Evidence-based Approaches to Creating Inclusive Classrooms

Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University; adapted by Anna Santucci
https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/teaching-learning-resources/inclusive-teaching

Approaches to getting to know your students:
☐ Consider administering a pre-test or questionnaire that can help you assess background knowledge, gather personal information, and/or allow students to share their motivations in the course.
☐ Ask students to write a pre-course reflection (e.g., Why did they sign up for this class? What are their goals in the course?). This can be done in class or emailed to you after class.
☐ Employ icebreakers to learn names and establish group communication.
☐ Offer and incentivize office hours. Explain to your students the purpose that office hours serve beyond simply answering questions or addressing difficulties in class, and give examples of ways students might use this time with you productively (Weaver & Qi, 2005).
☐ Arrange short one-on-one or small group meetings to take place in the first few weeks of class.

Approaches to fostering equitable participation:
☐ Emphasize your approachability: students who feel comfortable with their instructor are more likely to participate in class and to reach out to you if they are experiencing difficulties (Roberts & Friedman, 2013).
☐ Consider how your syllabus can help model the collective responsibility and citizenship you wish to see in your class: an invitational syllabus has the potential to help students perceive you and your course more positively (Harnish & Bridges, 2011; Palmer, Bach, & Streifer, 2014; Ludy et al., 2016), and small changes in syllabus tone can be effective for increasing students' motivation (Denton & Veloso, 2018).
☐ Before inviting verbal participation, allow processing time (e.g., wait time, minute paper) (Tanner, 2013).
☐ Develop norms or guidelines for participation, and consider involving students in creating them (Fox, 2004). Cogenerated guidelines can be extremely helpful for establishing the type of climate you wish to foster in your classroom and reminding students of this as the term progresses.
☐ In discussion, avoid asking a student to speak for an entire group; invite perspectives from all students without differentiating according to their experience with the topic (Fox, 2004).
☐ Experiment with discussion format, e.g., if using group or team projects, assign some planning discussions to take place online in synchronous text-based discussions (Fowler, 2015).
☐ Articulate how student participation will be evaluated in your course, and consider that there are multiple, flexible ways for students to participate: sometimes active listening, contemplative activity, and inviting others to speak can also be valuable contributions (Reda 2009).
☐ Invite student self-assessment of participation: periodic student self-assessment of their participation can boost learning and encourage more meaningful and frequent comments (Howard 2015).

Approaches to promoting active learning:
☐ Use a variety of teaching approaches. Approaches that use student interaction are most likely to enhance student learning in a diverse classroom (Gurin, 2000; Milem, 2000).
☐ Be explicit with students about the rationale for active learning (e.g., Why do we have group projects? Why speak in a class discussion?) and "what counts" for these activities (Howard, 2015).
☐ Be as transparent as possible with students about the reasons behind your choices in assignment design: interventions of this kind demonstrably enhance students' success, especially that of first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented college students (Winkelmes et al., 2016).
☐ Normalize what it means to be an effective reader (Bean, 2001; Lang, 2016; Wohl & Fine, 2017).

- ☐ Assign groups intentionally, aiming for heterogeneous groups (Finelli, Bergom & Mesa, 2011).
- ☐ Talk to students about what got you interested in the field and possible career paths in the area (O'Neal, et al., 2007).

Approaches to assessing students and giving feedback on their learning (e.g. tests, papers, projects):

- ☐ In giving feedback to students, note that high standards were used but you also have high expectations for the student (e.g., "I'm giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know that you can reach them") (Steele, 2011; Yaeger et al., 2014).
- ☐ In high-stakes group assignments, avoid solo status, or having students be the only member of their identity groups (Dasgupta, 2011; Meadows & Sekaquaptewa, 2013).
- ☐ At the beginning of the term, ask students to write about their core values and why those values are important to them (Miyake at al., 2010).
- ☐ Emphasize that tests and assignments are a diagnostic of students' current skill levels, which can be improved with practice, instead of a measure of permanent ability (Aronson, 2002).

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Some additional resources

ATL's Faculty Development page on "Inclusive Instruction" features a "Start Here" section on the importance of self-reflection; it also provides a list of resources available at URI:
https://web.uri.edu/teach/inclusive-instruction/

The Carl Wieman Science Education Initiative (CWSEI) multi-year project at The University of British Columbia aims at "achieving the most effective, evidence-based science education:"
http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca
Among the many materials offered is a concise "First Day of Class – Recommendations for Instructors" (2014): http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/files/First_Day_of_Class.pdf

If you are interested in developing a Diversity and Inclusion statement to include in your syllabi, rationales for this practice and sample statements are available online
(e.g. Sheridan Center, https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/teaching-learning-resources/inclusive-teaching;
Yale's CTL, https://ctl.yale.edu/FacultyResources/Diversity-Inclusion;
Eberly Center, https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/syllabus/checklist/diversitystatement.html)

Stanford Diversity and First-Gen Office and SPARQ Toolkits (Social Psychological Answers to Real-world Questions) created a collection of "activities for promoting equity in colleges and universities" based on social psychology research: http://sparqtools.org/diversity-inclusion-collection/

CATME – SMARTER Teamwork is a platform whose goal is to "prepare students to function effectively in teams and support faculty as they manage their students' team experiences:" http://info.catme.org

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