

## Examples of Hot Moments

### An Afro-Am Class

"We were ten weeks into Introduction to Afro-Am and were discussing Louis Farrakhan," a young instructor told me. "Near the end of section, a very smart Jewish woman said, 'Only uneducated black men would believe in Farrakhan.' Six black men in the class turned on her and attacked. "Class ended, and she ran out of the room, down the hall, in tears."

"I went after her and told her that if she was ever going to understand this stuff she had to go back the next time and listen very hard to what those guys, highly educated, say about why they might believe in Farrakhan.

"I then went back into the classroom. Luckily the men were still there, still talking about the incident. I told them that if they were ever going to get it, they had to listen very hard to why a Jewish woman might think that only the uneducated would believe in Farrakhan."

This young man was able to turn a hot moment into a profound learning opportunity for his students. He did it by keeping his head, not taking sides, and letting both groups know that they would gain immeasurably by understanding the arguments of the other side.

### A Government Tutorial

The class was discussing why nations might go to war. When asked whether we should have gone to war to prevent the holocaust, one student said "No." When asked why, she said, "Because they weren't Christians." What? "Maybe it didn't happen like they said it did, and if it did, maybe they had their reasons." The teacher in this case was unable to think of anything to say, and ignored the moment.

On reflection, he might have been able to use these shocking comments to initiate a conversation entirely relevant to contemporary foreign policy: To what degree is religion relevant in our foreign policy? When do we take on other nations' issues (see Rwanda, the Sudan, Bosnia) Is it our business to solve others' problems when we haven't solved our own? Should we be isolationist, or the world's savior?

### A Sociology Class

A white student and an African-American student were wrangling at length and without apparent movement toward any understanding. When the teacher asked all students to explore what they might learn from this, the discussion shifted gears quickly. They began to think about the difficulties in black-white communications when different belief systems were at work, the reasons for those difficulties, and possible ways to bridge the gaps.

## A Math Class

In a math class a student made a snickering remark that such and such a number must be feminine, because it was irrational. The lone female in the class didn't know whether to ignore the remark, though it undermined her abilities as a mathematician, or take it on, risking further rejection by the class. A remark by the teacher could have helped her and helped the men in the class learn new rules of behavior. It could be useful to stop to examine why and how men make such jokes and how they affect women's experience in math and science classes. It might be helpful to the men to understand why the women get upset by their good-humored jokes and to the women to understand how to counter them.

## Examples of Teaching for Diversity

One teacher of a sociology course asked each student, in pairs, to pick a group other than their own -- by race, ethnicity, class, age, religion, sexual orientation, etc. -- and learn as much as possible about that group. These pairs were then responsible to critique the course material each week from the perspective of their group. In this way, each student learned about a new perspective on the world and the class as a whole heard about the perspectives of many groups, thus broadening everyone's understanding on many dimensions.

A teacher in a course on a Buddhist text wanted students to know the 12 primary commentators on that text. Each student read the assigned portion of the text and one of the commentators each week, rotating over the semester, so that by the end every student had read each of the 12 commentators. Each week students reported on one and heard all 12 of the commentators' views.

A literature teacher, in a week devoted to Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, went around the room at the beginning of class, asking each student whom they had identified with: the white freedom workers, the blacks in Mississippi, the white land-owners, the black freedom workers. By the end of that exercise, one student reported, she knew that there were people at the table with whom she vehemently disagreed, but that there was room for all voices in that classroom.

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