INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE

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Inclusive Pedagogy in Practice

Perspectives from Equity-Minded College Educators

Edited by
Amelia Koford, Corinne Castro, and
Christopher Bollinger

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Introduction

Amelia Koford, *Texas Lutheran University*
Corinne Castro, *Rutgers University*
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COMMUNITY OF EDUCATORS

Learning to teach is a continuous process of trying, failing, accepting imperfection, and unlearning things we used to know. The messy process of learning to teach is best done in community. The three co-editors of this book, Amelia, Corinne, and Chris, have been fortunate to be in community with each other as we have deepened our knowledge of teaching approaches that work for us and our students. In this book, we hope to capture and share some of the lessons we have learned through conversation, research, and experience, and bring you, the reader, into a community of college educators engaged in the ongoing process of learning to teach inclusively.

With this book, we seek to contribute to the literature on inclusive teaching by sharing examples of ways to motivate, engage, and evaluate with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in mind. The current historical moment is both exciting and fraught for equity-minded educators. Across the higher education landscape, in books, at conferences, and in centers for teaching and learning, educators are challenging each other to build a more equitable higher education system. Equity-minded college educators can access approachable, research-backed books, conference presentations, and workshops to help them make small and large changes to their daily work. At the same time, the political climate is hostile and chilling for educators seeking to create liberatory spaces for marginalized students. As we discuss in the DEI in Context section later in this introduction, a variety of institutional stakeholders periodically challenge and criticize DEI work.

This book focuses on a primary audience of higher education faculty and staff working day-to-day with students. We hope this book will be useful both to those who work with students in the classroom and to those who work with students in co-curricular settings across campus. Students find their place in higher education through experiences in and out of the classroom. University faculty and staff serve as educators, teachers, and facilitators in multiple settings, including career development offices, service-learning centers, libraries, and athletics programs. Amelia, Corinne, and Chris have worked both as classroom faculty and as other kinds of higher education professionals—Amelia as a librarian, Corinne in an equity and inclusion office, and Chris in a student affairs division. Chapter author Leslie Flores serves as an equity compliance and Title IX professional, and chapter authors Chris Drue and Christina Bifulco work in a university office of teaching evaluation and assessment research. The book's secondary audiences include high-level administrators responsible for institution-wide changes and graduate students training to be educators. Although most of the narratives and examples in the book come from a diverse range of classrooms, there are also examples from DEI trainings, anti-violence workshops, and libraries.

Because we solicited chapters by individual invitation, the chapters are an extension of the community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) we have built over the past decade. The chapters share diverse narratives of the specific ways that instructors make inclusive teaching their own. All the chapter authors teach with inclusion in mind, but their classrooms do not all look the same. Some chapter authors prize clarity and transparency in their teaching personas, and others use strategic ambiguity to bring students to the productive edge of discomfort. Some chapter authors share their personal cell phone numbers with students, and others set firm boundaries on their availability as part of their self-care. We invite readers into the richly described contexts of the authors' lives as educators.

We hope that readers will engage with our book alongside other excellent works that have recently been published, such as *What Inclusive Instructors Do* (Addy et al. 2021) and *The Norton Guide to Equity-Minded Teaching* (Artze-Vega et al. 2023). Readers will benefit both from the how-to steps included in those books and from this collection's focus on first-person accounts of nuanced and idiosyncratic practices that have worked in different environments. We also encourage readers to explore the other books in Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning Open Access Book Series. The series' commitment to bringing scholarship free of paywalls to engaged learning practitioners around the world aligns with our viewpoints on inclusivity and equity.

In chapter 2 of this collection, Chris Drue and Christina Bifulco discuss the exciting potential of Open Educational Resources, which rely on open licenses like the Creative Commons license under which this book is published.

HOW THIS BOOK CAME TO BE

Amelia, Corinne, and Chris were involved with the inaugural Center for Teaching and Learning of Texas Lutheran University (TLU), a small, private, and diverse university that enrolls mostly Texas residents. Instructors who frequented events at the Center for Teaching and Learning saw the need to better support their students from traditionally marginalized groups, but they were unsure of what changes to make to their syllabi, assignments, and teaching practices to support that goal. For us, co-editing a book has been a way for us and our chapter authors to capture, extend, and hone our understandings of inclusive pedagogy and to carry forward conversations from Texas Lutheran University's Center for Teaching and Learning to a large community of readers.

In thinking about student identity, we try to resist any temptation to essentialize, stereotype, or assume that all students in a certain demographic group are the same. At the same time, we reject color-blind rhetoric that states that because we value all students, their demographics are irrelevant. In our case, part of the work of the Center for Teaching and Learning in 2014 was to grapple with the fact that while our institution was a Hispanic Serving Institution with growing proportion of Latinx and Black students, the vast majority of instructors were white. Institution-wide efforts to increase the numbers of faculty of color, although beyond the scope of this book, are important in fostering success of students of color. We examined rates of retention and

graduation in relation to race, ethnicity, first-generation status, and Pell Grant eligibility. When you look at your university's demographic profile, what does it help you learn about who your students are? Which elements of student identity are recorded in institutional data, and which are absent from the data? In addition to race and ethnicity data, what can you learn about religious identities, LGBTQ+ identities, disability identities, veteran status, and socioeconomic status?

Amelia came to TLU in 2012 and Corinne in 2013. As we got to know each other, we began carpooling to work one or two days each week. On the commute, we would chat about our days: teaching, grading, committee work, scholarly work, and the difficulty of fitting it all in alongside time for ourselves and our families. Amelia was teaching Introduction to Women's Studies and serving as a reference and instruction librarian, and Corinne was teaching Introduction to Sociology and upper-level Sociology classes. Since we both taught about political topics like race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender, we both encountered student resistance and discomfort. In addition, we both struggled with questions that educators may encounter in any discipline: How to get students to do the reading? How to reach out to disengaged students? How to pitch an assignment at the right level of challenge? How to give meaningful feedback? When Chris became the founding director of the Center for Teaching and Learning in 2014, he created an institutional structure where vulnerable and authentic conversations about pedagogy could continue. We felt very lucky to have developed a relationship of trust that let us talk frankly about challenging classroom moments. Our connection continued long-distance when Corinne left Texas Lutheran University to become the Senior Director for Faculty Diversity and Institutional Transformation at Rutgers University.

As Addy, Dube, Mitchell, and SoRelle describe in *What Inclusive Instructors Do*, information about educators' strategies for inclusive teaching often "lives within the minds of instructors and within closed off classroom spaces" (3). Developing a trusting collegial relationship gave Corinne and Amelia insight into each other's minds and classrooms, and ultimately inspired us to collaborate with Chris on this edited book.

THE LITERATURE OF INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

In discussing inclusive pedagogy, we bring together many strands of educational research and theory, with the understanding that describing them in broad strokes has limitations. Although different inclusive pedagogy frameworks sometimes challenge and complicate each other, they often complement each other. Several strains of theory note that focusing on students' embodied experiences, and students and instructors as whole people, creates pathways to more productive education. Critical pedagogues (Freire 2000) call on educators to push back on dominant models of students as recipients of information, and to encourage students to generate content, levy critique, and be agents of their own learning. Feminist authors (hooks 1994) ask educators to think deeply about the power dynamics of classrooms and to find wisdom in student lived experiences. Pedagogical partnership advocates call on instructors to fully value student voices by sharing decision-making power with students (de Bie et al. 2021; Cook-Sather, Bahti, and Ntem 2019; Mercer-Mapstone and Abbot 2019). Experiential learning practitioners have posited the power of engaging and unpacking hands-on applications (Amrose et al. 2010). Performance scholars encourage immersion and the exploration of sensory elements, which strengthens

recall, promotes empathy, and broadens perspective (Madison and Hamera 2006). The Universal Design for Learning framework (Rose et al. 2006) helps educators build learning experiences that are accessible to students with and without disabilities. Much like the different yet complementary approaches to educational research and theory described above, our collection of narratives will expose readers to a diverse set of inclusive approaches that aims to expand the community of equity-minded educators and inspire experimentation with multiple perspectives.

Beyond educational research and theory, our collection grapples with the important reality that many of our students suffer cultural isolation as a product of centuries of systemic exclusions and inequities built into our institutions of higher education. For example, the drop, fail, or withdraw rates of underrepresented minority students in gateway courses is one indicator of the severe impact of these structural inequities (Koch and Drake 2018). Students with disabilities (Yssel, Pak, and Beilke 2016) and LGBTQ+ students (Broadhurst et al. 2018) can feel alienated in institutions that were not designed for them. Rodríguez and Oseguera (2015) articulate institutional and curricular strategies for recognizing, embracing, and celebrating the achievements and contributions of our students from multiple cultures. High-impact practices, especially well-designed group work, have gained momentum providing access to students from marginalized populations (Kuh et al. 2010; Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, and Pascarella 2015; Pascarella and Blaich 2013). Integrating diverse experiences, values, and scholarship into the curriculum (Haslerig et al. 2013) helps us to connect with more of our audience, and Vincent Tinto (2012) rightly argues creating a socially just and inclusive community requires similar consideration of diversity in our institutional personnel, services, and interactions.

For some time now, education scholars have produced a large body of work rethinking pedagogy through a cultural lens. In her landmark piece, *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) shares her findings from her research observing teachers successfully educating African American students. She identifies three important criteria marking successful learning: academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. Ladson-Billings challenges us to examine the ways in which there may be cultural exclusion in how we recognize and measure academic success, inherent biases in standardized testing being one example, and develop better means. She defines academic success as:

> the intellectual growth that students experience as a result of classroom instruction and learning experiences. Cultural competence refers to the ability to help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture. Sociopolitical consciousness is the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real-world problems. (Ladson-Billings 2014, 75)

Culturally relevant teaching is distinguishable by how teachers understand and operationalize conceptions of "self and other, social relations, and knowledge" (Ladson-Billings 1995, 483). Teachers see themselves simultaneously as being called to give back to the community and participating as a member of the community, see students as capable of succeeding academically and having knowledge and experience to contribute, and see their role as the teacher to draw those contributions out of the students. Teachers also consciously work to "maintain fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrate a connectedness with all of the students, develop a community of learners, and encourage students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for another" (480). Further, teachers are called to passionately (yet critically and reflexively) engage knowledge, learning, and multifaceted forms of assessment; to recognize that knowledge, learning, and assessment are constructed and always evolving; and to scaffold their work, facilitating learning by building bridges to student experience.

With an interest in focusing more on the strategies teachers use in their classes, Geneva Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (31). Gay calls for consideration of self-awareness, techniques, materials, relationships, and climate (Muñiz 2019). Both culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching stand in prominent opposition to "deficit" understandings, which view the students as being disadvantaged rather than bringing different sets of assets to the learning than their classmates. There is an abundance of research emanating from both frameworks (Paris 2012).

In 2012, Django Paris offers a new framing, culturally sustaining pedagogy, to better foreground the necessity of preserving and promoting practices and languages of our student's cultures of origin and better resisting static and monolithic understandings of those same cultures. Reflecting on this very issue, Ladson-Billings (2014) supports this reframing:

> [Practitioners have too often become stuck in] very limited and superficial notions of culture. Thus, the fluidity and variety within cultural groups has regularly been lost in discussions and implementations of

> culturally relevant pedagogy. Even when people have demonstrated a more expansive knowledge of culture, few have taken up the sociopolitical dimensions of the work, instead dulling its critical edge or omitting it altogether … they rarely pushed students to consider critical perspectives on policies and practices that may have direct impact on their lives and communities. (Ladson-Billings 2014, 77-78)

Ladson-Billings further argues that the new framing addresses the need for the pedagogy to continue to adapt to "ensure that consistently marginalized students...become subjects in the instructional process, not mere objects" (76).

Along with the wealth of educational literature focused on the cultural lens, we want to additionally acknowledge that our students bring shifting mental health care needs. Regardless of where one stands on trigger warning debates, trauma is a real experience which can make accessing learning more difficult. Students routinely experience racism, hostility, and even threats, some face-to-face and many online, which are enhanced by global reach and ease of repetitions. Sexual assault is still one of the most prominent forms of violence on our campuses (Flintoft and Bollinger 2016). More military students are returning from combat zones, some of whom are struggling with PTSD and some of whom are struggling with reintegration (Bollinger et al. 2018). While many trigger warning approaches suggest options for disengagement or removal, we need to focus on approaches that better equip students and instructors to engage the material rather than opt out. Examples may include structuring sensory learning assignments with gradually increasing levels of intensity which allows for evaluation and interruption along the way (Flintoft and Bollinger 2016). Additionally, employing multiple modes of delivery allows students some control over the kind of engagement that might offer the best learning with the least harm. We find that collaborating proactively with students known to have past trauma allows us to think through a workable plan ahead of time. Ultimately, we acknowledge that teachers are not counselors and should not pretend to be, yet we will be confronted with students experiencing trauma. When this happens, we should be able to recognize what is happening and productively support our students in their learning journeys as they work with a mental health care professional on their recovery plan. For more discussion about trauma and facilitating learning, please see chapter 3.

Teaching is complex and messy. It requires that we recognize and appreciate differences, especially when this makes us uncomfortable. It requires that we collaborate with faculty, staff, and students. It requires that we learn as much as we can about the various inclusive pedagogies and equally as much about our students. It requires us to always be prepared to adapt. Most of all, it requires us to sometimes fail, come back, and work harder. That is, it requires us to keep learning. In this edited book, we invite readers to join a community engaged in the process of continuous learning, adaptation, and collaboration.

CULTIVATING INCLUSIVE TEACHING COMMUNITIES

As the three of us got to know each other beginning in 2014, there were several things that felt special about the community created by the Texas Lutheran University's inaugural Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Ten years later, we believe this book captures key elements that organically emerged during its development that reflects our origin story. We share them here so that you can cultivate similar elements as you find and create communities of practice in your institutions, professional associations, and virtual gathering places.

A WILLINGNESS TO BE VULNERABLE

One of the CTL's projects, initiated by math professor William Hager, was a Teach-Pair-Share program in which instructors from different disciplines reviewed and discussed videos from each other's classes. Teach-Pair-Share was intentionally focused only on professional development and kept separate from the peer review of teaching that was part of the annual evaluation process. Receiving feedback from colleagues across campus didn't always feel easy, especially since different instructors had different ideas about what good teaching looked like, but it led to productive, specific, and authentic conversations. In being willing to be seen by colleagues, and thoughtfully considering their feedback, we grew as teachers. Communities of practice thrive when people build enough trust to be vulnerable with each other. In this book, as you read personal narratives such as Chris Bollinger's Facilitating Failure section in chapter 3 and Margaret Gonzales's story of writer's block in chapter 4, you can appreciate the way that the authors' willingness to be vulnerable facilitated their growth as instructors and ultimately helps you as a reader connect to their chapters.

AN EXPECTATION OF CONTINUOUS CHANGE

In one Center for Teaching and Learning workshop, Amelia suggested that instructors should establish classroom ground rules, including "What's said in the classroom stays in the classroom." An audience member, who worked in the equity and compliance

office, pointed out that faculty cannot, in fact, guarantee confidentiality or privacy of things students say in the classroom, because we don't control students' behavior and because we have mandatory reporting requirements. Since then, Amelia's classroom ground rules include a more nuanced discussion of how students might decide what to disclose in class. This was just a small example of the way an intervention by a fellow practitioner led an instructor to drop one equity-minded practice in favor of a more up-to-date practice. As our careers in higher education continue, the language, practices, and strategies we use in inclusive teaching are bound to change. A healthy teaching and learning community acknowledges that we have *not* figured everything out, and this does *not* undermine our expertise, intelligence, or commitments. The evolving theories and practices related to inclusive pedagogies can feel overwhelming for even the most seasoned educator; therefore, the benefits and needs of an active community of practice become even more crucial. In this book, you can see instructors expecting change and practicing flexibility, whether it is keeping up with new opportunities provided by Open Educational Resources and digital accessibility practices (chapter 2), changing facilitation strategies mid-workshop (chapter 3), or facing the major change of going from sighted to blind (chapter 5).

A RECOGNITION OF IDIOSYNCRASY AND CONTEXT

The editors believe that inclusive teaching cannot be confined to a checklist or a tidy formula. Instead, it is based on relationships (e.g., teacher-student; facilitator-learner), and it happens in context (e.g., classroom, organization, geo-politics). Instructors develop their own unique ways to teach inclusively, and they develop teaching personas that feel authentic to them. In Tiffiny L. Sia's classes (chapter 5), students are often startled into new understandings as she nudges them out of their comfort zones. In Rodrick Shao's classes (chapter 6), students are reassured by frequent communication and clear structure. Both professors are committed to equity, but their styles and strategies differ. We encourage all readers to reflect on their own uniqueness and the way their teaching and facilitation is shaped by their own and their learners' histories, values, personalities, identities, and relationships.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Part 1: Inclusive Pedagogy Approaches, focuses on theories and practices that can be applied across situations and disciplines. Knowledge about cognitive and neural processes (chapter 1), inclusive teaching competencies (chapter 2), and facilitation practices (chapter 3) can be applied in a variety of contexts, including classrooms, workshops, one-on-one meetings, and professional development settings. Part 2: Inclusive Pedagogy Applications, provides three windows into specific contexts. The authors of part 2 discuss restorative writing pedagogy (chapter 4), knowledge gained from teaching as a blind person (chapter 5), and diversity, equity, and inclusion in online teaching (chapter 6). Readers can further preview the chapters by referring to the section introductions. The three themes outlined previously: *a willingness to be vulnerable, an expectation of continuous change,* and *a recognition of idiosyncrasy and context,* are evident throughout the chapters and sections, and can potentially be utilized by readers as a guide for pulling out major key takeaways, practices, or models for future implementation.

DEI IN CONTEXT

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education is a set of evolving constructs and practices that have made positive inroads at many of our institutions. Some institutions have created DEI-focused senior leadership and administrative offices, and some have instituted new requirements for assessing important processes like student admissions, course curriculum, faculty and staff employment, tenure, promotion, advancement, and merit. However, progress and trends within DEI in higher education continue to be contested and sometimes fraught with landmines. Pushback and skeptics of DEI work can come from any institutional stakeholder (e.g., faculty, staff, students, administration, alumni, community members, lawmakers) and can originate from politics across the spectrum (e.g., from the far left to the far right).

In addition to being influenced by sociopolitical contexts, instructors' approaches to DEI are influenced by the context of their roles within their institutions. For adjunct instructors, staff members, and pre-tenure faculty, it can be risky to try new and potentially controversial teaching approaches. As Margaret Gonzales discusses in chapter 4, the degree to which instructors feel supported by administrators plays an important role in their willingness to build strong teacher-student relationships and take pedagogical risks.

Rather than spending time defining DEI, our intention is to present DEI within the evolving context and landscape of higher education and our culture at large and leave these terms purposely undefined to allow for the inevitable change and necessary flexibility. The language used to describe equity-focused efforts will continue to evolve over time. As terminology changes, readers can learn and adapt while continuing to focus on the values, experiences, and relationships that drew them to DEI work. At the time of drafting this introduction, Florida and Texas are leading the way in banning and defunding DEI efforts, followed by dozens of other states across the country. Transgender care is being challenged nationally, and we are just starting to see the devastating aftermath of *Roe v. Wade* being overturned. Affirmative action was gutted by the Supreme Court. Book banning and censorship is rampant across the nation. This edited book project is being developed in spite and in resistance to the current social-political moment in which we find ourselves.

As the context of DEI continues to change, we as educators within higher education must be nimble and allow for constant evolution of our collective work. Several of our contributors write about competencies and skills that can move us towards more inclusive practices. We see an immense value in these approaches, especially for those who are just starting to explore DEI pedagogies and practices. However, we want to encourage readers to resist the temptation of seeing this work as finite or having a clear end point. Instead, we believe this work is best approached from the lens of lifelong learning. As educators and practitioners, we must stay abreast of the evolving cultural and political climate and continue to adapt. Our work never exists in a bubble; our students and others we serve do not enter our spaces with tabula rasa. Our collective work will always be complex. Approaching our work with curiosity, openness, and *an expectation of continuous change* will serve us well.

Engaging in DEI work in higher education also requires a deep commitment and practice of humility. Sometimes this is referred to as cultural humility in terms of addressing and preventing bias interactions (Tervalon and Murray-García 1998). However, focusing on humility more broadly can be instructive

here. Humility can be humanizing and powerful when engaging with DEI in the classroom and beyond. Being humble when we don't know something or when we make mistakes has the potential to break down power relations in the context of classrooms, trainings, and facilitations. The willingness to continuously learn and adjust relates closely to this book's call for *a recognition of idiosyncrasy and context* and *a willingness to be vulnerable*. As champions of DEI, we should never strive to be impermeable or flawless in this work. First, this puts unproductive stress and pressure on ourselves; and second, this could prevent us from doing the important self-reflective work that can help us grow, thrive, and form strong connections with our communities and those we aim to serve.

In that spirit, we (the editors) are humbled by the generous time and intellectual labor all the contributors have spent to share their perspectives and practices for this book. We are even more humbled by all of you, the readers, who have invested time to explore our collective work, and who will hopefully be inspired to make changes to your instructional space to better serve our diverse learning communities.

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Part 1

Inclusive Pedagogy Approaches

SECTION INTRODUCTION BY

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In the introduction of this book, we discussed how communities of practice can collectively support our efforts to build a more equitable higher education system and bolster our resilience in the face of politically hostile attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. For those of us who have contributed to this book, this community has been crucial to our excavation of the ways in which inclusive pedagogy allows for not just *more* but also *better* learning to take place. The editors identified three characteristics that emerged organically during our time cultivating a community of practice: *a willingness to be vulnerable, an expectation of continuous change,* and *a recognition of idiosyncrasy and context.* In part 1, Inclusive Pedagogy Approaches, the authors will focus on foundational theories and practices that help instructors connect with learners in intentionally inclusive ways.

In chapter 1, The Learning Brain: Cognitive and Neural Processes and Inclusive Pedagogy, psychology professor Michael Czuchry and communications professor Chris Bollinger discuss the biological site of human learning: the brain. They demonstrate that learners' existing knowledge and their schemas of self and community play key roles in determining how they process information. Czuchry and Bollinger work to expand our understanding of how identity and culture influence the information processing that takes place in the brain and how inclusive strategies support and improve learning. They explore how instructors' pedagogical actions—including the ways instructors use language, cultivate relationships, and use student-generated content—connect to learners' neural and cognitive processes.

In chapter 2, Adopting, Implementing, and Evaluating Inclusive Teaching Practices, educational developers Chris Drue and Christina Bifulco share their experience implementing a training program for higher education instructors interested in reducing

barriers to student success and creating more equitable educational outcomes. They show us how we might enhance inclusive pedagogy competencies in communities of practice through faculty and staff development programs. Readers can find an overview of research-based inclusive teaching practices, organized into three competencies: 1) Identities, Biases, and Microaggressions, 2) Course Design, Policies, and Educational Activities, and 3) Accessibility. Drue and Bifulco also include instructors' reflection statements discussing their experiences, successes, and challenges with inclusive teaching practices.

In chapter 3, Facilitation Practices for Inclusive Teaching, equity compliance and Title IX professional Leslie Flores and communications professor Chris Bollinger explore the role of facilitation in cultivating inclusion and enhancing learning. They take us on a journey exploring four experiences which required facilitators to adapt the original game plan and use multiple techniques in varying combinations. Flores and Bollinger share these as a way of showing three focal points of facilitation: First, the authors identify the ways in which relationships are foundational to facilitation and are always nuanced by sociocultural contexts. Second, the authors closely examine the role of learner capacity and capability, which includes realizing and accepting challenging moments, constructing choices, reshaping beliefs, and developing communal support as mechanisms to help facilitators navigate such moments. Third, the authors detail two general families of facilitation techniques to help enhance capacity and capability in real-time adaptation.

These three chapters provide readers with a wealth of different inclusive teaching and facilitation strategies. What approach excites you the most? What can be your first step towards implementation? Further discussion questions for each chapter can be found on Elon University Center for Engaged Learning's https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/books/inclusive-pedagogy-in-practice.

Chapter 1

The Learning Brain

Cognitive and Neural Processes and Inclusive Pedagogy

Michael Czuchry, *Texas Lutheran University*
Christopher Bollinger, *Texas Lutheran University*

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Many of us share a common desire: how to help people learn and perhaps even be transformed by the learning experience. This chapter focuses on how the brain processes information and how inclusive pedagogies can empower learning. Carl Sagan (1986) noted that given the billions of neurons in the brain and the trillions of changing connections, the brain is one of the most complex systems in the universe, and others continue to quantify the brain in similar ways (Krauss 2024). Still, there appear to be specific ways in which the brains of humans and other animals process information, although there are individual variations on this design. And the brain, and learning, of course, do not happen in a vacuum. It is our shared and unique culture and experiences that ultimately shape who we are and how we learn. Tapping into these experiences takes advantage of the unique structure of every learner's mind and is one of the most powerful ways the brain learns. Although the current chapter does not examine every nuance of the brain and how it supports learning, memory, and understanding, universal and unique themes underlying such learning will be explored.

In this chapter we will explore 1) universal ways that the brain processes information, 2) cultural differences and its impact on processing and knowledge, 3) neurodivergence and how it can impact experience and learning, and 4) inclusive strategies that can facilitate the effectiveness of the learning process. Along the way, we'll offer some suggestions about potential straightforward strategies to incorporate in the classroom. In the end, we hope you engage in some self-discovery and develop some of your own ideas for facilitating inclusive learning.

UNIVERSAL WAYS THE BRAIN PROCESSES INFORMATION

The architecture and processing of the brain provides a universal starting point for understanding learning. Historically, there have been attempts to localize specific types of processing to specific areas of the brain or to global communication of the entire brain (Finger 2000; Fedorenko et al. 2024). However, both local and global processes are inextricably connected to processing information. As complex as this may be, new methods are emerging to simultaneously examine unique and universal ways the brain is organized to support information processing (Dworetsky et al. 2024).

INTRODUCTION TO AN INFORMATION PROCESSING MODEL

From a cognitive perspective, information processing models provide a useful framework for understanding how new knowledge is acquired. Information must get into the system, but existing knowledge also influences how it is processed and understood. The figure that follows attempts to capture a few critical features of how memory impacts learning.

As noted, information processing is impacted in important ways by existing knowledge. Long-term information includes our structured knowledge of the world, indicated in figure 1.1 as *knowledge structures*. This can represent, for example, semantic memories of facts and figures or episodic information about life experiences. In essence, any information that is organized in a meaningful way could be thought of as being represented in the brain as a knowledge structure or schema. Knowledge structures relevant to the self will be especially important for processing and remembering information. Self-generated or self-derived knowledge is much more easily remembered than information that is provided to an individual (Bauer et al. 2024; Slamecka and Graf 1978; Marsh et al. 2001), especially when individuals are not aware they are going to be tested over the material days later. Self-schemas are thought to be chronically accessible and processed automatically (Markus 1977; Chu and Lowery 2024), much like language, and thus can powerfully shape how one understands something in the moment, including finding meaning in life (Chu and Lowery 2024). Indeed, the self may be the most important organizing knowledge structure we discuss, as it is central to everything one cares deeply about. It is why an inclusive strategy around learner-generated content, where students find and incorporate relevant materials into a class, can

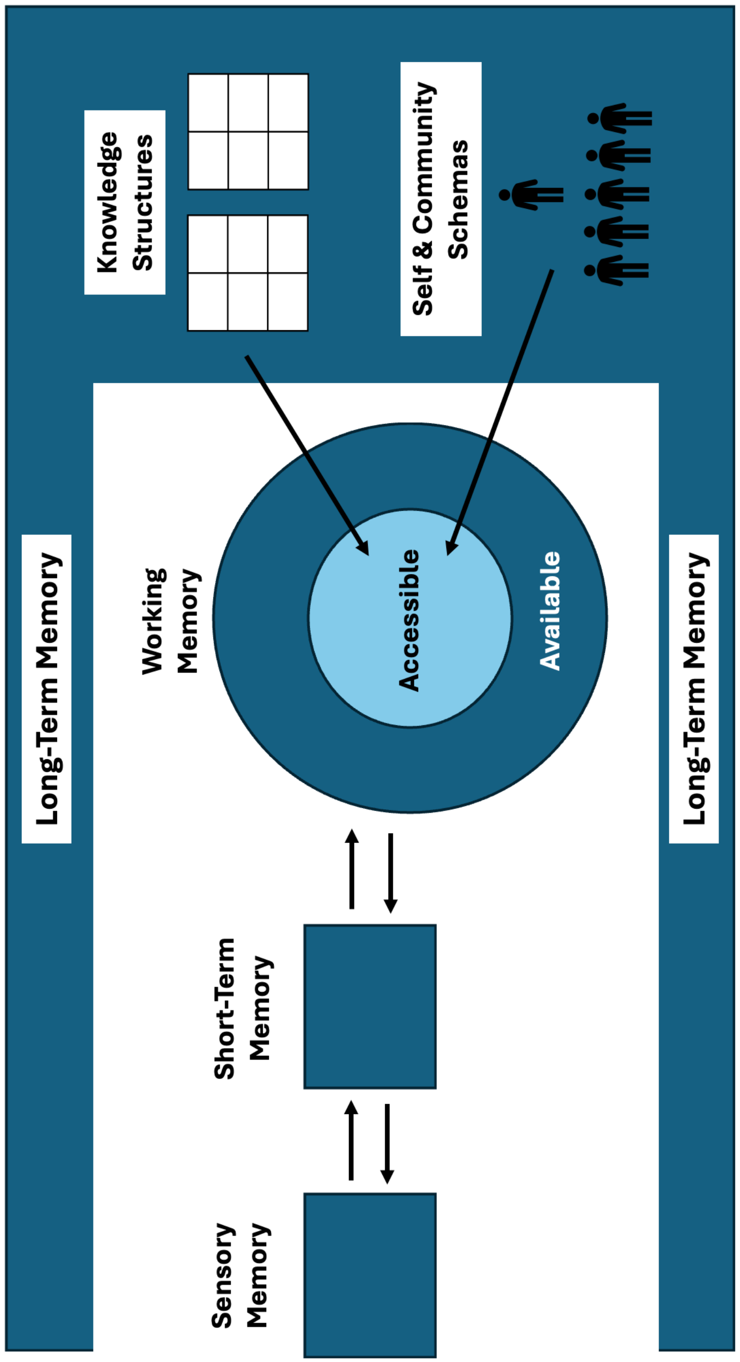

FIGURE 1.1. Information Processes Impacting Learning

be so effective (Freire 2002). It is impossible to predict the myriad of differences that learners will bring with them; thus, allowing them to directly bring these lived experiences and individualized discoveries into the learning environment is particularly useful. The rich, complex knowledge of all learners can contextualize the learning experience. Mike uses an "All About Me!" low stakes assignment at the beginning of the semester to learn about students' schemas and experiences, and a course survey at the start of a class, as discussed in chapter 2, could also be used to gain this knowledge.

Our identity, our sense of self, and our individual practices always take place within a larger structure of social relationships (Bollinger and Menchaca 2014), and social situations can inform the underlying neurology of the self and account for some biases that occur (Forbes 2024). Who we are is always shaped by those with whom we are socially connected. Our identity is complex, comprised of multiple parts. One might identify, as Chris does, as white, a male, a teacher, a feminist, and a Catholic. While all of those play a part in one's identity, a particular combination and ranking of affiliated values to those parts might be more influential in one moment over another and influence what knowledge is currently accessible. Identity is also fluid, evolving over time with experience. Who you are today may in some ways be similar but, in many ways, different than the person you were ten years ago.

Our culture, our social community sharing a sense of values, ideologies, and practices handed down from one generation to another, is always being shaped by the practices of its members (Bollinger and Menchaca 2014). These social experiences can vary. For example, those who live in multigenerational homes have different ways of communicating with and representing family in the brain compared to those who do not (Dikker, Brito, and Dumas 2024). Agency, our ability to act, is a product of our identity, our culture, our histories, our accomplishments, and our values. Put another way, it is a product of our individual mindset, our knowledge, and our skills all tempered by the conditions, restraints, and opportunities put in place by our culture. And all of this is represented in our long-term memory structures in the brain. In a very real way, then, understanding culture is understanding the architecture of the brain. Activating that architecture is critical for deep learning to occur.

Further, our self-concept and how it is structured can vary dramatically depending on cultural values. We know cultural values influence how we see ourselves and others (Kikutani et al. 2024; Wang et al. 2015), relate to our community (Sullivan and Cottone 2010; Hofstede 1980), process information (Chua et al. 2022), care about others (Wang et al. 2015), and how we display and interpret emotions (Kikutani et al. 2024). Researchers have often focused on cultures varying in individualism and collectivism (Sullivan and Cottone 2010; Kikutani et al. 2024). In individualistic cultural groups, independence and individual accomplishments are prioritized over collective ones, and it is more likely that an independent self-concept can develop. In collectivistic cultural groups, collective values of the group are valued higher than one's own, and it is more likely that an interdependent self-concept can develop, although there are within culture variations as well. In individualistic cultures, family, friends, and coworkers are very important, but they are often viewed as separate and distinct from the self. This is very different than interdependent self-concepts more likely formed in collectivistic cultures where family, friends, and coworkers are an intricate part of the self-concept (Kikutani et al. 2024; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Sullivan and Cottone 2010; Triandis and Suh 2002).

People holding individualistic cultural values might like to have a choice when selecting what type of sandwich they want to eat for lunch. People holding collectivistic values might prefer when someone else makes the decision about what to eat because they remember what they have liked in the past and are demonstrating this directly (Triandis and Suh 2002). Folks embracing individualistic cultural values might see choice as fostering intrinsic motivation to complete tasks, embrace their independent autonomy, and place enormous value on individual accomplishment. In contrast, folks embracing collectivistic values might prefer a trusted authority figure to recommend which task to do next and place enormous value on family (Triandis and Suh 2002). This means that knowledge is structured in the brain in different ways based on culture, but also that different cultures can influence motivation for learning.

Knowing that different cultures and subcultures hold individualistic or collectivistic values and that those values shape how the brain operates, one might be tempted to assign a person to a culture and therefore to a specific set of values, but that would be a mistake. Similarly, it would be a mistake to assume multiple collectivist cultures, such as Japanese and Korean cultures, share similar beliefs and behaviors (Kikutani et al. 2024). While Hofstede's (1980) concepts of individualistic and collectivistic cultures provide great insight into the varying ways cultural values may be central to how we move through the world, we have to be careful to not overreach when applying these constructs. Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier (2002) rightly challenged Hofstede's and others work for using individual level analysis of insufficient subsets to assign characteristics to very large populations comprised of many diverse people. Certainly, dominant cultural norms exist, but much of the work ascribes these norms to not just people but to entire countries and in some cases continents. Such overgeneralizations do not account for variations in situational contexts, membership across multiple cultures, or varying generational shifts within cultures (Paris 2012). That said, the work does offer us some value in understanding the multiple ways people makes sense of the world, especially when overgeneralizations do not occur.

Our cultural experiences do shape our cultural values. Those values shape how we make sense of ourselves (Wang et al. 2015) in our community (Sullivan and Cottone 2010; Hofstede 1980), how we process information (Chua et al. 2022), and how we relate to others (Wang et al. 2015; Kikutani et al. 2024). Thus, learning about our cultural experiences, viewpoints, and values can help us better connect with them and capitalize on the various strengths they bring to the learning environment, rather than forcing a one-size-fits-all approach. Jigsaw learning (Aronson 2012; Mengduo and Xiaoing 2010; Sharma, Singh, and Devi 2025), where small groups work together interdependently and develop individual expertise to accomplish a learning task, could be modified to include an examination of each participants' cultural experiences and knowledge, thus making the approach more inclusive than it already is. Indeed, any assignment could be modified to include reflections on how our own culture, or the cultures of others, could potentially change interpretations or suggest new lines of inquiry.

Returning to information processing and figure 1.1, only a subset of available information in long-term memory is accessible at any one time, so what is currently accessible can dramatically shape our understanding. If you have ever struggled coming up

with a name that you knew you knew, but just could not access in the moment, you have experienced the "tip of the tongue" (TOT) phenomenon. If you were to ask someone for the initials for the name you were struggling with, these retrieval cues could suddenly help make that information accessible (Brennen et al. 1990). The TOT phenomenon is interesting in that it also requires metacognition and knowing you know the information but just cannot currently retrieve it (Fossa et al. 2024) This also means that at any given moment, even self-relevant information that could be available may not be immediately accessible; therefore, allowing for multiple opportunities to access knowledge across time is important for learners to demonstrate their knowledge.

One of the more robust findings in cognitive psychology is that spacing learning over time facilitates learning and memory (Cepeda et al. 2006; Cowan et al. 2024). Giving learners an opportunity to freely recall everything they can about a topic, even without corrective feedback, facilitates memory and learning after a delay more than re-reading or relearning material (Agarwal, Nunes, and Blunt 2021; Roediger and Karpicke 2006; Wang and Yang 2015). These are universal ways that can help people learn and can supplement the various tools we have in the toolbox for inclusive learning. Over time, it is also true that long-term memory processes and schemas can become so overlearned that they are processed automatically and unconsciously (Shiffrin and Schneider 1984; Schneider and Chein 2003).

To get a sense of how knowledge structures or schemas can impact processing learning automatically and quickly, try the following demonstration. (If you are viewing a grayscale version of this chapter, visit this chapter's web page to see the color images). Look at the box on the next page (figure 1.2) and identify the *ink color* of each rectangle as quickly as you can. Now

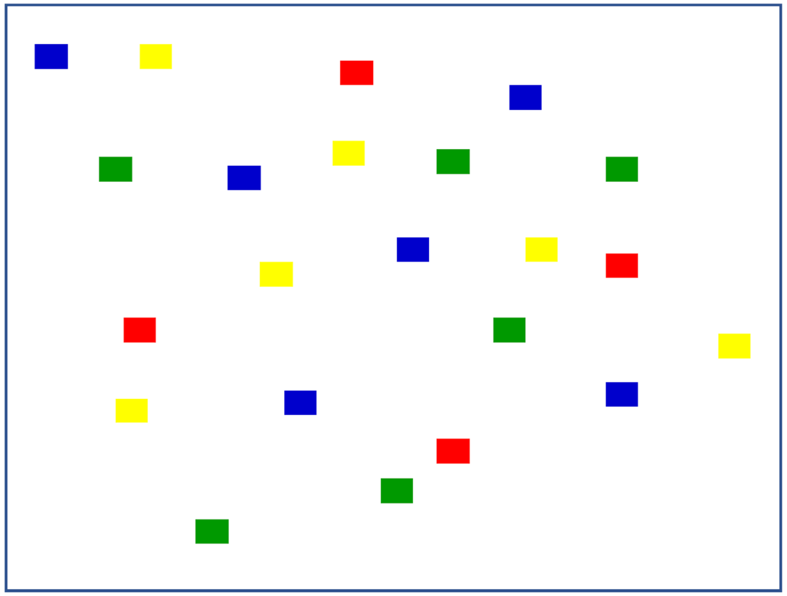

FIGURE 1.2.

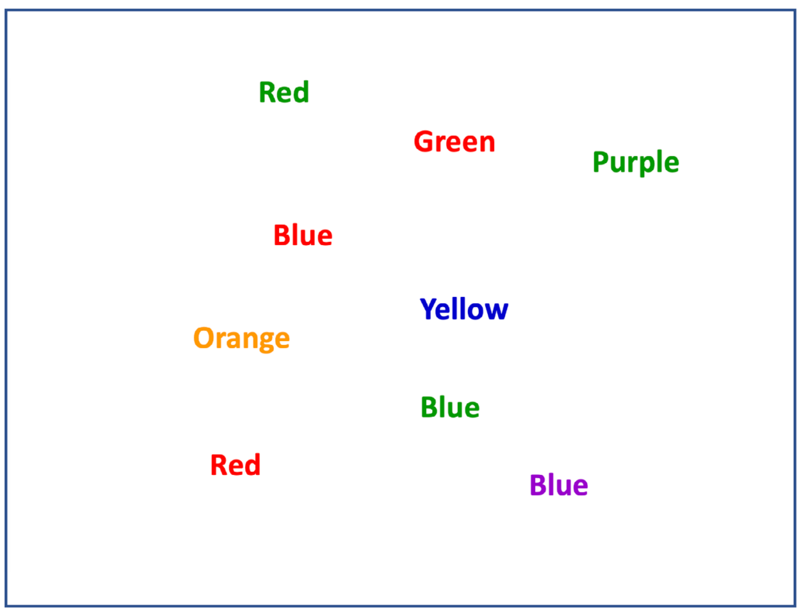

FIGURE 1.3.

try it again, name the *ink color* for each of the following words, not the word itself (figure 1.3). This example is drawn from the well-known "Stroop Effect" (Nicosia et al. 2021; Stroop 1935).

Language has become automatized and thus processed so quickly and unconsciously that it makes this second task more challenging, although it may also be that the name of the ink colors automatically triggers imagery that interferes with processing (Nanay 2024). The beneficial impact of automatization, however, is that it generally facilitates and organizes information processing in beneficial ways. However, it can also lead to implicit, unconscious biases that impact how we communicate with others. These biases can be challenging to uncover, and even harder to change, but there are ways to become aware of some of them. For example, the Project Implicit website maintained by Harvard University provides a test people can take to help identify biases. We need to be forgiving of ourselves as we make attempts to change, including becoming aware of and changing microaggressions (see chapter 2 of this book for more of a discussion about this).

Explicitly wanting to change does not mean these implicit processes come along for the ride immediately. For example, Mike has accidentally said "he" or "she" after knowing someone used the pronoun "they," but has found that if he simply apologizes and notes he will try to get it right the next time, the connection with the student is stronger than ever as they appreciate his awareness of their preferences and his efforts in his communication with them. As another example, Mike long ago changed to saying it was nice talking "with" you, instead of "to" you, to symbolize that when communicating with others, it is communal. It took a long time before it became an automatic part of Mike's way of saying goodbye. And that is fine. Be patient with yourself too as you wait for these implicit processes to catch up with the explicit/ conscious ones.

As can also be seen in figure 1.1, there are different types of memory systems that influence processing and the length of time that the information remains accessible (Wirth et al. 2020). Sensory memory is the first step for information to get into the system through one of our senses (e.g., visual, auditory, olfactory/ smell). Sensory memory can last milliseconds to seconds (Baddeley 1990; Baddeley 2001; Schraw and McCrudden 2009; Tomić and Bays 2024). If you have ever played with sparklers or glow sticks in the dark, you have directly experienced a form of visual sensory memory known as iconic memory. The tracers observed are an illusion. It is a way for the visual system to continue an image after it ceased to exist so that the images could be combined across time (Baddeley 1990). Other memory systems keep information available for longer periods of time. Short-term memory has traditionally been thought to last about 30 seconds, although it can last longer if an individual can focus on one thing alone and is not interrupted (Squire 2009). This means that if a learner is distracted, the information is never processed. That is why making things relevant to the learner (e.g., Artze-Vega 2023) is so important. It is tedious and challenging to follow something that is not interesting. When something is relevant and meaningful, people are not only ready to learn, but their learning comes naturally because they want to make meaning of themselves, others, and the world.

Working memory is a little bit different as it combines long-term and short-term memory, where information that has been consolidated into long-term memory structures, including schemas that represent the self and our communities, shape our immediate experiences. And this is why existing knowledge

structures are, in the end, more important than just the processing limitations that most individuals face. For example, it has long been known that expertise shapes experiences. Chess experts have derived patterns that are stored in long-term memory that can assist processing, but only if it fits an expected or possible pattern. Novice and expert chess players who are shown chess pieces for only a few seconds show no differences in reconstructing the placements of chess pieces when they were in random places that could not actually occur in a game, but experts are far superior when the chess pieces are in locations that could actually occur at some point in the game (Chase and Simon 1973; Leong et al. 2024). Elaborative rehearsal, connecting things to what you already know, is much better than maintenance rehearsal, simply repeating things over and over, for remembering new information accurately later (Bartsch et al. 2024), although the speed with which it is processed may be slowed (Benjamin and Bjork 2000). However, as noted previously, one needs time to be able to do this, so learners need to have time to engage with information fully before connections to existing knowledge can occur. And different leaners may need different amounts of time, as would be a consideration of Universal Design for Learning (which is discussed further in chapter 2).

INFORMATION PROCESSING AND THE BRAIN

Even though the self is unique to everyone, and there is variation from person to person in how the brain processes information, there are still universal brain processes thought to be involved in processing stimuli. What one finds to be beautiful can demonstrate what we mean by this. In an intriguing experiment (Vessel et al. 2012), participants were shown 100 paintings that were thought to be novel/new to most individuals. Although there was great variation in terms of which paintings were found to be especially beautiful and inspiring, fMRI images of the brains of participants found that there was common brain processing across all individuals when examining paintings that received higher ratings versus lower ratings. Universally, across subjects, there was consistent activation of the default mode network (a series of brain areas typically active when one is not thinking about anything in particular) and also, and importantly, areas of the prefrontal cortex that are known to process self-relevant information (Salgues et al. 2024; Vessel et al. 2012). In essence, the paintings that were perceived as beautiful and meaningful were so because they were relevant to the self. And this was true despite the great variability in the paintings selected. Thus, engaging the learner in something that is self-relevant will naturally and organically generate interest in processing that information further. The importance of making things relevant is capitalizing on this aspect of brain processing (Artze-Vega 2023).

Although there are specific ways to link both conscious and unconscious processing to various parts of the brain (Sherman et al. 2024; Squire and Zola 1996), often we focus on conscious or explicit processing. It turns out that one of the most important areas of the brain for conscious memories includes the hippocampus. We know this both through research with animals (Squire 2009) and through accidental discovery in the story of H. M. H. M. was a patient with severe epilepsy who underwent surgery as a method of last resort and who had both hippocampi removed (Squire 2009; Amaral et al. 2024). As a result, H. M. could no longer create new long-term conscious memories and was thus often stuck in the past, although new unconscious procedural memories could still occur as these areas of the brain remained

intact (Squire 2009), and he could remember information for fifteen minutes if he could repeat it over and over without interruption (Squire 2009). Although as noted previously, this would not be an effective strategy for getting information into long-term memory, as was even the case for H.M. H.M.'s brain is undergoing intensive analyses, and detailed elaborations of what are found are forthcoming, so he continues to contribute to understanding of explicit conscious memories (Amaral et al. 2024). Some understanding of the changes to capacity as people age or for those dealing with other mental health factors can inform inclusive pedagogical approaches. Learning management systems, such as Canvas or Blackboard, can be tailored to release assignments after learners reach certain milestones, which may help with these differences (see chapter 2 of this book for more information).

Memory and explicit consciousness appear to require that reciprocal connections from parts of the brain that are engaged in later processing keep earlier processing active (and is why there are back and forth arrows in figure 1.1 on information processing). As an example of this, lean in close and stare at the "+" in figure 1.4 that follows for about 30–40 seconds (next page).

For most people, if they stare long enough, the colors generally disappear and fade into the background. If you are viewing the image in grayscale, the same effect occurs, although it is more subtle. The reason the colors disappear is that neurons later in processing (that have reciprocal connections to earlier neurons) typically facilitate their continued processing, but at some point, those later neurons no longer keep those earlier neurons firing. When this happens, the information disappears as it is no longer fed-forward in the system. Conscious processing of many types appears to require just this type of reciprocal relationship where

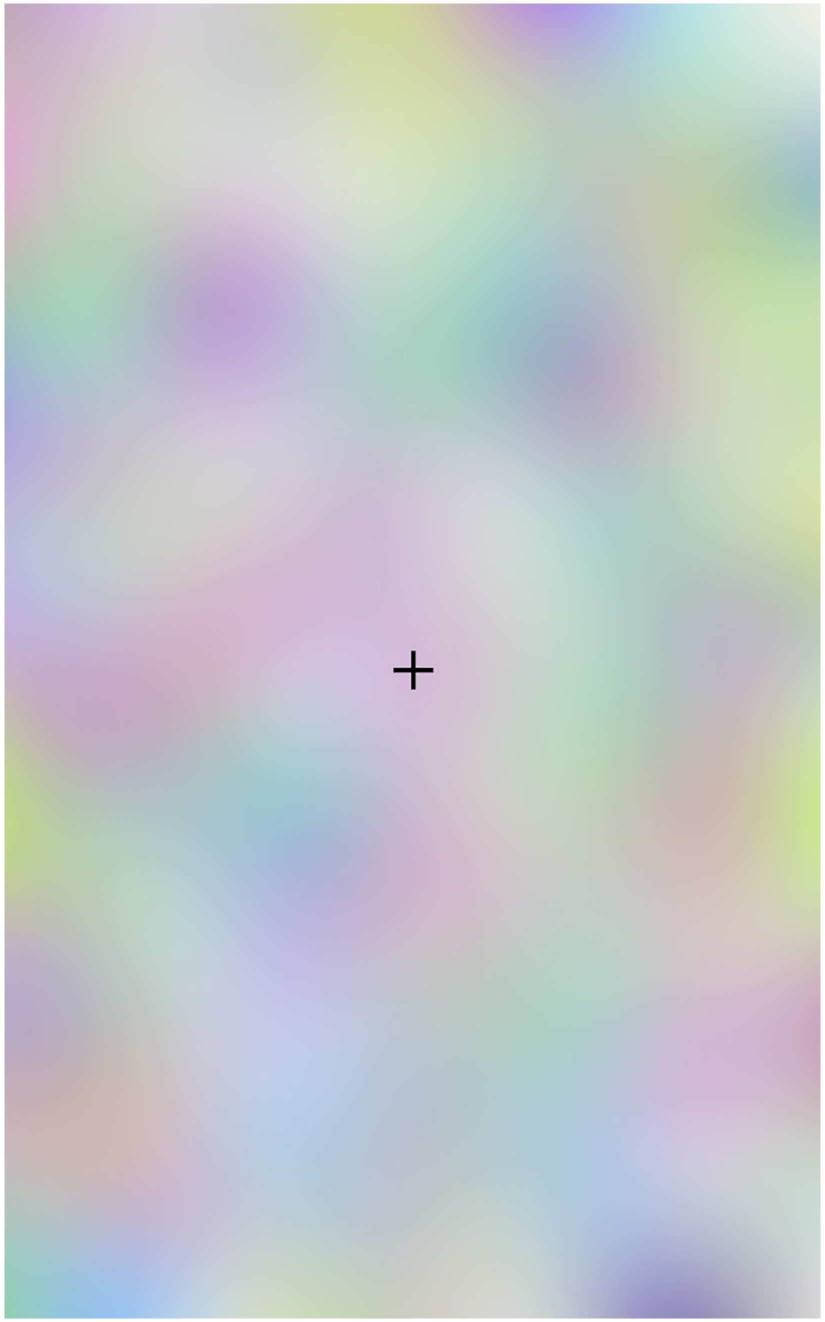

Figure 1.4.

later neurons facilitate earlier neurons to keep firing (van Gaal and Lamme 2011; Zheng et al. 2024).

The reason this is important for inclusive pedagogy is that if information is not relevant and engaging, the brain itself is not fully processing information in a way that will contribute to learning. And although the ways in which unconscious/implicit processing may impact learning are beyond the scope of this chapter, conscious/explicit processing is additionally important as it is tied to willful agency and the desire to engage fully with materials.

NEURONAL PROCESSES

Interestingly, the hippocampus is an area of the brain that is continually generating new layers of neurons (Deng et al. 2010; Alonso et al. 2024), and these new neurons may serve as a sort of biological time stamp for new memories that are being formed throughout the neocortex (Kveim et al. 2024). It seems analogous to a geological time scale where layers of sediment hold keys to the past. It should be noted that the memories are not stored in the hippocampus itself, rather they are distributed widely throughout the neocortex, but without it, new conscious memories would not occur, as occurred with H.M. The tragic and devastating impact of Alzheimer's disease is thought to involve, in part, the gradual destruction of this important part of the brain. In terms of neuronal architecture of knowledge structures and self-schemas, imagine a tree with its many branches growing into a beautiful and complex structure. This is not entirely unlike how neurons form their connections over time, if one considers how the complicated network of roots beneath the ground connects trees in a forest. Interestingly, and as a bit of an aside, given the networks of vast connections/roots that trees share, trees at remote distances can be warned about impending dangers, such as disease or pests, and can attempt countermeasures to protect themselves (Wohlleben 2016). To streamline information processing, periods of pruning (imagine trimming back the branches of a bush or tree) help these structures become more efficient (Paolicelli et al. 2011; Fleming and McDermott, 2024), although it is thought that memories can be lost in this process. One model of Alzheimer's even suggests that it is the pruning process that has gone haywire in the brain (Hong et al. 2016; Wen and Shen 2024). Fortunately, this is not the case for the healthy brain, although these pruning processes are still active. However, there are periods of active pruning that can interfere with memory to a greater extent than others, such as occurs during adolescence, which may be a contributing factor to the phenomenon of childhood amnesia (Bauer 2013; Bauer and Larkina 2014), where many individuals cannot remember events from before about 2.5 years of age, although additional factors, such as the development of a stable self-concept (Ross et al. 2024), are also critically important.

The main point of this chapter's current section is to note that information processing depends on what is happening at a neuronal level. The neuronal level includes the structure of connections, which are exceedingly complex, as well as the biological processes among them. The ways in which these processes occur are generally thought to be universal at a biological level, but the architecture itself varies greatly, as do some of the processes. As an extreme example, there have been experiments with genetically bred "knock out" mice where receptor sites for opioids have been eliminated (Kieffer and Gavériaux-Ruff 2002). If there are no receptor sites for these neurotransmitters, injecting these mice with opioids will have no behavioral effects. Similar effects are

seen in the simple worm *Caenorhabditis elegans* that is being used to investigate the link between dopamine activity and opioid addiction (Ide and Ikeda 2024). Dramatic impacts of the drug curare on humans have also long been known (Elsherbini and Backman, 2024). For example, in order to move, a specific type of the neurotransmitter acetylcholine needs to activate muscle movements—but if these receptor sites are blocked with the drug curare (Trautmann 1982), a person can be completely paralyzed even if they desire to move (Anderson 2010). Although it may be hard to make direct connections to inclusive learning with some of these examples of neuronal processing, one place where it may be easier to see the connection is with trying to make safe learning environments.

Most readers are likely familiar with discussions about the fight or flight response, and how the nervous system can be overwhelmed and make it so learners are unable to fully be in the moment. Learners bring all sorts of trauma into the classroom we may be completely unaware of; trauma-informed teaching is one way educators grapple with this issue (Brunzell et al. 2019). In general, the more we create spaces that feel safer for all students, the more we can minimize the disruptive effects of internal fight or flight biology on the learning experience. Again, even here, the biology of each person varies. In certain situations, women may not have the same fight or flight experience as men, especially when oxytocin, the bonding hormone, is released. In these cases, women may have reductions in fear responses and engage in a 'tend and befriend' response that may be very different than responses of men to threatening situations (Cohen and Lansing 2021; Funder 2019). However, it is worth noting that gender differences do not capture the full spectrum of human behavior, that we are more than just our biology, and that plenty of men, women, and nonbinary individuals will exhibit differences in biological and psychological predispositions in the face of threat. As a general rule, different people may require different types of structural support when faced with threatening situations, but a safe learning environment for all can help alleviate hidden trauma and stresses impacting learners.

Although there appear to be seemingly universal ways in which our brains process information, even at the level of neuronal connections and processes, there can be notable differences; this is where we turn our attention to the neurodiversity or differences of brain systems.

NEURODIVERGENCE

As noted previously, there are differences in processing that occur in the neuronal architectures of all individuals. Even identical twins, who share the same genome to begin with, start to have differences in gene expression as the result of epigenetic processes, or the turning on or off of specific genes (Funder 2019), and even have fingerprints that are distinguishable from each other (Srihari et al. 2008). Indeed, advances in forensic science are attempting to exploit differences in DNA and epigenetic differences to distinguish between identical twins when crimes are committed (Skrant et al. 2024). Experiences, and when those experiences occur, cause different types of neuronal expression depending on the developmental stage of an organism. Even something that may seem relatively fixed and dependent on genetic factors can rely on having certain experiences during certain windows of time. Kittens, for example, will not develop neurons that are specifically sensitive to lines of a given orientation in the visual cortex of the occipital lobe if they are not exposed to those lines

within a critical or sensitive period of development (Parrey 2024; Tretter et al. 1975). If exposed to horizontal lines during this time they will see them but not vertical lines, and vice versa if only exposed to vertical lines. So, if there can be great neuronal diversity for even identical twins, imagine how many differences can occur for individuals with atypical neuronal development, such as individuals diagnosed with synesthesia, autism, or schizophrenia. People diagnosed with synesthesia may experience a blending of senses, e.g., visual experiences associated with certain sounds (Ward 2008). People diagnosed with autism may have differences in prefrontal regulation of brain regions responsible for representing and mimicking others (Yates and Hobson, 2020). People diagnosed with schizophrenia commonly experience auditory hallucinations, such symptoms being associated with abnormally high dopamine levels and neuronal receptor sites (Howes and Kapur 2009; Stellakis et al. 2024).

Even with individuals who are assumed to have relatively comparable neurological systems and processes, when experiences happen at different times, different pools of neurons are recruited as part of that learning process to become the foundation of long-term memory (Ward 2015). For example, it is possible to see how similar but different neurons are recruited when one learns the piano at a young age, during adolescence, or in later years (Ward 2015), or when one learns a new language. People who know more than one language can lose the ability to understand one language but not the other after a stroke, as the pools of neurons supporting the understanding of each language are different, and where some have survived, others have not (Ward 2015). Advances in investigating similarities and differences in brain organization and function suggest that everyone's brain is unique, yet comparable to others (Dworetsky et al. 2024).

The advances in this research will allow researchers to better appreciate and predict how subsets of individuals learn and process information based on the organization and function of the brain. These differences again suggest a one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective with all learners, and that being open to learning about individual preferences or capacities for learning remains an important consideration. Although learners are not always accurate in identifying what truly benefits their learning, simply asking them about and acknowledging their preferences is a form of inclusion.

Ultimately, experience is a great architect of our minds. Research indicates that rats raised in enriched environments will have many more neuronal connections than rats raised in impoverished ones (Rosenzweig and Bennett 1972; Khalil 2024). But it is also true that mice who are naturally more exploratory when young create a greater range of experiences that in turn increase the number of neuronal connections in the brain (Funder 2019). Everyone is thus a mix of their genetic propensities and their ultimate experiences. These experiences include different cultural experiences that shape and craft our brains in different ways. As noted, using just one blueprint or cultural context for explaining or understanding things essentially guarantees that a lot of people are going to miss out on the experience. This would be expected to be especially true as diversity increases within a community. What this means, circling back to knowledge structures and the information processing model in figure 1.1, is if we do not have a sense of what these knowledge structures are (including self- and community-schemas), we cannot tap into one of the many great resources available to any learner to help shape their immediate experience and understanding.

INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES TO INCREASE CAPACITY: ATTENDING TO PROCESSING AND CULTURAL CONCERNS

Although we have dropped some hints about potential inclusive strategies that one might use to take advantage of universal and independent ways the brain processes information, we want to step back now and provide a wider view of inclusive strategies more generally, especially ones that are culturally responsive (Abdalla and Moussa 2024). Scholars and practitioners have embraced many common inclusive strategies to enhance learning. This section will examine the following: relative importance (through structural recognition and cultivating productive relational connection) and designing inclusive curriculum. We believe that attending to these approaches while being mindful of the ways the brain processes information and cultural considerations will ultimately increase the capacity for all students to learn.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE

As practitioners of learning, we know that the level of importance a topic holds for the learner is a critical factor a critical factor to one's engagement with the learning process. Our own excitement and passion for a topic can generate interest, but to maintain interest and engagement, the information must be relevant to students in some specific and important ways. Three ways to increase the relative importance of information are 1) attending to structural recognition, 2) cultivating productive relational connections, and 3) using learner-generated content (Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; Paris 2012; Felten and Lambert 2020; Freire 2002).

First, we will examine the importance of *attending to structural recognition.* When people talk about structural strategies as part of inclusive approaches, they frequently focus on the number of people you have from different groups. Although broad representation is indeed important, it alone will not address structural recognition of others. For example, jigsaw learning approaches construct diverse groups comprised of members from different identity groups where each member has some expertise others must depend upon. Although this can lead to improved relationships and learning outcomes, Vives and colleagues (2024) found that even when producing positive results, it sometimes yields mixed outcomes. For example, in some of the original research with jigsaw learning, it was not as helpful to Mexican American students who were not comfortable with how they sounded while talking in front of their peers (Aronson 2012). In addition, these kinds of discussions around broad representation often rely on assumptions about groups that risk essentializing them (i.e., making individuals feel like they are characterized by group stereotypes instead of individual characteristics), and research shows that just making numeric changes often fails to create more inclusive environments in-and-of-itself (Haslerig et al. 2013).

Within educational settings, inclusive strategies addressing structural concerns seek to recognize local, regional, and national contexts surrounding issues relevant to our learner population. Our learners carry their contextualized experiences into our classrooms or programs with them. Recognizing and being cognizant of those experiences accomplishes two important tasks. As their contextualized experience is recognized, they can begin to see the connections their curricular experience has in their own lives (Eden et al. 2024; Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; Paris 2012). The

recognition also helps educators identify potential knowledge structures and self-schemas that shape understanding of learners. Second, it has the potential to impact mindset and self-efficacy (Marzano 1998; Rocha et al. 2024). When students and teachers recognize the structural impacts, this allows them to take on an alternative perspective. Instead of only being passive participants either feeling powerless as they are objectified by the structure or feeling guilty for unwittingly being the beneficiary of the structures, they can embrace the role of being active agents working on the challenges. For example, when a speaker acknowledges that the land audience members are on was first inhabited by indigenous people, this highlights an understanding of an otherwise disenfranchised group. This allows all audience members to reflect on their own group memberships and provides an entry point for individuals who may often feel that they are not represented in typical conversations.

Structural recognition can also be enhanced through linguistic engagement. As we discussed earlier, language cues automatic processing shortcuts (Nanay 2024; Stroop 1935; Ward 2015), and thus, it is incredibly important in shaping our learning for better or worse. Consider how having different languages of origin, where some meaning is not easily translated from one language to another, might influence processing and understanding. Proficiency in or holding space for multiple languages to be valued and embraced can help improve communication and connection. Further, how we linguistically represent ideas and experiences is important but so is how we linguistically mark identities, including or excluding our fellow community members (Paris 2012). Inclusive strategies for linguistic engagement encourage us to learn to use each other's pronouns, know and correctly pronounce each other's names, become accustomed to accents different from our own, begin learning different languages and expressions, and always work on how we describe different groups of people, humanizing rather than dehumanizing them.

Additionally, *cultivating productive relational connections* is important to increase the perceived relative importance of new information (Felten and Lambert 2020). Relationships are ever present in everything we do, and developing good relationships with learners is appropriately one of the first things most instructors focus on. Indeed, relationships have been shown to be an important factor in students' learning, belonging, and persistence in college and in promoting job satisfaction years after graduating from college. Relational connection happens in a lot of ways: instructor with learner, learner with learner, and learner with curriculum (content and modality).

With any of these connections, feeling understood and valued and having a positive and productive place in the community is crucial to our internal desire and belief in our capability to grow. When we know our students beyond the surface level, we can also use that knowledge to make our curriculum (content and modality) and facilitation more effective. When we find ourselves connecting more with some students over others, we have an opportunity to interrogate what makes some of those connections easier, considering what implicit, unconscious biases might be operating within us. Facilitating more productive peer to peer dynamics can also produce a positive learning impact (Hammond 2015). Poor facilitation of those dynamics has been shown to have the reverse effect. Inclusive strategies attending to relational dynamics focus on 1) exploring productive ways of coming to know our students and ourselves as whole persons, 2) recognizing and valuing people for who they are, their experiences, and their contributions, and 3) constructing curriculum in ways that

cultivate positive and productive connections in learning. For a deeper focus on facilitating relational dynamics, see chapter 3.

Lastly, using *learner-generated content*, a concept foregrounded in Freire's (2002) foundational work in critical pedagogy, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, can be especially useful for increasing the perceived relative importance to students for learning new information. As noted previously, the brain activates deep learning when that learning is somehow connected to the self and self-schemas. Oftentimes, we appropriately make sure that our examples come from a variety of diverse backgrounds so that learners will connect with those individuals and the materials at an important level. However, it may be perceived as formulaic if it still does not connect to the individual in meaningful and specific ways. One way around this is to structure examples in a way that requires the learner to provide self-generated content that he, she, or they can then explore further. The methods of exploration need not change, but if the examples and/or data to be examined is generated by the individual, it is going to be something that is relevant from the beginning to the end of the task. Because it is connected to the self, it will be much easier to draw upon a wealth of existing knowledge in the brain while completing the task.

DESIGNING INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM (OFTEN ADDRESSED AS CURRICULUM INTEGRATION)

Inclusive strategies in this area focus on curriculum and the connections it makes with our diverse student body. A more comprehensive understanding of the roles many people have played in our disciplines is important to all students' learning. Recognizing that there is some challenging work ahead, it is reasonable to state that much of our curriculum could provide more representation with respect to the diversity of our learning communities. There are many prominent exemplars (scholars, leaders, artists) who have been underrepresented in curricula who are women, Black, indigenous, people of color, LGBTQ+, or neurodivergent. Recognizing such diversity in the curriculum provides a sense of belonging and establishes the relative importance for learning the material.

Learners also find themselves more comfortable with different kinds of modalities from individual to external processing, to small group discussions, to discussion forums, to video engagement (Gay 2010). Universal Design for Learning focuses on both providing multiple modalities and working to ensure each modality is as broadly accessible as possible (Bastoni et al. 2023). In what ways is our curriculum representative of and accessible to a wide range of students is the primary question that such an approach attempts to answer.

If we appreciate Paris's (2012) concerns about the dangers of essentializing when attempting to recognize diversity within and across excluded groups, then accomplishing connection through representation for all our learners in the content is very challenging. There is, however, some promise in curriculum design that allows learners to insert more of their own experiences. As such, many inclusive practitioners have explored immersive pedagogies to help develop connection and motivation. Some common approaches include service learning, role plays, simulations, and even learner-generated content exercises where students in one way or another contribute part of who they are, which as noted contributes directly to perceptions of relative importance. Research has shown these can be effective when facilitated well, which often includes critically reflexive engagement throughout

the practices (Hammond 2015). In summary, inclusive strategies in this area seek to ensure our selected readings, videos, images, and various engagements better represent the diversity of our learners; to provide multiple modalities to be as accessible as possible; and to design engagements that allow learners to immerse themselves in their learning engagement. They also allow learners to connect to their existing knowledge structures and to develop this knowledge further in a way that is truly tied to their unique experiences.

SUMMARY

This chapter attempts to cover some general ideas around information processing, the brain, and inclusive strategies to improve learning. It addresses 1) universal ways the brain processes information by providing a general model of information processing, as well as some aspects of the brain and neuronal processes that underly this model, 2) cultural differences and its impact on processing and knowledge, 3) the importance of neurodivergence in understanding individual variation of this universal design, and 4) inclusive strategies that could be used strategically to improve learning. A fundamental truth that we hope is revealed by this chapter is that every individual is very much tied to the fabric of their mind. That fabric is made by the neurological structures that are organized in long-term memory. Those structures, in turn, are uniquely shaped by our experiences, reflect the communities to which we belong, and our intersecting identities. By connecting material to those structures, we are making learning more accessible. Although the chapter represents only a first step in linking the brain directly to inclusive approaches, we believe attempting to make such links is imperative for deep and meaningful learning to occur. Of course, we do not recommend attempting to change everything you do all at once. Pick one thing and see how this change impacts student learning. Every important journey begins with that first small step.

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CHAPTER 2

Adopting, Implementing, and Evaluating Inclusive Teaching Practices

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INTRODUCTION

Every student encounters obstacles or barriers that hinder their success or make them doubt their ability to reach their academic goals. These obstacles could be caused by lack of prior knowledge needed as a foundation for new learning, unreliable internet access or lack of access to other technology, illness of one's self or a family member, a comment from an instructor or other student that led one to doubt their ability, or a broken elevator that prevents one from reaching their classroom. These barriers and others like them are unevenly distributed and experienced by students at our institutions. For some students, these barriers are rare and surmountable, but for other students, the barriers compound to become much more formidable obstacles. For many, these barriers lead to failed classes, extra years trying to complete a degree, and even leaving the university without a degree.

We, the authors, are both educational developers in a university-wide teaching support office at a large public research institution and instructors in the departments of our disciplines. Our role as instructors has given us a window into the experience and effect of barriers to learning. From our classrooms, we work closely with our students, learning about who they are, where they come from, and about their aspirations and goals. Every semester, we see students who struggle, and we share in that struggle as we coach these students through our courses. Invariably, we suffer the heartache of assigning a failing grade to a student who we thought could do it, in whom we believed. What happens to those who fail our classes? Sometimes we see these students again and have another 15-week window into their lives. Most of the time, though, after we assign final grades, these students disappear from our view and fade into the obscurity provided by a large research institution. We rarely hear reports back from those students who leave our institution without a degree.

However, in our roles as educational developers, we can see these barriers to learning from a different perspective. We have reviewed the evidence on time-to-degree and the percentage of entering students who end up completing a degree. According to our institutional research office, the six-year baccalaureate graduation rate at our flagship campus for the 2014 entering cohort was 84.4 percent. While this percentage has increased in recent years, we also want to consider the almost 16 percent of students who are not completing. How do we support and break down barriers that are hindering student success of those individuals?

As educational developers, we have long provided resources on how to improve teaching using active learning and high-impact practices, but we've recently been more explicit about providing workshops and opportunities for faculty that target lowering or eliminating barriers to learning to support student success.

While you could find plenty of literature on barriers to learning, if you have classroom teaching experience you probably have already developed a sense of who is likely to struggle. When we begin one of our workshops with the question of "what barriers do students encounter that will impact their learning," our faculty participants are able to rattle off a long list of barriers related to student identities. The range of responses demonstrates that instructors understand the obstacles that students face. The challenge is to learn about and adopt inclusive teaching strategies that can help students overcome those obstacles, learn new content, persist in their studies, and excel.

For these reasons, we developed a program called the Classroom Inclusivity Series to help instructors at our institution develop inclusive teaching strategies. For the purposes of our program, we define inclusive pedagogy as working toward breaking down the barriers for each individual student to enable them to engage in the course and learn (based on Addy et al. 2021). As instructors, we are in a unique place to do something about the barriers that our students face. We can design courses and manage classroom experiences in ways that reduce barriers and give a greater chance of success for all. The program is organized as a collaboration between our central teaching support office and the university diversity office, with support from several other university offices which provide workshops.

Each workshop is aligned with one of three program competencies:

- **Competency 1: Identities, Biases, and Microaggressions**
  Understand and begin to address your and your students' identities, biases, prejudices, and fears and the impact they have on learning and the classroom environment.
- **Competency 2: Course Design, Policies, and Educational Activities**
  Infuse inclusive teaching practices into your educational practices by course re-design or adopting new teaching activities.
- **Competency 3: Accessibility**
  Ensure course content, web pages, activities, and assessments are accessible to all students.

Faculty and staff participants have the option of earning a credential by attending workshops and submitting reflections detailing what they learned, what and how they anticipate implementing within their course(s), and any difficulties they anticipate encountering. As of the end of 2023, we have offered about 150 workshops and issued 130 credentials to participants.

In this chapter, we explore the strategies adopted by our participants in their written reflections after engaging in our program. We collected these strategies as responses to an open-ended prompt, and we analyzed them as part of our program evaluation, which was approved by our institutional review board. We have organized this discussion based on program competency and ordered strategies within each competency by increasing difficulty. We begin each section with a "starter" inclusive teaching strategy that can be accomplished more quickly, followed by a more intensive "middle choice" level activity that might take more time and effort, followed by the most ambitious changes

that, while challenging, are important to tackle to achieve the biggest impact. We hope that by reviewing these examples of inclusive teaching strategies, you can learn new ideas about how to take the first steps to reduce barriers to academic success in your courses and on your campus.

COMPETENCY 1: IDENTITIES, BIASES, AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

Creating an inclusive classroom environment where the barriers to success are broken down for each individual student can seem a daunting task for those that understand the breadth of differences between students. Where to start? An initial beginning step toward inclusive pedagogy is reflecting on one's own social and professional identity including biases, prejudices, and fears (Applebaum 2019; Bell et al. 1997; Berk 2017). This process has been shown to support instructors' awareness of their students' identities, which is important to develop empathy and increase understanding of how to support students (O'Leary et al. 2020). These findings prompted the development of the first program competency: Understand and begin to address your and your students' identities, biases, prejudices, and fears and the impact they have on learning and the classroom environment.

Biases can impact student and instructor behavior in a multitude of ways, but, in classrooms, these biases, oftentimes implicit, are manifested in microaggressions. This competency encompasses an instructors' ability to respond to disruptive incidents or microaggressions and effectively manage tense classroom moments while learning about students' perspectives and experiences. Microaggressions are many times not intended to cause harm but have been correlated to physical and mental health, satisfaction, stress, and school and work performance, and found to be at least as damaging as overt discrimination (Jones et al. 2016).

Three themes emerged from faculty reflections on this competency: acquiring knowledge of identities, biases, and microaggressions, getting to know your students, and being prepared for hot moments in the classroom. Within each of these themes, there are strategies that are simple and quick to implement ("starter" strategies) and others that will take more time and/or effort to incorporate into your classroom ("mid-level" strategies). The following three sections provide strategies, each beginning with starter activities and continuing to more ambitious approaches.

SYLLABUS STATEMENTS TO RESPOND TO MICROAGGRESSIONS

At least in our experiences, students rarely express overt bias and discrimination during a public conversation in our classrooms. It is far more commonplace that a student would say something or do something to someone else that is subtly or ignorantly hurtful. These unintentional but commonplace slights are known as "microaggressions" because, while any individual action may not seem meaningfully harmful to an outside observer, the regularity and pervasiveness of the experience leads some students to feel that they do not belong in their field and discipline (Miles, Brockman, and Naphan-Kinger 2020). As one faculty member commented:

> Throughout my career, I have been on the receiving end of microaggressions and bias from students and colleagues. Examples abound. It was both uncomfortable and also a relief to see those experiences represented here. Similarly, I was torn between feeling surprised and unsurprised that so many of the faculty in the workshop are oblivious to the perspectives presented.

Learning about microaggressions is an important first step that will allow you to develop strategies to address these incidents. While many institutions offer training on microaggressions, you can learn about microaggressions on your own by reviewing the Student Microaggression inventory, which was developed from surveys of students at the University of Illinois and University of Denver (Berk 2017). Once you understand what type of statements constitute microaggressions, you can develop strategies to respond to them in a class. Many instructors who completed our program committed to incorporating a syllabus statement spelling out their position on diversity and inclusivity and providing ground rules for how to handle incidents of microaggressions.

Developing a syllabus statement is a starter strategy that can be easily implemented and referred to throughout a course. One faculty member wrote:

> ...syllabus statements are a small and simple way to move towards a more inclusive environment in my courses. Though these statements are not enough, they are a signal to my students that I am working towards increasing inclusivity and letting students know my classroom is a safe place. I will 'back up' these syllabus statements in the classroom through my ground rules, the way I conduct my course, and calling out inappropriate behavior as necessary.

Explicitly stated ground rules and a policy for calling out inappropriate behavior not only warn students that the instructor is serious about making the course a civil space for discussion, but they help the instructor hold themselves accountable for intervening according to their own policies. Womack (2017) provides an excellent discussion about using the appropriate tone to convey these messages in your syllabus statement such as using warm language in the syllabus where an instructor details what a student can do instead of can't do. Fuentes and colleagues (2021) provide suggestions such as including a diversity statement or one regarding individuals' multiple and intersecting identities within the syllabus. The authors give reflection questions to guide your process developing your own syllabus policies and provide a great additional resource (Fuentes et al. 2021). Most institutions will also have some language that can be incorporated, but putting it into your own words is necessary to truly signal to students, as the previous instructor mentioned, that this is important to you.

START-OF-COURSE SURVEYS

A strategy that takes a little more time to implement but has a rich payoff is to survey students about their background, life experiences, and previous knowledge at the start of a course (Addy et al. 2021). While you might already use a pre-course survey to learn about your students' prior knowledge, faculty who participated in our program committed to developing questions to help them understand more about their students' background and to learn how to better support them. After a workshop considering circumstances impacting learning of transfer students, adult students, and other non-traditional students, one faculty member decided:

> I will begin my course with a survey to give students an opportunity to share things (privately) with me that they think may affect their performance or inform our interactions. I will have specific prompts around language and familiarity with Rutgers, as well as questions regarding worries about the class, as well as the level of confidence they can succeed in this class.

This is a wonderful way to engage students and learn more about them. While time consuming, providing individual feedback to students on their responses can create connections with students and allow you to point out resources that are there to support them. We have begun to include questions asking for students' pronouns (after also introducing ours in welcome videos posted to the learning management system), comfort level with different types of technology and the content, and their future plans/major. Some questions pertaining to native language and cultural norms may be particularly helpful, as one faculty member mentions:

> I will aim to understand the cultural background of my students and utilize culturally relevant examples within the context of the subject matter I am teaching. A challenge I anticipate is understanding the cultural background of students since I have different sets of students throughout the semester. However, asking students to share their cultural background and showing my appreciation of their efforts may be a good place to start.

Even with a pre-course survey to efficiently gather information about students, it may seem daunting to consider how cultural differences contribute to different educational practices. You may need to take the additional step of researching further. For instance, one of the authors noticed that some students put the US dollar symbol after the number when denoting currency. When units were required for a mathematics problem, she would warn them once, but then deduct points if the dollar sign was not at the front of the numbers in future problems. In many countries, the currency symbol does go at the end of the numbers. It is a cultural norm that students have learned and have known for twenty years, and one reminder may not be enough.

DEVELOPING CLASSROOM NORMS FOR MANAGING HEATED MOMENTS

We have heard some instructors mention that in their content area, tense moments, heated arguments, or other social conflict in the classroom rarely occur. However, even in these courses it is important to be prepared. One of us teaches mathematics courses in which most topics do not trigger classroom conflict. However, in one instance, before coming into the classroom, students discussed a new school policy that some felt was biased against certain groups. An argument between a small group of the students ensued and continued as they took their seats in the classroom. Having only taught a few years at this point, this author was unprepared for the rapid deterioration of civility, as students yelled at each other before the class even began. While one might think that the beauty of the pending mathematics concepts would instantly calm the students, it was clear that additional intervention and discussion needed to take place before teaching the content of the course could even begin. Our students do not come in as *tabula rasa*, devoid of any other knowledge or prior experiences, and so all instructors should be prepared for a heated classroom situation.

Preparation is the key to success, and there are a number of ways that you, as an instructor, can devise strategies to be ready to engage your students. Several participants in our program mentioned how they found the use of classroom norms to be a

valuable way to set the stage to be prepared for responding to classroom incidents. For instance, one faculty mentioned they have developed classroom norms on their own in the past but would be doing so collaboratively with students moving forward:

> I plan to change my approach to setting these guidelines by creating these rules of engagement together with my students. We may create guidelines to address appropriate ways of asking questions or conversing with one another in class, norms for discussing controversial subjects in respectful ways, and/or processes for calling out bias or microaggressions. By implementing these changes, I can reinforce to students that they are colleagues and that this is a graduate program where they are learning to be better public service leaders. In establishing clear expectations of one another, this process can make space to get to know each other on an interpersonal level and build empathy.

Research on student pedagogical partnerships has explained the benefits of co-designing syllabi with students (Cook-Sather, Bahti, and Ntem 2019). Some faculty also saw the benefit of including students in the development of classroom norms, such as this instructor who referred to "classroom community guidelines":

> These guidelines help provide structure to support constructive interactions and responses to negative interactions in course settings. I currently create my own course guidelines before the semester starts and articulate them in the syllabus. However, from this workshop, I plan to change my approach to setting these guidelines by creating these rules of engagement together with my students.

Classroom norms are especially valuable to structure an instructor's response to a heated moment, a misunderstanding, or an incident where bias or a microaggression contributed to harm. As mentioned previously, microaggressions have been seen to be at least as harmful as overt discrimination. Research has also shown that the impact is felt not only by those at whom the bias or microaggression has been directed, but the rest of the class as well (Jones et al. 2016). For this reason alone, it is important to have a strategy to de-escalate a conflict, respond to a perceived sleight, and ensure students feel a sense of belonging. One instructor explained the challenge this way:

> While I have been good at identifying and correcting it in my own behavior, I've always struggled calling it out in others, especially students, fearing it would be perceived as below threshold and not warranting remediation. Moving forward, I will look at it less as 'calling someone out' and more as an opportunity to discuss or briefly mention why a certain level of language is potentially harmful.

While intentions matter, when harm has been done, it should be addressed. Having some "...wording that bystanders can use to call out the microaggression but also call in the person who said it," as one faculty member mentions, is particularly helpful. Consider appropriate strategies for the different ways that microaggressions may be directed, whether student to student, instructor to student, student to instructor, or instructor to students. Another instructor provided an example of what this could entail:

> Of the bystander interventions offered in this workshop, I resonated with being direct and making a clear statement that I do not tolerate microaggressions in my classroom. This is something that I will be sure to put on my syllabus and Canvas sites going forward—to set the tone of my classroom. In this classroom, we will be respectful of each other and each other's differences. I also appreciated the strategies around sharing the impact of the microaggression on yourself, saying 'I feel uncomfortable' or 'I'd like to share the impact of that statement on me,' and asking if others also feel uncomfortable (delegating). This seems like a good way to address the microaggression without asking the target of the microaggression to take on all of the burden alone. I can imagine doing this in a particularly heated classroom situation. I also want to be sure to remember to check in after class with the student who was targeted, to see what kind of supports I can provide...

We appreciate the firm tone of this instructor's suggested language, but also would encourage instructors to be gentle when calling out microaggressions. Students are still learning, and instructors can help them learn to be more cautious and considerate in their language, but this works best when they are compassionate. Even instructors make mistakes—sometimes unwittingly saying something that could be interpreted as a microaggression. Asking the individual who voiced the microaggression, "what did you mean by that?" can start the conversation about how what a person meant is not always the same as how it was perceived by another. A helpful book, while not written for an educational context, is *What if I Say the Wrong Thing?* (Myers 2013) which provides suggestions for self-correction. While learning some of these statements may seem simple, we acknowledge that becoming comfortable and understanding when and how (e.g., tone of voice, body language) can take mental effort, time, and practice to perfect.

COMPETENCY 2: COURSE DESIGN, POLICIES, AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Once you have reflected on your identity and the identities of your students, you can begin to think through how course design, course policies, and educational activities can act as barriers for some students. Our second competency, "Infuse inclusive teaching practices into your educational practices by course re-design or adopting new teaching activities," encourages you to focus on instructional practices.

In developing our program, we noticed that many of the topics that we fit into this competency were topics covered through Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Cast 2018). UDL recognizes that every learner is unique, with different strengths, needs, and preferences, and that traditional instructional approaches may not work for everyone. It involves the use of flexible, customizable approaches to teaching and learning that allow learners to choose how they engage with content and to express their learning in different ways. UDL is based on the principles of accessibility, flexibility, and engagement. By applying these principles, educators can create an environment that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of all learners, including those with disabilities, those who are learning English as a second language, and those who may have other challenges or learning styles (Cast 2018). While some of our workshops are not framed as UDL workshops, many of the practices discussed in the workshops included in our program incorporate principles of UDL.

However, we didn't believe that inclusive teaching practices should be limited to UDL. We also considered how instructors could make changes to course content, from the readings and assignments that are chosen to the way people from different backgrounds, cultures, and with different life experiences are represented as examples in images, cases, stories, narratives, or other aspects of a course (Marx, Torres, and Panther 2019). It should also include how instructors explain their decisions to include some materials and not others, and how they contextualize these conversations when introducing course content to students. Here we share some of the practices that our participants most frequently embraced.

EXPLAINING THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

As a large regional public university in a diverse urban US state, our institution draws students from a variety of backgrounds, with vastly different levels of preparation and understanding about university norms. This is particularly pronounced when we consider our substantial international student population, representing regions of the world where the educational norms place much more distance between students and instructors. One of our partners for this project was the International Student Support office, with whom we developed several workshops for the series. For one workshop, they reached out to their students and collected a series of video vignettes about instances when the students were surprised by the differences between their educational experiences abroad and in the US. In a particularly memorable video, a student from Northern Europe explained how shocked she had been to find that, in the US, professors want students to ask questions, to engage in office hours, and to develop a friendly rapport. She found it almost unnatural to engage with authority figures in this way. Many of us who are instructors believe that students know that we expect this sort of engagement, that asking questions is important to success, and that there is no stigma associated with attending office hours. But this knowledge has been referred to as "the hidden curriculum" since it is often left unsaid (Cotton, Winter, and Bailey 2013), raising a barrier to learning for those who have not been taught these lessons. While many think this is a concern mainly for undergraduate students, graduate students encounter similar challenges (Bandini et al. 2017).

Since knowledge is based on prior experiences, students will only understand the standard processes in higher education if someone has taken the time to explain them (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 2000). First-year university students' frame of reference is based on their high school education where rules and expectations can be very different. One semester, a student came up after a mathematics class to ask if a course he was taking in another department would fulfill a school requirement. It took one of the authors a few moments to realize what the student was asking before responding that this would be something to ask in the Dean's office. The student replied that it was not a problem, he would ask the other instructor in another section of the course. The author explained that the other instructor would not know either and helped the student look up the Dean of Students at his school. Coming from high school where every teacher knew the procedures and requirements of that school, it may not be obvious that at a large university some knowledge is siloed and needs to be obtained from a particular location.

Many participants in our program reported that they would do more to explain elements of the hidden curriculum such as

the purpose of office hours, how to ask questions during class, or how to format and submit a college paper. We consider this a starter strategy since it can be accomplished with limited resources through in-class or written announcements. Here is how one instructor described it:

> I appreciated the reminder to think about what assumed information I'm asking of students when I ask them a question and also how they have been socially conditioned to interact with instructors. I mentioned during the workshop that I tell my TAs how to best interact with me during the first meeting. I think this is something I will do with students when I'm teaching a course where they have direct interactions with me. I honestly think I do a pretty OK job with this as-is. I've tried to make things more approachable by renaming office hours to student hours and providing students with a list of questions they can ask if they choose to attend. I inform them of opportunities that they should be aware of that are specific to American education.

We hope this instructor will stick to these efforts to demystify the educational experience. We consider this a starter-inclusive teaching practice that can be impactful for student success. Discussions clarifying engagement activities, or how to seek additional assistance or ask questions out of class can be inserted into the weekly announcement before lecture begins, added to the syllabus, or reviewed at any time when a few spare minutes emerge.

BUILDING FLEXIBLE DEADLINES

While students need structure, too often, canned essay prompts or project instructions, and strict deadlines can lead students to submit rushed and uninspired work. What's worse, students can become disengaged from the process of their own learning rather than develop as self-directed learners with a connection to what they study and a sense of responsibility to turn in their best work. By providing flexibility in deadlines and choices in assignments, prompts, or problems, we can help our students develop their agency, though this mid-level strategy may require extra communication with students.

Inflexible deadlines, in particular, create lasting barriers to student success (Patton 2000). Our students hold a variety of identities, as students, but also as workers, student athletes, club members, family members, and caregivers. It is not uncommon for our students to confide in us that they hold multiple part-time jobs in addition to their other responsibilities. While many instructors would like to imagine that our students only worry about our classes, in the modern world this is rarely the case. If a student must decide between accompanying an ailing parent or child to the emergency room or completing an assignment, classwork can be less of a priority than we would wish. For this reason, allowing students to request extensions, while a difficult balancing act for instructors, reduces barriers to learning for all. One instructor explained their approach as follows:

> This semester I offered all students the option to request extensions for any reason. I have been concerned in the past that students would over-utilize this option causing the class to fall behind. However I found that students only asked for extensions when they really felt they needed it, adhering to deadlines the vast majority of the time. Additionally, flexible deadlines allowed students to more effectively work around competing deadlines in other classes. The resubmission policy allowed students to demonstrate mastery of the material, and to integrate feedback into their future work. I found that the quality of the work improved, and students were markedly less stressed. By centering the students in the classroom, I was able to reflect on which policies were truly serving their needs.

Instructors must balance their own needs for scheduling grading and managing the course timeline against endless student requests for extensions. It is challenging because offering extensions requires instructors to both respond to numerous requests for changes and keep track of these differing deadlines. Technology does provide a manageable way to keep track of deadlines and differing extensions. For those instructors who collect work online, most learning management systems allow for custom due dates for different students. This makes it easy to give an extra day to one group of students, and two extra days to another, and then to know while grading which assignments met the deadline and which did not.

We heard from one instructor with hundreds of students who created an online Google Form for students to request extensions, specifying a reason from a drop-down box and then choosing a new deadline from a set of options. While this instructor still needed to use the form to update the deadlines in the learning management system, the form eliminated the step of replying to email requests. Such automation facilitates a process that could be overly tedious.

We offer a word of caution on flexible deadlines. While we promote some degree of flexibility, we do not actually recommend that students be given free range to turn in assignments at any time in the course. Course deadlines serve a function in the classroom because they motivate students to do the work and a significant number of students use impending deadlines as motivation to complete their assignments (Keith and Morón-García 2009). In our experience teaching and consulting with faculty, too much flexibility will lead a large number of our students to put off deadlines until the last minute and then attempt to submit enough work to pass in the last days of the semester. While some of these students can be successful, many are not, either because the quality of work they produce is low or because they did not make time to learn the content before trying to complete the work. The unlimited assignment time tricks students into thinking that they can prioritize other courses, leading to high rates of failure. Students need deadlines to keep up with a course, so flexibility shouldn't come at the expense of having a schedule.

You should also ensure that your policy regarding late work is clearly stated in the syllabus. It can be tempting to take a strict approach in your syllabus stating that you do not allow late work for any reason in order to motivate students to take your deadlines seriously. If a student reaches out and requests an extension and tells you a compelling story, you might grant their request. This discrepancy between the syllabus and actual policy can exacerbate inequalities. Some students will feel comfortable asking for assistance, but others may consider the statement in the syllabus as "law" and will not ask. This creates another type of "hidden curriculum." Whatever your policy is, state it clearly for students in the syllabus and adhere to it throughout the course.

DIVERSIFYING THE COURSE CONTENT

While some instructors at our institution use a syllabus that is provided by their department, and thus are not responsible for the course content, many instructors have to decide for themselves what readings, textbooks, examples, and case studies they will include to support student attainment of the learning outcomes of the course. Naturally, we often turn to what we learned in our own graduate and undergraduate programs, often beginning with the exact syllabi that our favorite instructors used years or decades ago when we first fell in love with our academic subjects. The cost of this approach can be a stale, overly white, overly male, overly heterosexual, overly western collection of academic work. By diversifying this course content and making strategic changes, we can correct some of the inequities of history, help our students see that academia is a diverse and welcoming place, and share ideas that may reflect unique social and cultural perspectives of a diverse world (Ambrose et al. 2010; Hockings 2010).

We recognize that this is the most ambitious of the three approaches discussed here. It is challenging because unless we are brand new to instruction, we have probably already developed an entire course around the content we selected. Our lesson plans for each day reflect the content that students read, with activities that we may have honed for years. We have homework, quiz, and exam questions that ask students to demonstrate their knowledge of the work. Changing out one article, book, reading, or textbook is not a matter of simply updating the syllabus. Each change has cascading effects through the course structure. To fully diversify course content might require numerous such changes, restructuring an entire course. This is hard work that need not be done in one sitting or one semester.

Perhaps the bigger challenge to diversifying the content is that we often are not familiar with material from diverse authors. We may not have even studied a particular course we teach during our own education, and so to teach it, we must first read numerous textbooks, scholarly articles, and other content. Even when deeply familiar with the field, instructors have told us that to select a new article they must first read several contenders to vet them for appropriate language and difficulty and decide how they might fit into an existing unit or module.

Several participants in our program committed to working to diversify their course content. They sometimes found creative ways to approach this work, even in the sciences, where less attention is typically paid to the identity of the scientists read in a course. One instructor described their intentions this way:

> I am going to be more critical when selecting journal articles for class and will look for ones that include diverse groups of authors. Furthermore, I may include a homework assignment based on the podcast *People Behind the Science*, which introduces students to the career path that different scientists have taken and humanizes them. I would then try to find journal articles by these scientists or other diverse voices to demonstrate the diversity of scientists.

This example raises an important point. Diversifying a curriculum is as much about which readings are selected and taught as it is about how this can be discussed and made visible to the students. By having conversations about the identities of the scholars whose work you read, you can frame your decisions, probe historic inequities, and help your students feel welcome in academia. The small steps you can make toward this goal include starting to show diverse names in examples, problems, and case studies.

Another impactful and yet simple technique is using our students' names. Consider giving students an assignment where they create examples that resonate with them and assist you in this creation of multiple and diverse examples. Chapters 1 and 3 of this book include additional discussion of learner-generated content and of diverse representation in the curriculum.

COMPETENCY 3: ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is only just becoming part of the conversation about inclusive pedagogy as many faculty and staff have looked at it through a lens of compliance (Betts et al., 2013). If a student with a hearing impairment cannot watch a course video because there are no closed captions, it becomes a barrier to learning, which leads to Competency 3, "Ensure course content, web pages, activities, and assessments are accessible to all students." We focused our third portion of the program on how we can ensure that all course content—from class readings, to virtual spaces, to the face-to-face classroom are as accessible as possible to students. While accessibility of classroom content is a familiar concept, and instructors are usually aware that certain steps should be taken when creating new digital content and developing a course, many instructors do not know where to start (Guilbaud, Martin, and Newton 2021; Moriña, Perera, and Carballo 2020). Helping instructors develop concrete steps for increasing the accessibility of their courses provides an important avenue for faculty to reduce barriers to learning. Several other chapters in this book discuss accessibility and universal design, including chapters 5 and 6.

Our institution recently purchased Ally, a digital tool that is used to scan the course learning management system to alert instructors to issues that might affect the accessibility of their courses, such as scanned digital reading files that are not screen-reader accessible and images that do not have alternative text. The tool provides a color-coded gauge to visualize the number of problems found, with green representing courses that have few issues and red for courses with many potential problems. Since this tool arrived on campus, accessibility has become a much more visible issue, leading some instructors to seek out training. We were pleased to be able to include this training in the program. If your institution does not have Ally, it probably has other tools to assist with verifying the accessibility of your content. Reaching out to an office of technology can be helpful to point you in the right direction.

However, our vision of inclusivity goes beyond the course learning management system and digital files. While a hearing or sight impairment may prevent a student from accessing course content, there are other barriers that may hinder students from accessing course content such as financial restrictions that do not allow them to buy a textbook. In this section, we report on three strategies for improving accessibility, from creating accessible digital materials, to adopting open and affordable resources, to finding new ways to present learning materials that are innately inaccessible—such as teaching chemistry lab experiments or dance routines to those who have impaired vision, or in our example, making media such as comics accessible by screen reader.

CREATING ACCESSIBLE DIGITAL MATERIALS

The Classroom Inclusivity Series included many workshops focused on how to ensure that the digital materials we post follow best practices for accessibility. Many of these best practices, including using headers in word processing documents and PDFs,

hosting videos on the university's platform which automatically captions them, and providing alternative text for images, were tasks that our instructors were eager to begin implementing. As one instructor said,

> I had no idea what I didn't know about accessibility equipment and how they work. As I now understand, it is critically important for me to implement changes to my course materials. Though I am off to a respectable start. In preparing my course, I worked closely with [my department's instructional designer] to develop accessible materials. She demonstrated and explained the importance of using headings, for example. During that process, I was careful to use headings, provide short links when possible, and use captions in my course materials. So, I thought that I knew a lot about how to make accessible [sic] my course materials, but I can see that I have a lot to learn. This seminar illustrated to me why it's important to use the formatting functions provided by the software (i.e., use "headings" to create headings) because the instructor explained how the accessibility tools work. I understand now that the goal is to create materials that not only look accessible, but are built to be responsive to various ranges of accessibility.

These actions, while adding an extra layer of complexity for instructors as they set up their course material, are important for many students. Through different workshops in our program we explored the spectrum of ways through which disability and ability are presented. For example, our students may be neurodiverse and may experience dyslexia, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or autism. These conditions may or may not be diagnosed. When instructors follow best practices for accessibility, they can proactively reduce barriers even when it is not apparent that students need this support.

It is easy to get started on this work and to use these practices when adding new work. It is harder to go back to revise the many courses we have already built. For this reason, we categorize "creating accessible digital materials" as both a simple starting strategy to adopt more inclusive practices, but potentially a challenging strategy at the same time, were one to attempt to revise all of the content used in instruction. Here is how one instructor explained it:

> My concern is finding the time! One course I am teaching is moving from a 10-week summer schedule to a 15-week spring schedule. Since new content will be created as well as the flow adjusted, it should be pretty easy to build these guidelines into the course. The challenge will be to find the time to address these issues in my other two courses during that same semester. A solution to this challenge is to create a project plan and block off time each week to implement change. Even though I would want it all done by day one of the course, I have to be realistic that it might take some time for all the accessibility guidelines to be incorporated.

This final sentiment is critical. In our own courses, we have our fair share of old scanned PDF documents without headings, errors in video captions, and other problems. For many years now, we have used these documents in classes by putting them on the course website, rather than having students purchase a printed copy in a course reader. Many of the readings that we have used in our classes simply do not yet exist in accessible formats. To

address even a single reading, we must first scour the internet and library resources to see if an accessible version is available. If not, we search for tools we could use to make the version we have accessible. But in some cases, the scanned versions of classic articles from the 1960s and 1970s simply are not yet available in accessible formats. Our only solution is to wait or to find an alternative source, which means hours of additional work searching for and reading articles, changing presentations and lecture slides, adapting new assignments or homework, and replacing quiz and exam questions.

Given the scope of work that we are asking of faculty, the most reasonable expectation is a steady and methodical approach to revising existing materials. When choosing new materials and making general changes, instructors can prioritize accessibility. Perhaps too, we can follow the suggestions of the instructor quoted above by setting a realistic goal or "project plan" to implement some amount of change and improvement, for the good of our students.

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OER)

One of the revelations we had when designing this program was that "accessibility" is not just a goal for accommodating physical limitations or neurological differences. Making a course "accessible" can also mean that students can easily afford the textbooks and course materials. The adoption of Open Educational Resources (OER) has the added benefit of making it clear for students that their success is important to us (Levy and Tila 2022) and further allows us to create that welcoming and inclusive learning environment. Our colleagues in the libraries had long encouraged faculty to adopt open and affordable resources, so we included a workshop on this topic in the program. When course readings are freely available, it increases access for those students who are at the limits of their financial resources. Faculty and students have found that the quality of OER materials is commensurate with the quality of paid resources, and several studies have shown that student outcomes in courses that use OER are also equivalent if not better than in courses that do not (Hilton 2020; Hilton 2016).

We consider adopting new course materials to be a mid-level strategy since it can be challenging for all the reasons described in our discussion of diversifying the course content. It is also time consuming because instructors will need to use open-source databases to search for candidate texts and review them for level, content, and accuracy. However, the quality and availability of open-source materials has improved tremendously in recent years. Here is how one instructor described what was available to them:

> After taking this workshop I searched the internet once more for open-source textbooks for my course and found a huge number of new open source textbooks. Between all these textbooks, I can probably find the material I need for my course. At this workshop, I also learned about fair use, that I can use a small portion of a copyrighted material for educational purposes. I have already used this new knowledge when preparing for teaching my smaller course… . In this course, I have worked with the library to make accessible several textbook chapters via fair use that are not well covered by open-source textbooks. I teach the same courses year from year, so over time I will be able to gradually switch to 100 percent free textbook resources in my courses by combining fair use and open-source textbooks.

In our experience, we have found that while the language in open source textbooks is not always as elegant and as entertaining as the top-selling publisher editions, and the graphics, images, and illustrations may be less polished, there are many books that provide students with the information they need to complete the course work.

We have also found that at our institution, many instructors are convinced that students do not read what they assign anyway. This is especially true of those who teach large courses designed to introduce students to new subjects and fill core requirements, where students may be less intrinsically motivated to master the subject. Instead, the readings are used as references to help with tricky assignments or the review before an exam. These courses may benefit from open resources.

MAKING INACCESSIBLE LEARNING MEDIA ACCESSIBLE

Perhaps the thorniest problem of all that we discovered in our inquiry into accessibility was a fundamental challenge posed by certain kinds of subjects, where the visual or auditory nature of some course content was intractably connected to the meaning students were required to mine from the source. How does a music teacher make a symphony accessible to a student who is hearing impaired? How does an instructor in fine arts ensure that a color-blind student can understand a painting that uses difficult-to-see colors? How does a mathematics instructor add alt-text to a graph without giving information that would effectively answer the questions they are asking of the students? These concerns, though less frequent than some of the others we have described, present a substantial challenge. For instance, one instructor from an English department described the challenge in her course on the graphic novel:

> Readings of actual comics and graphic novels presented a particular challenge because these texts incorporate both image and text sometimes enclosed in a series of panels (sometimes but not always represented as bordered rectangles) and panels may follow a reading order that is not intuitive or straightforward enough for an automated screen reader to follow. The text is often handwritten in a variety of fonts, colors, and sizes and is highly expressive, while the images are most often complex, incorporating mood, texture, expressive lines and color palette, and figures are depicted with subtle facial expression and body language. This level of sophistication in word-image combinations cannot be conveyed through alt-text and, due to the sheer volume of word-image combinations (sometimes hundreds of pages consisting of a dozen or more individual image/panels per page), using 'long description' is too time-consuming to be a feasible strategy. Added to this, almost no publishers or authors of comics and graphic novels provide fully accessible versions of these works. Those few works that do enable text-to-speech reading, moreover, translate only the written words, and none of the vast amount of information conveyed by the images.

This instructor went on to describe a process they went through to investigate this possible solution: from speaking with IT and accessibility offices on campus, to contacting booksellers and publishers. Through this investigation, the instructor discovered a small number of comics and graphic novels that were available in

accessible formats and also learned about the process for making them accessible. It prompted her to consider how to engage her students in making these resources accessible.

By thinking ahead about what course resources provide the greatest challenge and investigating them, you can be better prepared with alternatives, when possible, for students who struggle to access these materials. Unfortunately, this is not something we can provide a step-by-step process to assist you in solving, but we acknowledge that there are not accessibility solutions for all resources at this point and a large amount of time and effort is required for faculty engaging in these problems.

REFLECTING ON THE IMPACT OF YOUR CHANGES

We hope you have identified inclusive teaching strategies that resonate with you and represent a reasonable and manageable challenge to implement in your teaching. As you adopt new strategies, take the opportunity to consider the impact your changes will have. How do you know that the changes you have made to your course have facilitated the students' sense of belonging? By assessing your course changes, you can make decisions about additional modifications, big or small.

To begin the assessment process, consider what your goal was for each course change and what you might measure to determine if the change had a positive impact. This process is similar to how the concept of backward course design suggests you connect your learning goals to your course assessments (McTighe and Wiggins 2005). Some measures or indicators of success are more appropriate for some goals than others. For example, if your goal was to create a more inclusive and welcoming classroom environment, student perceptions would be an excellent indicator, as students are uniquely positioned to comment on their own comfort level in the classroom environment. However, most students tend not to notice how improving the accessibility in a course has benefitted them, even if those same students have used the closed captions of a video instead of playing the sound and waking up their child. In this way, a better indicator for success may be the positive change of a course's "accessibility score" provided by an accessibility checker application.

Begin with the goal and decide on the activities or tasks you have implemented to address that goal. Then consider how you could begin to look at the success of those changes. For example, Table 1 lists a set of goals, activities, and indicators of success. The use of pre- and post-assessments is often held up as a model for determining educational impact, but this is not always possible in assessing inclusive teaching practices. You may ask students for their perceptions of certain elements that you have incorporated into the course, which you most likely would not have asked about previously. Despite the lack of a comparison, a single data point can still be valuable. It can help you decide whether your course change was worthwhile or needs additional revision. Revision is common since instruction is an interactive process and it is difficult to get it exactly right most of the time.

Depending on your goals and activities, you may also want to add a measure to evaluate the fidelity of the activities themselves. For example, if you developed classroom norms for managing heated moments, perhaps in the first year of implementation you found it difficult as the instructor to bring the students back to these norms in tense situations. This is completely understandable as it takes time to develop a new habit, but you should consider how the fidelity of implementation of your activities impacted your results. Those activities were meant to support your goal—if

Goal	Activities	Indicator of Success
Develop and use classroom norms to manage expectations and an inclusive classroom.	Implement classroom norms in your course from the beginning and continually refer to and utilize them throughout the semester.	Review (perhaps peer review) of classroom norms themselves. Ask students their perceptions about use of norms in (a) midcourse and/or final course survey(s).
Incorporate more diverse literature within the field.	Review and include literature from more diverse scholar perspectives. Incorporate activities and/or discussions on the limitations, generalizability, and DEI concerns in field.	Compare syllabi or other course materials showing diversity in authorship. Collect student reflections submitted at the end of the semester discussing DEI topics related to field.
Implement Open Educational Resources	Review and implement Open Educational Resources in place of textbooks and other course materials students need to pay for (while maintaining rigor of content).	Calculate how much students have saved by not buying the textbook or other content. If possible, determine the percentage of students utilizing the resources, perhaps through learning management system access data.

Table 1. Example Assessment Plan for Inclusive Teaching Practices.

you didn't achieve your goal, was it due to some element of the implementation of activities that did not take place as intended? In these cases, you might realize that focusing on implementation is the key to improving the outcome.

While you can plan to gather some indicators of effectiveness ahead of time, be open to incorporating assessment techniques as new situations arise. For instance, after a difficult or tense classroom conversation, you may want to provide an anonymous survey to the students to determine if they feel it was handled properly. Do they feel the class is a safe place? Were all students' perceptions and feelings acknowledged? This reflective activity can help you understand whether further discussion is warranted, and when done regularly over multiple semesters, might show your growth in facilitating and handling these situations.

You will notice that the heading of this section is Reflecting on the Impact of Your Changes. Don't forget that you are a large stakeholder in this process and your experiences implementing them are important as well. Your perceptions, comfort level, and the limited time you have to learn about and make the changes is valuable information for your own notes and those colleagues with whom you discuss the changes.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Having conversations about inclusive teaching is rewarding, but the goal for our Classroom Inclusivity Series is not just to talk, but to do what our Vice President for Academic Affairs refers to as "move the needle." We want our participants to actually make changes to their teaching and we want those changes to positively impact the outcomes that matter to us, such as the graduation rate that we talked about in the introduction. We also need to

justify the time and energy spent on this program to ensure that it will continue. For these reasons, we developed a mixed-methods assessment strategy to collect evidence about what participants are actually taking away from the workshops in our series and how they are adopting the techniques we described above.

Not everyone reading this chapter is an instructor: we suspect that some of you are also university administrators and staff like us who have taken the time to invest in learning about this topic. We include this short section on the evaluation plan for the Classroom Inclusivity Series to provide ideas on how to assess a program with similar goals within your own context. We hope this is also relevant for instructors as they think about how to assess their changes.

The overall goal of our program was to support instructors' development of a well-rounded understanding of what it means for a course to be inclusive, as demonstrated by the range of the three program competencies. Given the breadth of this goal, we had to limit the questions we addressed in our evaluation. As we considered the evaluation of the program in the first year, we wanted to know if the program supported participants to help them understand the issues presented in the core competencies, and we hoped that they held attitudes that were supportive of the goals of these competencies. We also asked how participants use this knowledge to create more inclusive learning environments and if these new practices "stick" after the program is complete.

We used the participant reflection statements to assess understanding of the concepts and to learn about the changes they made or were planning to make. Participants also completed a survey when submitting their reflections which included several Likert-scale questions adapted from existing instruments to evaluate participant attitudes and comfort levels with incorporating inclusive pedagogy in their classrooms. Focus groups were completed several months later to evaluate the longevity of the instructional changes and participant perceptions of the workshops and program overall.

Is our evaluation perfect? No. Ideally, we would have liked to determine the impact of instructor changes on students and also to understand how differences in individual workshops impact participants. As in the advice we gave in the last section, we assessed elements that we could, and hope to expand the assessment in the future.

Considering our findings, we developed changes that we implemented for the second year of the program. For instance, a review of the reflections made it clear that faculty still needed support to reflect on their identities, biases, and prejudices as stated in Competency 1, so an additional small group discussion session was added as a requirement for the second year. This change was also supported by the focus groups where participants said they appreciated networking opportunities with colleagues across the university and wanted more of these. Focus group participants who had completed this first certificate also mentioned they wanted the opportunity to continue engaging with the program. Survey results and reflections demonstrated that implementation of inclusive teaching practices takes time and therefore a "Level 2," where faculty can focus on implementation was designed for the second year. A complete discussion of our analysis can be found in another article (Bifulco and Drue 2023).

CONCLUSION

Participants in our program learned a variety of techniques and committed to adopting these techniques in their courses or other teaching experiences. However, changing the ways we teach our classes requires time and energy in addition to understanding that it is important. We spoke to many participants in our follow-up focus groups several months after the program to ascertain how well their changes had gone. They were often still struggling to find time to make the most ambitious changes. We fully understand this sentiment since, depending on the institution, instructors learn quickly that teaching may not be the most incentivized aspect of career success. Once a class has been developed, it's much easier to continue teaching it the same way than to disrupt and redesign.

It is also worth noting that while the program was developed for instructors (hence the name of Classroom Inclusivity Series), some participants were staff with training or management responsibilities. The content of the series was still applicable and their reflections detailed that they gained ideas that they would implement in their roles working with others at the university, with student workers, or creating websites.

Given the challenge of adopting these techniques, we hope that the organization of this chapter simplified the process. Many of the techniques we describe—from explaining the hidden curriculum, to adding alt-text to images uploaded to the learning management system—are techniques that you can adopt today, without major disruption or advanced preparation. Once you get started by adopting the quick and easy practices of inclusive teaching, you can turn to the more ambitious practices.

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Chapter 3

Facilitation Practices for Inclusive Teaching

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Some educators see facilitation as a *good day, bad day* thing. They intuitively deploy a lot of interpersonal skills that have been honed over time, resulting in an effective class, workshop, or meeting. This approach works up to a point. These good teachers might have a lot of days where it just feels right. Sometimes, the conditions don't line up perfectly, and then they have a bad day. Recognizing what we do to facilitate learning well and how we do it limits bad days, and makes good days better and more consistent. We see facilitating learning as the process of making learning accessible and achievable for our diverse community of learners across multiple modalities and contexts.

Facilitation is dynamic, contextually bound, and implemented in partnership with a community of learners. When done well, it

recognizes and attends to diversity, equity, and inclusion. In this chapter, we endeavor to explore how that can be done. Specifically, we will address the ways in which: 1) relationships are foundational and always nuanced by sociocultural contexts, 2) recognizing learners as whole persons and developing inclusive curriculum produce better learning, and 3) learner capability and capacity can be enhanced.

In our career as practitioner educators, we have relied on facilitation skills to enable learning as teachers working with students, as trainers working with professionals, as crisis responders working with the community, as advisors working with groups, as colleagues working with committees, and as human beings living in community. While Leslie primarily works in student affairs and Chris primarily works as faculty, both teach courses, facilitate workshops, train professionals, and lead in a variety of capacities. We use facilitation skills across these areas to make learning accessible and achievable.

We'll share some facilitation narratives that cross multiple contexts: professional development, workshops for students, classroom discussions, and emotionally charged moments. While exploring multiple contexts provides insight into how the nuances of those contexts shape learning experiences, the foundational facilitation skills used to navigate those moments and enable learning are the same across contexts and modalities. Even though some of our examples required delicate navigation, the skills that help us navigate those moments are equally productive in our routine day to day facilitation practices whether those be in the classroom, in a workshop, or in a meeting. Let's see if we can make our good facilitation days better and more consistent.

RELATIONAL CONNECTION AND SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT

Our job as facilitators is not to never fail, but to recognize when we are failing and adapt our strategies. In its perfect form, we do this in real time, not the next day. The following scenario was far from perfect, but along with the other examples in this chapter, it does offer a few lessons on relational connection, recognition, and learner capacity and capability. If we learn to effectively use facilitation techniques, plan out a few different pathways for progression, and make ourselves prepared to adapt our approaches, maybe we can catch a closer glimpse of that perfect form.

FACILITATION FAILURE

Chris — Walking down a scenic mountain road in early fall was both peaceful and invigorating. I was heading toward University of Colorado Boulder's campus to facilitate a three-hour workshop on combatting hate on college campuses. Pre-conference workshops were intended to be intensive engagements for small audiences. In this case, thirteen participants registered to attend mine. A key factor to effectively facilitating longer engagements is extensive preparation—I had been prepping for several months and felt ready to go. On the day of the event, the conference coordinators learned that CU Boulder had just experienced a major hate crime, so they opened the workshop up to all CU Boulder personnel for free, elevating the attendance to nearly thirty participants, a still workable size but different than anticipated. Folks entered the room, and the energy was palpable. They were serious professionals interested in serious action, which got us past the first hurdle facilitators usually need to overcome. We

spent some time introducing ourselves and what brought us to a workshop focused on responding to hateful violence.

Then we dove deep. I guided participants through a comprehensive evaluation of their campuses' prevention, intervention, and response strategies. I frequently use this assessment approach to identify potential areas for improvement. The first sign there was a problem with how the workshop was going was in participant body language. Some began to slump. Others shifted in their chairs with irritation. Vocal tones became terse. Their language quickly shifted from identifying challenges to expressing frustrations about how they were underappreciated, under-supported, and undervalued. Just like that, the workshop was under water, and I was struggling to stay afloat. The next few hours did not go well.

Later that night, I called some colleagues and talked through my epic failure. The extensive preparation I did turned out to be woefully insufficient. I hadn't considered how my preparation and needed adaptation should have been informed by the contextual dynamics impacting individuals, groups, and structures. These folks were working through a recent hate crime and all the challenges that that brings. As individuals and programs, they were justifiably feeling overtaxed and unsupported. No doubt some of the participants were impacted more profoundly by the recent violence: those from the CU Boulder campus experiencing emotional and physical fall out from the event, those who themselves occupied marginalized locations, and others still with indirect or unseen echoes of violence from past experiences. Hate crimes dehumanize not just individuals but also related population groups. Further, each institution has its own set of long-held barriers (practices, policies, resources) that thwart change. Under such circumstances, my choice to begin the workshop by identifying ways they needed to work harder and better had been short-sighted.

The next day, I facilitated the workshop again with a group likely to have similar needs. I kept much of the content the same, but engaged it very differently. I opened with a collaborative discussion of the local challenges folks were facing, what they were accomplishing in their areas, and how we could build networks of support on our campuses to meet our challenges. Then we dove deep, critiquing our strategies. I paid closer attention to where participants were, not just with their interest in the problem, but also their relational connection to it and their capacity for challenge. As we moved forward in the workshop, I was prepared to adapt as failures emerged. Having been more recognized and supported this time, participants embraced the material, and the overall experience was much more productive for them and for me.

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Relational connections are foundational for facilitation, and as we have seen in the example provided, context and culture always shape and nuance those connections. Learners are balancing multiple relational connections at any given moment, not the least of which are their connections with the material, other learners, and the facilitator. Facilitators work to support learners in these connections by meeting known learner needs of relative importance, self-efficacy, and safety (Baddeley 2001; Hammond 2015; Sousa 2001; Stanovich 2003). Primarily, we do this with two broad strategies: first, recognizing learners as whole persons in sociocultural contexts, and second, inclusive curriculum (Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; Hammond 2015; Gay 2010; Flintoft and Bollinger 2016).

RECOGNIZING LEARNERS

While our own knowledge, skills, and accomplishments are important contributions, learners are neither deficits needing to be made whole nor passive recipients of our expertise. Good facilitators recognize learners as whole persons in sociocultural contexts (Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; Hammond 2015; Gay 2010; Flintoft and Bollinger 2016). Consider the sociocultural context in the narrative and the framing with which Chris entered the workshop. He viewed the engagement problem clinically, as a challenge separate and decontextualized from history and the learning community. In so doing, he dismissed the learners from the picture. He missed understanding the learners as assets to solving the problem in two important ways. First, participants' nuanced understandings of the impact of the crime help us understand which issues need to be prioritized and how we might best address those issues. Second, participants' previous success experiences help us to develop support networks to sustain responses.

On the first pass, Chris failed to recognize how participant experiences fully shaped the moment. In so doing, he placed the learners in the role of passive targets who failed to prevent the violence from happening. In the revised workshop, he recognized the participants more wholistically as he worked with them to capitalize on their assets, highlight previous accomplishments, and reinforce support networks. After which, the group was in a much better position to collaboratively tackle some of the systemic and local challenges. In this version, he cast learners in the role of assets rather than deficits, simultaneously accomplishing two things. First, participants were able to share and learn about their contributions and strengths. Second, participants were able to develop a better, more sustainable, response. For more information on asset based pedagogy, see López (2017).

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

The goals of curriculum integration are twofold: show learners the importance of the topic as it relates to their unique lives and experiences and support learners in recognizing their personal capability in becoming competent and accomplished in the topic area. The primary mechanism for meeting these goals is designing a curriculum that more inclusively represents the diversity of the learning community through both content and modality (Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; Hammond 2015; Gay 2010). Some of this work can happen before facilitation of learning begins. One might consider the texts through which learners recognize themselves in and connect with course content: books, scholarship, websites, author/practitioner examples, case studies or problems worked, media shown, music heard, and/or perspectives shared.

Research indicates that culturally relevant curricula have substantial benefits. Sleeter (2011) and Fischer (2007) have shown that students of color participating in such curricula exhibit higher levels of academic engagement and achievement (Brozo, Valerio, and Salazar 1996). By connecting their learning to their cultural contexts, students are more likely to feel empowered (Carter 2008; Vasquez 2005) and motivated to succeed academically.

In addition to the content we learn, curriculum integration also considers how we learn the material. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that learners from different cultural groups lean more toward certain kinds of learning interaction with familiar cultural activities (Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; Hammond 2015; Gay 2010). These have revolved around type, genre, and style of activities. Consider learners doing small group work (type) analyzing songs as a means of understanding social messaging (genre). One might build the exercise to focus on country music, pop, or hip hop (style). Different learners might have more familiarity with some types, genres, or styles over others, and that familiarity can allow for quicker processing, making other learning easier. That said, there is a significant risk in assuming that all members of a particular cultural group favor the same type, genre, or style (Paris 2012). As facilitators, we want to provide students opportunities via assignments and modalities to approach learning in multiple ways. We also want to watch how these engagements work in real time and adapt as we go. To do that, we need a big toolbox.

When many of us think about "multiple modalities," we often think about issues of the interface, whether we are face to face, online, or in virtual reality. Certainly, these are relevant, but we like to think about modalities in a less limited way. We are accustomed to learning as individuals, in pairs, small groups, and large groups. We process things internally and externally. We appreciate audio, visual, and kinesthetic stimulation. We produce material in a variety of formats, some of which are written works, presentation, media, and art. Effective facilitators are prepared to traverse multiple modalities, dialing in when those are working and shifting to alternatives when change is needed.

In addition to making course content relevant to students' lives and supporting self-efficacy for learners by providing multiple entry points for different learners to access the material, curriculum integration has a broader benefit for all of us. In her TED Talk entitled "The Danger of a Single Story," celebrated author Dr. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie reminds us in the absence of multiple true stories how easy it is for any of us to develop reductive stereotypes about our fellow community members. As educators, we need to be cautious of being overly reductive with our course design and facilitation. There is more than one true story of how learning can be achieved. Facilitating inclusive curriculum through which multiple truths are shared and multiple modes of learning can be engaged provides participants with greater accessibility to learning.

We have focused on recognizing learners as whole persons in sociocultural contexts and curriculum integration as broad structural facilitation choices. We'll focus more on recognizing and valuing learners in greater depth later in this chapter. For now, though, we would like to consider the roles of capacity and capability.

ENHANCING CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY (FOR LEARNERS AND FACILITATORS)

Our sense of safety is influenced by actual and perceived threats to our physical well-being and our social status (Hammond 2015). With threats to both physical well-being and social status, there is a risk that the amygdala, a part of our brain, floods our system with cortisol inducing "fight or flight." When coping with trauma, anxiety, stress, and depression, learners potentially contend with these types of chemical alterations in their body, which consequently challenge their learning. While the nuances of each of these factors are better addressed by mental health care professionals, facilitators still need to recognize when learners are contending with such challenges and offer them general support including but not limited to but not limited to sharing campus/local mental health resources available to students or participants.

Fortunately, there is much that we can do as facilitators to create a supportive learning environment that does not require us to be mental health care professionals. See chapter 1 for more on cognitive and neural influences on learning.

FACILITATION CHALLENGE

Leslie — Early in my role as Advocacy Coordinator at Texas Lutheran, I facilitated a workshop with students on healthy and unhealthy relationships. I showed a 20–30-minute film that depicted a couple whose relationship escalated to abuse, emotionally and physically. Following the film, a student shared that it reminded her so much of a past relationship. I could see it on her face. If I close my eyes, I can still see her face. I see her connecting the dots. I hear it in her voice as her heart breaks, and she begins to conceptualize for the first time that she has experienced something very traumatic. Finally, she says it aloud in front of everyone, "Oh wow, I did not realize I was in an abusive relationship until now. I did not know that is what it is called." At that moment, I suddenly became overwhelmed with emotion.

I felt honored that she felt like she could share something so personal and difficult with me. I felt happy because she could put words to what happened to her. Honesty and language to express oneself are powerful for a person's journey and healing. Yet, I also felt incredibly sad. Seeing her realization was like looking in a mirror for me. She is also a Latina with long brown hair and brown skin. She was about the same age I was when I was coping with an abusive relationship. Wholly drawn in, I was once again a teenager going through it for the first time with her. Then I felt scared as I realized that the things I say and do next are impactful and they matter. I am not just reading about these issues anymore. I am talking to people with real experiences and real feelings.

At this point, she needed my attention, and the class needed to move forward, so I had to rethink my original facilitation strategy quickly. I knew I needed to create a space to breathe, collect my thoughts, and be fully present to the students. So, I acknowledged the student's experience and reassured her that she was not alone. Then, I redirected the conversation to a group activity. I let the students get into three small groups, one group of all men, one of all women, and one of men and women. I gave them a scenario to read and discuss how they would respond. While the students talked in groups, I got myself together, checked in with the student without drawing additional attention to her, and determined how to move the group forward. In time, we wrapped up the session.

I think about this student a lot while I facilitate workshops now. Her face is etched in my memory—a constant reminder of the power of connection, empathy, and the importance of doing this work to the best of my ability.

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When facilitating challenging material, we consider not only the challenges faced and care needed by our learners but also by ourselves. The moment described in the narrative above was not only potentially triggering for the learner but also for Leslie. When triggered, some feel stripped of control and isolated from support networks. This limits our capacity, meaning the amount and type of challenge we have room to cope with, and our capability, meaning our ability to engage and complete tasks. In this section, we will discuss approaches to help us navigate

these difficult moments. The first challenge we always face is realizing and accepting what is taking place. Doing so allows us to create opportunities to enhance our capacity and capability. Once we have accepted what is taking place, we can focus on restoring control, understanding and shaping beliefs, and rebuilding a communal support network.

ACCEPTANCE

Just breathe. We have all heard this before, and it is sage advice. When your heart is racing and you are starting to have tunnel vision, just breathing is harder than it sounds. First, you need to recognize that you and/or others are having a reaction like this. Your heart rate picks up. You find it difficult to track things beyond what is right in front of you. Your breathing feels a little more labored. In the narrative, Leslie detected the shift in her own experience and in her students. She heard the strain in the student's voice and saw the struggle on her face. Sometimes, people show other signs of internal struggle like twitching or rubbing their hands together. When we see these things, we need to check in on folks and provide support. Prior to that, though, we need to make space where we can do this. Leslie made space by first accepting the feelings she was having and identifying what prompted them. Next, she shifted the exercise modality and decreased the required capacity. She moved from a large group discussion on an emotionally deep topic to small group discussions on a less threatening question. Then, she was in a much better position to collect herself, check in with her student, and provide support.

In the event of an anxiety attack, one cannot control their way out of it; trying to do so, ironically, increases the anxiety.

Conventional reasoning is to accept what you are feeling, identify what is causing it, and ride it out. Challenges of an anxiety attack acknowledged, focusing on our breathing can help reduce stress. One approach is to slow your breathing, taking deep breaths in and out, which can help to slow your heart rate. Another technique is called box breathing. You breathe in for four counts, hold for four counts, out for four counts, hold for four counts, and repeat a few times. Sometimes these approaches help us regain physiological control. Focusing on our breathing also allows us to clear our distractions, at least for a moment, which can allow us to better prioritize our next steps.

As facilitators, we also want to focus on how learners perceive themselves as having control of what and how they are learning. Our perception of control can be influenced by our choices, our beliefs about learning, and our community of learning. As facilitators we can help to shape all three of those influences.

CONSTRUCTED CHOICES

When we make choices, it adds to our feeling of control in an experience. As the facilitator, you can provide choices that are very simple or very complex. You would determine the kinds of choices by considering what you believe the learner capacity is in a moment and what your concerns are regarding potential risks. In the previous example, consider the facilitator's decision to shift the exercise. The student disclosing her personal experience was potentially in an increasingly vulnerable position. In some disclosure cases, the momentum runs faster than the learner is prepared for and presses decisions before they are ready to make them. This can result in high vulnerability under heavy scrutiny. The facilitator wanted to give the student room to express herself when she was ready. To do that in a way that relieved the pressure but also did not shut her down, the facilitator shifted the exercise to the small groups (less scrutiny) and shifted to a less risky question for discussion. She also connected with the learner at the next opportunity to check in. So, the learner could connect more with her, share more with the group, or not discuss it any further until she was ready, but in any of those renditions, the learner had a moment to think through what she needed and wanted.

UNDERSTANDING AND SHAPING BELIEFS

Our self-efficacy, our belief in our capability of performing a task, is a key factor in our ability to learn how to do a task. As a result, the mindset with which we enter an engagement is important. Carol Dweck (2006) addresses the relationship between mindset, growth or fixed, and the identification and achievement of goals. Believing you are either capable or not capable of something (a trait you either have or do not) is considered a fixed mindset. Believing you may not presently be able to do something but can improve and eventually become capable (a changing state) is considered a growth mindset. Dweck associates learning potential more with a growth mindset. People might have fixed mindsets about some things and growth mindsets about others. The language we use (about ourselves or others) helps to shape our mindset. For example, people will often say something like, "I am not a good writer" or "I am not good at math," both of which indicate fixed mindset thinking. Dweck suggests that shifting the language to "I am not a good writer yet" refocuses our expectation on how they can improve and become good rather than accepting the state that they are not capable. Similarly, we want to identify and reinforce movement and growth when that happens. Move the emphasis from the specific state, "you are good at this," to the growth process, "your efforts have been paying off, this is great work."

REBUILDING A COMMUNAL SUPPORT NETWORK

Our beliefs about learning extend beyond our viewpoints of the ways we learn but also about the safety of the spaces in which we learn. The rhetoric on safe spaces is highly contested, in large part due to the two issues (Arao and Clemens 2013). First, we cannot make or guarantee that any of our spaces will always be safe for all our students. Second, sometimes students perceive uncomfortable spaces of learning as unsafe. Arao and Clemens (2013) argue for rethinking our spaces as "brave spaces." They assert that we should do more to prepare our learners for nonviolent but sometimes discomforting spaces of learning.

So how do we develop learning communities that feel like brave spaces? In our effort to bring about brave spaces, we work to develop a learning community with a shared sense of honesty and respect. To do this as a facilitator, work with the group to develop a shared understanding of the kinds of things you will be engaging, ground rules for how participants will engage them, and define what acting respectfully towards each other means. Facilitators will often recognize the challenges that may arise in the engagement and discuss how they will work through difficult moments. Expectations of privacy are a common discussion point. Finally, the faciliator and participants should spend some time learning about each other and each other's hopes and goals. In singular events, this tends to be more directed by the facilitator, and in longer engagements over time (a course, for example), facilitators tend to do this more collaboratively with the group.

Arao and Clemens (2013) interrogate popular community interaction ground rules for so called safe spaces, including "agree to disagree," "don't take things personally," "challenge by choice," "respect," and "no attacks" (143). Rather than "agree to disagree" which they believe truncates discussions about difference, they suggest "controversy with civility" (144). This acknowledges and encourages purposeful and civil discussion regarding contention. Similarly, they dispute not taking things personally as things often do impact people personally. Instead, they suggest focusing on "owning your intention and your impact" (145). While they find "challenge by choice," "respect," and "no attacks" helpful, they argue for a deeper understanding of each: understanding why we might be uncomfortable with challenge, discussing what respect means for us in which contexts, and differentiating between problematic attacks on people and productive challenges to ideas.

Many facilitators provide trigger warnings for material that potentially poses greater risks. While equipping students with the knowledge of content areas prior to engagement does support their control of how they engage the material in positively productive ways, it is insufficient in preventing post-trauma responses and does not on its own necessitate effective pedagogy. Flintoft and Bollinger (2016) suggest the following strategies for enhancing pedagogy that goes beyond trigger warnings: "Structuring learning through gradually increasing levels of intensity" (29), using "multiple modes of delivery" (30), "collaborating proactively with students known to have post-trauma experiences," and "responding appropriately when students experience a trigger response." By scaffolding with increasing intensity, assignment structures allow for multiple facilitator evaluation and intervention points, thus creating opportunities to respond to students or pivot direction before situations escalate too high.

As discussed earlier, having multiple modalities prepared not only adds entry points for students with different learning needs, it also provides more maneuverability. In many cases, we know in advance some potential hot points for some students. We can collaboratively work with them and, when appropriate, with mental health care professionals to determine better learning approaches. Once trigger points are known, they are easier to navigate. Finally, while we are not counselors, as facilitators we can be good listeners and make referrals to mental health care professionals. We can certainly adapt our facilitation to situate our learners in less vulnerable moments without sacrificing their or others' education, as was demonstrated in the narrative.

Modeling and self-disclosure is another technique that lessens the sense of risk for learners, but it also presents a different set of risks (Jacobs et al. 2015). Modeling involves demonstrating how to do something. After seeing it done, learners often find trying it less risky as it is more of a known concept. Self-disclosure involves the facilitator sharing their own experience. This approach allows the group to see the leader taking a risk, which often encourages them to reciprocate. If you exceed the comfort capacity of the learner when sharing your experience, they may disengage, and you are left in a heavily vulnerable position. But when engaged effectively, it engenders a lot of trust—so much so that the facilitator needs to be careful about the momentum we were discussing in the earlier section. In some cases, the momentum runs across the group with graduating levels of disclosure, potentially encouraging some folks to share more than they are ready to share and later wishing they could un-share it. So, if you use this tool, it is important to also be attentive to the vulnerability levels of your learners and be prepared to deescalate the momentum by shifting an exercise or altering the tone. We will

discuss this in more detail in the section on personalizing and depersonalizing.

Ruiz-Mesa and Hunter (2019) suggest modeling "disagreement with ideas, not people" (136). When discussing different perspectives on ideas, instructors can prompt students to consider the origins of their attitudes toward difficult issues. The facilitator can suggest various scenarios or contexts in which a particular viewpoint might have developed, encourage students to question why certain beliefs are strongly held by some individuals or communities. This reflection can lead to respectful discussions that acknowledge the diverse ways people perceive controversial topics, bridging differences among students whose attitudes, values, and opinions vary widely. This approach promotes relationship maintenance during disagreement and establishes a norm where participants are urged to reflect on their biases and privileges, as well as consider the validity of their classmates' opposing viewpoints.

FACILITATOR SELF-CARE

Facilitation as a practice is, in and of itself, hard work. Staying present and responsive to the needs of participants while also monitoring your own energy level and emotional state and maintaining focus on the engagement and lessons to be learned is emotionally taxing, even when you do it well. This is potentially even more challenging for work with heavier emotional content such as violence, issues that have serious impact on historically excluded or underrepresented community members, issues at the center of people's core beliefs and values, or issues surrounded by passionate political debate (Conyers and Stone 2024). While the previous section was devoted to navigating challenging moments, it is important to note that when facilitators are not in good headspaces, they do not facilitate as well as they should. In this section, we will discuss how facilitators exercise better self-care when they prepare for and respond to challenging situations with the support of their community of fellow practitioners.

PRACTICES OF SELF-CARE

Self-care begins with self-awareness and routine practices focusing on maintaining health and well-being. Many facilitators, with their focus being on supporting their learners, will downplay or sacrifice their own needs in service of those they are teaching. Facilitators must recognize when they are not at their best and understand their own needs and boundaries. This self-awareness allows facilitators to take proactive steps like meditation, reflective journaling, physical activity, and connecting with loved ones. Practicing self-care in these ways can help facilitators stay centered and calm, reduce anxiety, boost energy, and improve focus (Stebnicki 2007). Working with a professional counselor is also an excellent practice and is highly recommended in cases involving particularly traumatic material. Facilitators should not hesitate to access mental health resources to address any distress they may experience. Counseling can provide a more comfortable space to explore feelings, develop coping strategies, and maintain emotional well-being.

SELF-CARE IN COMMUNITY

Building a community of practice and aligning with community organizations are also essential components of facilitator self-care (Lave and Wenger 1991). Aligning oneself with a community of practitioners who have similar experiences and/or focus on similar issues offers a space for facilitators to share experience, seek advice, and gain encouragement. Facilitators can also benefit from aligning with community organizations that share their values and goals. These organizations provide opportunities to see the important tangible impact of our work and to connect with individuals and groups who benefit from our efforts. Engaging in these regular processing experiences with community enables us to establish more sustainable self-care practices.

FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

As we have discussed, building trust, creating brave spaces, and caring for self and learners help to enhance learner capacity for challenge and capability. Facilitation techniques can also be used to maintain and enhance capacity and capability in real time as you work through learning. We often think about these techniques in two camps: 1) listening and probing and 2) processing and deepening. This section of the chapter will excavate these approaches and suggest how they may be applied.

FACILITATING QUESTIONS BEHIND QUESTIONS

Chris — I was facilitating a discussion on suicide prevention, a subject that frequently touches people in significant ways. The students in the class had lots of questions. A young woman in the second row, looking a little pained by the discussion, raised her hand, and tepidly asked if people exhibiting warning signs always followed through. Part of our responsibility as facilitators is to recognize and respond to the question being asked. Another part is recognizing and responding to the potential questions or concerns behind the question being asked.

The factual answer to the question is that not all people exhibiting signs attempt suicide, but most people who die by suicide demonstrate warning signs. The prompting for the question was likely one of a few things: Someone she knew may have engaged in warning sign behaviors, attempted, or died by suicide. Very likely, she was also feeling some level of responsibility. I sat on the desk, softened my voice, and asked if any folks in the room knew someone impacted by suicide. Her hand as well as a few other hands went up. I looked at them, nodded, and told them I was sorry for their loss. I reminded them of some of the resources we have on campus and began to gently respond to the question. I shared the factual answer but went on to say that suicide is a tragic loss that impacts many friends, family, and more—all of whom could use our support. There are multiple factors which make suicide attempts more possible, not the least of which is a cultural system that makes it difficult to ask for and get help. I shared that it is often difficult to recognize warning signs in real time. I explained that while we can personally do some things to address warning sign behaviors when we recognize them, it will take more than the work of any one of us as an individual. Finally, I shared that when someone dies by suicide it hurts them and those close to them, that it is not the fault of the folks close to them, and that by learning more about it, we can all do what we can to work together to minimize suicide.

LISTENING AND PROBING

For our purposes, we will think of listening in a broader sense including not just what we hear, but also in what we gain through observation. Part of careful listening includes effectively reflecting what you are hearing back to your communicating partner, and

in so doing, forming connection with and validating their experience (Jacobs et al. 2015). When we listen carefully, we get lots of cues about where people are situated in relation to an issue. In the narrative just discussed, there were cues in what the student said, how they embodied their engagement, and what they did not say. Taken together, these cues prompted some probing. While there are multiple ways to probe a learner's thinking, we usually begin with reflection.

REFLECTION

Reflection is a powerful tool in letting your partners in learning know that you recognize and understand them. It can be used to connect with the participant, validate what is being shared, or summarize multiple things that have been shared (Jacobs et al. 2015). As facilitators, we can reflect what learners are expressing back to them with our body, our voice, and our language. Reflecting with our body is usually referred to as mirroring, and interestingly is a practice that has been observed across interpersonal interactions, including with babies. When people connect with other people, they somewhat less consciously begin to adapt their nonverbal physical expressions to match the person with whom they are connecting. One smiles, the other smiles. One crosses their legs, the other often does the same. A second way reflection happens is through using our voice, paraphrasing or stating back to our communicating partners what they just said. Maintaining a similar tone functions similarly. Reflecting in this way can take place in person, but it can also take place in email, text, and a host of other mediated forms of communication. Vocal tone and language choice become more important in formats like Zoom where the physical mirroring is less readable. When not done in an obviously mocking way, any of these applications make people feel more comfortable, more heard, more understood, and encouraged to engage. In his narrative, Chris sitting down on the desk, altering his vocal tone, and carefully choosing his language that reflected what he believed to be the learner's concerns were all attempts to use reflection to recognize the concern, enhance connection, and validate participant experiences.

EMBODIMENT

Once we have effectively listened and understood, we can provide support, enhance challenge, and/or focus participant learning by negotiating the embodied experience of the learner. We use eye contact; vocal tone, volume, and speed; and physical posture, positioning, and proximity to accomplish this task. As was the case in Chris's narrative example, there are times we want learners to feel supported in tackling issues with which they are already struggling. In such moments, we want to provide more support. There are times when material comes too easily, allowing learners to retrack their thinking toward other more interesting challenges. In these moments, we want to intensify the challenge. We can both provide more support and intensify challenge by negotiating the embodied experience of the learner.

We all have social norms, conventions, within our cultural groups about how we use our body to connect. Again, we want to be leery of assuming that every member of a group fits all the group norms. The trick is learning the patterns of the people with whom you are interacting. While none of the considerations we will discuss in this section should be understood as universal truths with respect to intent or outcome, social norms for interactions

within groups offer some insight, and we can use those norms as a starting point. Research and previous experience can provide you with some understanding of generalized group norms before you begin your engagements. So, before we start facilitating, we should learn about the populations with whom we are working. We recommend that you align your opening activity with this base understanding of the group norms. Then, as you engage the learners, carefully observe how they are engaging, and take the cues for how to intensify or lessen connections based on their responses.

Like most embodied choices, the ways in which eye contact impacts someone is shaped by the perception of what is normally appropriate for which kind of interaction. When you are talking about the weather, it carries a different expectation than talking about a recent loss. There is a correlating level of expected intimacy and vulnerability with eye contact. Think of intimacy as the closeness one has with another person or a subject; as intimacy increases, there is an increased expectation of eye contact. Consider working with a group and locking your eye contact on a person as you finish saying, "What is your favorite color?" The longer you hold it with them, the more pressure they will feel to respond. You can also use eye contact to disconnect and broaden the conversation. Imagine a scenario in which the learner states something, you reflect what you heard from them, and then you move your eye contact to others and say, "What do folks think about that?" The original learner will feel disinclined to continue, and others will feel more inclined to contribute. In the narrative example, looking at the students who raised their hands, nodding, and maintaining eye contact while talking through the issue established more connection and support. Imagine how the impact would be different if, instead, Chris turned away and looked at the blackboard while discussing the issue. At best, that would have focused their attention on what was on the board. At its worst, those students would have felt ignored. Alternatively, holding eye contact for too long can provide so much pressure that it prompts learners to look away or show other signs of being disturbed.

As we adapt our eye contact, distance, and physical positioning to best engage our learners, we also adapt our vocal choices. Different situations call for different variations of vocal tone, volume, and speed. In Chris's suicide prevention class discussion scenario, learners were grappling with a very intimate issue coupled with fear, guilt, and confusion. In this case, speaking more softly, quietly, and slowly eased some of the tension, allowing us to have a serious but supportive conversation about really challenging material. In other scenarios, the facilitator might want to use voice to establish a high energy, playful discussion. In such a case, one might speak more quickly, vary the volume, and incorporate a less serious tone. Vocal speed frequently relates to the energy or drive of the experience. Tone frequently relates to the emotional concern or seriousness of a situation. Volume relates to both, though, it seems to vary more by person how it does so. We all grow up in different families and both quiet and loud can mean a lot of different things. We should be attentive to learner responses to all of these, perhaps especially in the case of volume.

How we physically carry and position ourselves in relation to learners is also important. A quick search on the internet will provide you with many ways to read body posture, positioning, and distance, and far too many codes regarding what specific gestures always mean. Most of these codes hold little reliability across groups of people. There is some reasonable reliability in the

work on micro-expressions, minute facial expressions of emotion that happen fast and are then covered by social performance (Gong, An, and Elfiky 2022). While one can learn to recognize these expressions, most facilitators cannot read and process them fast enough to make them a viable tool for our purpose. There is, however, some similarity in how people respond to comfortable and uncomfortable moments with respect to their own social norms. People grow up with different distances they expect for personal space. Like eye contact and voice, space needs vary based on intimacy. Even though the distances differ by person and differ by context, as you violate their comfortable distance, they will move away. Once you learn where those distances are, you can determine how you want to navigate them to provide support or add challenge. Don't forget what we have already discussed regarding capacity and capability. You want the best combination of challenge and support. We are not attempting to break people down. Learning how our participants experience our facilitated learning engagements helps us determine when to use facilitation skills, when to step back from support or challenge, and how to enhance both their capacity and capability for challenge, all in order to enable deeper learning.

PERSONALIZING/DEPERSONALIZING

Content material feels more personal when it is about our own experiences, directly or indirectly. When we engage in experiential learning and role play simulations, we are then thinking through things through the frame of our own experience. Similarly, engaging in service learning provides an opportunity to form relational connections with the community, making their challenges and opportunities more important to us on a personal level. Detailed narrative examples help us feel like we are observing the moment being described, and in a way, allow us to form relational connections (supportive or oppositional) with the people described in the narratives. These narratives accomplish this better when they are vivid (looks like, sounds like, feels like) and contextual (who, what, when, where, how, and why). Prompting learners to fill in the experiential blanks and prompting them to process the vivid and contextual details of those moments is yet another way to enhance personal connection. Just as relational connections are primary for any of us to learn, they are primary in personalizing material.

There are times though, when the material becomes too personal for learners and results in inner or outer conflict. Spirited debates, in some cases, have evolved into escalating anger and potential physical attacks. More common, we have all had a set of learners who left our engagements a little too upset with their colleagues in learning and/or having full faith that their one personal experience outweighs an abundance of well collected, reliable, and valid data. In cases where conflict escalates, there are two general responses you can try. The first is to engage learners from the outside and use embodied skills to calm them down, moving forward with slower and softer speech, altering proximity, and bringing their bodies into less defensive or aggressive positions (by asking those in the room to sit down with you, for example). Alternatively, split people up and shift exercises. In cases where learners are struggling with perspective, situating the experience in the larger field of data or using language that repositions the learner in relation to the experience can both be effective.

Our job as facilitators is to personalize when doing so accomplishes more learning, and recognize when we need to dial things back a bit. Our job is also to help folks establish a perspective that includes more than just their own experience. Consider Chris's narrative example. Students were learning about suicide and suicide prevention. Some students had more direct experience with the issue and others had less. Generally, we would not start with detailed material on a subject like this, because it is already so close to some participants. For those less experienced learners, they need to understand what people are struggling with, the sociocultural structural issues, and how we can support those who are struggling. The learners in this situation gave us some cues indicating that they had some personal connection to the content. Chris used the previously mentioned embodiment skills to connect with them more personally. He then spoke about how folks who did not recognize cues are not at fault and how the social situation makes it hard to see these cues. These choices repositioned learners in a more distant and objective location, attempting to depersonalize and relieve a certain level of felt responsibility, specifically targeting the potential guilt they may have been carrying. Then, he used language in a way that repositioned the learners as personal actors working collectively toward improvement. With these moves, he personalized for connection, depersonalized the guilt, and personalized productive efforts toward change.

FACILITATING PROCESS AND DEPTH

Leslie — The first workshop I ever designed and facilitated tackled the challenging subject of combating rape culture, a topic that quickly highlighted our students' diverse experiences and varying degrees of familiarity with the material. From individuals unfamiliar with the term "rape culture," to skeptics questioning its existence, to those who firmly aligned with the way American culture can normalize sexual abuse. Accommodating each student's starting point and meeting them where they are with this material became a primary consideration in the workshop's design. To do this, I had to create opportunities for the students to engage in this material on various levels.

The workshop began with a gallery exercise that allowed students to engage with the material privately. The classroom was transformed into a gallery space with thought-provoking images and texts displayed across the walls. The students were invited to walk, observe, and place notes on each display. This activity allowed for reflection of the material on an individual level before transitioning to a group discussion. After the students took their seats, I took each image and read each comment posted aloud. This allowed me to acknowledge everyone's contribution to the activity and see what the student's individual experiences with rape culture were before I opened the discussion to the class.

The verbal and nonverbal language was a telling indicator of the student's familiarity with the topic. For instance, an image featuring a 2015 Bud Light advertisement (Chappell 2015) sparked intense debate. The bottle's label reads: "The perfect beer for removing 'no' from your vocabulary for the night." This advertisement elicited contrasting reactions amongst the men and women in the class. Most of the men interpreted it as a harmless endorsement of spontaneity, while most of the women recognized its uncomfortable alignment with an alcohol-fueled rape culture on American college campuses. Another example in the gallery exercise was a tweet that read, "Damn, that test raped me. It was so hard." There were those who responded with, "It was a bad joke, but it is just a joke," and it was not that serious while four others mentioned that comparing an exam to a deeply

traumatic event minimized their experiences and normalizes this type of violence.

Guiding the discussion, I posed questions aligning with the workshop's overarching goal: recognizing how ingrained beliefs and attitudes perpetuate sexual violence in American society. How can this be interpreted? How can advertisements like these perpetuate a chain of behaviors and daily practices? How can sexist attitudes, jokes, and locker-room banter lead to catcalling, nonconsensual touch, unsolicited photos/videos, and stalking? How can we change this culture? Remarkably, as the conversation progressed, there was a perceptible shift in language among the students—initial dismissals transformed into considerations, and skepticism evolved into empathy and reflection. Students who started off by saying "It is not that deep" began making comments like "I can see how someone else might find this offensive" or ask questions like "Did they not test these advertisements before they went out?"

To foster even deeper engagement and understanding of the material, I then put students into smaller groups based on their responses in the gallery exercise. For students in the group who were encountering these discussions for the first time, this format offered a supportive space to deconstruct societal norms while learning from their peers in a way that made sense to them. For those who understood the concept of rape culture and wanted more, this format allowed them to share their own experiences and discuss ways to respond. Have we heard someone say this before? Who do you think is making this statement? What are gender roles? What are stereotypical roles for men and women? How do we think this would make someone feel? What would I say if I heard someone tell this to my sister or to my mother?

To wrap up the session, I encouraged students to share what they discussed in their groups.

PROCESSING AND DEEPENING

As we discussed earlier, we can use reflection to validate, clarify, and connect learners to the material, the facilitator, or other learners (Jacobs et al. 2015). Reflection can also be an effective tool to combine with other objectives. In combination, we meet people where they are and then move forward. For example, you might *reflect* the participant's statement and then *redirect* the discussion. In another case, you could *reflect*, then *deepen* the processing of the experience. The advantage of using both approaches allows you to benefit from the validation that accompanies reflection along with the challenge of thinking differently or thinking more deeply that accompanies the others. Reflect and redirect can happen in at least two ways. First, in reflecting the experience back to the learner, the facilitator might find a connectable piece of what they shared and use that connection to pivot the conversation. Second, if the facilitator sees no clear connectable element, reflect what was shared, thank the learner for sharing, and then bridge with something like, "now let's shift gears for a bit." In both cases, the learner was heard and validated.

Reflect and deepen is a little more complex. Deepening learner understanding and ability requires that we can both quickly evaluate their comprehension/skill level and use carefully crafted questions designed to enhance them. To accomplish both tasks, we look to learning theory to understand how people cognitively process material. Bloom's Taxonomy identifies the following "levels" of cognitive processing, suggesting that, to be effective, the latter levels require the former levels to have been reached

before advancing to the next: recall, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, create (Anderson and Krathwohl 2000). Marzano (1998) similarly identifies retrieval, comprehension, analysis, and knowledge utilization. By carefully listening to what learners say and do, we can learn a lot about the level at which they are currently processing the material.

Consider how Leslie engaged learners in relation to the advertisement that read, "The perfect beer for removing 'no' from your vocabulary for the night." We could already see from the comments posted in the gallery exercise and the discussions happening in small groups that learner experiences and positions in relation to the advertisement were rather different. Some of the students were less familiar with understanding how culture shapes meaning with respect to rape and really thought of the advertisements as separate and not influential. It is not too surprising that the small group comprised of all women recognized the contextual nuances and potential impact of the advertisements on behavior more so than the group comprised of all men. The mixed gender group made statements that were a bit in both arenas. Their learning experiences leading up to the workshop had likely been radically different. As always, we want to be careful about assuming, but in this case, there was a strong correlation to social norms. The all-men group was still working on enhancing comprehension while the all-women group was focusing on application. To tackle this variation in understanding, Leslie combined a few tools. First, she moved to a large group discussion of the advertisement. She called for input from the all-male group, then the mixed group, and then the all-female group. Then she facilitated conversation among them using questions designed to enhance comprehension first and then eventually application. Throughout the discussion, she reflected on what she heard from each group validating their contribution, posed questions crafted to push their understanding up a level, and facilitated additional contributions from the other groups.

When trying to gauge comprehension, we typically use questions designed to probe the ways in which the learner is experiencing or understanding something. Questions like this often focus on encouraging the learner to describe sensory elements (what it looks like, sounds like, feels like, ...) and context elements (who, what, when, where, how, why). Once we have the nuances, we can gage the impact and influence on different groups of people. For example, for some people less at risk, the text might mean "be brave, because you only live once." For others more at risk, the text might mean an increased threat of male aggression. Ironically for both those who have been assaulted and those perpetrating assaults, it might be a communal justification of the violent and dehumanizing act. Broadening the context can help. Advertisers do due diligence in testing the impact of ads; they know the different ways it is being read, they have calculated the likely profit yield, and sadly, they have concluded that selling the idea of sexual violence is lucrative.

We can ask questions that lead to discovering this information, providing an opportunity for the learners to develop a more informed position. How much do advertisements cost? How do advertisers know ads will work? What does that discovery process look like? What similar choices have they made with more obviously violent ads? Who profits from this process? And so on. As a result, learner positions become more nuanced. Once learners have reached understanding, facilitators can move to the next level up and explore with learners how they will use this information. A common model for this process is "What— So what—Now what. What is happening? So, what does that mean? Now, what

do we do about or with that knowledge?" Leslie adds the "now what" component in the next phase of the workshop by having groups identify how they would respond to different scenarios. It is worth noting that while not all groups achieved the highest level of sophistication or nuance in their responses, all increased their levels of processing by the end of the workshop. This can be seen in how they talked about the situations to which they were responding in that final exercise.

COMMON EXPERIENCES

Thus far, we have provided four narratives. One described a workshop on hate crime prevention conducted with professional responders at a conference. The other three describe moments that took place in college classes. These classroom moments included a workshop on relationship violence, a discussion about suicide prevention, and a workshop about rape culture. We chose these examples because they required heavy facilitation and delicate navigation. So, we were able to pull a lot of techniques out of them.

Longer and more intensive learning engagements like service-learning and simulations will likely require a heavier facilitation touch, as the need for intensive and deep reflection is important. Much of the facilitation we do in our classes and our programs won't require us to use all the aforementioned techniques, but still necessitate some. Shorter and less sensitive engagements like facilitating class (somewhat less charged) discussions, small group task work, or applications of basic problem solving might not require such close attention to trauma responses, but likely still contend with learners' confidence and self-efficacy. Being aware of relational and sociocultural contexts, recognizing learners as whole persons, and integrating inclusive curriculum remain helpful in connecting learners with the engagement. The skills and physical/emotional state of the learner might still require you to attend to capacity and capability even with exercises that appear less threatening. Facilitation skills that attend to cognitive processing (listening, probing, processing, and deepening) apply in almost any learning scenario.

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

In this chapter, we shared four experiences which required the facilitator to adapt the original game plan and use multiple techniques, often in varying combinations. We shared these as a way of excavating three focal points of facilitation: First, we identified the ways in which relationships are foundational to facilitation and are always nuanced by sociocultural contexts. To provide guidance for building effective relationships, we discussed the value of recognizing learners as whole persons and the value of designing curricular content and approach that is inclusive of the variety of diversity represented in our student population. Second, we looked closely at enhancing learner capacity and capability. In this section, we addressed realizing and accepting challenging moments, constructing choices, reshaping our beliefs, and developing communal support as mechanisms to help us navigate such moments. Third, we explored two general families of facilitation techniques to help enhance capacity and capability in real-time adaptation. Within the frame of listening and probing, we explored reflection, embodiment, and personalizing/depersonalizing. Within the frame of processing and deepening, we examined reflection in combination with redirection or deepening and carefully crafting and mobilizing questions.

Fundamental to facilitation is appreciating that while different learners often share some common experiences across different groups, all learners are different. Given this diversity, what does this mean? We can and should do what we can to learn about our students and how they learn. Our structures and curriculum need to be representatively inclusive and multimodal. Still, as facilitators, we will need to develop and adapt our approaches in real time. Hopefully, this chapter provides some approaches and techniques that will help with this endeavor.

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Part 2

Inclusive Pedagogy Applications

SECTION INTRODUCTION BY

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In part 1 of this book, the chapter authors examined a few different ways to understand, design, and facilitate inclusive pedagogy. Three of the many characteristics of inclusive pedagogy are *a willingness to be vulnerable*, *an expectation of continuous change,* and *a recognition of idiosyncrasy and context.* Leaning into the spirit of *a recognition of idiosyncrasy and context,* the three chapters of part 2 explore specific instructional modalities in their local settings. The chapter authors show you in vivid narrative detail how they learned what they learned and how they put that knowledge to work. These chapters delve not just into the negotiated relationships between and among educators, learners, content, and modalities, but also into the ways in which the learning is lived.

In chapter 4, Restorative Writing Pedagogy: Repairing Harm and Developing Agency in the Writing Classroom, Margaret Gonzales discusses her use of restorative writing pedagogy, an approach based on the practice and philosophy of restorative justice. She describes this approach as helping learners think differently about writing and about themselves as thinkers and communicators. Drawing from her time teaching Advanced Composition, Gonzales seeks to undo the harm caused by punitive models of writing instruction that traumatizes students, especially students of color, into believing that they were bad writers. Through the use of inclusive practices and Freirian critical pedagogy, Gonzales promotes spaces that help students to 1) locate and interrogate the root causes of the harm they experience; 2) reflect on how past harm informs their relationship with writing, teachers, and their approach to education in general; and 3) emerge as critical agents who feel empowered to write in, and value, their own voices. This chapter is relevant far beyond English classrooms, since its discussions of the way educators frame, describe, and assess written assignments can apply to business plans, reflections, lab reports, or any other type of writing.

In chapter 5, Facing Life's Crises as an Educator: The Blind Leading the Sighted, psychology professor Tiffiny L. Sia discusses the connections between her personal story and her professional approach to motivating students. She shares her experience going from a sighted college freshman to a blind college professor. Sia provides a fresh set of ideas and strategies for educators thinking about how instructors and students alike can face life's curveballs, dips in motivation, and crises. She discusses catastrophic thinking, misconceptions, and mindset, demonstrating her commitment to the idea that instructors can impact students' lives in lasting and positive ways.

In chapter 6, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Online Classrooms, instructional designer Rodrick Shao and librarian Amelia Koford discuss the intersection of inclusive teaching and online teaching. They share their story of being colleagues together at Texas Lutheran University, where Rodrick spent many years teaching often-resistant faculty about tools and strategies for online classrooms. This chapter will be of interest to anyone who has wondered about how to infuse online spaces with the vitality and warmth that characterize excellent face-to-face classrooms. Shao and Koford review the literature on the effectiveness of online learning for marginalized students, and draw on the Community of Inquiry framework, which frames the educational experience as an interaction between Teaching Presence, Social Presence and Cognitive Presence, to organize narratives and ideas from their professional experiences.

As you read these chapters, we invite you to consider how the authors were shaped by their own experiences as learners. How have your experiences shaped you? How can you leverage these experiences to grow as an educator? Additional discussion questions for each chapter can be found at the Elon University Center for Engaged Learning's website.

Chapter 4

Restorative Writing Pedagogy

Repairing Harm and Developing Agency in the Writing Classroom

Margaret Gonzales, *Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science*

INTRODUCTION

Each semester, the stories my students tell me about their writing experiences are not new. For the last ten years, the students in Advanced Composition have expressed their frustration and anger about the way they were taught to write, mainly in high school. They have been taught to perform writing for standardized tests and to think of test scores and GPAs as their greatest achievements. This focus on extrinsic rewards has, as they and I argue, alienated them from the many other purposes that writing can serve, including self-expression and critical thinking. Most of them believe that they are bad writers, unable to perform to the standards that their teachers have demanded of them. First-generation and minority students struggle the most with the sense of inferiority brought on by years of test-driven instruction. By the time they get to Advanced Composition in their junior or senior year of college, they are alienated from academic writing and are only taking the class because it is required for graduation.

Before going any further, I want to make it clear that I am not blaming teachers, who are doing the best they can under the circumstances, but to instead understand why so many students feel this way about writing, to critique the practices that lead to their alienation, and to offer a way forward. For my students, the way forward requires a seismic shift in thought and practice, no easy feat considering that, although it's made them miserable, what they've been doing has worked for them in terms of grades and achievement. But, as they realize, the achievement has come at the price of their individual voices and agency. To help restore their voice and agency, I have taken a restorative approach to the teaching of writing, one that seeks to repair the harms many of them have experienced in the hands of well-intentioned teachers who are preparing them for tests and, or so they believe, college.

Over the years, many students have written the stories that have contributed to the development of this approach, and I am grateful for everything they have taught me about teaching and learning. Here, I will include stories from students in the fall 2022 section of Advanced Composition, used with the generous and kind permission of my students, who gave their written consent and agreed to have their full names used so that their contributions could be recognized. I have deliberately left their sentences as-is since one of the main tenets of my teaching is to value students' voices and individual forms of expression over grammatical correctness for its own sake.

BACKGROUND

In 1999, as a first-semester graduate student seeking an MA in English Literature, I was required to take a class in composition pedagogy and practice before I was assigned to teach my own section of Composition the following semester. Three quarters of the way through that class, I realized that I wanted to switch my concentration from literature to composition studies because I felt, for the first time, that not only did I understand the purpose of my education, I could also explain that purpose to students. Like me, many were first-generation college students who had perhaps loved to learn but had no idea why they had to take certain subjects, like composition, especially when they were majoring in something like math or biology. Writing, or so I thought, was a practical skill, unlike literary analysis, and was relevant to every career. After all, one needs to be able to write for one's job, whether that job is chemical engineer or physical therapist.

My own experience as a writer differs from the vast majority of my students. I was a natural, drawn to both reading and writing from as young an age as I could remember. When needed, my teachers would show me how to do things that would improve my writing and thinking and because I took some honors English in high school, I was given far more leeway to analyze texts and create my own arguments instead of regurgitating the ideas of others. Of course, I still needed to meet the requirements of the genre, write in grammatically correct sentences, and cite my sources properly. While the feedback I received was helpful for advancing a particular essay and avoiding things like run-on sentences, no one ever explained why I had to do things a certain way, and I never asked. I did know that sounding and thinking like a teacher was a requirement for college, and college meant better prospects in life. I was still very lucky. Because I took honors English in high school and standardized tests had not yet taken over the curriculum, I had teachers who could focus on ideas rather than counting sentences or paragraphs.

Eventually, however, I reached the limits of my natural talent. Some time between the last couple of years of undergrad and that first year of graduate school, writing had become negatively associated with grades, and grades were associated with my financial aid status, future career, and intellectual abilities. In my first semester of graduate school, I hit a wall. I did not know how to make the leap from writing 8–10 page papers to 20–25 page papers. I did not believe that I could make the kinds of arguments I felt that my professors expected of me at that level. I took an incomplete in my first graduate-level literature class because I was overwhelmed by the fear of failure. The effect was nearly paralyzing and I spent most of my graduate career trying not to fail.

I did not know how to ask for help, either. I, like many first-generation students, assumed that to do so was a sign of weakness. No matter how kind my professors were, I assumed that if I took them up on the offer, I would be found out as an imposter and a fake, a kid from a working class family on the south side of Chicago who didn't belong in academia but had managed to trick everyone into thinking she had some talent. Eventually, writing became one of the hardest things about my life; not knowing how to make progress in my own work or how to view feedback as anything other than punitive, I struggled to complete my master's thesis and my dissertation, all the while trying to help first-year students complete the essays I assigned them. I was much better at preaching than practicing.

Eventually, I moved on to teaching at a community college, during which time I finished my dissertation, driven by desperation to leave a toxic work environment. Degree in hand, I accepted a tenure-track faculty position at a small liberal arts college, Texas Lutheran University, where I would teach writing and direct the composition program. It was there that I would develop what I later came to realize was a restorative approach to teaching writing that would attempt to repair the harm that my students had experienced in their previous English classes. I was driven, in part, by my own experiences, but also by the stories of so many students who had come to loathe writing and resent required writing classes. Many, like me, felt that writing was a struggle when once it had been such a pleasure. I didn't know when that shift happened for me, but I was determined to make sure my students did not feel as stuck as I did.

WHAT IS RESTORATIVE WRITING PEDAGOGY?

Restorative writing pedagogy is based on the practice and philosophy of restorative justice, an alternative approach to addressing criminal behavior that focuses on acknowledging the harm that has been done and repairing it as much as possible. Restorative justice requires participants to think differently about the problem "by asking who experienced harm, how the harm impacted people and relationships, and how the various stakeholders can see a community response to the harm as opposed to fueling further polarization of those involved" (Winn 2013, 127). While the practice of restorative justice has been adopted to address disciplinary issues within K–12 schools with high rates of suspensions and expulsions, it is not often utilized in the classroom as a means to address the harm created by previous experiences with punitive and authoritarian teaching approaches.

Research into the practice of restorative pedagogy is not extensive, and what is available is not centered on one discipline, largely because it is a practice that extends beyond any particular subject or classroom. In the classroom, a restorative approach, which intersects with the critical-liberatory practices of Paolo Freire, provides teachers and students with the opportunity to reflect on the harm that was caused and work to restore agency (Fine 2018).

A restorative writing pedagogy specifically seeks to invite all students “into a writing community where they [can] foster literate identities without fear, limitations, or judgements” (Winn 2013, 130). Through the use of inclusive strategies and Freirian critical pedagogy, teachers can create a space for “relationality, interconnectedness, and non-punitive approaches” (Fronius et al. quoted in Fine 2018, 105) to writing that have helped students to 1) locate and examine the root causes of the harm they experienced, 2) reflect on how this has informed their relationship with the subject, teachers, and their approach to education in general, and 3) emerge as critical agents who feel empowered to write in, and value, their own voices. In doing so, students feel that the writing classroom is a place for them, one where they not only belong, but can thrive without having to abandon who they are and what they think to satisfy a set of standards that they did not create and often do not understand. The classroom becomes a critical space in which those standards are critiqued, analyzed, and considered before being put back into use, modified, or rejected.

While the ideal of restorative pedagogy is at the core of my practice, it is not enough to change the way students think about and do their writing. There are, I argue, three essential structural

components of the writing classroom that are necessary for restorative writing pedagogy to work: building relationships and trust; assignments, processes, and feedback that promote and value writers’ agency and voice; and labor-based grading contracts that neutralize the punishment aspect of writing that is often at the core of students’ anxieties and beliefs about their writing abilities. When these elements are at the center of a teaching practice that is informed by the concept of restorative pedagogy, the classroom and the discipline itself can be an inclusive space in which all students can thrive. In the restorative writing classroom, students can finally see writing as something they do, not something that has been done to them.

BEYOND THE WRITING CLASSROOM

Before I continue, I want to make it clear that what I discuss in this chapter is not limited to my particular discipline, class, or institution. Writing is not the only subject that students either profess to hate or see as utterly pointless given their majors. As undergraduates, my fellow English majors and I had no idea why we had to take College Algebra. We were not “math people,” after all, otherwise we would not have majored in English. I deliberately avoided becoming an English Education major in part because I didn’t want to take the required Intro to Physics class. I also didn’t want to teach at the high school level, but the required physics class didn’t exactly serve as a selling point for the program. It also made no sense to me. Exactly when would have used what I learned in a physics class as a high school English teacher? I couldn’t make the connection, and no one I knew could do it either. Even though I would have had a guaranteed career path as a high school teacher, I opted not to go in that direction.

This view of required courses is common and often expressed by my students about my classes. In a first-year writing class I taught one semester, a student voiced his frustration with having to take the course because, as he believed, he "wouldn't have to write in a computer science job." Because we had a good relationship, I responded with "How many computer science jobs have you had?" He acknowledged the point, and then we had a conversation about what really happens in most jobs held by college graduates (there's usually a lot of writing). I also felt it was my duty to make the connection between the essays he was writing for class and the kind of writing he'd be doing in the workplace. To do anything else would have been a missed opportunity to help him see how this class could be useful to him in the future. Most students, however, never have that conversation with their instructors. Students are often told they have to get the required class out of the way and that's that. So it's no surprise that students resent taking classes they struggle in or think are irrelevant. Compound that with the pressure to perform, i.e., grades and their associated consequences (scholarships or punishments from parents), and other barriers to learning, including stereotype threat and exclusionary teaching practices, and you have the recipe for building resentment and hate toward not only the subjects students don't want to learn in the first place, but sometimes also classes within their own majors.

These lessons usually don't start with us, but they can end with us. We should not, after all, be in the business of stoking students' resentments toward and hatred for learning any subject, especially those we have dedicated our lives to teaching. Since we cannot change the past, we must consider what we can do to reframe and revitalize their learning. How can we repair the harm caused by years of test and grade-centric teaching and learning? How can we make classes and subjects relevant to all of the students in our classes, not just our majors?

A restorative approach, one that interrogates, with the students, their feelings toward the class and the subject and seeks to repair harm, can be one way to tackle the issue even in disciplines where discussion and reflection are not typical. Restorative pedagogy has been used in college-level education courses (Hollweck, Reimer, and Bouchard 2019; de los Rios, Martinez, and Musser 2019; Canady, Camangian, Quijada 2019), English as a second language (ESL) classes for refugee learners (Ogilvie and Fuller 2016), college-level criminology classes (Sweeney 2022), and high school gender studies classes (Fine 2018). It does mean, however, that instructors will have to change the structure and nature of their classes, moving away from a more didactic, lecture-based delivery toward a model that actively engages students, not only in the course material but also in ongoing, value judgement-free conversations about their learning.

In order to help students be successful, we should be actively removing barriers, including those that were erected in previous classes, irrespective of discipline. This requires open dialogue between students and teachers and a willingness to interrogate what has come before. At the heart of restorative pedagogy is relationship building and trust, but students can't learn to trust their instructors until they confront, on some level, why they have learned to distrust them. Instructors must also be willing to engage in critical reflection of problematic teaching practices, biases, and assumptions that they have relied on to explain poor student performance or attitudes. Just because they learned their subject in a particular way, for example, doesn't mean all students will be able to learn in the same way.

To help students exam their assumptions and biases about a given course, instructors could begin the semester by asking their students to consider the following: "The faculty who designed the general education curriculum believe that, regardless of your major, you will benefit from taking this class. They are not doing it simply to give themselves more work to do. Why do you think you are required to take this class? What purpose will it serve given your major and/or your own life and interests?" Making the reasons for the course transparent will go a long way toward promoting student buy-in. Building a safe classroom where learning from mistakes and taking risks is rewarded is another step in the right direction. Additionally, asking students to share their thoughts, ideas, and views in class discussion and in their assignments is a significant move toward helping them to connect with the purpose of the class and subject.

Ungrading, typically done in the form of labor-based grading contracts, which will be more extensively discussed later in this chapter, is another strategy that transcends disciplines and opens up a space for students to make mistakes, revise, learn, and develop transferrable skills beyond one class or one discipline. Grading contracts and ungrading, once limited to college writing classes, have moved into other disciplines, and not just in the humanities. Instructors in chemistry (Jarvis 2020), biomedical engineering (Dosmar and Williams 2022), educational psychology (Greenberg, Sohn, and Moret 2022), and neuroscience (in an honors seminar combined with classical studies) (Meinking and Hall 2022), have used grading contracts and ungrading with great success. Clarissa Sorensen-Unruh, a chemistry instructor at Central New Mexico Community College, switched to grading contracts and realized that once she "divorced grades from feedback, students were more likely to absorb her advice on

improving their performance" (Jarvis 2020). The grading contract turned grading on its head, and meant that "midterm exams and quizzes could be a learning experience for the students, not just a way of assessing their progress" (Jarvis 2020).

Finally, for those who teach in other disciplines, it is important to note that if you assign writing, you are teaching writing. What I mean by this is that students learn lessons from how you talk about writing, what requirements you have, and what kinds of feedback and grades they receive. If, for example, the grading criteria is heavily focused on or over-penalizes for correctness, form, and required numbers of words and citations, they learn that the most important thing about writing is not how effective you are at communicating with your audience, but that writing is about meeting a set of specific requirements on an assignment sheet. While we may think that we're preparing them to be professional communicators in the workplace, we are actually teaching them that what they are communicating is less important than how they communicate it, and that how they communicate it can be reduced to a set of formulaic requirements. There is a dangerous imbalance here that may actually do more harm than good in the workplace for several reasons.

First, what we consider to be professional in terms of grammar, punctuation, syntax, and word choice is based on standard white American English. When we evaluate people based on their ability to follow the rules, we set students and professionals up for either significantly more work or shame and judgment for not meeting the standards. For most forms of written communication, this is an unrealistic and unnecessary approach. It would be better to emphasize meaning and coherence; in other words, can I understand the message as it is written? Is my response to the issues in the writing driven by the way I was taught to value certain elements of writing or is there a real problem with my ability to understand the text?

By encouraging students and people in general to write in their own voices, we teach them and ourselves to value the great variety of writing and speaking styles available to us. More importantly, we encourage the kind of linguistic diversity that we should value as much as any other kind of diversity. As Vershawn Young writes, code meshing of primary and secondary discourses "has the potential to enlarge our national vocabulary, multiply the range of available rhetorical styles, expand our ability to understand linguistic difference, and make us in the end multidialectical, as opposed to non-dialectical" (2009, 65).

These changes are not easy to make since they require fundamental shifts in approach and belief about what matters most. Many instructors in disciplines that are more lecture-based may worry that a restorative approach will steal time away from content delivery. It is true that adding restorative practices to a course will require time, but the value may be in better performance and learning from students overall. While more fully developed arguments for reducing or eliminating fully lecture-based classes are outside the scope of this chapter, I do hope to show that restorative pedagogy, ungrading, and an approach to writing that values agency and voice can be rewarding for those who are interested in restoring students' sense of belonging as well as their desire to learn and engage.

EVOLVING INTO RESTORATIVE WRITING PEDAGOGY

Early on in my teaching career, like many new writing teachers, I focused on all the things that seemed important at the time: grammar, punctuation, format, citations, transitions, and many

of the mechanical things that I thought would be their ticket to success in college and in life because that's what I had believed, too. I gave them feedback about their content, but like most students, they struggled to see this as anything other than punitive because of its association with a grade.

In 2010, a colleague introduced me to Peter Elbow's and Jane Danielewicz's article "A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching," which discusses the use of labor-based grading contracts in writing classes (2009). What if, Elbow and Danielewicz dared us to consider, you could do something that would get students to focus on their writing instead of their grades? What if you could, at least until the end of the semester, shift their mindset toward the intrinsic rather than extrinsic value of writing? Many of my colleagues were skeptical; they thought that students could not live without the grade as a form of feedback. They remain skeptical to this day, but the grading contract revolutionized my teaching. Instead of focusing on mechanics and adding up points, students could focus on drafting and revision and improving their writing through process. Because early drafts did not receive grades, there was no punishment for making mistakes as they tried to figure out what to say and how to say it. Given that the classroom is a space for learning, it made sense to me that early efforts should not be penalized for being unable to exhibit what had not yet been fully developed.

It didn't solve every problem, largely because of the baggage that students brought with them regarding what constitutes improvement as well as my lingering attachment to certain standards and expectations. Students come to college-level writing classes with a long history of writing instruction that relies heavily on punishing them for errors in grammar, formatting, and citations rather than rewarding them for process, development, or depth of thought. Well-intentioned instructors enforce the standards of written English they were taught and that they feel they must pass on to students, especially first-generation and minority students. Teachers believe that they must prepare these students for college by teaching them to write in a generic, white, middle-class academic voice that will ensure that the students are not marked as outsiders. Consequently, the students who make it to college are well-trained in suppressing their own voices and agency. As Vershawn Young writes in an article that I assign in Advanced Composition, students, especially those who are encouraged to use code switching, learn "that there is an acceptable way to communicate in this nation, and their way isn't it—at least not in official, graded school assignments, in public, or at work" (2009, 64). A grading contract alone could not undo more than twelve years of negative reinforcement.

To restore students' agency, I would need to change more than how I graded. It took several years of teaching First-Year Writing and Advanced Composition before I began to really see what the problem was and to determine what I could do about in the short time that I had with students. It would require a significant change in the classroom dynamic. I would need to shift away from a traditional teacher-student relationship and toward a model where "the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" and "arguments of 'authority' are no longer valid" (Freire 2005, 80). Grading contracts were the first step in this shift, but I also needed to critically examine my own beliefs about writing, teaching, and learning. I needed to abandon the idea that I was doing them a disservice by not explicitly enforcing standards (especially for grammar, syntax, and punctuation) that they would need to follow in other classes and in their workplaces. I needed to reject the kind of standards-based writing that had always been touted as being "fair" and to move toward an approach that was more flexible and accounted for individual expression and choice.

ADVANCED COMPOSITION

The majority of students who take my 300-level Advanced Composition course are not English majors. They are mostly Education majors specializing in music, history, kinesiology, social studies, and sometimes math. I also get history, psychology, communication studies, and political science students, but it is an elective for these majors.

On the first day of class, I ask the students to introduce themselves. Lately, I have taken to asking them to tell us their names, majors, pronouns, and one thing they like about themselves. The only thing that bombs harder than that last one is "tell me something good that happened to you this week." They usually play it safe by saying things like "I like that I like baseball." The juniors and seniors seem particularly reticent; they don't trust me and I don't blame them. Then I ask them to raise their hands and tell me how many of them hate writing. I emphasize that I won't take it personally; most students do hate it and deliberately choose majors so they can avoid it. They are fine with sharing their feelings about writing: it's no secret that they'd rather not be there. Usually, they all raise their hands. Occasionally I get a student (usually the lone English or political science major) who says they don't hate it, but they don't love it either.

Every semester for ten years, a group of fifteen students, with few exceptions, has told me they hate writing, by which they mean academic writing. (They don't think of all the non-academic writing they do as writing in this context.) Many have chosen to major in a discipline that they believe does not require much, if any, writing. Their degree plans require them to take Advanced Composition because the professors in their department know they will have to write for their jobs. They must know how to write emails to students' parents, one colleague told me. The subtext is that they need to write like they're college-educated adults, not like they're shooting off a casual text to a friend.

When the students say they hate writing, they are not being hyperbolic. They write about it extensively in their first essay, which is an academic literacy narrative that focuses on their experiences as writers for as far back and in as much detail as they can remember. As Joel Zuckerman, a student in the class, writes of his high school experience, "Because of this, I convinced myself I hated to write. I hated lacking a connection to what I was writing. I hated being forced to write when I otherwise wouldn't choose to."

The goal for the academic literacy narrative assignment is to locate the root causes of this hatred because no one starts off their educational career hating writing. In fact, many of them write about how much they loved to write creative stories and essays in second or third grade, before the start of standardized test prep. Once the test prep begins, it's all over for many of them. In his academic literacy narrative, Israel Vargas specifically takes issue with the AP test-prep they went through:

> Aside from the numerical grade, all that mattered was the structure of my essays. The quality and substance of my essays were set to a low standard. I just had to follow a formula. In 11th grade, I was in my first AP class, AP English and Composition. My teacher...was unforgiving and stringent. There were no late work submissions, no forgiveness, and impossibly high standards. She greatly helped me to improve my writing, but it was a difficult and arduous process. We had 40 minutes to write an entire essay, and retrospectively this seems like a ridiculous amount of time to even write an introductory paragraph. Nevertheless, it was what was expected of us. I always felt like a loser. All my peers would seem to get it. They would finish their entire essays in the 40-minute time span, and I would still be on my outline. As we got up to turn in our little essays, I never had enough. I would get 20/100 as a grade on each one.

Those who hold on to some positive feelings for writing usually learn to have control over it rather than be controlled by it—they love the ability to write perfect sentences, well organized paragraphs, a clear three-part thesis, with one to two quotes per paragraph. It is orderly. As Abigail Roalson notes in her academic literacy narrative, "These writing rules set me up for success in some ways," but those lessons were not without their limitations: "throughout these classes, even if I had no clue what I was writing about, I could still get great grades on my essays because they were so formulaic. And due to this, writing felt incredibly unpersonal for me at this time." For some students, the formula is almost a comfort and it has served them well, even if the writing is not particularly interesting to them or to their audience. If it checks all the boxes on the assignment, then it is usually considered a job well done by teacher and student alike because it has achieved the aim: getting a good grade.

For those students who have not learned to control it and play exactly by the rules, writing is best avoided. And they usually do avoid it, until they reach Advanced Composition and have no choice but to suffer through. Caleb Mosier represents this view rather well:

> To be completely honest, at the start of the course I had no idea what I was doing in this class and why I had to take the class. Throughout my academic career I have disliked writing, not only because it takes a lot of time to put together an essay but because I never felt like I was very good at it. I am a procrastinator and I wait until the last minute to do things, especially essays, so this made writing much worse for me. As I have explained in my academic literacy narrative, I had a fear of a bad grade and along with the voice in my head telling me "you are not good enough" or making me doubt on my own writing. This fear of a bad grade just amplified the voice in my head, making the whole process of writing that much worse for me.

He does have one other choice: change his major. Others have done it before, in part to avoid classes like Advanced Composition.

The conditions that lead to this kind of hatred for writing seem like a new phenomenon, but it is not. Historically, writing instruction has often led to the alienation of students, especially those whose primary discourse is not college-level, standard white American English. In 1974, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the largest professional organization for first-year writing teachers, acknowledged this in their "Statement on Students' Right to Their Own Language," a document that seems to have been largely ignored by the vast majority of college-level writing teachers up until it was revised and reissued following the 2020 murder of George Floyd. The statement includes the following:

> We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.

In 1977, Mina Shaugnessy published her seminal work in the field of Composition Studies, which further highlighted the potential harm that writing teachers inflicted on students by enforcing standards of academic writing:

> Neglected by the dominant society, they have nonetheless had their own worlds to grow up in and they arrive on our campus as young adults, with opinions and languages and plans already in their minds. College both beckons and threatens them, offering to teach them useful ways of thinking and talking about their world, promising even to improve the quality of their lives, but threatening at the same time to take from them their distinctive ways of interpreting the world, to assimilate them into the culture of academia without acknowledging their experience as outsiders. (292)

The only thing that Shaugnessy gets wrong is that this is no mere threat. It happens repeatedly for students who are told that college is their ticket to a better way of life, but they must learn to speak and write in approved ways if they want what college has to offer. At best, they get taught to code switch or they learn to do it to preserve their connection to their family and friends. In a broader social context, written literacy has been used as a means of excluding those who cannot conform to the standards of middle-class, educated, white American English grammar, form, and structure, from public and civil discourse. As Peter Elbow writes in 1999,

> The most common attitude toward "wrong" language is to want to get rid of it. Citizens of all sorts—whether they are teachers in schools, college faculty, members of the mainstream general public, spokesperson for culture, or legislatures—are likely to agree that a teacher's job is to "improve" students' language. And students often feel the same goal for themselves—as we ourselves are likely to feel in relation to our own speaking and writing; if the words that come naturally to your mouth or pen are labeled wrong, we feel ourselves to have a problem. (642)

Despite the recognition that there is something deeply wrong with the focus on grammar and "correctness" in the teaching of writing as early as the 1970's, in the age of standardized testing, the emphasis on form and correctness has only been strengthened. (After all, how else can a machine grade an essay?) And within this approach to evaluating students' writing abilities according to countable features and form, the legacy of exclusionary literacy practices remains, negatively impacting students' performance and perception of themselves as writers. It is no wonder that

students turned eagerly to things like ChatGPT to write essays for them; if artificial intelligence can produce a boring and meaningless five paragraph essay that checks all the boxes, why waste time writing it yourself?

Rather than merely accept that they are wrong and their teachers are right, students are more likely to view academic writing as a largely pointless hoop that they are required to jump through to fulfill the real purpose of their education: obtaining a degree that will get them a job. In which case, the formula will do just fine or they'll take the C if they can get it. As Myla Mitchell says in her literacy narrative,

> When following the formula, I did not have to worry about how I would structure my essay. I could easily create an outline with the formula and fill in the blanks with whatever content I specifically needed for the class I was writing for. But even with this comfort, writing still felt suffocating. I was not writing something from myself, rather I was going through the motions as I always had with writing.

In the process, they have learned that their voices and thoughts don't matter in academic writing; they are there to get the job done as best as they can while they internalize the judgment and criticism of their primary discourses. During our class discussions, Katlin Ramirez became aware of just how much this had impacted her. Coming from the southeast side of San Antonio, she had been made conscious of her voice as something that needed to be changed or altered to meet the standards of the academic context. As she writes in her literacy narrative,

> I feel, in a way, teachers try to restrict our voices by trying to make us all sound the same. If they see little individuality, they will brush it off, but the moment

> they see a huge difference, they try to suffocate it. I believe students should be able to use their voice no matter what their voice might sound like.

This sentiment comes through again and again in that first essay, which is intended to help them locate the harm so that they can begin the repair process, which ideally leads to a rediscovery of their voices, the opportunity to express their thoughts, and a renewed sense of agency. They may not learn to love writing by the time they leave Advanced Composition, but some do and others make at least a kind of peace with it. Most importantly, they feel that, for the first time, they have control. As Israel Vargas writes in their final essay for the class,

> I was able to take a step back and observe my routines and thought processes from both past and present. I was able to discern the limits of a five-paragraph essay, and by finding freedom from one discourse, I was able to identify another discourse and dwell in it. I was able to think about my writing processes in a way I had never done before in high school. I was able to let go of my pressures to be perfect. In fact, I was able to be open to more serendipitous moments in life, ones on which I could learn the most.

Many of them are also future teachers, and they leave with lessons that go beyond writing. They are committed to minimizing the well-intentioned harm they may do in the name of college preparation or standardized testing. They may not be able to avoid standardized testing or a tightly prescribed curriculum, but they can teach their students to think critically about the system and open up paths for creative expression and agency within the confines of state and local school board mandates. The desire to do so is strong. As Myla Mitchell writes,

> It starts with me. Taking initiative to break the "rules" in my writing and consciously write papers that speak to me and a greater purpose than just a good grade or to get it over with. And then in my career I would strive to change my own students' perspective on writing and prepare them for actual college writing in the ways I hadn't. I would look for growth and depth of thought rather than checked boxes on my grading rubric. My motivation for inspiring this wave of change in my future student's writing comes mostly from the idea of wanting to be the teacher I wish I had had. The kind of teacher I wish had caught me earlier on in my academic career and encouraged me to write honestly and with purpose and to not feel restricted by "rules" that aren't even truly binding.

This is a remarkable shift considering how anxious Myla was at the beginning of the semester about the class, the grading contract, drafts, and assignments, all of which are designed to remove the safety net of the formula and encourage students to make their own choices.

How is this possible? How can students' hatred for writing be reduced or even reversed in one semester? How can they learn to shift their thinking about writing and learning in such a short amount of time? How can they so quickly go from feeling excluded to included? This is accomplished through a commitment to restorative writing pedagogy, as well as three main elements that I will discuss next: relationship building and trust; assignments, processes, and feedback; and labor-based grading contracts.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND TRUST IN THE CLASSROOM

None of this works until and unless students realize that my goal is not to punish them for what they do not know, and instead reward them for the progress they make. The first step in the process is getting them to see me as a person/reader, not just a teacher/grading robot. I have to humanize myself in real and meaningful ways.

The vast majority of students I work with do not see me as a reader. What I mean by this is not someone who reads their essay—they know I do that—but rather as someone who might enjoy reading what they have to say in the way they have chosen to say it. By the time they get to me, they have come to view their teachers as graders, not readers, and have learned that the purpose of writing is to check all the boxes on the assignment or risk being penalized. It has never occurred to them that a teacher might enjoy a joke or clever turn of phrase or might give them feedback that engages their ideas. If it has, then they have probably been punished for it by either not approaching the assignment correctly or being too informal. Given their experiences, it is crucial to shift their view of me as a reader to change the relationship they have with me and, by extension, their writing. In learning to think about their audience as a real person whose reading is informed by preferences and experience, they learn one of the most crucial components of any writing task: how to engage a reader.

But first, I have to convince them that I mean what I say and to work with them on building a different kind of relationship. Restorative justice is a "philosophical approach that views harm as a violation of people and relationships" (Zehr as quoted in

Hollweck, Reimer, and Bouchard 2019, 246). It is thus necessary to build a "climate of care, trust, and autonomy" (246) before any repairs can happen. This does not have to be done by giving up complete authority over the classroom, but rather consciously resisting the approach that privileges the teacher's authority over the students' experiences, knowledge, or voices (257). Classrooms thus become sites for "relationship-building, peacemaking, and peacekeeping" that allows students to focus on what matters most: learning (Winn 2013, 127).

According to Smith, Frey, and Fisher, "restorative practices provide a framework for building trust and rescuing trust when it has been lost" (2018, 76). In restorative pedagogy, classes "predominantly take the form of workshops, rather than formal lectures, help[ing] to remove power imbalances within the classroom by positioning the person teaching as facilitator, rather than a lecturer. In doing so, promoting that learning and knowledge production is a process of investigation immersed in dialogue, humanization, and collaboration" (Sweeney 2022, 11). In many cases, this involves circle discussions, a typical feature of restorative justice practices and pedagogy. The structure usually involves teacher and students arranging "their chairs in circles so they face one another, pushing aside desks or other physical barriers,"(Smith, Frey, and Fisher 2018, 76) which then allows students and teachers to first learn about each other and create a non-threatening environment. The circles can then move on to broader discussions that ask students to "process complex ideas and dilemmas," drawing extensively on their knowledge and experience. "Using circles allows every voice to emerge and gives each member opportunities to connect and to appreciate others' contributions" (2018, 78). As a result, "students get used to speaking their thoughts—which helps them take risks academically in speaking or writing challenges" (2018, 77).

While circles are typical, I argue that the form itself is not essential to building trust and creating meaningful relationships. These things can be accomplished any number of ways, but the most important feature of this practice is that everything that happens in the classroom is done with transparency and consistency. It also involves taking a more humanized approach to teaching and learning than traditional authoritarian models allow for. In the authoritarian model, the teacher holds power over their students and there is significant emphasis on what students should not do rather than what they can do. Alternatively, "the restorative classroom seeks to actively engage learners by providing participatory learning processes that balance the need for limits, boundaries, and structure with engagement, support, and nurturing" (Bailie and Adamson 2016, 77). The nurturing is perhaps the most difficult change in the move away from authoritarian teaching, which requires the teacher to appear impersonal or "professional" and always in control of the class.

Nevertheless, Winn argues that "circles are catalysts for blending communities in which facilitators are committed to eliminating hierarchies based on academic prowess or social and cultural capitaI. There is a particular kind of power-sharing in circle processes that is undeniable and necessary for establishing concepts" (2013 128). While this is undoubtedly true in some cases, I am conscious of two things when it comes to conversation circles in the classroom. It is, in general, difficult for some students to be vulnerable and open in front of their classmates; they may be more reserved or shy about sharing their experiences for a variety of reasons. It is particularly difficult for first-generation and minority students to speak up and speak out if they have felt

like the classroom is not a welcoming and inclusive space for them. Instead, students should have the option to share their own experiences or thoughts if and when they're ready. They should also have other paths to participation in which they feel confident and comfortable. The goal, after all, is to "engage students in participatory interaction and dialogue," which can come in many forms (Bailie and Adamson 2016, 75).

As for the professor's authority, it can be mitigated by seeing students as interlocutors, rather than receptacles of the professor's wisdom. In Advanced Composition, classroom activities center on discussion, asking students to contribute their perceptions, knowledge, and experience related to course materials. For example, I assign Richard Rodriguez's "The Achievement of Desire," a chapter from his book *Hunger of Memory*, which describes his experience of growing up as the son of Mexican immigrants who later finds himself unable to write his dissertation because he realizes his education has turned him into a mimic who is incapable of thinking his own thoughts. He describes painful scenes in which he rejects his parents or feels rejected by them (1982). Our discussion might begin with me asking students if anyone in the room identifies with Rodriguez's experience and, if so, why. Myla Mitchell writes, "Much like Rodriguez..., I felt I had to do better, be better to prove a point—to show that I belonged in the classroom and to step into the 'better life' [my family] had sacrificed so much for me to have. I, too, managed an 'odd success'—I was a low income, first-generation student preparing to apply to college in just a few short years." Others don't like the way Rodriguez treats his parents and judge him accordingly. This presents us with an opportunity to question why the author might have disclosed such details knowing how it made him look and to think in more nuanced ways about his particular social and historical context. We consider, for example, what Rodriguez helps us understand about the process of literacy development, especially for a first-generation son of immigrant parents in the 1950s.

We also look at the passages that students selected and analyze the writing choices in the passage to understand its impact. Rodriguez also serves as an example for how to write their first essay, as Katlin Ramirez points out, "When taking a set back and reviewing his work in a new way, you can see him thinking through it all and in a way relate to it as well which opens our eyes to what we are doing. Like Rodriguez, we did the same kind of work in our first essay… . During this essay, I felt I found a new way of freedom that I had never felt before in my past writing experiences." Students thus learn lessons about writing not by focusing exclusively on mechanics, but by taking the natural path of a reader followed by a more analytical approach that focuses on the author's rhetorical choices and their impact on meaning.

Regardless of the form the discussion takes, a class that embraces a restorative approach does its best to recognize and question the role of the professor as authority over them and their writing. The goal is not to eliminate structure or class policies, but to give students a sense of agency within the constraints of the class. This includes involving students in decision-making processes, which can mean soliciting their feedback, adopting their recommendations, and being transparent about the reasons why a decision has to be made one way versus another.

Transparency is a particularly important part of restorative pedagogy, although it is never explicitly mentioned as such. I have been relying heavily on the TILT (transparency in learning and teaching) framework for encouraging buy-in to my courses. According to Winkelmes et al. (2016), this approach has been

shown to improve student retention, levels of engagement, and levels of completion in courses. The goal is to ensure that students understand the purpose of what they're doing, what they are being asked to do, why they are being asked to do it, and how they will be evaluated. The reasons don't have to be entirely noble either. I play the game Password, which involves pairs of students trying to guess a word or phrase using a one word clue, with students when we're going over key terms in order to vary the way we approach discussion, keep them busy and off their phones, and have some fun while talking about things that may be difficult to comprehend or that might be vital to their writing assignments. They play for meaningless points to keep things competitive but with very low stakes. Nothing about the activity is a mystery, nor should it be unless the mystery is a part of the lesson, in which case, that would be explained to students.

Another critical aspect of restorative teaching practice is making a conscious effort to avoid value judgments about writing practices and mistakes the students would typically have been penalized for in the past. For example, students have learned to judge themselves harshly for procrastination. As a procrastinator myself, I know that shame, tips, and tricks have never worked to change my behavior. I will procrastinate. Instead, we talk about why we procrastinate—I have a hard time getting started because I assume any writing task will take longer than I want to spend on it—and I suggest that they build time for procrastination into the process since we know it will happen no matter how much we try to resist it. I also ask them what other strategies work for them to get them started. I encourage them to view writing as an idiosyncratic process, one that must be tailored to each writer's working style and needs, and there is no approach that is better or worse if it works for them. The only thing that seems to work for most writers is drafts and revising based on feedback, which is why the course is built around it. The goal here is to subvert the one-size-fits-all approach to writing they've been taught and encourage them to think instead of what might work best for them to accomplish their tasks, thereby encouraging agency. This approach encourages action instead of reaction, re-framing instead of shaming. As Jill Spiller, a student in the class, writes,

> Recently I was reminded by Dr. Gonzales that I could embrace being a procrastinator and instead incorporate it into my plan for writing. Which has actually worked throughout the semester. While I do not think this is the healthiest long-term solution for doing assignments, it's interesting to hear that procrastination can be incorporated into a plan rather than being told it should never happen.

While there is still a judgment about procrastination in the quote, it is clear that Jill no longer blames herself for not being the perfect (and, I might add, imaginary) student who never procrastinates.

To build trust and to position myself as a human reader rather than a robot-teacher-grader, I routinely share my own experiences as a writer and a student with them. I tell them about a terrible case of writer's block I had when I was working on my dissertation—I worked on one paragraph for a month because I thought if I could get it right, the rest of the dissertation would follow. Turns out I would need to abandon it for two years instead. I share with them the things I did as an undergraduate to meet the length requirement for assignments. Before electronic submissions, one could simply adjust the font from 12 point to 12.1 point without any notice. It might buy you a line or two. I also ask them what they think I would find interesting, appropriate, and funny in an essay based on what they know about me

so far. It seems like a simple question, yet it is not one they have considered in a classroom context.

In a further attempt to humanize myself, I don't fuss about my own grammatical mistakes and typos in the feedback I give them; in fact, I don't bother to hide errors by spending way more time than I have proofreading. My goal is to normalize the behavior of actual writers who live in the real world and are busy people. By outing myself as a person who has made a career out of writing but still struggles and makes mistakes, I bridge the gap between them and me, a necessary step in repairing the relationship between student-as-writer and teacher-as-audience. We can then move away from the "authoritarian, coverage-focused, teacher-centric pedagogy" toward "a fertile space for healing and transformation" (Fine 2018, 115) that values them as authors and is a more open space for learning and development.

ASSIGNMENTS, PROCESSES, AND FEEDBACK

By the time I meet students in my Advanced Composition class, they have had many years of prescriptive writing assignments that place more value on form, structure, and correctness than on the content or their ideas. They learn, very quickly, that any attempt to deviate from the requirements or to put more emphasis on their thinking is the best way to get a bad grade. According to Ogilivie and Fuller (2016), "in contemporary education where accountability measures, performance on standardized tests, and preparation for competitive global economy have been emphasized, the needs of learners are often portrayed in instrumental terms" (90). Joel Zuckerman , a student in the class, confirms this as he writes, Often, I felt my essays were more focused on fitting the model expected of me and less on the content I was asked to write about. I wrote not with the intention of thinking deeply about a question and finding new ways to understand a subject, but to write an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The level of thought that went into writing the essay mattered less than following the formula.

With an emphasis on instrumental writing, students learn a lesson that is hard to forget: writing is boring, formulaic, and neither the reader nor the writer seem to matter as long as the assignment has five paragraphs, a thesis statement at the end of the introduction, the required number of sentences and quotes, and a conclusion that restates the thesis. There is almost no writing in the world that is written in this style and enjoyed by audiences, yet it seems to have become the dominant form for teaching writing in high school because the emphasis is "on compliance over engagement" in classrooms and in writing (Fine 2018, 114). This causes a harm that is not only about "the brokenness of the relationships between teachers and students but also about the brokenness between learners and what they are supposed to be learning" (Fine 2018, 115).

As part of the effort to repair the harm caused by the broken relationship between the teacher-reader and the student-author, l design assignments and provide feedback that values the writer's voice and ideas while still leaving a space for the reader to be engaged. When the reader gives feedback, it is a teacher-reader, rather than a teacher-grader. The difference here is that the teacher-reader engages the content of the essay, seeing only possibilities and offering suggestions and recommendations based on expertise. The teacher-grader tends to focus on the problems, leaving students with a sense that they've done it all wrong.

Before we get into the reading, we generate a list of what they've been told constitutes good writing. The list usually contains the following: don't begin sentences with and, but, or because; don't use "to be" verbs; don't use "you" or "I"; don't use slang or jargon; don't use contractions; don't have run-ons or fragments; always put your thesis at the end of your introduction, etc. More varied advice is given about how long a paragraph should be: three to five sentences or five to seven. In addition, there should be either one or two quotes per paragraph depending on the teacher. The list is comprised mostly of don'ts and quantifiable objects makes and is restrictive and reductive, turning writing into something that is easy to grade but not particularly worth reading. Once the list is as complete as we're going to get it, we go through the items and we talk about why the rule exists. Mostly, they don't know and it was never explained by the teacher other than to say that this is just how it's done. For the students, every rule is about checking a box, not about successful communication or learning. We talk about why rules are merely conventions and point out the obvious: that most writers break these rules consciously and to great effect. The students' favorite thing is learning that they can begin a sentence with "and," "but," or "because." This is where they begin to turn away from what not to do toward what they can do.

For class that day, we discuss a chapter called "The Basics of Good Writing in Any Form" from the book *Tell It Slant*, which is intended for nonfiction, non-academic works, but I take "any form" to be an opportunity to broaden our understanding of what is possible in an academic essay (Miller and Paola 2012). The basics include scene, character development, metaphor, details, and specificity. We talk about how these concepts might apply to the academic essay, which is what they will be working on all semester. Because we are trying to undo the harm caused by tightly prescribed assignments and rubrics that boil writing down to its countable features, I assign the genre that students have learned to hate the most: the academic essay.

Their first writing assignment is their own academic literacy narrative. They are asked to write about how they developed their academic writing skills and to compare that purpose of what they learned to the purpose of student academic writing that Scott Crider argues for in his book *The Office of Assertion: The Art of the Academic Essay* (2005). According to Crider, who talks about the academic essay in terms of rhetoric, the purpose of writing is to lead souls. "Such soul-leading," Crider argues, "is a liberal power, one which in its finest and fullest manifestation is a form of love: the finest rhetorician not only loves wisdom, but also loves others who do so" (2005, 12). I assign this reading primarily because it offers a shocking contrast to the utilitarian view that students have been presented with when it comes to writing; they have certainly never associated essays with love. Throughout his book, Crider explains the rhetorical purpose of different parts of the essay, not to give students another formula, but to show them how and why certain choices are made by the author. He encourages readers to find the organization that works for them and what they are trying to communicate rather than follow any pattern of organization dogmatically. His book is not perfect—Crider's views on language usage are not exactly consistent with the trends in composition studies that promote students' right to their own language—he does offer a new way for students to view writing beyond just following requirements and getting a good grade. He ends his book with a powerful quote that resonates with students when they read it near the end of the semester: "An education for economic productivity and political utility alone is an education for slaves, but an education for finding, collecting, and communicating reality is an education for free people, people free to know what is so" (2005, 123).

The first few chapters of Crider's text offers them an alternative view of the academic essay that they consider in their academic literacy narratives. The assignment asks students to move beyond blame or praise toward understanding why the system works the way it does, what it values, and why that may be beneficial, harmful, or something in between. The goal of this assignment is not to condemn high school teachers and college professors. I want to prevent, as much as possible, "further polarization" by opening up the complexity of the situation rather than blaming any one person (Winn 2013, 127). Since many of my students are going to be high school teachers, I encourage them to think about the position teachers find themselves in as they are increasingly pressured to teach to the test and are overburdened by bureaucratic processes. This aligns with the goals of the restorative classroom where students learn "empathy as well as how to build healthy relationships through learning about themselves and each other" and to "engage in a process that promotes literocracy" (Fisher as quoted in Winn 2013 133). In my feedback on their drafts, I ask them to consider, broadly, what the long-term implications their academic literacy narrative might have for teaching writing specifically and teaching in general. Through this assignment and others, they learn that the goal of restorative, critical pedagogy is to "help learners identify, critique, and transform oppressive power structures" (Fine 2018, 107). The other assignments contribute to their more nuanced and complex understanding of the purpose of college and their place in it. They are asked to consider the role that non-discipline specific classes play in their literacy development and to consider how one achieves the highest stage of literacy development, critical literacy, in which an individual

> needs to learn not only how to understand and produce meanings in a particular semiotic domain that [is] recognizable to those affiliated with the domain, but, in addition, how to think about the domain at a "meta" level as a complex system of interrelated parts. The learner also needs to learn how to innovate in the domain—how to produce meanings that, while recognizable, are seen as somehow novel or unpredictable. (Gee 2003, 23)

They finish the semester with a reflection essay in which they consider what they have learned, how they have changed (and/or haven't changed), and why it matters. All of these assignments are designed to "draw students' experiences and emotions into conversation with theory, position them as agents of structural change, and engage them in complex thinking" (Fine 2018, 113), one of the key features of restorative pedagogy. The result can be transformative.

Each assignment requires a minimum of three drafts and evidence of substantive change between each draft. Instead of a numerical or letter grade, students receive a completion score (1 = complete, 0 = incomplete, unrevised, or not submitted) and extensive, individualized narrative feedback. I recognize that this is labor-intensive and not sustainable for high school or community college teachers who often have 100–150 student writers to respond to. I will address that issue later in the chapter. For now, I will focus on the nature of the feedback. First and foremost, I make very few comments in text. This is a deliberate choice because students are all too accustomed to receiving this kind of feedback, which makes them focus on sentence-level concerns

rather than looking at the essay holistically. Instead, I focus on the arguments, evidence, and ideas from the text, offering students suggestions and recommendations for how they might address questions that I, the reader, have about their arguments or ideas. My goal is to get them to think deeply and critically and to make conscious choices as writers. They can reject my feedback and recommendations as long as they are able to say why. After they receive the feedback, I talk with them individually to determine if it worked for them, to offer clarification if requested, or to respond to whether I think a different approach might work. The purpose of this approach to feedback is to illustrate that "the process of knowledge creation is dynamic and social in nature and [should] underscore notions of agency, contribution, and connectedness; learning is a collaborative endeavor undertaken with students" (Fine 2018, 120).

Agency does not mean, in this case, that they are allowed to completely ignore the concerns or responses of the reader, whether it is me or their peers. After all, "restorative practices do not negate the formal power of authority figures, leadership, or hierarchy" or, I might add, expertise. "Rather, restorative practices seek to limit authoritarianism through highly participatory processes…that encourage power sharing and collaboration in learning between educators and students" (Bailie and Adamson 2016, 79). This involves a "co-construction of new agreements based in a framework of reciprocal obligations" (Fine 2018, 116). Students are asked to consider: What does my reader need from me and what do I need from my reader? In order for this to work, I must be a reader that they trust and respect enough to consider.

LABOR-BASED GRADING CONTRACTS

For years, labor-based grading contracts were often found only in first-year writing classes at colleges and universities and were only used by the most radical of writing teachers. When I first began using contracts in my classes as a professor at a community college, I was routinely criticized and/or met with skepticism. When I moved to a small liberal arts college, this criticism and skepticism remained and was even mentioned in my third-year tenure review because a couple of students expressed their frustration with non-traditional grading in my teaching evaluations. The main critique that students and others had was that students could not cope if they did not receive grades immediately and regularly. There was little acknowledgment of the copious amounts of feedback students received on their drafts or in progress reports. When students have never encountered a grading contract before, especially as first-year students, it can feel frustrating, a point I acknowledge with my students while also encouraging them to seek me out if they are afraid that they are not doing as well as they would like.

At the beginning of my grading contract, I explain the purpose to students:

> This document is going to tell you exactly what you need to do to earn an A in this class.
>
> This is probably the most important thing you need to know about how this works: during the semester, you will not receive a letter or number grade on your drafts.

> The reason for this is simple: I want you to focus on becoming a better writer, not on just doing what you need to do to earn a specific grade. The advantage is that you will be able to take risks, make mistakes, and practice writing without having to worry about an early grade bringing down your final grade. In other words, if you are producing C quality work at the beginning of the semester and A quality work by the end of the semester, you will earn an A as long as you have fulfilled the requirements for an A.
>
> You may be worried about knowing where you stand in this class, but you don't have to be. You will get feedback—lots of it. You are expected to use feedback to help you improve as a student and writer. If you are reading the feedback, consulting the contract, asking good questions, keeping track of your work, and putting the right amount of effort into your work, you should be able to earn an A in this class.

One of the main goals of the labor-based grading contract is to shift students' focus away from checking off items on an assignment sheet and toward thinking about writing as a means of communication and learning. While it seems that there should be a focus on both, ultimately students feel that their ideas don't matter when they lose points for grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Grading contracts like this help to dismantle the harm done by punitive grading approaches. While I am unable to eliminate grades entirely, I can shift the way students think about grades and the purpose they serve in education. In the writing classroom, grades most often serve as a form of punishment that runs counter to the restorative pedagogy approach to education and, one could argue, to the purpose of learning in general. Writing under the threat of a bad grade discourages students from taking risks and making mistakes. Students are expected to turn in a perfectly polished piece of prose that fits the requirements of the assignment with little understanding of the process of revision. As Myla Mitchell writes,

> the idea of a "shitty first draft" [a phrase coined by the writer Anne Lamott] seemed downright unattainable, humiliating even, to me. I could not afford to not get it right the first time. I wanted those around me to not know of anything but my success and to now know I was capable of anything other than perfection.

For students like Myla, at best revision means proofreading, cleaning things up so that the teacher will not mark them down for minor errors.

The fundamental difference between labor-based grading and traditional grading is that students can also be evaluated individually on their individual work and progress rather than on whether they have achieved an arbitrary set of standards for what constitutes "good writing." This does not mean that they are not responsible for drafting, revising, and ultimately creating texts that meet the expectations of the assignment. It does mean that what that looks like will be different for every student.

The grading contract also does not lead to a free-for-all in terms of the writing students submit. It does, however, make the expectations clear and, if designed well, flexible. The contract for Advanced Composition students specifically asks them to meet the following goals by the end of the semester:

- Appropriately respond to the assignment with original work that you produced specifically for this class.

- Productively address feedback you received from your instructor and peers.
- Improve the overall quality of your writing by making obvious and substantial changes and improvements.
- Have a complex controlling idea or thesis statement.
- Have organized, coherent sentences and paragraphs.
- Show obvious awareness of your audience.
- Consciously attend to language choices, grammar, syntax, and punctuation.
- Go above and beyond in your use of source material, including the texts from the class as well as outside research if required.
- Engage in a meaningful and complex conversation with your sources.
- Cite sources correctly and as needed. See syllabus for academic dishonesty and plagiarism policy. Provide necessary polish for final drafts.

Notably, these are all things that teachers desire in academic writing, but the way they are described represents a shift in how we ask students to think about writing. Rather than saying I want "five to seven sources," I ask for students to focus on what they do with their sources. Otherwise, they might have the correct number of sources, but none are used in a way that actually contributes to the overall purpose and quality of the essay. Quantity, after all, does not equal quality. They still have to cite sources "correctly," although what that means is less about formatting and more about giving credit where credit is due. We have a long conversation about the ethical treatment of the work of others and why citation matters in terms of their own ethos. "Coherent" sentences means that I can understand what they're trying to say, not that they are writing in perfectly correct standard academic

English. This encourages them to think about how they will get their point across to the reader. The goal is for them to think about their writing in conscious ways, to demonstrate agency and deliberate choice, to understand and utilize or reject conventions in an effort to communicate with their audience. They are discouraged from reverting back to the formulaic writing of the past and instead invited to consider what works for what they are trying to communicate. What this looks like for every writer will depend on where they began, where they want to go, and what they can accomplish given the constraints of the semester and their busy schedules.

Throughout the class, these expectations are clarified in both the feedback and in conversation. When students inevitably ask me how many sources they should have, I say "As many as will do the job you need to do." This is frustrating for them because they are used to being given a number, but I explain that the number doesn't matter. They can use two sources well or five sources badly. I am also encouraging a kind of maximalist approach to writing because they have, for the most part, engaged in a minimalist approach, meaning they will do as much as they need to meet the requirements of the assignment and nothing more. In another text we discuss in class, "Learning to Read Biology," Christina Haas (1994) describes the rhetorical development of a biology student who, as a freshman, takes the "low investment strategy" to writing, which means "waiting until the last minute and then [relying] on a minimum number of sources, sources selected mainly because they were easy to locate and convenient" (365). This was driven by the student's lack of awareness of how writing a research paper for a freshmen class would be useful to her in her pursuit of a biology degree, but also by a very human

approach to juggling a busy life and is something we all do if we think that the task at hand is not that important.

Critics of grading contracts are concerned that students will take advantage of the lack of grades and try to turn the work in toward the end of the semester, or that they will turn in work that is slapdash and incoherent. The one thing that is made very clear to students is that their grade depends on their engagement, which includes submitting work on time, meeting minimum requirements for each draft, and making progress between drafts. I have two minimum requirements for the first draft: they must meet the minimum word count and appear to be addressing the assignment they were given. In other words, they cannot submit an essay on elevators if the assignment asks them to write about literacy. If their readers (myself or their peers) cannot understand what they're trying to say, this too is something that must be addressed in the next draft. So yes, a student could submit a draft that is "slapdash" and "incoherent," and sometimes they do so because they are busy (students often have jobs and the only time they have to work on their drafts is in the car during breaks), they forgot that a draft was due, or they procrastinated. They are not penalized for it because that would be the least helpful thing for addressing the circumstances under which the draft was produced. Instead, they are given feedback and encouragement for producing the next version. We might also have an honest conversation about what happened and how to avoid it next time if circumstances aren't beyond their control.

Some students will miss assignments, and while I have a late work policy, I tell them that as long as it does not become a habit, the occasional late assignment is not an issue. In fact, I encourage them to talk to me if they think their assignment will be late in order to figure out the best time to submit it so they can do peer review or receive feedback. When lateness or lack of completion does become a habit for a student, I meet with them individually to try to determine the root cause and to see if there is support that can be offered. If none of the interventions work, I may drop the student from the course knowing that they will not be able to recover sufficiently to earn a passing grade in the class. This is a compassionate move and prevents the student from bombing at the end of the semester. Some may think it would be fine to let them turn everything in at the end, but this only sets students up for failure in multiple courses as they struggle to do the work for mine while ignoring the others. When I make the decision to drop a student from the course, I explain the rationale in detail. Almost no one has argued the point. They know when it is sensible to throw in the towel, but they need someone to help them make the most appropriate decision. It is important for them to learn that quitting is not a sign of failure, but rather the appropriate choice to make if and when their obligations become unmanageable and unsustainable. The point is to work with the students, not against them, to model flexibility and responsibility, and also to know when it is time to call it a day.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

It would be very easy to throw high school teachers under the bus either in the classroom or this chapter, but what happens in high school is not the fault of any individual teacher nor any group. High school English teachers often have too many students and too many mandated requirements from school districts and Boards of Education that are obsessed with standardized testing. Most high school teachers have good intentions, but neither the time nor the power to do other than what they have been doing, which

is often the best they can do with limited resources. It would be next to impossible, given the number of students, for them to give individualized, substantive feedback on 100–150 essays. We should not take issue with teachers but rather with the systemic problems they face in secondary schools that are governed by state legislatures and Boards of Education that continuously attempt to restrict their ability to teach their students and don't provide enough funding to reduce class sizes. The problem is bigger than any one teacher or any one school.

College and university faculty do, however, have more control over what we do in the college classroom. The first thing that ought to be carefully examined is notions of professionalism that we insist on for ourselves and our students. Often faculty members are afraid to share personal experiences that students would connect with because they don't want to appear vulnerable or fallible; we have decided that these are somehow the antithesis of professional behavior. Sharing personal experiences does not mean having no boundaries; there is a level of sharing that is inappropriate for most classes. Nevertheless, if we want our students to see us as people they are writing for, not just writing at, then humanizing ourselves is an essential feature and we need to share something about ourselves in order to do that.

It is critical to acknowledge that what sharing means for faculty members will also depend on institutional culture, the instructor's position within the faculty (pre-tenure and adjunct faculty may feel their positions are more precarious), as well as the instructor's age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and other variables that may make it more challenging to have a more personal relationship with their students. In short, a restorative approach, which relies heavily on changing the power dynamic between teachers and students, may not be easy or possible in certain institutions and classrooms where faculty members do not feel safe because they are not supported by administrators. Institutions should work harder to ensure that adjuncts, pre-tenure faculty, non-tenured faculty, faculty of color, women, LGBTQIA+ faculty, and younger faculty are appropriately protected from harassment or censure.

We should also reconsider our efforts to try to prepare students for the workplace by insisting that they get everything in on time and that it be done perfectly. Classrooms are not workplaces and teachers are not bosses. If we want students to get things in on time and to submit polished work, then we need to have a better reason why than "this is what you will be required to do in the workplace," because honestly, it may not be. In my professional life, I almost always either give myself an extension or get an extension if I need one. The reality of most workplaces is that some things can be postponed if they're not ready. Just ask anyone who has been on a flight that's been delayed because of mechanical problems. A delayed flight, however, causes all kinds of other issues, which is how I present late work to my students. We need to keep things moving along, but realistically, some deadlines are looser than others, and I prefer to give them extra time if they need it rather than to have them turn in something that is not ready or has to be written under extreme duress. We should be flexible where and when we can be given the realities of students' lives. Chapter 2 of this book includes additional discussion of flexible deadlines.

Faculty members may also struggle with the restorative approach because they will need to reconsider what they value most in students' writing. This begins with questions that may require intense reflection about their own experiences. They may have had teachers who were sticklers for grammar and they have

come to believe that it was for their benefit, all the while perhaps feeling alienated from their primary discourse. Nevertheless, they must ask themselves: why does form, grammar, and syntax seem to take such precedence? Are we actually frustrated by these things or frustrated by the apparent lack of care that students put into their writing? Instead of creating increasingly specific requirements for student writing and inflicting even harsher grade penalties for what we perceive to be a lack of care, it might behoove us to take a step back and ask ourselves why students don't seem to care about the writing itself. In what ways are we contributing to the problem? What are the conditions under which they are producing writing and how are we contributing to those conditions? What can we do to encourage students to see that their writing assignments are not about the grades, but about learning, creating, and sharing their understanding of the world?

Finally, there are elements of this approach that may be difficult to pursue for teachers at the college level who may have 150 or more students across five or six sections of first-year writing. I do believe, however, that this approach can be modified in a way that retains the spirit of restorative pedagogy without creating more work than any one instructor can handle. Rubrics can be a useful way to manage feedback on drafts for large numbers of students, and those rubrics can be based on the goals stated in the grading contract. Transparency can and should be the norm: if you're asking students to fulfill a certain requirement, the answer ought to be better than "because this will be expected of you in your other classes/workplace." We can and should do better than that when discussing the purpose of what we are teaching and assigning.

CONCLUSION

In Fine's (2018) study, the teacher invited students to:

> participate in constructing their own meanings and in shaping the "what" and "how" of the work. The implicit messages that students received in this process resonate with the RJ [restorative justice] framework: their experiences matter, theory and critical analysis can help them understand these experiences, those in positions of power can be authoritative without being authoritarian, and those in disempowered positions…have a real and important role to play in helping dismantle oppression…[which helped] to establish a positive relational culture—one that supported many students in experiencing transformation in their relationship to the curriculum, as well as to themselves [and to their teacher]. (121)

Every semester, this is the goal I have for my students, particularly those who are headed to classrooms themselves. Israel captures what I am hoping for in their final essay:

> Now that I am self-aware of my rhetorical decisions, I will be particularly careful about placing my sentences in the way that best connects the audience to my argument. This is true art—and the artist is me. I now look at writing as an art, which will help me calm my worries about getting the perfect grade, and now I will be able to inspire others.

They are thinking about their sentences not as the things that have been critiqued and red-inked, but as tools to build connection with their audience.

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CHAPTER 5

Facing Life's Crises as an Educator

The Blind Leading the Sighted

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Think of what you know about blindness. Is your knowledge from media depictions or personal acquaintances who are blind? Who is the most famous blind person that comes to mind? If it is Helen Keller, what do you know about her adult activism career? How many books did she write? What political party did she belong to? Which causes did she advocate for: disability rights, women's suffrage, animal rights, or world peace? Were you aware she was a founding member of the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union)? All of this information is easily available but is usually overshadowed by the magical breakthough in communication between Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan when Helen was age seven. Google Helen Keller and some of her quotes—they

may surprise you. This is just an example of how easy it is for a disability to *erase* a person's accomplishments in the public eye. For a brief overview of Helen Keller, see *Hellen Keller: A Life* (Herman 1999). I use this Expanding on an Exemplar technique to help students pause and reconsider their assumptions (Sia et al. 1997; Sia et al. 1999; Lord et al. 2004). This technique can be used with any disability, but you must pick an exemplar for students where there is enough public information beyond their disability. I can attest to the utility of figures like Helen Keller, Louis Braille, and Stephen Hawking.

Accurate representations of the blind are limited in our culture. My main experience with a blind person was my grandmother. She went blind after a car wreck in her 70s, but it almost seemed like part of aging. She was also reticent about sharing what the experience was like. She just kept doing what she did (not surprising, since she lived through World War 1, World War 2, and the Great Depression). Although personal experience with a blind person I loved made me compassionate towards the blind, it did not break through the culturally promoted belief that blindness precludes meaningful accomplishments for most.

Now picture you are going blind permanently. How do you feel? How does your life change? How do you react? It may be painful to picture such a thing, but try. Jot down the ways your life changes. These ideas will help you start to understand the misconceptions and stereotypes that get in the way of understanding blindness and being an advocate for the blind. Once you have made your list, read a trustworthy article like Vision Center's "Blindness Statistics, Facts, and Myths" (Hill 2024). Cross off the misconceptions and update the assumptions. This technique ("Imagine & Correct") can be used with any disability if you look up actual information. People tend to remember things they got wrong better than what came easily, so jotting down a list first is important. Otherwise, it is extremely easy to look at misconceptions and falsely believe that you already knew them (Ross, McFarland, and Fletcher 2012). I can tell you from experience that going blind is more of a *hassle* than a tragedy. However, being surrounded by people who assume a blind person is helpless (and if they are not helpless, are conning you) is exhausting.

I was a first-year student when doctors at the University of Washington nailed down what was wrong with my eyes: Stargardt's macular degeneration (for more information, visit the National Eye Institute's page on Stargardt disease). It had seemed minor. My glasses never quite corrected my vision to 20/20 (close to 20/50, but not quite). I was no more prepared than you are right now to hear from a university research team, "You will go blind; we just don't know exactly when." The timeline seemed particularly important to me. Would I have five years left of vision or thirty years? And truthfully, my initial reaction was thinking of what I had to fit in before "my life was over." I was naïve and going blind sounded like "The End." I would not be able to drive. I would not be able to read. I would not be able to go to movies or recognize people.

Most, if not all, of my catastrophic thinking was entirely *wrong*. When it comes to disability, picturing yourself in their shoes may not lead to clarity or an ability to encourage or mentor (Goleman 2006). It may lead to a type of oppressive sympathy or pity that encourages passivity (Seligman 2006).

I want to share how I went from a sighted first-year student to a blind professor. I believe it is critical that people understand more about blindness (and disabilities). Knowledge can help us feel empowered to approach the challenges that each of us may face. I do not expect you to go blind. I do, however, know

that each of us will encounter challenges in our life that we do not want, are unprepared to cope with, and do not understand. Learning how to face these crises can be the difference between stagnation and growth for both your students and yourself as a professional (Seligman 2006). This is my story of facing my crises.

The first time I remember worrying about my vision was in fourth grade, when my 20/20 vision suddenly plummeted. I knew having glasses would make me a social pariah, so I spent most of fourth grade walking to the front of the classroom to sharpen my pencil and memorizing the board. The first gift of vision loss was improving my memory. However, fifth grade hit, and the pencil sharpener was in the back of the room. All the reasons to go to the front were seen as disruptive, and I got caught. It was just as I feared; I needed glasses. The only weird thing about this was that the eye doctor could not correct my vision to 20/20. He thought it was due to my being unable to sit still or focus (which my teachers would also attest to). At that point, most thought I was "hyper," and the focus was on helping me pay attention (for more information on misdiagnosis of ADHD, see Graham 2020). Not surprisingly, these interventions did nothing to improve my vision. I have great focus now, though. Our brains really want to protect us from knowing about vision loss (and some other disabilities). I have met both visually impaired and deaf students who had no idea about their condition because of gradual onset. A technique I use to illustrate this is to ask students to share what it is like when they get a new eyeglasses prescription. Many share how crystal clear their vision is, and how they did not realize it had gotten as bad as it did. That sharp contrast between what was impaired and 20/20 illustrates how vigilant our brain is at protecting us from knowing our vision is deteriorating.

Somewhere in junior high (amidst my goth phase that never quite ended), the professional consensus gradually shifted from "hyper" to "doing it for attention." My vision still wasn't correctable. Physical education class was a nightmare. I was continually being hit by baseballs, tetherballs, basketballs, soccer balls, volleyballs, etc. Most teachers/coaches genuinely believed I was doing it on purpose for attention, and so ignored the frequent collisions (and black eyes, bloody noses, and other injuries). This is not surprising, since they were told by trained professionals that this was the case. I have been told as an adult that this could never happen today, but I have met college students who were not diagnosed correctly with visual impairments until college (so I doubt this assertion). Misdiagnosis can lead well-meaning professionals down entirely incorrect rabbit holes. In seventh grade, I tried wearing sunglasses all the time, but it was perceived as "bad attitude." Light causes low level pain in my eyes, even indoors. The sunglasses helped, but I didn't understand or articulate the situation or my rationale for wearing the sunglasses well. I also stopped being able to interpret social cues like facial expressions with the same facility as fully sighted people (Stargardt 2021). I was often misperceived as stuck up or hostile, much the way a dog without a tail can get in fights when the opposing dogs cannot see a tail wagging. Since people often reacted poorly to me, I reflected their poor reactions back to them. Picture (or google) adult Wednesday Addams, and you won't be far off.

However, I also became obsessed with reading "all the books." I read through most of the five libraries I had access to. When I ran out of books, I started in on encyclopedias and dictionaries, as well. I would get sent out to play and sneak up a tree or roof to read. I would get sent horseback riding and let the horse wander while lying on his back reading. If I had more than sixty

seconds to spare, I was reading. I may have been worried about not being able to read in the future, so I was fitting it all in. Gift two of developing blindness was the my focus on reading, plus gift one that gave me the practice of using my memory to retain and access much of the information. Most disabilities come with unexpected gifts (although it took me half a lifetime to see this).

College was wonderful. No P.E.. Social interactions were odd and stilted for most of the more intellectual students. No one expected anything different, since now I was perceived as a nerd. Professors and students alike seemed unfazed by the morbid persona I had adopted. Once others were reacting neutrally, I found myself abandoning the attitude (not skulls, I still love skulls, and my favorite color is still black). The obsessive reading also came in handy.

If you are picturing me as a wonderful student, guess again. I was in the front row face down, apparently sleeping. I pulled all-nighters at the beginning of the semester so I could have everything read before class started. Then I only had to memorize anything the professor said that wasn't in the textbook. I still couldn't see the board clearly, but I sat in the front row to catch glimpses. Light still bothered my eyes, so I usually was face down unless the professor said something novel. I had not been diagnosed yet, and did not have the language or understanding to advocate for sunglasses indoors. I remember one class, when a student asked why I got to sleep in class. The professor started asking me questions from the next chapter, which I answered without lifting my head or opening my eyes. He then started talking about a study on paranormal activity and I popped up and started frantically writing notes (it wasn't in the book). Then he said, "When you can do that you can sleep in class, too." Dr. Gilden was a social psychologist (what I would eventually become). He was talented at seeing what was going on, even if he did not know why. He also pointed out to the class what I had not even recognized. I could be used as a human barometer of what was and wasn't in the book. I expect we all see students in class who appear to be doing things that are problematic. It is a sad truth that the students who have a reason/need for their behavior will look exactly like the students who are being disruptive with ill will. The obvious ploy of talking with the students individually will only help if the student understands and has the language to advocate for their behaviors. I at the time (and many of our students) have no way to articulate or even understand their own behaviors.

At this point, you may be wondering what and how I see. Everything looks like a Claude Monet painting. However, 80 percent of what is in the painting has no relationship to reality (my brain just makes it up). Your brain does this too, on a smaller scale. Try the following exercise with figure 5.1. Close your right eye and look at the X while slowly moving the page closer or farther from you. At a certain point, the circle will disappear. Or close your left eye and look at the circle, and the X will disappear.

Figure 5.1. Blind Spot Test

The part of my vision that my brain fills in from sound, smells, memory, and opinion is my central vision. Put your hand with fingers closed in front of your eyes with your palm touching your nose. Keep your eyes focused on the hand and fingers. Then look around. Try to walk somewhere. Try to recognize people's facial expressions. Or try to recognize your facial expression in the mirror. Or try to read, without shifting your gaze out of the corner of your eyes. It will be tempting to picture this instead of doing it. Your imagination is not that good; try it. Understanding, rather than picturing, will allow you to be able to use this information. A third gift of blindness is that imagining is never the same as experiencing. Hands-on experience not only is more accurate, but it also changes us more quickly.

I use the above "blind spot" demonstration to help my students understand that they do not know what their *own* brain is doing. I want to be clear that I am not advocating for just trusting that a student will know the best way to learn in your classes. I am asking for the grace to assume there may be an underlying reason for their behavior beyond the obvious, and a willingness to jointly explore what is happening. I occasionally run into students who suffer from migraines, and I usually share that wearing sunglasses under fluorescent lights helps me. A surprising number of sighted students found limiting light exposure helped, as well as having the language to explain so they did not run into the same stigma of "attitude" that I encountered.

Another moment that might help others relate to what it is like losing your vision was when I attended a drunk driving prevention program at Linfield College. I was active in promoting this basic responsibility. On one weekend retreat, I realized that I was worse than the average drunk driver. I had memorized the eye chart years ago and was using that knowledge to pass the vision test that kept my driver's license. If you have ever gotten new glasses, you know how easy it is to think your vision is fine until it is corrected. My vision didn't correct, but it still felt useable. I felt *safe* to drive. We had gone over common excuses that drunk drivers give:

"I feel fine to drive."

"I am only driving a short way."

"I drive better than most people drive anyway."

"There is no other way to get home."

I realized I used versions of these excuses to justify my continued visually impaired driving. I stopped driving. I have also seen a lot of older adults with vision problems who are a danger on the road. I did not want to be them. I did not get tickets or in a lot of wrecks, and no one made me stop. I just *knew* if I kept driving, I accidentally would kill someone eventually. It may have been the most mature decision of my life. It was also, however, a hassle. I could walk to most places in if I allotted enough time. I got used to walking several miles a day, and still do. I also realized our feeling that we "have" to drive is based on not knowing how to do things differently. I spent a semester in Vienna, Austria and never missed driving, because it was so easy to get around using public transportation. The reason I remember this is that one of my only meltdowns about blindness happened while waiting outside the Linfield campus cafeteria. A student said, "I would die if I couldn't drive." I eviscerated him verbally, right there. We were never close again. It was not the insensitivity or the hyperbole that struck me, it was the "giving up." I was furious that merely picturing a mild inconvenience had someone ready to die. The fourth gift of blindness was persistence. It is not that hard to just keep trying, especially when you do not compare every moment to the "if only…" In my teaching, I hear a lot of

students tell me versions of why they cannot do something well as a reason to not do that something at all (Seligman 2006). I hate seeing that level of passivity or learned helplessness.

I try to get students to see that doing something badly is a mark of persistence, and much braver than not doing something at all (Duckworth and Gross 2014). I have four speaking rules in my classes. Rule 1: *Do not say "I don't know" (even if you don't know)*. Rule 2: *Do not repeat what another student just said*. Rule 3: *Answer in ten seconds*. Rule 4: *Multiple voices should be heard*. If everyone follows the rules, everyone gets a point for that day of class (5 percent of the course grade). When a rule is broken, no one in class gets the point for that day. Wrong answers or even nonsense answers are encouraged. One student would yell out "Bill Nye the science guy" when the class was about to lose a point. This technique may sound bizarre, so let me unpack it a bit. I do not usually call on invisible-to-me students. I cannot see facial expressions, confused looks, or raised hands. The regular non-verbal student communication is lost on me. I need to hear their voices, but even well-meaning students find it difficult to speak out loud when their mind goes blank. Being treated as a hero for saving the class's point with a wrong answer can break down the sometimes lifelong habit of not speaking (Allen, Hunter, and Donohue 1989). I let them come up with strategies on how to deal with the rules. Some classes tag team. Others all yell out answers at once to all questions. The wrong answers are also more useful in helping me guide my teaching than the right answers ever were. Even the incorrect "Bill Nye the science guy" response example previously provided was informative. It was so far afield from what I was asking them about, that it informed me they had no idea what I was asking about.

The individual rules built for the needs of a blind professor also have their pedagogical utility for my students, as is true for many Universal Design for Learning strategies (Edyburn 2021). Our brains will come up with answers based on little or no information (sort of like conspiracy theories). This is happening in every classroom. What we teach is not what students learn. What the professors say is interpreted through what the student understands. If there is no feedback loop, we as faculty can believe that our students are learning something quite different than they are. I gained this insight after asking a class what the word "truth" meant. A student said loudly that the truth was whatever was said the loudest. Another student disagreed saying it was whoever believed it the most. Of the several voices volunteering answers (to preserve the multiple voices rule), not a single student mentioned it having to do with reality, evidence, or facts. This made it clear that my previous approach to encouraging the use of peer-reviewed articles to find out the truth was laughable in light of their understanding of what truth is.

Now let's unpack the individual speaking rules, starting with Rule 1: *Do not say "I don't know" (even if you don't know)*. Many students have learned that "I don't know" is the magic answer that gets the focus off them. There is no need to think, just ward of the teacher with the magic words (like a cross at a vampire). For information on your cognitive miser, see Fiske and Taylor (1991) and Sia (2015). I try to convince them that any answer is better than "I don't know." Saying whatever comes to mind helps you learn about your snap judgements (or gut feeling). Some students will find out they knew something without knowing it. Others will find out not to trust their internal voices. One graduate (from my freshman experience class) who is now working as a physician's assistant texted me in graduate school to tell me how

grateful she was for "breaking her of the 'I don't know' habit" and that until then she had never "realized how lazy it was."

Rule 2: *No repeating what another student just said* is intended to break the "anchoring" effect of social cognition (Aronson 2012). When we hear someone else say something/anything, it becomes extremely easy to anchor on it and believe that is what we would have said, too. This can lead to the kind of groupthink that in part led to the space shuttle explosion (Teitel 2018). Since students do not have to be "right," they can share any other answer, or paraphrase. When talking with students about this rule, I often present it as a skill they are building. Even when you agree with someone, rephrasing or expanding on it makes more of an impression on an audience than simply saying "what they said."

Rule 3: *Answer in ten seconds* is intended to keep the class moving, and to get reactions, rather than carefully thought-out answers. Silence or masked expression allows confusion and frustration to be unrecognized even by sighted instructors. For me, verbal reactions are more useful and closer to facial expressions than well thought-out answers. I usually tell students that life and careers seldom give us enough time to always sound thoughtful (Aronson 2012). There will be moments when reaction is critical. Professors often complain that when they ask if there are any questions, the class goes silent. Students complain that they do not have time to formulate or explain the confusion they are experiencing. Getting students ready for the moment when they need to say something fast, rather than let a silence hurt them and their fellow classmates by leaving them confused, is critical. For guidance on developing these skills, see Chugh (2018), pages 129-142. Another extension is how we process silence. A hateful comment left unaddressed in a shocked silence by the class (and sometimes the professor), is too often understood as implied support. Again see Chugh (2018), pages 129–142 for tips on how we can use speech and silence strategically to allow for full consideration. Learning to say something, even "What?", can open the dialogue.

Rule 4: *Multiple voices should be heard* is meant to invite everyone to talk (sometimes all at once). It is easy for a professor to feel like a class is interactive if three or four students are talking regularly. Students usually have a higher bar for what an interactive class feels like. Unless almost everyone in the class is talking occasionally, it can place barriers on students feeling like they can, should, or would be welcome to speak. Many of the questions I ask can be answered in unison by the whole class. For example, in asking "Are duckbilled platypuses venomous?", students will yell out yes or no at whim, to soon find out that this is used as a transition into learning about the complexity of simple questions (male platypuses have venomous ankle spurs and females do not). Both yes and no are equally wrong or right, which is frequently the case with issues of nuance in social psychology. Do Irish people like green? To say yes, is a stereotype, but undoubtably true for some Irish people. To say no is unlikely to be true for all Irish people, since green is a lovable color from what I remember. Stereotypes are like that across the board: they are not true for the whole group, but may be true for an individual member (Banaji and Greenwald 2013).

My speaking role game does require comfort with ambiguity for both student and professor. I find the payoff of learning where student misconceptions are occurring to be worthwhile. The details of using this strategy are that attendance is worth three points per day (one for attending, and half points for each of the rules). Keep in mind, this amounts to not much grading or tracking since either everyone gets the points or no one does.

Once again, this allows a blind professor to try to replace what is lost without being able to see facial expression. Fair warning, I have been told by sighted faculty who have team taught with me that my students' facial expressions vary all over the emotional gamut, as they hear a bit more from their classmates than usual.

After that lengthy digression, let's head back to my autobiographical narrative. Heading off to graduate school was a challenge. At this point, I still had 20/70 vision (searching for a Snellen eye chart may help visualize what this means). Reading was fairly easy, and the main issues were driving and interpreting facial expressions. I got funded to get my PhD at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. Relocating to Texas (where I knew *no one*) meant I had to do a lot of planning. I had to live within walking distance from school, the grocery store, the laundromat, the bank, and doctors. Eventually, I hoped to make friends, but I was finishing my PhD whether Texans were friendly or not. Texans were very friendly, but I still think it is better to be prepared, because even your best friends cannot be there all the time. The fifth gift of blindness was the ability to plan ahead. Having to plan ahead is a common habit for people with disabilities. It isn't best practice, it is a necessity. Quite frequently, if you don't plan ahead, you are not able to be involved. Keep in mind that as a blind professor, I can be derailed in class by an out-of-place chair tripping me, or an out-of-ink dry erase marker that I am diligently writing with, or not realizing the classroom has no lights on. Sometimes odd questions to my class like, "Knock if you have a pulse" are intended to help me locate how many people are in the room and where they are sitting.

My students and colleagues will tell you that I routinely plan every interaction. This level of planning can seem like overkill to a non-disabled individual, but may be a necessary coping strategy for someone with a disability. Frank discussion of my needs can be a segue into a broader discussion of universal design and accessibility.

I eventually finished my PhD and was working as a research scientist at the Institute of Behavioral Research in Fort Worth, Texas. I was focused on increasing the motivation of incarcerated men who were put in substance abuse treatment programs (Czuchry, Sia, and Dansereau 1999; Czuchry, Sia, and Dansereau 2006; Dansereau et. al 2003; Sia et al. 1999; Sia, Dansereau, and Czuchry 2000). I suspect my lack of vision made my work easier, since other women researchers had to develop a thick skin to ignore the men staring and gesturing. I was unlikely to be intimidated by attitudes that I never saw. Working in prison was great preparation for working with college students in other ways, as well.

I have noticed a similar mindset between inmates and college students. Many do not want to be in class/prison and do not believe class/prison can benefit them. This can become a detrimental combination of distrust and apathy. Although not always said out loud, a lurking thought seems to be "What is the bare minimum I can do and not get in trouble?" Both populations throw up smoke screens to fit what they believe is needed in the situation, rather than what is going through their heads. Breaking through the almost institutionalized apathy is critical. Whether "working the program" in treatment or fully committing to the academic process in college, this level of engagement leads to future success and opportunities. It is also more personally rewarding and worthwhile (Czuchry et al. 1997; Czuchry, Sia, and Dansereau 1999; Sia, Dansereau, and Czuchry 2000).

In addition to working in the prison system, I was doing all the usual academic things. My vision was still holding out for reading. Then a strange thing happened: The university put energy efficient doors in all the buildings. They were slightly smaller than the original doors in my building and so sat about six inches to the left. For almost a year, I kept "seeing" them in their old positions and running into the wall. It was the first big clue that most of what I see is made up or filled in from memory and other sources. I also started getting hit by invisible cars. Low-contrast gray cars blended into the pavement, and I would see a clear road unless I was listening carefully. I usually got hit in parking lots or streets where a car was about to go into motion. At this point, I was not legally blind and so did not qualify to carry a white cane to alert drivers. During this time, I got hit by eight cars, one bus, two bicyclists and an angry skateboarder. I looked right at him before stepping in front of his invisible low-contrast self. Some disabilities, like mine, are degenerative. The subtle daily worsening may not always be apparent to the person experiencing it (it certainly was not for me). It is easy to make assumptions that because a person could do something yesterday, they can do it today. The amount of useable vision for me can vary from minimal to none, but I may not be aware because my brain fills in from other senses. It feels very surreal. I may "see" a doorway open, run into a closed door, and realize what feels like vision is not at all rooted in reality. In this case, a vent above the door blowing cold air was probably the culprit that tricked my brain into thinking the door was open.

One of the struggles with being blind is that students and colleagues either cannot remember I am blind or believe I am "not really" blind. My mother once said that I act like I can see too well. I suspect that people imagine blindness being so incapacitating that they cannot relate it to an independent person (this relates to my earlier point about *imagining* being different than *experiencing*). Perhaps the most pernicious of the misconceptions of the blind are that the blind are helpless, sad, useless people, living in a world of darkness and dependent on the kindness of others. If you examine the life of Helen Keller or Louis Braille or Ray Charles, or even the ancient Greek poet, Homer, you will see this is far from the truth. People can retain their true selves, even when struggling with disabilities or challenges. If you spend time together with the blind, you will realize they adapt well. I have seldom met a blind person who matched up to my own catastrophic imagining at the beginning of the chapter. At this point, if you didn't take the break and wander around with your hand in front of your face trying to use only your peripheral vision—*do it*, please. It is so much harder to forget what you have experienced. We all need to remember that challenges may not be as bad as we imagine that they will be (Seligman 2006). It is easy for students (and professors) to believe that the imagined horror of a disability, or failing, or even speaking in public will be the same as the reality. This can become self-fulfilling prophecy. For experiments on self-fulfilling prophecy, see Word and colleagues (2012) and Snyder and colleagues (2012). If you rehearse a feared outcome enough in your head, you can make it more likely to occur.

I knew the end of my career as a research scientist was near when I could no longer reliably detect the magic number of truth: $p<.05$, i.e., statistical significance. As my vision deteriorated and much of what I saw was imagined, I became less and less competent at skills I once excelled at. My data entry was full of errors. My ability to data check had more to do with what I wanted to see than what was there. Proofing and editing of stimulus sets for experiments or write-ups of results were also full of typos. My colleagues helped, but it meant I was a drag on the research

team. When the grant ran out, I was unemployed. It is as close to catastrophe as I have come. There are some rabbit holes that are dangerous to go down mentally when that catastrophe strikes (Seligman 2006). A common thought I had was "Why me?" I am an artist. I love reading. I love traveling. I need my eyes. It was easy to spend a lot of time in all the reasons I shouldn't go blind. This type of thinking increased my bitterness and kept me trapped in a dark place. Ironically, I spent more time in this dark place imagining myself blind than when I went blind. When I shifted my thinking to "who deserves to go blind?", it became apparent that I viewed it as an extreme punishment for serial killers, criminals, and politicians. It helped me to realize no one deserves to go blind. Most things like this just happen (e.g., the "Just World Fallacy"). I began to call this blame-the-victim thinking, "the Jabberwock," referring to Lewis Caroll's poem which tells an understandable story using sheer nonsense words. Blaming the victim is a familiar experience that seems to make sense, but at its core it is nonsense. So for me, calling this thinking the Jabberwock helps me recognize the fallacy for what it is.

Another dangerous thought was "What if?" It was easy to dream of "What ifs?" that could take my problems away. What if there was a cure? What if I were rich? These were lovely daydreams, but "what if" daydreams have no utility. I know people who are waiting for a cure in order to continue with their lives. I know people who proclaim that their problems will go away once they have enough money. And I am sure we have all gone down the "Ignore it, maybe it will go away?" rabbit hole. The problem for all of these ideas was that it left me in the same headspace without being able to take action to improve my life. I credit these experiences with becoming skilled at recognizing and steering my students away from similar catastrophic thinking (or Jabberwock).

Once I emerged from the rabbit holes about being blind, I was able to seek out help. Another one of blindness's gifts is becoming OK with needing and seeking out help (everyone needs to be able to do this). Ironically, the first website I found told me how to cheat on my driver's test to keep driving blind. The second was the Division of Blind Services, a state resource. Once I contacted them (and documented that I was blind), they pulled out all the stops to find me employment and keep me functional. In my very first encounter, they asked why I did not have sunglasses on, since people with my condition usually experience migraines. I spent six intense months focused on learning to not get hit by cars (i.e., properly using cross walks), not hurt myself (doing basic household chores), and professional refocusing. Getting hit by cars became a thing of the past, as long as I had my white cane. Kindles and other devices allowed me to resume reading (albeit at a slower pace). Many of the techniques I was being taught were small things that made huge differences. As a teacher, I try to look for these small things that can lead to big progress (Gladwell 2002). One small but meaningful change was asking students to knock on their desks to show agreement (since I cannot see their nods or head shakes) or to knock rapidly instead of raising their hands.

I will not hide that the real challenge of being blind is interacting with other people. I often end up thinking, "Why can't people just act normal?" Many people hate being wrong and will say I am not blind. I am too independent, so I must be faking it. As far as I can tell, this comes from people's belief that blind people must be sad, helpless, and useless (and if they are not, they don't count as blind). It is a strong stereotype that must

be fought. I am *coping* with being blind, not faking it. I suspect many people with disabilities face this same issue. If they cope well, they are seen as faking or not deserving of accommodation. It is an annoying catch-22.

Once people know I am blind, they usually start gradually treating me like a "normal" sighted person. This is disastrous. Sometimes you should not treat people the same. It leads to impossible requests. I have been asked to point out where a car is, describe a student, and even drive on a field trip. I am sure people wave, and point, and do all kinds of things that I cannot see to respond to. For many casual encounters, this can be misinterpreted as being stuck up, distant, or purposely obtuse. It is also easy for people to forget that moving the furniture in a room can be disastrous for me when I come back in. People also get defensive when I call them on their misjudgments. I was at a McDonald's and I asked a friend to read me the menu. A lady immediately, said, "You should be ashamed that you can't read at your age." I exclaimed, "I'm blind." She continued with, "You wouldn't be if you went to a doctor and got glasses." She really did not want to admit she came to the wrong conclusion. Even small, non-hostile conversations can upset people. Often, I will ask questions, "What is …?" people will point and I will say, "I can't read that. I am blind." The most frequent response is that "I didn't have to be rude about it" and "why didn't I tell them first." Usually, I am hungry, I am in a hurry, and I forget that people respond poorly to questions about things that are posted visually. Working with any person, it is important to find out what their limitations are and then work within them. We all have limitations, even if we do not recognize them. For some, we have limitations around our kids' schedules. Others have limitations based on a long commute. I can't drive or recognize faces.

Keeping it in mind helps interactions go more seamlessly. I had to stop expecting people to know and understand blindness and start educating them even though I know only a little about my own type of blindness.

Eventually, the training turned to the question of what I wanted to do in my career. The only part of my work as a research scientist that was unaffected by vision loss was leading two-hour motivational interventions in the prisons. This led me to believe that teaching was an option. I was usually facilitating groups of fifty people. (For more information on attending to cognitive enhancement for the treatment of probationers see Czuchry, Sia, and Dansereau (2006), Dansereau et al. (2003), and Sia, Dansereau, and Czuchry (2000).) Appointing ten team leaders among the inmates was a common strategy. I would pick out the ten with the best attitudes. They would then hand out materials and convey questions. It is a facilitation strategy I still use with college students. This might be choosing a row leader to be their spokesperson., or if I put students in groups, appointing a spokesperson or note-taker. Choosing, rather than letting the students choose, a spokesperson denotes trust, and allows the faculty to highlight underrepresented groups. Choosing spokespersons with good attitudes has continued to serve me well.

In a brave or reckless move, Texas Lutheran University hired me as a visiting professor. I may have glossed over the fact that my teaching experience had all been as a sighted individual. I went into teaching with an attitude that is best described as "nothing to lose." I didn't know if I could teach, and I certainly wasn't going to be surprised if I couldn't. So I marshaled my social psychology training on influencing small groups, my motivational training from substance abuse treatment in prison, and what I hoped was my infectious love of research. *It worked*. Each semester I see and

try to impact up to a hundred new students in my classes. For more on my teaching strategies, see Sia (2015).

I wouldn't have this opportunity if I hadn't focused on making small, significant changes in my life. Of course, some of the small things are remembering to check if the desks have been moved. The devil is and will always be in the details of any situation related to disability or challenges. Focusing on the small things, like explaining blindness to people, can allow greater things to happen.

The truth about being blind is that it is an inconvenience, not a tragedy. The degree to which my remaining vision is useable varies day to day. I can do many things as well as the sighted (and sometimes even I forget that I can't see). Keep in mind, the vision I see is 80 percent made up, but feels quite real. Strangely, I am alarmingly good at axe throwing, which is as big a surprise to me as the friends I went throwing with.

Perhaps the greatest gift of blindness is compassion. Google Helen Keller quotes. She experienced a level of disability that I cannot imagine, but writes with a level of compassion that I can only hope to emulate (Keller 1996). These quotes were not meant just for the blind. Which ones can make your life better? How do we as educators bring voices of disability into the forefront of our lives and teaching? When my class is struggling, I will do a short easy exercise to find quotes to inspire. I choose a person, like Helen Keller, who showed a remarkable level of grit and persistence. Just like I did earlier with you, I ask students to google quotes from Hellen Keller that inspire and make them feel motivated to continue struggling. I then ask who wants to read the quote they found out loud and for other students to on their desks if they like it. It is probably better to learn from those who deal with obstacles, rather than ignoring them. Helen Keller's challenges were far greater than mine, and I expect her contributions to continue to remain greater as well. For a comprehensive biography see Herman (1999). Occasionally, a class will agree with a quote they like, and I will make it into the grounding exercise to start class. Each person says the quote and one word describing how they feel (Goleman 2006). Even on bad days, we remind ourselves of our desire to persist.

Before going blind, I was opinionated and impatient with people who didn't keep up academically, socially, and personally. It was very difficult to understand how they could stay mired in mediocrity. It is hard to maintain a know-it-all attitude when you can forget where you are in space and walk into walls, and when most conversations take place with people you can't recognize until rather far in the conversation. Blindness helped me understand that all people face challenges that they *cannot see a way to deal with*. It isn't their actual eyesight that traps them, but not being able to find a vision for themselves that frees them. A favorite Mumford and Sons lyric from their song "Awake My Soul" that I use for a mantra is, "Lend me your eyes, I can change what you see." Is it working?

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Chapter 6

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Online Classrooms

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Teaching online requires instructors to examine our assumptions about what works in our classrooms. Online instructors often find that things we did by instinct in face-to-face classrooms need to be done intentionally when teaching online. We often need to explain and articulate things in online classrooms that may go unsaid when teaching face-to-face. In a similar way, looking at our classes through a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) lens can force us to reexamine our practices. If we see that students from marginalized groups always struggle in our classes, we can think about ways to change the class design and delivery to avoid reinforcing inequities.

In this chapter, we explore the intersection of inclusive teaching and online teaching. We suggest using the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer 1999) as a useful organizing model for building online learning experiences that work for marginalized students.

OUR COLLABORATION STORY

In Amelia's years as a professor at Texas Lutheran University before the COVID-19 pandemic, she heard a simple narrative from other faculty about online learning. According to the narrative, online learning was good for privileged, older, self-motivated students, but it was not a good fit for traditional-aged students at TLU, many of whom came from backgrounds of poverty, were the first in their families to attend college, and needed extra scaffolding to succeed in classes. Amelia joined colleagues in repeating the narrative that online learning wouldn't work at TLU.

Throughout this time, Rodrick was part of a small group of professors who patiently and gently championed online education and encouraged professors to get more comfortable with it. As a campus instructional designer, Rodrick taught instructors to use the learning management system and other online tools and emphasized the importance of pedagogical approaches that use technology effectively. Rodrick helped develop a short course to certify instructors in online and blended teaching. Amelia took the short course in 2016.

In spring 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and all classes moved online, the groundwork Rodrick had laid was invaluable in helping Amelia and other instructors manage the chaotic transition to emergency remote teaching. Now, several years later, TLU offers many more synchronous and asynchronous online classes than it did pre-pandemic, although most students and instructors continue to place high value on their face-to-face educational interactions. Even in face-to-face classes, Rodrick encourages faculty to use the learning management system as an online support component. Rodrick tells faculty that the learning management system can be much more than a quiz-giver and gradebook. He encourages faculty to learn more about the capabilities of the learning management system and harness its power to make information accessible to students 24/7.

Rodrick and Amelia have worked together for over a decade as tenure-track faculty members with the university library as their home department. Both of their faculty roles combine teaching with administrative work: Rodrick usually teaches two courses per semester (for the information systems department and the freshman experience program) in addition to working as an instructional designer, and Amelia usually teaches one course per year (for the women's and gender studies and freshman experience programs) in addition to working as a reference librarian. Rodrick and Amelia have each served in rotating directorships—Rodrick as director of the Center for Teaching and Learning and Amelia as director of the Women's and Gender Studies program. As an immigrant from Tanzania, Rodrick launched a program called The Watoto Project to raise funds and awareness for children experiencing economic hardship in Tanzania. When Amelia and the other co-editors were inviting contributions to this book, they thought that Rodrick's unique role at TLU—combining inclusive teaching, instructional design, and service learning—exemplified the idea that instructors build their inclusive pedagogical approaches in specific contexts.

RESEARCH ON DEI AND ONLINE LEARNING

The narrative Amelia and colleagues had told themselves, that online learning was a poor fit for younger, low-income, and first-generation students—was it accurate, or was it a myth? In reality, the situation is nuanced. Several studies have found that students' performance in online classes is worse than in face-to-face classes, and that the success gap is worse for Black and Latinx students, younger students, men, and students with lower levels of academic preparation (Johnson and Mejia 2014; Xu and Jaggars 2014; Xu and Xu 2019; Tate and Warschauer 2022). This finding is troubling and should be kept in mind as institutions, departments, and instructors make decisions about online classes. Colleges and instructors can strive to mitigate inequities in online learning through attention to inclusive teaching practices and structural supports for students. Inclusive online teaching includes considering the full humanity of students and recognizing the structures that impact their lives (Woodley et al. 2017, Humphrey and Davis 2021). Several authors suggest that the success gap between online and in-person classes might lessen over time with new technologies and with attention to best practices in online teaching (Tate and Warschauer 2022; Shankar, Arora, and Binz-Scharf 2023). Some studies have found that although course-by-course success was lower in online courses, long-term success measured by college completion rates was higher for students who took some courses online (Johnson and Meija 2014; Fisher et al. 2022). Colleges cannot reject online learning in the name of equity, but they should pay careful attention to improving it and making sure it does not reinforce existing inequities.

The pandemic made it clear that online learning had tremendous benefits in a situation when health risks and caretaking responsibilities made face-to-face learning nearly impossible. Even outside the context of a pandemic, health risks and caretaking responsibilities are realities that many students face. For students whose caregiving responsibilities, jobs, or disabilities put face-to-face learning out of reach, online learning is invaluable. Disability activists have long insisted that many jobs can be done remotely, and with the post-pandemic increase in remote work, people with disabilities are employed in record numbers (Gamble and Dunn-Paul 2023). Online education, like remote work, has become more mainstream after the COVID-19 pandemic. Both online and face-to-face learning have strengths and weaknesses, and most students will engage in both modalities during their college careers, even at residential colleges and universities. With suitable approaches, proper training, and resources, instructors can provide excellent education in online classrooms.

HOW CAN THE COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY FRAMEWORK FACILITATE INCLUSIVE TEACHING?

In Rodrick's discussions with faculty from across the disciplines who are learning to teach online, he has found a useful organizing model in the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer 1999). Extensive research has been done on the framework and its associated methodological tools (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer 2010). The CoI framework posits that three interrelated components make up an educational experience: teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. When Rodrick describes this model to faculty as a sort of three-legged stool, he helps them design well-balanced educational experiences online. The most optimal educational experience occurs when teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence interact.

TEACHING PRESENCE

Teaching presence referes to the instructor's role in the class. The instructor shapes how interaction looks by setting the class climate and designing ways to get students to learn and engage by selecting and presenting content. The instructor provides expertise, direction, and motivation.

In a face-to-face classroom, students get a sense of their instructor's teaching presence through nonverbal cues and quick interactions before, during, and after class. By contrast, in an online class, the instructor's teaching presence doesn't always come through strongly enough unless it is intentionally added to the course design. When teaching presence is lacking, online classes can feel like they have no instructor at all, even though the instructor is working behind the scenes to design the course, grade assignments, and respond to the students who reach out proactively. Online instructors should connect with each student, not just the ones who initiate interactions. Students learn best when they feel that their instructor cares about them and their learning. Scholars have found that students' sense of connection with their instructors is especially important for students from historically underrepresented groups (Bensimon 2007; Felten and Lambert 2020).

How do you think about DEI in relation to teaching presence?

Rodrick — A close relationship between the instructor and students is essential in education, and research shows that a working relationship leads to student learning and retention. If a student doesn't have a sense of security and trust, everything stops

there. The instructor's role is to set enough sense of assurance and welcomeness to support readiness and learning to diverse learners.

I cannot claim to be an expert who can solve all student issues, but I could open the door so that at least the learner-instructor relationship can facilitate a better dialogue. I strive to let students know that I care and continuously engage in learning their background, where they're coming from, and any issues that they could share with me so I can tailor and respond to their needs better. This approach has been helpful in personalizing learning knowing that I can only solve some things, but I can channel learners to other experts who can help them.

Amelia — There are many different ways for instructors to communicate their care for students. Different instructors adapt different teaching styles. Instructors find their balance between being warm, rigorous, firm, and lighthearted. In her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (2015), Zaretta Hammond writes that to effectively teach culturally diverse students, teachers should cultivate the stance of the warm demander. The term "warm demander" was coined by Judith Kleinfeld (1975), who found that effective teachers insisted on high standards for academic performance and effort while also building trusting relationships. Hammond writes that any instructor can become a warm demander, and warns against the pitfalls of focusing only on warmth without holding students to high academic standards. If instructors hold lower expectations for certain students out of pity, Hammond reminds readers, students will not engage in the productive struggle they need to learn and grow.

I have a warm and transparent style, but I've enjoyed changing things up by playing Reacting to the Past games in class. The Reacting to the Past curriculum (Carnes 2014; Lidinsky 2015) calls for students to take charge of class for weeks at a time as they exchange arguments informed by historical texts. The instructor takes on the role of game manager, using strategic ambiguity and playful challenge to prod the students to figure things out for themselves. After I had practiced interacting with students in a new way as a game manager, I was able to bring some of that style into my teaching outside the game.

For women instructors, LGBTQ+ instructors, and instructors of color, communicating care through one's teaching style is especially complex. Researchers have noted that instructors who teach diversity-related courses, and particularly instructors who share underrepresented identities with students, perform a disproportionate amount of emotional labor (Miller, Howell, and Struve 2019). Instructors want to show students we care, but we also want to set boundaries on our time and our emotional resources.

When students tell me about their difficulties with finances, family, and relationships, I always let them know about the available resources elsewhere on campus, but they still want to talk to me because they feel comfortable with me. I am honored to listen to their stories, but my time is limited and so is the amount of help I can offer in my scope as their instructor. In class, I try to share information frequently and enthusiastically about how students can find help. For example, I share information about campus mental health services, national hotlines dealing with disordered eating and sexual violence, and trustworthy sexual health websites like Columbia University's Go Ask Alice (https://goaskalice.columbia.edu). When we teach inclusively, we hear about the heavy problems in students' lives and we refer students to the university structures that support their mental and physical health, safety, and basic needs.

How do you approach disengaged students?

Rodrick — It is paramount to let learners know you care about them, including in non-academic situations. I care about them as people. I don't let it go without reaching out to a student if they fall behind. It's about signaling to learners that the instructor is present, interested, and believing in them. In motivating disengaged students, I consider increasing curiosity by articulating what is essential for them—benefits, rewards, the relevance of the course content to their daily and future lives, and simply appreciating their contribution to the class. I address barriers students may encounter in engaging with the content, e.g., understanding complex concepts or accessing materials. Personalization of content must allow learners to engage with their learning preferences and interests while working toward reaching learning goals. In writing assignments, for example, I offer students space for several drafts and attempts with the hope of improving their work over time.

Sometimes, I offer my synchronous presence as an instructor-on-demand. In doing so, I consider my availability to students when they need me, not only when I schedule to be available, but also honoring individual requests the best I can while being mindful of my precious time and how I can offer my presence effectively. Whatever tactics we use to attempt to motivate disengaged online students, they will have the most benefit if we remain student-focused and implement flexibility in teaching, cognitive, and social interactions (Ripley 2021).

Over the years, I have been interested in which students seek ADA accommodations from the university. It has been interesting to see which students receive those types of accommodations. In my summer student research in 2020, I found that

Black students, especially men, resist opening up, seeking help, or sharing situations in their academic and non-academic lives. Internal university data indicated that the university's accessibility office served women and white students at higher rates than men, Latinx students, and Black students. There was a difference in who was willing to come to the accessibility office to request services because they were comfortable with that process. Black students, particularly first-year students, asked questions about getting accommodations but did not follow through. They were either just uncomfortable working with the accessibility office, or they didn't think the office would understand, or that it was just not cool. In my study, one of the attitudes I found was "Never mind, I don't want to do that because I'm a guy, and guys don't have problems." Another perception was "some didn't want to get extra help because that's looked down upon." Black men expressed a lack of trust in the system that is in place. This group of students expressed a sense of disconnection between their university experiences and their expectations.

The situations and stigmas I have described are known to happen in face-to-face learning; imagine what a problematic educational journey this can be for online minority learners. There is a lot more to learn on this front. There are many strategies to consider, and one of them is implementing a well-designed peer mentorship program that tailors to and reflects the interests and cultures of these students. Trust is the base that holds student-mentor relationships together, as it functions as the basis for helpful communication.

Amelia — As instructors, we know that we care about all our students' success, but how do we make sure each student knows that we care? If students are acting disengaged, we should let them know that we notice and ask them for their thoughts or their

questions. We should recognize that their lives are complicated, and they may be dealing with a lot of things beyond our classes.

As a librarian, I often think about that idea of asking for help. A few students will visit the reference desk or send an email to ask for help, but there's another huge group of students who will stay quiet and not reach out. But if you build it into their course and prompt them, they'll engage. Building library sessions into class requirements has been key. If there's something students should do to help them succeed, whether it's consulting with a librarian, going to the writing center, or visiting office hours, I'm in favor of incentivizing it and holding students accountable for it. In that way, we reduce the gap between students with and without the time and inclination to do those things on their own. In chapter 4 of this book, Margaret Gonzales shares a personal story about how asking for help can be especially hard for first-generation students.

How does the Regular and Substantive Interaction requirement relate to teaching presence?

One of Rodrick's responsibilities as an instructional designer is to ensure that online classes include Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) as defined by the US Department of Education. The guidelines for Regular and Substantive Interaction can dovetail nicely with teaching presence, because it is a way to ensure that students feel regularly seen and heard by instructors. RSI is a teacher-driven variable. The instructional designer working with a subject matter expert can build an online course that meets and reflects RSI. However, ultimately, it comes down to how the faculty member teaches/facilitates the online course daily. All online courses should be designed to maximize the opportunity for good and substantive communication, which is the backbone of RSI. Rodrick emphasizes the need to establish good feedback and constructive criticism channels in the class and substantive communication from the faculty to the students. According to federal regulations, substantive interaction is:

> … engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following—
> (i) Providing direct instruction;
> (ii) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
> (iii) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
> (iv) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
> (v) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.
> (US Code of Federal Regulations, 34 U.S.C. § 600.2)

The *regular* part of RSI is essential to online learning as activities such as opening and due dates for discussion posts, assessments, and feedback, are predictable to students. Regular interaction leads to a consistent schedule and expectation of due dates for class activities for all students, and confusion is vastly reduced for all learners.

COGNITIVE PRESENCE

In the Community of Inquiry framework, cognitive presence refers to students constructing meaning through interaction with course content. Cognitive presence provides knowledge and skills to learners, e.g., problem-solving, critical writing, and

critical thinking, through interaction between the students and the course content elements like readings, quizzes, written assignments, discussions, and reflections.

How do you think about DEI in relation to cognitive presence?

Rodrick — When instructors prepare course content like videos, slideshows, readings, and assessments for students, they should consider elements of Universal Design for Learning such as ensuring instructional videos include captions and transcripts, making sure content is readable by screen-readers, and providing multiple ways for students to engage with content (Tobin and Behling 2018).

For well-designed online courses, cognitive presence is fostered through planning or design that facilitates engagement (Riggs 2020). The Ebbinghaus experiment and findings about the memory process, including its forgetting curve and its impact on learning and retention, illustrate that memory decreases over time, and bite-size learning may help our memory (Ebbinghaus 1885, 2013). Developing modules, creating three to five-minute videos, and selecting content in multiple varieties to serve various preferences may lead to a better understanding, skills, and knowledge retention.

Amelia — When I teach Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies, I want students to see their own life experiences as very relevant. They can make their own analyses, bring in their own wisdom, and converse with the authors whose theories they read.

One of my go-to ways to start a conversation about an article is to have students identify one key point, one confusing point, one way they could challenge the article's claims, and one way the article connects to them personally. That allows them to do several things at once: make a concerted effort to understand the author's argument, let me know what they're having trouble understanding, engage with the reading critically, and connect the reading to themselves. As Czuchry and Bollinger discuss in chapter 1 of this book, learners can process and remember information much more readily when they perceive it as connected to themselves in some way.

I try to assign texts written by women, people of color, trans and nonbinary people, and people with disabilities. I usually include photos of the authors in my slides so that students have a visual picture of the author's identity, although I also encourage them to remember that photos communicate a very limited amount of information about identity.

How strictly do you keep to the schedule?

Rodrick — A philosophy I share with my students is that we do not finish the book because we "have to finish the book." There are some chapters we probably will not cover at all. We will take our own pace. I believe students learn better and retain knowledge from those fewer chapters that are covered in greater depth. Frankly, I don't see the value in rushing for the sake of rushing! I must judge what is essential for students here. As I empower students to find much information independently, I focus on what would be difficult and find what is important for me to guide and facilitate online learning. This approach is effective and allows online students to have a flexible learning environment.

Studies show that long lectures do not suit expectations for the online medium (Riggs 2020). However, bite-size lectures in various formats should provide learners with important information

they need to learn and retain. In all my online courses, I share a spirit of flexibility in teaching, cognitive, and social interactions to help motivate and accommodate various situations that may occur during the course. The due dates and end dates are enforced with flexibility in mind on a case-by-case basis. As such, I take into consideration personal and technical issues that may happen to online students, while motivating them to accomplish learning goals and activities better. Most online students are highly positive about the flexibility strategy if rightly and equitably articulated and implemented at the beginning and throughout the course. This strategy works well for online adult learners.

Amelia — At one point, one of my students told me, "You're the only one of my professors that's still on track with the syllabus," meaning that I hadn't revised the schedule as the semester went along. At the time, I felt self-satisfied about providing students with clarity and consistency through a defined schedule. I felt, and still feel, that sticking to the schedule promotes equity and inclusion in certain ways: it can build trust, decrease confusion and cognitive load, and help students jump back into class after a rough patch. After talking to Rodrick, however, I realized that the opposite approach—taking a flexible and malleable approach to time—is also grounded in inclusive pedagogy. Being flexible with the schedule can be student-centered, collaborative, and supportive of students who need a few more days or weeks to fully learn a concept. Humphrey and Davis (2021) write that they treat time as abundant and "remind students there is always enough time" as an anti-racist practice that challenges the dominant White culture's fixation on schedules and timetables. Clarity and consistency will still be important to me, but I'll allow more flexibility when the situation calls for it.

SOCIAL PRESENCE

Students in a face-to-face classroom use physical proximity and casual communication to generate a sense of rapport, study support, and informal mentoring. To create a similar level of social support in an online class, the class designer needs to intentionally set up structures for students to interact with each other and form a level of camaraderie. Darby and Lang (2019) write: "Historically, an individual online student worked through content alone and submitted assignments from afar. Some highly motivated students can succeed in such an environment, but many cannot. Lots of us thrive in an engaging, dynamic, interactive environment in which we can learn from and with our peers" (104).

How do you think about DEI in relation to social presence?

Rodrick — A trained student mentor is assigned to each Freshman Experience class at Texas Lutheran University. They play an essential role in communicating resources and teaching lessons that engage students, responding to students' questions or concerns, and fostering interaction aiming to open a space for an individual and group collaboration, provide academic guidance, motivate learners to achieve their potential, facilitate communication, share constructive criticism and feedback, and be there for emotional support. As such, freshmen students relate well and speak highly of their peer mentors.

The mentorship role is not visible or well-articulated in most online programs or classes. As a mentorship role is critical in face-to-face learning, I challenge that it should be equally important in online learning. Mentor-to-online student relationships are mutually beneficial, especially to minority and underrepresented

learners. Mentorship interaction with such a population can be done by a trained student (peer mentor) or a qualified professional mentor to foster growth and trust for both parties. Trust opens a welcoming space for expression that may help the instructor learn more about online learners' needs, preferences, and challenges and allow timely and optimal support for online learning experiences. Thus, the deliberate decision to invest in online mentorship is crucial to student success and retention.

Amelia — I reiterate often that the discussion portion of class is part of the course content. Students are learning from each other, as well as from the professor and from the authors whose books and articles we read. The most impactful and memorable things the students take away may well be the things they learn from their classmates. I ask my students to submit weekly notes where they respond to both the current week's readings and the previous week's class content. In the notes, I have students report on what they learned from their classmates as well as what they learned from the professor. That way, students record fleeting moments from class discussion that may otherwise have been forgotten. I ask students to look back on their weekly notes to answer reflective questions on the open-book midterm and open-book final.

As we are encouraging an atmosphere of openness and disclosure, it's important to remind students that they have autonomy over what to share. I never want to give the impression that extensive personal sharing is required for success in the class. It's not students' job to teach their instructors or their classmates about their identity. At the beginning of the semester, I have students answer a series of questions for me and choose one of the answers to share with their classmates. That action sets the tone for the rest of the class: Students will be expected to share some of their thoughts with classmates, but they are also welcome to keep some of their thoughts just between them and the instructor.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Many of the higher education classrooms around the world are online classrooms. When done well, online education promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion by providing flexibility and the ability to integrate education with other facets of life. However, online instructors must carefully attend to best practices in course design and delivery, because there is some evidence that all students perform worse in online classes than in face-to-face classes and that the success gap worsens for students from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds (Tate and Warschauer 2022).

The Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer 1999) can help instructors organize their thinking as they design, deliver, and evaluate online classes. The Community of Inquiry framework reminds instructors to attend not only to students' interaction with course material, but also to students' interaction with each other and with their instructor. An intellectual community of trust, belonging, and security provides an environment where learning can happen.

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Conclusion

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How do we cultivate successful teaching and learning in a way that recognizes and supports diversity, equity, and inclusion? Our collective approach to this question focuses on awareness and understanding of both instructors and students as complex whole people. We have looked at science to explore how our brain, personality, and culture shape our learning processes. In doing so, we learned the imperative of recognizing learners' identities and experiences, relating content and modality to those identities and experiences through multiple forms of engagement. We learned that people do not exist in vacuums and are always situated within local, institutional, and broader world contexts that shape and influence their learning; these contexts include individual, collective, and structural sociocultural histories, as well as policies, practices, and resources. Thus, as we have shown ways of building, implementing, and evaluating instructional

strategies, we have attempted to do so by contextualizing them, showing what they look like in real life contexts.

What we do, and why we do what we do, are first and foremost about cultivating cooperative human relationships in ways that challenge the persistent power dynamics between instructors and learners. In this concluding chapter, we will revisit chapter themes, cross-cutting elements, DEI in context, and close with suggested actions and questions.

CHAPTER THEMES

Part 1 of this volume provides useful approaches and concepts intended to guide your individual practice and experimentation with inclusive teaching practices. We hope these approaches can inspire innovation within your local educational contexts, in or outside the classroom, leaning into the key element of *continuous change* established in the introduction. We believe the approaches presented in part 1 can also shape professional development opportunities within many different academic institutions and units. For example, faculty development units or centers for teaching and learning can develop drop-in workshops on the neuro- and cognitive science of inclusive pedagogies (chapter 1) or the art of equitable and inclusive facilitation (chapter 3). Chapter 2 provides a model for a long form professional development program that can be scaled up or down, depending on institutional size and available resources.

Part 2 of this volume provides a wide range of inclusive teaching practices in their real-life contexts that can provide a menu of strategies that educators can begin to experiment with in their own spaces, which embodies the key element of *recognizing idiosyncrasy and context*. We believe one of the most powerful elements connecting the chapters in part 2 is the centering of the authors as educators and lifelong learners, putting into practice *a willingness to be vulnerable*.

The contributors to this volume are no doubt content experts and seasoned educators, yet we hope that their respective journeys and contexts chronicled in these chapters highlight the importance of self-reflection, assessment, and even more significantly, giving ourselves permission to make mistakes. Ultimately, we believe that part 2 can inspire courage to think outside the box and take risks with the reassurance that our communities of practice will be there for support when we stumble or to restore us when we fail.

RETURN TO DEI IN CONTEXT

We hope that through exploring the chapters and multiple perspectives presented in this volume, it has become more evident that engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion is complex work and goes well beyond checking boxes or following a formula. Educators who commit to the implementation of DEI tools within their instruction, facilitation and/or interactions must always keep in mind that context matters. DEI constructs and practices are constantly evolving; therefore, success can only be achieved if we commit to the lifelong process of continuous improvement, staying flexible and nimble. Additionally, we encourage readers to resist the urge to attain an untenable and fixed state of expertise or competence. Instead, we hope you adopt a growth mindset that centers on cultural humility, in which we remain curious and wonder about ourselves and the people we interact with. These mindsets and practices can be transformational in our work to educate diverse communities, with the bonus of promoting

personal growth in all our relationships. For example, committing to lifelong self-reflection, self-critique, learning, and transformation can give us the courage to experiment, make mistakes, and sometimes fail, knowing that even if we ever cause harm, there's a way to repair, reconcile and give ourselves grace.

We recognize that engaging with DEI is hard work, and becoming harder everyday as our sociopolitical landscape changes. However, we encourage you to not let fear drive our collective work; rather, be bold, try new things, and let your commitment to *your values* of diversity, equity, and inclusion guide your path.

ACTION STEPS AND QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Our intentions for this collective work are to set you up for inevitable future changes: new pedagogies, sociocultural shifts, political divisions. Most importantly, we want to move away from cookie-cutter approaches and towards reflexive processes for supporting your teaching journeys. We want you, the reader, to embrace the messiness of inclusive teaching, and utilize the guiding theories, pedagogies, and contexts presented in this volume to experiment and innovate. We highly encourage readers to dive deeper into this collective work through the online supplemental resources.

We close this volume with suggested action steps and questions for consideration to guide your path forward and next steps.

Do:

✓ Practice regular self-reflection in the spirit of cultural humility.
✓ Make small changes, a few at a time, and assess those changes.
✓ Acknowledge new trends and contexts in higher education.

Ask yourself:

- What are the contexts you are coming from, the context your students are coming from, and the structures that impact those contexts?
- How are you helping students relate and connect to you and each other? How are you deepening students' engagement with the material?
- Within your learning environments, who's not being heard? Whose voices are missing?

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