

Twelve Tips for Making Teaching More Equitable and Inclusive

TAKE A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Tip 1

Accept that one can be both an expert and a learner in an area of expertise

Educators ought to acknowledge that they have significant expertise in an area, AND, have opportunities for learning in that same area. This is especially true when a topic is viewed through a lens different than one's own. It is common to overlook gaps in one's own knowledge that others may see more clearly. An individual educator's ways of interpreting the world are shaped through life experience and conditioning, inevitably creating blindspots.

- Possible language: "I've studied (topic X) for 20 years and every day I learn new things and consider new perspectives about it."
- Possible language: "I have the honor to share what I've learned with you all and I am grateful for that. AND I want you to also know that I will learn from you as much as you will from me — we are both teachers and learners in this process."

Tip 2

Critically examine your objectivity, your profession, and your content

Educators must continually evaluate the assumptions they possess about themselves, their learners and their content-and in response - refine their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. For example, when presenting content that implies there are only two genders, that is a time to pause and ask: "Can I be critical about this?" How can I question this assumption in a way that is humble but also teaches the students what they need to know?

- Possible language: "Medicine and society are always changing. There are many good things about the field of medicine and there are also many areas for growth and improvement. Reflecting on and critiquing ourselves and our assumptions is how we ultimately offer patients better care."

Tip 3

Deliberately consider the biases inherent in pattern recognition based on archetypal categorizations

Pattern recognition helps physicians care for patients efficiently. It is also prone to creating and perpetuating biases. Educators would benefit from continuously considering the origins of the

categorizations they use as well as the benefits and the harms of the archetypal patterns they teach.

- Possible language: “This is a pattern often seen in medicine, how could this be helpful? How could it be harmful?”

ROLE MODEL AN OPENNESS TO LEARNING

Tip 4

Role model receptiveness to feedback

Educators may cultivate a culture of humility, accountability and camaraderie by establishing an expectation of feedback on their teaching sessions.

- Possible Language: “One of the most important aspects of medicine is a commitment to ongoing learning. Today we’re going to be talking about ‘Topic X’ and in this presentation if there’s any content that merits more discussion or if I say anything that’s inappropriate or that you’re curious about let me know; I welcome a discussion. I’m going to try to cover the material as much as possible and at the same time I want to be respectful of anything that may come up. I may make mistakes, let me know, I’m here to learn as well.”

Tip 5

Role model lifelong learning

Educators must teach lifelong learning, even in the classroom, and often most effectively, by role modeling. When a student challenges or questions the content being taught, pause. Take a moment to consider what can be learned by seeing the material from the student’s perspective. Try to avoid just moving on to get through all the planned content.

- Possible Language: “I appreciate your question/comment. Let’s take a minute to discuss this briefly now and for those interested, we can continue the conversation after class.”

Tip 6

Reflect back to clarify the target of feedback and critique

Criticism can feel personal, even when it is not meant to be. Often it is directed at the content being taught or sociocultural systems and structures. Rather than making assumptions about the target of criticism, ask for clarification.

- Possible Language: “What I hear you saying is that you are criticizing XYZ because of ABC, is that correct?”

Tip 7

Help students communicate effectively about emotional topics

When a student asks a question that challenges the content and is demonstrably emotional, it is important to avoid reacting defensively or challenging the learner, even when they may be incorrect. Learners' behaviors in the classroom are influenced by their personal backgrounds and experiences. Intentionally seek out the root of the student's emotion. Consider that the student's critique may be valid from their perspective. Model professionalism by helping students articulate both the emotions and the content of their feedback or critique.

- Possible Language: "Being upset about topic XYZ is understandable. It sounds like your concern about XYZ is ABC."

Tip 8

Embrace mistakes as an opportunity for growth

When a student points out an error, model the type of response that is becoming of a future physician.

- Possible Language: "Thank you for catching this error. I'm taking responsibility to change and improve the content."

CRITICALLY EXAMINE SIMPLISTIC ASSUMPTIONS

Tip 9

Use the term "risk factor" advisedly

Be clear about what the underlying mechanism is for a risk factor. Consider using the words "at risk" instead of "risk factor". Educators should avoid referring to race as a risk factor unless talking about racism. Race is not a genetic or biological indicator, but the way that individuals experience racism in the world is very real.

- Possible language: "Ask students: what do you think are the underlying mechanisms for this factor being a reason people are at risk for this condition?"

Tip 10

Intentionally discuss the sociopolitical, economic and environmental factors that affect the health outcomes of patients and populations

It is important to acknowledge that social structures and systems have very real impacts on individual patients and population health. Disparities in health outcomes are the result of complex factors, including structural racism, low income, lack of health insurance, and unstable housing. Every time a social identifier or specific group is included in the educational content, educators ought to be able to identify how the factors listed above may impact their health outcomes. It's okay to not be an expert: be humble and acknowledge one's own lack of knowledge about certain topics.

- Possible language: “Let’s examine why this social group might be at risk for certain health outcomes. Often it has to do with how people in this group experience the world, what resources they can access. It’s important to consider all factors that contribute to health, not just biological ones.”

Tip 11

Start small — explicitly incorporate a critical approach to material

Challenge race and gender categories on standard graphs. Find 2-5 slides per session where a critical approach would help students deepen their understanding of a topic. Be explicit when teaching on this.

- Possible language: “I want to point out that this is the current state of medicine, but a more equitable approach would be XYZ.”

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Tip 12

Practice self-care and self-compassion

- Faculty may experience negative emotions after a critique, a mistake or a tough teaching moment. It might take time to work through the experience and all the emotions one is feeling. Try putting this experience into perspective, reflecting on all of one’s own teaching experiences over a career. Educators must take full responsibility for their own educator identity. By carefully, critically and openly examining one’s own teaching-educators may improve their ability to teach for its own sake and be resilient after tough teaching moments. Consider how to learn from and build on one’s own experience, with the knowledge that there are multiple perspectives and it might be difficult to come to consensus about any single outcome. Create a community of support to debrief and discuss events, both in real time and on a regular basis. Members of CLIME are always available.

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ROLE MODEL AN OPENNESS TO LEARNING

Role model receptiveness to feedback

Role model lifelong learning

Reflect back to clarify the target of feedback and critique

Help students communicate effectively about emotional topics

Embrace mistakes as an opportunity for growth.

CHALLENGE SIMPLISTIC ASSUMPTIONS

Use the term “risk factor” advisedly

Intentionally discuss the sociopolitical, economic and environmental factors that affect the health outcomes of patients and populations

Start small — explicitly incorporate a critical approach to material

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Practice self-care and self-compassion

Center for Leadership & Innovation in Medical Education (CLIME)

1959 NE Pacific Street Box 356340 Seattle, WA 98195-6410 clime@uw.edu