

# Strategies for Inclusive and Effective Teaching

Dr. Shihmei Barger  
CIRTL Diversity Institute  
University of Wisconsin–Madison  
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Today's student body represents a wide range of backgrounds and abilities. While such diversity is beneficial for learning, it also presents a challenge for instructors. To help instructors meet this challenge, the following strategies for inclusive and effective teaching have been identified and synthesized from the literature. Not all strategies are appropriate for every discipline or instructor, but employing these strategies can help create a learning environment that is conducive to all.

## *I. Share yourself with your students*

- Think about your cultural background and personal biases. How do you communicate non-verbally? How do you generally respond to conflict? What is your comfort level when dealing with diversity? (Banks, 1994; Saunders and Kardia, 2000; McKay, 2001; Border, 2001)
- Communicate to your students that you are committed to understanding your own biases, assumptions, and values as they pertain to diversity. One possibility is to include some comments about your heritage when you first introduce yourself. This lets your students know that heritage is valued and respected in your class. (Banks, 1994; Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; McKay, 2001)
- When relevant, share your cultural experiences with your students. Travel, research, and personal observations can all demonstrate your knowledge of cultural differences. (Banks, 1994)

## *II. Get to know your students better*

- Learn your students' names and correct pronunciations. When possible, call on students by name. (Bailey and Toro-Morn, 2004)
- Try to learn something unique about each student. (Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teaching Excellence, 2002)
- Provide opportunities for students to chat with you informally. The time before and after class is ideal for this. (Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teaching Excellence, 2002)

- Find out how your students prefer to learn and adjust your lectures and class activities accordingly. For example, you could ask your students to write an “autobiography” in which they explain how they like to learn, or provide them with a forum to openly discuss their learning styles (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; Saunders and Kardia, 2000; McKay, 2001).
- Ask your students what they already know about the course subject and find ways to build on that knowledge. (Fox and Hackerman, 2002)
- Find out what your students believe in. Cultural themes such as intellectual property, freedom of speech, nutrition and diet, and the environment are a great place to start. (Office for Professional Development, 2001)

### *III. Engage in positive interactions with your students*

- Use positive nonverbal behaviors (e.g., facial expressions, eye contact, body language, posturing, physical contact, smiling) to make students feel comfortable approaching you. (Talbert-Johnson, and Beran, 1999; Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teaching Excellence, 2002)
- State in your syllabus that accommodations can be made for students with disabilities and that students are welcome to meet with you during office hours to discuss their learning needs.
- Make eye contact with all students. (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; McKay, 2001; Bailey and Toro-Morn, 2004)
- Give your students your undivided attention. (Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teaching Excellence, 2002)
- Communicate high expectations for all students and encourage everyone to participate. (Wellman and others, 2000)
- Be careful in your use of humor, especially if it could be construed as condescending to people of a certain race, religion, nationality, culture or physical characteristic. (Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teaching Excellence, 2002)
- Respond to any statements that could be considered hurtful. Do not ignore racist, sexist, or culturally insensitive remarks made by students in class. (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; Wellman and others, 2000; McKay, 2001; Bailey and Toro-Morn, 2004)
- Treat classroom conflict as an opportunity for learning. (Saunders and Kardia, 2000)
- When presenting materials on issues of diverse social groups, cite research findings instead of expressing personal opinion. (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; McKay, 2001)

- Eliminate stereotypes from your lectures and your thinking. Avoid depicting all authority figures as men, for example, and keep an open mind about each of your students (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; McKay, 2001; Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teaching Excellence, 2002)
- Watch out for cultural and linguistic biases that may hinder learning. (Gollnick and Chinn, 2001)
- Notice if you have a tendency to favor one group over another when answering questions. (Saunders and Kardia, 2000)
- Be on the lookout for students who may not be achieving their full potential; try to help them overcome any academic difficulties. (Fox and Hackerman, 2002)

#### ***IV. Encourage open classroom dialogue***

- Encourage students to ask questions. Use open-ended questions, such as “Who would like to express a contradictory opinion?” (Border, 2001)
- Encourage all students to participate in discussions, but avoid putting anyone on the spot. Do not single anyone out to comment on issues related to their ethnic group or gender. (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; Saunders and Kardia, 2000; McKay, 2001)
- Establish rules for classroom dialogue. Demonstrate appropriate behavior and give students an opportunity to practice these behaviors with safe topics. (Saunders and Kardia, 2000)
- Encourage alternative perspectives with role playing, concept mapping, and guest speakers. (Office for Professional Development, 2001)
- Acknowledge and respond to students’ non-verbal communication. (Border, 2001)
- Provide structure for discussing controversial topics. Help students learn to express their ideas while listening to others. (Saunders and Kardia, 2000)

#### ***V. Facilitate balanced group work***

- Structure groups and teams so that membership and leadership roles are balanced across ethnic and gender groups. (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; McKay, 2001)
- Monitor leadership roles in group activities. (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; Office for Professional Development, 2001)

- Help students learn to work in groups by discussing group process issues in class and by addressing process issues as they arise. (Saunders and Kardia, 2000)
- Pair students who may be less proficient in English with culturally-sensitive classmates. (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 1995)

#### ***VI. Diversify course content***

- Balance fundamental understanding with practical problem-solving. (Felder and Silverman, 1988)
- Balance abstract concepts (e.g., principles, theories, mathematical models) with concrete information (e.g., facts, data, real or hypothetical experiments and their results). (Felder and Silverman, 1988)
- Examine the values of your discipline that may confuse or disturb students. (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 1995)

#### ***VII. Diversify pedagogy***

- Recognize that there are different learning styles and vary your instructional strategies to accommodate them. For example, classes may be divided into segments with different presentation styles, student activities, and student roles (e.g., lecture, discussion, problem solving, group work). (Davis, 1997)
- Provide opportunities for active learning, such as small group brainstorming. (Felder and Silverman, 1988)
- Include time for discussion and collaborative learning in lectures. (Border, 2001)
- Use pictures, schematics, graphs, and sketches to illustrate verbal material. Show films and conduct demonstrations. (Felder and Silverman, 1988)
- Incorporate multicultural examples and materials into lectures and discussions. (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; McKay, 2001)
- Use concrete examples and analogies. Solicit examples from students. (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 1995)
- Help students develop problem-solving skills by providing them with real-world examples and applications. (Fox and Hackerman, 2002)
- Give students time to think about what they've been told. (Felder and Silverman, 1988)

- Provide options in assignments to accommodate students' different learning styles and cultural backgrounds. (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995)
- Assign drill exercises for practice in basic methods and open-ended problems for analysis and synthesis. (Felder and Silverman, 1988)
- Let students cooperate on homework assignments if they wish. Active learners learn best when interacting with others. (Felder and Silverman, 1988)
- Employ a variety of assessment tools (e.g., multiple choice, mathematical thinking, performance assessment) to measure student learning. This will allow students of all learning styles to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. (National Institute for Science Education, 2005; Fox and Hackerman, 2002)

### ***VIII. Understand your practice***

- Use student evaluations to assess your inclusive practices. (Office for Professional Development, 2001)
- Seek feedback from your students at mid-semester. Under the categories of “Stop,” “Start,” and “Continue,” have students list what they would like you to stop doing, start doing, and continue doing to support their learning. At the next class summarize their suggestions and present possible implementations. Ask the students which suggestions they would like implemented for the remainder of the semester. (Hughes, 2001)
- Be aware of campus resources that can help you in the classroom. (Van Note Chism and Pruitt, 1995; Office for Professional Development, 2001)

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