

Discussing Equity Issues: Suggestions for Teachers

When you talk about issues related to equity and inclusion in your classroom, you can:

- 1. Respect the choice of students who do not want to take part.*** Try to make sure these students don't feel uncomfortable. Not everyone is ready to share his or her life or experiences: this may be a way of protecting themselves.
- 2. Take into account that some students in the class may be experiencing bullying and others may be bullying.*** Bear in mind, too, that someone who is bullying in the classroom may be, and probably is, someone who is being bullied in another context.
- 3. Approach the discussion as an exploration for both you and the students.*** Work together, through questions and discussion, to come up with responses to complex issues and strategies for dealing with difficult situations. If someone makes an offensive or disparaging comment, use it as an opportunity to ask questions designed to increase awareness and education about the impact of the comment while remaining sensitive and attentive to the student who made it.
- 4. Respect students' privacy and personal limits.*** Approach the topic using questions, comments and activities that do not target specific students or compel students to confide or talk about their own experiences. If they choose to talk about the proposed topics, that is their choice, but students may feel uncomfortable if the discussion is oriented in this direction.
- 5. Discuss human rights to encourage inclusion and respect.*** It is helpful to acknowledge human differences (language, religion, age, physical appearance, tastes, style, sexual orientation, ethnicity and so on) as well as what unites us and is similar.
- 6. Actively promote valuing diversity.*** Encourage the students to learn about others' differences instead of valuing only what is generally perceived as "cool" or trendy. You could reinforce this idea by encouraging students to talk about what he or she likes that differs from what appears in all the ads or is considered "cool."
- 7. Celebrate moments that respect the principles of equity and inclusion.*** Emphasize comments and jokes that are respectful and not hurtful to a particular group or person. This will demonstrate to the students that it is possible to have fun without prejudices and negative judgments about people.
- 8. Be attentive to students' needs.*** Discussing problems like racism, homophobia and sexual violence can draw out difficult emotions in some students. If you are approached, you can try to be accessible and open to those who want to talk to you one on one about their experiences. Your respectful attentiveness and empathy alone may mean a great deal to a student. Another goal is to encourage students to reflect and think for

themselves about constructive strategies. Ideally, they will feel proud of themselves for coming up with solutions on their own.

9. Approach the issues in a positive manner. For example, focus on the impact of discrimination and positive ideas and strategies for change instead of emphasizing examples of ways of hurting others. In this way no-one going through such an experience will feel uncomfortable.

10. Continuous and constructive intervention. It is important to notice and address any disparaging comment by encouraging reflection on the impact of the message it conveys. Every comment of this kind is a learning opportunity!

11. Be sure to include everyone in the discussion (without forcing them to take part). Some students are bound to be more open than others to equity- and inclusion-related topics. It is important to interact and encourage discussion with everyone to model ways of finding connections with everyone, even those who have a different opinion or who are different from us.

12. Convey your optimism that change is possible. Those whose actions and words are discriminatory have learned this way of thinking and acting. Someone who lives in an environment in which such behaviour is acceptable will have more difficulty changing. It is important, however, to believe in change and in people's capacity to learn new ways of doing things. As teachers, you are role models for your students.