Responding to Hate on Campus
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.
• 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
• Stop Talking http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/cafe/difficultdialogues/handbook.cfm

Thank YOU!