

Crucial Conversations in the Classroom Podcast

Episode 3 Bonus Conversation on Election Time

Intro

Sheyda Jahanbani

Hi everybody, just a quick, very quick we promise, bonus here because we are T minus four days from the election and if you're like us, you're probably thinking about what next week is gonna look like and you're probably looking at your syllabus and realizing that you might not have anticipated what we're all gonna be kind of, the wave we're gonna be surfing.

So Jane and I just wanted to offer a couple quick ideas about things we've done in our classrooms that we felt like I think worked or not worked is less useful than saying that felt good and right to us about how to approach what we're about to go through. So also just quick thing.

All of the resources, these podcasts are available at cte.ku.edu and this will be a teaching resource that you can use this week and that will be there for you as you contemplate how to think more about incorporating crucial conversations into your classrooms. So Jane, how are you preparing for what's ahead?

Jane Barnette

Well, you know, I mean, it's all well and good to just prepare and then we'll see how things sort of shape up. But the way that I've spoken about it is building on what we talked about in, I think, episode two and a little bit in episode one, which was about the community agreements. So, kind of returning to those and recognizing and reminding students that we are a community and that this is a brave space and trying to frame it as.

So, I only have a graduate class on a Tuesday. And at first, I thought I was going to let them have the full day to make sure that they were voting, because I also think that's such an important thing that you can do, a gift that you can give. But these are graduate students, half of whom are international and so therefore don't have the ability to vote here. And so instead, they asked, and I'm so grateful that we are comfortable enough to provide a community of care for each other. So, thinking of coming to class in the week or so following the election as an act of care, as an act of providing space, whether you want to think of it as brave as we frequently have talked about here or as safe, but certainly as a place where we respect each other and that we are going to acknowledge the human side of the student. So, in my undergraduate classes, which is, you know, a Monday, Wednesday class, we start with check-ins and the check-ins often are topical and often do have to do with things that occur. But in the last check-in and probably the next couple of check-ins are really more about nature and more about just sort of trying to, you know, go outside if it's not too cold and find something from nature that is beautiful to bring back into the room.

as a way of just sort of clearing our minds so that we can have space for creating. But I'm so interested because of history classrooms and because you're dealing with United States history, Shada, what are some plans that you have for this coming week?

Sheyda Jahanbani

Well, I want to see your description of engaging with the natural world, just like I took a deep breath. I don't know if you could hear that. It made me feel good to just hear somebody remind me that that's what we should do. Touch grass is not just a slogan. It's actually pretty useful advice. OK, so here's what I did. The class I'm teaching this semester is actually about global history, that's, know, US history fits into that and the fate of democracy and this sort of contest about democracy and authoritarianism I think is super relevant to the story I was telling. That said, what I wanted to do was, I've done the community-building work, we've set up an infrastructure and some ground rules. I wanted to walk in and ask the students how they wanted to be together in the next few weeks. And I said to them that, I don't see the classroom as a space that we should politicize, but that I think that's different from being able to talk about politics. And part of what that means is that I create a forum in which they can connect and talk to one another, that it's not just a teacher-student relationship, it's a student-to-student relationship. And so I asked them if they felt that our community was robust enough to do that, and we talked about what we were afraid of, we talked about what we were...

comfortable with. So, we really kind of reiterated our shared values and what we've been trying to build together. And then I said, as somebody who's studied US history, I do have a lot of knowledge about the functioning of the US government. And so if you have questions about that, I will be happy to draw on my expertise if you're curious about why this or that is happening to offer whatever insight I can. But I said, you'll probably sense in my voice that I am uncomfortable about these kinds of conversations because I don't want this to be a place where you feel like the authority I have standing in front of the room is being used in ways that don't feel right to you. And it's just not something I would ever want to do.

And so I said, want you to tell me how you want me to be and first, you know, talk to each other about that. And then also I just said, like, it's okay that we're uncomfortable about it and then we're going to struggle to figure out what feels right, but we're going to play it as it goes and we'll just keep in touch with each other. I said, I didn't want to walk in and not acknowledge that this is happening because it is happening and it's significant and it feels existential to people on all sides of this political moment. And so I don't want to be a person who walks in and pretends like we're going to talk about the 19th century and just ignore the present world that we live in. But I also want you to guide me in how we want to talk about it. It was lovely, I thought, to hear their responses to that. And it made me feel like the work that we've been advocating people do to build space in their classrooms for listening you know, was paying off.

So, ask me how I feel about it next week, but that is the way it felt right to me. And I think in these moments, like honesty is so important, but also just being aware of the privilege we walk into the room with, whether it's the privilege of maturity, whether it's our expertise, whether it's the fact that we're professors, and by maturity, I mean age. It's just a more polite way of saying it.

Jane Barnette

Yeah. 100%.

Listen, you can call me an old lady. I'm good. I like to be called a crone. But one last thing that I want to offer that my colleague Darren Canady over in English has shared that I think could be useful this coming week especially, which is the notion of speaking in draft. The notion that, especially as people who are perceived to have a certain amount of power, instead of necessarily sharing something that is, you know,

Sheyda Jahanbani

Yeah, we're both old ladies.

Jane Barnette

for a test or otherwise supposed to be considered, you know, knowledge that they are learning to recognize that there are times when we speak in draft and that is a demonstration of trust and vulnerability and that we can give that tool to our students as well so that they can feel potentially more brave to say certain things as a trial run to see how it works as opposed to feeling like they're committed to it forever.

Sheyda Jahanbani

Mm-hmm.

I love that. Yeah, I use the word grace in that little spiel that I gave them on Tuesday in the conversation we had. probably use that word like 20 times. So maybe we can wish each other and our listeners grace for the coming week.

Jane Barnette

It's so crucial.

100 % may we all get to the other side, whatever that side might be, alive and potentially, you know, kinder to each other.

Sheyda Jahanbani

Yeah, I think that's a wonderful sentiment to wrap up on. Thank you so much, Jane.

Jane Barnette

Thank you.