

Constructing Critical Conversations in the Classroom: Creating Change

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Today's Plan

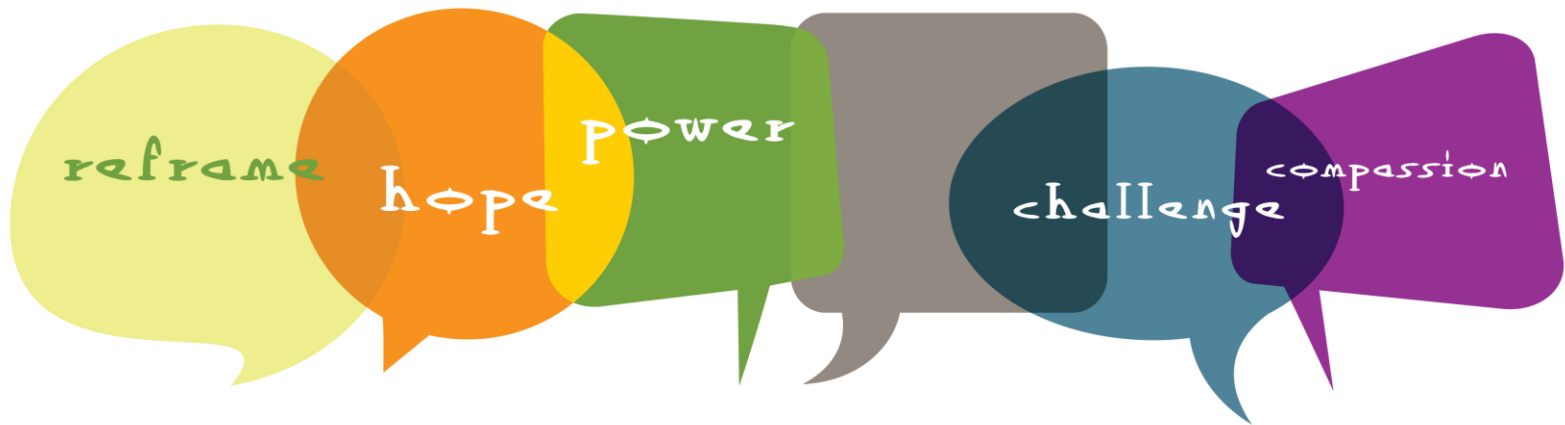
What are the moments when critical exchanges lead to deep conversation in a classroom?

How do we know when these moments are happening?

What constitutes a **Critical Conversation**?

Theoretical grounding

Introduction to the Critical Conversation (CC) Model



CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

Critical Conversations Model

Goals & Objectives

- Encourage **deeper awareness** of power, privilege, structural inequities and the **immediate impact** these have on the **learning environment** and to produce **change in the moment**

Critical Conversations Model

Goals & Objectives

Develop skills to facilitate challenging or difficult conversations that attend to **power dynamics in social context in the classroom related to power and privilege, race and racism, gender and other social and structural inequalities**

- Practice **critical consciousness** using tools of **reflexivity** and **critical reflection**
- **Engage ambiguity** to allow participants to move through conflict/tension toward greater understanding of self and others – creating change.
- Engage content toward **deeper understanding** in context
- **Enhance self-efficacy** in engaging in critical conversations

Tuning In Exercise

Think of a moment, perhaps in the past week, in which you experienced feeling **challenged to be as much a learner as an instructor** in your classroom.

- What **thoughts and feelings** did the experience engender for you?
- Did you **feel it in your body? Where?**
- What **skills** did you use, need, wish you had?
- What did you **feel invested** in?

Use the large paper and markers at your table and **in silence** write down your thoughts and feelings about that moment (then and now).

Add race and racism as the focus of the conflict/tension

- What are you feeling?
- Where are you feeling it?
 - Mind/body connections
- How are you thinking in relation to the feelings?
- How do you know you are in a learner/instructor mode?
- What are your own typical responses to these moments?

Witness yourself
in process

Add intersectionality of gender, abilities...

Critical Conversations

Conversations in which *power dynamics* in *social context* are illuminated, substantively *examined in the moment*, and *subsequently reflected upon* in order to *produce change* – personal, systemic, institutional

What is the Critical Conversations (CC) Model?

A model for facilitating conversations that surface conflicting ideas related to the understanding and experience of oppression, and structural inequalities that often activate tension.

When facilitated effectively these conversations can produce fruitful dialogue that supports multiple perspectives and critical analysis.

Key Elements

The critical conversation model builds on **facilitation skills** including but not limited to

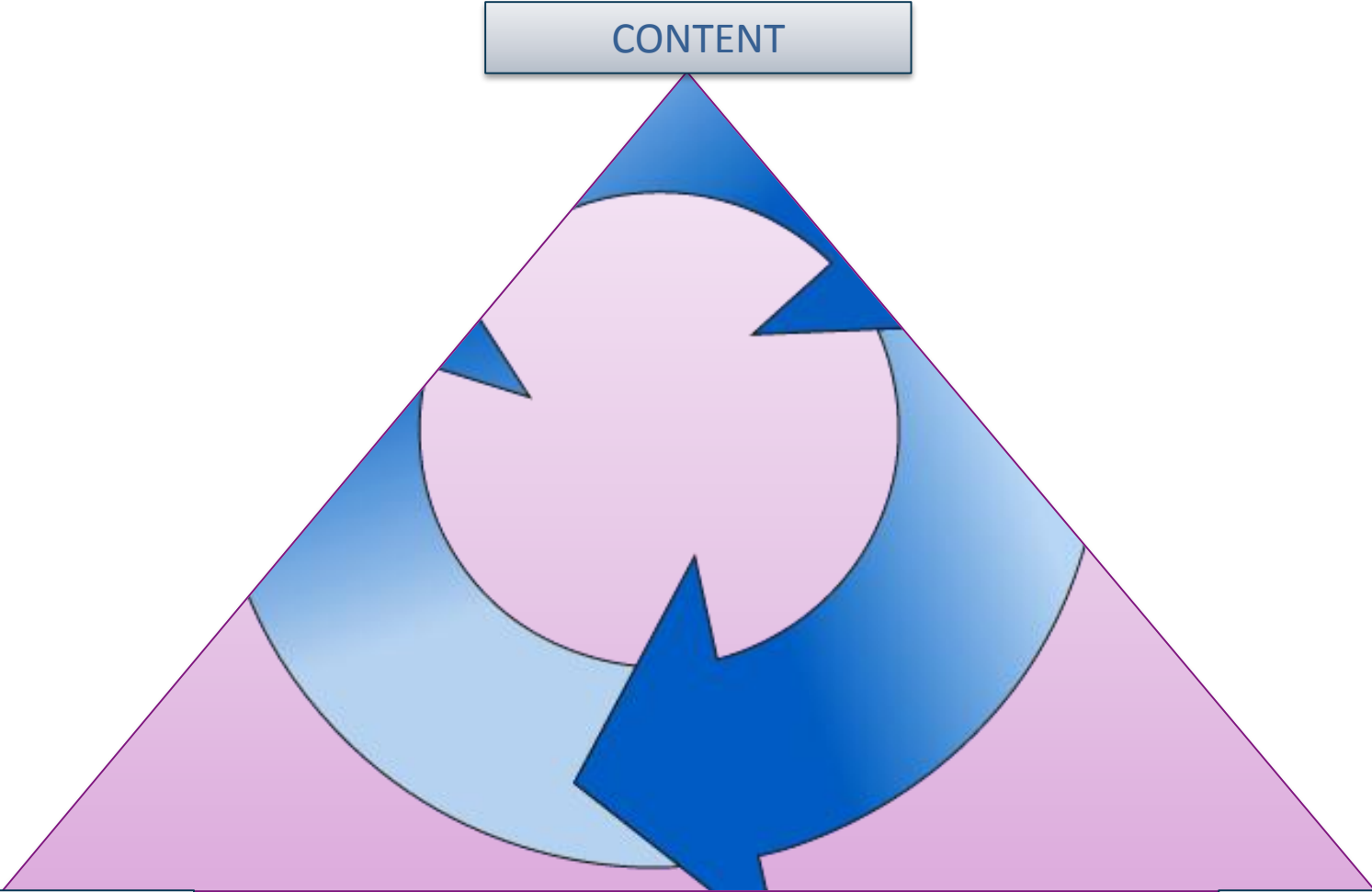
- Reflective and active listening
- Establishing group agreements/guidelines
- Cultivating mutual responsibility
- Attending simultaneously to content and process
- Attending to use of self
- Attuning to intersubjectivity – unspoken space
- Attending to timing, pace, verbalizations and silence

Theoretical Grounding of the Critical Conversations Model

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Intersubjective Relationships – Multiple Perspectives



INSTRUCTOR

STUDENTS

Continuum of Pedagogical Style – Place yourself



Dialogic

Instructor in charge:

More dominant

Disagreement not encouraged

More objectifying of content, students and relationships

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Instructor and Students share power:

Open to change

All perspectives welcome – more vulnerability in sharing differences

Instructor “provides clear direction ... models, invites and inspires”

(Guilar 2006, figure 2)

Students hold more power than instructor:

Unbalanced – not all voices have space

Instructor fears challenging guidelines of community and does not provide direction

All voices are thought to be equal – yet some dominate

Guilar (2006)

Dialogic Learning Assumptions

Power dynamics that perpetuate inequities across relationships and structures are active – including in the classroom

CC model provides a pathway for students and faculty to interrogate how power dynamics are enacted within their immediate conversation.

Dialogic Instruction

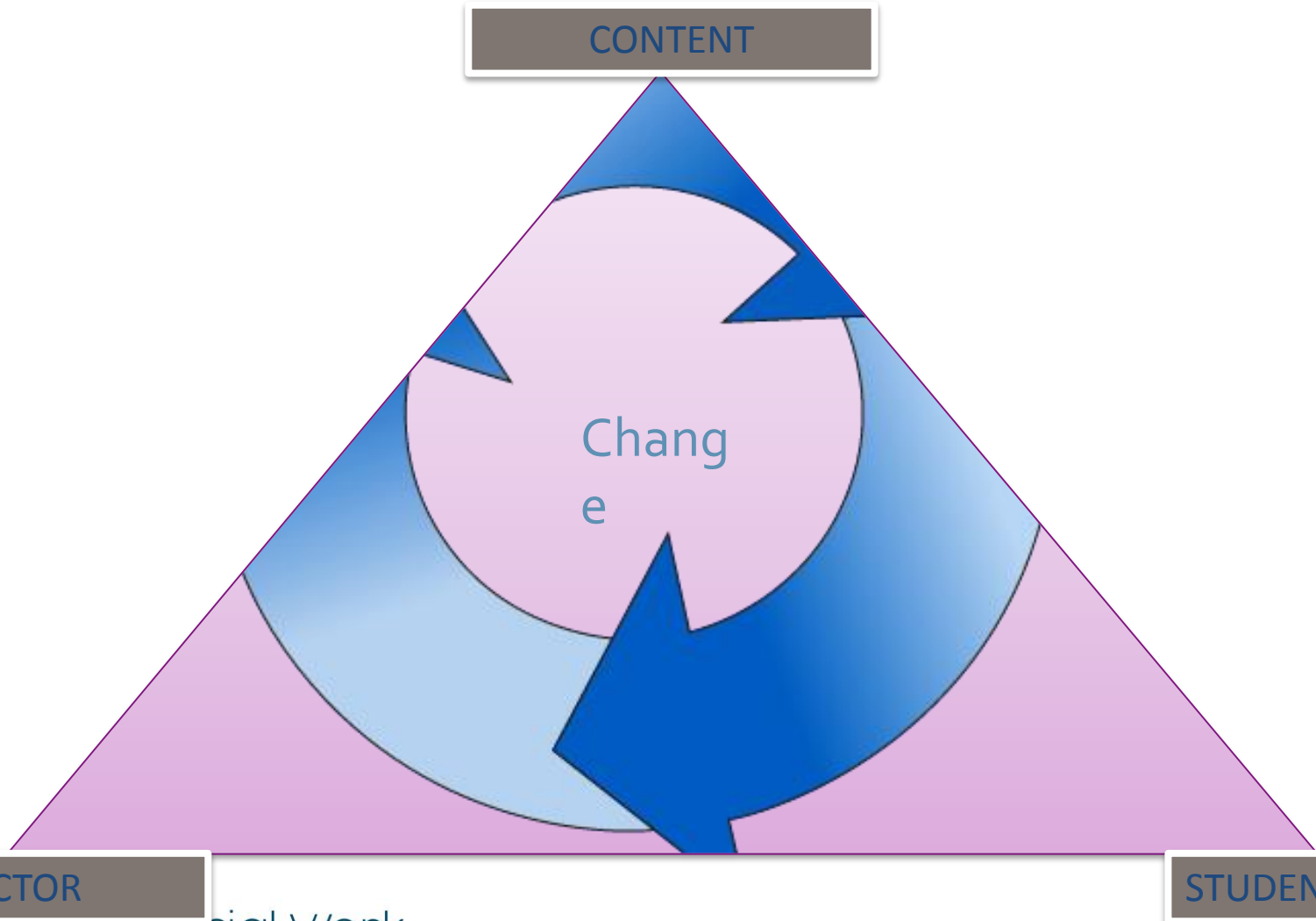
Buber (1957; 1958); Freire (1972); Guilar (2006)

Principles

- Collective engagement and sharing of power
- Relevance – immediate and historical
- Building community – humanizing not objectifying
- Presume respect - not agreement
- Cumulative and iterative learning
- Purposeful
- Intersubjective dialogue
 - Affects relationships among and between
 - Students in relation to each other
 - Student(s) and instructor
 - Students, instructor & content

What has been one dimensional becomes multidimensional...

Guilar (2006)



INSTRUCTOR

STUDENTS

SCHOOL OF Social Work

When is the CC model useful in a classroom?

Critical incident that is reverberating among students and faculty that surfaces issues related to oppression and social injustice.

Immediate conflict occurs between students within current group (e.g., classroom);

Conflict between students and faculty and/or administration;

Incident within the institution occurs

Conflict between the institution and the local community;

Content of the course or current events in the local community, national, international and/or global society evoke tension around issues of oppression, social identities, intersectionality, power and privilege;

Content of the course generates apparent avoidance of direct attention to such issues in the classroom.

Now to the

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS MODEL

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Deciding*

* Not if, but when and how...

Questions to inform the instructor's decision:

- Is this a teachable moment?
- Is there sufficient time?
 - If not, acknowledge to the group the need for critical conversation, the importance of having time available, and schedule when it will occur.
- Do I have the skills and stamina to engage in and facilitate a critical conversation with this group of students in this class?
 - What support do I need?
- What might be the consequences if I/we do or do not engage in a critical conversation at this time on:
 - student learning;
 - classroom dynamics;
 - course evaluations;
 - students' reactions beyond the classroom?
 - my own growth and learning?

Tune-in

Instructor/Facilitator reflects internally on own social identities and positionality in relation to group membership, content and context.

- This usually happens swiftly (and throughout the critical conversation)

If co-facilitating, check in with each other regarding intersecting social identities and their impact on group process, content and context.

Facilitator can also invite others to reflect on own social identities and positionality in relation to group membership, content and context.

Build the Scaffold & Develop Shared Language

Acknowledge the opportunity to engage in critical conversations.

Identify and share hopes and concerns about engaging in critical conversations.

Establish and commit to a time frame knowing that such conversations are rarely finished. Rather, they develop and continue in myriad ways. This is to be encouraged. Connections will continue to be made.

Build the Scaffold & Develop Shared Language (cont.)

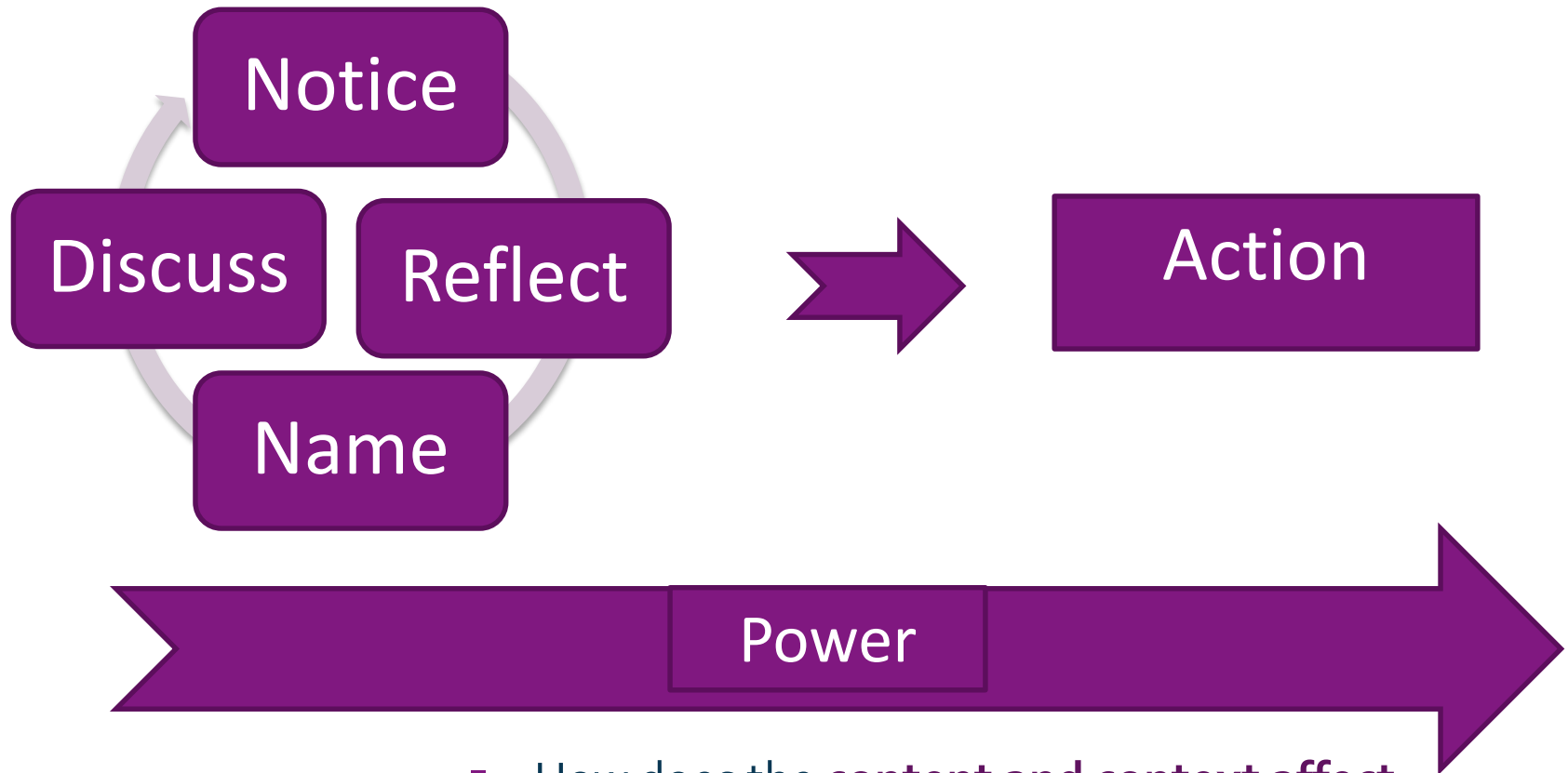
Collaboratively develop group guidelines, based on expressed hopes and concerns, for engaging with each other.

Decide on the focus of the conversation.

Develop shared language about key concepts central to the critical conversation.

- Be aware that this can become the focus of the conversation.
- If such shared language exists already in the group, acknowledge this and move into the focus of the conversation.

Dive into the Conversation



- How does the **content and context** affect **interaction in the moment**?
- What **power dynamics** do you notice in the group?
- What **assumptions** might be taken for granted?
- What **larger societal and structural power dynamics** are implicated and active in current interactions?

Transition Forward

Honor the contributions of all participants and express appreciation.

Acknowledge the on-going nature of the conversation.

Mark the end of the conversation.

- Do not debrief the conversation at this time (unless in facilitator training)
- Plan for follow-up conversation as appropriate and possible.

After the session: Facilitator Reflection

How am I feeling?

What have we learned?

- Participants
- Facilitator (self)

What went well? What didn't go so well?

What might I do differently?

What would be most useful to process/debrief the critical conversation? For example,

- Discuss with peers and/or mentor?
- Reflective writing
- Gain some distance and come back to it later
- Physical activity

Are there any next steps?

THANK YOU

Please feel free to contact me with
questions or for consultation

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