



Felicia Sandler

CEB Faculty Think Tank Project

NEC Role: Music Theory Faculty

Title of Project: Facilitating meaningful and safe challenging discussions in the classroom: a game plan

Define: The goal of this project is to identify the steps I need to take to acquire skills for facilitating meaningful courageous conversations in the classroom.

Discover: This project is an attempt to address the problem of student hesitation when it comes to participating in challenging classroom conversations. It is my experience that this hesitation occurs in at least three ways:

1. Students don't feel they belong, because the music we study is not the music they love and/or play (for instance, jazz musicians who feel left out because of an emphasis on classical music, forms, approaches; students who identify as female who find we are studying exclusively male composers; etc.)
2. Students aren't interested in the approaches we employ, because they don't resonate with the theorists we study (for instance, engaging with Schenkerian approaches while cognizant of his racist views and how they intersect with his theories, etc.)
3. Students experience the faculty as being out of touch with the student's life experience, and as such don't feel free to engage in conversations in the classroom, especially those that involve sensitive topics.

Dream: Once complete, it is my dream that this project will give me enough tools to begin to change my classroom culture from one in which students feel hesitant to share or engage to one in which they feel they can speak about and problem solve around their resistances freely. The ultimate goal is to help students to know a bit more about not only the theories and theorists we are exploring, but also who they (the students) are, and what they bring to the discipline.

Design:

Steps I am taking / have taken:

1. Journaling my reflections after a recent DMA Seminar discussion on Phil Ewell's article "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," which was facilitated by Monique Van Willingham.
2. Participation in the workshop by Dr. Deion Hawkins offered through CEB: "Inclusive Syllabi and Navigating Challenging Classroom Conversations."
3. Exploring materials at "Courageous Conversations" (<https://courageousconversation.com/>)

4. Identifying six strategies for facilitating challenging classroom conversations with Monique Van Willingham.
5. Answer the questions related to Classroom Culture in the CEB Faculty Toolkit
6. Answer the questions related to *Student Dialogues* and *Developing Syllabi* in the CEB Faculty Toolkit.
7. Give thoughtful attention to how my syllabi are crafted so that students see their identities reflected in our work.
8. Give thoughtful attention to how I communicate the syllabus and policies so that students experience themselves as collaborators, and that their voices are important and respected in our classroom.
9. Brainstorm on how to help build a community of practice here at NEC pertaining to the facilitation of challenging conversations in the classroom. It is too hard to do this work alone. Ideally, we could role-play and develop skills together.

Derive: I am incorporating a cultural equity and belonging lens in this project by visualizing a classroom conversation in which I have explored preparation, execution and post-conversation reflection through the CEB lens.

Delivery: A guideline template with pertinent steps for auditing 1) course content, 2) styles of communication that foster participation, 3) tried and true norms for the facilitation of meaningful discussions, and 4) tools for post-conversation reflection.