How Can Higher Education Research Guide Faculty Development to Create Equitable Access to Learning?

Emily Sommer

Boise State University
How Can Higher Education Research Guide Faculty Development to Create Equitable Access to Learning?

ABSTRACT

With an increasingly diverse college-going population, faculty need more support facilitating discussions around controversial content. Faculty can facilitate or impede discussions, which impacts students’ access to learning. Research on conscious pedagogies, instructional strategies that focus on facilitating discussions to challenge existing norms, claim that faculty need support to develop capacity to create equitable access to learning. This research examines faculty members’ perceived barriers to engaging students in discussions around controversial content at one transitional Hispanic Serving Institution. Better understanding their concerns over student engagement will help universities better support faculty in creating equitable access to learning.

Equitable access entails more than ensuring that all people have the means and opportunities to go to college, but also that all students have opportunities to learn within it.


QUESTION 1

What are faculty and student perceptions on the importance of student participation in difficult dialogue for learning?

FINDINGS

Survey indicated 92.3% of faculty and 82.4% of students agree on the importance of discussing controversial topics for student learning.

Importance of Discussing Controversial Topics for Student Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Faculty Agree</th>
<th>Faculty Disagree</th>
<th>Student Agree</th>
<th>Student Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to Learning</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENTS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENTS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT DISCIPLINE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT DISCIPLINE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACULTY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledge Required by Competent Teachers

Content Knowledge - the knowledge base that defines the discipline

General Pedagogical Knowledge - those broad principles and general strategies of classroom management and organization that appear to transcend subject matter

Curriculum Knowledge - the materials and programs that appear to transcend subject matter

Pedagogical Content Knowledge - that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional knowledge

Knowledge of Learners and Their Characteristics

Knowledge of Educational Contexts - ranging from the workings of the group or classroom, the governance financing of school districts, to the character of communities and cultures

Knowledge of Educational Ends, Purposes, and Values and their Philosophical Historical Grounds

Shulman’s competent teacher requirements reinforce the need for knowledge across several components including knowledge about students and their characteristics, Tuitt, Haynes and Stewart (2016), also emphasized the importance of faculty to “consider who their students are and use their prior experiences to engage their identities within classroom learning” to create an equitable learning environment.

ILLUSTRATES THE COMPLEXITY OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN TEACHERS, CONTENT, STUDENTS AND ENVIRONMENTS THAT INFLUENCE CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING.

CONCLUSION

This research suggests that while the majority of faculty and students agree open discussion on potentially controversial topics is important for student learning, faculty struggle with facilitating difficult dialogue. Faculty perceptions of the influences that inhibit student engagement were limited to a practice-focused approach. Further research is needed to raise critical consciousness of instructors to develop the transdisciplinary lens by which an equitable learning environment is created. By engaging in this self-work with vulnerability and courage, faculty can transform the classroom into a richly dynamic environment where all can learn (Tuitt, Haynes & Stewart, 2016).

Acknowledgements: Dr. Esther Enright and Dr. Tasha Souza


By Emily Sommer