

# Reflecting on Your Practice: Applying Inclusive Teaching Principles in Remote Teaching

## Introduction

The lists below offer examples of concrete practices, aligned with research-based inclusive teaching principles, for inclusive teaching in remote settings, especially in circumstances such as the COVID-19 crisis when (1) remote teaching has been adopted on short notice or as an after-thought, rather than integrated into the design of a course, and (2) both instructors and students are experiencing the emotional and cognitive challenges of major life disruption, unfolding crisis, and even trauma. This resource elaborates a framework for thinking about all aspects of instruction--including content selection and delivery, interactions among students and between students and instructor, and assessment--in terms of 5 elements of an inclusive learning environment:

- **Transparency:** Clearly communicating with students about expectations and norms; explaining purpose, task, and criteria for learning activities
- **Academic Belonging:** Cultivating students' sense of connection to and ability to see themselves in the discipline or profession, your course, or a community of scholars (including your class or campus)
- **Structured Interactions:** Developing protocols or processes that support equitable access and contributions to interactive elements of the learning environment – and disrupt patterns that reinforce systemic inequities
- **Critical Engagement of Difference:** Acknowledging students' different identities and experiences; leveraging student diversity as an asset for learning.
- **Flexibility:** Responding and adapting to students' changing and diverse circumstances; engaging empathetically with student needs, both emerging and persistent; balancing intentional design and commitment to providing accommodations

These five principles are relevant to any teaching setting and any discipline. This resource adapts our general [inclusive strategies reflection](#) by offering suggestions for how they might be implemented in a remote teaching/learning setting.

This resource is not intended as a check-list for ensuring your remote teaching is equitable, accessible, and inclusive. Rather, it is designed to help individual instructors reflect upon a range of inclusive teaching practices *you already use in more familiar settings* in order to reinforce those practices and show their relevance to the remote context -- as well as identify new ones you might adopt. It can be hard to slow down and reflect in a time when adaptation and change feel so urgent; this is a tool to help you do so.

Adapted from University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), 2020. Format and some content adapted from Linse & Weinstein, Shreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, Penn State, 2015. For information about the research behind these strategies, see <http://crlt.umich.edu/node/90467>.

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### Suggested Ways to Use These Lists

Reflecting upon your teaching practice, do you or would you use any of the following strategies? As you read the lists, mark each strategy using the key below.

✓ = I **regularly** use this or a similar strategy in my teaching

~ = I **sometimes** use this in my teaching

X = I **do not or would not** use this in my teaching / this is not applicable in my setting

☆ = I **would like to try** this, though I may need more information or resources

We hope this reflection provides a useful basis for further exploration of inclusive teaching practice, through conversation with colleagues, consultation with CRLT, or reading in relevant scholarship.

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### Transparency

Clearly communicating about norms, expectations, evaluation criteria.

*Examples of practices that align with this principle include:*

- \_\_\_ 1. Establish a predictable way of communicating with students, letting them know which elements of the course will be synchronous and asynchronous; where to find information about changes to meeting plans, assignments, timelines, etc.; when and how they can expect to hear from you about the course.
- \_\_\_ 2. In an easy-to-find and persistent place (e.g., the course homepage on your learning management system (LMS), not just an email), share guidance on how students should communicate with you (or others on your instructional team). Consider offering multiple options in order to maintain both transparency and flexibility.
- \_\_\_ 3. 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.
- \_\_\_ 4. 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.
- \_\_\_ 5. If you're meeting synchronously using video conferencing software, make clear whether, why, and when students should share their audio and video. Explain how they should volunteer (using a 'hand-raising' function, a chat box, a physical gesture, etc.) if they want to contribute a comment or question.
- \_\_\_ 6. Explain the learning purposes and goals of the activities you ask students to engage in, especially if you are shifting from an in-person mode of engagement to something online (e.g., if you choose to use a discussion board in your LMS where you once facilitated in-person discussion, this is a good opportunity to explain *why* you chose that particular mode, what the learning goals and benefits are, how student contributions will be structured and assessed, etc.).
- \_\_\_ 7. 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.
- \_\_\_ 8. Format assignments in predictable and consistent ways: e.g., use a template that puts information like instructions, deadlines, and grading information in the same space on every document.
- \_\_\_ 9. Offer guidance on how students might prioritize various course tasks or requirements and allocate their time strategically.
- \_\_\_ 10. Create opportunities (dedicated time during or outside of synchronous class meetings, online forms, etc.) for students to ask questions about assignments and expectations.

*What other ways do you seek to be transparent about norms and expectations? What are additional areas where you could be more explicit about your expectations or assessment process or criteria?*

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### **ACADEMIC BELONGING**

Cultivating students' sense of connection to and ability to see themselves in the discipline or profession, your course, or a community of scholars.

*Examples of practices that align with this principle include:*

- \_\_\_ 1. Communicate your willingness (and be clear about your capacity) to support students' learning and engagement across their various circumstances.
- \_\_\_ 2. Emphasize that struggle and challenge -- with both the shift to remote learning and the core learning objectives of your course -- are to be expected, and can often be important parts of a learning process, rather than signs of student deficiency.
- \_\_\_ 3. As a way of validating the range of backgrounds students bring, help students connect their prior knowledge or skills to new learning (e.g., when introducing a new topic, ask students to reflect on what they already know about the topic, or invite them to identify relevant skills they bring from different domains).
- \_\_\_ 4. 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 or video conferencing screen. In video or audio discussions, encourage students to identify themselves before speaking.
- \_\_\_ 5. 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 maintain a commitment to this practice even if you have to trim material because of a pivot to remote teaching.
- \_\_\_ 6. 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.).
- \_\_\_ 7. Communicate interest in and openness to connecting with students, individually and (especially for asynchronous courses) collectively: this might include remote open office hours, regular short assignments that are framed as opportunities for the instructor to gauge individual students' engagement, or sharing of resources connected to individual student interests (perhaps choosing a segment of your class to check in with each week to keep numbers manageable).
- \_\_\_ 8. Avoid making generalizations that may not include all students. These might include assumptions about students' comfort with technology, their economic means, responses to current events, etc. Similarly, avoid referencing pop culture in ways that assume common experience among your students. Provide links to information about apps, shows, movies, music, memes, etc. you reference.
- \_\_\_ 9. 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.
- \_\_\_ 10. Consider self-assessment opportunities (e.g. non-graded reflections, self-assessment with rubric, goal-setting activities) as a way for you and the student to understand their individual progress and learning in relation to their individual circumstances, and make use of self-assessment to support student learning.

*What other ways do you help facilitate students' sense of belonging in your class, discipline, or professional field?  
What else could you do?*

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### STRUCTURED INTERACTIONS

Using protocols or processes that support equitable access and contributions to interactive elements of the learning environment.

*Examples of practices that align with this principle include:*

- \_\_\_ 1. Build in intentional opportunities for rapport-building that leverage the remote context or digital environment: e.g., invite students to contribute to a 'playlist' of songs related to your course; assign students to pairs or small groups for part of the class meeting; use a video conferencing software's 'chat' function to do a virtual ice-breaker where everyone answers a light-hearted open-ended question.
- \_\_\_ 2. Develop discussion guidelines or community agreements to guide virtual interactions, and revisit them at strategic points throughout the term. Some of these will look the same as in a face-to-face class, some will need to be added or modified. Considerations that may be especially important to discuss with students in the remote context are:
  - Challenges related to lack of access to -- or differently visible -- non-verbal cues from others in the class (nods, puzzled expressions, signs of restlessness or attentiveness, etc.)
  - Challenges of conveying and reading 'tone' in text-based discussions, including the increased potential for misunderstanding
  - Challenges related to the visibility of students' different living situations in video conferences
  - Challenges related to disrespect and disruption enabled by semi-anonymity in online spaces and interactions.
- \_\_\_ 3. If you break students into smaller groups during online meetings, provide clear instructions about *how to work in groups*: e.g., what they should achieve in their groups, when they will return to the full group (and whether you or they will control that), what they will be expected to share with the fuller group, etc.
- \_\_\_ 4. 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?"
- \_\_\_ 5. In facilitated video/audio discussions, use strategies for including a range of voices: e.g., take a queue, provide multiple ways for students to participate in a discussion (e.g. backchannel chat during video, shared discussion notes), ask to hear from those who have not participated, use paired or small group conversations to seed larger discussion.
- \_\_\_ 6. If participating synchronously in live discussion, consider distributing the cognitive load by creating different roles for students in discussion. Rotate notetaking/scribe responsibilities to allow some people to focus on discussion and others to capture what is being said. Share notes with everyone.
- \_\_\_ 7. Give all students time to gather their thoughts individually before sharing with the whole group, whether in writing or in speech.
- \_\_\_ 8. Facilitate study behaviors by providing a process and/or online space for students to connect with each other to form study groups, ask and answer each other's questions, and to share class notes.

*What other strategies do you use to structure equitable and inclusive interactions among and with your students? What else might you do?*

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### **AFFIRMATION OF DIFFERENCE<sup>1</sup>**

Acknowledging students' different identities, experiences, strengths, and needs; leveraging student diversity as an asset for learning.

*Examples of practices that align with this principle include:*

- \_\_\_ 1. Acknowledge the ways that world events may be creating barriers to students' capacity to engage in coursework (causing change to their living situations, demands on their time and attention, relationships, health-related anxieties, etc.), and acknowledge the differential impacts developments may have on different students.
- \_\_\_ 2. In order to support students' inclusive interactions with their classmates, ask students to be mindful of their own positionalities and the range of (more and less visible) identities, circumstances, and resources among the students in the course.
- \_\_\_ 3. Reflect upon and share ways your own identities shape your relationship to your work in the discipline -- and how your circumstances shape your choices about remote teaching.
- \_\_\_ 4. 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.
- \_\_\_ 5. Use a background questionnaire to learn about individual students' past academic experiences, goals, concerns, technology resources and preferences, access needs, or other information that would help you design inclusive remote learning activities and interactions.
- \_\_\_ 6. Proactively invite student requests for accommodations as a chance to include everyone more fully in learning. Ask students to self-assess their access needs multiple times throughout a course.
- \_\_\_ 7. Communicate concern for students' well-being, and share information about campus resources and how to access them remotely (e.g., C.A.R.E. Center, Counseling & Psychological Services, Sexual Assault Prevention & Awareness Center, Services for Students with Disabilities).
- \_\_\_ 8. Affirm a range of modes of student engagement by presenting material and conducting class meetings using a variety of modalities (video conference live discussion, chat functionalities, discussion boards, screencasts, collaborative documents, lectures, podcasts, etc).
- \_\_\_ 9. As a way of supporting a sense of community, acknowledge the ways everyone is being called upon to use a potentially new set of technology skills, and normalize the fact that everyone will have learning to do, though this will look different for different people.
- \_\_\_ 10. Structure accessibility into your course by adopting -- and supporting all of your students in using -- basic accessibility practices including: alt text and image descriptions for images; closed captioning and transcripts for videos; screen reader compatibility for PDFs, docs, and webpages. Also provide multiple means of access when you deliver course content (e.g. record a live video discussion to enable students to tune in later, provide an audio description or screencast for lecture slides, provide a written transcript for video-recorded lectures or discussions).
- \_\_\_ 11. Deliberately choose course materials and activities with a range of student access needs and technology resources in mind: e.g., choose tools and platforms that can be accessed by a cell phone, in addition to tablets and computers.

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<sup>1</sup> For the Inclusive Teaching in Remote Contexts by CRLT, this section is known as "Critically Engaging Difference" Adapted from University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), 2020. Format and some content adapted from Linse & Weinstein, Shreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, Penn State, 2015. For information about the research behind these strategies, see <http://crlt.umich.edu/node/90467>.

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*What other ways do you acknowledge or affirm students' different identities, strengths, or needs in your courses? What else could you do?*

### **FLEXIBILITY**

Responding and adapting to students' changing and diverse circumstances; engaging empathetically with student needs, both emerging and persistent; balancing intentional design and commitment to providing accommodations

*Examples of practices that align with this principle include:*

- \_\_\_1. 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.
- \_\_\_2. Understand that some assignments and activities you have used during in-person courses (as well as the pace at which you cover content) will need to be adjusted for a remote context. Be willing to create new learning experiences for students that help them achieve your learning goals in the remote context.
- \_\_\_3. Design course policies that provide clear pathways when students need to be absent, turn in work late, etc.
- \_\_\_4. Build in opportunities for student choice: e.g., flexible or self-paced deadlines for assignments if possible; optional opportunities for instructor or peer feedback on drafts; multiple options for topics or modalities for assignments.
- \_\_\_5. Solicit feedback from students about what technologies work for their learning and be willing to make changes to accommodate those preferences when you can.
- \_\_\_6. When content coverage is in tension with responding to student learning needs, prioritize student learning needs: e.g., be willing to adjust lecture pace, reduce information on slides, make lecture materials available to students for study and exam preparation, etc.
- \_\_\_7. Before introducing a new technology in your course, learn about students' prior skill and familiarity with it to gauge how demanding learning the technology is likely to be and make informed decisions about students' capacity to add that learning to the core learning in your course.
- \_\_\_8. Provide both synchronous and asynchronous options for class meetings and other regular course engagements. Recognize that 'discussion' does not have to be synchronous.
- \_\_\_9. Consider that students may not have a private space nor sustained quiet time to participate in online learning. Create learning experiences that can be accessed in small intervals over longer periods of time (e.g. a short video lectures, brief readings, discussion threads that are open for a whole week).
- \_\_\_10. Recognize (especially in the time of the COVID disruption) the ways trauma or persistent high levels of stress can limit students' ability to process information and track changes. Some ways to account for this include: removing grade penalties for spelling and punctuation, being willing to repeat instructions, consider adding extra time for everyone to complete assignments and tests.

*What other ways do you build flexibility into your courses to support and respond to students' range of needs and circumstances? What else could you do?*

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