Difficult Dialogues & Stereotype Threat: Facilitating Effective Classroom Discussions

Workshop by Tasha Souza, Faculty Associate for Inclusive Classrooms, Professor of Comm.

“We find comfort among those who agree with us, growth among those who don’t.” Frank A. Clark
What is Dialogue?

- Assumes the 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?
Goal

Better Equipped to More Effectively Facilitate Difficult Dialogues in the Future
Outcomes

• Reflect upon steps to take in order to lay foundation for productive classroom dialogue

• Summarize prelim. research related to stereotype threat & difficult dialogues to minimize stereotype threat

• Apply facilitation strategies appropriate to classroom

• Utilize the OTFD comm. framework

• Evaluate assessment options that follow a difficult classroom dialogue
Today

- Information Sharing
- Pairs
- Role Play
- Discussion
- Groups (if time)
Learning From Past Experience

Lessin#1
Consider Timing of Difficult Dialogues

Affirm need for “confirmation” before “contradiction”

(conditions challenging current meaning-making systems)
What to do PRIOR to difficult dialogue?

- Ground rules
- Clarify expectations
- Create a safe climate
- Serve as a model in ALL interactions
- Provide early/regular feedback re: discussion.
- Others?
Pairs: Which could you do/improve to better prepare for diff. dialogues?

- Timing
- Ground rules
- Clarify expectations
- Create a safe climate
- Serve as a model in ALL interactions
- Provide early/regular feedback re: discussion.
- Others?
What about Stereotype Threat?

- **Stereotype threat:** felt risk of confirming negative stereotypes about own social group (Inzlich, 2011)

- Can have adverse effect on student learning & comfort (Steele, 1997)
  - Over 300 published studies
RQ 1: What influences student participation during difficult dialogues in the classroom?

RQ 2: How does stereotype threat impact student and faculty participation in difficult dialogues?

Surveys:
- 440 Students
- 95 Faculty

Interviews
- 16 Students
Let’s Predict:
Why don’t some students participate in discussions on controversial/sensitive topics?
When you choose NOT to participate in discussions on controversial/sensitive topics, what influences this decision?

- Uninformed
- Uncomfortable
  - Minority opinion
  - Sensitive topic
- Fear of offending others
- Fear of confirming a stereotype
“People who are parts of historically marginalized groups are constantly worried that privileged people will take something they say out of context and tokenize it to be the sole story that an entire group is expected to relate to.”

“That preconceived beliefs and attitudes towards my race and gender may cause people to not like me and directly shun any opinion I have...”

“I come from a small town with little diversity and, before now, have not really been educated on politics. Its hard for me to voice my opinions because I am a blonde, white girl. In the discussions of race, I am afraid of looking racist or ignorant when I really have just never experienced anything like this before.”
Stereotype Threat in Discussions:
Suggestions for Minimizing

- Encourage students to affirm personal values
- Create authentic opps. for students to affirm individuality
- Communicate value in all students’ perspectives
- Encourage belonging
- Encourage growth mindset
- Remove any ST triggers
Preparation is preventative!

“I’ll have an ounce of prevention.”
Strategies to take **during** difficult dialogues? Nonverbal Awareness
Never attribute to malice what can be attributed to ignorance.

Trying is the first step towards failure.
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…”
A student makes a blatantly inappropriate remark

- Clarify
- Explore Intent
- Explore Impact
- Share Impact
- Rethink/Change
I have no idea how to respond!?!
OTFD: Open the Front Door to Communication

• **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.
“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 (Feel) moving forward with the discussion. Following our ground rules, I am hoping someone can share (Desire) what they are thinking or feeling right now so we can have a productive conversation about this and learn from it.”

Questions?
While having a discussion, the topic of school segregation in the United States comes up. One student mentions how she read an article recently that claimed that schools are more racially segregated today than they were in the late 1960s. Another student stated, “That’s because people like to group by race, which just drives me crazy. We are all part of the human race and should stop dividing up by racial groups. After all, we are more alike than different.” The student who mentioned the article didn’t respond verbally but rolled her eyes, folded her arms, and avoided eye contact with anyone. A few other students looked irritated as well.

• Once done: B give feedback to A on use of OTFD
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
Questions on OTFD?
Teaching Scenario Analysis: Groups of 3-5

- Group according handout color
- Read directions & scenario
- Discuss & write down answers
- Use one communication framework for #4. See packet
- Let me know if you have questions
What Can I do AFTER?

• Metacommunicate: Conduct a debrief using a framework.
  • The Four F Debrief Framework:
  • Facts, Findings, Feelings, Future

• Pass out anonymous survey with questions assessing the discussion.
  • Contact me for examples

• Conduct a quick, anonymous Minute Paper.

• Quick nonverbal poll
In summary

• Identify steps PRIOR
• Apply strategies
• Utilize the OTFD framework
• Evaluate options for AFTER
Quaker Ending

- Something I learned today was. . .
- I still wonder about. . .
- Something I will do as a result of today’s session is . . .

Thank you!!