

INCLUSIVENESS

Strategy: Creating a democratic space

Summary

On the first day of class, it is made clear that the classroom will be used as a democratic space, where we will learn to engage in the practice of dialogue, debate and dissent but will do so with respect to the plethora of views that exist. Students are informed that they are free to state their views as long as such views are warranted (with empirical data, personal experience, etc.). It is through pluralistic dialogue that new ideas can be constructed. It's immensely important that teachers model and adequately facilitate this type of practice. Too often, we as teachers intentionally or unintentionally shut down viewpoints we see as contradictory to what we believe or feel are too controversial. For example, students from conservative backgrounds sometime assume that their viewpoints will not be respected. In the beginning of the semester when I'm facilitating discussion, I am intentional about providing counter arguments to any point brought up. Students will find that I will change ideological positions on any given topic and sometimes on the same topic to model the diversity of thought I desire in the class. If classroom discussions appear "liberal" I will frequently take "conservative" or "moderate" positions as a means to provide diverse ways of viewing any given topic.

Another way I create inclusiveness is on the first day of each class week, the first 5 minutes of class are dedicated to allowing students to share things they may have experienced or learned since our last meeting. This could include academic ideas learned in other classes, family or cultural events experienced over the weekend, or announcements about events they find interesting or are personally involved with through an organization. This allows students over the course of the semester to share a variety of experiences that are of importance to them, and provides other students with awareness of the diversity of events that take place in the state of Colorado. On a practical note, allowing students to share these experiences upfront usually ensures that the small group discussions stay focused on the topic.