

Stay current with inclusive teaching literature and strategies

Committing to inclusive teaching and to fostering inclusive learning environments is not a one-time exercise. On the contrary, it is a continuous practice to learn, implement, and evaluate inclusive teaching practices. Inclusive pedagogy is social justice oriented, regardless of discipline. Instructors with an inclusive teaching mindset understand and value the importance of keeping abreast of current practices. They deliberately learn more about critical pedagogies and equitable teaching practices.⁷² Furthermore, they do not limit their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion only to the classroom setting; they seek ways to apply their pledge to their departments and disciplines.

Stephen Brookfield argues that an important component of self-evaluation is through engagement with theoretical literature (refer to *Principle 7*). Engaging with “educational theory, philosophy, and research can provide new and provocative ways of seeing our actions and the meanings students take from our work.” Theoretical literature “sometimes also introduces us to new vistas that broaden our understanding and force us to reappraise old assumptions.”⁷³

Instructors should examine the diversity in their discipline or field and seek ways to further their knowledge. Diverse teaching strategies can vary by discipline, and instructors benefit from learning about the teaching practices that work best within their discipline.⁷⁴ In “Small World: Crafting an Inclusive Classroom (No Matter What You Teach),” Mary A. Armstrong notes that “many people feel more comfortable learning about inclusivity on their own turf. Disciplines have powerful social cultures as well as intellectual cultures.”⁷⁵

Armstrong argues that for instructors in STEM and other disciplines with course content that is sometimes considered objective or unrelated to diversity, self-education is especially important because “once you’ve spent some time looking at the same old world with brand new eyes, you may even find that the course material that once seemed so completely neutral to you is not quite as disinterested and unbiased as you once thought.” Furthermore, such disciplines “are often the exact places

where a more welcoming climate could do the most good in promoting diversity and facilitating broader student success.”⁷⁶

There are numerous starting points for instructors to begin self-education. For example, instructors can engage with revolutionary classic works in psychology and education such as Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; bell hooks’ *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*; Beverly Daniel Tatum’s *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: A Psychologist Explains the Development of Racial Identity*; Claude Steele’s *Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*; and Derald Wing Sue’s *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*. More recent works include Bettina Love’s *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*. As Armstrong argues, such works “invite us to consider targeted, practical ways to re-think pedagogy as a social act of inclusivity as well as an act of instruction.”⁷⁷

TEACHING STRATEGIES

1. **Read inclusive, cross-discipline pedagogy literature.** Seek campuswide opportunities to read and discuss inclusive teaching literature, such as seminars offered by the Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching.
2. **Read literature that specifically addresses teaching in your field.** Seek discussions or sources through societies in your discipline or your network of colleagues beyond Northwestern. If you have a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed to stay abreast of literature in your discipline, add a few discipline-based education journals that can help you be aware of new ideas for teaching in your field.
3. **Encourage department discussion** by bringing in a speaker on developing pedagogies of inclusivity in your field.⁷⁸ You can also join your colleagues in a reading group or a roundtable discussion series.
4. **Familiarize yourself with the works cited in this guide.**

“For me, an inclusive classroom is one where each student’s experience of learning is validated. This requires acknowledging the vast array of potential starting points and approaches that students bring to problems. It requires recognizing that each student’s challenge with material will be different and framing these challenges as equally important and necessary for productive learning. To be inclusive is to resist the temptation to view a group of students as a monolith and to see the humanity in each person’s struggle toward constructing knowledge.”

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EXAMPLE

An instructor has taught their signature course for the past 15 years. The course and instructor are popular among students in the department; the instructor recently received a University Teaching Award. In the last two terms, however, the instructor received feedback through their course evaluations that some students are mildly dissatisfied with the structure of assignments in the course. Specifically, the students mention that they encounter inequity during group projects. One student mentions that several group partners regularly dismiss her ideas and minimize her contributions. While the specific student feedback does not reflect the majority of students' opinions, the instructor recognizes its importance. The instructor facilitates a class discussion that emphasizes the importance of different points of view while denouncing stereotyping and microaggressions. Furthermore, the instructor consults their disciplinary society for literature on inclusive teaching in the field and confers with colleagues in the department about group-project practices. Reading the literature, the instructor discovers evidence-based strategies to establish equitable, rotating roles within groups for projects and decides to incorporate these techniques in the course. They also recommend to the chair that the department meet periodically to read and discuss these sources on inclusive pedagogy and to share practices.

FURTHER READING

Artze-Vega, I., Darby, F., Dewsbury, B., & Imad, M. (2023). *The Norton guide to equity-minded teaching*. WW Norton.

Salazar, M., Norton, A., & Tuitt, F. (2009). “Weaving promising practices for inclusive excellence into the higher education classroom.” In L. B. Nilson & J. E. Miller (Eds.), *To improve the academy* (pp. 208-226). Jossey-Bass.