

How do I make my teaching more inclusive?

Topic focus

- the nature of diversity in the classroom
- inclusive teaching strategies

Topic outcomes

- you will be able to identify the various elements of classroom diversity
- you will be more familiar with strategies to use to make your teaching more inclusive

'When I walk into a classroom at Deakin, I see young faces, mature age students, students from other countries and cultures, students with disabilities, and I assume students dealing with issues such as transition to university and mental health, amongst other things.'

Take a moment to reflect on this issue.

What challenges does this pose for *your* teaching?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Possible solutions

1. Reflect on what issues may cause some of your students to feel excluded – language, age, culture and so on.
2. In classroom discussions, establish ground rules for the way class members speak to each other and to you.
3. Approach the issue by remembering all students bring knowledge and life experiences to your classes, but each has a different 'entry point'.
4. Tap into this by developing learning activities which require students to first think about and explain what they know about a topic. Be careful that the topic(s) are gender balanced and culturally broad where possible.
5. Encourage a range of students to contribute to class discussion by nominating individuals to respond to questions or discussion.
6. Use a wide range of 'real world' examples in your teaching.
7. Combine students into small groups (by mixing up the diversity) and urge the group to share and combine their existing knowledge/experiences.
8. Ask groups to then use this combined knowledge to solve a new and challenging problem, perhaps from a cultural context with which students would not be familiar.
9. Use language that tends to be 'universal'
10. Occasionally ask students if they understand what you are saying.
11. Select case studies from different cultures – the www makes this achievable.
12. Encourage mature age students to share their experiences with younger students.
13. Design assessment tasks which seek interpretation and understanding rather than recall (where possible), and allow responses which reflect each individual's understanding of an issue.

Example:

Topic: 'Advertising'

- seek individual's perceptions of advertising
- encourage comments from students about the role of advertising in their particular culture
- using small groups of students, set the challenge to come up with a group consensus on the issue of '*is advertising a reflection of a society and culture at a given time or does a society/culture respond to advertising?*'.

Note: Many topics studied at university can be placed into a cultural context, allowing different perspectives to be contributed and shared.

More help

Here are some resources from which you may seek some advice. They are all annotated so as to assist you in making judgements about what might be useful advice for your particular teaching context. By exploring some or all of these resources, you may well be able to generate strategies to suit your particular circumstances.

1. http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/WiSE/gender.html - an extensive and practical discussion of ideas for achieving gender equity in science classrooms from Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, A series of common problems (such as how males can tend to dominate question and answer sessions) are analysed and then followed by some practical tips for helping teachers overcome these problems.
2. http://www.latrobe.edu.au/adu/inc_curriculum.htm#4 - a brief and basic discussion of both the theory of, and some practical suggestions for, more inclusive teaching.
3. <http://ctl.unc.edu/tfi2.html> - an extensive discussion from the University of North Carolina, looking at many aspects of diversity (some within an American context) in great detail. Offers practical suggestions for helping you to become more inclusive with your teaching.
4. <http://www.asu.edu/provost/intergroup/resources/dialogue-guidelines.pdf> - this discussion from Arizona State University offers several guidelines for creating an inclusive and positive climate within your classrooms.
5. http://ilp.anu.edu.au/Tutors/Considering_diversity.pdf - a short and simple message from ANU which really makes you think about how to define diversity.
6. <http://www.yorku.ca/srowley/tahomepage/incldiv.htm> - contains many useful strategies to use such as assisting painfully shy students, using small group work, involving students in identifying the reasons for some students feeling marginalised.
7. <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/diversity.html> - many practical ideas from Barbara Gross Davis on how to base your teaching on consideration of race, ethnicity and gender.
8. <http://www.iub.edu/~icy/divtips.html> - many helpful tips for teachers organised around teaching to particular diversity groups such as gender, race, age and religion.
9. <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/TFTwomen.html> - focuses on ensuring inclusion of women in classroom activities by providing a range of tips for teachers.
10. <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58474/hotmoments.html> - from Harvard, this site offers many sensible suggestions for handling 'hot moments' in a diverse classroom. Although American based, the principles discussed are transferable to Australian classrooms.
11. <http://depts.washington.edu/cid/web/resources/diversitytools.html> - contains links to a range of resources on diversity and inclusivity (University of Washington).

Alert !

Be alert to the fact that the very matters which lead some students to feel excluded, also impact on their perceptions of the role of teacher and student, as well as their approach to learning. The process of trying to encourage more inclusivity needs to be handled carefully and may be seen as threatening initially by some students. For example, some students from Asian countries may not be as familiar with the Western focus on constructing meaning and questioning their teacher.