**Teaching Strategies for Discussing Emotionally Charged, Historic Events in the Classroom**

Ryan Pickering, Allegheny College

Abstract

We are currently living through multiple historic events at one time. This includes the Black Lives Matter protests, the COVID-19 pandemic, the election of Kamala Harris as Vice President of the United States, the events at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th, and whatever else has happened after submitting this abstract. It can be extremely difficult to process these events, let alone discuss them in the classroom. This can be particularly true if you are a member of a marginalized community who has been or may be disproportionately impacted, or even traumatized, by these events. In November of 2020, APA published a book titled “Navigating Difficult Moments in Teaching Diversity and Social Justice.” Within this book, I wrote a chapter on communicating with your students about emotionally charged moments in the classroom. This chapter combined research on trauma-informed, critical, intersectional, dialogic, and decolonial pedagogies as well as my own personal experiences of teaching through traumatic events (e.g., a local mass shooting, the violent death of a student currently enrolled in class) as a fat, gay atheist and a cis, white man from a low-income background. As one might expect, approaching these discussions are complex and crucial for student growth and engagement, as well as difficult and, at times, risky for educators. They are also relatively common for those teaching courses related to social justice and psychology factors related to current social issues. I have had many of these discussions with students in my Psychology of Prejudice, Psychology of Social Class, Contemporary Social Issues, and Pandemic Psychology courses at Allegheny College, and I still often turn to resources provided by the Society for the Psychological Social Issues for guidance before and after these discussions. Through this presentation, I hope to help educators become more aware of these resources while also discussing the complexities, the limitations, and the joys that can come from discussing these events with your students in the classroom. This presentation will also introduce attendees to practical teaching strategies (e.g., syllabi development, assignments, activities, etc.) for implementing these pedagogies within the classroom, as well as how these pedagogical approaches can be both harmonic and dissonant.

Bio

Dr. Ryan M. Pickering is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Allegheny College. He received his PhD in Social Psychology at the University of Maine. Dr. Pickering has a professional passion for teaching, as well as improving the educational experiences for students from marginalized communities. This has included conducting and mentoring diverse, inclusive, and intersectional research projects, hosting grant-funded multi-institutional conferences for first-generation and low-income college students, organizing a research symposium for LGBTQ+ campus-wide research, and teaching courses related to power, prejudice, systemic inequities, and contemporary social issues (e.g., the pandemic, social justice movements, etc.).

Dr. Pickering has served as the co-chair of SPSSI's Early Career Scholars Committee and on APA's Committee on Socioeconomic Status. He also recently received an honorable mention for SPSSI's Innovative Teaching Award. His recent book chapter, "Responding to events in the news" was featured in the book Navigating Difficult Moments in Teaching Diversity and Social Justice: Perseverance and Resilience.