

Don't be Scared, Be Prepared

Controversial Discourse in the Social Studies Classroom

We have a responsibility, as Social Studies Educators, to prepare a climate and culture for students to express their views through academic discourse. How can we do this without the lesson going off the rails? Be prepared and keep your learning goals/ content standards in view at all times. No matter if you want to discuss news that broke on your way to school, or you have a discourse lesson your students tackle each year, keeping the five steps below in your planning will allow your students to practice discourse and keep the peace.

1. Compelling Question:

Take time and develop a question for students to analyze and think about. Compelling questions also allow the instructor to gain control of any discourse that may be going in the wrong direction by refocusing discussion. Pose the question without lean and in achievable language for all learners. The first step of any discourse lesson needs to break down the question for students and check for understanding in the entire class. For more information on writing compelling questions see <http://www.c3teachers.org/what-are-compelling-questions/>.

2. Prepare supporting questions:

Although compelling questions perk student interest, classes typically need supporting questions to keep on a time schedule. Questions also assist with overcoming uncomfortable lows in discourse, and serve as a check to instructor to see if the compelling question is good. Prepare a set of questions that will lead students to be able to answer the compelling question and scaffold their thoughts. Supporting questions can be closed- ended, with supporting comments. They build confidence in students and will add voices to the discourse.

3. Students must have access to multiple perspectives on an issue:

Require that students research, or you present multiple perspectives. Perspectives should show the different views in a respectful manor and not allow students to pass judgement or disregard perspectives. Video clips from multiple news sources are very helpful (Twitter is a great resource for breaking news).

4. Choose a specific instructional method for the lesson:

Without process, discussion of sensitive issues will ultimately end up happening between a few strong minded students and the instructor. Choose a strategy that allows every student the opportunity to voice and hear opinions. Anchor charts of your most successful method are great for creating discourse around breaking news, have them ready and talk about today's news today. Jennifer Gonzalez, Cult of Pedagogy, has provided a Big List of discussion strategies to choose from here <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/speaking-listening-techniques/>.

5. Set guidelines and classroom discourse rules

Ideally each class would create these discourse rules. There are a number of lesson plans available to lead instructors through this process of creating classroom culture. Classrooms are different, but the goal remains the same; if a student's comment crosses the line, instructors must be able to refer to policies and procedures.