

Transforming Teaching and Learning Practices

Practices to Critically Engage Across Difference

Identify and Name Your Social Identities and Locations

- Persistently reflect on your social identities and locations in relation to systemic racism and oppression inside and outside your institution
- Acknowledge systemic inequities
- Identify your strengths and weaknesses

Be Anti-Racist, Anti-Ableist and Anti-Oppressive

- Learn about the trauma of systemic racism and oppression
- Support and validate students' intersectional identities
- Reduce students' social-emotional stress

Adopt An Intersectional Lens

- Recognize students as the subject matter experts in their own lives
- See students as individuals *and* acknowledge their intersecting identities and communities
- Honour a range of expression and communication

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

- Acknowledge the ways that campus or world events may be creating barriers to students' capacity to engage in coursework, or their sense of being welcomed and valued; acknowledge the differential impacts developments may have on different students
- Model vulnerability by sharing the ways your own identities shape your relationship to your work or the discipline
- Deepen your understanding of culture beyond race, language, etc.
- Ask students to be mindful of their own positionalities and the range of (more and less visible) identities among students in the course; this supports students' inclusive interactions with their classmates
- Consider opportunities for respectfully integrating Indigenous and African Nova Scotian perspectives and worldviews within your courses
- Consider opportunities to integrate anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-oppressive perspectives within your courses
- Understand microaggressions and how they might occur in both in-person and online environments; be ready to address them

- Stay present in dialogue; monitor it regularly and intervene when necessary
- Critically reflect on your roles and responsibilities in removing systemic barriers to student success; don't attribute disparities in outcomes exclusively to perceived deficits in students' identities, life circumstances, or capabilities
- Normalize the fact that students will have a range of background preparation and find ways of highlighting those differences as assets for learning (e.g., learners who are new to material can often pose useful critical questions that help those familiar with the material identify gaps in their understanding or think about the material in new ways)
- Provide opportunities for students to consider the relevance of course concepts to concerns of communities that they are part of
- Draw examples you use to illustrate course concepts from a range of social or cultural domains. Or invite students to identify examples from their own arenas of knowledge or expertise
- Use a background questionnaire early in the term to learn about individual students' past academic experiences, goals, concerns, or other information that could help you plan relevant and inclusive learning opportunities
- Choose course materials and activities with a range of student circumstances in mind (e.g., physical abilities and disabilities, financial and technological resources, time commitments such as work or family care obligations)
- Proactively invite requests for accommodations as a chance to include everyone more fully in learning (through a non-stigmatizing syllabus statement, a reminder in class, an email); be inclusive in your messaging to not single out students who require accommodations
- Communicate concern for students' well-being, and share information about campus resources (e.g., Counseling & Psychological Services, Sexual Assault Prevention & Awareness Center, Services for Students with Disabilities, Indigenous Advisors, Black Student Advisors)
- Ask students for concrete observations about content (e.g., simply describe an image, passage, or diagram) before moving to analytical questions; this can provide everyone a common starting point, highlight multiple different approaches, and model analytical processes you want to teach
- Present course material in a variety of modalities (readings, diagrams, lectures, podcasts) rather than relying on one mode of engagement
- Accompany verbal instructions with a written corollary; multiple modes can be helpful to students with processing disabilities as well as multilingual learners

Practices to Shift Attitudes and Mindsets

Challenge Your Mindset

- Recognize that changing attitudes are key to changing actions
- Know equity-centred practices can help all students
- Integrate an inclusion mindset to foster innovation, performance, academic and personal success, opportunities, and well-being

Expand Your View of Students

- Reorient your view to *students as co-learners*
- Value students' diversities as strengths and build on them
- Commit to identifying and removing barriers for — and challenging all — students

Embrace Intentionality

- Plan and design for predictable variability in students' lived experiences, strengths, and needs
- Formulate proactive approaches, instead of reactive approaches
- Work to move responsibility for knowledge and healing from the individual to the community

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

- Embrace learning and inclusive mindsets; accept vulnerability as without it, you miss key opportunities for growth
- Cultivate growth mindsets: Allow for productive trial and error (e.g., through low-stakes practice quizzes, drafting opportunities, modeling, or discussion of interestingly productive wrong answers). Emphasize that risk, struggle, and failure can be important parts of any learning process and/or the scientific method.
- Communicate high expectations and your belief that all students can succeed
- Remember that service provision is a teaching and learning interaction/ experience in both directions
- Hold high expectations for performance — for your students and for yourself
- Reject deficit perspectives about students' intellectual capacities or *fit* for higher education; validation and positive messaging are critical
- Tell students, "you belong;" "you can do the work;" "you can succeed;" "you have the ability;" and "you are intelligent"
- Seek opportunities to expand your own knowledge and skills in helping students with specific concerns (e.g., bias, navigating systems of oppression) as well as interfacing with equity groups
- Be open to feedback on barriers
- Establish rapport with students, groups, colleagues, and others that acknowledge differences in lived experience
- Ensure all students feel welcome as an integral part of the institution
- Learn students' names to create the feeling of *more than a number*

- Engage in continual relationship building
- Have an open mic session for students to ask general/informal questions. Or use an anonymized tool such as a question box if students do not want to be identified
- Use external community supports (like the Youth Project) to do presentations/ training for faculty and students on gender identity
- Exhibit culturally inclusive active listening skills (e.g., appropriately establishing interpersonal contact, paraphrasing, perception checking, summarizing, questioning, encouraging, avoid interrupting, clarifying)
- Allow for flexibility when assisting students who feel uncomfortable with current processes. When a student feels intimidated going to a formal meeting invite them to meet in the cafeteria over coffee and allow for pauses so students can formulate thoughts and have a chance to speak without feeling they are interrupting
- Consistently update student information to ensure all populations are included in approaches
- Demonstrate culturally inclusive advising, supporting, coaching, and counseling strategies
- Design or modify services and programs to support well-being and a positive organizational culture and ethic of care, considering students holistically

Practices to Design the Learning Environment

Be Culturally Relevant and Affirming

- Know your own cultural and social lens
- Learn about diverse cultures, lived experiences, and ways of knowing
- Connect content, assessment, and approaches/strategies to students' lived experiences and cultures

Foster A Community of Learning

- Ground decisions in accessibility and equity
- Welcome courageous conversations
- Build a learning community that goes beyond the classroom and institution

Cultivate Safe(R)/Brave Learning Environments

- Create intellectually and socially safe(r) learning environments
- Foster student voice and agency
- Establish a culture of accountability with equal space for culturally relevant conversations

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

- Recognize the importance of students' physical, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being in learning, development, and success
- Demonstrate a willingness and capacity to generate, critically examine, and change policies and practices that privilege one group of students or educational stakeholders over another
- Perceive and analyze unspoken dynamics in a group setting
- Create dedicated opportunities (time during class, dedicated office hours, online forms, etc.) for students to ask questions about assignments and expectations
- Invite students to share information about their own expectations about the learning environment based on their prior experiences to help you understand where your expectations may be mismatched and what you might need to explain
- Explicitly communicate the purpose, task, and assessment criteria for graded assignments; also identify any assumed capacities, abilities, skills, or prior knowledge embedded in your assignments or course learning activities, and connect students to resources that help them bolster those skills if necessary
- Explain the learning objectives of activities you use class time for (e.g., discussion of readings, lectures, critique of peers' work, independent work on projects)
- Ensure information is created in multiple formats
- Make your documents, presentations, and websites accessible (there are [website accessibility guidelines](#)) and check with your Centre for Learning and Teaching center or IT supports
- Make your online meetings more accessible (see the [Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate's](#) guide online for tips).
- Make videos accessible (e.g. use closed captions, have ASL interpreters when possible, create transcriptions)
- Clearly articulate core course learning objectives so you can make deliberate decisions about what elements in the course can be revised, adapted, or made optional in response to individual and/or collective student needs.
- Build in opportunities for student choice, for example, flexible or self-paced deadlines for assignments if possible; multiple options for topics or modalities for assignments; optional opportunities for instructor or peer feedback on drafts
- Design course policies that provide clear pathways if students need to be absent, turn in work late, leave class early, etc.; explain how these are designed to support student learning when unforeseen circumstances arise; avoid framing such policies as simply punitive
- Solicit feedback from students about what teaching approaches or technologies work best for their learning and be willing to make adjustments accordingly when you can
- Regularly assess student understanding of key course concepts so you can provide relevant instruction or access to supplementary materials to fill common gaps

- Prioritize student learning needs when content coverage is in tension with responding to student learning needs; be willing to adjust lecture pace, reduce information on slides, make course materials available to students for study and exam preparation, etc.
- Learn about students' prior skill and familiarity before introducing a new technology in your course; gauge how demanding learning the technology is likely to be and to make informed decisions about students' capacity to add that learning to the core learning in your course.
- Design your course with both synchronous and asynchronous options for participation; flexible design choices can help you adapt to changing conditions *and* meet student needs as they arise

Practices to Support the Learning Process

Centre Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

- Engage in personal and professional learning and development
- Apply a social justice/decolonizing/anti-racist/anti-ableist/anti-oppressive lens to programs and environments
- Commit to designing for diverse learners

Build Authentic Relationships and Rapport

- Ground relationships in humility, trust, respect, and care
- Support students' ownership of their learning and have high expectations for all students
- Reach out to students often and engage positively

Strategize For Inclusive Information Processing, Engagement, and Assessment

- Maximize choice in expression and assessment and encourage self-reflection
- Connect your practice to the neuroscience of learning
- Advance digital equity, offer flexible delivery, and ensure access

Examples of practices that align with this principle include:

- Learn and use students' names and pronouns, and encourage them to learn and use one another's, accurately pronounced and spelled; be aware that what students choose to be called may differ from the name that appears on your class roster
- Build rapport in the class through regular icebreakers, small group activities, collaborative thinking, etc.

- In course materials, meetings, and communications, express your commitment to creating an accessible, inclusive course, and invite student feedback about practices that do and don't facilitate that goal
- Assess students' prior knowledge about your field and topics so you can accurately align instruction with their strengths and needs
- Encourage or require students to visit office hours early in the term, and use that time to ask about their interests and experiences with course material
- Highlight the diversity of contributors to your discipline (through the authors you assign, the research you highlight, the guests you invite to meet with your students, etc.), and/or sponsor discussion about the reasons for a history of limited access to the field and current efforts to change it
- Seek to identify professionals who bring a range of backgrounds, including identities that are different from yours, when inviting outside critics or speakers
- Prepare outside visitors to contribute to the inclusive environment of your class meetings (e.g., make sure they are aware of community norms, accessibility needs, etc.)
- Deliberately avoid generalizations that may exclude students who are already experiencing marginalization on campus; these are often communicated through phrases (e.g., "when you go home for Thanksgiving," "if you have a child some day," "just walk over to my office," "it only costs \$x") that make implicit assumptions about students' physical ability, family structure, social identities, citizenship status, or economic means.
- Create intentional opportunities for students to provide feedback on their experience of the learning environment and share ideas for improving it; this could include short anonymous polls, check-ins at the beginning of a class meeting, or more substantial written feedback opportunities.
- Online, invite students to create short videos about themselves as a way to start building meaningful relationships; in person, find safe ways for students to meet and get to know each other
- Convey unconditional positive regard; see your students as being fully capable of succeeding; approach them in non-judgmental ways
- Develop discussion guidelines or community agreements about interactions during class (see examples at crlt.umich.edu/examples-discussion-guidelines); reflect upon those guidelines with students at strategic points throughout the term; revise them when useful
- Use strategies for including a range of voices in facilitated discussions, for example, take a queue; ask to hear from those who have not spoken; wait until several hands are raised to call on anyone; or use paired or small group conversations to seed larger discussion
- Give all students time to gather their thoughts in writing before sharing ideas with the whole group
- Task students to work in pairs or small groups on brief, well-defined activities (with a timeline and specific goals/outcomes)
- Assign student groups/teams or provide criteria for student-formed groups/teams that both help leverage diversity and avoid isolating students from underrepresented identities, when possible

- Create time and a process for students to discuss their respective strengths, personal learning goals, anticipated contributions, etc. at the beginning of group or team projects
- Give students regular opportunities to reflect upon ways their learning has been enhanced by interaction with classmates; this could be as simple as asking them to reflect on their learning at the end of a session with the question, "What did you learn from someone else today?"
- Establish processes for ensuring you're giving equitable time and attention to each student