

Creating an Inclusive Classroom

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PURPOSE

This job aid offers practical strategies to help instructors cultivate a learning environment where all students feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed.

BACKGROUND

Inclusive classrooms recognize and accommodate the diversity of student backgrounds, identities, and experiences. Research shows that fostering inclusion enhances students' sense of belonging, which is strongly linked to higher engagement, motivation, and academic success (Strayhorn, 2012). Conversely, feelings of exclusion or isolation can create significant barriers to learning (University of Manitoba, n.d.).

Creating an inclusive classroom is an ongoing process that involves intentional course design, classroom culture, and teaching practices that acknowledge and reduce barriers for all learners.

HOW TO: STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSION

1. Classroom Environment and Community

- Foster respect and safety: Co-create guidelines for respectful communication and behaviour and reinforce that the classroom is a safe space for all voices.
- Invite feedback: Regularly check in with students about the classroom climate and encourage them to voice concerns.
- Celebrate diversity: Offer a diversity welcome statement expressing your support for students to bring their authentic selves to class.
- Encourage community: Learn students' names and acknowledge their individuality to build connection and trust.

2. Instructional Strategies

- Use varied teaching methods: Incorporate multiple modes of delivery (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) to reach diverse learners.
- Organize content clearly: Present materials in manageable segments with straightforward instructions.
- Facilitate active learning: Encourage collaboration through group work or crowdsourced notes.

- Allow time for questions: Build pauses for clarifications and review to support all processing speeds.

3. Curriculum and Design

- Include diverse perspectives: Integrate voices and examples from multiple backgrounds and experiences throughout your course content.
- Offer varied assessments: Move beyond traditional exams by incorporating projects, presentations, or multimedia assignments to allow students to demonstrate learning in ways that suit them best.

4. Learning Resources

- Audit course materials: Ensure texts and examples represent diversity authentically and respectfully.
- Choose accessible formats: Provide eBooks or screen-reader compatible materials for accessibility.
- Use inclusive language: Opt for gender-neutral and stereotype-free language, or discuss limitations openly when unavoidable.

5. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Practices

- Caption videos and lectures: Enable auto-captioning on Zoom and any recorded content to support all learners, including those with hearing impairments.
- Record sessions: Provide recordings for review and for students who may need flexible pacing.
- Provide materials early: Share slides, readings, and key resources in advance to help students prepare and reduce cognitive load.
- Read aloud visual content: Describe images, diagrams, and board work to support visual and auditory learners alike.

6. Get to Know Your Students

- Use surveys or informal check-ins to understand student backgrounds, learning preferences, and potential barriers.
- Be open to adjusting course plans based on student needs and feedback.

REFERENCES

- University of Michigan, CRLT. (n.d.). Creating Inclusive College Classrooms.
https://crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_1
- FLOE Project. (n.d.). Inclusive Learning Design Handbook.
<https://handbook.floeproject.org/introduction.html>



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