

## Brion-Meisels Clip 5 Transcript

AUDIENCE: Yeah. I think the word that's coming to mind based on what you just said is consistency. And I think consistency is like the death knell for a lot of first year teachers because they start out really like, I care, I'm going to do all these great things. But then because they're not consistent with just basic things in their room, kids don't trust them because they're like, well, but what you said yesterday was different than what you said today. And so it's like, how do you build someone's capacity to be a strong educator without sacrificing their ability to have relationships with young people. And is that a system thing or a human thing? Is that coachable or is that just like a flaw in the system?

AUDIENCE: But what's difficult about that is, do you notice yourself changing things based upon the students' need? Because I find myself doing that. And then that causes tension with the whole group because it's like, well, why did you allow that person to do that? But again, if we're going off of this philosophy of meeting students where they're at, sometimes you have to do that. But then that completely changes those structures and that community culture that you built at the beginning of the school year.

So I also feel like maybe sometimes that inconsistency sometimes is necessary to meet the students where they're at. But then-- I don't know. I feel like there's tensions with that.

GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS: All right. So I'm going to ask you to move. And this time, I've counted more carefully. I'm going to ask you to form a group of three. So we should be able to form groups of three where no two people are from the same state/country. So if you're not from the United States, you get to go with your country. If you are from the United States, go with your state. OK? But no two people can be from the same

state. However you're thinking about it. OK? So form a new group of three. Go. Move around. Talk to each other.

[LAUGHTER]

You can do it either way.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATIONS]

How much responsibility do you think the adult facilitator has and in terms of ensuring safety or facilitating agency. So to what extent is the adult responsible for ensuring safety? To what extent is the adult responsible for making sure that the youth have agency? And how might you think about being an adult in a situation where young people are engaged in making a decision about something that could get them in trouble in some way? OK. I'm going to give you four minutes to think about that as a group and then we'll switch to our reflection. Go ahead. Teenagers.

AUDIENCE: I struggle with-- this feels so awkward. OK.

[LAUGHS]

I struggle with this hardcore because I'm in the youth organizing field, and I think about this all the time. And where I'm at right now is-- A, just being transparent about what the risks are. But then there's like, how much of that do you do that doesn't scare them away from the kind of work that needs to be done? But, yeah, just really having them think through the risks of different actions and think through what might be at stake for themselves in a way that really allows them to consider their own agency and their decision making. Because I think youth do incredible activism and they know what the stakes are. So kind of providing that space for them.

AUDIENCE: One of the tensions that I would layer on are like expectation-- what's our responsibility to inform families or involve families in the discussion?

AUDIENCE: I struggle with that. It's one thing to have the conversation with youth. And I don't know. What's our responsibility as the person responsible for--

AUDIENCE: For minors.

AUDIENCE: Minors and letting them feels like not the right thing. But not stopping something that could get them into some serious trouble without the consent of their families. I don't know.

GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS: So I-- this is something I really struggle with because I find it much easier to work with adolescents than parents. Like, I'm much more uncomfortable with working with parents. It's getting better now that I am a parent, but not that much better.

[LAUGHTER]

But I really I feel like-- so I'm not saying this in the sense that I've done it well, but I feel like among the work that I've seen, the people who do it really well are working cross generationally so they have families in some way, with the exception maybe of the queer community, where families aren't always like in favor of this stuff. But if possible, they have families like onboard and supporting their kids in some way.

I don't know what you do when the families disagree. At some point, I think kids have to make their own decisions. But in a lot of these situations, I think there have been-- I see adults who are really good at bringing parents in in a way that then helps with this kind of question, I think.

AUDIENCE: In my community, the art teacher right after the election, she let the students do this big project. And part of it was they made-- we discovered that Frederick Douglass had spoken in this building in downtown Ypsilanti. And so we did the silent peace march, which took a lot of organizing. So I was part of the organizing committee for it because my organization also participated.

We had a whole bunch of younger kids and their families come. And so we wanted to make sure that the younger kids and all the families that were going to come would be protected. I mean, the high school students, we wanted to protect them too, but we also wanted to make sure that it was going to be an all city event. And we ended up getting the current and the former mayor involved in all kinds of stuff because we did a lot of outreach to those communities. And we're lucky that we have a really progressive community that we could do that in.

But I think we did want to make sure that we did it all legally so that there would be no problems with the police because that's what more what we were worried about is whether there would be some tension with the police.

GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS: It makes me think about something-- it's OK. I think I just realized I have a mic.

AUDIENCE: Oh, you do.

GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS: It makes me think about something we talked about a few weeks ago, which is just like the ways in which sometimes our voices are most powerful dealing with other adults so what can we do to get out front to figure out how to get other adults ready for whatever young people are deciding they're going to do. There are some situations where-- I think like this one maybe-- that is actually enough. Then there's other ones like DACA, where it's not enough.

AUDIENCE: And then what happens when families aren't on board, youth make a decision against those wishes or they get in trouble or whatever-- then, where do we stand? So then are we advocates? Are we advocates for them and the decisions that they made through their own agency regardless of how we feel about what that decision is? And what does that look like too?

AUDIENCE: So, yeah. That was something that I was going to touch on because I feel like in that situation, you kind of have to make a decision of-- you need to keep a good relationship with families and parents because they have such a huge impact on what do youth do.

But then, at the same time, you've got to keep a good relationship with the youth and basically advocate. And if you've advised or encouraged this, you can't just like sell out on them and be like, well, you know, this will happen. So it's a really sticky position to be in because-- which way do I actually go about this?

GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS: Yeah. Right. I think that you can't do the sell out thing, right? Like at a certain point it's like, well, then you have to stand with them. That goes back to the writer thing.

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS: What does it mean to stand then after the thing comes down?

AUDIENCE: Even if you don't agree.

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: It's where I think it gets even sort of--

AUDIENCE: Yeah. It's even harder.

AUDIENCE: Even harder, when you're like-- you ended up making a choice that I maybe don't agree with. And I do agree with your ability to make that choice that you made.

GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS: Yeah. Such a hard thing. OK. Finish up your sentence.

AUDIENCE: Strategies. I don't know.

[BACKGROUND CONVERSATIONS]

GRETCHEN BRION-MEISELS: Three, two, one. You're not switching groups. So if you're really compelled by what you're talking about, you can just keep talking about it for the next question. So I'm going to ask you to now, again, reflect inward. And this time, I'm going to ask you to think or talk about a time when you have had trouble stepping up. In other words, a time when you think you should have used your power as an adult but you didn't. And then, if you're willing to talk about what worried you in that moment.