

A Shared Language Leads to a Shared Classroom Culture

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Imagine walking into a committee meeting, and the first thing you hear is “*SLSCC is the foundation of building stability in an inclusive college community...*” You know, SLSCC. Everyone knows what SLSCC is; don’t you?

Dearest reader, please do not stress. SLSCC is completely fictitious and refers to the title of this article: *shared language leads to shared classroom culture*.

How did reading this introduction and jumbled collection of letters make you feel? Hopefully you are curious to learn more, but more likely such curiosity would be clouded by confusion, exclusion, and feeling lost. Most professionals can relate to similar stressful moments, when it seems like everyone in the room knows what a term means... but you. It takes great courage to ask for clarity, often a step many do not take hoping instead to piece together clues so they can discreetly remain engaged in the conversation.

Now, let’s apply this example to a classroom environment, a hierarchical structure where students feel organically pressured to demonstrate understanding with confidence. Acronyms, jargon, and slang can become unintentionally problematic if students do not feel confident and safe to ask for clarification.

As educators, we must be conscious of our cultural and linguistic choices while designing and delivering lessons.

What we say, and how we say it, matters.

Here are some considerations while planning inclusive lessons and assignments that promote language learning and cultural understanding in the classroom:

Model gender-inclusive and culturally inclusive language.

Invite the insight and expertise of others involved in the conversation. For example, ask students to self-identify a preferred pronoun. Show that you are self-educating and be confident to acknowledge when you too may require clarification and support.

Foster belonging through curiosity. Vulnerability is part of the learning journey.

Invite students to share their cultural perspectives. Be prepared to check understanding for concepts and words that are new to you and students.

Co-construct class glossaries with students.

Create a virtual “[parking lot](#)” for students to post their questions anonymously about unfamiliar vocabulary and new concepts. Also, post vocabulary lists ahead of time for students to review on their own time.

Don’t make assumptions about students’ identity, cultural, or generational knowledge.

Miscommunications happen easily in cross-cultural and cross-generational learning environments. Assume that not all students have the same notion of “standardized language.” For instance, take time in class to explain the purpose and benefit of office hours, what defines professionalism, and accommodation processes.

Together, we are all learners, and we may at times be flummoxed by new words and concepts. Showing vulnerability and modelling strategies to build a collective classroom identity, language, and supportive internal culture will help students develop the tools to thrive in a learning community where all belong.

Teaching Tool

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