Introduction

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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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