



APA ANNUAL CONVENTION
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Responding to Hate on Campus



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Teaching and Using Difficult Dialogues in Psychology Classrooms during Times of Hate

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Times of Hate-Important to Teach and Use Skills in and out of Psychology Classroom

- Micro-aggressions, Hate speech, other acts of hate, and hate crimes not new
- Consequences of hate are in the hearts and minds of many including faculty and students in our psychology classes and elsewhere on campus and fear being targets of hate themselves
- Important to teach skills in classroom that help students become “psychologically literate citizens”, (e.g., APA,2011)
- These include teaching Difficult Dialogue Skills and using in class discussions, especially during times of hate and critical incidents on campus

Difficult Dialogues

- The Ford Foundation, with input from leaders in higher education, launched the Difficult Dialogues Initiative in 2005.
- The aim was to promote academic freedom and religious, cultural, and political pluralism on college and university campuses in the United States.

<http://www.difficultdialogues.org>

Pluralism

- Pluralism includes mutual respect and tolerance of other views.
- “Pluralism is not diversity alone, but *the energetic engagement with diversity.*”
- “Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.”

<http://pluralism.org/>

Some Definitions and Delimitations

- Difficult dialogues are:
 - discussions (NOT DEBATES) designed to promote listening, understanding, and often critical thinking in the classroom
 - may be planned or spontaneous
 - are usually around topics that evoke strong emotions and opinions, and in times of hate
 - May often be around issues that at “Shushed” or Not talked about

DIFFICULT DIALOGUES MAY BE SPONTANEOUS or PLANNED



Spontaneous

- For those of you who teach, in class you experience an awkward moment or classroom comment, a slur or heated statement, or some sort of excluding behavior about a controversial topic or issue
- **To do nothing, be silent, ignore or shut down such moments is a mistake.**
- We encourage you to embrace these awkward, sometimes even hostile, encounters, as teachable moments.

Effective *Spontaneous* Discussions on controversial topics during times of hate include planning ahead

May be around recent news items, events:

- Hate crimes...
- Another police officer freed, found not guilty after “Killing” a Black man
- Suicide of local student after being cast out by parents and church...hushed by school
- Another Trans woman of color found murdered

Before a discussion occurs:

- Expect there to be incidences and **plan ahead**
- Expect emotion and strong feelings
- Set ground rules to create a safe space in the classroom and after class

Acknowledge Faculty fears of engaging in discussions of controversial issues

- Threat of negative student evaluations
- Student harassment of other students
- Disapproval from colleague/administrators
- Promotion/tenure concerns
- Lack of skills for handling difficult dialogues
- Discomfort with silence in the classroom
- Lack of knowledge on the subject matter
- Fear of political/religious profiling by students

Acknowledge Student fears of engaging in discussions of controversial issues

- Students fear being wrong and want to please the instructor.
- Students do not want to appear stupid.
- Students have to live with what they reveal about themselves after they leave class or being tarageted.
- Students may fear that they will be ridiculed for their view and possibly stigmatized.
- Students may not want to say something that might be hurtful to someone else.
- Fear not to go along with friends.

Strategies for Effective *Spontaneous* Discussions on Controversial Topics

When the discussion occurs

- Students may be unfamiliar with listening to others' points of view for understanding
- Discussion is not debate; the goal for debating is to win. The goal of discussion is to understand.
- Asserting facts may not change opinions.
- Carefully monitor students' reactions.

Before the discussions

- Important for student to learn to identify “hot buttons” and emotional reactions to hate.
- Early in semester and throughout curriculum in and out of classroom, present and teach rules of engagement, techniques to promote listening, understanding and thinking.

PLANNED DIFFICULT DIALOGUES IN CLASS and PRACTICE FOR THE FUTURE SPONTANEOUS DISCUSSIONS

- **Develop Rules Early in Term**

- Divide the larger group into smaller sub-groups of three to five individuals.

- Ask them to make a short list of desirable and undesirable classroom behaviors. Give the groups about five minutes to make their lists.

- Bring everyone back together, and then invite the groups to share their lists.

- **Achieve Consensus on Rules**

- Combine similar items to create a list in each category that the class can agree on. Save these and display or refer to them regularly throughout the semester.

Sample Ground Rules*

In this course, we will/may have class discussions.

- You must respect diverse points of view. We can agree to disagree.
- You may not belittle or criticize personally another individual for holding a viewpoint different from your own.
- Your use of language should be respectful of others or groups.
- You should be mindful of your non-verbal communication; not paying attention, sneering or sighing conveys a lack of respect.


* *Best if you involve students in discussion or rule and setting rules early*

Some techniques to start...

- Anonymous Reflective Writing (in class or out of class) designed so that the student can make a connection between their view, their emotions about the view, and what has led them to their view.*
- May ask students to do without names after incident in class Summarize next class. As a way of showing differences in viewpoints, avoiding groupthink, preventing targeting of individuals, and increasing student safety.

*Reflective writing has been studied by James Pennebaker at the Univ. of Texas at Austin

FOR PLANNED AND SPONTANEOUS DIALOGUES

- **TALK ABOUT IT / DIALOGUE**
 - **Exchange**
 - **Discuss**
 - **Promote Understanding**
 - **Listen**
 - **No Decision**
- 

PRACTICE in Class or Workshops

- **Integrate into Curriculum**
- **Use Triads and Dyads with Feedback on whether individuals felt heard, understood—
Teach Active Listening Skills**



IN MODERATING DIALOGUES

- The one-minute rule
 - Each contribution is limited to one-minute
- The rule of two
 - After a person contributes, two others must speak before the person can contribute again

Some Take Home Messages

- Teach and use some pedagogical strategies to encourage student learning through dialogue to manage any conflict.
- Strategies to encourage students in a safe way to examine and reflect on their beliefs around issues of race, religion, sexuality, privilege, etc. and learn about those of others.
- We are not as teachers or faculty members all experts on Hate crimes, ethnic studies, n religions or religious studies, nor do we need to be.
- However, we need some content knowledge and need to know about resources where you are to increase your confidence in handling difficult conversations in the classroom.
- Believe it is part of our ethical obligation (Aspirational Principles) as psychologists be able to “Teach the Taboo” where it is a taboo and facilitate questioning and critical, difficult dialogues with ourselves and our students, and tool to Stop Hate.

SOME RESOURCES

- Difficult Dialogues National Resource Center <http://www.difficultdialogues.org/>
- [Start Talking \(2008\) http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/cafe/difficultdialogues/handbook.cfm](http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/cafe/difficultdialogues/handbook.cfm)
- [Stop Talking http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/cafe/difficultdialogues/handbook.cfm](http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/cafe/difficultdialogues/handbook.cfm)
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Thank YOU!

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