MEETING STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE: STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES

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"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."
— Albert Einstein
IMPORTANCE of RECOGNIZING STUDENT LEARNING NEEDS

Impacts classroom learning and environment dynamics

- positive experiences = more classroom engagement

Allows students the ability to better understand the content being presented

Allows the educator to better tailor course content to reach students in the desired manner
RESPONSIBILITIES of an EDUCATOR

To offer a safe place for learning

*Includes:* emotional safety

To provide consultation related to and clarification of the course material

*Includes:* respecting student comprehension needs

To effectively teach the course content

*Includes:* using various methods of teaching
WHY ACCOMODATING LEARNING DIFFERENCES is IMPORTANT

Offers a more engaged, inclusive classroom
- increased engagement = increased retention of the subject matter

Offers the ability for all students to participate
- more diverse opinions = more ideas to be shared

Offers an opportunity for students to experience different teaching methods
- increased exposure to different teaching methods = better understanding of personal learning style
3 WAYS WE LEARN

1) Tactile- touch, “doing”
   *Examples*: group activities, moving around the class, trouble shooting scenarios

2) Auditory- hearing
   *Examples*: listening to lecture, experience sharing, presentations

3) Visual- seeing
   *Examples*: viewing a PowerPoint, reading articles, interpreting data

*Effective classrooms incorporate numerous learning methods!*
ADULT LEARNERS

A unique learning audience requiring:

- relevant, meaningful information; “purpose driven”
- breaks; time to process the information
- acknowledgement of experiences & a busy lifestyle
- clear expectations
- genuine, honest feedback
- respect
WHY ENGAGE STUDENTS in the LEARNING PROCESS

Offers a richer learning environment for students and educator

*Consider*: the group enjoys learning together

Increases probability of content retention

*Consider*: allows for more competent practitioners in the field

Allows those with learning differences a voice

*Consider*: it is common for non-traditional learners to become intimidated in class

*Tailor the course to meet the needs of those you’re teaching!*
## HOW to ENGAGE STUDENTS with LEARNING DIFFERENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ask Students:</th>
<th>Ensure You:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“How do you learn best?”</td>
<td>validate and respect differences in learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What can I do to assist with your learning?”</td>
<td>are mindful of non-verbal cues</td>
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<tr>
<td>“What hinders your learning?”</td>
<td>are receptive to the feedback received; tailor syllabus/content as able</td>
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WHEN ENGAGING STUDENTS...

Be aware students learn:

- in different ways
- at a different pace
- with a different perspective/ past experiences
STUDENTS WHO ARE STRUGGLING

SIGNS:

- Inability to complete assignments in full
- Inattention to detail (i.e. errors, disjointed ideas)
- Frequent absences

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS:

- Not aware of student supports available
- Anxious to connect with student supports due to stigma
- Inability to organize course content (i.e. due dates)
Educators have an ethical responsibility to refer students to appropriate supports when concerns present
- be empathetic → work to improve student ability to succeed

College campuses have a Disability Support Services Department
- required by Federal and State law
- students can request accommodations to support learning → provide document to teacher with modifications needed

College campuses have: writing/ tutoring/ counseling resources

Start the semester by reminding students
- “know your strengths, but realize areas of challenge serve as great learning opportunities”
  → encourage students with different learning needs to seek support
  → address stigma as appropriate
PERSONAL COMFORT with TEACHING

Take an honest inventory of personal biases related to teaching those with learning differences

- we teach how we learn best → this style may not work for all students
- recognize feelings of anxiety related to alternate teaching styles/ use of non-traditional means (i.e. YouTube, PollEverywhere, guided imagery)

Be open to students needing assignment modifications → there are numerous ways to effectively transmit ideas

Allow for effective 2 way communication → learn from those you teach & ask a student to elaborate as needed
Leaving room for course interpretation can result in confusion and prove frustrating to the students.

To minimize confusion, ensure the course syllabus:
- is clear and organized (i.e., due dates, assignment details)
- is concise in grammar
- provides information for student support services
3 BEHAVIORS to AVOID

1) Projecting your frustration with learning expectations on students in a punitive way

2) Thinking your idea of student success is the same as the student’s idea of success

3) Using “I have to” language related to mandated or ethical class modifications
QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU

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