Teaching for Inspiration: Approaches to Engaging Transfer Students in Gateway Courses

Diversity and Inclusion, Special Populations

Although transfer students comprise a sizable portion of gateway (or general education) course enrollment, little, if any, attention has been given to examining the pedagogical approaches that might be used to meet the needs of this diverse student population. Participants will leave the session with strategies and approaches they can implement in gateway courses to create to foster equitable outcomes while inspiring transfer (and all) students.

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Teaching for Inspiration
Approaches to Engaging Transfer Students in Gateway Courses

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Learning Outcomes

At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

● Describe characteristics of transfer students and common influences on their transition and success

● Understand several pedagogical approaches that are responsive to transfer students

● Identify ways in which they can adapt and apply the pedagogical approaches for use in their own course(s) and programs
No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption.

(Freire, 1970, p. 54)
TRANSFERS
What is one word you might use to describe your transfer students?
Engaging and Inspiring Transfer Students

What does it mean to inspire and engage transfer students in gateway courses? What does that look like?

In many ways, teaching to engage and inspire transfer students looks simply like good teaching.
Engaging and Inspiring Transfer Students

Hope
Love
Humanity

Flourishing

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Engaging and Inspiring Transfer Students

The specific pedagogies and approaches have been chosen because:

1. They are evidence-based and effective
2. They help create inclusive learning environments (inclusive of various identities and learner needs)
3. They can be used in courses in a variety of disciplines, as well as courses taught in different modes and modalities, and in a range of professional practices.
THINGS ARE DIFFICULT, I'M TURNING TO WONDER

When things get difficult, turn to wonder. If you find yourself disagreeing with another, becoming judgmental, shutting down in defense, try turning to wonder:

“I wonder what brought her to this place?”
“I wonder what my reaction teaches me?”
“I wonder what he’s feeling right now?”

ESTRUS TUCKER
Getting to Know Our Transfer Students

Asking students reflective questions can help faculty better understand who their students are while illuminating aspects of motivation and mindset that could influence their engagement and performance in our course(s).

- What are your expectations for the course?
- In what areas do you feel most challenged and most confident, based on what you know about the course or your prior experience in this particular subject or discipline?
- What are your strengths as a learner?
First-Day Info Sheets: A Tool to Prompt Semester-Long Inclusive Teaching

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What faculty do and say on the first day of class is crucial to establishing and maintaining an inclusive learning environment for the duration of the semester. First-day information sheets ("info sheets") are commonly used by instructors. By making simple modifications to this tool, we can gather more information about the goals and experiences of our students, the lives of our students outside of our classroom, and how our students' lives may impact their engagement with the course material and course structure. We can also use this information to actively highlight to students that their full selves (names, pronouns, background) belong in our biology classrooms. We provide a set of prompts and suggested steps, rooted in the scholarly literature, to encourage and facilitate faculty use of info sheets as a valuable tool to inform semester-long inclusive teaching efforts.

INTRODUCTION

The first day of class sets the tone for the semester. Research shows that instructor actions and students' interactions with students on the first day of class can have lasting influence on student attitudes about the course and the instructor (1, 2) and about their sense of belonging. First-day information sheets ("info sheets") are commonly used by instructors to take inventory of their students' names, majors, and provide course information at the start of the semester. We believe that by modifying the info-sheet prompts (Fig. 1) we can turn this document into a valuable tool for semester-long inclusive teaching by gathering information about the students' experiences and identities that students bring into the course, setting us communicating the climate for the classroom, and stimulating instructors to make equitable course-design decisions and build relationships with students.

The info-sheet prompts and suggested actions are informed by the recently-published scholarly "Deep Teaching" model for the college STEM classroom (3). Deep Teaching prompts that instructors must first increase their own self-awareness of how their experiences and social positioning influence their teaching and their interactions with students. The increased self-awareness is the launch point for getting to know our students in a more holistic way and for enabling greater empathy for students. We instructors subsequently use this increased self-awareness and empathy to implement varied pedagogy, develop trusting class climates, and effectively have open and honest conversations with our students.

The tool described below is not a survey tool or magical solution to creating an inclusive classroom, nor is it a tool for that matter. Simply gathering the student responses is just the start. It's in the next steps that we take with the information—by repeatedly referring back to the info sheets throughout the semester and using the information to reflect upon and change our pedagogy, make one-on-one conversations with students, and build community—that the inclusive teaching practice occurs. Below, five reconstructed info-sheet section templates are outlined and some suggestions for action steps to take using the student responses are provided.

Section 1: Demographics

The first section prompts instructors to gather students' names and identities. The names are integral and fundamental components for student-orientation. As instructors, we hold significant power in our classrooms, and the care we take to affirm our students' experiential and multidimensional identities communicates our respect for the individuals in our community. College classrooms are increasingly diverse and international and it remains that faculty use students' preferred names and pronouns correctly.

Please use this space to privately share anything you would like your professor to know (Perhaps something that could impact or help with your learning experience/environment in class)

FIGURE 1. First-day "Info Sheet."
Well-designed courses can induce significant learning by engaging in students challenging active learning experiences.

For transfer students, some of the most significant learning experiences are those that involve “working harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations” (Fauria & Fuller, 2015, p. 39), as well as opportunities to contribute to class discussions, and tutor other students, formally or informally (Fauria & Fuller, 2015).
High-Impact Learning Experiences

- For transfer students, in particular, participation in multiple HIPs can have a significant impact on learning and success (Finley & McNair, 2015).
- HIPs can help communicate the utility of concepts and ideas in gateway courses, which is particularly important to transfer students who often struggle to find utility in their academic course work (Foote, Kranzow, & Hinke, 2015).
Critical compassionate pedagogy encourages faculty to be critical of “...institutional and classroom practices that ideologically place underserved students at disadvantaged positions, while at the same time be self-reflexive of their actions through compassion as a daily commitment” (Hao, 2011, p. 92).

The concept is rooted in compassionate communication (Rosenberg, 2003), which has four foundational components:

- Observation (observe without judging)
- Feeling (identify and express feelings)
- Need (connects needs to feelings)
- Request (open channels for communication)
Reflective Teaching

- Reflective Teaching (RT) engages instructors in a process of self-evaluation with the goal of continuous improvement (Brookfield, 2017).

- This process, which occurs during and after a course ends, is action oriented, meaning the instructor looks for ways to mediate challenges or issues in a class. RT includes four lenses that “...correlate to processes of self-reflection, student feedback, peer assessment, and engagement with scholarly literature” (Miller, 2010, p. 1).
Metacognitive Teaching

Reflecting on Our Practice

Faculty and staff who are metacognitive have an awareness of their own teaching practices and purpose, but at the same time, they are also aware of student engagement and learning and are willing to adapt based on that awareness (Scharff, 2015).
Students who are metacognitive are also more likely to plan, monitor, and evaluate strategies they use to learn; and adapt these strategies based on the specific learning environment and/or subject (Steiner & Foote, 2017).

While not a concept specifically designed to engage transfer students, metacognition can be particularly important for these students because, as a flexible approach to learning, students can use various metacognitive strategies depending on the specific task. Faculty can also employ various metacognitive teaching approaches to help foster deeper learning among all students in their gateway courses.
Active Learning

● For transfer students, specifically students in STEM majors, active learning experiences can contribute to their “transfer-related motivational attributes” (Wang, 2016, p. 52) that speak to their potential success in STEM-transfer.

● To ensure active learning is both meaningful and produces deeper understanding of concepts and ideas for all students, context should be provided before the experience, followed by an opportunity for reflection (Fink, 2003).

● Some examples of active learning are considered “small teaching,” or short activities or in-class assignments (e.g., minute papers, think-pair-share, and polls) designed with the intent to briefly engage students in reflection on a specific question or idea.
TAKING A METACOGNITIVE APPROACH TO ACTIVE LEARNING

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Introduction

Although existing research documents the impact of active learning (Ambrose et al., 2010; Bonwell and Eison, 1991), the focus is often on collecting and implementing techniques. While it is tempting to “plug and play,” to be effective, active learning needs to be examined in the larger
Reflect and React
What will you do to support transfer students in gateway courses?
Please Stay in Touch!

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