

What Inclusive Instructors Do: Principles and Practices for Excellence in College Teaching

reviewed by Kate Law & Esther A. Enright - November 22, 2021

Title: What Inclusive Instructors Do: Principles and Practices for Excellence in College Teaching

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The recent push in the United States to ban the teaching of Critical Race Theory in preK-12 and postsecondary education has added another layer of risk and challenge to discussing equity and inclusion in instruction. In higher education, we have systemic, persistent inequities that are often reinforced and reproduced through teaching practices. This tense policy environment poses a unique challenge for college and university faculty seeking to challenge systemic forms of inequity, such as racism in instruction. Faculty spend a significant portion of the work week engaging in teaching, a professional practice for which many received little or no preparation. Yet, faculty often work in fraught political environments which makes talking about inclusion in teaching of minoritized student populations both critical and risky. Given these conditions, Tracie Marcella Addy, Derek Dube, Khadijah A. Mitchell, and Mallory E. SoRelle's *What Inclusive Instructors Do: Principles and Practices for Excellence in College Teaching* provides a resource for faculty to learn about the fundamentals of inclusion in postsecondary teaching.

What Inclusive Instructors Do presents information on the what, why, how, and for whom of inclusive teaching practices, while integrating activities with which readers can engage throughout the book to learn more about their own postsecondary context. The authors divided *What Inclusive Instructors Do* into three sections: Part 1 - Evidence Supporting Inclusion and Major Principles; Part 2 - The Practice of Inclusive Teaching; and Part 3 - Developing and Sustaining a Culture of Inclusive Teaching. The integration of information and activities makes this book a great resource for faculty learning communities, departments, and other university stakeholder groups to use in efforts to build capacity for inclusive instruction on their campuses. As the authors state, "Being an inclusive instructor is a continual process that involves making active, intentional pedagogical choices for each iteration of every course taught" (p. 151). The authors argue that excellence in college teaching requires the intentional use of inclusive practices, and their book provides a primer to help instructors bridge what often feels like a chasm between theory and practice.

EVIDENCE SUPPORTING INCLUSION AND MAJOR PRINCIPLES

In Part 1, the authors present findings from research they conducted on how instructors define inclusive college teaching. Synthesizing across their findings, the authors claim inclusive teaching begins with designing learning environments that are equitable, welcoming, and conducive to fostering a sense of belonging. The authors identify key qualities of inclusive instructors, such as utilizing an asset-based mindset in addressing student needs (i.e., viewing student strengths as levers for supporting them through challenges). This section provides a brief introduction to multiple minoritized student groups and provides an overview of what inclusive teaching should attend to relative to each affinity group. The authors claim that "embracing multiculturalism in the classroom can help set the stage for building an inclusive classroom community" (p. 20). Through the activities embedded in the text, the authors encourage instructors to explore the demographics of their own student population and institutional context. We believe the work the authors ask the reader to do is essential to building individual capacity to design more inclusive learning environments for student success.

THE PRACTICE OF INCLUSIVE TEACHING

Part 2 focuses on identification and application of inclusive practices in classrooms. The authors explore how the instructors who participated in their research design and implement inclusive classroom environments. The authors caution, "Inclusive instructors are aware that while inclusive teaching is an essential aspect of effective pedagogy, it can be overlooked, ignored, or narrowly defined" (p. 7). This section divides the work of building capacity for inclusive teaching into three key spaces: course design, learning communities, and classroom culture. In Chapter 3, the authors examine the syllabus as a tool for designing an inclusive course. Instructors can use this chapter to understand

different approaches to leveraging syllabi to create inclusive practices and promote student engagement. In Chapter 4, the authors provide strategies, advice, and examples to help instructors create a welcoming learning environment that fosters a sense of belonging across all students. Utilizing their survey data, the authors collected key questions from instructors on how to make classrooms supportive learning environments for students. We found those questions to be helpful in our own reflection, and we added additional questions to the list through the chapter activities. Chapter 5 focuses on foundational concepts and practices for inclusive instructors to employ, such as student-centered learning strategies, growth-mindset practices, ensuring accessibility through universal design, and reflecting diverse perspectives in course content. The authors also discuss navigating the inherent tension between being transparent about learning goals and high expectations while remaining flexible and responsive to student needs. The authors also underscore the importance of instructors eliciting student feedback in different ways to continue building capacity for inclusive practices.

DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF INCLUSIVE TEACHING

Part 3 provides the reader with tools to use to further develop capacity for inclusive teaching. In Chapter 6, the authors introduce their “who’s in class” tool to help instructors learn about their students and identify both visible and invisible forms of diversity. This tool provides a concrete approach for inclusive instructors to practice “view[ing] the diversity of their learners as an asset and ... recognize that some students can be particularly vulnerable to the harms of stereotypes, and thus they [inclusive instructors] are deliberate in affirming all students’ identities” (p. 24). Examples of student responses to the tool model the types of modifications instructors can make to expand their inclusive practices. Chapter 7 provides a professional learning framework that outlines how instructors can utilize a cycle of learning and reflection to continue to build capacity for inclusive teaching. Since student populations continue to change and evolve, the work of inclusive teaching necessitates continual learning, self-reflection, and adaptation to support the educational goals of all students.

What Inclusive Instructors Do is an important contribution to the scholarship on equity and excellence in higher education, and a very timely one as well. Throughout the book, the authors hold collaboration up as a through line in building more inclusive instructional environments across the levels of an institution. In the epilogue, the authors extend their call for collaboration in building capacity for inclusive instruction to administrators and students, in addition to instructors. The authors also reinforce the work involved in fostering an institutional commitment to inclusive teaching through strategic planning and incentive structures.

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