

Difficult Dialogues: Responding to the World

Learning & Teaching Commons
Fall 2023 Resource Packet

Compiled by Julie Levin Russo

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Teaching at Evergreen

Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom – Tasha Souza – *Faculty Focus*

Guidelines for Dialogue – *Difficult Dialogues National Resource Center*

Strategies for Current Challenges in Dialogue Facilitation – *Difficult Dialogues National Resource Center*

The Four Stages of Psychological Safety

Calling in and Calling Out Guide – Harvard

What Do You Teach After the War Begins? – Bill Arney – *Works in Progress* (1992)

FACULTY FOCUS

SPECIAL REPORT

Diversity and Inclusion in the College Classroom



A MAGNA



PUBLICATION

Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom: Concrete Strategies for Cooling Down Tension

BY TASHA SOUZA, PhD

We've all experienced that moment in the classroom when the tensions run high and the air feels as if you could cut it with a knife. How we respond can shift the communication climate from supportive to defensive, which can have an adverse effect on student learning and comfort (Dallimore, et al., 2005; Souza, et al., 2010). Despite the feelings of paralysis that tend to come during hot moments in the classroom, certain practices can be implemented to increase the likelihood of maintaining a supportive climate. The following strategies are not exhaustive, nor will they be appropriate for all faculty or all courses. The strategies offered are meant to be reflected upon, modified, utilized, and evaluated so that faculty can be better equipped to effectively respond to hot moments and, as a result, move out of paralysis.

What are some strategies faculty can use when a comment has been made that causes a negative reaction? Regardless of whether you or a student were the source of the comment, it is important to view the challenge as a teachable moment and an opportunity for you, and others, to learn. Allow silent time for reflecting and for collecting your thoughts; silence can have a cooling-off effect. Asking everyone to take a couple of minutes to write down their thoughts may be appropriate as well.

Be aware of your nonverbals as well as those of students. Even though you may be surprised or shocked, express curiosity instead of judgment. Inquire about students' nonverbals that could be harmful to the communication climate (e.g., loud exhalation, clinched fists). Acknowledge emotions, as neglecting to do so can make it difficult for students to listen and understand others (Sue, 2005; Sue, 2015).

Communication framework

When someone is clearly offended by a comment, inquire about what led to the offense. "What does that comment bring up for you?" "Please help me understand where you are coming from." If it's a discussion-based course in which students feel comfortable with one another and the offended student seems like he/she would be responsive, this can be done during the discussion as a group. Consider using a communication framework, such as Open The Front Door to Communication (OTFD).

The OTFD steps (adapted from The Excellence Experience, 2015) are:

- Observe: Concrete, factual observations of situation
- Think: Thoughts based on observation (yours and/or theirs)
- Feel: Emotions using "I statements"
- Desire: Specific request for desired outcome

Example: "I noticed (Observe) the volume of some people's voices rising. I think (Think) there were some strong reactions to what was said. I feel uncomfortable (Feeling) moving forward with the discussion until we explore this. I am hoping some of you can share (Desire) what you are thinking/feeling right now so we can have a conversation and learn from each other."

If students make blatantly inappropriate remarks, consider the following steps below (adapted from Obear, 2010):

1. Clarify what you heard. "I want to make sure I heard you correctly. Did you say..."
2. If they disagree with your paraphrase, you could move on. If you suspect they are trying to "cover their tracks," consider making a statement about the initial comment. "I'm glad I misunderstood you, because such comments can be..."
3. If they agree with your paraphrase, explore their intent behind making the comment. "Can you please help me understand what you meant by that?"
4. Explore the impact of the comment. "What impact do you think that comment could have on..."
5. Share your perspective on the probable impact of comments of this nature. "When I hear your comment, I think/feel..." "That comment perpetuates negative stereotypes and assumptions about..."
6. Ask them to rethink their position or change their behavior. "I encourage you to revisit your view on X as we discuss these issues more in class." "Our class is a learning community, and such comments make it difficult for us to focus on learning because people feel offended. So I'd like you to please refrain from such comments in the future. Can you do that please?"

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Common ground

If a student is hostile toward you, you have options. Ask yourself if you've done anything to contribute to the hostility, and own it. Try not to take attacks personally or become defensive, and keep the focus on learning (yours and students). It's useful to find common ground ("I know we both care deeply about...") without changing the nature of the issue. Consider using OTFD. Acknowledge student emotions (e.g., "I understand you're upset"), and convey your interest and concern to the student. Recognize that students are coming into the classroom with their own histories and issues (Warren, 2011). If appropriate, ask the other students to do some writing on the topic while you check in with the student who is upset.

If the situation escalates, remain calm and seek to regain control of the setting by requesting compliance from the student in concrete terms (e.g., "Please sit in your chair"). If the student refuses to comply, remind him/her of ground rules and the student code of conduct. If the student continues to refuse to comply, leave the academic setting to call for assistance. If a student is violent or threatening, remove yourself and instruct others to remove themselves from the situation, and summon campus police.

When hot moments ignite in the classroom, it is important to engage thoughtfully and purposively in strategies that maintain a supportive communication climate. Managing hot moments is a complex endeavor, and it is our responsibility to maintain a climate that is conducive to learning by not adding fuel to the fire.

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Guidelines for Dialogue

(Adapted from The Program on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan)

Guidelines or group agreements are used to establish expectations for how the group will engage in the space and can be used as an accountability check-in when behaviors in the space starts to stray from agreed upon norms.

1. Confidentiality

- a. What is said here, stays here; what is learned here, leaves here.

2. Use “I” Statements

- a. Speak from your experiences.
- b. Each person is an expert of their own experiences.

3. Make space, take space

- a. Share airtime and monitor how much you have been talking. Reflect on how you are engaging-- be aware if you are taking up much more space than others. If you are taking up less than others, empower yourself to speak up.

4. Expect and accept a lack of closure

- a. The dialogue space is intended to be a starting place-- to start a conversation, to reflect, to challenge some of our assumptions, to grow and think in ways we may not usually.
- b. It is not a space to “fix” everything or come away with all of the solutions. Instead, this space is meant to be a catalyst from which you continue to think, reflect and build upon after the dialogue ends.

5. We will trust that people are always doing the best they can.

- a. This is a space for learning and growing. It is okay to make mistakes; when mistakes happen, acknowledge, apologize and move on.
- b. Don't freeze people in time. Stay open to the idea that people are able to grow and change and your understanding of others should remain malleable.

6. Challenge the idea, not the person.

- a. It's okay to disagree. Focus on the ideas expressed and any underlying assumptions, the dynamics of power and oppression and values reflected in statements by asking questions. Avoid personal attacks and judgment.
- b. We will not demean, devalue, or “put down” people for their experiences, lack of experiences, or difference in interpretation of those experiences.

7. Our primary commitment is to learn from each other.

- a. We will listen to each other and not talk at each other.
- b. We acknowledge differences amongst us in backgrounds, skills, interests, and values.
- c. We realize that it is these very differences that will increase our awareness and understanding through this process.

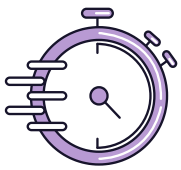
Note: This list is a suggestion of commonly used guidelines but does not encompass every option.





STRATEGIES FOR CURRENT CHALLENGES IN DIALOGUE FACILITATION

In these unprecedented times, dialogue is more important than ever and yet, it feels increasingly difficult to engage in dialogue. In this resource, we explore some of the common challenges dialogue practitioners have been experiencing and offer ideas, strategies and tools to address them.



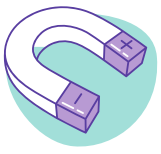
CHALLENGE 1: SPEED AT WHICH ISSUES ARISE & NUMBER OF TOPICS

Showing up as:

- Multiple topics arise simultaneously or in rapid succession causing a constantly shifting and evolving context for dialogic spaces (social justice and human rights issues, natural disasters, global pandemic, etc.)
- Disagreement around what issue is "most important" and the belief that there is a hierarchy to the issues
- Feeling that certain people aren't allowed to take up space right now or weigh in on issues
- Being unsure of what to dialogue about when there are so many concerns. Should it be dialogue about just one thing, everything or certain things?
- Facilitators feeling like they do not have enough time to prepare to address newly emerging topics and issues

Strategies:

- Making space for everything people are bringing into the dialogic space, grounding in what is happening, honoring how hard times are, etc.
- Emphasizing and expressing that these are unprecedented times and helping (student) participants understand this isn't normal and everyone is experiencing this totality for the first time together
- Utilizing intragroup dialogues to develop skills and tools related to dialogue before bringing different identity groups together
- Creating Anti-white Supremacy dialogue groups as an intragroup for white folks to explore power and engage with their discomfort
- Focusing on creating coalitions across social identity groups and helping people explore how they fit into different movements and spaces



CHALLENGE 2: INCREASING POLARIZATION

Showing up as:

- Lack of ability to agree about realities and to accept facts
- Increasing violence and the threat of violence
- People being unwilling to engage with people who have different opinions
- Participants being more hesitant to speak, increasing level of (self) censorship and fear of saying the wrong thing and/or being unsure if they can or should speak about topics
- Not being willing to agree to dialogue group guidelines and/or do not believe in dialogue

Strategies:

- Naming that polarization is increasing
- Using videos during session about how technology platforms like Google and Facebook, algorithms and disinformation campaigns have contributed to increasingly insulated bubbles to facilitate dialogue about divisions (e.g. The Social Dilemma on Netflix)
- Reaching for the center, pulling for the middle (middle framing) and finding common issues people can still agree on
- Establish clear expectations around what will happen if participants do not follow the guidelines



CHALLENGE 3: OUR VIRTUAL REALITIES

Showing up as:

- Loss of informal processing space-- the informal engagement and conversations before/after group with colleagues to debrief, process and prepare
- Limitations of not having as much non-verbal communication and data to read individuals and the group as a facilitator
- Delays, lags and technology challenges
- Competing for participants' attention with multiple windows open on computer screens and more distractions

Strategies:

- Create group norms around technology
- Embracing technology to enhance the virtual dialogue space to help increase engagement, to be more inclusive of different learning styles, and to help disrupt some of the traditional patterns of communication:
 - introverts v. extroverts
 - older v. younger participants
- Lean into the crowd sourcing nature of technology to quickly generate and brainstorm ideas and content
 - Eg. using Discord, Miro, Jamboards, etc.



CHALLENGE 4: DIALOGUE FACILITATORS' DIFFERENT ROLES

Showing up as:

- Struggling to find separation as a facilitator from the role of an activist and resisting the impulse and desire to persuade, try to convince or change minds
- Facilitators feeling exhausted and emotionally drained from their other work around promoting social justice, which impacts their ability to show up, be present and create a dialogic space

Strategies:

- Embrace self-care for you as an individual and also as part of community care
- Ask yourself: What are you feeling right now? What do you need right now? What are you doing to try to take care of yourself?
- Relationship building: Connect with others engaged in this kind of work



CHALLENGE 5: DOUBTING IF DIALOGUE IS APPROPRIATE, USEFUL OR HELPFUL IN THIS MOMENT

Strategies:

- Diversify your approach:
 - Explore different models of dialogue including:
 - Start Talking
 - We Listen (political spectrum dialogues)
 - Intergroup Dialogues
 - Sustained Dialogue
 - Different approaches bring different strengths and strategies
 - Add new tools to your toolbox
 - Some models are intended to depersonalize issues to focus more on policy and structures, which may be more appropriate in certain situations
 - The facilitator's role is different depending on the model
- Get creative and incorporate alternative activities:
 - Incorporating mindfulness practice
 - "Me and White Supremacy" by Layla Saad
 - Bringing art into dialogue
 - Finding inspiration within art therapy
 - Theatre of the Oppressed

The Four Stages of Psychological Safety

June 15, 2021 - <https://psychsafety.co.uk/the-four-stages-of-psychological-safety/>

Timothy R Clark in his book "[The Four Stages Of Psychological Safety](#)" describes a conceptual model of four "stages" of psychological safety that teams can move through, progressing from stage 1 to stage 4.

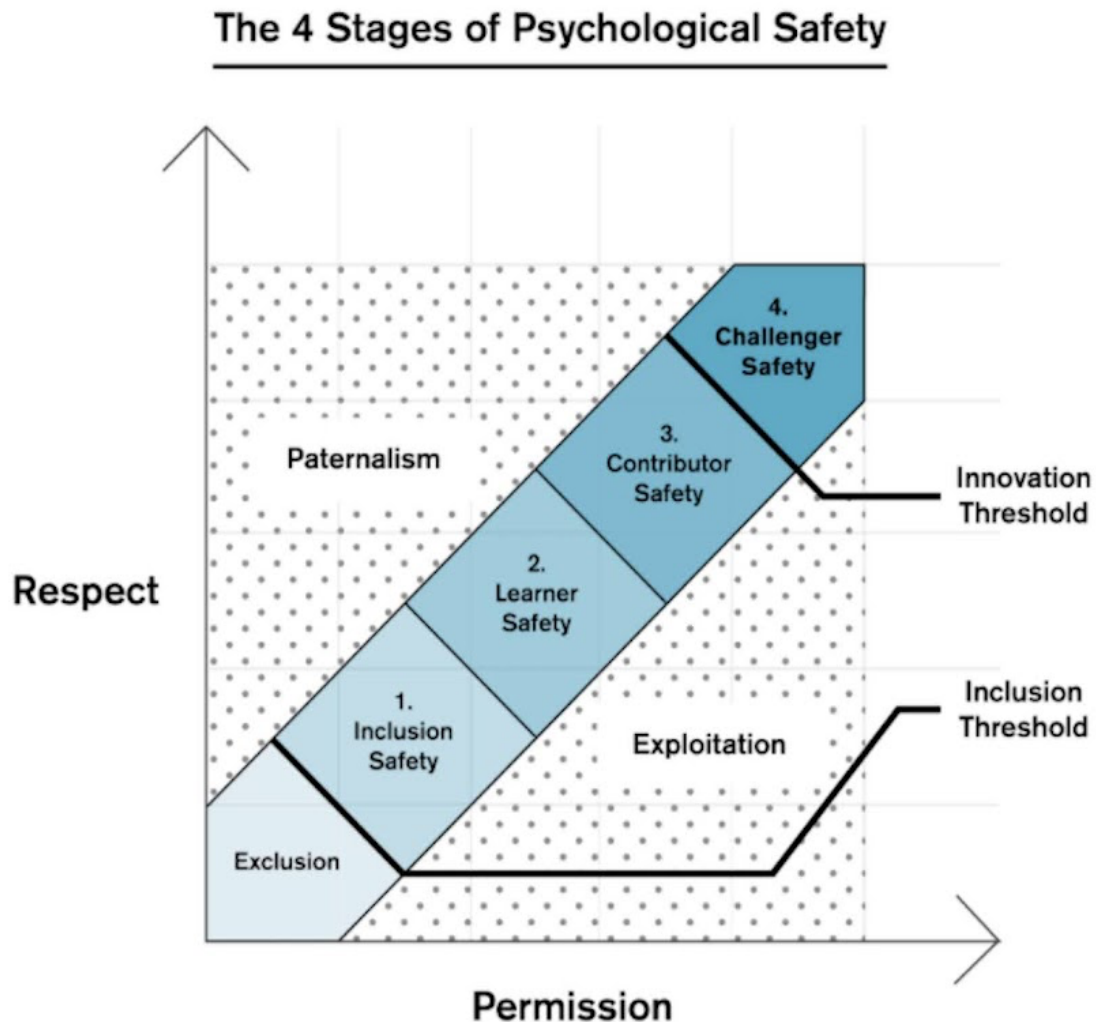
These four stages are:

1. **Inclusion Safety** – members feel safe to belong to the team. They are comfortable being present, do not feel excluded, and feel like they are wanted and appreciated.
2. **Learner Safety** – members are able to learn through asking questions. Team members here may be able to experiment, make (and admit) small mistakes, and ask for help.
3. **Contributor Safety** – members feel safe to contribute their own ideas, without fear of embarrassment or ridicule. This is a more challenging state, because volunteering your own ideas can increase the psychosocial vulnerability of team members.
4. **Challenger Safety** – members can question others' (including those in authority) ideas or suggest significant changes to ideas, plans, or ways of working.

The Four Stages of Psychological Safety

This is a really useful model from Tim Clark. Of course, *all models are wrong, and some are useful*. This one is useful, although it is a linear model applied to a non-linear phenomenon of psychological safety. It can be useful to describe and explore these stages to help people understand that **psychological safety is not a binary "on/off" phenomenon**, but a dynamic that changes throughout the team's journey. People and teams will move through these forwards and backwards, skip stages, and move into and across different "stages" in different contexts, times of day, and different teams. It is also useful to think about the how we can create these environments of increased psychological safety and how that manifests in different types of groups, cultures, neurodiversities, and in people with different backgrounds, languages, genders, sexualities, socioeconomic backgrounds and more.

The Four Stages diagram



Tim Clark's "Four Stages of Psychological Safety" Model - from "The Four Stages of Psychological Safety"

The first stage is **inclusion safety**. We all want to feel included. We long to belong. We humans need to be accepted in a team before we can be heard, so essentially the first stage is simply being comfortable being present. This stage means all members but be included and welcomed – without discrimination regarding gender, age, social background, sexual orientation, neurodiversity or anything else.

The second stage is **learner safety** – and this means being able to ask questions, give and receive feedback, experiment, and make mistakes. Team members at this stage will provide feedback to each other, and ask for feedback themselves.

The third stage is **contributor safety**. This means being able to participate as a member of the team, contribute ideas and suggestions, and raise threats and risks using members' individual talents and abilities to contribute to the team without fear. At this stage, retrospectives and "post-mortems" become very powerful practices.

The fourth stages is **challenger safety**. This means being able to challenge the way the team works, come up with new ways of working, behaviours, and challenge the ideas of others – even the ideas of senior members. This is the most powerful "stage" of psychological safety, as it not only allows new ideas to surface and learning from mistakes to occur, but it can prevent potentially bad ideas from getting to the real world. You could argue that disasters such as the VW emissions scandal, Enron, or the global financial crisis may not have occurred if the teams in those organisations had possessed challenger safety.



Thanks to Deisa Tremarias (@esmagia) for the fabulous illustration.

One of the other interesting things about these four stages is that if someone on the team is at a significantly different stage to the others in the team, it can feel highly discordant. It's important to think about increasing the psychological safety of **all** the team and bringing everyone one along together at a similar pace.

Critique of The Four Stages of Psychological Safety

While the book is certainly valuable in its content and applicability, it is not without its limitations. Here are some points of critique:

1. **Lack of empirical evidence:** While Clark's model is based on real-world experiences and observations, there is a lack of empirical evidence to substantiate the four-stage framework. More rigorous research and empirical data would strengthen the book's claims and provide a stronger foundation for its recommendations.
2. **Ambiguity in implementation:** Clark provides general guidance on how to create psychological safety in the workplace, but readers may find the steps for implementation somewhat ambiguous. Concrete examples, case studies, or practical tools would be helpful in illustrating how to apply the concepts to specific situations.
3. **Overemphasis on leader responsibility:** While the book acknowledges the role of leaders in fostering psychological safety, it tends to overemphasize their responsibility in doing so. Psychological safety is a shared responsibility among all team members, and the book could do more to emphasize the importance of each individual's role in maintaining a safe and supportive environment.
4. **Focus on a US workplace context:** The book is primarily aimed at teams and organizations in the workplace (particularly a Western, English-speaking, neurotypical context), which might limit its applicability to other contexts, such as education, families, or community groups. Expanding the discussion to include these other contexts would make the book more universally relevant.

At increasing stages of psychological safety, team members become more and more happy. Very few high performing teams are unhappy, but high performing teams are not happy because they're high performing, they're high performing **because** they're happy.

Calling In and Calling Out Guide

In fostering spaces of inclusion and belonging, it is important to recognize, name, and address when individuals or groups with marginalized identities are experiencing harm, such as bias or discrimination. The concepts of "calling out" or "calling in" have become popular ways of thinking about how to bring attention to this type of harm. Knowing the difference between these concepts can help us reflect, then act, in the ways we feel will best promote constructive change.

What Is Calling In and Calling Out?

Calling In

- Calling in is an invitation to a one-on-one or small group conversation to bring attention to an individual or group's harmful words or behavior, including bias, prejudice, microaggressions, and discrimination



Calling Out

- Calling out is bringing public attention to an individual, group, or organization's harmful words or behavior



Why Would I Call Someone In or Out?

- To stop the perpetuation and negative effects of harmful words or behavior
- To create a compassionate space for listening, understanding, offering new information, and correcting assumptions
- To lean into having tough conversations with people in your sphere of influence - the individuals or groups you know personally, and that will be open to conversation with you



Note: Calling in and calling out are not mutually exclusive strategies. Depending on the situation, calling out could precede calling someone in for a follow-up conversation.

What Should I Consider When Calling In or Out?



Calling In

- **Influence** - You have influence with this person through a personal (e.g. close relationship) or professional (e.g. work colleague) connection
- **Safety** - A one-on-one or small group conversation will not compromise your safety or wellbeing
- **Openness** - This person has demonstrated an openness and commitment to learning how to better foster spaces of inclusion and belonging



Calling Out

- **Urgency** - There is an urgent need to hit "pause" to prevent further harm to others or yourself, and make it clear to others present that you are not in agreement with what is being said or done
- **Influence and Safety** - There is a specific power or relationship dynamic that would render calling in harmful, unsafe, or ineffective for you
- **Openness** - Previous attempts to call in have been unsuccessful

How Do I Call In or Call Out?



Calling In

- "I'm curious. What was your intention when you said that?"
- "How might the impact of your words or actions differ from your intent?"
- "How might someone else see this differently? Is it possible that someone else might misinterpret your words/actions?"
- "Why do you think that is the case? Why do you believe that to be true?"
- "What is making you the most fearful, nervous, uncomfortable, or worried?"



Calling Out

- "That's not our culture here. Those aren't our values."
- "I don't find that funny. Tell me why that's funny to you."
- "It sounded like you said _____. Is that what you really meant?"
- "I need to push back against that. I disagree. I don't see it that way."
- "I need you to know how your comment just landed on me."
- "It sounds like you're making some assumptions that we need to unpack a bit."

Note: While the phrases above may be more suited for an interpersonal (calling in) or public (calling out) setting, they can be used in either setting.

Remember

Patience



- Try to be patient and understanding, keeping in mind that you will also sometimes cause harm with your words or actions

Self-care

- If you are the target of the harm, make sure you are taking care of yourself (you may not have the capacity or ability to call in or call out right now and that's okay)

Find Allies

- Identify allies for support and to step in, so that the burden is not on you
 - If you are an ally, act as an upstander to call in or call out when you see the harm being done, without being asked to do so
 - Reflect on your own identities and privilege, noting how they may make you more or less effective, safe, and able to call in or call out (e.g. if you have racial privilege, it may make it easier or safer for you to call out racial harm)

What Do I Do When Someone Calls Me In or Out?



- **Pause** - take a breath. Ground yourself to receive what they have to say.
- **Listen** - with the intent of learning and seeing things from their point of view
- **Acknowledge** - take responsibility for the impact of your words or actions
- **Reflect** - process your thoughts and emotions. It may help to do so with a trusted partner who will not only have grace for your mistake, neither defending your actions nor condemning you.
- **Repair the harm done** - change your behavior going forward, inviting trusted partners to hold you accountable to learning and doing better



- Don't beat yourself up or go on a shame spiral; try to be kind to yourself
- Don't make the person calling you in or out be your emotional caretaker, especially if they are the recipient of the harm (that is centering yourself and may add to their emotional labor)
- Remember: You're not a bad person. You are an ever changing and evolving person and this is just one step in your growth.

References

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2. Corine Rosenberg, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Specialist, Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, Harvard Graduate School of Education
3. Interrupting Bias: Calling Out vs. Calling In, Dr. Rebecca Eunmi Haslam, Seed the Way LLC

Additional Resources

1. 6 Signs Your Call-Out Isn't Actually About Accountability - Everyday Feminism
2. When Calling Out Makes Sense - Briarpatch Magazine
3. Speaking Up Without Tearing Down - Learning for Justice
4. You've Been Called Out for a Microaggression. What Do You Do? - Harvard Business Review

Thoughts Out Of School

What Do You Teach After The War Begins?

William Ray Arney

January 17, 1991. Five students show up for seminar today. Yesterday, in time for prime time on the east coast, a war started. "The liberation of Kuwait has begun," Marlin Fitzwater said with as much of a snarl as a seasoned news guy could manage. I was in the car on the way to hear Christopher Lasch talk at Elliott Bay Books in Seattle. Nancy had invited me. "Well, I wonder what he'll say now," she said as we listened to the bombs behind the voice-over on the radio.

Lasch didn't say anything. He didn't show. The folks at Elliott Bay weren't even apologetic. David, a friend who had come with another friend in a separate car, knew Lasch and asked after him. "He's staying in his hotel room. Called in to say he was really upset and wouldn't be coming. I told him about the demonstration that's going to be at the Federal Building at 8:00. You might catch him there." David and Nancy and Rudy and I went out for dinner. Fine pasta, good company, and serious talk (filled, as it had to be with this group, with many laughs).

Those five students in the seminar were very serious and without laughter the next day. Four on the far side of the table opposite me, the fifth to my right at the head of the table. "It's so depressing. What do you think?"--looking at me. More than any other day this year I was the center of the seminar even though I had avoided the head of the table.

"I really don't think much about it. I'm still bothered that Christopher Lasch didn't come to Elliott Bay last night and talk. I mean, really, here's this guy who writes a book on progress and here we are trying to progress through the Middle East and he's so depressed that he stays in his hotel and doesn't say anything. What's the world coming to when a smart guy like him doesn't have anything to say publicly at a time like this?"

Not the response they wanted.

"Now wait. We think it's important to talk about this war."

"Whatever you like. It's your seminar." A gambit I used often.

"No, it's important that you talk now. What do you think? I mean, when we're teachers and in situations like this, with a war starting and all, and the students come to class and they're upset, what do you think we should teach?"

"Math? History?"

Not the response they wanted.

"Math?! At a time like this. Look, Bill, there's a half a million troops over there. Men and women this time. Fathers and mothers. Just up the interstate there are huge military bases that only have the women and children and dogs and cats still there. Some of the students in the schools we're in have their fathers--some of them have their mothers--over there. And you think we should teach math?"

"Or history. Or anything else that you might think it's important to teach."

"It's important to teach about this war."

"Then teach history. George Bush started this war by drawing that damn 'line in the sand' months ago. Right then--right at that moment!--you should have started teaching about how all those lines in the sand that we call 'national borders,' those lines that a whole lot of people are going to start getting killed over, got drawn in the first place. Did you ever notice on a map just how straight those lines in the sand are? Do you think they follow the 'natural features' of that region? So George Bush talks about lines in the sand. Teach about lines in the sand."

"Or teach about math. How many people are there today? Half a million? And how many calories does each one need each day? How much food is that going to be over the next four weeks? How about the next four years? Bet you anything that the supermarkets all over Kuwait are going to shut right down once they hear that there's a war going on. How are the generals going to get all that food to all those folks? Teach about math. In fact, I heard just the other day that the Defense Department is recommending that each person drink something like eight quarts of water every day. How many Boeing 747s full of water is that going to be each day? Teach math."

"You've got to be serious for once. The children are going to come to school upset. You've got to deal with that."

"Where did your students learn to be upset?"

"From TV. From hearing their parents talk. It's upsetting. Look at our seminar. Only a third of the students came today. We're upset too."

"What is there to be upset about?"

"Bill...-.."

"I mean it. This war--this particular war; let's leave aside all the Middle East problems--started last summer. Remember, there was this State Department announcement about Iraq massing 30,000 troops on the Kuwait border. What happened? The stock market went down fifty points. The next day the market came back and no one thought about it after it until Bush, 'after conferring with our allies,' starts sending half a million troops into that region. Then things go along pretty much as normal for the whole fall. People talk about how long this war is going to last once it starts, as if that is a normal thing to talk about. And all the news stations go over and tape these interviews with the troops saying how they're glad to be able to do their duty and how they wish they were home for the holidays, and everyone treats *that* like it's normal. But then the war starts and everyone sits in front of their television sets thinking that they are learning something about the war. Just doing what's normal. And now they get upset?! I can't believe that even a smart guy like Christopher Lasch is upset. When, in the normal course of events, you say that you're drawing a line in the sand and will go to war over it and then, normally and naturally, you send half a million troops 10,000 miles away and you give them guns and other stuff that you normally give to people in the army, and then you conduct these normal training missions all over somebody else's sand, it seems only normal that you might expect a war to start. I don't see any reason to be upset about events just following their normal courses.

"But you have given me another idea for something to teach about. Why don't you teach children how easy it is to learn to be upset by watching worried adults or by listening to TV announcers who treat war as if it were a normal thing?"

"The children are worried in the schools. It seems to me that we have a responsibility to care for them."

"Perhaps. But you are paid to *teach* them. It's damned difficult to decide what to teach on any given day. Having a war start in prime time the night before when everyone's sitting around the dinner table makes that decision on this particular day a little more difficult, but it's the same decision I hope you'll make every day."

"Some schools are hiring psychologists part-time, to be 'on call' so that if a kid freaks out, there'll be some help."

"I know that most schools have too much money and that they make very bad decisions about how to spend it. I just hope that those of you in the poorer districts don't think that you have to be psychologists just because your school isn't hiring them for you. You're hardly trained to be a teacher yet; we haven't done anything to train you as a psychologist."

"But you don't have to be a psychologist to care for people."

"As teachers, I think you can care for students best by teaching them well."

"Is it possible to be a teacher at all in the schools?"

I'm afraid I laughed.

I had just finished giving a typically scathing critique of the schools in an undergraduate program typically titled "Meaning, Power and Learning" (or some permutation of those terms or terms like them). Some of the students had been irritated, some charmed, some puzzled. One of the puzzled ones came to me afterwards to ask this question: "Is it possible to be a teacher at all in the schools?"

"It's possible to be a teacher every nano-second of every day you are in the schools. From where would such a question ever come?"

"I read Illich and now I listen to you and the schools seem like such hopeless places. Who would ever want to teach there?"

My laughter, already on the wane, subsided entirely when I realized that once again I had failed as a teacher. This young man was, it seemed likely, headed for a career in teaching. He was sensitive and thoughtful, a little rebellious, probably concerned about improving society (and convinced it could be done). You could tell he was one of those students who had had one, maybe two, possibly (even though it was unlikely) three good teachers in the public schools. He had tasted good education, in the schools. He knew it was possible, but all the critiques of the schools he was reading and hearing had left him discouraged. He had listened closely to what I had to say and, if my talk had not been the final straw to push him toward a job in ecology or some such new venture outside the schools, the next one would. He was serious, so I had to be too.

"I hope that lots of people will want to teach--in the schools. The best teachers are often people who wonder why anyone would ever want to teach there. Don't forget: Illich is *not* opposed to education. (That *would be* a little silly, wouldn't it, given how obviously educated he is?)" We laughed together this time. "Somewhere in *Deschooling Society* he says that the problem is not the value that people attach to education; rather it's *the institutionalization of values* that concerns him. It's not education that worries him; it's schooling. There's a difference. I think it's possible for education to occur, even in the schools. It would take some courage and a remarkable ability to keep your head clear in the face of the fog that schooling creates to go into teaching nowa-

days, but I hope that nothing I said will discourage you from it, if you're inclined that way."

He thanked me in a formal sort of way and walked away without tipping his hand concerning his plans. That poker face, I thought, will serve him well in the schools.

The problem teachers face, in the schools, is not whether they can be teachers. There are teachers--true educators--in the schools. Even if there was only one, it would be sufficient evidence that it is possible to be a teacher, even there. The problems arise only when teachers forget that they are teachers. When they become psychologists, surro-

gate parents, deputies of the local police force, mouthpieces of the government, safety experts, or adjudicators of the rules of extra-curricular life, they run into problems. They aren't trained to those tasks, and doing any one of them, even for one nano-second, takes time away from what a teacher actually can do in the schools--teaching.

One student teacher I know had an especially difficult class to which he was charged to teach Washington State history. His first quizzes and tests came back blank from some of the students. There seemed to be a hard core of eight students who could not or would not--in any event, did not--do any of the work he assigned. Then the requests for documentation started arriving from the counselors and the specialists and the remedialists entrenched in their offices around the school. Everyone, it seemed, wanted some information, if you please, on just those eight students. Instead of completing the forms as requested, he went looking for the form senders.

"Why these eight?"

"They're all special ed. or on watch for it," said the remedialists. "She gets beat up by her father if she gets lower than a B," said the psy-

chologist. "He's next on the list for reading enhancement," said the specialist.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Didn't want to stigmatize them in your mind. Wanted to give them a chance in your class first."

"Great. So I've been trying to teach

these kids for five weeks and you knew that they were going to have problems learning anything from me and you didn't tell me, much less help me. Is that right?"

"Uhhh..."

It's easy to complain about all the programs for special ed. and special help and psychological assistance and this and that in the schools nowadays. This student teacher knew all those critiques, but he had a wonderfully naive and productively literal view of them: If there are these specialists and remedialists and psychologists peppered around the school, then they should do their jobs. So that he could do his job, which he knew to be teaching. He was willing to do his part, even to fill out all the forms, but he expected to be allowed, then, to teach. He is a man who will never forget that he is a teacher, no matter how much the schools try to get him to think or behave otherwise. The toughest problem in the schools is not being a teacher; the toughest problem is not forgetting that you are one.

I was very pleased that those five students came to seminar the day after last year's war started. They helped me remember what I am paid to do.

And I'm still bothered that Christopher Lasch forgot, at least for that evening, that he's a teacher too. It's a bad sign for our times when learned people find reasons not to talk about what they know.