

Designing for Inclusive Learning Environments

Facilitator: Angie Wong, General Education

Speakers:

- Joy Chadwick, Education
- Kelsey McColgan, Communication Studies
- Liza Choi, Nursing and Midwifery



This session on designing inclusive learning environments brings together voices from across the Mount Royal community to discuss best past and current practices on the challenges of inclusive learning. In this dialogue, we will share a dynamic range of strategies, methods, and personal experiences for creating an inclusive learning environment in your classroom.

How do you get to know and understand your students?

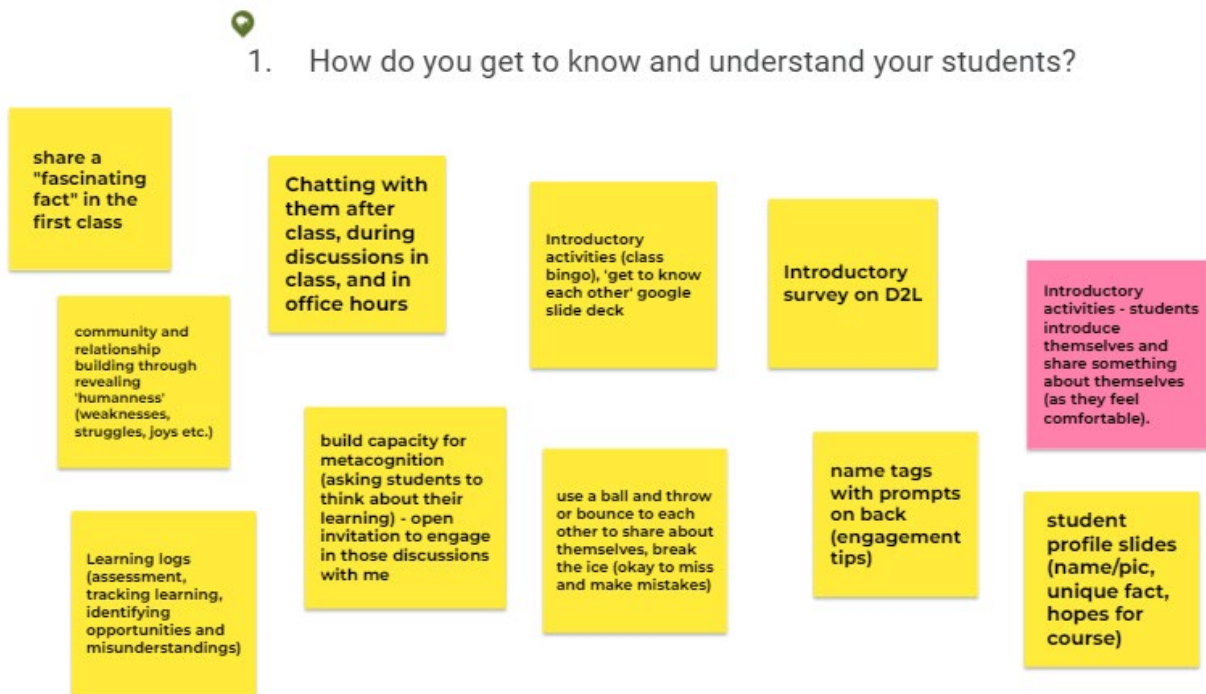
- Part of this is about relationship and community building and this cannot be rushed: it takes time to build.
- It is important to give up power and authority to develop reciprocity and trust building.
- In terms of writing, at the beginning of the first class I ask them to share a fascinating fact about themselves. This could include family, favorite things or memories, future, focus or fun.
 - Students can draw or write but they only have 5 minutes to do it.
 - They can talk about their past/present/future.
- We can also invite students to share information about themselves, such as how many of you can speak more than 1 language – this shows where students have commonalities and can lead into future discussions.
 - This is an interactive approach that connects students and builds community(ies)
- Invite students to pass a tennis ball and to share expectations of themselves and of the students in the space we inhabit together – we invite people to consider what their role is in the space.
 - When someone drops the ball, we say that it is okay: this is a space where it is safe to make a mistake and it is safe to learn. We all come to this space with different skills.
 - This creates a welcoming and open space where we can learn together and not be perfect all the time.
- Putting name tags/table tents on the desks and include on the inside of the 'table tent' some

It is important to give up power and authority to develop reciprocity and trust building.

Let students know (by way of demonstration if you can) that this is a space where it is safe to make mistakes: it is safe to learn. We all come to this space with different skills.

prompts for how they can interact in the class.

Jamboard below: session attendee input on how we connect with students at the beginning of a course



Consider Asking Students to Provide Student Profile Slides:

- Get students to fill these out before class
- Share them in the class
- Encourage students to discuss and share on specific /light topics

Student Profile Slides


Include the following:

- Name & snapshot/picture of just you (make sure your face is visible)
- your year of the program and if you have taken another inclusive education course or had experience working with individuals with special needs
- Something unique about you that your colleagues may not know
- What you hope to learn from this class

Thinking around UDL – the visual, the auditory, and the engagement

We need to consider all approaches in our teaching and being able to engage in these UDL approaches effectively requires a strong foundation: knowing your students well and getting to know them better throughout the class helps you ensure that you are able to provide an accessible learning experience and respond to students' concerns as they arise.

Assignments to Support Ongoing Awareness of Students' Experiences and Learning

- Get to know their understanding of curriculum and content through learning logs. Posing a question at the end of every week on concepts. Ask students to triangulate and synthesize their information and to do so in creative ways.
- Provide an ongoing Google doc throughout the term where students add questions and these are reviewed by the faculty who then connects back to these at the beginning of every week. This helps to understand where the students are at and can help to address any barriers to learning occurring.  which may be

Consider iterative assessment/ongoing discussion logs to have an ongoing sense of student learning.

How do you plan your courses with inclusivity in mind?

Be mindful of students' language (if they are ESL this can impact their engagement with course content)

Provide case studies related to a particular group that connects to the students. For instance, use a case study that helps understand different approaches and differing ways of experiencing the world. Promote a learning experience where students see themselves, or various aspects of their identities, in the course content.

2. How do you plan your course based on that understanding with inclusion in mind?



Inclusion:

“Anticipate who will show up and how you can welcome them.”

Addressing and Responding to Neurodivergence and Mental Health Challenges.

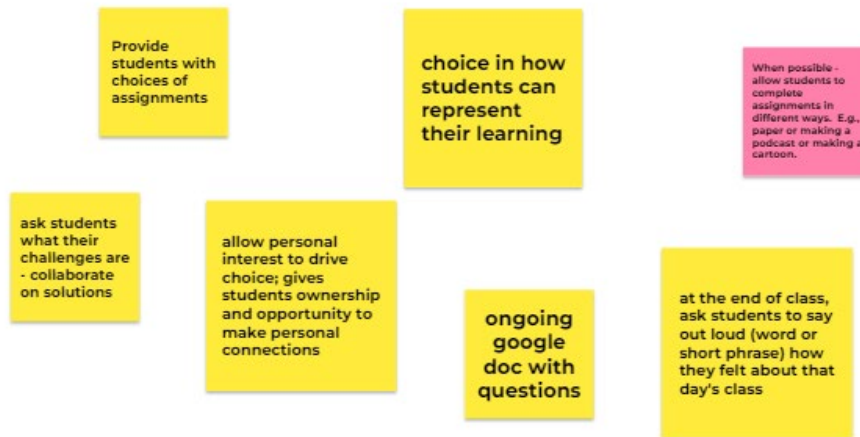
- In recent surveys of students there are anecdotally **1/10 having learning disabilities and 3/10 have mental health challenges**. Knowing this we need to consider how we approach content.
- We need to **be aware of expert bias** – things we consider simple are and can be very difficult from the perspective of comprehension this content can also be challenging from an emotional perspective and corresponds to neurodivergent issues.
- Large projects can be paralyzing for students who do not act and procrastinate. To address this we need to **build in iterative processes**. Break large projects into smaller steps and force them to work iteratively.
 - o Empathy is not enough. We need to go beyond the intent to anticipate needs to get to know and understand where our students are coming from and what needs they have that we can and should anticipate
 - o Remember, it is nerve racking to share unfinished work so forced iterative processes can be difficult. Deliver iterative assessment with this in mind.
- **To help understand the different situations that can happen it is helpful to have unconscious bias training, but we need to continue to learn and commit to continuous improvement. To do this in the most effective way we need to know our students and have a relationship of trust so we can learn from them where we are doing well and where we can improve as educators.**

How do you respond to student needs when assessing student learning?

- Active movement and visual learning are important in pedagogy but in terms of assessment it is helpful to provide choice.

- Allowing students to have choice in their assessment allows them to make personal connections which connects them more to the content:
 - o Identification of different exceptionalities is important in pedagogy that is truly UDL.
 - o Write a letter from the voice of the learner back to the teacher about what they need in the delivery of content to the individual as a learner.
 - o See Alternative Assessment Practices Notes from an earlier PD Session.
- Visual Journals
 - o This is a synthesis assignment. Students can do this by hand or using digital technologies.
- Mini – presentations (pecha-kucha)
 - o This was stressful for the students but it was a good experience – it gave them a chance to present what they had spent time researching in a quick and condensed way.

3. How do you create opportunities to respond to student needs while assessing student learning?



Creating a Trusting and Engaging Space

- Need to consider the variation/demographics of your student group.
 - At the end of the first class in the first semester – ask students to write on a card or say out loud a word or phrase about how they perceived the learning from the day (e.g. some students may say “the agenda,” “inspiring,” “tiring,” or “I feel safe”). These words let you know what you need to prepare to better engage them where needed and to know how they perceived the process.
- We do not need to wait until the end of the 13 weeks of teaching to get this feedback – We**

can invite and allow this feedback from our students. This makes them feel heard, acknowledged, and supported.

Creating Opportunities to Engage:

- Letting students know that they are not expected to be perfect and that they do not need to be on point all the time.
- Let them know that learning is iterative and there will be progress throughout the term.

Being able to give and receive critique as a gift

- Some students may have accommodations where they may not receive critique well or they may not be able to be called on in class for a comment. Rather than having a synchronous and instant exchange of feedback provide time. Have quiet time to allow students to consider their thoughts before providing critiques to peers and perhaps providing those critiques via an online forum. This allows students to more thoroughly process things and develop appropriate critiques.

Designing for the margins often benefits everyone in meaningful ways.

You can make progress on designing for the margins by developing metacognitive reflective practices so that you can work with students to come up with better processes and outcomes.