

## Creating a Generative and Inclusive Classroom Climate

Classroom conversations about race and racism are not inherently difficult or challenging. Rather, it is the racial dynamics at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), ones that are reflective of the larger sociohistorical context, that make race and racism “difficult” topics. It is nevertheless possible to cultivate racial dynamics that lead to inclusive classroom climates and learning rooted in social change. Below are a few practices to help make your classroom a generative and inclusive environment for talking about race and racism. Given the racial dynamics already at work in the classroom, how, if, and to what extent such practices are relevant to your classroom has much to do with your own racial positioning.

- **Explicitly acknowledge pre-existing racial dynamics.** Reflect on and acknowledge your own racial positioning and the racial dynamics of the university and how this shapes your experience of teaching. Similarly, consider who your students are and become cognizant of how their racial positionings show up in how and if they participate.
- **Be Clear about your own epistemic limits.** Talk about your own racial positioning, what it affords you to know *and* to not know. Modeling such vulnerability and truthfulness with your students will encourage them to do the same. It is also a reminder that people from different racial backgrounds often experience the world in drastically different ways and affirms that this difference matters and is valuable.
- **Acknowledge the reality of racism and white privilege.** Do not shy away from truths about racism. Make them starting points for discussions rather than debatable or unacknowledged phenomena.
- **Let your students know where you stand.** Make your commitments to racial justice explicit and situate them in relation to why you teach and how you teach. Offering such a rationale makes clear that you are not neutral and you have good reason not to be.
- **Establish classroom values and ground rules.** In order to hold space for honest discussions, including ones that involve disagreement, it is helpful to establish parameters for how to do so. Consider establishing values for your class or create them with your students, and continually refer back to them during the semester. Examples of classroom values include: deeply listening, working to be aware of your own racial positioning, validating different experiences, honoring confidentiality, engaging texts seriously, allowing disagreement, using “I” statements, identifying what is non-debatable (e.g. that racism exists), honoring marginalized experience, etc.
- **Engage HOT (heated, offensive, tense) moments.** Be willing to engage intense disagreements and offensive remarks rather than being quick to shut them down. Do not try to neutralize a situation. Instead embrace the tension, initiate a reflective pause, and work to draw generative attention to the issue at stake.
- **Intervene when necessary and honor mistakes.** Intervene when you witness problematic, hateful or biased language or behaviors, regardless of student intent. And, if you make a mistake or misstep, acknowledge and address it without making excuses.
- **Build rapport and cultivate shared objectives.** Allow your students to regularly interact with one another and with you, creating opportunities that encourage deep listening and collaboration. Consider creating common goals for each class discussion, so that all participants are tasked with solving the problems of race and racism together.