The Coaching Chronicles

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DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

HOW TO MAKE YOUR TEACHING MORE INCLUSIVE

Read the full article on Inclusion here

Teaching inclusively means embracing student diversity in all forms — race, ethnicity, gender, disability, socioeconomic background, ideology, even personality traits like introversion — as an

asset. It means designing and teaching courses in ways that foster talent in all students, but especially those who come from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

Common Questions About Diversity and Inclusion

I don't teach about diversity. What does diversity have to do with my course, and why should I care?
Some instructors make the mistake of equating inclusive teaching with introducing current events or "diversity issues" into, say, a math course. Of course you should offer diverse content, texts, guest speakers, and so on, where they're relevant, and there's been plenty of talk about that in academe. But when we talk about teaching inclusively, we choose to focus on the teaching methods that apply to all courses.

Are the tools of inclusive teaching just hand-holding? Shouldn't students be expected to learn on their own?
Instead of hand-holding, consider the word "structure." Without structure in any situation, you leave it up to chance whether your goals are accomplished. For example, say you threw a party to bring together your single friends. They are far more likely to meet a variety of people if you plan icebreakers and activities (high structure) than if you simply provide space and time for the event (low structure). The same is true of learning: More structure means more students will engage and learn from you and their peers.

I understand these methods help certain students. But don't they harm the ones who don't need this kind of assistance?
Using a party analogy, an extroverted party lover is going to mingle and meet people in either a low- or high-structure event. But the introverts at the party who aren't comfortable with random mingling won't. Helping those who need the structure doesn't harm those who don't.

My course has a lot of content I need to get through. Can I really adapt these teaching methods to my discipline?
You're not alone in believing that your course is unique in having too much content to make any changes. Inclusion does not necessarily require a total redesign — just that you consider making some tweaks that can be the difference between retaining a more diverse population of students in your discipline, and not.

This all sounds good, but does it actually work?
Yes. Positive changes have been seen on all kinds of metrics, including narrowed achievement gaps, increased interest in our disciplines, fewer students off-task in our classrooms, and more students expressing their thanks at the end of a semester.

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3 Key Principles of Inclusive Teaching

Principle No. 1: Inclusive teaching is a mind-set.
For every teaching decision you make, ask yourself, "Who is being left out as a result of this approach?" Consider: When you lecture, students vary in their ability to stay focused, pull out key ideas, and organize the information. Is it "hand-holding" to provide a skeletal outline of your lecture in advance? Critics might think so. But the result is that all students leave class with a set of minimal notes, a clearer idea of the main points, and an expert's example of how ideas fit and flow together. And in the process, your students now have a good structure for how to take notes.

Principle No. 2: The more structure, the better for all students.
It's worth repeating: More structure works for most undergraduates, without harming those who don't need it. Students come to your classroom today with different cultural backgrounds, personalities, learning differences, and confidence levels. Their very diversity may seem overwhelming at times, but you can reach more of them by sharpening the structure of your syllabus, assignments, tests, and pedagogy. In our experience, all students appreciate and thrive from additional structure, and some benefit disproportionately.

Principle No. 3: Too little structure leaves too many students behind.
Some of the most traditional and common teaching methods — lecturing, cold-calling — aren't very inclusive, at least as they are commonly done. Certain faculty members even take pride in using the classroom to cull the "weak" students from the "strong." This is especially true in STEM fields, as we know from experience, since one of us teaches biology and the other statistics.

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ASK US ABOUT BEING A SIBME AMBASSADOR!

5 Ways to Interact Inclusively With Students

Get comfortable with periods of silence in your classroom.

Think-pair-share is a gateway technique to active learning. It's the versatile little black dress of inclusive teaching.

There it is, prominently in the name of the technique: *think*-pair-share. The thinking time is crucial for students to form and own their individual thoughts before pairing off and sharing. Otherwise, you risk seeing some students monopolize the discussion and others overwhelmed and left behind. That could cause quiet students to prematurely accept other people's ideas before considering their own, and lead those dominating the discussion to think their contributions are more valuable. As the instructor, you know that good ideas can come from any student.

Some instructors rush the "thinking" part of this exercise because they get nervous about too much extended silence. Even five seconds of silence in a classroom can feel like an eternity.

Get comfortable with the silence so that all students have the time they need to think. Tell the class, *"I'll give you two minutes to think or write silently, and then I'll prompt you to pair up with your classmates."* Be prepared to repeat that every time you use this technique. If you know that you feel discomfort with silence, you may want to use a timer to regulate it.

Add structure to small-group discussions.

A classwide discussion has its benefits, but not all students have the desire, confidence, or chance to participate. Small groups give students a low-pressure way to vet their ideas with peers. Use this time to walk around the classroom and eavesdrop, often with the goal of affirming the work of a few students who could use a confidence boost.

Yet this technique is not as inclusive as it could be, if you leave it to chance that the teams will function well (low structure). Here are some ways to add structure to small-group discussion:

- Assign and rotate roles. Students who are at ease in class discussion, like Michael, have a tendency to take over. By assigning and rotating roles (reporter, skeptic, facilitator), you increase the structure and level the playing field a bit.
- Take time to teach students how to participate in small groups. Be explicit about some of the "rules," such as exchanging names before they get started and putting away their cellphones or laptops.

- Provide clear instructions on a screen or worksheet. Many faculty members give a single oral prompt, but that leaves behind students who have hearing loss, who have learning differences, or who simply need to be reminded about the task at hand. Principle No. 2 about structure applies here, too: Some people need visual cues, but offering them certainly won't harm the other students. For more advice on this front, read about "universal design for learning."

Allow anonymous participation.
Not all participation and engagement in your course needs to be spoken. In a recent essay in *The Chronicle*, Sarah Rose Cavanagh reminds us that anxiety is a huge barrier to learning. Students who are introverts, who feel that they don't belong in a college classroom, or who hold a minority opinion on some issue may need to engage with the class in other modes besides public speaking. For example, some students with conservative viewpoints may be reluctant to participate in a class discussion if they perceive that nearly everyone else has a liberal viewpoint.

Here are two ways to use unspoken, anonymous participation in class:

- A low-tech approach: Offer a prompt and ask students to write an anonymous response on a notecard. Ask them to swap cards, and then swap again. Start a class discussion with a few students reading aloud the card in front of them.
- A high-tech solution: Choose a classroom-response system (clickers, web-based polling) or a discussion board in which students are anonymous to one another but not to you as the instructor.

Counteract self-perceptions that stunt student learning.
Two such self-perceptions that we frequently encounter are a fixed mind-set (versus growth mind-set) and impostor syndrome.
A fixed mind-set reveals itself in comments like "I'm not a math person" (uttered more than a few times in the history of higher education). To counter it, one of the simplest things you can do is talk about a growth mind-set in class. Your goal: Help students to see that intelligence is not a fixed, predetermined quality but something that can be developed via learning. Students may be particularly receptive after a challenging assignment or a midterm exam. Share in class a task that you found difficult — maybe learning how to speak a foreign language or play the guitar. Convey that learning is hard yet not impossible.

Connect with students personally.
This is a skill you may need to practice. Even if making personal connections with students comes naturally to you, it can be tricky to find the time, identify the appropriate words, and establish boundaries. But it's worth the risk. Here are some things that work:

Use their names. It's an easy yet powerful way to connect. Many students described how meaningful it was when an instructor made eye contact or called them by name. You can try simple hacks like having students use name tents or hang folders over desks with their names in large print. Don't assume that, just because you won't learn the names of *all* of them, you don't need to learn *any* of them. Having trouble pronouncing some names? Ask for a phonetic spelling or a recording — a request that is deeply appreciated by those of us with difficult names to pronounce ("How is Viji pronounced?").

Model sharing pronouns. On the first day of class and on your syllabus, share your pronouns and invite students to share theirs with you and with peers if they feel comfortable doing so. Students who identify as LGBTQIA will appreciate this welcoming gesture, and all students will see you modeling inclusive methods to avoid assumptions about students' gender identities.

Fire off a quick note. Send a note congratulating students who were successful on an early exam or paper or who substantially improved. Reach out to those who didn't do so well and express your willingness to help them. Check in with students who have missed a class or two. Whether through a mass email (now's a great time to learn how to do a mail merge incorporating a preferred name from your pre-course survey) or individual notes, reach out. The same principle behind learning their names applies here: Just because your notes won't reach every student doesn't mean you should abandon sending any.

Share some of who you are as a person. In his essay on "How to Teach a Good First Day of Class," James M. Lang reminds us, "We do not teach brains on sticks." Similarly, students are not taught by brains on sticks. When you talk content, and only content, you run the risk of losing a human connection with them. Be careful not to overshare or sidetrack your class sessions, but it's OK to strategically place a photo of your pet somewhere that students can see, or to offer an insight about yourself that is relevant to a class topic. Such small gestures help students see you as a whole person.

Acknowledge hard times. One teacher started class by saying how grateful she was for her time with students that day because she was experiencing something personally challenging and appreciated the respite. Surprisingly, several students contacted her afterward to express concern. Even more poignantly, they thanked her for not feeling that she had to mask being sad — it provided a model, they said, for how to do the same with their peers. Likewise (and unfortunately), there are events during the academic year that touch our students' lives. Some are personal and some are societal, and you may feel uncertain how to express concern without taking a side that may alienate some students. Here's a useful phrase you might keep in your back pocket: "I know this can be a tough time, and I want you to know I'm thinking about you."

By adding structure to your teaching and by taking steps to connect with your students personally and emotionally, you confirm for apprehensive students that they are not invisible. They belong in your classroom, and you care about them.

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

NC Student Success Center Professional Development-Spring 2021

Greetings,

The NC Student Success Center is happy to announce an excellent line up of professional development opportunities for all faculty and staff at our 58 colleges. We have presenters from a variety of our colleges along with national experts to round out our offerings. Please share this information widely at your college.

Register now for these exciting and informative workshops! You will be sent the Zoom links after registering for the workshops. A list by date is also attached for your convenience.

Additionally, remember to check out the Student Success Center Moodle site, ncssc-pd.org. We currently offer a six-module onboarding course called **Start Right Now** that has gotten rave reviews. It includes modules on Who We Are, What We Do, Who We Serve, Advising and Financial Aid, Best Practices for Teaching and Learning, and Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We will be launching six additional courses in January, so check back then. All courses are free and available to all colleges, faculty, and staff on demand.

Thank you,

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Student Success Center Spring 2021 PD Opportunities

Click this button to view the sessions!

Inclusive Teaching in Higher Education: Abdul's Story

How Will You Know If Your Inclusion Efforts Are Working?

Survey your students.
This one is the easiest. And we always learn something when we survey our own students. At the beginning of the semester, ask students what makes them feel included in a course. Check in again mid-semester to find out what they think could be improved, so that you can make a few meaningful

changes for the second half of the course. At the end of the semester, both of us have an added question on our student evaluations of teaching that reads: “In what ways did I (the instructor) convey that I cared for all students’ learning?”

Ask a peer to observe your class.
Because there is only so much a peer can focus on in a single class session, ask your colleague to comment specifically on whether you offer students a diversity of ways to participate, and whether your “instructor talk” is as inclusive as it could be. If you have an instructional team (co-instructors, teaching assistants, or undergraduate assistants), your teammates may have insights on the inclusivity front.

Collect data.
Given that one of us is a statistician, we hope you aren’t surprised by the suggestion that you collect and analyze some data. Talk with folks in your campus teaching-and-learning center about data you might want to track and how to analyze it. Start small by seeking to answer a particular question you care about.

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SCHEDULE A COACHING SESSION!

Do you have specific questions you want to have addressed? Would you like a one-on-one conversation with your Instructional Coach to get some ideas regarding instructional strategies?

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