

The Seven Principles for Inclusive Education

1. Teaching All Students

Students learn in different ways. It is, therefore, important to develop the skills to teach in different ways. For example, some students learn best when introduced to information visually, while others learn best through hearing information, working in groups or activity-based projects. By using several different approaches to the same material within the same lesson or activity, information can become more interesting and tangible to a greater number of students.

Some ways to accomplish this are:

- **Think of three different ways to teach a lesson.** You could teach a new concept or definition by: (1) having students create a web map on newsprint to represent a concept or a definition (visual), (2) giving a brief lecture about the concept or definition (auditory), or (3) having students act out the concept or definition using various clues (kinesthetic). Of course, there are other strategies as well, such as doing a group brainstorm on chart paper to evoke students' prior knowledge about what they already know about the topic, reading a story aloud that illustrates the concept or inviting students to draw an illustration of what they guess the concept might mean. There are many modes to uncover student knowledge and expand new ideas. By incorporating at least three different approaches in your instruction, you will have increased your student's learning outcomes by a factor of three.
- **Ask other teachers how they have taught or would teach a lesson.** Try out new approaches, even if you may not have used that approach before.
- **Share with your colleagues** a lesson that you created and ask if they see evidence of the three learning styles being addressed or have any other ideas or suggestions. Learn from each other!
- **Listen carefully to student's questions and comments.** Learning is a dialogue between students and teachers, with both asking questions and seeking answers from each another. Allow and encourage students to feel comfortable enough to ask for more information, or to seek clarification of information that has already been given. Draw upon the prior knowledge and life experience that students bring to the classroom. Integrate their comments and questions authentically into discussion.
- **Expect student's backgrounds and abilities to be different.** Try to be considerate of these differences and help the students reflect on their individuality and to cultivate a sense of belonging in your learning community.

2. Exploring Multiple Identities

Building confidence and affirming identity for students supports their learning. Students who are excited about themselves and other people, and who are inquisitive about the world around them will more easily learn to be compassionate and understanding of people who are different from them. They are less likely to hold negative feelings about others, if they are comfortable with themselves and also with those who are different.

Here are some ways to affirm and encourage student's identities:

- **Create activities** that help students talk about, and feel pride in, themselves and their unique experiences.
- **Engage students in projects** where they can talk about their *experiences* as it relates to the academic content, so that their experiences gain status by becoming part of academic knowledge.
- **Encourage all aspects of each student's individuality.** Let them know it is okay to be themselves.
- **Create an environment where it is safe to wonder and investigate about self and others.** Help students to see that none of us is a “final product!” Rather, we are all in a constant state of developing as learners and as members of our communities.
- **Discuss all areas in which a student may find opportunities for success** — academic, artistic, athletic, physical, emotional and personal.
- **Help students understand** the ways in which their identities and their experiences may be linked to their gender and sexual identity, their ethnicity and racial identity, or their religious beliefs and religious identity.
- **Maintain a respectful environment among the students.** Help them to use respectful language and behaviors with all their classmates and peers. Work with students so that they learn to disagree respectfully. Students should not shy away from conflicting ideas but learn how to use divergent points of view as an opportunity to deepen their understanding of themselves and others. Cultivate a classroom community where questions are welcomed and expected.

3. Preventing Prejudice

All of us are influenced by the legacy of institutionalized inequalities that permeate history as well as the stereotyped ideas and images we encounter every day. The best way for an educator to address preconceived stereotypes and to prevent them from escalating into feelings of prejudice and bias is to create awareness. This can be done by discussing students' stereotypes in both large and small groups.

*This topic may bring up some challenges and sensitivities from the class and the teacher, as well. Here are some ways to discuss the topic of prejudice. It is important to talk about all topics the students bring up. If the educator feels uncomfortable speaking about specific topics, please feel free to contact **Tanenbaum** about ways to address or improve the situation.*

These are a number of suggestions about how to create student awareness of stereotyped beliefs and inequality:

- **Teach explicitly about histories of unfairness, or institutionalized inequality.** Guide students in understanding that institutionalized inequality is not everybody's fault, but that it is everybody's responsibility to become aware, and to create fair and equitable learning communities.
- **Talk about all of the student's feelings and attitudes.** Do not ignore prejudicial behaviors or feelings. They will not go away on their own. Cultivate a productive atmosphere of trust, examination and responsibility rather than one of guilt.
- **Set clear boundaries and rules** about behaviors that are based on prejudices, such as teasing, bullying or excluding. Set goals for an anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-biased classroom or learning community. Work explicitly with students to create ways to recognize and interrupt discriminatory or biased language and acts. Be clear with students that you and they will benefit from an inclusive learning community.
- **Introduce key words to students that can alert them to the presence of a stereotype.** "All women..." "They always..." "My people would never..." and "Those people..." are a good start.
- **Help students to identify prejudicial behavior (as opposed to making generalizations).** We all put people, places and things into categories so that we can contextualize them in relationship to ourselves. But when we place a value on people that is less than the value we place on ourselves, we are prone to treat those people in an unfair manner.
- **Don't be afraid to talk about stereotypes.** If you do not feel you have been able to get a point across, you can always come back to it at a later time, or consult with another educator for assistance.
- **Train students to discern fact from fiction, especially when it comes to stereotypes.** If a student makes a statement or uses words that are prejudiced or are based on a stereotype, the teacher should address the situation by asking questions about the information source, asking whether there are other points of view on the stereotype, provide concrete information that will enable students to rethink their stereotypes based on new information.

For example, if a student says that women are not good at sports, ask the student, "What makes you say that?" or "Does anyone know of women who have excelled in sports?" Try to help students gain an understanding of their own source(s) of misinformation. Then, engage in activities and dialogue that illustrate the many professional and amateur female athletes, who have defined sports throughout the ages (such as Wilma Rudolph, Kerri Strug, Lisa Leslie, Dara Torres, Mia Hamm, Serena Williams, Venus Williams and more).

- **Develop dialogue and reflection.** Help the students ask themselves, *Why do I feel this way? Where did I learn this misinformation? How can I incorporate and act upon this new information?*

4. Promoting Social Justice

Young people are good judges of what is or is not fair. Talk to students about issues of fairness, and of justice or injustice in terms of equality for all.

Here are some ways to promote social justice in your classroom:

- **Make comparisons.** Help students compare situations of injustice in their own lives to larger social issues. For some students, their experiences of injustice are directly linked to larger social issues, such as access to equitable education, immigration rights and civic neglect of urban environments. For other students, these larger social issues will be “new” ideas with which to grapple. These dialogues help students develop empathy and awareness of their personal context within the broader community.
- **Develop a worldview.** Encourage students to explore their perspective on issues within and outside their immediate communities and their relationship to the larger world. For example, if the air or water in their community is polluted, what are the sources of pollution?
- **Engage in critical thinking.** Ask students to explore why they think what they think and examine where they got their opinions. Have they taken other people’s perspectives into account? Assist students in activities to gain accurate information or to see other perspectives.
- **Explore power dynamics.** Ask students if every view has been represented in a given situation. Ask students to explore how they define “power,” who has power, who doesn’t, and examine issues of access to power. Use students’ own experiences to explore power dynamics. Who has greater or lesser power on sports teams? In math or spelling or beauty competitions? In the classroom? In the school?
- **Encourage students to develop a sense of civic responsibility.** Use academic learning to encourage students to understand their unique roles in society and the contributions that they can make. Provide role models by teaching about students and communities who have created social change.
- **Bring these discussions into all subject areas.** Don’t limit your discussions to one day a week, month, or year. Fully integrate a social justice perspective into all content areas. These topics can be addressed continuously and in many different contexts. For example, you can draw attention to a character’s behavior in a book or in a math problem that compares the resources of one city with another.
- **Service learning and action planning.** Get students involved in taking social justice issues into their own hands. Service opportunities can help students feel empowered to address issues of inequity in their own communities. Help students develop concrete projects that are achievable and relevant in their own communities. Guide students in critically examining the misguided assumptions of taking on the role of “rescuer” in humanitarian aid/“charity work.” Engage the voices and viewpoints of the communities with which the service learning is taking place.

5. Choosing Appropriate Materials

It is important to choose books and materials that reflect accurate images of diverse peoples. Books, magazines, movies, web-based media and handouts can be guides for behavior and ideas, but they also have the potential to perpetuate some stereotypes. Read over all materials you are planning to use with students and decide if they promote a positive and appropriate image of people and themes.

The following are a number of things to keep in mind when choosing what you present to the students:

- **Be diverse.** Have multiple pictures, sources, or readings by and about different groups and people.
- **Let groups speak for themselves.** Use sources from within the contexts you are studying. For example: when studying about women, make sure you use women authors to describe situations, not just men writing about women.
- **Experts are everywhere.** Go outside the traditional people, organizations and resources to find sources that relate to your studies. These will offer a unique perspective that can round out more traditional sources. Draw from the richness of democratic media such as YouTube, blogs and other interactive sources.
- **Use primary sources.** Secondary sources are useful – but are used best to accompany primary sources and not as a stand in for them.
- **Show past and present images of different groups.** Societies and cultures are constantly changing and people often appear very different now from how they may have appeared in the past. It is important for students to recognize the ways in which culture and people change over time. For example, ceremonial dress is for ceremonies. Make sure that students don't confuse the actions and dress celebrating an important day for a cultural or religious group, with the usual daily actions and dress of that same group.

6. Teaching and Learning about Cultures and Religions

It is important that students learn about other cultures and religions in a positive and comfortable manner. This includes learning about the cultural and religious differences among their peers – as well as other cultures and religions that are more remote from their experiences.

Some ways to do this are:

- **Teach students the value of asking questions.** As a teacher, model ways of asking respectful questions in the classroom or learning community. Encourage them to think about how to ask respectful questions of each other and to practice doing so.
- **Discuss appropriate ways to ask questions about identity, religion, culture and race.** Help the students use positive terms to gain information about others.
- **Provide anonymous ways for students to ask questions** such as an anonymous “question box” in a prominent place in the classroom. This is essential for a learning community that hopes

to open dialogue. When students realize they may ask previously silenced questions, they can become more eager participants in their learning.

- **Emphasize that culture is not a fixed or permanent condition.** Society and culture are constantly changing. Languages, religions, rituals, traditions and ways of knowing change over time. People often appear very different now from how they may have appeared in the past. It is important for students to recognize the evolving nature of, and the inaccuracies of, previously assumed images.
- **Allow opportunities for students to learn about the ever changing cultures of the world.** Complicate this goal through a range of subjects - not just social studies. For example, an *abacus* can be a tool to teach both math and the similarities between Chinese, Japanese, and Russian cultures. Yet, the use of the abacus has changed drastically in the past fifty years, especially the past ten years – the lifetime of many of our students - so these kinds of examples should be approached with a contemporary framework. Furthermore, avoid making sweeping statements about “Chinese, Japanese, and Russian cultures” or other cultural groups. There is vast diversity within every cultural group. It may be more helpful for students to grasp the notion of diversity within groups and geographic regions than to try to oversimplify the experiences of a certain people, nation or region.
- **Help students see a range of nuanced views and make connections within and between cultures.** For example, a generalization such as “Muslim women cover their hair” is not only false, but it does not address the range of beliefs among Muslims about modesty in dress and what that entails. A more helpful discussion may guide students in seeing connections between Islam and other religions where people may cover their hair in different instances due to religious requirements and preferences (for example: Amish women, Jewish women, Greek Orthodox women, Sikh men and women, Catholic women, etc.) These discussions require constant attention to nuance and acknowledging the spectrum of practices that spring from the range of ways people interpret their religious teachings and beliefs.

7. Adapting and Integrating Lessons Appropriately

It is important that educators be flexible in the adaptation of all the lessons in our curriculum as well as pre-scribed curriculum in general. Sometimes, the most teachable moments are unplanned and unscripted. Often pre-designed lessons are a good starting point for dialogues or critical thinking.

Some ways to do this include:

- **Be mindful of who is in your classroom, so that the lessons can be more culturally-relevant.** When utilizing a lesson that shows representations of a particular place (such as the country of Kenya in East Africa), first ask students if they have ever been to the place in question. **The students who have been there, or have family from there, may be able to participate in the activity in a leadership role.** Also, be cognizant that stereotypes or ignorance on the part of students or educators can make some students hesitant to share their connection or personal stories. Students and families may feel more trusting to share stories in a classroom that makes distinctions among the range of perspectives and experiences held by individual Kenyan families and that avoids the all-too-common pitfall of assuming that all experiences from Kenya, or worse, from the continent of Africa, are similar. It is also presumptuous

to assume that the student from the place in question is an expert or wants a leadership role. Caution should be taken to be certain that the student is comfortable sharing. For example, students or family members, who have survived severe conditions and possibly entered the United States as refugees, may not have a desire, nor be prepared to “show and tell” something about their homeland.

- ***Proceed with caution and thoughtfulness about student family histories.*** Provide meaningful opportunities for students to present their beliefs and traditions, based on their own readiness and willingness to share them. This is very important so that you can make connections throughout the various lessons to their personal experiences. Themes of family history and immigration are commonly used in classrooms that aim to bring a multicultural perspective; however, when doing this, a social justice perspective points to the need to include discussions on the forced immigration of enslaved people and refugee people as well as the forced migration and genocide of American Indian people. Children of adoption and foster care may not have access to stories of “where my family is from,” so caution needs to be taken in how to include stories of questioning. Do not assume students have access to family history, or that it is a topic with which the family wants to share.
- ***Do not assume that you can tell where students are from or how they identify just by looking at them, by the sound of their names or articles of dress.*** Remember race and ethnicity are social constructions, not scientific law.