

A CRITICAL REFLECTION TO IMPROVE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN THE CLASSROOM

Amy Anderson, Spokane Community College, Gonzaga University, Whitworth University

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this reflective practice was to critically examine an unexpected revelation that I did not have the skills needed to effectively teach in a diverse classroom. As a communication studies instructor at the community college and university level, I teach students from various backgrounds. Yet, I lacked knowledge about the elements of these students' identities that impact their learning, such as their differing abilities, genders, cultures, and socioeconomic statuses. After an intensive year of professional development on diversity, equity, and inclusion, I finally had the knowledge to better serve my students. Next, I reflected on how I could use these insights to improve my course curriculum, relationship with students, and teaching practices. Furthermore, I developed a checklist for educators to use as a self-reflection tool to better inform their teaching practices in a diverse classroom.

Keywords: critical reflection, diversity, equity, inclusion, curriculum, teacher-student relationships, teaching practices

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this reflective practice was to critically examine new insights about the skills needed to teach in diverse classrooms that I gained during professional development opportunities on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Furthermore, I wanted to use this new knowledge as a catalyst for improving my future teaching practices. Brookfield (2009) noted that critical reflection should be the center of educators' professional development as they challenge the power dynamic of traditional teaching methods. This type of reflection can help educators identify and analyze various problems in the classroom that occur in different social, cultural, and political contexts (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Saric & Steh, 2017). Then, teachers can change their classroom practices to better serve students whose identities differ from the hegemonic norm or dominant cultural view of those identities (Liu, 2015).

Background

For the last 11 years, I have worked as a communication studies professor at the community college and university levels. I teach courses that relate to communication in personal, social, and professional contexts. Although my educational background included coursework on intercultural communication, I was not trained to individualize my instruction to meet the needs of students that represent various backgrounds, including different genders, ages, socioeconomic statuses, academic levels, and cultures. In my educational experience, this type of teaching was not modeled. Similarly, I had never examined how my positionality might impact my students' learning experiences. As an instructor in a diverse classroom, I need the skills to acknowledge the remarkable differences of my students and adapt my curriculum and teaching practices to meet their needs.

Since I lacked the knowledge and skills to effectively teach in a diverse classroom, I enrolled

in several training courses to enhance my teaching skills. These professional development workshops and communities of practice (CoP) aimed to help educators create diverse, equity-minded, and inclusive classrooms. The classes often included speakers who could share their own lived experiences as minoritized or disenfranchised individuals. For example, several workshops focused on learning more about how to best serve students with differing abilities, genders, and cultural backgrounds. We also learned how to navigate the complexities of teaching students who have experienced trauma or mental health issues. The DEI CoP included like-minded staff and faculty who wanted to improve their equity-mindedness. The group created projects related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Then, the participants shared their projects with the CoP. For example, I created an open educational resource (OER) of a lesson and assignment on non-verbal microaggressions that other teachers or facilitators could utilize.

These professional development opportunities were transformational for me. I began to see my students as whole people and examined how their identities impact their learning experience in my classroom. Similarly, I explored the barriers these students face, such as a lack of resources or support. I began brainstorming ways to create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable classroom.

After this intensive training, I felt like I had a better understanding of how my identity impacts my teaching practices and how my students' identities impact their learning experiences. Furthermore, I believed that I had a better grasp of the skills needed to create an equity-minded classroom. With this new knowledge, I began developing a list of techniques to incorporate these new insights into my course curriculum and teaching practices. The list included tangible ways to improve my relationship with students, enhance my course content, and modify my instruction, assignments, and assessment techniques to be more equity-minded.

Positionality

Critically reflective self-analysis starts when teachers begin to identify, explore, and consider their stereotypes, biases, and attitudes (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). One of the most important

takeaways from these professional development courses was that my positionality in the classroom impacts my students. Positionality relates to one's identity, such as their race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, and how those elements affect our social and political context in unique ways (Cedillo & Bratta, 2019). In the classroom, my identity impacts my course content, relationships with students, and teaching practices. As a white female from an upper-middle-class home in a conservative area of the Pacific Northwest, I was privileged to have the familial and financial support to pursue a career in teaching. Since I was part of the dominant culture, I did not face many obstacles in my academic journey, nor did I have to hide parts of my identity. This positionality enables me to better relate to students who come from similar backgrounds. However, my identity and upbringing may differ from the lived experiences of many of my students, particularly those non-traditional students at the community college level. With this new knowledge on the varying components of my students' identities and how students' positionality impacts their learning, I was better equipped to teach in a diverse classroom.

Reflective Theories

My reflective approach was based on the theoretical foundation of Brookfield's (1995) Model of Reflection (see Figure 1). This model was designed to help practitioners identify and critically reflect on their assumptions about how to best help students learn (Brookfield, 2017). This model can also be used as a guide to challenge our assumptions to improve our teaching practice.

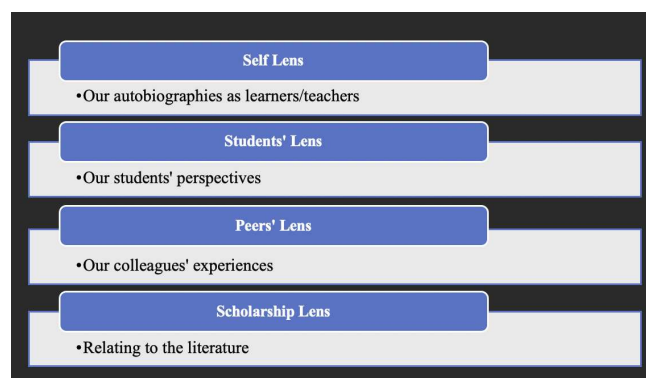


Figure 1. Four Lenses of Brookfield's (1995) Model of Reflection

The reflection process started with the self lens, which meant identifying how my

positionality impacted my teaching as well as uncovering which of my teaching practices could be strengthened (Brookfield, 1995). Next, I began to look at the problem through the students' lens. This step involved looking at how students may have perceived my words and actions in the classroom (Brookfield, 1995). The third lens of Brookfield's (1995) Model of Reflection involved examining my colleagues' experiences. Through the connections that I made in the professional development courses, I gained input from my colleagues about their desire to improve their DEI teaching practices. The final step included looking at the problem through the lens of the existing literature in order to uncover the economic, social, and political processes impacting my teaching (Brookfield, 1998). The critical reflection process can help educators contribute to new insights, reframe existing knowledge, and implement changes that will support students' learning (Saric & Steh, 2017).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teachers spend years at school specializing in an area of study. Although these teachers are experts in their field, they often lack training on cultural diversity, and many educators seek additional training to prepare them to teach in diverse classrooms (Gay, 2002; Hinojosa Pareja & López López, 2016). For years, I utilized my training in intercultural communication to interact with a variety of different students in my classes. As time passed, I realized that I did not have the necessary skills to serve all my students. My positionality and privilege do not represent the lived experiences of many of the learners in my class. This realization came to light as I learned about the many obstacles that my students face, such as food or housing insecurity. When I was a student, I was living in a house in an upper-class neighborhood. I was startled to think of college students attending school while living in their vehicles. After this realization, I committed myself to professional development and started the process of transforming my teaching. While attending training courses, I noticed that many other instructors were also faced with the same problem. We shared a similar feeling that we were ill-prepared to teach in diverse classrooms (Gay, 2002), and we shared a desire to better ourselves

and our teaching practices. Gay (2002) noted that these inadequacies could be remedied as educators acquire more knowledge about different identities in a wide variety of disciplines.

Throughout my professional development, I reflected on my current teaching practices. I identified three areas that I could improve in order to create a more diverse, equity-minded, and inclusive classroom (see Figure 2). First, I needed to adapt my course curriculum to represent the students whose identities do not align with the hegemonic norm that exists around that identity, particularly marginalized groups of students (Liu, 2015). Second, I acknowledged that I needed to take steps to improve my relationships with the students in my class. Third, I decided that it would be important for me to individualize my teaching practices to help students with different abilities and backgrounds.

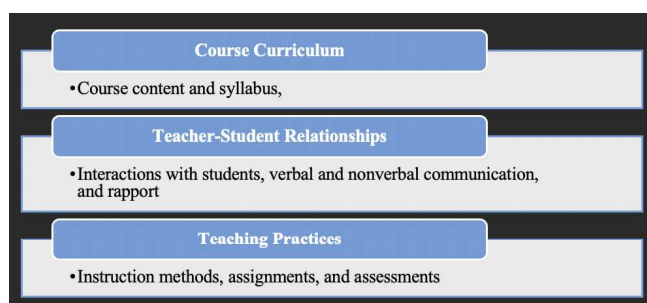


Figure 2. Three Problem Areas Revealed During Critical Reflection

ACTIVITY/PROJECT DESCRIPTION

When educators can use critical reflection as a basis for developing their professional skills, they begin to learn from their experiences in the classroom (Saric & Steh, 2017). My reflection journey started in the classroom as I examined areas in my teaching practices that could be strengthened (Brookfield, 1995). I began looking at my assumptions and biases and how these might be seen in my course content, relationships with students, and teaching practices. The next step in the reflection process was to see how my students, particularly those from marginalized groups, perceived the curriculum, my interactions with students, and my teaching techniques. Additionally, I began communicating with my colleagues to see if they also shared a feeling of inadequacy regarding their ability to create an equity-minded classroom. Many of my fellow educators also voiced a concern that they needed

more training to serve their students. Finally, I dove into the literature to explore if these concerns were supported by research.

Course Content and Curriculum

The first area that I began to work on was the course curriculum and content in my communication classes. Culturally responsive pedagogy “recognizes the rich and varied wealth, knowledge, and skills of diverse learners” (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017, p. 23). I was committed to changing my lectures, assignments, and activities to demonstrate my respect for all students.

I started this process by re-examining my syllabi. The course outline or syllabus is often the first document that students see. I wanted to make sure that all students, especially those from marginalized groups, started class feeling confident that this would be a safe learning environment. The syllabus needed to be a document that reflected my desire to create an inclusive classroom and show my respect for the often complex aspects of diversity (Fuentes et al., 2021).

Next, I began to explore what aspects of my course content and curriculum promoted and addressed areas directly related to my diverse student population. Since I teach communication courses, I already had components of intercultural communication interwoven through nearly every course that I teach. However, I noticed that there were opportunities for me to acknowledge the accomplishments of prominent cultural figures and celebrate multiculturalism in the classroom. Furthermore, I knew that I could improve the variety of instructional materials and offer readings from culturally diverse authors on topics representing my students’ racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, I could add activities in class to discuss the unique lived experiences of individuals with different abilities, socioeconomic statuses, and gender identities. The process began with an inventory of my previous course content and ended with an overhaul to shift the course content to be more inclusive.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Throughout my teaching career, I have always felt proud that I create positive relationships with my students. However, as I looked at my teaching through these reflective lenses, I realized that I could improve my rapport with students. This work

begins with tangible steps to make my classroom climate more diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

I make a first impression with students as they enter my classroom on their first day of school. In the past, I handed out a personal data sheet where students could jot down any obstacles that might hinder their learning in my class so that I could accommodate and offer them resources that might help them succeed in my classes. However, after learning more about the diverse students that I am serving, I decided to expand this document so that my students felt more supported. The revised personal data sheet included questions about students’ preferred names and pronouns. I believe that these questions show respect for students because misnaming or misgendering students can cause students significant distress (Beemyn, 2003). Then, as students enter class each day, I can greet them by their preferred name so they feel welcome and included.

My verbal and nonverbal interactions with students also impact our relationship. Verbal communication that builds a positive teacher-student relationship in the class includes equitably acknowledging students’ questions and answers, seeking perspectives of all students in the class, as well as asking students about their backgrounds, goals, interests, and barriers that they experience. Likewise, positive nonverbal communication impacts students’ relationships with their teachers. Culturally appropriate proximity, gestures, and eye contact show respect for students’ cultural norms. Furthermore, it is important to understand that students have implicit and explicit cultures. In other words, there are areas of each students’ identity that are out in the open and other areas of their identity that may not be visible. As teachers get to know their students as whole people with unique identities, they can begin to build a positive relationship with them.

As I reflected on other ways to improve my relationships with students, I decided to re-examine my availability before and after class. In the past, I gave students my e-mail address and information about my office hours. However, through these reflective lenses, I could see that I might improve my rapport with students if I made myself more available. Since not all students have access to the same resources, I wanted to offer different modes of communication as well as options for timing.

My goal was to be available to all students so they could ask questions or seek support.

Teaching Practices: Instruction, Assignments, and Assessment

Teaching practices that acknowledge students' differences and validate students' identities increase students' success in schools (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). Specifically, instruction of course material, assignments to improve learning, and assessment of learned skills can and should be diverse, equity-minded, and inclusive. Through the reflective lenses of Brookfield's (1995) Model of Reflection, I re-evaluated my teaching practices. I discovered that there were areas in my teaching practices that needed strengthening.

First, I wanted to explore how my instructional methods supported students' learning needs and abilities. Although I incorporate many different instruction methods in my classes, I found areas where I could better serve students. For example, a typical class might include a short lecture, small and large group discussion, and an activity. However, I did not consider that students who struggle with hearing or visual impairment might not fully understand the content in the lecture. Also, students whose primary language is not English may be translating the lecture as I was speaking in class. As a result, I began offering students a copy of the PowerPoint before or after the lecture so they could review them on their own time. I also told my students that they could record the lectures if that would be helpful.

Clarity of instructions and expectations for classwork was also an important area of my teaching practices that I could strengthen. I began using the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) method to reduce systemic inequities in the coursework and clarify the directions and expectations for my assignments (TILT Higher Ed, 2014). By using the TILT method, assignments have a clear purpose, directions, criteria for success. This process is ongoing, and I continue to revise rubrics and expand on the purpose of assignments.

I also re-evaluated my class assessments to ensure that they were unbiased and balanced. This process included offering more of a variety of assessment techniques as well as adding quiz or test questions that represented the cultural diversity of my students. Furthermore, I gave

students more autonomy in the classroom and began offering students the option to choose diverse reading materials or speech topics. For example, I gave my students a persuasive speech assignment, and they were able to pick any issue related to civic engagement or social justice. Since the students had the freedom to choose any issue within these categories that they felt passionate about, they were more invested in the topic.

REASONS FOR THE PROBLEM

As a higher education instructor, my goal is to help students experience academic success. I strive to give them tools to help them apply communication concepts to their personal and professional lives. However, through this reflection process, I realized that I needed to strengthen areas of my teaching. Ultimately, I had content knowledge but needed to continue to improve my teaching practice to better meet the needs of my diverse student population. There are two reasons that I struggled to create a diverse, equity-minded, and inclusive classroom.

First, I lacked knowledge about the diverse areas of my students' identities and felt overwhelmed with how much I needed to learn. I teach students of different ages, races, religions, abilities, cultures, genders, and socioeconomic statuses. These students all deserve a quality education, yet, I felt ill-prepared to meet their individual needs. Ultimately, I needed to take the time to learn about the needs and challenges of these different student groups to better prepare me to teach them effectively.

Second, I did not have the resources to create an equitable classroom. In the community college classroom, many students face obstacles to their learning. This non-traditional student population is often balancing work, school, and family responsibilities. Many students are academically underprepared for college and need help with study skills and time management (Martin et al., 2014). Moreover, many community college students have a lower socioeconomic status, and many even struggle with food and housing insecurity (Martin et al., 2014). Although I desired to help all my students succeed in class, I did not have the resources to even the playing field.

Upon further reflection, the reasons for the problem had similarities and differences.

The obstacles were similar because my lack of knowledge and resources focus on something many educators are missing. Most teachers are experts in their field, yet many lack the knowledge and skills to teach in diverse classrooms. Furthermore, most educators do not have the financial means to create an equitable classroom for all learners. The reasons for the problem were also different. I could only overcome one of these two challenges. I could learn more about diversity through professional development if I took the time to immerse myself. Yet, I could not acquire the resources to make the classroom truly equitable.

EVALUATION OF REASONS FOR THE PROBLEM

Modern classrooms are filled with diverse learners. To meet the needs of this unique student population, teachers must learn skills to create inclusive and equity-minded classrooms. However, educators are faced with two challenges. First, they may not know about the various components that make up each student's identity and how these elements impact their learning. Second, they may not have the resources to assist each student in their classes. In order to evaluate these challenges, I needed to compare them with existing scientific literature.

Lack of Knowledge

In the classroom, the term "diversity" might be referring to students' race, ethnicity, gender, ability, religion, socioeconomic status, or other components of their identities. Teachers may desire to view their students as whole people and learn what makes them unique in order to individualize their classroom practices; however, this is a daunting task. Many teachers lack the knowledge and skills necessary to provide a quality education for students who represent differing abilities and who often come from ethnically and economically different perspectives from their own (Bonner et al., 2018; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Shulman and Mesa-Bains (2018) noted that "when teachers are unfamiliar with the culturally diverse backgrounds of their students, their frustration is heightened by uncertainty about succeeding at basic communication" (p. 5). A lack of knowledge about the various elements of students' identities deters teachers from creating diverse, equitable, and inclusive classrooms.

However, when teachers cannot create

equitable opportunities for their students, regardless of their skills, abilities, or backgrounds, there are profound implications on academic outcomes (Villegas, 2018). For example, in my communication studies courses, students may be asked to create a PowerPoint visual aid for a speech. However, not every student has access to a computer or has the technological skills to create a PowerPoint presentation. Therefore, this assignment is not equitable for all students. Furthermore, if students' grades are impacted by this inequitable assignment, they are at a disadvantage compared to students who have the necessary resources for this assignment.

Although a lack of knowledge about DEI seems overwhelming, this obstacle to creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive classroom can be overcome. Teachers can study, practice, and reflect on ways to learn about the cultural experiences of those who are different from themselves (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). Yet, developing cultural competence is a journey that requires support and guidance (Bonner et al., 2018). School leaders need to support professional development for faculty regarding cultural diversity in the classroom (Szelei et al., 2020). Luckily, I feel very supported by the institutions where I work. There are many opportunities for faculty and staff to enhance their knowledge about these critical topics. Ultimately, I just needed to take the time to immerse myself in this learning process and overcome my lack of knowledge for the sake of my students.

Lack of Resources

Many students, particularly non-traditional students, have economic obstacles that distract them from their studies and hinder their academic success (Ambrose, 2016; Hallett & Freas, 2018). In fact, many of these students who struggle with food or housing insecurity must make sacrifices to attend college (Hallett & Freas, 2018; Innis et al., 2019; Martinez et al., 2018). When students have to choose between their basic dietary or housing needs and paying for their tuition, they are in a crisis (Anderson, 2021). As a teacher who would like to create an equitable classroom, I felt discouraged that I did not have the resources to help students meet their basic needs.

Although a teacher may not be able to solely provide resources to make learning equitable in

class, instructors can still inform students about available resources offered by the campus and larger community. The college where I work has a food pantry where students can access food and hygiene items throughout the quarter. This service can help fill the gap for students who are struggling with food insecurity. Students can also borrow laptops and mobile hot spots so they can complete their assignments. If students need care for their physical or mental health, there is also a health clinic on campus. Similarly, students struggling with housing insecurity can stay at shelters that are located several miles from campus. These may not be long-term solutions to learners' problems, but these resources may get struggling students through challenging times.

DECISION

Brookfield's (1995) Model of Reflection was designed to help practitioners identify and critically reflect on their assumptions about how to best help students learn (Brookfield, 2017). In the past, I used my knowledge of intercultural communication to communicate with my diverse student population. However, it became apparent that I lacked the skills to create a diverse, inclusive, and equity-minded classroom. The solution to this problem was to immerse myself in professional development classes to learn more about how my positionality permeates the classroom. I also needed to explore how my students' identities, such as race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, abilities, and sexual orientation, might impact their learning (see Figure 3).

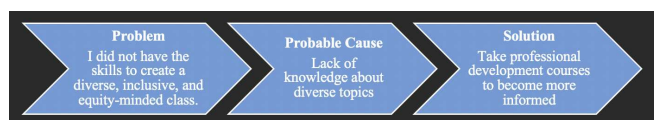


Figure 3. The Problem, Probable Cause, and Solution to the Problem before Reflection

Prior to these professional development courses, the biggest obstacle that I faced when creating an equity-minded classroom was a lack of knowledge. I was unaware of how my positionality impacted student learning. I also mistakenly assumed that education was equitable, and I realized that this narrative stemmed from my privilege and lived experiences. Additionally, because I am part of the dominant culture, I was unaware of the complexities of diverse students'

identities and how they impacted their learning. Similarly, I did not know that many other educators also struggled to create an inclusive classroom climate for this exact reason. Ultimately, I needed to be better informed.

After attending a series of professional development courses on creating diverse, inclusive, and equity-minded classrooms, the critical reflection process began. First, I explored how my positionality impacted my teaching. Next, I re-examined my teaching practices through the self, student, colleague, and literature lenses. To create a classroom that supports diverse students, I needed to improve my course curriculum, relationship with students, and teaching practices (see Figure 4).

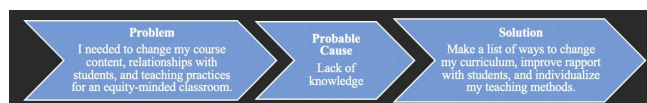


Figure 4. The Problem, the Probable Cause, and the Solution after Reflection

Once I gained the necessary knowledge about the needs of diverse students, I reflected on how this might impact my teaching practice. I was able to identify tangible ways to revise my course content, enhance my relationship with students, and improve my teaching practices. Next, I began to list ways to change these areas in the classroom as they are all crucial components for creating a positive classroom climate (see Appendix).

REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

Critically reflective teaching occurs when educators thoroughly examine their teaching practices (Brookfield, 2017). The process begins with identifying assumptions about how students learn, which might come from our own experiences as teachers or learners. Through the self and student lenses, I began looking at how my academic journey differed from my students' experiences (Brookfield, 2017). For example, I grew up in a white, upper-middle-class home with two highly educated parents. They supported my education and gave me the resources and support to continue my education through the doctoral level. However, many students do not have the same resources or support for academic success.

I lacked knowledge about the challenges that other students face because they did not align with my own experience as a learner. Similarly, I was

ill-prepared to teach students whose identities I didn't fully understand. With this new realization, I knew that I needed to continue learning about the various components of diversity that impact student learning. Furthermore, I needed to modify my course curriculum, interact differently with my students, and individualize my teaching practices to meet the various needs of my students.

Through the peer lens, I also examined the problem from the perspective of my colleagues (Brookfield, 1995, 2017). I realized that other educators could benefit from knowledge on DEI teaching practices in order to improve their support for students. Since I had gotten so much out of the professional development courses and the reflective practice, I decided to share these new insights with my peers. I created a DEI checklist of ways to tangibly improve the classroom experience for diverse students. Throughout the development of this checklist, I received feedback from both students and colleagues. After student and peer review, the document evolved and, in the future, this DEI checklist may also be used as a professional development tool for other educators.

I hope that other teachers, who desire to create diverse, equitable, and inclusive classrooms, can benefit from this tool. The document defines diversity, equity, inclusion, and equity-mindedness, and it explores how teachers can incorporate DEI into their course curriculum, teacher-student relationships, and teaching practices (see Appendix). In addition, the document offers additional reading materials to enhance educators' knowledge on these crucial topics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This reflection demonstrated how a higher education instructor could challenge their assumptions about how students learn and transform their course content, rapport with students, and instruction practices to create a more diverse, equity-minded, and inclusive classroom. Although there can be discomfort in identifying our assumptions, it is vital to the critical reflection process (Brookfield, 2017). All educators would benefit from examining their positionality, understanding students' identities, and exploring how a culturally relevant pedagogy can benefit students (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Future research could examine how educators

utilize the DEI checklist to self-reflect on their course curriculum, teacher-student relationships, and teaching practices. Furthermore, additional research is warranted on how students describe the benefits of a diverse, equity-minded, and inclusive class. Specifically, researchers could explore how this type of equity-minded classroom impacts students' educational experience and academic outcomes.

References

- Ambrose, V. K. (2016). "It's like a mountain": The lived experiences of homeless college students (Ph.D. dissertation). Retrieved from https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/3887/
- Anderson, A. M. (2021). Examining if charismatic teaching predicts community college students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Publication No. 28321860) [Doctoral dissertation, Grand Canyon University]. ProQuest.
- Beemyn, B. (2003). Serving the needs of trans-gender college students. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, 1(1), 33-50. http://www.umass.edu/stonewall/sites/default/files/Infoforandabout/transpeople/genny_beemyn_serving_the_needs_of_transgender_college_students.pdf
- Bonner, P. J., Warren, S. R., & Jiang, Y. H. (2018). Voices from urban classrooms: Teachers' perceptions on instructing diverse students and using culturally responsive teaching. *Education and Urban Society*, 50(8), 697-726.
- Brookfield, S. (1995). Adult learning: An overview. *International Encyclopedia of Education*, 10, 375-380. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.152.4176&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Brookfield, S. (1998). Critically reflective practice. *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, 18(4), 197-205. <http://anitacrawley.net/Resources/Articles/Brookfield.pdf>
- Brookfield, S. (2009). The concept of critical reflection: Promises and contradictions. *European Journal of Social Work*, 12(3), 293-304. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Stephen_Brookfield/publication/232937598_The_concept_of_critical_reflection_Promises_and_contradictions/links/5f5a5e6892851c07895d2665/The-concept-of-critical-reflection-Promises-and-contradictions
- Brookfield, S. D. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Cedillo, C. V., & Bratta, P. (2019). Relating our experiences: The practice of positionality stories in student-centered pedagogy. *College Composition and Communication*, 71(2), 215-240.
- Fuentes, M. A., Zelaya, D. G., & Madsen, J. W. (2021). Rethinking the course syllabus: Considerations for promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion. *Teaching of Psychology*, 48(1), 69-79. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0098628320959979>
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.294.1431&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Hallett, R. E., & Freas, A. (2018). Community college students' experiences with homelessness and housing insecurity. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 42(10), 724-739. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2017.1356764>
- Hinojosa Pareja, E. F., & López López, M. (2016). Impact of initial intercultural teaching training. A review of the investigation. *Convergence*, 23(71), 89-109. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v43n3.5>
- Innis, J. A., Bishop, M., & Boloudakis, S. (2019). Food insecurity and community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2019.1635541>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1163320>
- Liu, K. (2015). Critical reflection as a framework for transformative learning in teacher education. *Educational Review*, 67(2), 135-157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.839546>
- Martin, K., Galentino, R., & Townsend, L. (2014). Community college student success: The role of motivation and self-empowerment. *Community College Review*, 42(3), 221-241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552114528972>
- Martinez, S. M., Frongillo, E. A., Leung, C., & Ritchie, L. (2018). No food for thought: Food insecurity is related to poor mental health and lower academic performance among students in California's public university system. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105318783028>
- McGee Banks, C. A., & Banks, J. A. (1995). Equity pedagogy: An essential component of multicultural education. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 152-158. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1476634>
- Ragoonaden, K., & Mueller, L. (2017). Culturally responsive pedagogy: Indigenizing curriculum. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 47(2), 22-46.
- Saric, M., & Steh, B. (2017). Critical reflection in the professional development of teachers: Challenges and possibilities. *CEPS Journal*, 7(3), 67-85. https://www.pedocs.de/volltexte/2017/14908/pdf/cepsj_2017_3_Saric_Steh_Critical_reflection.pdf
- Shulman, J. H., & Mesa-Bains, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Diversity in the classroom: A casebook for teachers and teacher educators*. Routledge.
- Szelei, N., Tinoca, L., & Pinho, A. S. (2020). Professional development for cultural diversity: The challenges of teacher learning in context. *Professional Development in Education*, 46(5), 780-796. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1642233>
- TILT Higher Ed. (2014). www.tilthighered.com
- Villegas, A. M. (2018). Introduction to "Preparation and development of mainstream teachers for today's linguistically diverse classrooms." *The Educational Forum* 82(2), 131-137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2018.1420848>

Appendix

DEI CHECKLIST: INCORPORATING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION INTO COURSE CURRICULUM, TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS, AND TEACHING PRACTICES

Amy Anderson, Spokane Community College, Gonzaga University, Whitworth University

With contributions from:

Jonathan Rossing, Gonzaga University

Jennie Sevedge-Angel, Gonzaga University

Angela Rasmussen, Spokane Community College

Lori Hunt, Spokane Community College

Rebecca Marquis, Gonzaga University

Melina Monlux, Gonzaga University

Timothy Westerhaus, Gonzaga University

Virginia Monroe, Gonzaga University

This checklist is a self-reflection tool for educators to assess how they incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into their course curriculum, relationships with students, and teaching practices. This tool could also be used for teacher evaluation, professional development training, accreditation, and program review. There are also additional reading recommendations included.

COMMON TERMS

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (n.d.), diversity, equity, and inclusion can be defined in the following ways:

Diversity: Individual differences (e.g., personality, prior knowledge, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations) AACU

Equity: The creation of opportunities for historically underserved populations to have equal access to and participate in educational programs that are capable of closing the achievement gaps in student success and completion AACU

Inclusion: The active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive

sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions AACU

According to The Center for Urban Education (2021), equity-mindedness can be defined in the following way:

Equity-Mindedness: The term ‘equity-mindedness’ refers to the perspective or mode of thinking exhibited by practitioners who call attention to patterns of inequity in student outcomes. These practitioners are willing to take personal and institutional responsibility for the success of their students and critically reassess their own practices. It also requires that practitioners are race-conscious and aware of the social and historical context of exclusionary practices in American Higher Education. CUE

Checklist for Curriculum and Course Content

1. Do you discuss different cultures and social identities (with particular attention to traditionally underrepresented groups) in your course content or curriculum? Do you acknowledge the accomplishments of prominent cultural figures and/or celebrate multiculturalism in the classroom?

For example:

- a. **Music classes:** Utilize music from diverse cultural traditions beyond the Western European tradition to develop an appreciation of divergent aesthetic values.

- b. **Communication classes:** Discuss verbal and nonverbal norms for individuals from different regions and cultures
- c. **Science classes:** Discuss the background of different areas of science that originated in other countries/cultures.
- d. **Language classes:** Engage with materials from a variety of different backgrounds
- e. **Math classes:** Discuss individuals from varied cultures and identities that contributed to the field.

Additional reading: Integrating components of culture in curriculum planning (ed.gov)

2. Do your instructional materials and other classroom visuals represent a variety of students' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds?
 - a. Posters and art in your classroom or virtual backgrounds online that represent various cultures
 - b. Required reading materials from diverse authors
 - c. Reading materials/movies on culturally diverse topics

Additional reading: Respecting diversity in the classroom

3. Do you include experiences, contributions, and information related to disability, race, socioeconomic status, gender, language, ethnicity, geographical isolation, sexuality, work commitments, and family responsibilities in the course/unit content?

Additional reading: Individualized instruction

4. Do you create opportunities in class where students can share their different experiences, voices, work, and learning and connect school learning to students' lives?
 - a. Assignments where students can connect class material to their own culture, background, and experiences
 - b. Allow students the chance to share what they have learned with the rest of the class
 - c. Explain the relevance of course material to students' personal and professional lives

Additional reading: Andragogy Seeking diverse perspectives

5. How is bias evident in the course material/activity? Can it be identified and shifted to be more inclusive?
 - a. When drawing on cultural references and analogies, be aware of your limited awareness as an instructor. Whether because of generational, cultural, or other differences, students may have very different cultural reference points that may require your sensitivity.
 - b. Avoid readings that reinforce and perpetuate biases and prejudices.
 - c. Avoid exclusive examples, such as football or hockey analogies, sports that tend to be heavily dominated by men, or referring to a situation or joke from a show like Seinfeld, Friends, Leave it to Beaver, or other shows with a white-dominated cast and audience.

Additional reading: Inclusive Course Design | Derek Bok Center, Harvard University

6. Does the course feature one (or more) measurable and observable learning outcomes related to equity, diversity, and inclusion?
7. Does the course include assignments that require students to reflect meaningfully on their social identities, implicit biases, and preparedness for citizenship and professional work in a diverse, pluralistic democracy?
8. Do the syllabus and course materials articulate that equity and inclusion are highly valued and expected in the course?
9. Do you regularly engage in professional development to enhance your knowledge about diversity, inclusion, and equity-mindedness so that you can continue to update course content?

CHECKLIST FOR TEACHING PRACTICES: INSTRUCTION, ASSIGNMENTS, AND ASSESSMENT

1. Do you provide students with the criteria and standards for successful task completion?
 - a. Clear rubrics
 - b. Examples of high-quality work

Additional reading: Transparency in Learning and Teaching - TILT | Cal State LA

2. Do you assess your students using unbiased and balanced methods? A fair and unbiased assessment uses contexts that are equally familiar to all and uses words that have common meanings.

- a. Transparent lessons with clear rubrics
- b. Assignment and test questions that represent cultural diversity
- c. A variety of assessment techniques (projects, presentations, essays, etc.)

Additional reading: Transparency in Learning and Teaching - TILT | Cal State LA

3. Do you offer alternate and diverse options for assessing student learning?

- a. Verbal tests
- b. Project-based assignments
- c. Skills-based assessment

Additional reading: Inclusive Course Design | Derek Bok Center, Harvard University, Alternative assessment strategies

4. Do you offer your students the option to choose projects or assignments in class or choose delivery methods? Students feel more empowered when they have the ability to make some choices in assignments or projects.

- a. Students choose from a variety of diverse reading materials.
- b. Students choose projects or assignments that can represent their background or culture.
- c. Students choose how they want to submit their work (text, video, audio submission).

Additional reading: The Effectiveness and Relative Importance of Choice in the Classroom (immagic.com)

5. Do your instruction methods include a wide variety of techniques intended to address and engage with students' different learning needs and abilities?

- a. Visuals- PPT, videos (including closed captioning for accessibility), posters, graphic organizers, charts/graphs
- b. Auditory- Verbal instructions, discussions in dyads/groups, tell someone else what you learned.

- c. Kinesthetic- Hands-on projects, make/build something

- d. Reading/Writing: Writing summation

Additional reading: Varied instructional methods

6. Do you use various approaches to make sure students understand instructions, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content?

- a. Ask what questions students might have instead of asking if they have any questions
- b. Have students tell you (or a peer) what they think the directions were

Additional reading: Checking for understanding

7. Do you encourage and support equitable group work? Cooperative learning strategies give students the opportunity to learn from their peers and work with others from different backgrounds/cultures.

- a. Group work helps students learn to understand those who are different as well as build empathy.
- b. Provide resources and guidance for managing identity and power dynamics in group work.
- c. Consider building a cooperative and safe classroom community before engaging in small group activities.

Additional reading: Group & Cooperative Learning; Students as Classroom Leaders | ablconnect (harvard.edu)

8. Do you structure heterogeneous and cooperative groups for learning? Do you use team-building activities to promote peer support for academic achievement in the classroom?

- a. Random groupings include everyone (diverse academic levels, backgrounds, cultures)
- b. Small group projects promote skills for working with those who are different.
- c. Students learning communities may provide students with an in-class support system.

Additional reading: Group work

9. Do you ask higher-order questions equitably for all students?

- a. Analysis questions
- b. Synthesis questions
- c. Evaluation questions

Additional reading: Higher-order thinking

10. Do you give students effective and specific feedback that prompts improved performance?
- a. Opportunity for peer review
 - b. Verbal/written feedback from the instructor with things that went well and areas in need of improvement

Additional reading: Feedback

11. Do you allow multiple opportunities for students to revise and resubmit work?
Additional reading: Peer review
12. Do you explain and model positive self-talk in the classroom?
- a. Explain the benefits of positive self-talk
 - b. Modeling positive self-talk and sharing how it leads to positive outcomes, growth mindset

Additional reading: Positive self-talk in the classroom

13. Do you regularly reflect on and identify the ways your current instructional strategies place students from diverse backgrounds or students with different abilities at a disadvantage?
- a. Notes on verbal lectures might help ESL students
 - b. Copies of PowerPoints
 - c. Closed captioning on videos and Zoom

Additional reading: Teaching strategies for diverse learners

14. Do you seek feedback from your students on the effectiveness of your instruction?
- a. Informal or formal surveys
 - b. Interviews
 - c. Questionnaires to assess the effectiveness of instruction and/or student engagement in class

Additional reading: Getting Feedback | Derek Bok Center, Harvard University

15. Do you seek feedback from your students on their sense of inclusion and belonging in your classroom?
- a. Informal or formal surveys
 - b. Interviews
 - c. Questionnaires to assess the effectiveness of instruction and/or student engagement in class

CHECKLIST FOR TEACHING PRACTICES: TEACHER/STUDENT INTERACTIONS

1. Do you use a variety of communication modes in your teaching? Using a variety of communication modes can help reach more students in a classroom.
- a. Written
 - b. Verbal
 - c. Computer-mediated communication
 - d. Video (with closed captioning)
 - e. Discussion/dialogue

Additional reading: Tips for communicating in the classroom

2. Are you accessible to your students so that you provide individual help to all students?
- a. Explain that “office hours” are times where you are available to answer questions or help individual students and provide clear directions for how to find the office location.
 - b. Give students options for days/times for communication.
 - c. Give students options for how to communicate (in-person, phone, text, e-mail, zoom)

Additional reading: Beyond the classroom

3. Do you welcome students by name or use their names when speaking with them? If you are unsure of the pronunciation, do you ask them privately?

Additional reading: Using students' names

4. Do you ask students what pronouns and names they prefer?

Additional reading: Using students' preferred pronouns in the classroom

5. Do you consciously reflect on how your non-verbal communication impacts students learning in the classroom (especially in relation to our social identities and positions)?
 - a. Culturally appropriate eye contact with students
 - b. Equitable proximity (physical closeness) with students?
 - c. Body language, gestures, and expressions convey a message to students that all of their questions and opinions are valued (smiles, nods, and gestures)

Additional reading: Nonverbal immediacy behaviors

Additional reading: Nonverbal communication: A cultural perspective

6. Are you consciously working to ensure equitable participation and engagement?
 - a. Do you use random response strategies to call on students using random selection? (Calling sticks, random number generator, etc.)
 - b. Do you use probing and clarifying techniques to help students who are struggling to answer questions?
 - c. Do you acknowledge all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions in class?
 - d. Do you seek multiple perspectives in class? (Validating all perspectives with responses such as, "That's one idea. Does anyone else have another?")

Additional reading: Seeking diverse perspectives

Additional reading: Random response strategies

Additional reading: Helping students answer their own questions

Additional reading: Effective discussions in class

7. Do you use inclusive language in the classroom to ensure stereotyping is not present?
 - a. Avoid inappropriate humor that might alienate someone based on their abilities, gender, race, socioeconomic class, religion, etc.

Additional reading: Inclusive language in the classroom, Humor in the classroom

8. Have you identified barriers that prevent students from diverse backgrounds or socioeconomic classes from learning?
 - a. Language barriers
 - b. Lack of resources such as funds for class materials or access to the internet

Additional reading: Barriers

9. Do you actively work to get to know your students as whole people?
 - a. Who are they? Where do they come from? What are important parts of their social identities?
 - b. Why are they in your class? How does this class relate to their professional and personal aspirations?
 - c. What are their background experiences that inform their learning in your class?
10. Do you create a supportive and affirming space in your class for students to process current events that may be traumatic or painful in relation to students' identities?
 - a. Checking in with students and acknowledging the potential impact on them
 - b. Offering resources for student support
11. Do you readily recognize, identify, and actively work to minimize power differentials in relation to students' social identity (e.g. gender, race, class, disability, faith tradition, sexuality)?
 - a. Acknowledge that these power differentials exist
 - b. Work to create an inclusive environment where these power differentials are minimized.

Additional reading: Inclusive classroom

12. Have you considered how your own social identities, lived experiences, personal views, assumptions, expectations, and the physical and social environment where learning will occur might impact students' learning experience and success?

Additional reading: Implicit bias in the classroom

13. Do you openly share with students some of your own personal and professional work in these areas that model a commitment to the process?
- a. Acknowledging that you are learning new skills and you might make mistakes
 - b. Asking for feedback from students about ways you might improve.

References

- American Association of Colleges and Universities. (n.d.). Making excellence inclusive. <https://www.aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive>
- Montgomery County Public Schools. (2010). A resource for equitable classroom practices. <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/development/resources/ecp/ECP%20-%2008-13-10.pdf>
- Race Bridges Studio. (2019). Creating a classroom diversity checklist. <https://racebridgesstudio.com/infographic/creating-a-classroom-diversity-checklist/>
- University of Southern California. (2021). Equity mindedness. <https://cue.usc.edu/about/equity/equity-mindedness/>
- University of Tasmania. (2020). Inclusive teaching checklist. https://www.teaching-learning.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1096/inclusive_checklist.pdf