

Navigating Critical Conversations

(guidance shared by our friends at Facing History & Ourselves)

Practice to Foster Brave Space (ideal pre-discussion norms)

1. Listen with an intention to learn. We are all coming into this with different experiences and knowledge.
2. Share the air: create space and time so that all have the opportunity to speak.
3. Ask questions to clarify challenging ideas/statements and discomfort.
4. Challenge ideas and not the person.
5. Take responsibility for your impact even if it was not your intention.
6. Use "I" statements to avoid generalizations about the experiences of peoples & groups
7. Affirm the ideas, experiences, and reflections each person contributes to the group
8. Expect to seek next steps. Teaching Civic Education and Nurturing Civic Action is about both process and end product. Today is just one step.

Opened-Settled-Not Yet Framework

Open questions

- There are reasonable views on all sides of this issue.
- The scholarly/scientific community has not arrived at a consensus.
- While I may have personal opinions about the best answer to these questions, my students can decide the issue for themselves based on analysis of facts.

Settled (or closed) questions

- May have been open in the past but are no longer controversial, and therefore students should be taught that there is one agreed upon answer to the issue

Not Yet (avoid for now) questions

- Too controversial for productive engagement in class.
- Local/community/school/team considerations factored in.
- Lack of background knowledge, forethought or preparation.

Navigating Hot Buttons

Key Advice: Be reflective of your own identity and trigger events that you have to navigate as you respond.

Triggering Event: Any stimulus, either external or internal to the person, through which they experience an emotional reaction that may have some or all of the following characteristics:

- Unexpectedness
- Strong intensity of feelings
- Disorienting
- Feeling out of control and overwhelmed by the situation.
- Feeling “de-skilled” and reacting less effectively.
- Requiring extra effort to manage the situation effectively.

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Managing Your Reactions

Pause - Resist the urge to react immediately to gain control over the situation.

Observe - Take 10 seconds to observe what is going on inside you.

Detach - Don't take it personally! Shift your consciousness from needing to exert power or prove that you are right. Focus on being responsive rather than reactive.

Shift the Focus - Humanize the other person. And prepare yourself to have a positive, learner-centered interaction.

The Straights A's of Facilitation

Affirm

Affirm people and appreciate them for openly and honestly sharing comments and questions.

- Thank you for asking that question.
- I'm sure others were wondering about that too.
- That's an important point to consider.
- I appreciate your willingness to stay open and consider other perspectives.
- I appreciate your taking the risk to share that with us.
- I know this isn't easy to think or talk about.
- Thanks for doing the hard work.

Acknowledge

Acknowledge directly what was said. Seek clarity. Paraphrase their words and feelings.

- I'm hearing you say that...Is that correct?
- It sounds like you feel...Is that correct?
- So from your perspective...Is that correct?
- It seems like you're both concerned about... even though you're approaching it differently.

Ask

Ask questions to better understand individuals' behaviors and perspectives and to help them reflect on their views.

- What experiences led you to that belief?
- Can you tell me more about how you came to think that?
- How were you feeling when...?
- How would you make sense of ...?
- What would it mean for you if this was true?

Add

Add more information, context, or alternative explanations. Challenge misinformation, broaden people's perspectives, address differences in power and privilege.

- This research study found that...
- Let's consider how the history of...has impacted what we see today.
- What institutional policies might have contributed to these inequalities?
- How might people's social identities affect their experiences in this situation?
- What are some other explanations for this?

Address

Assess individual and group dynamics, your internal & external responses, and decide how to address it.

For the group:

- People are very quiet. I'm wondering what's going on?
- I noticed some of you just had a reaction. Could someone tell us what happened for you?
- I'm noticing that people are interrupting each other.

For yourself:

- I'm starting to get more tense and more aggressive.
- What's triggering me?
- I need to refocus on their full humanity.

5A's Scenarios

Additional scenarios/situations in case they are helpful:

1. A student casually says a disability slur (re**rd). When corrected she says, "Why? Everyone says it. You're all too sensitive."
2. A student interrupts another student who says Black Lives Matter and says, "No, ALL LIVES MATTER."
3. A student says, "why do we keep talking about being anti racist? I'm not

racist. None of us here are racist.” Students nod in agreement.

4. A parent says, “I am concerned about the emotional and developmental readiness of my child and I would like to opt them out of this unit.”
5. A parent says, “I’m concerned you are teaching a biased curriculum, what are you doing to ensure a balanced and fair approach?”
6. A parent asks, “I am just unsure and uncomfortable with what you are teaching. Can you explain your rationale/justification?”
7. In a discussion on sexual orientation, a student says, referring to you, “You don’t understand. You’re heterosexual. You won’t ever get it.”