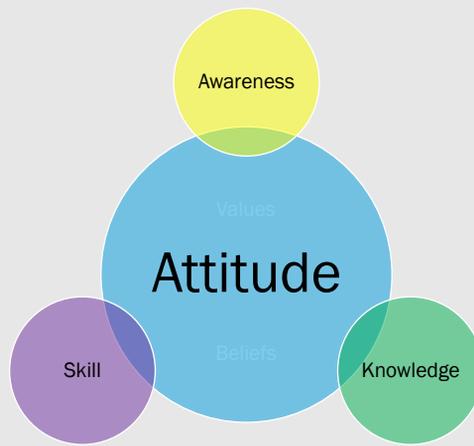


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Creating an Inclusive Environment in the Classroom



Components of Inclusive Competence



Ideally, there are competencies acquired to successfully implement inclusive strategies. Ideally, inclusive competencies begin with awareness of “otherness” that is in the classroom and consider our inclusive competence strengths and limitations. A fair question to ask ourselves is, “Do I really know my students’ backgrounds, experiences, and cultures?” And consider if your awareness is driven by assumptions, stereotypes, and biases. Seeking knowledge of various groups should follow our awareness. And the more knowledge we have about people of different backgrounds, the more likely we can avoid unnecessary mishaps in the classroom and facilitate an inclusive classroom environment. Awareness and knowledge is not enough without the skill to effectively manage differences. Our attitude is the constant supporter or disrupter. Values & beliefs impact the effectiveness on inclusivity because they convey the extent to which we are open to differing values, opinions, beliefs, and cultures. There are cases the Affirmative Action Office receives that speaks to this reality. Acquiring inclusive competencies is a continuous cycle, especially when becoming more aware of the various classroom identities, in general, and within individuals specifically.

Strategies to Create an Inclusive Classroom

Inclusive teaching includes course design, teaching strategies, and evaluation practices that cultivate a learning environment where all are treated equitably, have equal access to learning, and feel supported in their learning.

Instructors can implement the strategies that best suit them, their disciplines, and their students.



Here is a statement or description of inclusive teaching. Not everyone can utilize the same strategies in the same way. Depending on your academic field, you may have to extrapolate the following principles and concepts to your academic context.

Overall Syllabus

Use positive, welcoming, inviting, and inclusive language in your syllabus.

Examples:

- “Late work is eligible for 60% of the original points,” or
- “Attendance will benefit you in several ways,” or
- “You have what it takes to succeed in this course without engaging in academic misconduct. Do not jeopardize the hard work you’ve put into this course.”

Resource: <https://www.celt.iastate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/LearnerCenteredMindfulSyllabusChecklist-1.pdf>



These are some easy to do tips that instructors could consider for their syllabi...to use positive, welcoming, inviting, and inclusive language. The choice of words used in syllabi could help ease anxiety of some students based on unseen psychosocial factors.

Presenting Content

- **Avoid** phrases such as, “It’s easy to see...” or “I’m sure the answer is obvious to all...”.
- **Ensure** images and illustrations represent diverse appearances (e.g., genders, abilities, ages, etc.).
- **Incorporate** diverse student voices/perspectives/examples without stereotyping, spotlighting, or tokenizing.

Resource: <https://www.celt.iastate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/strategiescreateinclusivecourse.pdf>



These phrases can implicitly discourage students, who do not understand, from asking questions. Furthermore, if phrases have cultural implications, then the phrases could possibly be dismissive of diverse opinions and would facilitate the opposite of an inclusive classroom environment.

Presenting Content Example

The Scene:

- Teaching college course on Organizational Behavior and Ethics in the Arabian Gulf
- All students are citizens and nationals of the country
- Course taught in different classes by several teachers of different nationalities
- Using course material from the U.K. and U.S.
- Cultural mismatch of ethical decision making and choices



I will share a real example of what two of the suggestions on the previous slide look like in real time. [Dr. Ward shared a teaching experience of cultural mismatch between instructional material and student backgrounds]

Presenting Content Example cont.

1. **Avoided** saying “that’s not correct” or “that would be disastrous”...(e.g. **did not suggest the students’ way of thinking is incorrect**).
2. **Incorporate** diverse student voices...(e.g. **acknowledged cultural differences and avoided communicating ethnocentrism**)



Although many students supported ethical decision making that was not inline with the social responsibility objective, I avoided saying “that’s not correct” or conveying dismissive language that supports my cultural perspective, while excluding and not accepting the cultural lens which shaped their ethical decision making. Incorporating diverse student voices involved welcoming a lot of different answers and perspectives from the students. I acknowledged to the class that we were using “Western” books that are culturally influenced and might not always support their cultural influences and background. Just the acknowledgement showed that I was seeing, recognizing, and respecting. It was a class on social responsibility; therefore, I did have to guide the students toward the ethics of social responsibility. The objective was accomplished by changing the context of the text example we were reviewing, by repositioning the students in different roles within the example to generate different ethical perspectives and considerations that were more inline with the intended outcome.

Encourage Active Learning

- **Invite** students to complete projects on self-selected topics to draw on personal interests and relevance. Increase options for assignment format to allow students to choose oral presentation, research paper, and design project.
- **Treat** students as individuals whose ***identities are complex and unique***. Example: Ask open-ended questions to solicit students' reports of their experiences without calling on a single student to speak for their race, gender, culture, etc.

Resource: <https://www.celt.iastate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/strategiescreateinclusivecourse.pdf>



Diverse Student Identities are Complex and Unique

Video Source:

A Conversation with Latinos on Race

By Joe Brewster, Blair Foster, Michèle Stephenson

Published February 29, 2016 on NYTimes.com

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000004237305/a-conversation-with-latinos-on-race.html>



Diverse student identities are complex and unique, and we probably will not have the complete awareness and knowledge of the complexity and uniqueness that is in our classroom. Due to the complexity and uniqueness of students (and ourselves) is one of the reasons why personal narratives, and students being the authors of their own stories is a best practice in diverse classrooms and multicultural academic settings. The video referenced highlights this point. This video is used in some of my other diversity education sessions because it contains much more than this presentation and is highly represents diverse student identities among a singular ethnic group. The video provides awareness, understanding and knowledge through the narratives conveyed. Additionally, the video shows how open-ended questions can solicit students' reports of their experiences without calling on a single student to speak for their race, gender, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. As a bonus, it helps instructors recognize intersecting identities and an awareness of backgrounds that may not always be visible. This is important because inclusive strategies should not rely on "reading the room" of who is present and who is not, because we may not fully know who is present and who is not. Using generalizable approaches is preferred and prevents instructors from falling into stereotype-based approaches.

Student Feedback – Plus Delta

Students divide a sheet of paper into quadrants (like the table below).

- On the top left quadrant the student identifies what is working to enhance learning in the course.
- In the lower left quadrant the student writes what the student is doing to enhance their learning in the course.

PLUS	DELTA
What is helping me to learn in this class?	What changes could help me improve my learning?
What am I doing to improve my learning in this course?	What do I need to do to improve my learning in this course?

Resource: <https://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/assessment-and-evaluation/mid-term-formative-evaluation-using-a-plusdelta-assessment-technique/>



In order to know if instructors are successfully providing an inclusive environment, feedback is needed. It is very useful to be proactive and establish processes to receive anonymous feedback on the course climate and student learning. Make sure to review comments and report back to students at the next class session to validate their perspectives and improve the course to enhance student learning and inclusion. The current slide explains the PLUS side, the DELTA is explained on the next slide although it does not need much explanation because it appears in the figure.

Student Feedback – Plus Delta

Students divide a sheet of paper into quadrants (like the table below).

- In the upper right quadrant the student identifies what needs to change or improve in the course or teaching approach to enhance learning.
- In the lower right quadrant the student identifies what they need to change or improve in order to enhance his or her own learning.

PLUS	DELTA
What is helping me to learn in this class?	What changes could help me improve my learning?
What am I doing to improve my learning in this course?	What do I need to do to improve my learning in this course?

Resource: <https://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/assessment-and-evaluation/mid-term-formative-evaluation-using-a-plusdelta-assessment-technique/>



PennState

There are various ways to use Plus Delta. In one of my previous courses, I placed posted boards in the room and provided students with sticky notes to provide feedback. The posted boards had a drawn vertical line splitting the center and a + mark on the left, and – on the right side of the line. Students voluntarily offered feedback at the end of class prior to exciting. [assuming we will fully return to in-person instruction soon]

Additional Inclusive Learning Environment Strategies

- Examine your assumptions
- Learn and use students' names
- Use multiple and diverse examples
- Be mindful of low ability cues
- Provide accommodations for students with disabilities
- Review the Interfaith Calendar website (<http://www.interfaith-calendar.org/>) for world religion sacred dates when scheduling major projects, presentations, exams, and course events.
- Include achievement-based and positively impactful identity group representations when applicable

Resource: <https://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/creating-an-inclusive-classroom/creating-an-inclusive-learning-environment/>



These are additional strategies instructors can implement to create a productive and inclusive climate: **Examine your assumptions.** It is very common for instructors to assume that “familiar” students share their own background, but this is not necessarily so. Sometimes instructors might find themselves addressing students as if they all share their religion, sexual orientation, or economic class for example.

Learn and use students' names. Even in large classes, you can start with a few names and build up. At the very least, let students know you are trying. Usually students with very difficult names for some instructors to pronounce will provide an easier alternative. But they must be the one who suggests and provide an alternative.

Use multiple and diverse examples. Multiple examples increase the likelihood of students relating to at least one of them. Take care to include examples that include sexes and work across cultures. For example, the word “partners” instead of gendered identities.

Be mindful of low ability cues. To help students, some instructors inadvertently send mixed messages (e.g., “Sure, I’ll be happy to help you with this, I know your [group] or [someone with your background] has trouble with this course”). These cues communicate bias and stereotype threat, and encourage attributions focused on permanent, uncontrollable causes, which diminish students’ self-efficacy. Instead, it is more productive to focus on controllable causes, such as effort.

Provide accommodations for students with disabilities. Instructors are required by law to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. Contact Student Disability Resources if you have questions or observations of a student and think an accommodation is needed.

Review the Interfaith Calendar website (<http://www.interfaith-calendar.org/>) or one that Penn State provides for world religion sacred dates when scheduling major projects, presentations, exams, and course events. Students observing yearly religious practices may choose not to participate in some events or activities that coincide with those dates.

[last bullet] –include more than “cliché” references and typical narratives of diverse populations and representations. Consider including some group identity representations that a marginalized student would most likely feel proud to discuss openly.

Personal Assessment – Plus Delta – New Faculty Orientation

PLUS	DELTA
What is helping me to learn in this presentation/NFO?	What changes could help me improve my learning following this presentation/NFO?
What am I doing to improve my learning in this presentation/NFO?	What do I need to do to improve my learning following this presentation/NFO?



Try using this modified version of the Plus Delta to assess this presentation or the entire New Faculty Orientation as a method of providing feedback and to gauge your own development regarding this presentation and/or orientation.

Are you ready?

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