



Building a Cohesive Community with Meaningful Conversations

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WELCOME!

MEET YOUR PRESENTER



When we start with improving the foundational relationship between teacher and student, everyone wins.



DR. KARLA MANNING



- Founder/CEO - The Equity Leadership Group LLC is a diversity, equity, and inclusion consultancy based in NYC and Chicago.
- We help educators and school administrators build capacity for teaching and leading equitable classrooms and schools with our training, development, and coaching services.
- We are former/current K-12 educators, district administrators, and academic researchers.
- Be sure to check out *The Equity Experience Podcast* for conversations on race, equity, and education!

Previous Clients



movement
research



Department of
Education



TODAY'S AGENDA:

Building a Cohesive Community with Meaningful Conversations

- ✓ Four agreements of courageous conversations – Glenn Singleton
- ✓ What is a meaningful conversation? Why is it difficult to have meaningful conversations?
- ✓ Why are meaningful conversations important?
- ✓ Unpack 5 strategies for building community with meaningful conversations
- ✓ Practice activity with images
- ✓ Q+A/Closure



FOUR AGREEMENTS OF COURAGEOUS
CONVERSATIONS – *GLENN SINGLETON*

Stay Engaged

**Expect to Experience
Discomfort**

Speak Your Truth

**Expect and Accept a
Lack of Closure**

What is a meaningful conversation?

POLL – CHECKING THE TEMPERATURE

QUESTION: What is one word that comes to mind when you think of a ‘meaningful conversation’?

(share your 1-word response in the chat box)



A meaningful conversation is....

- ✓ Transformative
- ✓ Impactful
- ✓ Courageous
- ✓ Thought-provoking

A meaningful conversation allows individuals to show up fully, with authenticity, and ready to contribute to a dialogue in valuable ways.





WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS?

Having open and honest conversations are powerful ways to:

- Create community and embrace common ground as human beings;
- Have an impact on people and help to foster transformation;
- Dispel stereotypes & biases;
- *Decrease fear of differences;*
- To broaden one's horizons and to increase appreciation of all racial/gender identities & cultures;
- To enhance a greater sense of belonging and connectedness

WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO HAVE MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS?

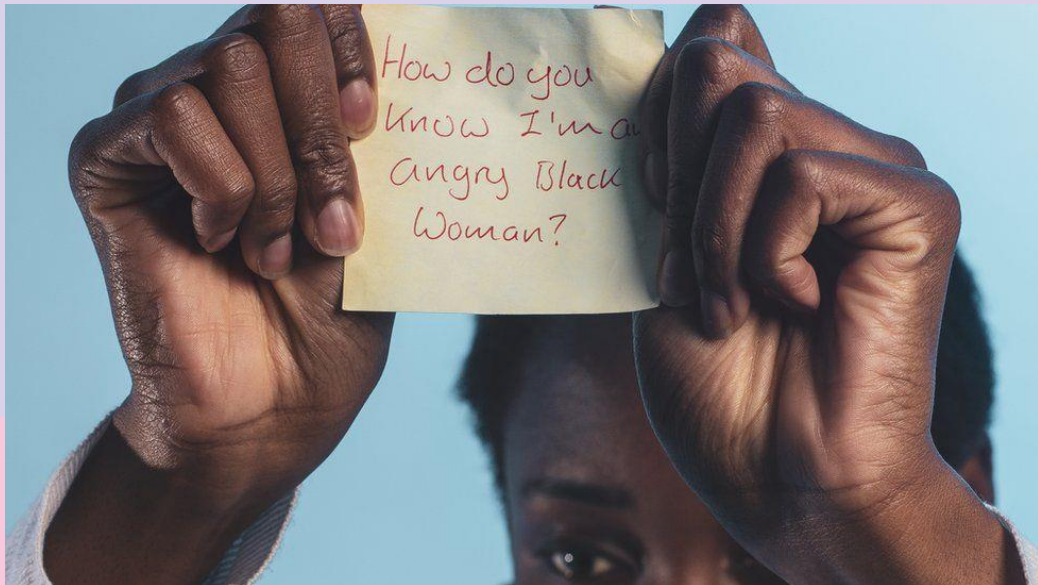


- ✓ Reluctance/Resistance
- ✓ Lack of knowledge on facilitating effective conversations
- ✓ People may have biases and stereotype belief systems and are not comfortable with sharing their perspectives (i.e. "I don't want to be labeled as a racist because of my beliefs, so I'm not going to engage in this conversation.")
 - ✓ Fear of retaliation, shame, guilt, or consequence
 - ✓ Confrontational, attacking, violent



WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO HAVE MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE?

- ✓ Managing racial stereotypes/microaggressions
- ✓ Feelings of being misunderstood or actions/statements misinterpreted
- ✓ Emotional avoidance/emotional detachment

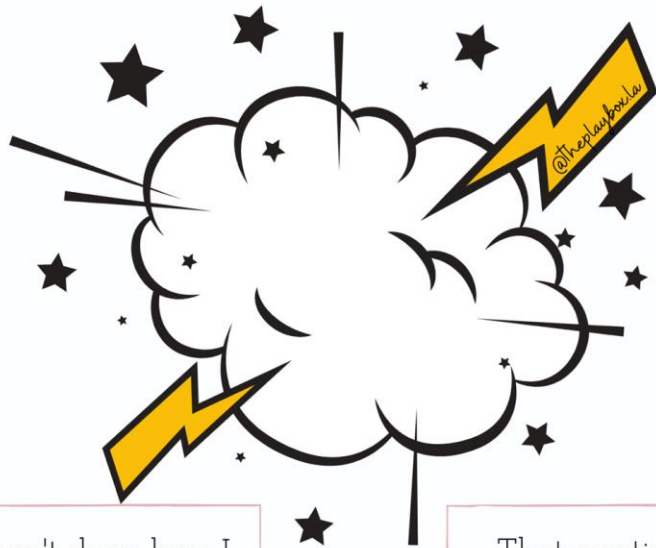


WHAT DOES EMOTIONAL AVOIDANCE LOOK LIKE IN A CONVERSATION?

- Anxiety & Fear
- Defensiveness & Anger
- Guilt, Regret, & Remorse

Emotional Avoidance

Not talking about emotions & averting working through them.



I can't share how I feel because others won't understand, accept, validate, listen to me.

That emotion is hard to deal with so, I or we, just won't do that anymore/avoid.



5 STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING COHESIVE COMMUNITY WITH MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS

STRATEGY #1: PLAN THE CONVERSATION WITH SPECIFIC GOALS IN MIND

Be clear with your students why you are having this conversation and what learning outcomes you expect.

- Contextualize the conversation within the disciplinary contexts of the classroom
- Determine several specific goals for each conversation:
 - Helping students find a new perspective?
 - Finding common ground on a controversial issue? Your goals will help keep the discussion focused.
 - **Remember to keep these goals developmentally appropriate for the students you are teaching**.

STRATEGY #2: PROVIDE PRE-DISCUSSION ASSIGNMENTS

Have students reflect on how they might participate in the discussion with reflection opportunities

- Ask students to complete an assignment in advance that helps them understand and articulate their own views, as well as others they have heard
- Pre-discussion homework can:
 - help students to reflect on those views
 - understand potential reasons behind them,
 - and connect them to disciplinary content in the course.

Such reflection activities allow for more logical thinking in advance, before emotional barriers may surface during a heated conversation

STRATEGY #3: FACILITATE THE CONVERSATION WITH MINDFUL COMMUNICATION

Building community requires trust and psychological safety when communicating

- ✓ Teach students how to actively listen for the purpose of meaning-making, not just listening for the sake of waiting to speak
- ✓ Use "I" statements – teach students to take individual ownership for their statements/perspectives; don't speak for a particular group or community of people
- ✓ Avoid inflammatory and offensive language, including name-calling
- ✓ Ask questions for clarification, don't assume to know someone else's thinking or motivations

STRATEGY #4: ALLOW SPACE FOR EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY w/ MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS

Teaching emotional intelligence is an important aspect of having courageous, meaningful conversations, esp. with strong emotions

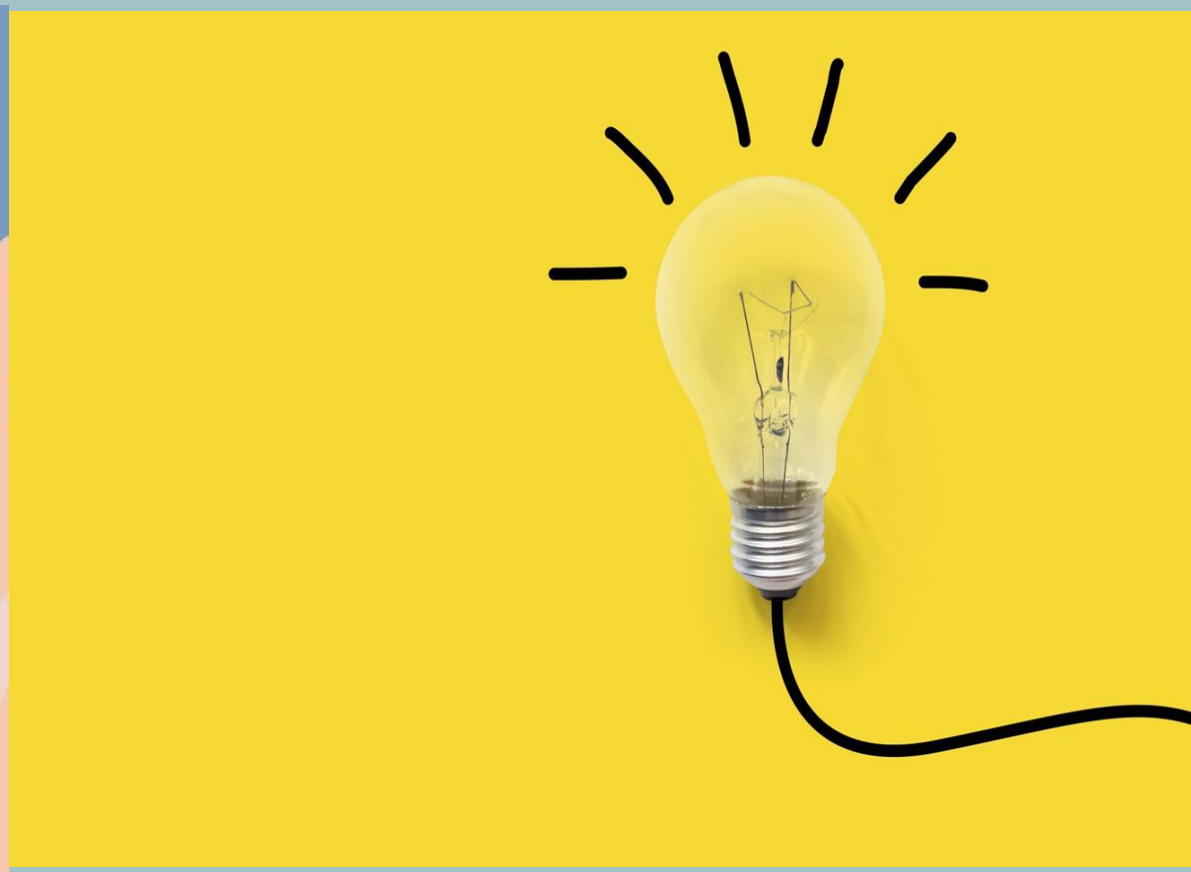
- Teach students to not hold grudges against people based on what was stated in a conversation
 - People need time/space to grow and evolve in their thinking
 - We need to be compassionate towards people who may not have strong, healthy communication skills (*how* something was stated can be triggering)
- Teach students the power of self-forgiveness; when we forgive ourselves, it's easier to forgive others. Sometimes we can say things that we may later regret – we have to forgive ourselves as well so that we are not living in shame and guilt.

STRATEGY #5: SYNTHESIZE AND REFLECT ON THE DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS

Offer time and space for individuals to process the conversation, after the convo is finished

- Reflect on the conversation dynamics – Leave time at the end of class for people to synthesize what they heard.
- Offer students a follow-up assignment after the discussion, asking them to synthesize, reflect, and draw conclusions and inferences to the class discussion and main ideas of the course/class.

**LET'S PRACTICE:
WHAT KINDS OF CONVERSATIONS CAN WE HAVE
ABOUT THE FOLLOWING IMAGES?**







What-to-do when people are not feeling the 'community' within a conversation?



- ✓ Allow people to exit or take a pause from the conversation when necessary
- ✓ Give people time/space to process comments and statements
- ✓ Be prepared to defer the conversation
 - Give students an explanation as to why the conversation is coming to a close
 - Offer students a follow-up activity to continue their thinking, even though the conversation is ending

What not-to-do when building community and conversations?

- Do not force or apply pressure to any person or topic
- Do not impose your viewpoints on someone else; do not hold consequences for someone not subscribing to your belief system. The conversation is about everyone, not just one person.
- Do not chastise or condemn someone for making a statement. If a comment was offensive or inappropriate, re-state the guidelines and have a 1-1 conversation with a student if necessary.



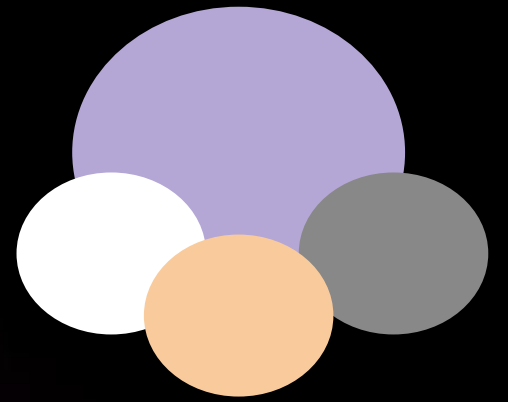
FINAL THOUGHTS



We build community with meaningful conversations by:

- Planning the conversation with goals in mind
- Providing reflection opportunities before the conversation happens
- Engaging in mindfulness while communicating
- Allowing emotional vulnerability into the conversation

REFLECTIONS, TAKE-A-WAYS, & Q/A



THANK YOU! 😊

Let's Stay Connected!



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- ✓ If interested, share your email address to be added to my email list
- ✓ Stay connected via LinkedIn for daily resources and inspirational tips for school diversity, equity, & inclusion

