Inclusion feature article for the Learning Log

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**Why inclusivity matters in the classroom**

Inclusive classrooms are important for all students, regardless of which discipline you teach. Diversity and inclusion matter to your discipline because your students are diverse and it affects their success in your classroom. Your students have different backgrounds, races, ethnicities, cultures, countries, religions, sexualities, gender identities, and life experiences. Some are parents. Some are veterans. Some work part- or full-time.

Graduation gaps continue to persist for students of color, low-income students, and students who are underprepared for college (Gabriel 2018). These students come to college with preparation deficits compared to White, wealthy students. Those deficits are not your fault. However, the way we interact with these students in our classrooms can either exacerbate these gaps or reduce them. The way you teach your classes has a huge impact on student success and retention. Failing to acknowledge the diversity of students in your classroom hinders development for marginalized students – in other words, if you aren’t explicitly being inclusive, marginalized students will feel excluded (Gabriel 2018).

**Inclusive Teaching Strategies**

* *Learn your students’ preferred names and pronouns and using them regularly.*

Really use them! Talk to your students before class starts. Ask them about their weekend, or kids, or dogs, or sports team.

* *Be inclusive in your teaching materials.*
  + *Include people of different skin tones, gender expressions, and physical abilities in your visual aids*. You may need to specifically include an identity in your search terms, like “Asian athlete” or “person using a wheel-chair at a microscope,” because search algorithms are often biased toward White, able-bodied men.
  + *Use a diverse variety of names in your questions and examples.* Don’t be afraid to Google terms like “popular Latinx names” or “common Chinese names” if you need ideas.
  + *Highlight the work of women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, and disabled people in your discipline.* Do this even if you have to go dig for examples. Actually, do this *especially* if you have to dig for examples. The contributions of people of color and women and queer folk have historically been erased in all of our disciplines. If we only tell our students about the accomplishments of straight White men, we are perpetuating the notion that those are the only people who are successful in our disciplines. Go find other examples, both historical and of current contributors, and highlight them in your class. I give some example websites below.
  + *Use culturally-relevant material to help students see themselves in your field* (Gabriel 2018). Teach nutrition? Include material on healthy diets from other cultures. Teach literature, theatre, art, music, or dance? Include writings, pieces, and artistic styles from other cultures.
* *Teach your students how to learn.*

It doesn’t matter how good of a teacher you are if your students don’t know how to learn (McGuire 2015). Spending class time on learning strategies is one of the best ways to help reduce gaps for underprepared students. Teaching students learning strategies, including active reading, studying by teaching, and the study cycle (McGuire 2015) can make the difference between a student merely getting a passing grade and that student excelling and persisting in your discipline.

* *Be super clear about your expectations.*

Instructors unintentionally decrease student motivation when we are unclear about our expectations, which can be especially harmful for underprepared students (McGuire 2015). Your students cannot read your mind. The notion that “figuring out what I want is part of college” inherently disadvantages first generation students who lack support networks that can educate them about college expectations. Be exceedingly clear in your goals for the course and for each assignment (McGuire 2015). Provide students with detailed rubrics making expectations for each aspect of the assignment clear (Tobin & Behling 2018).

* *Make your lectures interactive*

The way you provide information to students has a big impact on inclusion in your classroom. Traditional lecture in which the instructor speaks and students take notes for most of the class period benefits affluent, White, male students and disadvantages everyone else (Gabriel 2018). This doesn’t mean that lectures are bad and that you should replace every lecture with an activity. Rather, make your lectures active. Adding active learning to lectures benefits all students, including White males, and erases learning gaps for Black, female, and first-generation students! (Gabriel 2018).  
How do you make your lecture interactive? Break your lecture into 5-10 minute chunks, and separate the chunks with activities that allow students to engage in higher-order thinking (Gabriel 2018). These don’t have to be long activities like case studies. Eight minutes of lecture followed by two minutes for a Think-Pair-Share asking students to relate what they just heard to something they already know, or even two or three multiple choice questions, will engage your students’ brains and keep them focused on content. Nilson (2016) and Major et al. (2016) both list several examples of activities of varying lengths to intersperse with lecture.

* *Provide lecture outlines*

Regardless of how you lecture, you can help your students focus on key information by providing a lecture outline (Gabriel 2018). If students are provided with no structure for taking notes, they will try to write down every word you say and miss the most important information. If they have exact copies of the lecture slides, they may not write down anything, even though writing helps move information into long-term memory. The happy medium is to provide a skeletal lecture outline (Gabriel 2018; Lang 2016) that shows students the structure of the lecture and highlights the important concepts, letting them know what to focus on.

Remember, your RISE Scholars are here to help you increase inclusion in your classroom. The RISE Scholar for your college is always happy to talk to you about this in more detail.

**Resources**

**Books cited in this article** are available to check out from the Learning Academy:

* Gabriel KF. 2018. Creating the path to success in the classroom: teaching to close the graduation gap for minority, first-generation, and academically underprepared students. Stylus Publishing, LLC.
* Lang JM. 2016. Small teaching: everyday lessons from the science of learning. Jossey-Bass: a Wiley Brand.
* Major CH, Harris MS, Zakrajsek T. 2016. Teaching for learning: 101 intentionally designed educational activities to put students on the path to success. Routledge.
* McGuire SY. 2015. Teach students how to learn: strategies you can incorporate into any course to improve student metacognition, study skills, and motivation. Stylus Publishing, LLC.
* Nilson LB. 2016. Teaching at its best: a research-based resource for college instructors. Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Imprint.
* Tobin TJ and Behling KT. 2018. Reach everyone, teach everyone: Universal Design for Learning in higher education. West Virginia University Press.

**Social Media**

Follow people who are different from you on social media. Follow trans people, people of color, queer folx, disabled people, fat people… anyone whose life experiences are different than yours! Listen to their stories. Read their books and blog posts. For example, Schuyler Bailar (Instagram Handle pinkmantaray) is the first trans NCAA Division 1 men’s athlete, and he makes educational posts about trans issues, racism, and other issues of systemic inequality every day on Instagram.

**Websites**  - you’ll notice that some of my websites focus on diverse scientists. I literally Googled “black scientists” and “women scientists” to find these resources to update my lecture content. You can do the same for any discipline!

1,000 inspiring Black scientists in America.

<http://crosstalk.cell.com/blog/1000-inspiring-black-scientists-in-america>

ACUE (Association of College and University Educators). Inclusive teaching practices toolkit.

<https://acue.org/inclusive-teaching-practices-toolkit/>

Council of Ontario Universities. 2017. Educator’s accessibility toolkit.

<https://accessiblecampus.ca/tools-resources/educators-tool-kit/>

Discover Magazine. 2002. The 50 most important women in science.

<https://www.discovermagazine.com/the-sciences/the-50-most-important-women-in-science>

Focused.Art.Media.Education. 2017. Microaggressions in the classroom. YouTube.

PBS Teachers Lounge. 2018. Ten Black scientists that science teachers should know about.

<https://www.pbs.org/education/blog/ten-black-scientists-that-science-teachers-should-know-about-and-free-resources>

Project Implicit.

<https://www.projectimplicit.net/>

Examine your own implicit biases with these online tests.

Sathy V and Hogan KA. The Chronicle of Higher Education. How to make your teaching more inclusive.

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-make-your-teaching-more-inclusive/>

UDL on campus: Universal Design for Learning in higher education.

<http://udloncampus.cast.org/page/udl_about>