BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

4 IN A SERIES

Strategies for Managing HOT MOMENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

No matter what subject matter we are teaching, the size of our class, or the time we devoted to creating an inclusive classroom, conflict is part of the learning process. Conflict may erupt due to any number of things, including problematic humor, language that is viewed by some as oppressive, stereotypes, or microaggressions. Regardless of your content, class size, or teaching methodology, here are some suggestions about how to handle those hot moments when they arise.

1 Personal Assessment: When an unexpected conflict arises in the classroom take a moment to assess the situation. Center yourself (especially if you yourself are offended), breath, recognize what has just happened, and select how you want to respond.

2 Acknowledge: It is vital to acknowledge that something problematic has occurred. It will likely not disappear if you ignore it. Here are some immediate things you can do:

• **Validate student contributions (even if you disagree).** Surfacing a variety of opinions is key to helping all students deepen their content understanding. You do not have to agree with the student when you give them a platform, but treating the individual with dignity is important.

• **De-personalize it.** Don't shame the speaker. Treat everyone with dignity. Ex:, "Many people share this perspective. Why do some people think this way? Why do others disagree?"

• **Postpone the discussion.** If you don't feel prepared to respond at the moment, you can acknowledge to the students that a hot button issue came up and that you will move on now, but return to it at the next meeting. Being honest with your students is not a sign of weakness. It allows them to acknowledge that something happened, and it helps them trust that you, as the instructor, will work it through with them, and it buys you time to figure out how you want to respond.

• *You can use this time to check in with colleagues about a good way to respond.*

• *You may decide to devote the next class period to working through this issue, or that it can be handled quickly.*

3 Frame the Moment: Point out to the students that though this is uncomfortable, it is a learning opportunity. If you have set up an inclusive classroom, remind them about:

• **Dialogue and active listening skills** (See handout on dialogue and listening).

• **Refer to group norms** What group norms have been offended? (See handout on group norms).

4 Six Strategies to Interrupt Hot Moments:

1) PALS: Pause, Acknowledge/Ask, Listen, Share your truth/story. (See additional handout).

2) CURIOSITY: Ask powerful questions and listen generously to answers. Lead a dialogue balancing all voices in the class. Make sure to surface historically marginalized perspectives.

3) WRITING EXERCISE: Have students write responses to: "What I know about this topic..." "What I want to learn..." "What I want to say...." You may ask them to respond anonymously, collect and review to determine how to proceed next time.

4) SMALL GROUPS: Divide students into groups of 2 or 3 and give them prompts (from above or others); debrief or have them write.

5) CONTENT/DATA SHARE: Create a graph and ask students what they already know about this topic, what they need to find out. What do we know about this issue historically?

6) NAMING AND FRAMING: Sometimes it is useful to actually stop the conversation and ask the group to name and explore something that just happened during the conversation. Move away from the specifics of the issue and ask class "what happened here?" Solicit ideas about what, why, how to move forward.

5 Closure: It is useful to close the session with a reflection. Offer a closing prompt and go around the room so everyone's voice is heard. If particular students seem uncomfortable or have distanced themselves from interacting, check in with them outside of class and refer them to appropriate resources on campus.

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BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

4

Strategies for Managing

HOT MOMENTS
IN THE CLASSROOM

The Tips for Building Inclusive Communities Series was designed to address questions from faculty, staff, students, and community members about how to create inclusive spaces in classrooms, meetings, on study abroad, in community settings and beyond. Every Tip in the series is designed to share basic details about different methods for creating inclusive communities in a way that is quickly accessible to the reader.

BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES is a university-wide initiative that reflects Michigan State University's core value of inclusion and its rich history in supporting the efforts of every student to realize their full potential through academic pursuit. Students, alumni, faculty, and staff carry this message forward, on campus and across the globe to help build inclusive communities where diversity and differences are acknowledged as strengths.

It is the mission of the Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives to promote Building Inclusive Communities so that our differences will be acknowledged as our strength, so that we can be different together, and that our many voices sound together to form one will. The need to embrace and share this message has never been greater.

Why Build Inclusive Communities? When we participate in the process of Building Inclusive Communities we create the opportunity to see the world differently, in our research, in the work we pursue, in the classroom, in social relationships, as consumers, voters, partners, families, travelers, and more. Building Inclusive Communities starts with a frame of mind and a deep-seated understanding that inclusion is at the core of MSU's values and the very foundation of our life-long educational journey. But results don't occur overnight. It takes time and commitment to sustain. Together we will create a supportive and welcoming environment for all Spartans.

DIFFERENT TOGETHER.
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