DEDI PART 4: INCLUSION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

> This Food for Thought is part of a special 4-part series exploring approaches to *Decolonization, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion* (DEDI) in the context of teaching. We also encourage you to review York University's full 2023-2028 DEDI Strategy, which includes key principles, approaches, and strategies for the classroom and beyond.

WHAT IS IT?

Within the context of the York University community, inclusion refers to "enabling all individuals on our campuses to fully enjoy the opportunities the University offers creating a sense of belonging" (York University Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028, p. 10). Some core features of inclusion highlighted within the DEDI Strategy include making efforts to actively identify and address instances of oppression and discrimination, embrace differences which exist amongst the community, ensure that diverse perspectives are heard, acknowledged, and respected, and to provide supportive structures and social spaces where all members of the community can live and thrive in authentic and meaningful ways.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

As noted in the DEDI Strategy, inclusion it is closely tied to a sense of belonging. During COVID-19 pandemic, the rapid shift to remote and online learning caused a significant disruption in the learning experience for many of our undergraduate students. Due to these circumstances, it was difficult to create a sense of belonging within the community when students were alienated from their instructors and disconnected from their peers. Alienation and disconnect can impact student mental health and well-being, it can impact their performance in the classroom, and it can negatively influence retention rates of our student population.

However, making efforts to foster inclusion and create a sense of belonging is beneficial for students in a variety of ways. For instance, it can increase motivation and help with engagement in the course; it can provide meaning and purposefulness which allows students to gain more out of the learning experience; and since academic success is often enhanced when students feel a sense of belonging, a commitment towards incorporating inclusion can support students in their transition to higher education. Thus, fostering a sense of community and belonging inside and outside the classroom can provide support for students and promote their learning in positive ways.

HOW CAN INSTRUCTORS SUPPORT INCLUSION IN THEIR CLASSROOMS?

For instructors who are interested in implementing strategies of inclusion to support student learning in the classroom, consider the following suggestions:

1. **Incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) when designing your course and assignments.** By designing courses and assignments with the principles of UDL in mind, instructors can support inclusion by creating a learning atmosphere where all students are supported, and their learning needs can be met. For more information on how to implement this approach in the classroom, see our Food for Thought entry on UDL.

2. **Foster communities between groups of students to increase social engagemen**t. One way to support inclusion is to give students a chance to connect, collaborate, and share their learning with each other. For example, set aside dedicated time in class to give students a chance to discuss course topics and consider team-based assignments to give students a chance to work with each other. Furthermore, setting up Discord servers, WhatsApp chat groups, or even using eClass discussion forums can help create a sense of belonging inside and outside of the classroom and gives a chance for students to connect with each other and aids in the development of their interpersonal skills.

3. **Provide opportunities for student voices to be heard in the classroom.** Part of the sense of belonging is having the belief that your input matters and that your contributions are taken seriously in your community. As a result, give students a chance to directly contribute to the structure of your course. For example, work with students to establish classroom rules and expectations, invite students to work together in classroom management problem-solving, and check-in with students periodically to better understand their wants and needs and to ensure they feel supported in the classroom.

4. **Recognize and acknowledge the contributions of students as often as possible.** If a student raises a good question during a lecture or seminar, or makes a meaningful contribution to online forum posts, take the time to acknowledge student efforts to demonstrate that you care about their engagement with the course. By demonstrating to your students that you value their contributions to the classroom space, these acts of reciprocity can boost their self-confidence and motivation to learn which can have a positive impact on their learning experience.

5. **Treat all students with respect and dignity and lead by example.** Instructors play a significant role in creating inclusive learning environments by how they interact with their students. For instance, allowing students to speak in class without interrupting them, or avoiding letting students monopolize classroom debates and discussions are small ways to set the tone in your classroom. By modeling the type of behaviour and interaction you want your students to have, instructors can create inclusive spaces for everyone.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (Internal)

Decolonization, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at Glendon (DEDI).
https://www.yorku.ca/glendon/decolonization-equity-diversity-and-inclusion/

York University Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion. https://rights.info.yorku.ca/

York University Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028.
https://www.yorku.ca/vpepc/wp-content/uploads/sites/310/2023/03/22-201_DEDI-Strategy-2023-28_EN_r3.pdf

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (External)

Explore in 15-30 Minutes

Gamrat, C., Tiwari, S., & Ozkan Bekiroglu, S. (2022, March 10). Inclusive ADDIE: initial considerations for DEI pedagogy. https://er.educause.edu/articles/2022/3/inclusive-addie-initial-considerations-for-dei-pedagogy

Gizir, S. (2019). The sense of classroom belonging among pre-service teachers: Testing a theoretical model. *European Journal of Educational Research*, *8*(1), 87-97.

Mann, S. J. (2005). Alienation in the learning environment: a failure of community? *Studies in Higher Education*, *30*(1), 43-55.

Salisbury University, Center for the Advancement of Faculty Excellence (n.d.). Inclusive Pedagogy https://www.salisbury.edu/administration/academic-affairs/cafe/articles/inclusive-pedagogy.aspx

Spratt, J., & Florian, L. (2013). Applying the principles of inclusive pedagogy in initial teacher education: from university based course to classroom action. *Revista de Investigación en Educación 11*(3), 133-140.

Spratt, J., & Florian, L. (2015). Inclusive pedagogy: from learning to action. Supporting each individual in the context of 'everybody'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *49*, 89-96.

Explore in 30-60 minutes

Ahn, M. Y., & Davis, H. H. (2020). Four domains of students' sense of belonging to university. *Studies in Higher Education*, *45*(3), 622-634.

Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British educational research journal*, *37*(5), 813-828.

Florian, L., & Linklater, H. (2010). Preparing teachers for inclusive education: using inclusive pedagogy to enhance teaching and learning for all. *Cambridge journal of education*, *40*(4), 369-386.

Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2002). Investigating "sense of belonging" in first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *4*(3), 227-256.

Kember, D., Lee, K., & Li, N. (2001). Cultivating a sense of belonging in part-time students. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *20*(4), 326-341

Explore in 60+ minutes

Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS). (n.d.) Inclusive pedagogy toolkit. https://cndls.georgetown.edu/ip-toolkit/

Osterman, K. F. (2010). Teacher practice and students' sense of belonging. *International research handbook on values education and student wellbeing*, 239-260.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2018). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge

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