Inclusive Teaching and Learning

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What is Inclusive Teaching?

Inclusive teaching and learning denotes pedagogical methods, techniques and approaches that take into account the diverse needs and backgrounds of all students ensuring that they feel valued and welcomed in the classroom. Teaching inclusively means taking advantage of the diverse strengths learners and instructors bring to the classroom, as well as recognizing the interplay of systems of power and privilege. Inclusive teaching and learning practices are, therefore, instrumental in assuring and maintaining a democratic and positive educational environment in which all participants, regardless of viewpoints and backgrounds, are fully engaged and respected (Zumbrunn et al., 2014). Teaching inclusively also means that faculty have an awareness of the duty to respond to microaggressions in the classroom.

Interactions between faculty and students and among the students themselves in the classroom setting may be directly or indirectly influenced by student age, ability/disability, ethnicity, gender, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation and other characteristics (Hoffman and Toutant, 2018). The richly varied experiences, views, and backgrounds of faculty, staff and students make our classrooms and campus a healthy and robust teaching and learning community (Maruyama and Moreno, 2000; Gurin et al, 2002; Nomikoudis and Starr, 2016). In inclusive classrooms, the course is purposefully and unambiguously designed to include various viewpoints and wide-ranging experiences reflective of the demographic composition of the classroom.

"Even though some of us might wish to conceptualize our classrooms as culturally neutral or might choose to ignore the cultural dimensions, students cannot check their sociocultural identities at the door, nor can they instantly transcend their current level of development… Therefore, it is important that the pedagogical strategies we employ in the classroom reflect an understanding of social identity development so that we can anticipate the tensions that might occur in the classroom and be proactive about them" (Ambrose et. al., 2010, p. 169-170).

Strategies for Implementation

Facilitating Inclusive Discussions
- Create clear ground rules for classroom interactions and discussions from the very outset of the course or semester. In some cases, students may co-construct these ground rules. Examples of ground rules:
  - Listen carefully and do not interrupt—even when you are excited and feel an urge to respond.
  - Try not to generalize about groups (even groups with which you identify) and do not ask another person to speak as a representative of a group.
  - Support your arguments with evidence.
- Start each class and discussion with an objective and structure discussions with clear guidelines regarding appropriate boundaries for the discussion
- Guide the discussion by intentionally relating students' questions/comments back to the course content and learning objectives.
- Ask clarifying questions, challenge inaccurate information, ask students to integrate their discussion points with major points from their readings.
- Bring out ideas, perspectives, or solutions that were not yet represented or have not yet been adequately discussed. Be aware of privileged identities (Watt, 2007).

Increasing Discussion/Participation
- Ask students to bring in articles or video clips that relate to the discussion topic
- Assign students to teams in which they apply course concepts to current events or issues. Ask each group to share one or two major points from their work with the larger class.
- "Think-Pair-Share" – Ask the class a question, but have students individually write down their responses. Then ask students to pair-up with someone they don't know.
  - Provide explicit instructions about what you would like each person to share with their partner. Let the class know that after a few minutes you will indicate time is up and ask the person who has not yet shared to do so. After the pair discussion is concluded, reconvene the class and ask if anyone would like to volunteer one thing they learned. (Please refer to Think-Pair-Share Teaching Tool in a Flash.)
- "The Round" – A question is asked to the class and each person has the opportunity to respond briefly to the question. If a student does not wish to participate, he or she can "pass."
- Provide alternative means for contributing to the discussion, such as allowing questions or comments to be submitted on note cards.
- Consider alternative options in the online environment (Milheim, 2019).

Transforming Heated Moments Into Learning Opportunities
- During times of high emotion or conflict, you may need to remind participants about

the ground rules.
- Encourage   students to take a moment and engage in perspective taking and critically analyze multiple viewpoints
- Use writing assignments or paired-discussion as mechanisms to help students explore their thoughts and feelings   about a topic of discussion *before* the class discussion. In class, this method can be used to reduce tensions and allow for discussion after a period of time.
- Provide students with ideas on where they can gather additional information or suggest campus events they might attend   to increase their knowledge about a discussion topic.
- Discussion can also be delayed until the next class period if the issue is important to address, but you are not sure how to   do so in the moment.
- At the end of class discussion, summarize the major points as they relate to course objectives.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I respond when I witness microaggressions in the classroom?
   [Diverse Education (May 5, 2020](#)) recommends the following strategies:
   a) interrupt and redirect the harmful interaction; b) ask probing questions to help aggressors understand the harm done; c) clarify values and expectations; d) emphasize your own thoughts and feelings on the harm being done; e) provide next steps for the aggressor, such as making amends to those they have harmed or learning more about racism and microaggression.

2. I want to facilitate discussions related to current and potentially controversial topics, but I am reluctant because I do not have experience dealing with classroom conflict. How do I prepare for these discussions?
   It may be helpful to bring in someone at the beginning of the semester who has expertise in facilitating difficult discussions (e.g., staff from Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion or faculty in Peace and Conflict studies) just to speak with the class about establishing ground rules and assuring the class that learning does occur when multiple perspectives are shared in a respectful format.

3. What are some advantages for students in regard to inclusive teaching?
   - *Prepare students for a diverse workforce, clientele, and global environment*
   - *Students are more likely to take intellectual risks, persist with difficult material and retain learning across contexts*
   - *The cognitive load related to a non-inclusive climate for "others" may be reduced*

- *Increased sensitivity to and awareness of different cultures, different experiences*
- *Opportunities to celebrate and appreciate their perspectives, heritage and contributions*
- *Students naturally connect and comprehend course material that is relevant to them*
- *Undergo personal transformation and become an ally and an advocate*

4. What are some advantages for faculty in regard to inclusive teaching?
Faculty who are involved in integrating diversity into their curriculum report that their teaching is revitalized, their student evaluations improved, and their overall job satisfaction increased.

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