

Case Studies for Inclusive Teaching

Case 1. That Didn't Work Out the Way I Anticipated

Last semester, I got to teach a course that relates directly to my area of interest. I put a lot of time and energy into preparing materials and lectures and was really excited going into the semester. I used many of the classic works in my field, and assigned a research project based on primary sources in the literature. To get students to connect with the material, I incorporated analogies and examples based on my own experiences in college, and frequently pointed out how what we know now about the class topics is so different from what their parents learned in college.

But things did not turn out the way I expected. Engagement during class seemed very poor-the few students who had been speaking up early on stopped participating, and a couple who seemed quite promising dropped the course. When the research projects came in at the end of the semester many of them were very weak. The research topics they chose were not particularly inspired or creative - it was as if they did not care about this field at all. Even worse, many of the students had not done thorough research, and those who did tended merely to describe their findings rather than craft an argument that was supported by evidence. I was taken by surprise because I had presented well-developed arguments to students in every single lecture, and I had warned students that this was not supposed to be a book report! I even encouraged students to come to my office hours any time to talk about the project, but the only students who showed were the ones who needed the least help. On the end-of-semester evaluations, some students said that the class was “boring” or that my examples were not helpful at all. I am beginning to think that there is simply no way to reach everyone.

Professor I.M. Schocht

These cases are adapted from:

Ambrose, S., Bridges, M.W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M.C., & Norman, M.K. (2010). *How Learning Works: Seven Research Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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Case 2. End of Story

There's been a lot of discussion about how to get more students of color into my field. This is something I believe is very important, so I've gone out of my way to encourage the minority students in my classes, and I always try to provide them extra help and guidance in class. I have also looked for opportunities to diversify my course content. So in class last week I decided to ask my students what they thought about part of an assigned reading that mentioned the costs of illegal immigration to the U.S. economy. The students were very quiet but I kept asking questions to generate interest and to fill the long silences. Finally, a Black female student in the class raised her hand and said that she thought the article was biased, and that it didn't represent the situation accurately. No one else said anything, so I asked the two Latina students if one of them should share their reactions, and one replied, "The article says it's about the economic impact, but it's really just about race." A White male student then chimed in, "How could these numbers be biased? Can't we just discuss the figures in the article without this getting political? Why does this have to be about race?" The Latina student responded, "You will never understand. Whites don't have to understand." A White female student said that as far as she was concerned, illegal immigrants should be arrested and deported, "end of story." Her grandparents were Polish immigrants, she continued, and had come to the U.S. legally, "worked hard, and made good lives for themselves, but it's just plain wrong when people come illegally. Those people have no right to be here." Someone called her entitled and racist. She began to cry, another student stood up and walked out.

As a White male professor, I felt paralyzed. I tried to regain control of the situation by asking the students to focus on the central economic issues and show respect for each other, and then just returned to my lecture. I know I did not handle this situation well and it really impacted the class. Students seem reluctant to talk about anything, even non-controversial topics. And one of the two Latina students stopped coming to class, suggesting that my efforts have backfired. I wish my students were mature enough to discuss important topics without it getting so emotional.

Professor R.U. Furreal

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