

Articulating inclusive teaching: Three excerpts

Excerpt one: Crucial to my goal of establishing a positive learning environment is creating a classroom in which students feel free to express their convictions, challenging themselves and each other by grappling with the perennial questions explored in these books. To this end, I make a point of getting to know each of my students, scheduling individual meetings early in the semester. I also help them to get to know each other. I do this partly by facilitating a class blog where students discuss course material with their peers, especially in relation to current events and their own interests. Posts this semester have ranged from one comparing Putin's op-ed on Syria to a speech made by the Corinthians during the Peloponnesian War, to one evaluating how well Thucydides' portrayal of human psychology captures the decision not to drink and drive. Students' posts and the responses that follow reveal aspects of their interests and points of view that I am able to use in the classroom. I find class discussions can become much livelier and more productive when a teacher is able to take advantage of students' manifold perspectives and personalities, drawing out their positions when they are pertinent to the conversation at hand. Knowing the students well enables me to orchestrate dialogues among them, in which they take on active roles, teaching and learning from one another.

Excerpt two: Being a Nigerian instructor in a U.S. classroom, I am fully aware of the ways in which my cultural identity impacts the learning dynamics in the classroom. My Nigerian accent, a potential distraction to students' learning, requires that I become more deliberate with enunciation during lectures. While it highlights my cultural *difference*, I treat my accent as an opportunity to explore the larger questions of diversity in the classroom. Starting with myself, I encourage an atmosphere where students are honest about their own subject positions and feel comfortable contributing their unique perspectives to class discussions. I hold dear the idea of honesty in my relationship with students; because, for one, a handsome number of students I have interacted with have differed from me particularly in terms of age, sexuality, race, and class, honesty about my own identity has remained crucial in earning their trust and respect. On occasions, I remind my students that they could call my attention to words I "mispronounce" as a result of my accent; this strategy has proven effective in warming them to my appreciation of honesty. In other words, I always strive to create a space where my identity as a Nigerian lends strength to, rather than depletes the community of learners. With my research being Afrobeats music and performance aesthetics in postcolonial Nigeria— an art form which is steeped in egalitarianism, fairness and empowerment for the disempowered— my conception of pedagogy is that it should fuel students' appreciation of and desire for radical empowerment. It is my belief that honesty and the willingness to deal with difference precede any notion of radical empowerment.

Excerpt three: To foster writing confidence and analytical skills, I strive to create a supportive, inclusive learning environment. The processes of writing and literary study work best in a collaborative and comfortable atmosphere where the overriding tone is neither intimidating nor lenient. My classroom is a place of mutual respect and dignity where I encourage students to ask questions and express their opinions. My readings and other course materials represent a broad range of cultural, racial, religious, political, gender, and class identities. Working with diverse groups and texts increases students' awareness of the many people and perspectives that make up our world, and I find it valuable for students to examine their preconceived notions. I also ask my students to search out topics, resources, and contexts beyond their usual familiarity, which causes them to critically examine their own affiliations, participate in the larger conversation within our class and our nation, and practice their developing skills of research and investigation. This encourages students to develop new ideas, different methods and purposes of writing, and different approaches to literary analysis.