Making Teaching Spaces Safer and Inclusive

1 Introduction

This Guide provides easy to use strategies for teachers to work with students to make learning and teaching spaces safer and inclusive.

Inclusive and safe teaching spaces are important to enable the full participation of all students in the diverse UOW community; to demonstrate the university's commitment to respect and social inclusion; and to enable students to develop skills and experience in equal opportunity. Regardless of the subject content, it is important for students and teachers to appreciate that respect and inclusion of each other apply – they are about *how* we learn and *how* we communicate rather than only what we learn.

All classrooms include diverse students and teachers – whether or not differences are visible or acknowledged. How teachers set up teaching spaces, both in classrooms and online, can create teaching environments in which difference is respected, or can enable behaviours that may make people feel invisible, excluded or disrespected due to assumptions about differences associated with gender identity, sexuality, disability, religion, race and cultural background, migration status, class and suburb of origin.

This Guide aims to provide strategies for teachers to work with students to make learning and teaching spaces safer and inclusive. These strategies are a starting point for signaling and maintaining a general commitment to respect, safety and inclusion in any classroom. The focus is on respect and inclusion for trans and non-binary students, recognising that stereotypical or traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity can be limiting for everyone. Making spaces safer and more inclusive for gender diverse students benefits all students and teachers, and these strategies provide a foundation to enhance the inclusivity of the classroom for everyone.

2 Getting Started: Your first class

Pedagogical scholarship has established the importance of the approach and content of early classes in setting the expectations, tone and dynamics of the class for the entire semester. First tutorials, seminars or lectures are a valuable opportunity to establish the class as a safe, inclusive and respectful environment. Part of achieving this involves talking to students about what these ideas mean and what your expectations are of them in realising them. Another part of achieving this is 'doing' inclusion and respect through activities that generate these behaviours in students (and demonstrate them in us as teachers!)

Teachers can emphasise that none of us can presume to know the identity, background or experiences of individuals in the class – these are not always 'visible' or shared. Consequently, we must conduct ourselves in a manner that does not assume to know another's identity, background and experiences. When we presume or guess we may be implicitly informed by norms and stereotypes, and these perhaps 'benign' or 'accidental' presumptions can have significant impacts on others, who may experience them as offensive, harmful or dehumanising. There are a range of identities that cannot be presumed, such as disability, religion, race, class and migration status, in addition to gender and sexuality.

Acknowledgment of Country

Acknowledgment of Country is an important demonstration of the respect that the University and its staff and students have for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Acknowledgment can also be a grounded way through which to start students thinking about their responsibilities to people and place vis-à-vis their own physical and cultural relationships with the classroom, university, broader geographical area and local communities. Please refer to the Woolyungah Indigenous Centre guidelines 'You Can't Say That!' Hints and Tips, including guidance on Welcome to Country, Acknowledgment of Country, consultation and communication.

When teaching online, encourage students to acknowledge the country they are joining from, either as part of their introductions or in the platform chat function.

Introductions: Options for creating a safer and inclusive teaching space

Introductions are important for teachers and students. Students do not necessarily know each other's names and backgrounds. Introductions are an important opportunity to create connection and cohesion within the class as well as to provide an opportunity for students to name and define themselves.

Option 1 Pronoun Round: One way to avoid stereotyping is to allow all individuals to introduce themselves to the class and teacher and identify their name and gender pronoun.

Option 2 Name cards: students can create name cards to put on their desk which you can then cross-reference with photo rolls. This can also enable students and teachers to learn names more easily than by using a sign on sheet. Name cards can include both name and gender pronoun.

Option 3 Sign on sheet: circulate a sheet for students to indicate attendance, as well as name and pronoun. Refer to this brief piece on including a column for preferred pronoun: https://www. insidehighered.com/advice/2014/09/19/simple-classroom-change-make-trans-students-feel-home-essay

Option 4 Icebreaker pairs: Students can have a brief chat to a partner in which they cover 2-3 things about themselves such as name, pronoun, favourite food, favourite movie etc. The other student then introduces that student to the class. This might require some introductory explanation re pronouns and preferred names to ensure appropriate introduction of peer to the class.

Option 5 For online teaching: Include your name and gender pronoun in your video conferencing name, and encourage students to do the same. Similarly include gender pronouns in names for asynchronous delivery via digital platforms.

These strategies avoid teachers cold-calling the roll in their first class, which can cause discomfort and distress to students who have different names due to their gender identity, disassociation from family related to childhood trauma or violence and divorce or domestic violence. They also avoid referring to students other than by name (e.g. he, she) without knowing their preferred gender pronoun. Using the strategies set out above, teachers are able to respectfully learn the preferred names and pronouns of all students. It is then important to adjust the working roll accordingly and to make this working roll available to any other teaching staff throughout semester.

Your pronouns: Including your own pronouns on name tags/cards, Zoom and Webex titles and email signatures will encourage students to do the same.

Substantive Content

Another part of creating and sustaining a safe, inclusive and respectful class is to be mindful of how we talk (or fail to talk) about difference in the substantive content of the semester. Here are some strategies for discussing difference and increasing the representation of diverse voices in the curriculum:

1 Acknowledge the underlying assumptions of the discipline: It is important to point out to students that many disciplines are embedded in problematic ideas around differences - including gender, sexuality, race, religion, ability and class. Teachers can emphasise that thinking critically and engaging with the subject content also means pointing out problems with the discipline's underlying assumptions – where these are both explicit and implicit. Do not treat these problems as self-evident, or avoid difficult conversations about them.

2 Curriculum audit: Audit your curriculum, including readings, case studies, assessments and other teaching materials. How diverse is your curriculum? How representative is it of the broader community, and your classroom? Ensuring that a diversity of voices are represented across gender, sexuality, race, class and religion will not only enhance your curriculum, but also enable students to see themselves in their leaning.

3 Critical self-reflection: Spend time in class supporting students to engage in critical self-reflection on their own position and how it influences their worldview. Encourage them to explore how their background and life experiences influences their perspective on the discipline and the material. Model this critical self-reflection as a teacher in relation to the curriculum.

Reasons for students to care about respect and inclusion

We cannot assume that students will view respect and inclusion as being of intrinsic importance. Students might require additional reasons to persuade them to engage in these behaviours. Thus, in addition to activities that can foster respect and inclusion, you might also want to discuss with students why respect and inclusion is important for them in more material or tangible senses. This discussion could identify the core principles underpinning class communications throughout the semester, and can also be spelt out in the subject outline.

Linking respect and inclusion to the Student Code of Conduct

From the UOW Student Charter: Rights include: 'a safe and secure environment that is free from discrimination, bullying or harrassment'. Responsibilities include: 'respect the diversity of the University and broader communities' and 'behave responsibly and honestly in ways that are considerate of the rights and needs of others and refrain from behavior that may adversely affect the experiences of others.'

Linking respect and inclusion to assessment

If you have a class participation component to assessment, you might be able to link respect and inclusion to fulfilling the assessment criteria. For example, active and respectful contributions to class and listening (e.g. related to such assessment criteria as 'ability to actively listen, respect for other's ideas, no domination, preparedness to listen to others').

Linking respect and inclusion to graduate outcomes and to future employability

Respect and inclusion are important for UOW Graduate Qualities eg. 'effective communicator: articular ideas and convey them effectively and 'responsible: understand how decisions can affect others'. Most jobs (notably with government and NGOs) have a selection criterion based on equal opportunity and respect for doversity. Students can use class as an opportunity to develop these skills. If they display them to their teachers this might be noted in any job reference that academic provides to the students. Respect and inclusion are also relevant to many professions that students are training for. For example, if in disciplines where many students go on teaching jobs, they will be required to implement safe schools and anti-bullying policies in schools. Journalists will be expected to adhere to a Code of Ethics and lawyers will need to work with diverse clients.

3 Keeping On Track

Of course, even with the best setting up in your subject outline, first lecture and/or first tutorial, there can be moments during session when incidents arise and class becomes a less inclusive space. Tips for managing difficulties, getting back on track or staying on track:

Use inclusive language

Use non-binary collective terms such as people, students, folk, class, instead of binary ones (guys, girls etc.). Don't refer to or separate groups based on gender.

Accidental mis-gendering

If you make a mistake about someone's pronoun, correct yourself. Going on as if it did not happen is actually less respectful than making the correction. This also saves the person who was misidentified from having to correct an incorrect pronoun assumption that has now been planted in the minds of classmates or anyone else who heard the mistake. That said, do not apologise profusely. A single simple apology and correction acknowledges the error without continuing to make the affected student more uncomfortable. Also ensure that you correct the mistakes of others regarding pronouns, whether or not the misgendered person is present [taken from Dean Spade's piece, 'Making classrooms welcoming'].

Calling in rather than calling out

Calling out a student in front of the whole group for making a gender mistake can be upsetting or embarrassing for that student too. So it can be best to call them in to see you at the end of the class, and explain why their language choices were not appropriate. You might want to speak to the person about who the mistake was made too.

Moderating

If a student is mis-gendering another, you can interrupt to correct them and move on. If students are organising a class activity and proposing to divide the group according to gender, gently suggest another option that includes non-binary students (e.g. according to shoe colour or number of letters in their name). Phrases such as "how about we do this instead", or "let's be more inclusive and do it this way" can be helpful here. The Guardian provides a useful overview:

"The key is in educating students as to why [transphobia] is harmful. I've found that the simplest method is by far the most effective: assume ignorance rather than bigotry and explain why it is offensive. I usually start off by saying, "I know you probably don't mean it this way, but…" and finish off by saying, "so make sure you are presenting your views accurately." Once explained, adopt a zero-tolerance policy on future transphobia. As with all forms of behaviour management, consistency is key: challenge each and every time. It won't take long for the message to sink in that you don't permit transphobic remarks in your classroom, thus creating a safer environment for trans students." (http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/oct/29/transgender-supporting-students-school-lgbt)

Shutting down

Sometimes, something really inappropriate can be said or done in class. Tutors and lecturers should step in and stop it from continuing. You could try saying: "we don't make jokes like that in this space" or "come on, you know that's not appropriate".

Don't be afraid to refer back to the rules you set up in the first tutorial, or the ones set out in the subject outline if needed. You can remind students that their participation is assessed on their respect for others and their views.

It is vital to do something. Unfortunately, harassment is unlikely to go away on its own. Ignoring bad behaviour including hurtful use of language will allow it to continue and sends a negative message to other students. Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation. You may not know exactly what to say, but you must stop harassment. You can always go back to the student and say or do something else if you feel you did not respond well.

Listening

Remind yourself and your class that respect for others comes not only from the language choices we make, but also how we listen to others and give them space to express themselves.

Find Out More about Inclusive Teaching

Links to UOW Guidelines

Inclusive Language Guideline

Gender Affirmation Guideline You

Can't Say That! Guide

Inclusive Teaching Resources

Pronouns 101

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Links to UOW resources to ensure accessibility online

Making online content accessible

Making videos accessible

Making images accessible

Links to UOW Centres amd Networks

Woolyungah Indigenous Centre

Safe & Respectful Communities

Ally Network

This Guide was developed by the Feminist Research Network in response to student-identified needs, in collaboration with UOW Allsorts, UOW Ally Network, Safe and Respectful Communities, Woolyungah Indigenous Centre, Sarah Ailwood, Rachel Loney-Howes and Trish Mundy. It was adapted from an earlier guide developed by Felicity Bell, Tanja Dreher, Nicola Marks, Josh Pallas, Linda Steele, Ika Willis and participants in the FRN workshop on this topic. Graphic Design by Shirin Demirdag.

This Guide is continually updated. If you have a suggestion for a useful resource or strategy that could be included, please contact the Feminist Research Network Co-Convenors, Dr Sarah Ailwood and Dr Rachel Loney-Howes.