



To Self-Disclose or To Not Self-Disclose: A Dialogue About Politics in the Classroom

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The Problem With Political Discourse

- “*The Disappearing Center*” (Abramowitz, 2010)
- In 2014, the Pew Research Center released a comprehensive report showing that Americans’ values and basic beliefs are more polarized along partisan lines than at any point in the previous 25 years
- The Pew Research Center reported that the divisions between Republicans and Democrats on fundamental political values – on government, race, immigration, national security, environmental protection and other areas – reached **record levels** during Barack Obama’s presidency.
- In 2017, the Pew Research Center reported that in the first year of Donald Trump’s presidency, these gaps have grown even larger.
- People are more emotionally invested in their views and biased against other peoples’ views than in the past, creating difficulty in dialoguing.

Your Vote Matters!

- <https://tinyurl.com/ClassroomPolitics1>
- <https://tinyurl.com/ClassroomPolitics2>



Reflection



- Any surprises about results?
- What is your opinion?
- Why do you think that?
- Where does your opinion come from?
- What do you think the other people in the room think?

The Political Classroom Results

(Hess & McAvoy, 2015)

- Teachers were divided about whether it is appropriate to share their views with their students, with 50% saying sharing is appropriate and 50% saying it is not.
- The teachers who opposed sharing were most often concerned about influencing students' views about the issues being discussed.
 - Teachers were worried about students adopting that view or about students feeling coerced to express agreement with teachers bc of power differentials
- The teachers in favor of sharing identified some educational value in letting students know where they stood.
 - For example, a teacher who explained in detail how he came to hold his views by examining evidence and values found that he could model for students how to reason through a complex issue.
 - Most teachers who found value in sharing their opinions felt they were able to present views fairly and felt it was more respectful to students to reveal biases than to hide them

Evidence in Favor of Sharing

(Hess & McAvoy, 2015)

- 79% of students thought it was fine for teachers to share personal views. About 77% did not think sharing would cause them to adopt the teacher's view.
- Evidence was NOT found of students moving to align with their teacher's ideological views, though students and teachers in Like-Minded Schools were largely aligned from the beginning of the course. This suggests that alignment between ethos of the school can effectively shape the political orientations of young people.
- Students were largely supportive of teachers who "share," but they did not support teachers who "push," "preach," or "force" their opinions onto students. That is, students were not in favor of teachers who use the classroom for political proselytizing.
- High-SES students were significantly less likely to believe that knowing the teacher's views would cause them to change their minds

Evidence Against Sharing

(Hess & McAvoy, 2015)

- 41% of students suspected that when a teacher shares, *other* students will change their minds
- 23% of students thought that they were likely to change their views to align with those of the teacher were more likely to be low-SES students and students with low scores on our measure of political knowledge.
- Students in classrooms in which the teacher did not share enjoyed feeling like they have to “think more” about the issues and work harder to figure out the issues for themselves
- Students were significantly more likely to believe that they had a responsibility to participate in classes when the teacher did not share their views.

Evidence That Points in Both Directions (Hess & McAvoy, 2015)

- Students were overwhelmingly supportive of their teacher's policy related to sharing—whatever it was—and they remained supportive in the longitudinal follow-ups.
 - In the first follow-up survey, for example, 297 students agreed with their teacher's policy, 12 disagreed, and 23 were not sure
- Students wanted to feel that they were figuring out what they think about issues; some felt that knowing the teacher's view helped with this process, while others thought it interfered
- There was no clear consensus about teacher practice.
 - About 48% of teachers reported that they did share their opinions
 - About 54% of the students said their teacher shared
 - 37% said their teacher did so only when directly asked by students

Breaking Out of the Echo Chamber

- Recognize that there could be an ideological echo chamber in many liberal universities, especially when beliefs of faculty align with institution
- How does my identity affect my teaching?
- How does my field affect my teaching?
 - ex. 94% of social and personality psychologists identified as liberal (Inbar & Lammers, 2012)
- This may reduce students' (and our) abilities to learn how to dialogue with other viewpoints which may increase the political divide
- This may mute right leaning students who do not have liberal viewpoints

So... How do we make sure to
create inclusive classrooms
where we value the
perspectives of *all* students?

Exercise

- Small groups
 - 2 prompts
- Large group discussion

Prompt #1

- Discuss Immigration. Make sure to stay neutral, regardless of your viewpoint. Do NOT share your viewpoint. Please discuss BOTH sides of the issue objectively without infusing your opinion.

Prompt #2

- Discuss Immigration. Make sure to share your viewpoint with your small group. Explain your thought process and how you got there.

Discussion

- Which of the two felt more genuine?
- Which made you feel that you had more self-respect?
- Was one harder vs. easier than another?
- Which did you get more out of?
- Which would feel better while teaching?

Utilize Common Factors in the Classroom

- Respect facilitates the development and maintenance of healthy relationships (Gelso, 2009), increases receptivity to learning (Kohl, 1995; Palmer, 1997) and increases learning itself (Busler, et al. 2017)
- Empathy is one of most important considerations while approaching multiple and diverse views in the classroom
- Use of appropriate humor also increases positive learning experiences (Busler et al., 2017)
- Recognize how expressed or perceived positions **including neutrality/silence** affects classroom climate and relationships with students
 - (*Race Talk and The Conspiracy of Silence*; Derald Wing Sue, 2015)
 - Students may misrepresent what we think when we remain silent- when silent, we will be perceived as being part of status quo.
- A classroom climate is considered **open** when the teacher presents several sides of an issue and encourages discussion between different opinions (Kahne and Sporte, 2008; Torney-Purta et al., 2003; Youniss, 2011).

Move from Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013)

- “We cannot foster critical dialogue regarding social justice by turning the classroom into a *safe space*, a place in which teachers rule out conflict... We have to be *brave* because along the way we are going to be *vulnerable and exposed*; we are going to encounter [truths] that are *alienating and shocking*. We are going to be very **unsafe**” (p. 141).

Practical Suggestions

- **CONSIDER THE GOAL OF THE COURSE**

- For me- to embrace and reflect on identity, figure out how they got there, learn to dialogue with others while respecting views, have emotion around exploration
- This may not be the goal of all courses!

- **FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING AND ANALYSIS**

- What do you think?
- Why do you think that?
- Where does it come from?
- What do you think the next person thinks?

- **INTENTIONALLY WELCOME DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES AND DIALOGUES WITHOUT SHAMING**

- Found to be effective to encourage student to student discussion of politics 20% of the time in a class (Hess & McAvoy, 2015)

- **RESEARCH INFORMED TEACHING:**

- Extracurricular Opportunities (Brady-Amoon et al., 2012)
- Reflexive Journaling (take out grading when discussing opinions or personal experiences)(Dyer & Hurd, 2016)

Take Aways:

NO RIGHT OR WRONG!

Instructors who use Best Practice methods and who share without imposing views are doing no harm.

It appears that if the teacher is careful about when and how to share their views, students are likely to be supportive.

It seems to be helpful to allow students to develop and reflect upon their own views and to encourage more of a dialogue among students than between teacher & student.

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