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Strategies for Addressing Conflicts around Social Identities in the Classroom

Overarching theme: Create inclusive space in classroom for these types of conversations to occur. Set the right tone. Model kindness and respect for others.

- Establish Ground Rules
 - In syllabus
 - On the first day
 - Reminder before sensitive assignments
- Prioritize Diversity and its benefits
 - Help raise awareness of our differences
 - Explain why it is important
 - Multiples perspectives
 - All experiences valuable
 - Also recognize common experience
- Do exercises/entry points so that everyone can get to know one other
 - Student to student, as well as professor to student
- Be a catalyst for growth and change -- Encourage challenging conversation but provide the tools/suggest how to have them (See below for ideas)
 - Play devil's advocate to MULTIPLE sides and name that you are doing so: "Have you thought about this?" ... or "The other side might say this. How would you respond?"
 - Ask students to play devil's advocate
- Anticipate potential for conflict and prepare the class in advance
- Naming things/Naming certain dynamics
 - Acknowledge conflict when it happens – name it in the moment
 - Sometimes you might name silence – that there might be discomfort or something important residing in the silence
 - Name that these conversation are hard to have
 - Name your own identities -- acknowledgment of own (faculty) privilege and lack of experience being targeted in a particular area
 - Name that it is difficult for you, but you will do your best
 - Name potential for shortcomings (you are not perfect)
- Be present in space and use Active Listening Skills
 - Deep listening
 - No interruptions
 - Echo back (allows people to feel heard, and allows for clarification)
- Be intentional with group formation regarding diversity and multiple perspectives
 - Name the inevitable tokenism. One group cannot house all identities/vantage points
 - Release students from having to speak for their whole identity group
- Use Reflective writing assignments to give students a voice in private

Theater Delta Ground Rules

- Respect self and others: Share your point of view but also allow others to share theirs
- Be charitable: Give each other the benefit of the doubt that we are doing the best we can in that moment.
- Speak from your own experience. Don't Generalize.

Ten Tips for Challenging Conversations

1. **Set your goals** for the conversation, and focus on mutual goals if possible. Know exactly what you want to accomplish in the conversation and why.
2. **Choose an appropriate time and place.** Choose a time and place when and where the other person will be most likely to be receptive to your ideas. Also, try to ensure that the environment will be distraction and interruption free.
3. **Prepare** for your conversation. Gather the information you'll need.
4. **Be Clear.** Say what you mean, and mean what you say. Don't be indirect or beat around the bush. It confuses things.
5. **Acknowledge the other person's feelings and point of view.** Express that you understand where they are coming from. This creates a more balanced atmosphere.
6. **Avoid being judgmental, by focusing on behavior and not opinions.** Describe the precise behaviors that you want more or less of.
7. **Expect and manage emotions.** Emotions – yours and theirs – are a normal part of conflict and difficult conversations. Try not to let emotion overcome your reason.
8. **Stay on track.** The other person may try to deflect, deny, change the subject, or make you the subject of the conversation. Be prepared to herd their words back to your goal. Similarly, don't sidetrack yourself by piling on unnecessary issues; this will complicate your conversation and put them on the defensive.
9. **Listen actively – both verbally and nonverbally.** Be sincere about wanting to listen to the other person. Commit to being curious about their point of view and remain curious over the course of the discussion. Also, watch for clues in body language. Much about a person's attitude is conveyed through body language.
10. **Breathe and take your time.** If you need a break, take a few breaths to center yourself. Your thought can wait, and you can use the time to listen and/or process.

Resources

From the May/Fall Preview issue of Loyola's "the hub" faculty newsletter:

- Gloria S. Boutte and Tandra S. Jackson (2014). "[Advice to White Allies: Insights from Faculty of Color](#)" *Race Ethnicity and Education* 17.5: 623-42.
- Jeannine Bell (2014). "[How to Improve Discussions of Race in the Classroom](#)" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dec 12.
- Lori D. Patton and Stephanie Bondi (2015). "[Nice White Men or Social Justice Allies?: Using Critical Race Theory to Examine How White Male Faculty and Administrators Engage in Ally Work](#)" *Race Ethnicity and Education* 18.4: 488-514.
- Roxane Gay (2015). "[The Seduction of Safety, on Campus and Beyond](#)" *New York Times*, Nov 13
- Jessica Charbeneau (2015). "[White Faculty Transforming Whiteness in the Classroom through Pedagogical Practice](#)" *Race Ethnicity and Education* 18.5: 655-74.