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00:07 Speaker 1: Welcome to Popular Podagogy. It's good to have you back. This is a podcast brought to you by the Faculty of Education.

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00:19 S1: We're very fortunate today to be joined by a couple of special guests, Natanya Lavigne and Danielle LaRue. Our guests today are teacher candidates in the Bachelor of Education program at Queen's University, and they are going to be talking to us a little bit today about having courageous conversations. So I'm gonna pose my first question to the two of you as what does a courageous conversation actually mean? Can you define that for the audience?

00:53 Natanya Lavigne: So the way I like to think of a courageous conversation is having a critical discussion of something, and it could be anything, because the phrase relates to both the format of the conversation as well as the content. But it's really about having a conversation that brings in personal anecdotes and experiences and uses that as evidence to think critically about whatever the purpose of the conversation is.

01:27 S1: So how can that be applied in a classroom setting or a university setting, or who would be the audience that you would wanna hear this topic?

01:38 NL: So we looked at having courageous conversations in a school setting. So I am in the PJ Program, so I'm looking to have courageous conversations in a bit of a younger classroom setting, whereas the rest of the members in my group are all in IS. So it's kind of something that you can have across the age ranges, but we focused on having it in a smaller class setting rather than a university class size, and with a teacher as a leader and students as participants, although again, the format can be used in other settings.

02:13 S1: What are some circumstances in which you would have to have this type of conversation and you... Can you give us a bit of an example there?

02:20 NL: So for example, on one of my placements, I had a student... I was in a first grade class, and I had a student who would kind of... She would like... Sometimes... She pulled her shirt into being off the shoulder top, and she would ask other students if they liked her more now. So that student was getting some messages about attraction and her body and what that meant. So you

could have a conversation to destabilize that norm in the classroom, if that makes sense, and allows students to think more about their bodies as their own and develop bodily autonomy as opposed to just thinking of their bodies as a symbol and representing a social currency.

03:10 S1: Oh, these are obviously difficult conversations to have, that's why they're called courageous conversations. So how do you make it so that it's a space that's comfortable enough for both the person that's initiating the conversation and the person that is participating in the conversation to feel comfortable enough that they can be honest with each other?

03:32 Danielle LaRue: So in these types of settings a lot of the times, I think one of the things you could start to make these more comfortable is to practice a lot of these conversations in more of a low-risk environment. So having these conversations maybe outside of the topic of social justice, so you can practice making a brave space and holding brave space as a teacher and practicing mindful listening with your students and kind of setting the stage for what conversations would look like. So when we come to these conversations, when we talk about the topic of social justice, it's a lot more comfortable for our students to kind of jump into it. And as well with this social justice conversations can bring in a sense of discomfort, so helping students kind of navigate this sense of discomfort can also be really helpful in these conversations.

04:25 S1: You mentioned a brave space there, can you talk a little bit more about what that might look and feel like?

04:32 DL: Yeah. So when we have conversations, a lot of the time, we talk about safe space. But the reason why I talk about this shift from safe space to brave space is because the notion of safe space kind of gives students a feeling that they shouldn't have a sense of discomfort, whereas a lot of the time with social justice conversations, students will feel a sense of discomfort. And it takes a lot of courage and bravery to sit with that and to listen to multiple view points. So this brave space gives students the ability to emphasize a sense of courage or feelings of safety. So as a teacher holding this space, having this conversation, really encouraging students to be mindful of what they're feeling and really be mindful to what they're listening to their cares about when they're having these conversations.

05:26 S1: I'm gonna speak a little bit from my own perspective here for a second, and one of the challenges that I know that I faced when I was teaching, and even still to this day, if I'm having conversations with some individuals is that I feel like because I am in a privileged position... I identify as a white male, heterosexual person who is middle class and has been my entire life, I don't have a lot of those experiences that maybe some of these students or some of these people that I'm having these conversations would be going through. So for some people who might be in that position of feeling uncomfortable relating to those students because of their privilege, how do you coach them? How would you encourage them to still give an effort? Because they have to give an effort because it's important to those students, but it might be uncomfortable for them.

06:21 NL: So as the teacher of the class, you are often the most likely to be the one who ends up facilitating the conversation, and it is okay to lead a conversation from a position of privilege. But to do that, you definitely have to acknowledge that you are in the privileged position at least in how you identify and to facilitate a conversation, you have to hold space for those who might not be in the privileged position. So just because you are the facilitator or the leader of the conversation, I think it's helpful to think of that as being a guide to the conversation or mediator of different

perspectives as opposed to someone who is actually leading or instructing the class. Having a courageous conversation is really about opening up the floor and opening up the conversation to hearing the perspectives of those who might otherwise not be able to share them.

07:15 S1: And how would you recommend someone open up the floor to those students who maybe aren't feeling confident enough to share, especially in a large in-class group discussion?

07:25 NL: Well, there are definitely a few techniques, one of them, you mentioned. You can have students group off, talk to an elbow partner, just like you would in a regular class, have students take time in a smaller group to discuss questions beforehand so they kind of have time to process their thoughts. And you can also encourage students to do this by themselves, to take some time to think about what they wanna say, to reflect or journal. Some teachers build in a pause after students speak or other teachers can kind of like reflect on what the student says out loud to build in a pause for the whole class to have time to process what they've said. And then respond to what the student actually said as opposed to just saying what they were thinking. So allow students to have listening time as well as time to respond.

08:13 S1: Speaking to both of you, and I'll ask each of you to answer in turn, how do you think that you will take away the lessons that you've learned as part of this program, as part of this course and doing more research and looking into this topic more thoroughly, what will you take away and bring into your careers, whether it's in the classroom or elsewhere? So Danielle, I will start with you.

08:36 DL: Yeah, so for me, in this course, what I'm gonna take from it and implement in my teaching is that I really need to put an emphasis on how this is a process of learning. We're never gonna be at the end of something. This is a constantly evolving topic and something that we consistently have to reflect upon. So for myself as a teacher, I need to constantly be looking at literature, reflecting on my own teaching, reflecting on the experience that I have along with my students as well. And really emphasize to my students that it's okay to fill this discomfort, and it's good because we are taking steps forward in our learning process in relation to social justice as well as social injustice.

09:22 S1: Natanya, how about yourself?

09:24 NL: Well, one thing that I've learned about myself while I've been in this program is that I don't necessarily... I'm not sure if I want to be a traditional classroom teacher at this point of my life or my career, but I definitely want to be an educator. I really love Social Justice, and I've worked as a Social Justice educator, and I really like that. To me, Social Justice is a mindset as opposed to just a classroom topic, so I think it can really be built in and incorporated in how you teach. Personally, I think that what I've learned in my research of courageous conversations is that it's all about kind of building in space for people to have time to process events that happened to them. It's allowing students to make the personal, political and form views about that. It's encouraging critical thinking and not just comprehensive critical thinking, but having students actually have an opportunity to see an event or have an experience, and then be able to reflect on that personally, and then with a group and with a class. I think those are all just really important things and learning about courageous conversations, I think can just make you a better person 'cause it can help you converse with people. It can help you take time to listen and... Yeah, I think it can really help have just different interactions and conversations on all scales.

10:53 S1: Absolutely, and it can be really beneficial no matter what the occupation that you end up in having or if you are just trying to implement something in your day-to-day life, whether it's with your family or with friends, or if you're doing anything really, you can really take lessons that you've learned from this and put it into practice.

11:15 S1: I'd like to thank you for coming on today and having a courageous conversation with me in a different sense. If you are interested in learning more about the courageous conversations, we were fortunate enough to have, not only Natanya and Danielle, but the rest of their group, from their Social Justice class who have been able to put together a frequently asked question, a set of examples at the end of this podcast. So you can listen on and hear that. I'd like to give a big shout out and thank you to our producer, Josh, who is phenomenal and consistently puts together and makes us sound coherent. And we'd like to thank you as well for listening to Popular Podagogy.

12:00 Hannah: Hi, I'm Hannah.

12:01 Liam: I'm Liam.

12:02 Sarah: And I'm Sarah.

12:04 Liam: And today we'll be answering some commonly asked questions about courageous conversations.

12:12 Hannah: So the first question is, what if someone says something inappropriate in the discussion, like swearing, racist or homophobic language or outdated terminology? So in response to this, the first thing you should do is at the beginning of your discussion, just preface it by reminding your class about appropriate classroom language, so that could include reminding them what your school or school board's policies are on language and hateful speech. And reviewing some of the facts about the discussion at hand, for example, what terms are appropriate versus outdated, and making sure that the entire conversation is prefaced with guidelines on appropriate language, behavior and terminology. If a student does say something inappropriate, such as an outdated term or something racist or homophobic, give other students the chance to address that issue themselves. And if no one points it out, that's when you can step in to make the clarification. But one key idea if you are calling out a student is to think about calling them in rather than calling them out. So asking questions like, "What do you mean by that?" Or, "Could you explain that a little bit further?" Gives a student an opportunity to correct themselves and correct their own perhaps mistake rather than calling them out directly.

13:24 Hannah: However, if you do have consistent and problematic hateful language persisting within your conversation, it might be best to shut down your discussion to remind students of the appropriate language terminology and ways that we speak within the classroom and to schedule another time to discuss the topic further, without the use of appropriate language, which could be harmful to a variety of your students. The next question is what if conversations go astray? One of the best ways to deal with this is to prepare some questions or prompts that you can pose to the group before the discussion begins, just in case conversation get side-tracked or fizzles out. So you can have some low order questions prepared, so easy ones to increase discussion like, "Could you define this term?" And some high order questions that help bring in deeper discussions like, "Can you think of a time where X?" Or, "What efforts have you seen to fix this problem?" And importantly, if students are getting heated about a discussion that is sidetracked but they feel is very

important, it's important to validate those students by thanking them for bringing those ideas up and then giving them a time when you can get into that discussion even more in another class.

14:33 Sarah: Great, so my questions. I've got, how do I make sure everyone is represented in the discussion? Which I think is really important, especially because we need to remember that not all of our students are going to be really comfortable jumping in head first to these conversations especially because we're usually tackling quite heavy conversations when we are doing these courageous discussions. I think some of your students are gonna be really shy or they're gonna take longer to raise their hands, so... What's great about that is as the facilitator, you can actually change the pace of the conversation. So you can take your time and you can just pause or give a second just to let students time to jump in, which is kind of the same idea that we do anyways. Whenever we ask our students a question in class and nobody wants to raise their hand, you just give them a pause and somebody will eventually speak up. Otherwise, if you notice that your students actually haven't contributed to the conversation, it's okay to just ask them directly as well, just so and so or like, "Hannah, Liam, do you have anything to add to this conversation?" I think that's really important to do because you can't just let one or two people dominate the whole conversation, otherwise you don't know that your message is really getting across.

15:50 Sarah: If you're still worried about it though, I think you can plan out some activities beforehand where your students can either anonymously ask some questions to engage with the topic, or maybe you could have some small group work where they can break out into smaller groups and work through the scenarios on their own, 'cause sometimes your students might just be more comfortable in a smaller setting. My second question is, how should a facilitator share their views if asked, without influencing your views of discussion participation? This is kind of a tricky one because my initial thought is that you should always remain neutral in these conversations. I think you should be taking your time and try not to actively share your views and let your students do that for you. But then again, if the student does ask you, I think depending on the conversation, it can be okay to give your own opinion. But I think what you should be doing is outright tell them that you will give them your opinion, but you let them talk about it first. Give them some time once the conversation seems to die out, then you can step in. But if the topic is controversial, I recommend that you don't share your opinion at all. I do think that you should make that clear from the start of your conversation that your opinion is not what we're here to discuss. And yeah, I think it's just... It's safer to stick to the facts.

17:28 Liam: Alright, the final two questions for this recording are, one, how do we end the discussions? And two, how can we help students sit with feelings of discomfort from these discussions? So to answer the first of these two questions, I think it's important to not let the bell be the cause for the end of the discussion. So you will want to set some time aside at the end to review what has been discussed between your students. And you might wanna take some time now to clarify any confusing terms or ideas that have come up during the discussion that weren't necessarily clarified at the time. It's also important to have students reflect on their beliefs or feelings through the discussion process. So have they changed or are they the same, and what does this mean for the students? And it's also important to make plans for next steps.

18:39 Liam: Don't let the discussion end with just one discussion. How do you incorporate ideas that are brought up into future lessons and make sure that students continue to think about these topics and themes throughout the year? And it's also important to thank everyone for participating, just to know that their contributions were meaningful. Sometimes, however, discussions don't end

where you want them to end. This could be for a bunch of different reasons, but in any case, it's important to try to return to these topics at a later point. So it might be necessary for you and your students to do some additional research into the topic. And it's important to also encourage students to reflect on the topic on their own time, maybe outside of class they can develop a greater understanding of the topic that you were discussing. But how can we help students sit with feelings of discomfort from these discussions? Maybe there's three suggestions that I can give for this. One is through the year teaching the students how to talk about these difficult topics.

20:08 Liam: So offering your students a language that allows them to be able to comfortably describe how it is that they feel in an appropriate way. Because not being able to say how you feel can be very discomfoting. It's also important to help students learn to incorporate mindfulness in to the way they participate in discussions. So this should be taught throughout the school year as well. So helping students learn to pause and breath and witness how they feel about certain topics and how their peers feel so that they can befriend their discomfort in a way that allows them to process it. Also, for a final point, it's important to share your own story, I guess or experience with tackling uncomfortable or difficult themes or ideas. So you can share your own experience, like how you learned about certain topics and how you felt when you were younger worrying about these things, so that students can see that you also had to grapple with these feelings of uncomfortable-ness or discomfort where whatever could happen.

21:49 S1: If you like what you heard, please subscribe on Apple Podcast, Google Play or Stitcher, or you can find us on the Faculty of Education or CFRC websites. Have a nice day.