Restorative Dialogue

Restore and learn from 'hot moments' in the classroom

COLLABORATING | Communication Skills

What you will need:

- 16 - 20
- Group dialogue
- 30 mins preparation
- 1 hr execution
- Mentimeter or another online interactive presentation tool, or a flipchart

Related Tools:

Deep Listening

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"Learn about hot moments in class: delve into strategies for managing challenging situations when personal views clash. In this pedagogical exercise, students and educators restore a conducive learning environment."

—Lucho Rubio & Wouter Buursma

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I. Overview

This activity serves as a form of 'restorative practice' following a hot moment. Students are given time to reflect and exchange thoughts about a previous moment in class where a discussion became overly intense or certain remarks may have caused emotional harm.

Hot moments are defined as instances when “people’s feelings — often conflictual — rise to a point that threatens teaching and learning” (Warren, 2006). While there is no single 'correct' response, how a teacher navigates these difficult moments in the classroom can significantly impact the learning environment.

Warren suggests that teachers should then "leave the dance floor of the discussion and our emotions" and "go up to the balcony to look for a relevant meta-level issue that raised the hot moment". Additionally, listening to "the song beneath the words" and trying to hear the concerns or arguments behind the comments can be beneficial (Willner Brodksy et al., 2021).

Drawing from the principles of Socratic dialogue, this tool aims to address the students' assumptions and emotions, fostering a constructive dialogue.

Learning outcome

- The student is able to reflect individually and collectively on a hot moment in class, identifying the underlying values of their actions and the diversity of (ethical) perspectives to engage in an open dialogue

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II. Learning Activity

Students engage in a guided and introspective Socratic dialogue, responding to a classroom event marked by heightened emotions or sensitive remarks.

1. Recap of the Hot Moment

5 mins

Refer to the hot moment that occurred previously and share the definition of a hot moment: an instance where "people's feelings or emotions — often conflictual— rise to a point that threatens teaching and learning".

Emphasise the importance of reflecting on this moment to create a safe learning environment and to learn from it by listening actively, expressing their viewpoints and reflecting on emotions and thoughts. Explain the differences between a discussion or debate versus a dialogue.

Describe as briefly and factually as possible what happened:

- Background: where did it happen, who was present and who was involved?
- Situation: what were the circumstances? What did you see and hear?
- Feelings: what did you feel when the hot moment occurred?
- Actions: what actions did you take (e.g. moved on, had a break)?

Tip: refer to the facts you saw and what the different participants did at the time, and refrain from judgements and interpretations. Students should not respond or add information in this step.

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2. Introspection on Class Dynamics

10 mins

Each student is given 10 minutes to answer the following reflective questions in keywords individually.

Regarding what happened previously in class,

- What did you feel during the situation?
- What did you think?
- What principle or value did you feel was at stake?
- What did you do, or not do?

3. Collecting Perspectives

20 mins

Collect the students' answers using menti.com or another online interactive presentation tool. On a computer with a projector, share their answers in this chart:

	Feeling	Thought	Principle or value	Act
Student 1	.....	.....	.....	.....
Student 2	.....	.....	.....	.....
Student 3	.....	.....	.....	.....

Individually, look at all the information revealed in the matrix, without paying specific attention to the feelings and thoughts of the students directly involved in the hot moment. Then, as a group, students observe the variety of feelings, thoughts and principles or values expressed.

Tip: ensure that you maintain your role as a mediator, and refrain from taking sides with any of the participants in the dialogue.

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4. Restorative Dialogue

20 mins

Begin with a brief reiteration of the session's objectives. Emphasise that the goal is to learn and restore, not to win or convince. You will cultivate a restorative dialogue based on the following attitudes:

- Wonder
- Empathy
- Courage
- Curiosity
- Tolerating the not-knowing
- Judging and not taking that judgment seriously
- Tolerating irritation

Using the handout on Restorative and Socratic Dialogue, briefly explain what each attitude entails and why it is important for a fruitful dialogue.

To embody these attitudes, ask one of the students who was not involved in the hot moment to share their perspective. This helps reduce tension and provides a neutral starting point. Emphasise that reality and what is morally "good" is not fixed and can be interpreted in multiple ways. Allow this student to share their perspective without interruptions. Encourage the group to listen actively and reflect on what is being said.

Next, to suspend judgment, encourage the group to ask questions aimed at understanding the speaker. Example questions include: "Can you explain more about how you felt?" or "What did you mean by…?".

Then, ask a few other students who were not directly involved in the incident to share their perspectives as well. Aim to have at least two students share.

Your role as a facilitator is to:

- Regularly summarise what has been said to ensure everyone understands the speaker's meaning. This helps prevent misunderstandings.
- Ensure all communication is respectful and non-judgmental. Remind the group of the attitudes they need to adopt.

Allow the group to collectively reflect on the information on the board and in the interactive

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presentation. Ask questions like “What common points do we see?” and “What differences stand out?”.

Note down feelings, thoughts and values on a board or flipchart as students speak. This helps the group visually see common grounds and differences in perspectives.

Tip: to promote active listening, ask students to summarise what another student has said before they ask a question or speak.

5. Collective Reflection

5 mins

Allow the students who were involved in the hot moment to speak now. They do not have to defend themselves, but:

- describe what they see on the matrix or flipchart and what they heard;
- describe the value or principle that guided their actions.

To summarise the key insights and lessons from the session, ask students what they have learned and how they can apply this in the future. Conclude with a thank you to all participants for their openness and contribution to the dialogue.

Please note, as part of the assessment *as* learning, students write a five-minute paper and answer reflective questions.

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III. Assessment

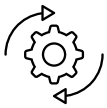
Evaluating values and feelings gains insights for future interactions, promoting personal and collective growth. With the five-minute paper and the reflective questions, students develop thoughtful and empathetic communication skills.

Purpose

Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.

Roles

Self-assessment



Characteristics

Self-regulated learning

Materials

Reflective questions and instructions for the 5-minute paper

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Assessment

Reflective Questions

Feelings

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, how intense were your emotions during the hot moment?

Minimal ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very intense

2. How would you describe the dominant emotion you felt? (E.g., anger, frustration, confusion)

Thoughts

3. What were the predominant thoughts you had?

Values

4. Can you identify the specific values that guided your behaviour? (E.g., respect, empathy, assertiveness)

5. Reflecting on your actions during the hot moment, to what extent were they aligned with your values? (Note: Not acting is also acting)

Not aligned ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Completely aligned

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Awareness of Other Perspectives Scale

6. How conscious were you of the diverse perspectives within the group during the hot moment?

Not aware	○	○	○	○	○	Highly aware

7. Did you actively seek to understand others' viewpoints, even if different from yours?

Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	Extensively

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Assessment

In the next 5 minutes, write a short paper, based on these guiding questions:

1. Reflect on the key insights and learnings you've gained from today's dialogue.

2. Consider any shifts in your understanding, perspective, or approach.

3. Summarise the impact of this dialogue on your awareness and future interactions.

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IV. Key Advice

Information on the **differences between a discussion and dialogue** (Step 1), the **handout on Restorative and Socratic dialogue** (Step 4) and **Brené Brown's List of Values** (Step 5) can be downloaded below.

To learn about the opportunities and risks of using digital tools in education and to get inspired by the numerous practical examples of digital learning activities, see the VU Mixed Classroom Educational Model, an educational approach that builds upon differences to enrich the learning experience for all students present.

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Key Advice

Differences between a discussion or debate versus a dialogue

Explain the fundamental differences between a discussion (debate or argument) and a dialogue (open, empathetic conversation). Emphasise the value of suspending personal opinions to explore diverse perspectives.

	Discussion / Debate	Dialogue
Starting point	Looking for 'the' best answer or that which is morally 'right'.	Reality and that which is morally “good” is not fixed and multi-interpretable.
Basic attitude	Wanting to convince the other person from one's judgement or knowledge.	Investigating. We have something to say to each other.
Speaking time of others	Participants demand speaking time and see the other person's speaking time, insights and/or knowledge as incorrect.	Suspension of judgements. Exploring your own and others' judgements through sincere questions is paramount.
The language that is used is characterised by	'Yes, but .....',	'Yes, and ....', asking (probing) questions, accurately formulating, and monitoring the process (e.g., summarising each other).
Process is characterised by	Momentum, acceleration, and conclusions and/or solutions.	Active listening, desires and answers that are evaluated are evaluated.
Focus is on	Objective and/or effective knowing, decisions, conclusions and judgements.	Examining and testing the different points of view.
Levels of inference	Attention is focused on 'absolute knowing'.	Attention is focused on 'relative knowing'. There is room for not knowing and new questions.

This table was created by the VU Centre for Teaching & Learning, based on: Molewijk, B. (2013).

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Key Advice

Restorative Dialogue

This restorative dialogue is based on the principles of Socratic dialogue. Socratic dialogue is driven by open-ended questions that provoke deep thinking and reflection. Participants in a Socratic dialogue suspend their judgments to explore different perspectives genuinely.

Active listening is key in Socratic dialogue to ensure that participants understand each other fully. Socratic dialogue seeks to uncover and examine the underlying assumptions behind participants' statements and beliefs. It is collaborative rather than adversarial, focusing on mutual exploration and respect. The aim is to find common ground while appreciating and understanding differences.

Socratic dialogue promotes intellectual humility, acknowledging that one's knowledge and understanding may be limited. Reflective thinking, where participants critically examine their own beliefs and values, is essential.

You will foster a restorative dialogue starting from the following attitudes:

Wonder involves approaching the dialogue with a sense of awe and openness to new perspectives. It is important because it helps participants remain open-minded and receptive to different viewpoints, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. It allows participants to connect on an emotional level, creating a supportive and compassionate environment that encourages honest and open communication.

Courage means having the willingness to speak up and share one's thoughts and feelings, even when it feels uncomfortable. This attitude is necessary for participants to express their true selves and contribute authentically to the dialogue, helping to uncover deeper insights and foster mutual respect.

Curiosity is characterised by a strong desire to know or learn something, particularly about others' perspectives and experiences. It drives the exploration of new ideas and encourages participants to ask questions that deepen their understanding, enriching the dialogue.

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Tolerating the Not-Knowing involves accepting uncertainty and being comfortable with not having all the answers. This attitude allows participants to stay open to new information and perspectives without rushing to conclusions, promoting a more thoughtful and reflective dialogue.

Judging and Not Taking That Judgment Seriously involves recognising one's judgments but not allowing them to dominate the conversation. It helps participants remain impartial and open-minded, preventing premature judgments from hindering the exploration of diverse viewpoints.

Tolerating Irritation means managing feelings of frustration or discomfort that may arise during the dialogue. It is crucial for maintaining a respectful and constructive atmosphere, even when the discussion becomes challenging, ensuring that all voices are heard and considered.

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List of
VALUES

Accountability
Achievement
Adaptability
Adventure
Altruism
Ambition
Authenticity
Balance
Beauty
Being the best
Belonging
Career
Caring
Collaboration
Commitment
Community
Compassion
Competence
Confidence
Connection
Contentment
Contribution
Cooperation
Courage
Creativity
Curiosity
Dignity
Diversity
Environment
Efficiency
Equality
Ethics
Excellence
Fairness
Faith
Family
Financial stability
Forgiveness
Freedom
Friendship
Fun
Future generations
Generosity
Giving back
Grace
Gratitude
Growth
Harmony
Health
Home
Honesty
Hope
Humility
Humor
Inclusion
Independence
Initiative
Integrity
Intuition
Job security
Joy
Justice
Kindness
Knowledge
Leadership
Learning
Legacy
Leisure
Love
Loyalty
Making a difference
Nature
Openness
Optimism
Order
Parenting
Patience
Patriotism
Peace
Perseverance
Personal fulfillment
Power
Pride
Recognition
Reliability
Resourcefulness
Respect
Responsibility
Risk -taking
Safety
Security
Self-discipline
Self-expression
Self-respect
Serenity
Service
Simplicity
Spirituality
Sportsmanship
Stewardship
Success
Teamwork
Thrift
Time
Tradition
Travel
Trust
Truth
Understanding
Uniqueness
Usefulness
Vision
Vulnerability
Wealth
Well-being
Wholeheartedness
Wisdom

Write your own:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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