

Applied Strategies for Identifying and Addressing Misinformation, Misconceptions, Incivility, and Conflict in the Classroom: AKA: Handling Hot Topics

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Spring, 2022/CALS



DIFFICULT DIALOGUES PROGRAM

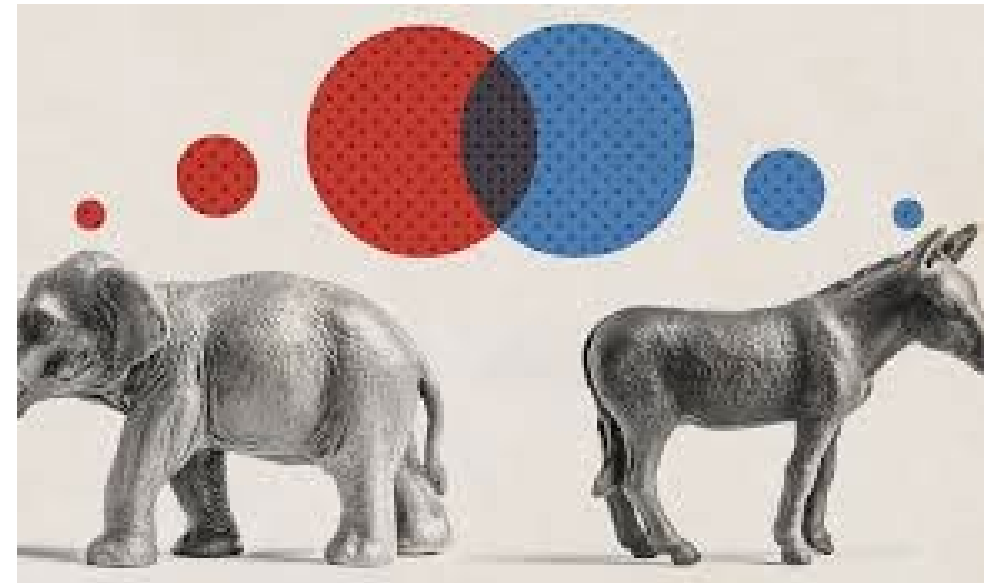
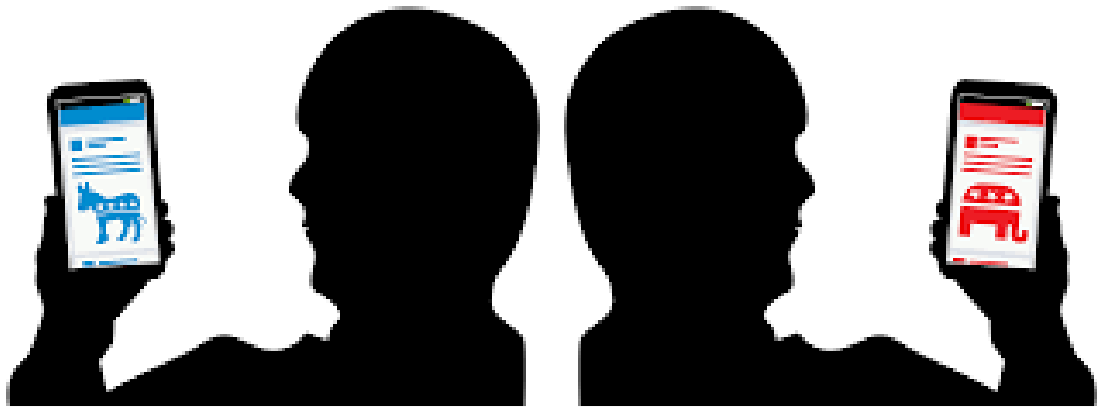
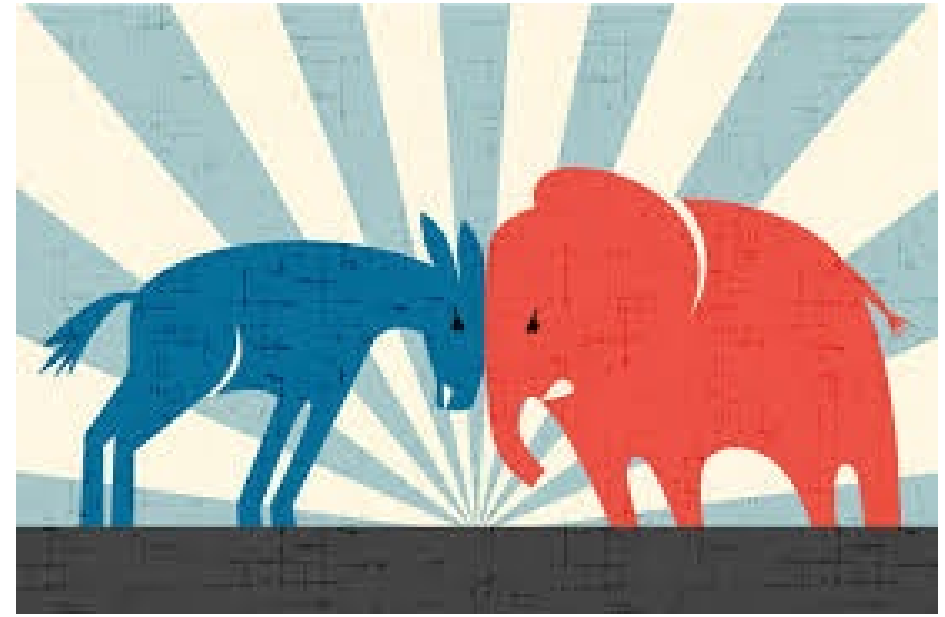
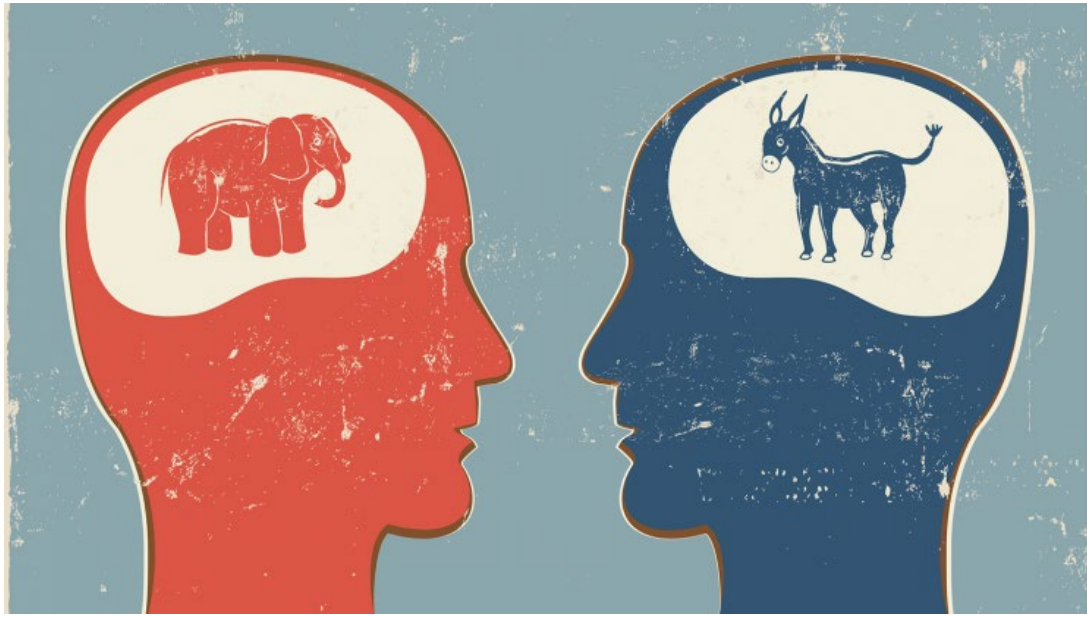
*Strategic Engagement in
Dialogue for Higher Education*

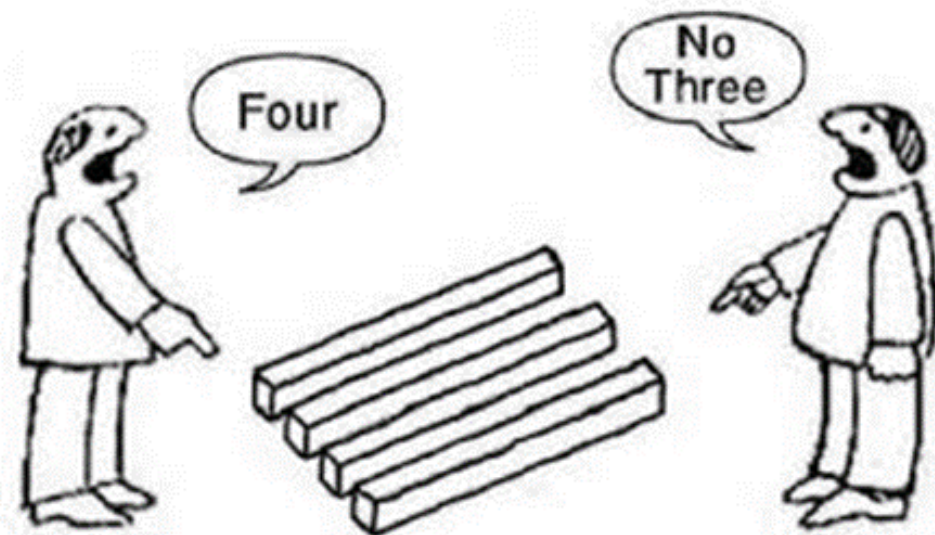
Nancy Watson, Ph.D., LPC, FAPA
TMCA Distinguished Mediator
Clare A. Gill, Ph.D.

HOT TOPICS

What are the types of difficult dialogues common in your classes/field?

What are some of the challenges you face with your students? *With one another??*

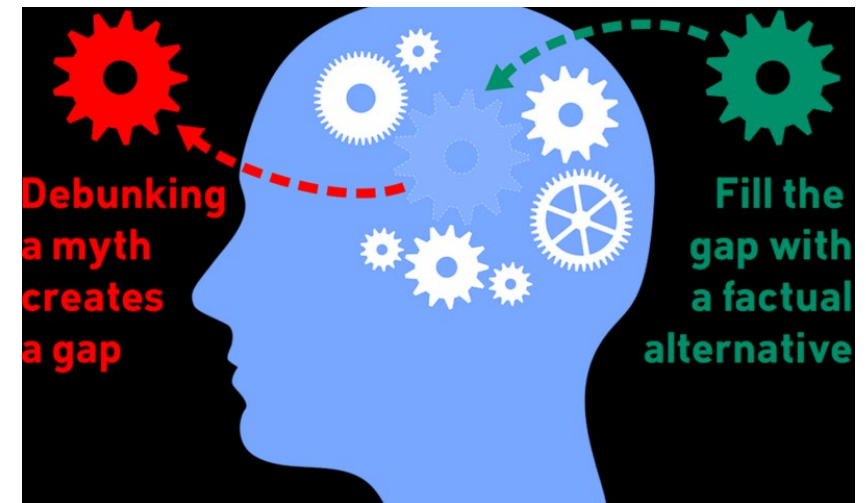




Minding the Gap: Misconceptions, Misinformation, & Ignorance



- <https://undsci.berkeley.edu/teaching/misconceptions.php>



What do we / our students do when we don't know something?

- **Ideally**, I/they/we would:

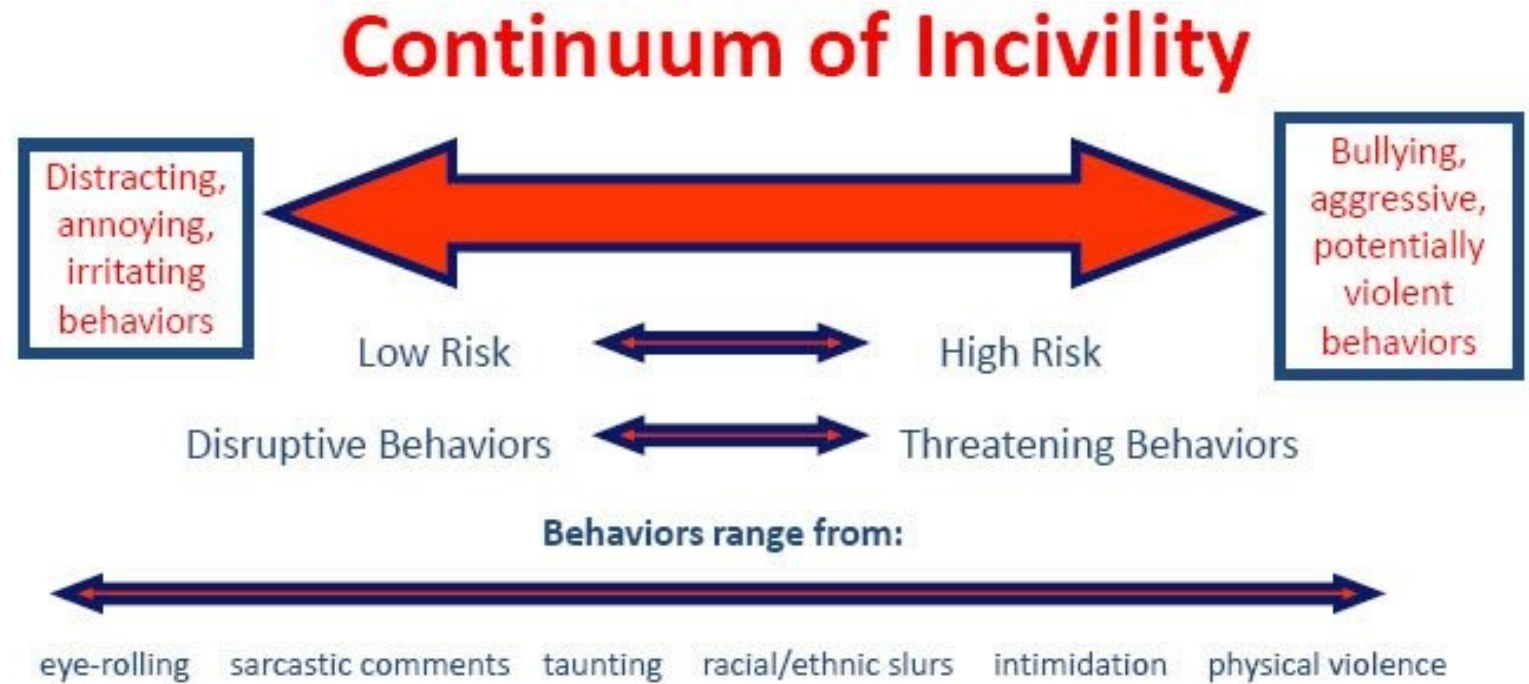
- **In reality**, I/they/we:

What do we / our students do when we disagree with something?

- Ideally:
- In reality:

[Cognitive dissonance and cognitive balance]

In the context of our classes, implicit, unconscious, and explicit biases and misinformation can result in incivility



Clark © 2011

What have you seen, heard, or been a part of?

What can we do?

Case Studies and Scenarios

Case Study #1

Teaching (and learning) about decidedly hot topics: A Case Study

- https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/princeton-university-lawrence-rosen_us_5a7dfa26e4b0c6726e134b09
- Several students walked out of an anthropology course at Princeton University on Tuesday after a professor repeatedly used a racial slur in his class about hate speech.
- Rosen gave this example: “Which is more provocative: A white man walks up to a black man and punches him in the nose, or a white man walks up to a black man and calls him a n****r?”
- He repeated the example once more, leaving students “shocked and visibly uncomfortable,”
- A few minutes later, students began to point out their discomfort with a white professor using the word in its entirety.
- When one student asked if Rosen planned to keep repeating the word in future classes, the professor reportedly responded that he would if he deemed it necessary for the discussion.
- Rosen then said, “I purposely did that, because I wanted everyone to feel the power of that word,” Salter told HuffPost.
- “As if black people haven’t been feeling the full power of the N-word for the past 400 years,” she said.
- At that point, Salter said she and another student decided to walk out of the class.

Your response? Options? Parameters?

Case Study #2

- **Something is said (Lateral violence and conflict)**
- In your class, there is a discussion about _____.
- One student expresses a strong sentiment and another chimes in, supporting that argument.
- Eyebrows raise, jaws drop, discomfort is apparent.
- {Imagine, if you like, a hybrid/hyflex format, and the chat window lights up with comments about each side and the persons occupying them}.
- Another student introduces a counter-argument.
- Each side feels under attack.

What does this tell you? What do you do?

Case Study #3

Nothing is said (Inclusion or exclusion; why don't they speak up?)

- While lecturing about a “hot topic”, you notice one category of students who clearly agrees with an argument you are presenting and another that does not.
- Nothing is said, but you observe it in their nonverbal responses. (What does this look like?).
- The agreeing population is much larger than the disagreeing population.
- You, of course, believe you are right and that those nodding along are, therefore, as well.

What does this tell you about your students? About their learning? What do you do?

Case Study #4

Well, that's your opinion (Misinformation and defiance)

- Pick a topic that fits what you teach.
- Imagine an assignment that requires your students to develop and present an argument.
- Now imagine a response rooted less in evidence than opinion, and dependent on sources that are not scholarly or, by conventional standards, reputable.
- The student argues that it is all just a matter of opinion; that her/his opinions and sources are as good and valuable as yours.
- When you disagree, you are accused of bias. The student assumes a defiant posture with her/his work.

• What do you do?

Towards a Strategy

First steps



Stop it Before It Starts: Build a Climate of Trust and Civility

A major determinant of a successful educational experience is a shared sense of **respect** among and between the students and their instructor.

- Indeed, our general education program “...cultivates the development of creative, independent thinkers and **learners who appreciate diverse perspectives in multiple contexts** and who are informed, educated and active members of society...”

How do we get started?

- Set expectations **clearly, early, and often**
 - In the **syllabus**, in a welcome message in **Canvas**, during your **first meeting** with your students, and with **every assignment/activity**.
 - Use real and pertinent examples of civility and incivility; what is expected and what is not tolerated.
 - Clearly articulate what we expect from our students and what they can expect from us. Explain why it matters!
- **It’s not just about rules, it’s about relationships.**
 - Our initial value proposition to students should not be all about us and what matters to us, *it should value them*.
 - Open the floor to understanding where our students are coming from.
- **Move beyond the “we/they” binary.**
 - We should know one another’s names and something about us all. How? Why?
 - **Listen...and encourage listening**
 - This means resisting the impulse to reply immediately, for us and our students.
- **Model appropriate behavior, respect, and civility!**

Understand Learning, Learners, and Learning Environments

Note the expanding definition of the classroom and learning environments, especially now and the challenges that apply to ...

- Different instructional modalities
- Chat and discussion group abuse
- Experiential learning (community engaged, internships, collaboration)

Regardless of the class or learning environment, diversity exists. This is where an equity framework applies, and where inclusion, accessibility, and civility become our responsibility.

Reality Check

Conflict does occur

Incivility does
occur

Misinformation
has consequences

What do we do?

Does silence tell us
something?

Think broadly
about and consider
the challenges of
inclusion.

Pedagogies that foster civil discussion of hot topics, reduce the likelihood of flare-ups, and help our students understand their own tolerances



Discussions



Debates



Simulations



Interviews



Collaborative
research



Problem-based
learning



Metacognition
exercises and
journals



Online forums

And a
Strategy



When the temperature rises: Open The Front Door

- **O** = Observe
 - A concrete, factual observation
- **T** = Think
 - Thoughts based on observations, but not intended to put the other person on the defensive
- **F** = Feel
 - Emotions you or others may have as a result of what you observed/conflict
- **D** = Desire
 - Desired outcome

~with gratitude to Dr. Tasha Souza~

How it Works

- **Own it:**
 - / observed
 - / think
 - / feel
 - / desire
- **Pause, process, and proceed:**
 - Point out what you noticed (rolling eyes, arms folding, etc). **O**
 - Indicate what this makes you think (that you said something contentious that might need to be discussed further). **T**
 - Indicate a potentially emotional response you or others may have (discomfort, misunderstanding, fear). **F**
 - Indicate a desired outcome (someone giving voice to their gestures, a civil conversation on the topic). **D**

Also

Don't (just) be a first responder –look for flashpoints!

- Looks of disbelief
- Looks of disengagement
- Looks of anger/agitation
- Knowing “that student” is going to say *something*

Intervene –calling out versus calling in

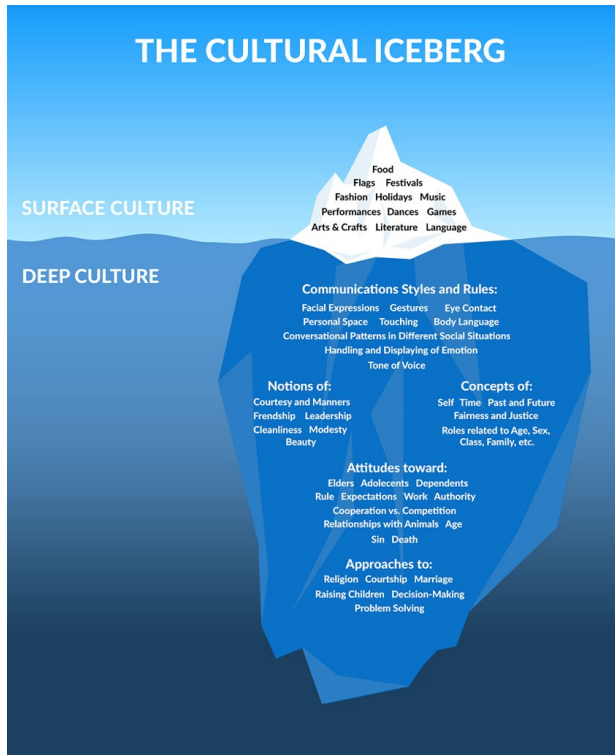
Pause

Reframe the topic and the rules for engagement

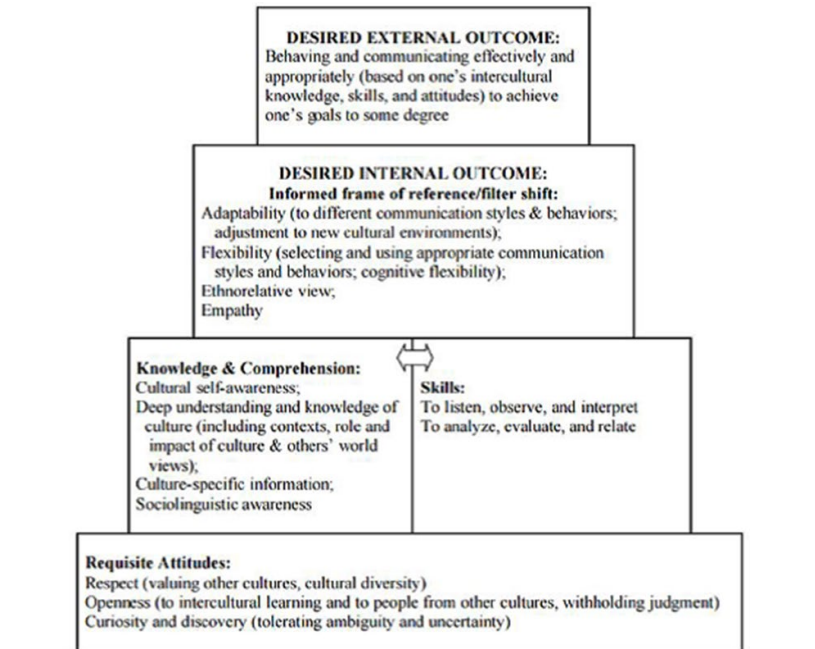
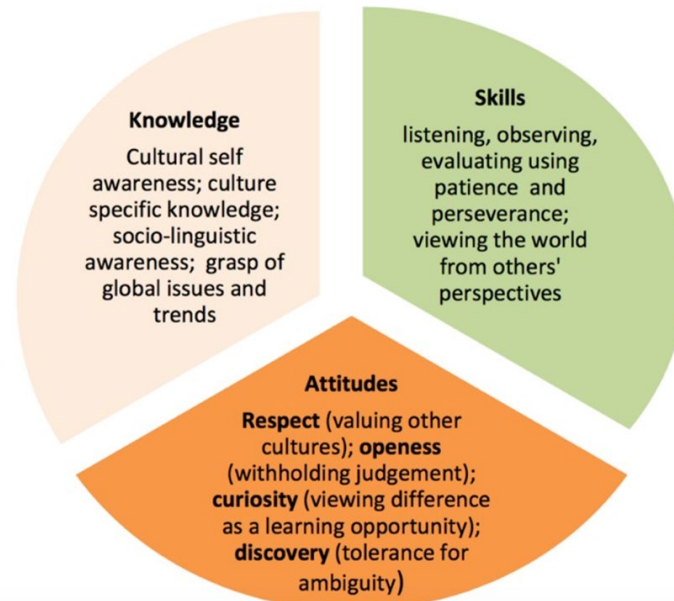
For example,

- Use timed intervals for students to think, reflect, write, and share
- Have them explore the issue from “the other side”
- Treat all sides fairly
- State and work towards a goal, conclusion, or solution
- Conclude the session with your own words, assessing the situation and how they handled it.

Be mindful of cultural differences and focus on the development of intercultural competences



Constituent elements of intercultural competence
(Adapted from Deardorff, 2006)





In Search of Healing

America is facing one of the deepest divides in our history — and, no matter who wins the election, a difficult path forward



Final Tips

The tyranny of absolutes is not helpful, so

- **Listen**
- **Think**
- **Feel**
- **Process**
- **Respond**

- ✓ **Don't normalize what's not normal**
- ✓ **Don't agree to be agreeable**



And consider this:

Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.

~and remember~

Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.

Resources

- <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/cetl/handling-hot-topics.asp>
- <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/cetl/law-school-resources.asp>
- [Discussing Traumatic Events](#) from UC Berkeley
Guidelines on how to prepare for and structure a discussion, if you choose to do so
- [Brené Brown on Empathy \(video\)](#)
3-minute video on distinction between empathy and sympathy with strategies about how to listen to and connect with someone who is suffering
- [Calling In: A Quick Guide on When and How](#) by Sian Ferguson
Distinction between calling out and calling in as ways to get someone to stop an oppressive behavior (calling in attempts to do this in the most loving, self-respecting way possible)
- [The Faculty Focus Special Report on Diversity and Inclusion in the College Classroom](#)
"Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom: Concrete Strategies for Cooling Down Tension" (p. 4)
"Seven Bricks to Lay the Foundation for Productive Difficult Dialogues" (p. 6)
"Overcoming Racial Tension: Using Student Voices to Create Safe Spaces in the Classroom" (p. 9)
"Managing Microaggressions in the College Classroom" (p. 10)
- [Responding to Everyday Bigotry](#) from Southern Poverty Law Center
Strategies for responding to bigotry at work, home, in public, and in yourself
- [Responding to Microaggressions with Microresistance: A Framework for Consideration](#) by Cynthia Ganote, Floyd Cheung, and Tasha Souza (pp. 3-7)
Theory of how microresistance can be an effective response to microaggression
- A solution from Communication: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/03/14/communication-professor-establishes-rules-his-students-talking-about-trump-class>
- https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/27/why-facts-dont-change-our-minds?utm_social-type=owned&mbid=social_facebook&utm_brand=tny&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&fbclid=IwAR3rBSeS1yQLGT0ii5Qqz-Xm1XNqZ25KMxkToxDPSSbyK_fvxVjigXOxyY
- *Touch of Grey*, The Grateful Dead.