

Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Curriculum:

What's in your Culture Box?



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Today's university classrooms are characterized by a diversity of learners and perspectives that was unimagined just 50 years ago. An inclusive classroom, I believe, is one that creates a safe and open learning environment for students to try new skills and ideas. The curriculum represents a crucial tool for creating an inclusive classroom. This activity which I learnt about in the 2016 Provost's Diversity Institute highlights an engaging experience with my students using Culture Box. Below I share the methods if you would like to adopt in your class.

The course lends itself particularly well to a mindful exploration of culture and diversity, beginning with exploring biases and creating an inclusive, safe space for all students. I wanted to set a tone for my class, develop an understanding of my diverse audience, and encourage students to think critically about how their background informs both their linguistic choices and how they interpret others' choices.

I also wanted the students to learn to create space for their cultural values in class interactions. The ultimate goals were to: 1) Create a comfortable and welcoming environment for all students, 2) Share with everyone that their essential family and personal values are not left behind when they come to work or school. 3) Reflect on how recognizing the impact of culture and language on others can improve our professional relationships and communication styles.

▪ What is a Culture Box?

A culture box is a collection of random objects that define us or our social identities. Such identities might include race, religion, gender, ethnicity, social status, sexual orientation, family groups, or perhaps none of these. The goal of the culture box is a way to help others understand our life story and who we are today, and share with them hidden or invisible values. Culture box items don't have to be physical or material items such as photos or jewels. Instead, the items can be quotes, family stories, important narratives, jokes, experiences, favorite expressions or words, or anything else.

- **Activity takes an entire session.** Below are logistics and methods:
 - Ahead of time (via email typically):
 - Present an overview of the topics you would cover in class
 - Communicate that you would like to use this class meeting as an opportunity to learn about each other's culture and worldview—and to learn to appreciate diversity.
 - Suggest a culture box discussion as a starting point.
 - Share with them a definition of a culture box (above).
 - Highlight the goal of the culture box as a way to help others understand our life story and who we are today.
 - Explain that Culture box items do not have to be physical or material
 - Set ground rules:
 - Appreciation of other's contributions
 - Suggest students leave valuables or irreplaceable items at home and take a picture of them
 - Start with your own culture box
 - Talk about each item: what is it, why it's important, how did you select it
 - How does your culture box inform your approach to teaching
 - Personalize the subject matter
 - Ask for volunteers to go next
 - Keep track of time so you don't run out, limit number of items
 - Other students may require drawn out with questions about their items
 - Make sure to come back to students' culture boxes throughout the term.
 - Emphasize the importance of reflection work and connecting course to personal life

Resources

1. Carmona, JF., Luschen, K. (2014). Crafting Critical Stories: Toward Pedagogies and Methodologies of Collaboration, Inclusion, and Voice. Peter Lang
2. Souidi, A., South-Paul, J. (2017). An interdisciplinary approach to cultural competence education in an academic health center, *European Journal for Person Centered Healthcare* 5 (4) 516-521
3. Souidi, A., (2017) [Living & Working Together: The Value and Meaning of Diversity. \[Documentary\]](#), University of Pittsburgh
4. Souidi, A. (2016) [What's in your culture box](#), Pitt Chronicle, September 19, 2016 (13)

