

Teaching Tip: Strategies for Inclusive Teaching



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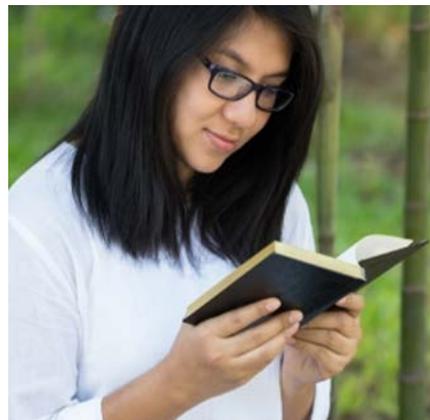


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As much as we are all alike, we are also dissimilar. Our students are different from us and each other in many ways. They have differing personal and cultural backgrounds; speak several languages; struggle with basic English literacy skills; have varied educational backgrounds and learning abilities; express contrasting college expectations; come from a wide-range of social and economic backgrounds; struggle with sexual identity issues; and some look very different from others – from both cultural and physical perspectives. As teachers, all these differences and similarities can be challenging. What are some inclusive teaching strategies that encourage equality among all of our students in our courses?

Assumptions and Biases

Being aware of our own assumptions and biases, and figuring out ways of addressing these in class, helps our students discover their own assumptions and biases. We can all learn from each other. Offering a variety of course materials and wide-ranging examples helps everyone feel more accepted and acknowledged. Highlighting a visible minority author or a physically challenged athlete are simple ways of being inclusive. Successful films, artists, and scientists from different eras and countries help our students become aware of others who may have struggled against a prevailing majority, in many contexts.

Acknowledge and Celebrate Differences

Students are usually more engaged in courses they can relate to personally. Offering a variety of course materials and examples from many sources is ideal. Allowing and encouraging students to choose areas of personal interest for assignments and to voice their own thoughts, beliefs, and concerns is also important. To share divergent views means taking risks and students will only do this if they feel respected, safe, and accepted in our courses.

Comfort Level Check

You can do a Comfort Level Check anytime in the semester. This can be done easily and anonymously. Distribute index cards to students and ask them to answer the following two questions (or similar ones):

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, please write the number that best indicates how comfortable you feel in this class ('respected' or 'accepted' are other words you may choose).
Scale: 1 = always uncomfortable, 2 = often uncomfortable, 3 = neutral,
4 = often comfortable, 5 = always comfortable.
2. Please indicate two suggestions that would help you and/or others feel more comfortable in this course.

The most important aspect of this Comfort Level Check and any [Classroom Assessment Technique](#) (CAT) is that we share all the results with our students in the next class and discuss ways that we will adapt the course, given the feedback we received. Listening to our students and making changes to address their concerns are important strategies for a respectful and inclusive classroom.

Cornell University has other excellent suggestions for [Inclusive Teaching Strategies](#) and [Universal Design](#) strategies in higher education.

For further ideas about strategies for Inclusive Teaching and Universal Design concepts, please contact [Wilma Brown](#) and view other online [Teaching Tips](#) on the [PDO web page](#).

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