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TA INSTITUTE

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology

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Race & Classroom Power Dynamics in TAing

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Icebreaker (10 mins)

You will be sorted into breakout rooms.

In your breakout rooms:

1. Introduce yourself. Share what is comfortable about yourself and your TA experience.
2. What does an inclusive classroom look like to you?

Share your responses (3 mins)

What does an inclusive classroom look like to you?

Please enter a 1 sentence response in the chat.

Agenda

Icebreaker

Learning Objectives

Group Guidelines

Personal Reflection exercise

Diverse classroom experiences, challenges and strategies

Identifying and addressing underlying racial tensions in a classroom

Summary: Building an inclusive classroom

Learning Objectives

- Identify and acknowledge your positionality in the context race, culture and classroom power dynamics
- Discuss the potential diverse experiences in your classroom and the barriers or challenges they might face
- Generate strategies for addressing the negative impact of racial tensions in the classroom
- Recognize your role as a TA in building an inclusive classroom.

Group Guidelines

<https://padlet.com/diwansai/Tainstitute2022>

Personal Reflection: Sketch your classroom (10 mins)

On a piece of paper, sketch a classroom consisting of the following members: 1 instructor, 1 TA (yourself), at least 5 students.

In this exercise, you are drawing on your imagination but you are grounded in your experience.

You can sketch a classroom you have been a part of or mix-and-match from different classrooms you have been a part of to create the identities of *the classroom members in your classroom sketch*.

Make sure to label your classroom members. You will be thinking about each classroom member's identity & positionality: cultural, racial, gender etc. Try to re(create) detailed identities for each member.

Think about your own identity and positionality when you draw the TA.

Use circles to represent each classroom member. The more power you think they have in that classroom situation, the bigger their circle will be. Make notes about the members' identity & power next to each circle.

How you arrange the circles in the context of each other and in the classroom is completely up to you. Use the arrangement to reflect how you see power dynamics in that classroom unfold. Make notes wherever relevant.

Reflect

Identify your biggest circle and take a look at the notes you have made.

Identify your smallest circle and take a look at the notes you have made.

Identify the circle that represents you and take a look at the notes you have made.

Race and classroom power dynamics

Use this sketch as your reference sheet throughout the session.

Note your own positionality in this classroom situation.

Identify your smallest circle. Through this session and through all the questions we will be discussing, make sure you are including the experience of the smallest circle.

Take a look at your classroom sketch. What challenges do you think the smallest circle will face in the classroom?

You will be in breakout rooms for 15 minutes to discuss the question in the context of 3 specific situations.

Find the slide deck corresponding to your breakout room number in the folder.

Discuss as a group and make notes in the relevant rows.

Make sure to identify at least 1 challenge per situation.

Elect a group representative to share any one challenge you have noted on the slide with the larger group in the main room.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14GR-hsgBY6D1S6LXM8un26cC2iwE6fap>

Share the challenge you identified

Power dynamics among students arising from their positionalities: can affect student comfort and sense of belonging in the classroom

Power dynamics that arise from the classroom setup: who gets to speak, whom does the instructor pay attention to etc.

Possibility of prejudice affecting how the instructor/TA grades or peers evaluate each other in peer evaluations

Fear of judgement about language skills among students: students might be afraid of participating

What could be the challenges?

- Experiencing friction in classroom conversations
- Others' reluctance/refusal to engage with them: feeling left out, feeling unsafe, unable to feel a sense of belonging
- Dialogue that can be deemed offensive to the small circle
- The small circle's racial/cultural identity being misrepresented in classroom material/discussions or not being represented at all.
- Conversations that arouse emotions such as dread/ anxiety/ feeling unsafe
- Conversation that cause frustration/hurt among students
- Experiencing micro-aggression in the classroom
- Discussions being dominated by some participants and the small circle being muted
- Feeling unsafe & this affecting assignment performance
- Unable to ask questions/offer opinions in 1-on-1 conversations due to lack of a feeling of belonging/feeling threatened

How might racial tensions manifest themselves?

Ignoring structural injustice: Structural injustices are systems of injustice that are embedded in/merged in social institutions: political, education, and economic systems can often be host to, or even built upon injustices. Ignoring or not acknowledging structural injustice is a form of racial injustice.

Microaggressions: Microaggressions are brief and often subtle actions, remarks, or visual cues in our everyday interactions that communicate negative ideas about a group of people, usually a socially marginalized.

Stereotype threat: Stereotyping, negative stereotyping and essentialism can threaten how individuals view themselves and how they evaluate themselves. This can threaten the individual's sense of self and ability to engage with relevant activities.

Tokenism: Tokenism is where a student is called upon by other students, or the instructor to represent, speak for, or explain the viewpoint of a particular (usually underrepresented) social identity. It places pressure on the student to "represent" their entire group, and may rely on aspects of social identity that the student doesn't have in their own social identity.

Silence

What are some strategies that you can use to address the challenges of how racial tensions manifest themselves? *Think of the other circles as resources.*

- Stereotyping: ask the speaker “what do you mean by that?”: create an opportunity for self-correction, reflection and
- Be open: share with the class that you are putting efforts into unlearning your biases
- Help students feel more comfortable: small group discussions instead of large group discussions, allow anonymous submissions
- Co-establish guidelines with the students: gives you something to refer everyone to if you need to, a way to hold each other accountable
- Having an explicit discussion about structural injustice early on in the course: during discussion, make it a point to not engage in tokenism and call on minority students to take on the responsibility of educating others
- Tokenism: Don’t draw attention to/call on students of a social group to speak about topics related to the social group unless the student volunteers to speak
- Silence: If a point raised by a student is met with silence during the discussion, make sure to acknowledge the student’s point to make them feel heard
- Microaggressions: consider a 1-on-1 conversation with the person who displayed microaggressive behavior (remember to think about how safe you feel doing so, whether you’d like to approach the instructor)
- Create more opportunities for participation than just spoken participation

Strategies

- Consider creating community guidelines with the students to help create a safe space
- Acknowledge own positionality and the biases that you may hold
- Create space for students' expression of feelings during discussions
- Hold space for minority voices
 - Stay alert and intervene if minority voices are being drowned out (asking those who have had a chance to speak to take on the active listening role, explicitly invite minority voices **who have volunteered**)
 - Fishbowl discussion
- Pre-discuss terms such as microaggression, tokenism, stereotyping, structural injustice and encourage self-checks
- Model active listening
 - Making notes during the discussion/ repeating a student's point (validation)
- If you are doing small group discussions, make sure there is a way for you to follow along the discussion so that you can intervene/moderate/guide wherever applicable
- Acknowledge the group's participation while closing the discussion

Building an inclusive classroom

Think back to your response of what an inclusive classroom means to you.

In the chat, note 2 things that you will do as a TA to make this happen.

Reminders

Theme certificate:

<https://institute.cilt.ubc.ca/ta-institute/january-2022-ta-institute/january-2022-ta-institute-themes/>

This session falls under:

TASHIP 101 (ESSENTIALS TO PREPARE FOR TASHIP)

EXPLORING AND SUPPORTING INCLUSIVITY, EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND WELLNESS

Make sure to complete the post-session form under the relevant theme.

Resources

<https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/resources/inclusive-teaching-guide/>

<https://www.kent.edu/ctl/inclusive-teaching-and-learning>

https://www.colorado.edu/center/teaching-learning/sites/default/files/attached-files/facilitating_difficult_race_discussions.pdf

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/27/learning/lesson-plans/first-encounters-with-race-and-racism-teaching-ideas-for-classroom-conversations.html>

<https://ombudsoffice.ubc.ca/>

<https://equity.ubc.ca/>