



Beyond the Single Classroom **The Paired Dimension in Inclusive Teaching**

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Abstract: As recently as ten years ago, inclusive learning was seen by some as a mere buzzword. Today, for many, it is the wave of the future. At most institutions of higher learning, faculty are increasingly adopting and incorporating inclusive learning strategies their courses. This article goes beyond the single faculty approach in inclusive learning, and examines an approach that involves pairing up faculty in two unrelated disciplines, and providing a continuum that takes learning from one classroom to the next.

I. INTRODUCTION

American institutions of higher education recruit and admit students from a wide range of academic backgrounds. While some are admitted from private high schools, others come in from public high schools. Even among public high schools, there are such vast differences in curricular content that students often enter college lacking a shared academic experience. For institutions of higher education, the challenge is to develop, as early as possible, a common shared academic experience for each entering class of students. In most colleges and universities, this is generally done through freshman seminars. Here,

students are provided a common academic experience that prepares them with the needed skills to succeed in the upper division courses and in college.

A variety of pedagogies are used to achieve this goal. They include:

1. Active learning: a student-centered pedagogical approach that actively involves students in the learning process, teaches skills for problem-solving rather than for information memorization, and prepares students to be engaged citizens and concerned participants in society;¹ Here, the instructor serves primarily as an enabler in the learning process.

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2. Peer tutors: a pedagogical approach wherein students learn by helping others learn;² tutoring partners mediate each other's learning, through an interactive process, and new knowledge is unveiled through a cognitive process of thinking, questioning, explaining, and problem solving.
3. Service learning: a "course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and b) reflect the service activity in such as way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility."³ While other forms of community service, such as volunteering, may have educational benefits, the integration of community service activities and academic objectives is uniquely experienced in the service learning approach.
4. Inclusive teaching: a pedagogical approach that does "not exclude students, accidentally or intentionally, from opportunities to learn."⁴ It is this approach that was adopted, and revised and elaborated upon in this article.

Inclusive teaching was born out of the need to accommodate the growing diversification of educational institutions. Of the more than 15 million students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States in 2000, 26.9 percent were racial and ethnic minorities (11 percent African Amer-

¹ Susan Hanson, <http://www.colorado.edu/geography/virtdept/library/activeped/html/section1.html>

² Goodlad, Sinclair; Hirst, Beverley, *Peer Tutoring, A Guide to Learning by Teaching*, New York: Nichols Publishing, 1989, p. 1

³ Robert G. Bringle and Julie A. Hatcher, "A Service-Learning Curriculum for Faculty." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 2 (1995), p. 112.

⁴ <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/inclusive/>

ican; 5.9 percent Asian/Pacific Islanders; 9.1 percent Latinos; and 0.9 percent Native Americans).⁵ According to Educational Testing Service (ETS, 2000), by 2015, some 2.6 million new students will be added to institutions of higher education. As many as 80 percent of this increase will be minorities, and 31 percent will be older students. Among the challenges faced by many of these students include feelings of isolation, stereotyping, and cultural incongruence. In such an environment, there is a growing need for teaching to become increasingly inclusive.

According to Graham Webb, inclusive teaching involves a shift in focus from content to the context of learning, in the learning environment.⁶ The key premise so far has been to focus attention on how the teaching and learning environment can be 'enabling' for students. It is assumed that all students can benefit from teachers being aware of the diversity in their classrooms and adapting instruction accordingly. Through collaboration between faculties and support services a network of support is offered to both students and staff with the inclusive view that diverse learners add value to classroom and to the institution.⁷

II. INCLUSIVE LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

Many of the existing theories on inclusive teaching focus on the instructor and his or her classroom. In most cases, the theories are designed to empower the educator rather than the student. The model, presented here as an "Inclusive Learning Partnership," goes beyond the single instructor/single classroom approach, to

⁵ National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2000a).

⁶ Graham Webb, <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/inclusivity/Practices/1.html>.

⁷ Kay Gardner, <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/inclusivity/Practices/3.html>

linking two instructors and two erstwhile unrelated courses. The same cohort of students is taught by the two instructors from two different disciplines. It is a model that empowers the students a lot more than it empowers the instructors, and thereby fits within the broader landscape of innovative pedagogies in first-year seminars. Its unique focus on race across two disciplines, however, distinguishes it from other first-year seminars in inclusive teaching.

The course was designed in response to a program offered by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Professor John Fobanjong is a Political Science instructor; and Professor Patricia White is an English composition instructor. Within the aegis of a University sponsored program (see the Appendix), the two partnered and agreed to teach the same group of first-year students. Any university instructor would attest that first-year college students are among the most challenging group of students to teach. Along with the challenges of a rigorous college curriculum, they have to deal with the challenges of transitioning and adjusting to college life. The courses partnered in the experiment were Professor Fobanjong's Introduction to African American Politics; and Professor White's Critical Writing and Reading I course. The courses were scheduled sequentially, with Professor Fobanjong's course going from 8:00 AM to 8:50 AM, and Professor White's meeting from 9:00 AM to 9:50 AM.

In Professor Fobanjong's class, students had the opportunity to study the historical contributions African Americans have made to political development in the United States. In the process, students were exposed to a wide range of racially sensitive and provocative concepts. Among them are the concepts of racial inequality, slavery, the Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws, segregation, institutional prejudice and discrimination, civil rights and affirmative action. Ordinarily, these concepts are

divisive. When first raised in class, students as a whole generally took a defensive posture. However, as debate and discussion proceeded, everyone gradually got comfortable. As they became increasingly comfortable, they were able to think and analyze the concepts more critically. At 8:50 AM, as they left to walk over to Professor White's class, they continued discussing the concepts along the hallways.

Professor White usually began her class by asking students to say what they had discussed in Professor Fobanjong's class. Using the Socratic approach, she would follow up on their responses to make sure that their grasps of the subject matter went beyond the superficial. Once she was convinced that students had a clear understanding of the concepts, she then invited them to "freewrite" an essay on any of the topics in the course that they found especially stimulating. As part of the classroom assignment, they would write one paragraph summarizing the topic and a second paragraph giving their reaction to it. For a take-home writing assignment, the assignments would be longer and more elaborate.

Twice during the semester, the two professors came together to show a film. Because the films dealt with themes of race, ethnicity and civic responsibility, they reinforced what students were learning in the classroom. Both instructors would direct a discussion of the movie, and students would then be assigned another take-home written assignment wherein they would summarize and synthesize the film and its content.

III. RESULTS

Based on the assumption that an idea is never a great idea until it has been discussed, debated, challenged and tested against the ideas of others, students had the opportunity not only to conduct ongoing

reflections on the issues and values learned, but to write thoughtfully about them. These reflections were carried out through a variety of exercises, both oral and written. Though offered in two different departments, the courses focused on the study of many of the same themes, looking closely at the notions of race, freedom, equality, ethnicity and identity, social movements and civic responsibility.

It takes more than the mastery of grammar and syntax to become a great writer. It takes passion, cultural sensitivity and a balanced worldview. This is what students got from the "Paired Inclusive Teaching" model. Given that the themes were thoughtfully debated and reflected on in both classrooms, by the time students got to writing about them they had already developed a strong sense of passion and ownership with the topic. Even among students who initially disagreed or took a defensive posture vis-à-vis a given concept, once they turned around and embraced the concept, they became very skilled at developing and expressing their thoughts.

The lesson here is that a culturally inclusive college classroom environment is beneficial to both the instructor and the students. It enriches the learning environment for all, as students are able to learn not just from the book or the instructor, but from one another. Positive intercultural contacts increase appreciation for diverse cultures. A student who initially starts out opposing affirmative action, for example, could, after a critical discussion and analysis of the concept, find herself or himself writing a paper in defense of affirmative action. This is an obvious reminder that critical thinking is one of the most valued skills instructors strive to develop in their students. Students will be more likely to critically examine multiple sources of knowledge and evaluate their own world-views when multiple perspectives are represented in the classroom.

Another important finding was that the

level of concentration and participation among students enrolled in a "Paired Course" tends to be high. Aware that they are going to be asked in the next class to talk and write about what they learned in the previous class, students are forced to remain alert and pay carefully attention. They become more conscientious in their note-taking, and are eager to participate in classroom discussions. By the end of the semester, not only do they develop more proactive learning habits, they learned to think and write across the disciplines.

For the paired faculty, there is also a heightened sense of diligence and conscientiousness. With the knowledge that students are going to be quizzed or asked to restate what she or he teaches on any particular day, the instructor makes certain that students leave class everyday with an adequate substance of learned material.

IV. CONCLUSION

According to the Center for Instructional Development and Research (CIDR), inclusive teaching means teaching in ways that do not exclude students, accidentally or intentionally, from opportunities to learn."⁸ The subject and focus here were students. Instructors took proactive measures to communicate to students that they were valued and welcomed. This all took place within the parameters of a single classroom. Our contention here is that, to be fully inclusive, inclusive teaching can and should be taken beyond the single classroom. Not only should it focus on students and in-class learning, it should conceptually focus on instructors, on what students discuss in the hallway as they move from one classroom to the other, and on what they learn in the next classroom. If it has been scientifically concurred that not all learning takes place in the classroom,

⁸ <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/inclusive/>

then we must by extension affirm that inclusive learning should not all be limited within the four walls of the classroom.

Other models of inclusive teaching traditionally focus either on developing course content that is sensitive to differing viewpoints, or on accommodating students from diverse gender, gender and ethnic backgrounds. Others adopt the team-teaching method, where two or more instructors from different backgrounds come in to teach the same course, but from uniquely different perspectives. The approach used in this article is the first known approach whereby instructors from two unrelated disciplines teach two unrelated courses by identifying common themes on which a continuum of learning that extends beyond a single classroom is built.

APPENDIX: THE TEACHING PARTNERS PROGRAM

The Teaching Partners Program was a call for proposals issued by the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Teaching Excellence. It invited instructors from various academic disciplines to pair up and team-teach the same cohort of students. The goal was to help enrich the first-year seminar experience. Below are additional details of the program:

What's the purpose of the program?

The Teaching Partners Program helps facilitate a sustained and intensive exchange about teaching between two or three individual faculty members. Each faculty team designs a series of activities over the academic year that best meets their particular needs and interests around teaching. The emphasis of the program is on flexibility so that focused and productive conversations about teaching are incorporated into even the most onerous of schedules.

- Each faculty team will decide how they would like to work together. Successful completion of the program entails:
- Attending an orientation and 2 meetings (one fall semester/ one spring semester) with other program participants to share suggestions and experiences;
- Meeting at least 4 times with your teaching partner over the summer and academic year to discuss teaching-related issues;
- Observing and giving feedback on one of your teaching partner's classes;
- Writing a brief reflection on the year's activities and impact on your teaching;
- Helping support the following year's Teaching Partnership program (speaking at the orientation meeting, sharing experiences and suggestions, etc.). The specific topics, activities, and themes are up to each faculty team.

Some suggestions are:

- reviewing each other's syllabi for content, clarity, organization;
- collaborating on effective use of technological tools;
- collaborating on specific content-related teaching projects;
- reviewing teaching goals, assignments, and outcomes;
- assessing classroom interaction and student engagement through classroom observation
- assessing student learning through focus group feedback;
- reviewing lecture and presentation styles through classroom observation or use of video recording;
- reviewing and responding to student evaluations;
- collaborating on developing a Teaching Portfolio.

How can you find a partner?

You are encouraged to find a colleague with whom you would like to discuss your teaching. This person does NOT have to be in your department—in fact it is often very helpful to have to explain your teaching goals to someone who does not share your disciplinary assumptions. Just be sure it is someone who is interested in collaborating with you on teaching development and with whom you can meet several times over the academic year. Some people prefer a “peer” relationship, others are looking for a more “mentor-like” relationship—it’s up to you. Contact us if you would like help in finding a partner.

What kind of support is available?

At the orientation meeting, CTE will provide material on a range of issues including guidelines for observing classroom interaction and giving constructive feedback. CTE trained Peer Coaches are available to assist teams. For greater Team Focused Projects, faculty may be considered for CTE support. CTE Resources are available on effective teaching approaches, conducting student focus groups, and developing teaching portfolios. A camcorder is available to record classroom sessions.

What should you do if you're interested in becoming a Teaching Partner?

- Send the following material via e-mail to the Center for Teaching Excellence.
- Names and contact information for participating faculty members (names, department, e-mail, phone);
- Brief overview of each person's teaching history (250 words or less);
- Brief description of the kinds of teaching-related issues you plan to work on over the academic year (500 words or less);
- Tentative outline of the activities you plan on undertaking together;
- Proposed teaching schedules including available meeting times.