



Post-Election Reflections on Safe Spaces

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The presidential election proved to be a perfect stage from which to observe a familiar classroom dilemma: How do I allow both “young Hillary” and “young Donald” to get equal airtime in discussions? More importantly: How will I



ensure that both students leave the class feeling heard and respected? Addressing this situation is not easy.

My reticent “Hillary” is more noticeably uncomfortable with spirited banter. Her reactions are more deliberate and just don’t lend themselves easily to pithy comebacks. In contrast, her classmate is quick to fire off comments that often stun and shun her

from the ring. As neutral referee, I need to be certain that the learning scenario I’ve set up is staged fairly. Does the setting allow both introverted and extroverted, male and female, students to respond from their individual comfort zones? Have I firmly articulated clear boundaries for discussion and consistently enforced them? And finally, have I spent enough time getting to know each one of them as vulnerable souls? The myriad of undisclosed stories that our kids bring to the classroom, the playground, and the adult world ultimately dictate the degree to which they’ll feel empowered or discouraged from vocalizing their opinions.

Overall, our commitment as educators is to create a space where all students’ convictions can be expressed equally. Ultimately, our challenge is to help our students to make necessary “volume adjustments” so that they can be heard and listened to in authentic ways.