**"Building Community in the Diverse Classroom:
Engaging Students and Promoting Equity"**
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AKD Teaching & Learning Preconference Workshop
Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting
February 20, 2014

I. The Meaning of "Diversity"

A. In its broadest application, usually seems to refer to race/ethnicity; important to be more expansive and inclusive in our definition when thinking about diversity in the classroom

    1. Race/ethnicity, citizenship status, international student status, social class, first-generation college students, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc

II. How to Engage a Diversity of Students

A. Provide a diversity of perspectives in different ways throughout the course (i.e., "move typically marginal groups into the core of the curriculum" to combat their alienation from the curriculum (Higginbotham, 1990))

    1. Need to build it in during course design; becomes part of the fabric of your courses (versus one class period addressing the needs of a diverse population)

        a. Reconceptualize course syllabi to represent various interlocking categories of analysis

            1. Course readings

                a. Can be helpful to include sources that are outside strictly sociological materials

            2. Ancillary materials in lecture (videos, images, political cartoons, etc.)

            3. In-class activities

            4. Out-of-class assignments

            5. Presentations and creative final projects

B. Have <u>all</u> students examine their own positionality along lines of race, gender, social class, etc.

    1. Examine individual experiences with/of privilege and oppression, highlight the simultaneity of these privileges and oppressions, and connect them to institutional structures and patterns

    2. Use the classroom space as a transformative tool where students who are normally marginalized or feel silenced have a space to speak out

        a. Change teaching style to allow for discussions on "sensitive" topics to develop and take shape

        b. Cultivate dialogue that challenges taken-for-granted assumptions and norms

2. Find common ground that transcends students' and faculty's differences (ex. through the shared belief in higher education/working towards a college degree)

    a. Develop empathy for each other's points of view, as our own personal biographies only offer partial views

        1. Hill Collins (1989) argues "empathy begins with taking an interest in the facts of other peoples lives, both as individuals and groups" (23)

III. Strategies for "Building Community" Inside the Classroom and Out

A. Use a variety of methods for breaking down barriers between students

    1. Simple first step: Learn all students names by the end of the 3rd week of classes

        a. Call students by name during class discussions

        b. Have students use each others' names when responding to student comments (can potentially provide a seating chart once everyone has settled into a pattern)

    2. Have students do self-reflections and share parts with classmates

    3. Build in opportunities for students to speak with a variety of students throughout the semester

        A. Can build this into group assignments/projects

B. Breaking down barriers between students and instructor

    1. Share the decision making. For example, invite students to make or alter curricular decisions, such as choosing media clips to watch as a class that will illustrate an issue of importance for the course. Invite them to design meaningful and interesting tasks.

    2. Consider ice breakers to begin class and group discussions.

    3. Give students space to disagree with each other and the instructor, and coach them on how to disagree repectfully. Feeling safe to speak without ridicule is important. Ask open-ended questions with no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, and give students the ability to 'pass' if they aren't comfortable contributing.

    4. Be a role model for the values espoused in seeking community. If disagreement is supposed to be 'safe' then be sure that it is safe to disagree with the instructor.

    5. Change your own language and behavior from 'yes but' to 'yes and' which does not negate the point of the previous speaker's point

    6. Be cognizant of balancing where you stand in the classroom, whom you talk to, look at, and greet

    *the above suggestions were adapted from K. Nevins, "Building Community in the College Classroom"

C. Outside of the Classroom

    1. Electronic Blackboards

        a. Group discussions online, both by student name and anonymous

        b. Journal entries for themes of inclusivity

        c. Space to include personal journey insights to class material

2. Participation Assignments

    a. For some students, participating in class discussion may never be comfortable for them, and regardless of how welcoming an environment we provide, they cannot speak freely in front of their peers. Offering alternative ways to express opinion and knowledge of subject matter may be of utmost importance for these students' feelings of inclusiveness.

3. Opportunities for students to further discuss their opinions and make sure that they are okay if a discussion becomes heated

    a. Calling/emailing a student

    b. Meeting with the student outside of class

IV. What NOT to do: Some Pitfalls of Well-Meaning Teachers

A. Call out individual students that represent 'diversity' to speak about their experiences

    1. Only call on students that represent 'diversity' when their group or a related topic is being discussed

B. The "privilege walk" (class activity/exercise)

C. Creating a Black/White dichotomy while ignoring other issues of race

D. Oversharing of students

E. Not recognizing boundary issues with students

    1. What to do if a student is over-sharing in the classroom

    2. What to do if a student is personally traumatized by a classroom incident

    3. Becoming too available to students, students oversharing with instructor

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