Navigating Controversial Topics

In the Classroom and at the Village
Presentors

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Premise

- Every culture has topics or beliefs that can be seen as controversial.
- It is important to learn how to address controversial topics thoughtfully.
- Different approaches are needed depending on the topic.
Controversial topics may

- Differ from US norms
- Be contrary to villager/student belief systems
- Be difficult due to personal/family connections or experiences
- Include new or difficult information
Examples from CLV include

- Ecological and environmental disasters and potential disasters
- Migration, Refugees, Asylum seekers
- Experiences of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability, economic inequality, poverty
- Prison, internment camps, indigenous boarding schools
- Certain historical events
Other examples?
Why address these topics?

CLV Mission:

A courageous global citizen lives responsibly by:

• appreciating and seeking to understand diverse cultural perspectives;
• communicating with confidence and cultural sensitivity in multiple languages;
• respecting human dignity and cultivating compassion;
• engaging critically and creatively with issues that transcend boundaries; and
• advancing a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world for all.
Why else?

• Being able to learn about and address difficult topics is a life skill that can be transferred to:
  • Personal relationships
  • Working environments and relationships
  • Any number of careers
How do we address these topics in a safe and meaningful way?

• All lessons must take place within the context of respect.
  • All questions, feelings, ideas, etc. are heard without judgement.
  • All speech and actions remain positive (i.e. no bullying, name calling, demeaning, etc).
  • Everyone involved must feel that they have a say/ are being heard, but can also choose not to speak

• Activities and discussions need to be carefully thought through and planned.
  • The method of instruction should vary depending on the sensitivity of the topic.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>(Potentially) Highly Sensitive</th>
<th>Moderately Sensitive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples</strong></td>
<td>Asylum seeking/ refugees treatment of indigenous people gender and sexuality experiences with disability slavery/internment</td>
<td>Oil drilling Whaling WWII economic inequality nuclear power overfishing, world hunger</td>
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<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
<td>Moderated discussions Interpretive activities (listen or watch, then debrief) Careful situation recreation or example scenario</td>
<td>Simulations Information finding activities Debates Round table discussions Making comparisons Pros and Cons Support an opposing view</td>
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During the activity

• Monitor the participants.
  • Make sure everyone is remaining respectful and feels safe.
  • It is ok to remove participants from the situation if necessary.
• Check in with the participants.
  • When conducting a full-blown simulation, check in when you see possible distress.
• Don´t be afraid to alter course or stop early.
• Always finish with a debrief and return to topic later if necessary.
Comments or Questions