



## Research that Reaches Out Podcast

### Episode 10: Creating Inclusive Classrooms Part 4/5

Digging Deeper into Inclusive Practices with Dr. Laura Simon and Dr. Vicki Luther

Hannah Nabi:

Hello and welcome to the Research that Reaches Out podcast from Mercer University. I'm your host, Hannah Vann Nabi. Research that Reaches Out is an initiative at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, that was launched in 2015 as part of Mercer's Quality Enhancement Plan or QEP. We work with faculty and students to help them integrate service and research to address real world problems affecting our communities at the local, regional, national, and global levels. Today we're in part four of the special segment about creating inclusive classrooms with Dr. Vicki Luther from the Tift College of Education at Mercer and Dr. Laura Simon from Mercer's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

For those of you who are just joining, Dr. Luther and Dr. Simon had designed some faculty development on inclusive teaching practices that was originally supposed to be delivered in a classroom workshop, but thanks to Covid-19, we've had to regroup and they have graciously agreed to bring their lessons into our podcast. In part one of this episode, they defined inclusive teaching for us as designing classes that support students' engagement with the course by working to serve all students. In part two, they talked about how faculty can acknowledge and assess their own readiness to address students' well-being in the face of major community or cultural events, such as the nationwide protests in support of Black lives in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. In part three, we learned about some low-stress, high-impact strategies that faculty can use in their classrooms to be more inclusive, and today we are going to dive a little bit deeper into more inclusive teaching practices.

Okay, so we know class schedules and teaching responsibilities can vary from semester to semester. And for faculty who have a bit more flexibility in their planning, in their course delivery, what are some ways that they can look at making their classes more inclusive? And too, what about faculty who don't have as much flexibility in course delivery, such as maybe a lab science course. What options are open to those faculty members?

Laura Simon:

Okay. So as mentioned in the question, I know we all have varying amounts of time available to us, and also varying amounts of flexibility in what we can or cannot change in our courses. Some of us, like myself, have courses that will directly align with some of the things we're talking about. So for me, student representation goes hand in hand in a lot of what I teach. For some, it's more difficult to find the connections across. And it can take different approaches and different types of mechanisms for that. So I'm going to go ahead and start with some suggestions that are a bit more time intensive but will lead to high impact. And the good news is, once the major work is done, it's that long-term gain, right. So this is a type of work that, you do it once and you do it well. And it doesn't mean your course is done forever, but it's not something that would

need to be redone every single time you teach it. So as you build these things in. So I have three kind of main themes here that I'll cover, and then I do want to directly give one idea about lab courses, and then I'll let Vicki take over.

So my three big things that I thought about were work to expand the viewpoint and coverage in your classroom. So if you remember the seven forms of bias that I overviewed – selectivity, unreality. These are major themes of bias. So if you have the time, go through your course materials and see what can be added to expand, for example, on the process leading up to an event. So if you are teaching, even about a scientific finding, so a major chemistry breakthrough. Was their work that led up to the event that's going to expand our view and talk about all the people that were involved? And to give a nod to a movie, the movie Hidden Figures and the role those women played in our development of space, but their narrative was kind of lost, right, we just kind of skipped over that part and got to the part where the big breakthrough happened. So even in these disciplines that don't, on the surface, seem like you can integrate this material, look at how things are being presented and what you might be able to add to broaden the scope, to expand the coverage, to expand the viewpoint.

So a second thing is, with the same theme, kind of this expanding coverage, are their authors that were writing during certain times or doing lab work or doing experiments during kind of the prime of the discipline where big breakthroughs were happening but they weren't allowed, they weren't in the room where it happens at the time. So they weren't in the room where it happens, but they were doing the work. Sometimes what happens in the history of our disciplines, if people weren't in the room, even though they were doing the work, they're now left out of the conversations. And we know textbooks control a lot of what is and what is not presented. So with extra time and extra work, you can often find voices who weren't in the room where it happens, but can be pulled in now in a meaningful way as a scholar, who's doing this work to broaden scope. And the perk of that, and this is a personal one for me, you tend to learn a lot in the process of doing it. And as someone who's a forever learner, I think this is a really powerful way to expand your own knowledge of your discipline while simultaneously giving your students kind of an insider's look at all of the goings on. And it would be near impossible in one semester to cover it all, but that's why you take the time to figure out what you can pull in. And it might be a smaller tidbit. So you add in a person's name that wasn't in the book. You add in a person's finding that, if their finding hadn't existed, we never could have got to the big picture one that made it to the textbook, etc. And so one of the things, just to use an example within sociology – my discipline, is there's a recent book called *The Scholar Denied* by Aldon Morris. And he writes a lot about W.E.B. Du Bois and his work in sociology as kind of one of the foundational scholars in modern sociology, but for a very long time was kind of a footnote in sociology textbooks. Not completely irrelevant but not given the acclaim such as other scholars, predominantly white males, were given. So he has an entire book now, that I use in my classroom, talking about the impact of Du Bois who was a black theorist in Atlanta sociology and just tons of great

work. So there's just one small example. My knowledge of his work beyond what traditional textbooks shared with me, even as an undergrad and graduate student, has expanded what I can now give to my students. But it did take time. It took time for me to read and to understand and to do deeper digging. But you can expand that coverage in your classroom.

The second theme I have is to catalog and review all the activities and examples you use in your classroom. And you are all saying, no way, right. But for many of us, we tend to use similar, maybe not the same, similar things and some more measures over repeated time. So look to your activities. Look to your examples that you're using in your classroom. Build lectures. And a lot of us, the first time we give a lecture, we refine it and we go. But what examples are you using? If you're giving examples on the fly, are you being mindful? And that goes back to our earlier conversations, which I believe Vicki mentioned, about implicit bias that bias isn't always saying the wrong thing and insulting someone. Sometimes bias is where we go with our examples. So doing the work now in the activities and examples that you use to kind of self-correct for that bias because it's ongoing work. It's not work that stops once we recognize it. It's not like, oh, I realized I was biased and now I'm not. It's ongoing, it's active. You have to engage over time.

So pre-semester or pre-course, and again not summer, maybe not even fall, but long term engagement cataloguing, actually going through what you're doing and looking at, am I leaving any groups out? Am I making an assignment that's really difficult for particular groups to achieve? One example of this is some classes incorporate things off campus, field trips or go do this or go do that. Are you being mindful of either having a mechanism in place to support students who may have mobility issues? Do you have a backup plan for them if they don't have a vehicle, they don't have access to a vehicle? If they're working full time? And some of this, we talked about in the first part of this podcast. Recognizing student barriers in the really creative, really wonderful, really engaging assignments that we give them, but we can do the work now and relieve students of the burden of coming to us and saying, Hey, I know I have to do this but ABCD. You can build and craft assignments that reduce that student burden. And they see you. They see the work that you've done to make it possible for them. And I tend to, when I modify my assignments, I give the option to everyone.. So I have crafted assignments, and it takes time, that no matter the modification they choose, I'm going to get the same outcome. So I'm comfortable giving that modification to the full class.

Another example of going through activities, lectures, etc. If you're using materials in your classroom, think critically about the size of texts you're producing, how information is presented for clarity. And again, putting in the time ahead of being in the classroom negates a student having to come to you directly and asking you for specific help. And so some of those examples are specific about student accessibility issues. And yes, I am aware that they can go to that Access office and get accommodations. If you have worked with students through that, you know the office is wonderful, but there's also a time lag. So what happens for many of the students is they kind of hang out in

uncertainty for a while as they're trying to get their accommodations. Where we can actually build classrooms ahead of time and build materials ahead of time that reduces the need. Won't completely eliminate, but reduces the need for some of this added conversation.

And then, if you're going through your examples, being mindful of language choices, representation. Are there any limitations of what you're representing? Are you framing things with one particular viewpoint and not allowing for an expanded notion? So just really going through and critically determining and examining what you're already doing and using those seven forms of bias and kind of applying those to your class. Identifying weakness areas, identifying strength areas. Where are you doing really well? Identifying something that you're doing that maybe you want to share with a colleague because it's really working. So these are all time consuming but really valuable practices.

And then my third theme, and we've talked about this a little bit, is engaging in our own anti-bias. And I've been recently critically thinking about, explicitly, anti-racist training and moving beyond just being not biased or being not racist, and doing the work to engage in anti-bias and anti-racist training. So this would include addressing implicit biases. So doing the work to acknowledge, reading what that means, applying that to our classroom. And again, going back to acknowledging bias, identifying our own bias Addressing how we will actively work to negate them in our own classrooms. There are great resources all over the place. If you want materials that are already laid out, there's a website, Teaching Tolerance, that I know Vicki went to a conference on. Thank you QEP, Research that Reaches Out. There's also the Matrix Center that has a ton of resources that are explicit. They link to higher education. So there are materials out there that we can engage in and put in the time. And again, instead of having a moment in the classroom we have to correct, we can do some of the work before we enter the classroom.

And then for an explicit example in a lab science course that, and talking with colleagues, we've heard some of the concerns of, like, Yes, I believe this is valuable. Yes, I believe. I just don't know how to do it in my, you know, ABCD classroom. So a lot of what we said I think already applies on what we can fill in, but one just kind of clear idea is, are there opportunities to incorporate additional groups? So can you add in a reading that maybe isn't in the textbook? Even a blurb. An article about someone, a quick, go to this website, read about this scholar that also contributed to this work. Linking back to that expanding coverage.

But it could also be incorporating something into your classroom. Maybe once a week, for example, I'm not good with titles of things that come up with ideas, but they're never named very creatively. But maybe at the top of your class, I'm thinking of a lab science course here. You, you have a slide that's just called Cool Science Happenings and you present scholar and the work they've done. And you don't need to explicitly stand there and say, this is a female chemist who did do this work. You can throw in an academic image, whether contemporary or historic, and say the contribution that they made to chemistry.

And for this, this is really cool because one, it expands the knowledge that your students have. Two, it engages them. I'm always sharing with my students all the cool stuff I'm reading about. And so if we're doing this work anyway, pop one slide in at the front of class and say, this is cool research happening now, or this is really incredible research that happened some time ago but it didn't get represented. And you can put an image up and a name.

And it can be a really powerful moment to build in kind of relevant contexts, other voices that don't make it into the contemporary, kind of normative context. It doesn't have to take, as you said not a ton of time. It doesn't mean completely scrapping lab science and moving away from it. And ultimately could lead to a lot of added engagement from your students and maybe piquing new interest and getting them excited about your discipline. So those are mine. I'm going to throw the mic over to Vicki.

Vicki Luther:

Thanks, Laura. You have so many wonderful ideas, and we are very similar in a lot of our thinking. One of the things that I kept thinking about, how we can learn from others is just so invaluable. Even if you're going to a conference for your discipline, there are opportunities that you can network with others, but just watching someone else do a session on the specific discipline, but doing it may be where they're reaching out and showcasing ways that you can talk to the persons that are in the session with you or just ways and strategies. So thinking in terms of, you know, I want, you know, make sure that everything's a teachable moment. But also I want to make sure that everything's a learnable – I know that's not really a term, but a moment in which you can say, hey, I can not just focus on the content specific of this workshop, or this professional development that I'm attending, or this conference. But I can also really hone in and focus on new ways of doing things in my classroom. Which again, may not always be specific to your content and you know if you're doing a lab science, obviously you're not doing something in very different ways. But just looking at those times that you can learn from others, learn from your colleagues here at Mercer but also at other institutions across the country and across the world.

Another thing that I've been thinking about is, and Laura really addressed this so well, it's just doing that self-reflection. A lot of times we get into this mindset of, I'm using the same template for the syllabus that I've used year after year after year. But just digging in and doing some really critical self-reflection to see what is something that I could change? It could be an assignment that you realize, Wow, I may have been alienating unintentionally, but maybe some students could not do the assignment, as well as others just because of limitations. And so just thinking in terms of, maybe I need to revamp assignments. Maybe I need to revamp my syllabus in a way that's just a little more. Maybe sometimes it's just the organization that we have within our syllabi or within our class lectures or within our maybe PowerPoints that we use that we put on Canvas. Just those kind of things. Just being a little more mindful.

And the last thing that I was thinking of when I was listening to Laura talk about everything that she does, it's just making sure that we're thinking of real world. And so, Laura again addressed this so beautifully, but we still have a world outside of our classroom walls, and we still have a community outside of the Mercer campus. And so we may not be able to go out, especially in this age right now of Covid-19. We may have to adapt some things for our community service and what we usually do, but we could still bring those ideas into our classrooms. So when we're using examples, we're using real world examples. We're making sure that we're helping our students to understand when they are doing, and I know I'm picking on chemistry all day, I'm sorry. But when they are learning about chemistry, how is that impacting what they're learning? How does that impact Macon? How does that impact the state of Georgia? What can they do to help others with what they have learned from your class? And doing that really deep thinking in terms of not just, I don't want students to just learn for a test. What are they learning that's going to make an impact and make a difference in the lives of others? And I think that's the Mercer way. And I think that's what we teach them. But we can be very mindful in how we approach that in our own classrooms. And so we may not be able to do, quote unquote, field trips right now in the fall semester, but we can certainly bring those aspects into what we are talking about and discussing in our classrooms.

Hannah Nabi:

Thanks so much, Dr. Vicki Luther and Dr. Laura Simon. It's been really inspiring to hear about all the different ways that faculty can approach inclusive teaching and increase student engagement in the classrooms. We're going to come together one more time for the final part of this special series, Part 5, where we'll round out these conversations on inclusive classrooms with recommendations from you both on how faculty can remain open to feedback and foster an inclusive mindset.

And thanks to our listeners for tuning in to this episode of the Research that Reaches Out Podcast at Mercer University. Be sure to check out all five parts of this special segment on Creating Inclusive Classrooms. You can subscribe to our podcast on SoundCloud.com or check us out on our website at QEP.Mercer.edu.