas (more listening, less editing)
3. Create guidelines in a shared and accessible space (immediately put in canvas, google drive, etc)
4. Reshare throughout semester; accountability

*Bonus: Share Guidelines for Yourself
1. Create guidelines for yourself that you also share with your students
Navigating Tough Topics

1. Content warnings, caution and care
   a. Give students permission to feel and address adverse feelings as they happen, even if unexpected
   b. Acknowledge any triggers that apply to you if willing/able

2. The “WHY”
   a. Explain why you are taking on this topic. How will it help them succeed/learning objectives

3. Modeling Behavior
   a. Tone
   b. Calling back to guidelines
### Navigating Tough Topics - Continued

#### Tools to Use in Class

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<tr>
<th><strong>Tools</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Cultivate a supportive environment</td>
<td>Through community building, norms, openness to dissent, individual affirmation, and humor.</td>
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<td>Prepare thoroughly</td>
<td>With attention to student identity and development, teaching contexts, subject matter, purposes, and methods.</td>
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<td>Think through teacher stance</td>
<td>Including pedagogical roles, positions on issues, and pros and cons of disclosing teacher views.</td>
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<td>Communicate proactively</td>
<td>With students, parents, colleagues, and administrators about issues that will be studied.</td>
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<td>Select authentic issues</td>
<td>And frame questions to promote student engagement and inquiry, progressing from cooler to hotter issues.</td>
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<td>Choose resources and pedagogies</td>
<td>That challenge assumptions, include diverse voices and perspectives, and foster participation.</td>
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<td>Guide discussion</td>
<td>With tools for analyzing sources, exchanging ideas, moving from small groups to whole group, and attending to equity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Address emotions</td>
<td>By creating space for processing them, using de-escalation moves as needed, and developing self-awareness.</td>
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Know-Heard-Learned Chart

- What I Know or Heard
- What I Learned

Geometric Forms

- Something I learned that "squares" with my thinking
- A question that is still "circling" in my mind

- Three important "points" I want to remember
- One new "direction" I will go in (or action I will take)

Tools to Use in Class
5 Simple Questions

Student voice in a classroom is a powerful tool of engagement. But to create that culture of student inquiry, good questions are essential. Here are 5 good ones, useful at any time, in any lesson.

“Share with a neighbor before sharing with me.”

Best used after a statement, prediction, conclusion, or observation. Students will often need for us to provide clarity on what we mean by “What do you think?” Ironically, the simplicity might confuse them.

Push students to provide more depth and reasons for their answers.

“How do you know this?”

When this question is asked, students can make connections to their ideas and thoughts with things they’ve experienced, read, and have seen.

This question challenges students to extend their thinking and share further evidence for their ideas.

“What questions do you still have?”

Questions like this require patience—wait time, but also time for students to get used to asking questions, not just answering them.

“What do you think?”

“Why do you think that?”

“Can you tell me more?”

Creativity is a part of why these are simple, yet powerful questions. They require students to provide the weight, depth and complexity to a conversation.

Tools to Use in Class
Tools to Use in Class
Healthy vs. Unhealthy Discussions

Feelings Wheel
Body Language

What does the room look like?

What do your students look like?

What do you look like?
5 Quick De-Escalation Tips

1. Don't rush the process
2. Give space
3. Validate feelings & experiences
4. Don't take it personally
5. Remember the end goal
Back to your experiences...

How did you address them?

How could you address them?
What questions do you have?

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