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## Engaging as a Force for Equity through our Pedagogy

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# Engaging as a Force for Equity through our Pedagogy

Stephen Secules  
Challenging Conversations Lecture Series  
April 25, 2023

# Agenda

- A bit about me
- Pedagogy as a force for equity
- A framework for engaging as a force for equity through pedagogy
- Interactive discussion and examples



## A bit about me:

Grew up outside of DC in Maryland

Bachelor's degree in engineering

Masters degree in acoustics

Worked in acoustical engineering

PhD in Education (University of Maryland)

Growing  
concerns with  
equity and access  
to engineering

Teaching experience in engineering

Research on engineering education

Faculty in Engineering and Computing Education

# Nowadays

- I lead a research group on Equity in Engineering Education
- Primarily qualitative, critical, participatory, ethnographic / observational, video-based methods.
- I hope my work helps faculty better understand equity dimensions of their classroom and ways to act as a force for good.



# What I tend to hear from faculty about equity

*My students come in with such lack of preparation, I can't really help them.*

*We've got to start early encouraging girls in STEM, by the time they get to college it's too late.*

*There aren't any equity issues at my [PWI/HSI/HBCU] class because all the students are all [white/Latinx/Black].*

*Most of my students prefer this teaching style I've used for years.*

*Sometimes I notice problematic student interactions, but I can't control my students.*

*I don't have time to engage with equity issues in my teaching, plus it's not my expertise.*

# Why engage as a force for equity?

**Equity towards diversity-- We don't choose which students we teach.**

**Students' everyday educational experiences matter.**

**Professors have agency to influence (but not control) the classroom culture.**

**While broader society creates inequities, we can be complicit or resistant to them.**

# Agenda

- ~~A bit about me~~
- ~~Pedagogy as a force for equity~~
- A framework for engaging as a force for equity through pedagogy
- Interactive discussion and examples





# Why a framework?

...and not a list of best practices

# A framework for equity in pedagogy

**Notice** problems with equity and inclusion

**Interpret** the problems

**Take Responsibility** to act

**Think Strategically** about how to respond

**Act** using a specific strategy

# A framework for equity in pedagogy

**Notice** problems with equity and inclusion

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## **Notice** problems with equity and inclusion

Question: What should we notice regarding equity in a classroom?

Provide quick answers and ideas in the chat (or unmute!).





## **Notice** problems with equity and inclusion

Talk time

Discussion norms

Content level of talk and materials

Team dynamics

Microaggressions and language use

Tone and body language

And more...

## **Interpret** the problems

Noticing is half the battle, but how we **interpret** events matters.

An instructor notices that in his programming class, the students who sit towards the front of the classroom are white and Asian men, while women and students of color are sitting further back. The students at the front tend to speak up to answer questions and ask a lot of questions about programming, some of which are beyond the scope of the class. Sometimes those discussions get so carried away those are the only questions asked and we lose time for the regular lesson.

***What are some possible interpretations of the events?***

Provide quick answers and ideas in the chat (or unmute!).

## **Interpret** the problems

Noticing is half the battle, but how we **interpret** events matters.

An instructor notices that in his programming class, the students who sit towards the front of the classroom are white and Asian men, while women and students of color are sitting further back. The students at the front tend to speak up to answer questions and ask a lot of questions about programming, some of which are beyond the scope of the class. Sometimes those discussions get so carried away those are the only questions asked and we lose time for the regular lesson.

### Possible interpretations:

- Students in the front are curious
- Students in the front are intentionally disrupting class
- Students in the back are disengaged
- Students in the back are intimidated
- Instructor's responses are encouraging this dynamic
- Men are overpowering women in conversation





## **Interpret** the problems

Our **positionality** (who we are) impacts how we interpret events.

Course context, discipline, level of course, course content also affect interpretation.

It is important to think about **multiple perspectives** and how events may make each person feel.

There are different **time scales** for interpretation.



## Take Responsibility to act

We don't have control over everything that happens in a classroom, but we do have a **responsibility**.

If inequities are happening our classroom can become a place where things get worse.

If we take responsibility we can help our classroom be a place where things get better.



**Think Strategically** about how to respond

The strategy about how to respond can also happen quickly / reflexively in the moment, or over longer *time scale*.

When we try to act quickly, we won't always get it right—that's ok. It's about learning about our own classroom and honing our own set of tools to respond to them.

We can have a **growth mindset** for equity work.

Equity doesn't need to become a place where we blame ourselves for getting it wrong, it's about keeping trying and getting better at getting it right.

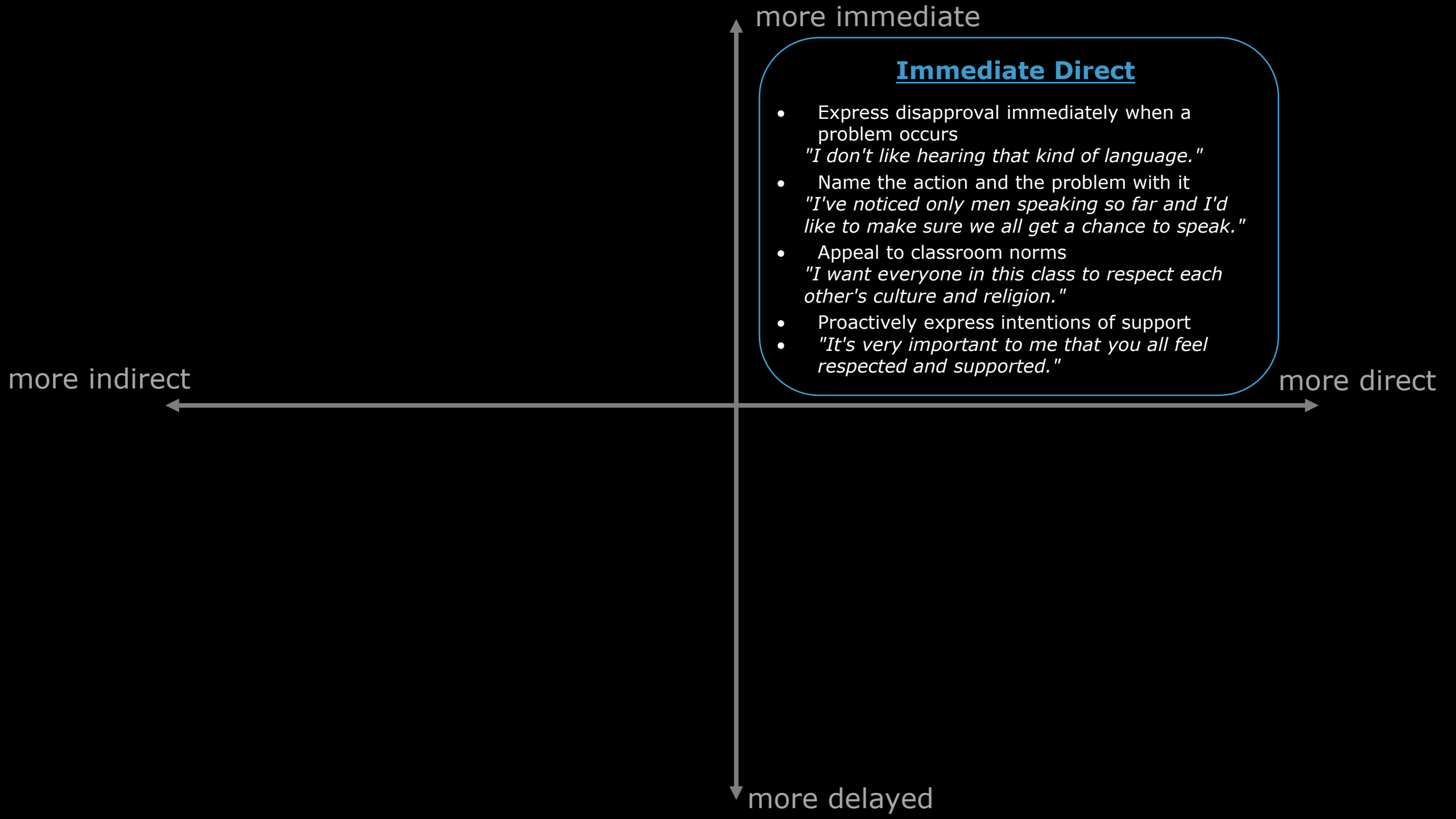
## **Act** using a specific strategy

A simple framework for how to act:

**more immediately** or **more delayed**

**more direct** or **more indirect**





## Immediate Indirect

- Change a class interaction  
*"Jamal I don't think I've heard from you yet." [If only one demographic are speaking.]*
- Change the subject from a problematic one  
*"Ok let's get back on track here."*
- Be responsive and caring to needs expressed  
*"I am so sorry to hear you are going through that."*  
*"I can tell everyone's feeling a bit stressed today."*

more indirect

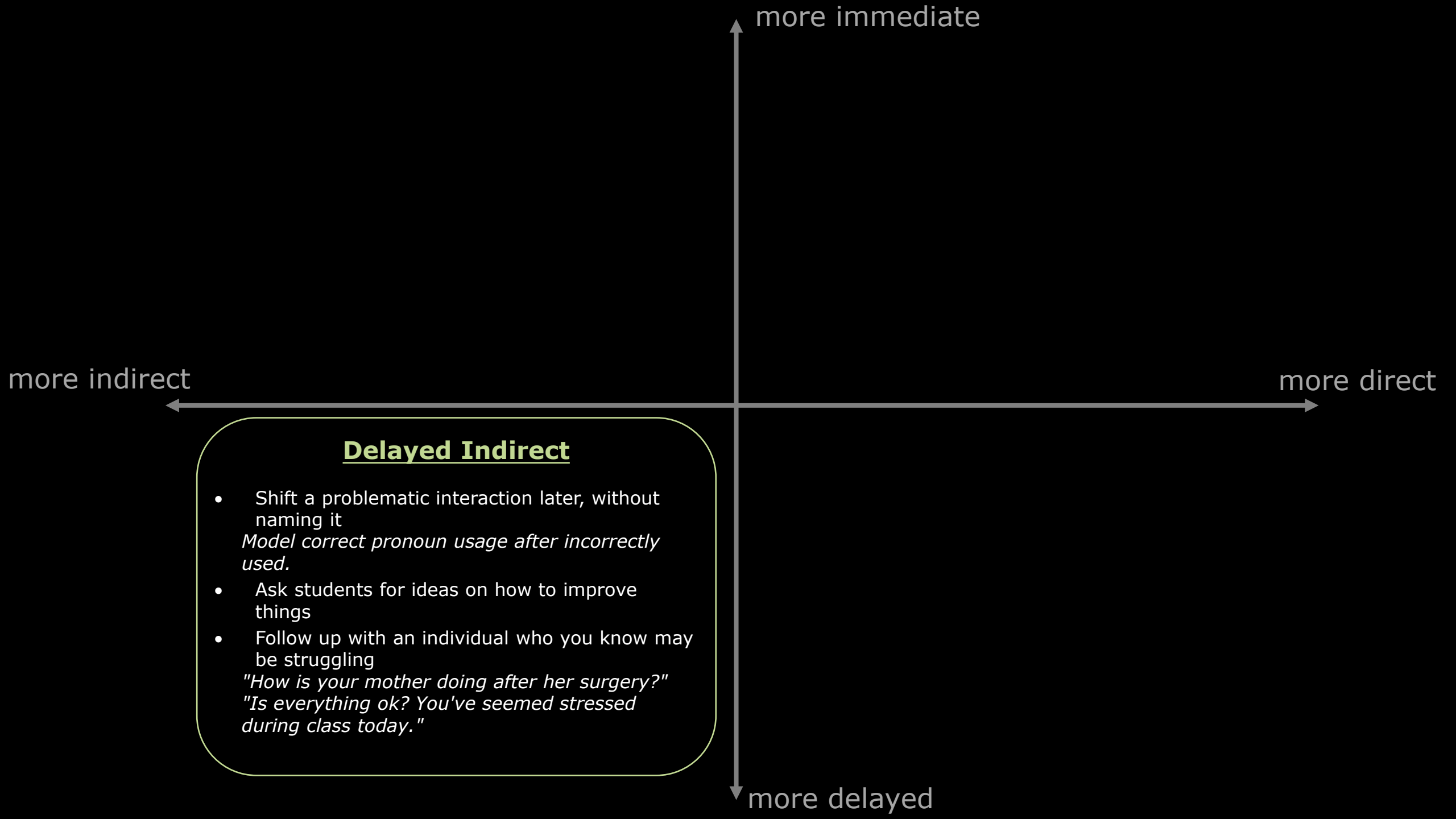
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more immediate

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### Immediate Direct

- Express disapproval immediately when a problem occurs  
*"I don't like hearing that kind of language."*
- Name the action and the problem with it  
*"I've noticed only men speaking so far and I'd like to make sure we all get a chance to speak."*
- Appeal to classroom norms  
*"I want everyone in this class to respect each other's culture and religion."*
- Proactively express intentions of support  
*"It's very important to me that you all feel respected and supported."*

more indirect

more direct

### Delayed Indirect

- Shift a problematic interaction later, without naming it  
*Model correct pronoun usage after incorrectly used.*
- Ask students for ideas on how to improve things
- Follow up with an individual who you know may be struggling  
*"How is your mother doing after her surgery?"*  
*"Is everything ok? You've seemed stressed during class today."*

### Delayed Direct

- Set a new policy in class  
*"Going forward, we are each going to present for a set amount of time and raise hands to offer feedback." [if some individuals are dominating]*
- Chat with an individual offline / later  
*"I didn't want to call you out in front of the group, but I didn't like the way you spoke to Jasmine in that meeting."*
- Ask students with advanced questions to come to office hours rather than take up a lot of class time.

more delayed

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**What's your most natural engagement style? Which of these boxes is your comfort zone?**

(Zoom chat or unmute)

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**What's an example of something you've tried for engaging towards equity, and which quadrant does it fit in?**

(Zoom chat or unmute)

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**Think about the benefits of each quadrant.**

**Think about how they may help you build tools for engaging proactively for equity.**

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- Ask students with advanced questions to come to office hours rather than take up a lot of class time.

**In a longer presentation we would practice noticing, interpreting, and improvising responses!**



# Engaging as a Force for Equity through our Pedagogy

Let's continue the discussion!

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