

STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING
INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

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INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND
LEARNING VOLUME 16

**STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING
INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS IN HIGHER
EDUCATION: INTERNATIONAL
PERSPECTIVES ON EQUITY AND
INCLUSION**

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SERIES EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

The purpose of this series is to publish current research and scholarship on innovative teaching and learning practices in higher education. The series is developed around the premise that teaching and learning is more effective when instructors and students are actively and meaningfully engaged in the teaching-learning process.

The main objectives of this series are to:

- (1) present how innovative teaching and learning practices are being used in higher education institutions around the world across a wide variety of disciplines and countries,
- (2) present the latest models, theories, concepts, paradigms, and frameworks that educators should consider when adopting, implementing, assessing, and evaluating innovative teaching and learning practices, and
- (3) consider the implications of theory and practice on policy, strategy, and leadership.

This series will appeal to anyone in higher education who is involved in the teaching and learning process from any discipline, institutional type, or nationality. The volumes in this series will focus on a variety of authentic case studies and other empirical research that illustrates how educators from around the world are using innovative approaches to create more effective and meaningful learning environments.

Innovation teaching and learning is any approach, strategy, method, practice or means that has been shown to improve, enhance, or transform the teaching-learning environment. Innovation involves doing things differently or in a novel way in order to improve outcomes. In short, Innovation is positive change. With respect to teaching and learning, innovation is the implementation of new or improved educational practices that result in improved educational and learning outcomes. This innovation can be any positive change related to teaching, curriculum, assessment, technology, or other tools, programs, policies, or processes that leads to improved educational and learning outcomes. Innovation can occur in institutional development, program development, professional development, or learning development.

The volumes in this series will not only highlight the benefits and theoretical frameworks of such innovations through authentic case studies and other empirical research but also look at the challenges and contexts associated with implementing and assessing innovative teaching and learning practices. The volumes

represent all disciplines from a wide range of national, cultural and organizational contexts. The volumes in this series will explore a wide variety of teaching and learning topics such as active learning, integrative learning, transformative learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, meaningful learning, blended learning, creative learning, experiential learning, lifelong and lifewide learning, global learning, learning assessment and analytics, student research, faculty and student learning communities, as well as other topics.

This series brings together distinguished scholars and educational practitioners from around the world to disseminate the latest knowledge on innovative teaching and learning scholarship and practices. The authors offer a range of disciplinary perspectives from different cultural contexts. This series provides a unique and valuable resource for instructors, administrators, and anyone interested in improving and transforming teaching and learning.

Patrick Blessinger
Founder, Executive Director, and Chief Research Scientist,
International HETL Association

PART I

CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES

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INTRODUCTION TO STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger,
Jaimie Hoffman and Mandla Makhanya

ABSTRACT

We are all a part of the structures and struggles of a wider society, the impact of which is also felt at the classroom level which creates its own society. Classrooms are guided by the invaluable contribution of teachers who play a key role in imbuing inclusivity, compassion, and social justice in the classroom atmosphere. The teachers ensure that the classrooms are spaces in which every learner feels wanted and included. An inclusive classroom has huge positive impact on learner where every child, regardless of their background, benefits from the learning process. Inclusiveness is far from being mere rhetoric and achieving an equitable opportunity for all is a challenge. Tools, frameworks, and standardized procedures have been formulated with an effort to minimize learning barriers and create a genuine inclusive environment. Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education advocates inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all in every part of the world by 2030. It emphasizes inclusion and equity as the foundations for quality education and learning. This chapter explores the meaning of inclusiveness and multiculturalism in a classroom context and further explores strategies that have been adopted toward formulating an all-inclusive classroom. In this volume, authors have written about inclusion and equity in and through education systems and programs. Through case studies and narratives, they

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have described steps undertaken in different parts of the world to prevent and address all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparity, and inequality in educational access. The chapters will serve as a resource for educationists and practitioners and contribute toward inclusive education.

Keywords: Classroom, inclusiveness, sustainable development goals, lifelong learning, diversity, equity, culture, multiculturalism, curriculum

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to establish a more coherent understanding of the current movement, and consequent reforms, for cultivating and promoting a more diverse and equitable classroom environment in higher education. As demand for higher education continues to rise around the world, educators continue to respond to a more complex educational environment and a more diverse student population; more demands and expectations are placed on colleges and universities to address a wider array of social and economic problems and issues, educational leaders, and faculty continue to struggle with how best to meet the contemporary needs of all students. This impacts not only both academic policies and practices like teaching and learning, but also co-curricular policies and practices. Thus, how institutional leaders, at a policy level, address students' needs and concerns has become one of the chief issues in education around the world.

DEFINING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2017) calls on higher education institutions to create inclusive and equitable education for all. A key part of this goal is to create inclusive classrooms – both physical classrooms and online classrooms. So, the key question for educators becomes: how can we make classrooms more inclusive? An important premise embedded in this question is that, all else being equal, the more inclusive a classroom, the greater likelihood that the classroom will create more engaged learners, and greater engagement leads to higher academic achievement in students.

In order to create inclusive classrooms, we must first have a good understanding of what diversity, inclusion, and equity means within an educational context. Inclusion and equity are parts of the foundation for quality teaching and learning at all levels and during all stages of the learning process (i.e., access, participation, and completion) and in all aspects of running a higher education institution (i.e., mission, policies, strategies, programs, and practices). In order to understand inclusion, we must also understand its counterparts: exclusion, disparity, inequity, inequality, and marginalization (UNESCO, 2017). In addition, addressing these issues is important to the democratization of higher education (Blessinger & Anchan, 2015).

Saunders and Kardia (n.d.) define inclusive classrooms as spaces where students and instructors come together and work together on ways to develop a

learning environment where all students feel safe and are encouraged to express their own views from their own perspectives. Inclusive classrooms are spaces where course content is discussed from many perspectives and respects the diverse views and range of experiences from the students. Thus, this implies that a diverse classroom is one that is diverse not only in terms of views and perspectives, but also in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, gender, age, disability, experience, background, or any other factor or personal characteristic that defines the makeup of the students and helps shape those views and perspectives. So, diversity is based on individual and group differences that help define each person or group.

Inclusion is a process that allows barriers to dissolve and the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners is encouraged. The problems of creating inclusive and equitable opportunities arise from the very aspects of the education system. The fault lies in the ways in which education systems are currently organized, the forms of teaching that are provided in the classroom, the learning environment created for the students, and the ways in which students' progress is supported and evaluated. One needs to view such challenges as opportunities that give us the scope for improvement and democratize and enrich the existing education system.

Even more important is translating this recognition into concrete reforms, seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for democratizing and enriching learning. Diversity and multiculturalism should be treated as a catalyst for innovation that can benefit all learners, irrespective of their background or the situation they are in.

DEFINING DIVERSITY

Hofsted (2001), while referring to diversity, states that people are different, which includes individual groups and cultural differences. According to Hofsted, the dimensions of diversity are varied and include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, class, and immigration status.

Devito, Shimoni, and Clark (2012) claim that the term diversity has gained ground in the recent years and appears in the popular media, professional magazines, scholarly literature, and trade books. Devito et al. (2012) interpret dimensions of diversity as social class, sexual orientation, religion, personality, learning style, communication style, and family background. Devito et al. also concur with Hofsted's (2001) argument that diversity itself is not a value-laden term, but acquires its meaning by the way people react to diversity which is largely shaped by their own values, attitudes, and beliefs.

DEFINING CULTURE

Every scholar has tried to define and interpret the word culture in their own way. The definition has been fraught with controversy and misnomer. One commonly used definition by Tylor (1986) states that culture is that complex whole which

includes several factors such as knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by the members of a society. The term sub-culture is used to refer to minority cultures which is a part of a dominant culture. [Brumann \(1999\)](#) has argued that the concept of culture is not precise. It can mean forms of traditional behavior which assimilates to give characteristics to a given society or race for a certain period of time. However, scholars have agreed that culture includes a wide range of phenomena mainly norms, values, shared meaning, and ways of behavior ([O'Reilly, 1989](#)).

In recent years, cross-border flow of population due to migration and socio-political condition mainly in the Middle East and Africa has led to intermingling of cultures within societies. This diversity calls for coexistence and integration of races.

DEFINING MULTICULTURALISM

Some scholars have often criticized multiculturalism as a feel-good celebration of ethno cultural diversity, encouraging citizens to acknowledge and embrace the diverse customs, traditions, music, and cuisine that exist in a multiethnic society ([Gomasca, 2013](#)). Multiculturalism allows different cultures to coexist in spite of their competing worldviews. Therefore, multiculturalism possesses inherent tensions and challenges amid the different value systems that are embedded within the various cultures. [UNESCO \(2002, 2006\)](#) defines cultural diversity or multiculturalism as the “principal for organizing sustainable cultural plurality, both within and across societies.”

CREATING INCLUSIVE AND MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOMS

A multicultural diverse classroom is a conscious creation advocated and spear-headed by a teacher where both the students and the teacher hails from different ethnic backgrounds, apparently diverse in nature but creates a bond and amiable inclusive atmosphere with acceptance and tolerance of diversity. Sometimes ethnicity and religion may not be the guiding forces for diversity but can be interpreted as inclusion of students with different learning abilities and cognition ([Allen, Paasche, Langford, & Nolan, 2002](#)). Inclusive classrooms consider that all students are entitled to the opportunities available to other students in the school. An inclusive classroom is about belonging, being valued, and having their own choices ([Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002](#); [Hutchinson, 2007](#)).

It can be seen as a classroom where the curriculum has elements of diversity and allow students with exceptionalities to participate in the general education ([Artiles & Dyson, 2005](#)). [Allen et al. \(2002\)](#) and [King, Hunter, and Karten \(2009\)](#) describe multicultural diverse classrooms as ones that accept and value human diversity and provide support to all children and their families so that they can successfully participate in the program, schools, and educational institutions

of their choice. [Artiles and Kozleski \(2007\)](#) and [Artiles and Dyson \(2005\)](#) also explain that through beliefs, values, experience, and outcomes, one can recognize (inculcate?) diversity and promote inclusive strategies. By nature, students are supportive and accommodating; they require the impetus and the inspiration to stimulate them which comes from the teachers ([Davis, 1993](#)). He adds that students have some inherent qualities in them which they bring to the classroom. Their beliefs and values undergo transformation either for better or for worse in the classroom setting depending on the type of teacher–student interactions and the kind of instruction provided to them.

INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES

Inclusion and equity are principles that should be an integral part of all educational policies, plans, and practices, rather than being the focus of a separate policy. These principles need to be imbibed in everyday practice in an educational institution and consider education as a human right and thus develop the foundation for more equitable, inclusive, and cohesive communities ([Vitello & Mithaug, 1998](#)).

It is expected that all learners have access to quality education thus acknowledging the value of diversity and respect for human dignity ([UNESCO, 2015a](#)). It is not only about access to education, but also about having quality learning spaces and pedagogies that enable students to flourish and work toward creating a just society.

Inclusion heavily rests on attitudes of teachers toward their pupils with special needs and those who are marginalized. Teachers in turn depend on the resources and opportunities available to them. In quite a number of studies, the attitude of teachers and their influence on policy makers have been decisive factor in making schools more inclusive. Mainstream teachers should not shy away from the fact that teaching these pupils are an integral part of their job; in such a case, they will refrain from shifting their responsibility for these pupils to a special need teacher and will resist converting segregation in the school (the special class).

Increasing available time of a teacher by providing educational assistants or enhancing teacher's professional knowledge through training and with the help of consultation teams are some of the ways of increasing the necessary resources for inclusive education. A social skill program maybe the cornerstone for developing inclusiveness in a classroom. By guiding the learners toward social skills, teachers can build socially responsible behavior.

The curriculum acquires a prime position in guiding principles of inclusion and equity within a classroom scenario. Teachers need to focus their attention toward developing the curriculum that will include the voice of those marginalized. Learning cannot be defined narrowly as the acquisition of knowledge presented by a teacher; it restricts the progress of the students and in enhancing their perception about society. Inclusive curricula are based on the view that learning occurs when students are actively involved in putting their learning to real-life experience ([Udvari-Solnar, 1996](#)).

Scholars have advocated certain guidelines toward building consensus for equity and inclusion in education. These lessons include the need for a shared understanding of the rationale for and the purpose of the changes with an understanding of the added value of the proposed changes. Champions, that is, those who are committed to such changes, should try to work toward mass appeal and communicate their projects to those who are keenly interested in developing their own inclusive agenda. Communicating with the stakeholders will help reach others and help build a path toward inclusiveness (UNESCO, 2017).

SUMMARY

Educational change appears to be apparently simple but politically and socially complex (Fullan, 2007). Moving toward inclusion and equity can be a daunting task and may not always be understood or welcomed in contexts where people have become used to segregated education or educators doubt their ability to cope with learners' diversity or avoid challenging situations. As an educator, one must try to mobilize opinion in favor of these principles of equity and inclusion. A well-functioning education system requires changemakers to promote and communicate policies that focus on the participation and achievement of all learners. Such policies should have the scope to address the disadvantages faced by some groups in the population. In this book, authors from various parts of the world have discussed and examined interventions that they have been actively involved with promoting inclusiveness and diversity in classroom setting. The overview of the chapters will give an insight and promote the levers of change toward equity and inclusivity in education.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

In "Global Perspectives on Academic Integrity," by Constance Bygrave and Özen Aşık, the authors describe culturally relevant teaching strategies by describing culturally sensitive pedagogical strategies effectively used by post-secondary faculty and administrators in North America while handling international students hailing from different backgrounds and cultures who may or may not share the same issues and understanding of integrity that is commonly practiced in North American universities with respect to academic integrity. The chapter proposes various strategies that can be used by educators to help international (particularly Asian) students who mastered the art of repeating the teacher's words verbatim (with or without citation) to interpret the master's words in their own voice. Evidence-based approaches are identified in this chapter to encourage post-secondary educators and administrators to progress from a retributive, consequence-based approach nurtured by them toward plagiarism and further convert it to an intrinsic reward and virtues-based approach thus promoting student self-authorship.

In "Valuing Knowledge(s) and Cultivating Confidence: Contributions of Student-Faculty Pedagogical Partnerships to Epistemic Justice," by Alise de Bie,