Inclusive Teaching Strategies

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The inclusive teaching strategies below are adopted and adapted from Sanger (2020), Adams-Santos et al. (2021), and Columbia CTL (2017).

1. Cultivate a classroom climate that fosters belonging for all learners.
2. Proactively learn about your students.
3. Establish and communicate clear expectations and share strategies for success.
4. Offer varied ways for students to demonstrate learning.
5. Incorporate inclusive course content.
6. Engage in self-assessment and self-reflection.

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1. Cultivate a classroom climate that fosters belonging for all learners.

Classroom climate is the best predictor of students' overall satisfaction with their institution (Graham & Gisi, 2000). Ambrose et al. (2010) define classroom climate as "the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environments in which our students learn". Classroom climate includes factors such as the quality of interactions between instructors and students, student-to-student relationships, the tone of the class, the psychological safety of the learning space, and the instructional materials and content.

An optimal classroom climate promotes a sense of belonging for all students. A key factor in promoting a sense of belonging is transitioning from a teacher-centered approach to a learning-centered approach, prioritizing students' diverse perspectives, experiences, interests, capacities, and needs.

Strategies:

- Build instructor-student rapport.
    - Learn your students' names.
    - Get to know your students through surveys, synchronous office hours, discussion boards, and in one-on-one communications.
- Build student-student rapport.
    - Structure opportunities for collaboration and interaction with peers (facilitated dialogue and discussion, peer reviews, etc.)
    - Model how to consider students' differing points of view and emphasize the need for students to adopt the same behavior with their peers.
- Treat each student as an individual.
    - Avoid making assumptions about students.
    - Allow students to self-identify as they wish and when they feel comfortable doing so.
- Convey the same level of confidence in the abilities of all your students.
    - Be balanced when acknowledging students' strengths, accomplishments, and areas for growth.
    - Emphasize high standards, assure that you will help students succeed, and put supports in place to ensure student success.
- Ask for feedback.
    - Set up informal, anonymous processes to receive feedback on climate, such as an anonymous midterm survey.

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2. **Proactively learn about your students.**

Essential to inclusivity is considering who our students are and what they need to achieve in their learning. Hockings (2010) states that "inclusive learning and teaching in higher education…embraces a view of the individual and individual difference as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others". Instructors must be mindful of the varied and intersectional identities present among their students, and actively encourage and invite them to share their experiences and insights in the classroom.

In addition to students' individual identities, consider other factors that impact students' learning experiences, such as what students have already studied in their degree program(s), differences in students' prior knowledge, and whether students have different disciplinary or educational backgrounds. Without awareness of who one's students are, educators may inadvertently construct their teaching based on beliefs and assumptions about students' capabilities, potentially resulting in some learners feeling under-challenged, overwhelmed, or disengaged (Hockings, 2010).

Strategies:

- Utilize introductory tasks and surveys to learn about your students.
    - o Survey students to learn basic information like prior education, prior knowledge about foundational course concepts, perceived learning preferences, native language, preferred gender pronouns, etc. In ERAU-W courses, you can also consider modifying the information requested from students in the "Send an Email to Your Instructor" activity to accomplish this goal.
        - ▪ Note that students may not want to disclose personal information due to stereotype threat, which is the psychological phenomenon where individuals, aware of negative stereotypes associated with their social group, may experience anxiety or concern about confirming those stereotypes. To mitigate this, consider embedding the reason you are asking students about themselves in the task description, and let students know that disclosure is optional.
        - ▪ In place of an email, a survey has the benefit of being able to be completed anonymously. This may encourage psychological safety, promoting disclosure while achieving the goal of broadening instructors' awareness of who their students are and what they may need. Surveys can be conducted throughout the term and can be used to gain an array of helpful information about one's students.
            - • If relevant, share the information you receive in anonymous form back with the students, which will help them also better understand one another and perhaps see common identities, interests, goals, and concerns.

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- Encourage students to share.
  - In course discussions, encourage students to share their experiences and academic interests. This can be accomplished through asking thoughtful discussion questions.
    - Ask targeted discussion questions that will help to gauge students' prior knowledge and learning.
    - Consider asking questions that encourage reflection on, for example, how students' prior knowledge has been applied in the class.

3. **Establish and communicate clear expectations and share strategies for success.**

   Instructors must be thoughtful and clear in conveying both course goals and specific learning objectives. As noted by Collier & Morgan (2008), students' success in higher education is contingent not only upon mastering course content but also on understanding the expectations of each professor. By making expectations explicit, students are better able to work toward and achieve specified goals.

   Strategies:

   - Avoid assumptions about students' prior knowledge.
     - Begin the course with activities that gauge students' baseline knowledge of key topics. This could be in the form of ungraded quizzes, surveys, or supplemental discussions.
     - Foster a classroom culture that values questioning and encourages students to seek clarification. Emphasize that asking for help is a strength and create opportunities for one-on-one conversations if needed.
     - Identify key concepts or skills that students should have acquired before the course and provide resources for those who may need review.
   - Elaborate on assessment criteria.
     - Anticipate catch points and provide clarification regarding what is expected and how to meet or exceed expectations.
     - Provide samples of exemplary work and share the process students can use to achieve exemplary results.
   - Don't let the grade speak for itself.
     - Consider asking students to submit not only their answers or papers, but also their process for arriving at those answers or writing their papers. Provide clear, constructive feedback on the final product and the process.
     - If common challenges are noticed across the class, consider sharing supplemental resources to bolster comprehension.
   - Share advice and helpful resources with students.
     - Provide your students with clear guidance on how to be successful on specific assignments, in the course, and, as relevant, in their degree programs and their careers.

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- Share supplemental resources with students that bolster comprehension of course content.
- Share institutional resources, such as tutoring services, with your students to support their success.

4. **Offer varied ways for students to demonstrate learning.**

Consider the potential obstacles that learners may face when trying to access and understand instructional materials. Reflect on how students with limited familiarity with your language, cultural references, or teaching methods might participate. Consider the challenges that students with visual or auditory impairments, for example, could encounter in your class. Providing varied options for students to demonstrate learning allows students to showcase their understanding in a manner that aligns with their strengths. Refer to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to support the effective implementation of this strategy.

Strategies:

- Help students reflect on what they bring to a task.
    - Incorporate reflective exercises.
        - Encourage self-assessment by asking students to evaluate their strengths and areas for improvement before starting a task.
        - Model reflection by sharing your reflection on tasks and projects.
    - Integrate metacognitive strategies into the learning process. Teach students how to set goals, plan their approach to a task, self-monitor, and reflect on their performance.
- Consider the possibilities for participation and assessment in a course.
    - Provide students with autonomy and choice…
        - in how a learning objective is reached.
        - through the tools used to gather information.
        - with how to practice and assess skills.
        - by surveying students about their strengths and needs.
        - in how classroom activities are designed.
    - Offer alternative assessments that allow students to articulate their understanding of the content.
    - Provide multiple opportunities and choices for expression.
        - Introduce a variety of ways for students to express their understanding. This may include transitioning an assessment from a paper to an oral presentation, a varied writing format, a collaborative project, etc.

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5. Incorporate inclusive course content.

Proactively incorporating inclusive, culturally relevant content contributes to a sense of belonging, which is foundational to effective learning. When students see their identities and experiences represented in the curriculum, it not only validates their perspectives but also enhances their engagement with the material. Incorporating culturally relevant content is associated with positive impacts in affective domains that are often correlated with higher test scores, such as increased motivation, increased interest in the content, increased ability to engage in content area discourse, and increased confidence when taking tests (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

Incorporating inclusive course content stands to benefit and enrich the learning experience of all students by exposing them to a variety of perspectives, cultures, and experiences. This exposure encourages critical thinking, helps foster collaboration and innovation, allows for the challenging of assumptions and biases, and helps prepare students to thrive in an increasingly globalized world.

Strategies:

- Select content that engages a diversity of ideas and perspectives.
  - Incorporate case studies from a variety of regions.
  - Incorporate content from authors of diverse backgrounds and identities.
  - Incorporate scholarly perspectives that may be underrepresented in your discipline.
- If broad representation in your discipline is not an option, invite critique and discussion.
- Do not assume that all students will recognize the cultural, literary, or historical references you use.
  - The references one might use when developing a course or when communicating with students are often second nature, particularly if they are commonly understood within one's own culture. Bear in mind that such references may prompt confusion, especially when being used to illustrate concepts. Provide context for cultural, literary, and historical references, and intentionally include references that are more universally recognizable.

6. **Engage in self-assessment and self-reflection.**

To foster inclusive learning environments, instructors must engage in critical reflection, examining both their social identities and pedagogical practices. This self-reflection, aided by tools like surveys and peer observations, allows faculty to continually improve their teaching methods.

interpret the classroom climate and content. Instructors should be receptive to such feedback, using it to adapt and model a reflective approach, creating a collaborative and transformative process that ultimately contributes to more inclusive learning environments.

Strategies:

- Engage in cultural introspection.

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- Reflect on your own culture and how it informs your teaching, as well as the cultures of your students and how they affect their approach to learning.
- Reflect on your own experiences as a learner and as a teacher.
  - Consider questions such as:
    - What are my identities, and how do others/my students perceive me?
    - What are my implicit (or explicit) biases?
    - How do I handle challenges in the classroom?
- Reflect on your inclusive teaching strategies.
- Seek feedback.
  - Seek student feedback beyond end-of-term student evaluations.
  - Seek feedback from peers.
  - Seek feedback from external evaluators, such as your RCTLE team.

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