From Fear to Freedom: Managing Hot Moments & Facilitating Difficult Dialogues in the Classroom

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“We find comfort among those who agree with us, growth among those who don’t.”
Frank A. Clark
Reflection: What is your biggest fear when thinking about difficult discussions & hot moments.
Short Phrase Report out:
State name & biggest fear (in brief) when thinking about difficult discussions & hot moments?
Acknowledging Fear

If we acknowledge our own fears yet still move ahead and risk having the conflict we fear, we empower our students (and ourselves) to find their own courage.

• Frederick, 1996
Workshop Goal

To be better equipped to effectively facilitate difficult dialogues and manage hot moments in the classroom.
Outcomes & Caveat

• Consider steps in order to lay foundation for productive classroom dialogue
• Apply the OTFD framework as a strategy for difficult dialogues and hot moments
• Describe options that follow a difficult classroom dialogue

• One hour only
What is Dialogue?

• Assumes transformative power of speaking, listening, & understanding.

• Not to persuade, but to clarify & truly understand different points of view.

• Its attentive, careful, & full of feeling.

  • (Wilmot & Hocker, 2010)

What Makes a Dialogue Difficult?
Where are you on this continuum?

- Respond to hot moment only as it occurs in class
- Written in syllabus and discussed
- Structure the course to increase productive dialogue
Pairs: How could you better prepare for difficult dialogues & hot moments? (look at handout)

• Ground rules/group norms
• Clarify expectations
• Unpack misconceptions
• Create a supportive climate
• Consider giving students guidance on dialogue
• Serve as a model
• Provide early/regular feedback re: discussion
• Hold students accountable for being prepared
• Consider timing-confirmation before contradiction
• Others?

You have 2 minutes
Strategies to take during difficult dialogues and hot moments?

• View challenge as a teachable moment & stay calm
  • Could ask students to reflect, write, pair up
Never attribute to malice what can be attributed to ignorance.

- Implicit bias is real for all of us
- We all have areas of ignorance
Frame any request for change in the interest of student learning
When someone is clearly offended by a comment:

Inquire about what led to the offense.

• “Tell me more what is going on for you...”
• “What upset you about...”
I have no idea how to respond!?!
OTFD: Open The Front Door to Communication (Learning Forum)

• O = OBSERVE
  • concrete, “objective,” factual observations
  • both be able to agree on observation(s) stated

• T = THINK
  • thoughts based on observations
  • DO NOT put other person on defense

• F = FEEL
  • actual feelings/emotions you have as a result of the conflict/observation

• D = DESIRE
  • a statement of desired outcome
OTFD Example:

“Let’s pause for a moment here. I noticed (Observe) some raised eyebrows and other nonverbals that make me think people might be reacting strongly to something that was said. I think (Think) we need to explore this because I feel uncomfortable (Feeling) moving forward with the discussion. Following our group norms, I am hoping someone can share (Desire) what they are thinking or feeling right now so we can have a productive conversation about this.”

Questions?
Must be New Pairs: Choose A & B
Practice in Pairs/Choose A/B:

A OTFDs B

You are in the classroom and you observe Paul (a white, male student) interrupting Tanita (a woman of color & student) during the discussion 2 times (and you’ve noticed that this is a pattern during class).

Person A use OTFD directed at Paul or the whole class, public or private (play role of instructor or classmate).

Once done: B give feedback to A on use of OTFD
Practice in Pairs/
B OTFDs A

Same Scenario: You are in the classroom and you observe Paul (a white, male student) interrupting Tanita (a woman of color & student) during the discussion 2 times (and you’ve noticed that this is a pattern during class).

Person B use OTFD directed at Paul or the whole class, public or private

B OTFD in way A did not (direct, private, etc.)

Once done: A give feedback to B on use of OTFD
How did it go?

• What was easy? Hard?
• How did it feel?
• Learn about self?
• How might use in future?

• Compliment OTFD
Questions on OTFD?
A student makes a blatantly inappropriate remark: Take A.C.T.I.O.N.

- Ask Questions
- Come from curiosity not judgment
- Tell Observation
- Impact Exploration
- Own Own Thoughts/Feelings re: Impact
- Next Steps
What Can I do AFTER?

Metacommunicate: Conduct a debrief using a framework.

• **The Four F Debrief** Framework:
  • Facts, Findings, Feelings, Future
What Can I do AFTER?

**Pledge Hand Poll 1-5**

How much did you learn/gain from today’s discussion?

1 = Very little

3 = Some

5 = A good amount
In summary

- Reflect upon foundational steps for dialogue
- Apply OTFD
- Describe options that follow
Reflective Ending

• Something I learned today was. . .
• Something I will do as a result of today’s session is . . .
Despite our Fears. . .

“We can teach in ways that transform consciousness creating a climate of free expression that is the essence of a ‘truly’ liberatory liberal arts education.”

• hooks, 1994

Thank you!!
Practice in Pairs:
B OTFDs A (“to the class”)

• You are having a discussion about the effects of burning coal and climate change when a student states “those people who live and work in coal mining communities just need to move and find a different job.” Another student responds quickly and sharply with “You’re totally classist!! Many people in coal-mining towns are locked into jobs and communities. They can’t afford to leave.”

• Once done: A give feedback to B on use of OTFD
Group Norms

• We don’t know what we don’t know
• Much of what we feel may remain unresolved
• Discomfort is a part of the learning process
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