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Public-Facing Resource: Teaching During Global and Geopolitical Crisis

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– *In collaboration with* –

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the Office of the Dean of Students



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WAYS TO ENGAGE with this Resource:

We imagine that educators will come to this resource seeking a variety of strategies and frameworks for supporting students equitably and compassionately. In order to provide flexibility, we have arranged this resource in the following order:

Please feel free to engage with this resource in ways that meet your specific contexts and access needs. Some may choose to engage fully with this resource from beginning to end; others may jump around the document to pick and choose the most helpful elements.

2 Broad Context and Purpose

3 Classroom Context and Approach

5 Tips and Strategies for Engaging in Conversations through Affective, Trauma-Informed, and Justice-Oriented Lenses

5 Before Class: Planning (before a course, module, or specific class begins)

6 During Class: Engaging

7 After Class: Reflecting

8 External Resources

8 Trauma-Informed Teaching

9 Facilitating Conversations through Affective, Trauma-Informed, and Justice-Oriented Lenses

Either way, this resource will evolve over time in response to what is happening globally and socially, at our University, and in our own learning, unlearning, and relearning.

Further, this resource represents the beginning, and not the endpoint, of opportunities to reflect on our teaching and learning practices, and to share ideas on community building, relational engagement, and caring pedagogies, especially during geopolitical and social crises.

BROAD CONTEXT

and PURPOSE

The violence and death in Israel and Palestine / Gaza, having far-reaching impacts on members of the University of Alberta community, motivated us to curate the following list of resources to provide those involved with learning / teaching with accessible and concrete approaches that may help support affected students in trauma-informed and relational ways during a time of geopolitical crisis.

We recognize that many educators might not have the specific facilitation skills to host a conversation about these tragic events; our hope is that by engaging with these resources, educators will feel empowered to recognize the varied feelings in the room and hold care and compassion for those feelings, to meet students where they are, to hold space for the impacts of this violence on their lives, and to make pedagogical decisions that support learners in wholistic ways.

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CLASSROOM CONTEXT AND APPROACH

Our classrooms and campuses do not exist separately from “the rest” of society, and our students, similarly, bring their whole selves (cognitively, affectively, physically, and spiritually) to their teaching and learning spaces.

In some classrooms, the **unfolding geopolitical conflict** will connect directly to the course or disciplinary themes, while in others, it may come up unexpectedly or tangentially. Initiating conversations about the ongoing violence in the Middle East can be daunting for a variety of reasons, including lack of historical, political, and social context for the crisis, not having direct and personal connections to those most impacted, **uncertainty** about how to frame and facilitate politically- and emotionally-charged conversations, and holding a social location¹ / positionality that confers a disproportionate amount of power and privilege under settler-colonial societal constructs.

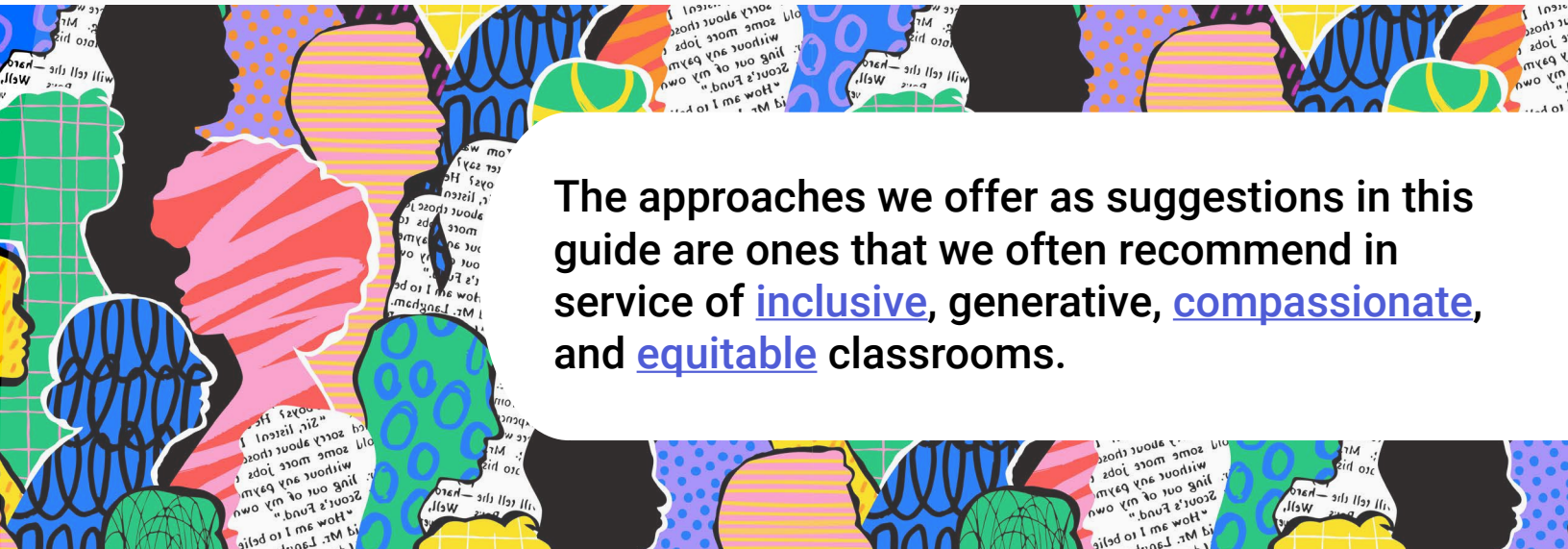
It is **important to remember** that many members of our University community will have direct connections to Palestine and Israel, or the region more broadly, as well as the people who live there, and may be

dealing with the death of family and friends or uncertainty about the whereabouts of loved ones; therefore, they may have strong feelings about or even experience trauma associated with the current events.

Others may be impacted by media imagery of human suffering. Generally, **acknowledging the violence and its many impacts on affected students** is preferred to ignoring the crisis. However, the level of detail of that conversation and the degree of engagement from instructors and students will vary significantly; **consider checking in with your students** and giving them anonymous opportunities to rate or describe their capacity to engage in the classroom.

¹While teaching in difficult times, and with trauma-informed teaching in mind, we must remember that our teaching and learning spaces have students from various backgrounds, and their individual uniqueness and positionality will be informed by their [social location](#), which includes community affiliations that impact proximity to power and privilege in society; these include, for example, social class, sexual orientation, gender, age, race, religion/belief system, disability, and geographic location.

It is important to remember, however, that, **you do not need to address the conflict nor the histories of Israel and Palestine to show care, compassion, and consideration for students** who themselves, along with families, friends, and colleagues, are at risk due to the violent geopolitical conflict itself and the resultant rise in cases of hostility, including [discrimination and harassment](#), towards people who are - or are perceived as - Palestinian, Israeli, Jewish, and/or Muslim (recognizing that people can have multiple social locations).



The approaches we offer as suggestions in this guide are ones that we often recommend in service of [inclusive](#), generative, [compassionate](#), and [equitable](#) classrooms.

However, they are especially important when broader events, including geopolitical violence, create fear, anger, stress, uncertainty, and trauma across our campuses. Academic freedom and [freedom of expression](#) are **key components** of a learning and research environment that fosters respect for human dignity, discovery, inquiry, and diversity of experience.

This includes the ability and right to engage in uncomfortable or

challenging conversations, including ones about pressing humanitarian and human rights crises, but it also demands the cultivation of respectful and accountable spaces, free from discrimination and harassment. As educators, **we must engage care-fully and relationally with our colleagues and students** in ways that honour each other as whole people with unique, intersecting social locations, values, and relationships.

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TIPS AND STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING IN CONVERSATIONS

THROUGH AFFECTIVE, TRAUMA-INFORMED, AND JUSTICE-ORIENTED LENSES:

Note: The key frameworks that inform the suggested strategies in this resource include a) [students-as-partners](#), b) [accountable spaces and communities](#), c) [Indigenizing and decolonizing pedagogies](#), d) [communities of practice and care](#), and e) [critical pedagogies and praxis](#)

Before Class: Planning

(BEFORE A COURSE, MODULE, OR SPECIFIC CLASS BEGINS)

- Develop / Co-develop community guidelines for engagement (see [CTL's sample](#) for a possible template)
- Give students time to sit with, review, discuss, ask questions about, and [co-create](#) community guidelines for engagement
- Build an [EDI statement](#) into your syllabus
- Introduce / reinforce the terminology and concepts of power, privilege, social location and critical self-reflection with students
- Model self-reflexivity, vulnerability, and relationality with students² (e.g., sharing your social location, reflecting on your own learning journey related to equity, power, privilege)
- Nurture opportunities for students to collaborate and build relationships early in the course

² like students, instructors' social locations may impact the degree to which they feel safe and empowered to share their own positionality / social location, especially for equity-denied and precarious / early-career scholars.

- Consider how you will proactively get to know and [build relationships](#) with students when you meet them
- Address equity-focused and access-oriented approaches / [accountable spaces](#) frameworks early and often, including right before difficult, challenging, uncomfortable conversations
- Identify ways to initiate conversations about [equity-related issues in your discipline](#): gaps, barriers, voices that have been included / excluded
- Design anonymous opportunities for students to check in with you about their current mood, energy, and capacity, and adjust your teaching plans accordingly
- Develop scripts that you can memorize to use in response to offensive comments and [microaggressions](#) in the classroom
- Structure conversations to support equity of voice in the classroom
- Review principles of [Trauma-Informed Pedagogies](#)

During Class: Engaging

- Always [respond to moments that are uncomfortable, challenging, or disruptive](#) - any response, even an imperfect one, is better than none at all
- Refer everyone back to community guidelines for engagement or [classroom norms and expectations](#) for compassionate, respectful, and accountable conversations
- Emphasize the need for balance between seeking growth and intentional learning rather than perfection, while also being accountable for ensuring that our words and actions do not harm others through systemic or individual violence
- Recognize and validate your students' lived experiences and engage them as partners in the classroom
- Invite students to anonymously identify how they are feeling and their capacity for engaging in learning (e.g., through Padlet or Menti; rating scale or self-described)
- Acknowledge the ongoing crisis succinctly and compassionately and offer [on- and off-campus supports](#)

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- Demonstrate empathy for students who are struggling as a result of geopolitical violence and its omnipresence in society and through media
- Be flexible about planned course elements (e.g., due dates, assessments, content) in order to be responsive to student needs
- Offer flexible opportunities for class engagement, such as a pause for a writing reflection and synchronous / asynchronous / blended opportunities to participate
- Use a prepared script that you have practiced for disruptive moments if you are concerned that you will not know how to respond to discriminatory or hateful remarks, should they arise
- Take a content pause, and invite the class to pause with you (e.g., reflection, time to breathe, opportunities to work on assignments)

After Class: Reflecting

- Reflect on moments of difficult or disruptive conversation: what went well, what didn't go well, what you might do in a future instance
- Acknowledge the challenges of uncomfortable conversations / offensive comments, including how you felt in that moment
- Mindfully and equitably hold space for those who are most impacted by the conversation / comments (ie, equity-denied students)
- Offer opportunities for [reflection](#) / debrief (individual, group, with instructor)
- Refer students to campus supports as appropriate

Trauma-Informed Teaching

Note: Trauma-informed teaching means that the educator – discussions, materials, activities, etc. inside and outside of the classroom – acknowledges the existence of trauma (and its many manifestations) and does not cause further harm. According to Dr. David Rock's SCARF model, learning and creativity are significantly impacted when students are threatened in any of the domains of safety, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, or fairness. The resources below offer further suggestions for developing a trauma-informed teaching practice and trauma-aware learning environments.

01

[Costa, K. Trauma-aware teaching checklist.](#)
100 Faculty.

A checklist of trauma-aware practices across the six key principles of trauma-informed practice as defined by the Centers for Disease Control: safety; trustworthiness/transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and cultural, historical, and gender issues.

02

[Graduate Student Instructor Teaching & Resource Center.](#)
[Discussing traumatic events and sensitive content.](#)
Berkeley Graduate Division.

Offers ways to provide students advance notice and preparation before potentially traumatic conversations or topics in the classroom. This resource also provides concrete strategies for effective and sensitive facilitation of difficult conversations.

03

[Taylor Institute. Trauma-informed teaching and learning practices post-COVID.](#)
University of Calgary.

This recorded webinar with downloadable PDF slide deck provides an overview of how stress and trauma impact learning, identifies the connections between trauma-informed work and equitable praxis, and offers ways of developing relationships within the classroom community towards stewardship, rather than saviourism.

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Facilitating Difficult or Disruptive Conversations

Note: When challenging conversations occur in the classroom, it is helpful to have concrete strategies at hand to facilitate accountable and care-ful interactions; this is especially true when the conversation becomes disruptive because someone has said or done something that is racist or otherwise perpetuates inequities against marginalized people. Educators can think about these moments before, during, and after them in order to feel prepared to facilitate, to minimize and repair harm when it occurs, and to ensure that the conversation is equitable and engaged.

01

[Centre for Teaching and Learning. Community engagement guidelines.](#)
University of Alberta.

This CTL document was designed for our Communities of Practice and Care, as well as some of our reading groups, in order to provide guidance on our communities' responsibility for careful, brave, and accountable interactions. Focusing especially on intersectional approaches to community building, this document is flexible and intended to be organically revised over time and for different contexts.

02

[Centre for Teaching and Learning. Teaching sensitive materials.](#)
University of Toronto - Scarborough.

Provides questions that instructors can ask themselves or their students about selection of course materials, topics of conversation, and voices included on the syllabus through the lenses of equity and justice.

03

[Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. Guidelines for discussing difficult or high-stakes topics.](#)
University of Michigan.

Shares general tips on facilitating unexpected and planned conversation on challenging topics. Resource includes a section on "issues to consider before discussing wars or other international conflicts" along with specific strategies for handling conversations about international and political violence.

04

[Slade, S., Charlo, A., & Koskela, E. \(2023, March 21\). *Difficult conversations and talking circles.*](#)

Medium.

This article focuses on the Indigenous approach of circle methodologies, which is a way of being in conversation with each other without trying to take action or make a decision. Rather, the focus is on inclusivity, well-being, and respectful honouring of people's positions and perspectives.

05

[Young, S. *Difficult conversations in the classroom.*](#)

Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning.

Provides concrete strategies for facilitating difficult classroom conversations before and during the session, as well as possible approaches when a conversation becomes disruptive.

