



A FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING POLARIZING CONVERSATIONS WITH STUDENTS

1

PLAN

Plan for when students say things that are insensitive, hurtful, biased or uninformed. Do this planning WITH students so they know what to do. Set norms for conversations and talk about them. Our norms for potentially polarizing conversations are below. Be sure you help students understand the distinction between intent and impact.

- Be more curious than certain
- Assume good intentions
- Redefine safe space
- Challenge the idea not the person
- Trust the process
- Take responsibility for your impact.

2

PAUSE

When an uncomfortable or contentious moment arises, we usually experience one of several common fear responses: freeze, flight or fight. We might experience a racing heart rate or a rise in body temperature. We need to pause and slow things down. Here are a few things you might say to pause the moment.

- "Let's take a minute. . ."
- "I'm noticing. . ."
- "Let's talk about this."
- "I'm wondering how that might have landed."
- "Something doesn't feel quite right. . ."

3

REFLECT

Help students make sense of what is happening in class. Some students may not have even noticed something uncomfortable or offensive has happened. It may not be appropriate to do this reflection with the whole class, but sometimes it is helpful to share a teachable moment.

- "Can you tell me what you mean by that?"
- "How does that make you feel?"
- "That landed hard for me because. . ."
- "That made me feel. . ."
- "How do you know that?"

4

REPAIR

Assess students' desires or capacity to repair in that moment. Recognize that it is not always going to be possible at that moment, or maybe ever. Offer the opportunity but don't expect apologies or forgiveness to happen instantaneously.

- "How can I/we make it right?"
- "What do I/we need to do right now?"
- "Are you open to repair?"

