



Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning

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Classroom Dynamics Tips

THE CHALLENGES OF DEALING WITH HOT MOMENTS

MANAGING THE MOMENT

I. Manage your self

- Stop! Breathe. Think. Hold Steady.
- Prepare: Know your own hot buttons/biases, and devise strategies in advance
- Think ahead: know what to expect as much as possible
- Don't personalize: separate self from role
- Have partners
- Defer if necessary

II. Manage your students — so they can learn from the hot moment

- Acknowledge the moment, name the elephant on the table
- Make it safe for all students — establish norms for behavior
- Model respectful listening and engagement
- Take the issue off the individual, make it general
- Protect the lone outlier, regardless of his/her position
- Acknowledge tears or breakdowns
- See individuals after class, help them learn from the situation

TURNING IT INTO A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

III. Read the situation

- Get up on the balcony, to see the big picture.
- Listen for the song beneath the words, the sub-text.
- Check that you have heard/understood correctly -- restate and question.
- See how the hot moment reflects the topic under discussion or the initial event.
- Get off personalities: it's about issues, not character – about factions, not individuals.

IV. Find and create learning opportunities for your students

- Know your Purpose and keep your eye on it
- Find the part in the hot moment that can be used to further the discussion
- Take the issue off the individual, put it on the table as a recognized, arguable position
- Require students to understand each other's position — listen, restate
- Ask students to step back and think about what they can learn from the moment
- Use the disruption as an opportunity to discuss the learning environment in the group
- Go around the room and get all perspectives on the table
- Ask students to write about the issue – in class, at home