

CHARGED DISCUSSIONS

CREATING AN ENGAGING & INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT



WHAT IS IT?



Charged discussions may organically arise from studying difference, power, inequality, and other emotional topics and controversial issues which occur as part of a university education.

Without deliberate mindfulness to these instances, anger, hostility, silence, and breakdowns in communication can result.

RESEARCH...



Class discussions can help students recognize and investigate their assumptions, develop new appreciation for differences, and lead to transformative learning experiences (Kipp, 2008)¹.

But for such dialogues to be successful, a supportive and inclusive learning environment is necessary, as well as skillful facilitation on the part of the instructor (Sue et al., 2009).

DATA ...



27% of UCD students report that they often (or very often) discuss and navigate controversial issues in the classroom

40% of UCD students report that they often (or very often) interact in the classroom with someone with views different than their own (UCUES, 2018)

¹List of all references in the complete JITT Guide.

TEACHING STRATEGIES...



- Consider **using micro-affirmations** (e.g., using facial expressions, correct names, proper pronunciations) that promote inclusion and support to those who may feel isolated or invisible.
- **Assess your students' experiences** to ensure no one is leaving the conversation angry and/or give you an opportunity to address students' concerns in a later class.
- When charged topics **come up unexpectedly**, have students **free write** about the topic.
- With unexpected comments, **depersonalize the comment** if it is potentially hurtful (e.g., "Thank you for raising that perspective. Many feel that way, and you've given us an opportunity to talk about it.>").
- **Relate** charged comments back to **course readings or concepts**.
- Define a **clear purpose** to focus your discussion and **tie it to the course's learning outcomes** and communicate this to students.
- **Acknowledge differences** in communication styles in order to help **prevent potential conflict**.

STUDENTS SAY...



"I really appreciated my professor who acknowledged that, although I come from a relatively more privileged background than many, my perspective was worthy of consideration as well."

"Sensing my discomfort with the class discussion, my professor emailed and invited me to share my concerns during office hours."

REFLECTION...



- How can you anticipate "hot button" topics or comments and prepare questions to guide the discussion?
- What does it look like to be an active facilitator, rather than a passive observer? How can you be best prepared to redirect the conversation when it strays?



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