

Guidelines for Inclusive Seminar Teaching

A student might be unable to participate effectively in a class discussion for a number of reasons: working in a second language; socio-cultural anxiety; poor memory; inability to process others' contributions quickly enough to respond; inability to read others' body language or intonation; physical problems in speaking; bewilderment at the cultural norms of an alien academic environment (perhaps less deferential than the one the student is used to)... the list is endless and multifarious. There are, though, steps you can take to make it easier for most of your students to keep track of the discussion and to engage with it:

- Make sure that you know all your students' names –and perhaps also use ice-breaking exercises. The first step towards inclusive teaching is treating each student as an individual.
- If you can, arrange the chairs in a seminar room in such a way that students can see each other's faces.
- In longer sessions, provide breaks: avoid making them gruelling experiences.
- Make sure you plan your session: thinking about what you will be going to do will help you anticipate possible problems facing particular students.
- In a free-flowing seminar, in which frequent student contributions change the course of the discussion, record the main ideas as they develop on a board (or ask a student to). Revisit the board at the end of the seminar.
- In your seminars, provide a variety of tasks, to allow different students to use their specific skills: i.e. periods of individual reading/analysis (perhaps involving small-scale written tasks), periods of small-group activity and periods of plenary discussion.
- If you require students to make in-seminar presentations, provide detailed support and guidance. A complex and useful framework is provided in Arran Stibbe's English Subject Centre case study, 'Emergence: a person-centred approach to oral rhetoric', at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/casestudies/oralskills/emergence.php

- Small-scale autobiographical exercises, as well as enabling students to make links between their own lives and their academic work, will, if shared with the group, help raise your students' awareness of the diversity of contexts from which their fellow students come, and help avoid stereotyping by assumptions about gender, nationality, culture, disability, etc.
- One way to gauge students' experience of seminars is to distribute unofficial, mid-module evaluation forms. Student responses should highlight any substantial problems with the room, your delivery of the sessions, etc.
- Run 'problem-based learning' sessions without a lecturer present.
- Supplement your teaching sessions with 'peer-assisted learning' sessions run by students.
- Complement your teaching session by using online discussion fora. Many students (for example, some with disabilities) will find posting to a forum (at the most basic level, in a discussion around a given topic) easier than contributing to a seminar. As live chat can create anxiety, use a threaded forum discussion, to give students time to compose and check their contribution.
- Run some seminars in rooms equipped with computers: for some students, this will be a particularly comfortable and welcoming environment..
- Try to make your seminar a 'safe space' in which students feel comfortable talking about challenging topics without fearing an unreasoned hostile reaction. Establishing some key 'ground rules' with students at the beginning of the course, to which the whole group subscribes (highlighting, for example, the need to respect other people's opinions and to avoid intellectual bullying) will help.
- Respond immediately and negatively to aggressive and unreasoned intolerance and crude stereotyping if it occurs in your seminar. Bad behaviour can come from any ideological position: often, the most important thing to bear in mind is the power dynamic in the room.