ANNEMARIE VACCARO

Fostering Inclusion Through Professional Development: The Case of Faculty Workshops at the University of Rhode Island

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Abstract: In the United States, post-secondary institutions have enacted a variety of approaches to foster inclusion of diverse students. Some efforts (e.g., training, workshops) are aimed at teachers, who spend significant time with students, and thus, have a direct influence on whether, and how, students feel included. This study provides rich detail about a series of professional development workshops at one U.S. institution. The goals of the workshops were to increase instructor knowledge of inclusion and to offer tangible strategies for fostering it in their spheres of influence. The manuscript details the history, design, implementation, and selected outcomes of the Inclusion Workshops for Faculty.

Keywords: Faculty Development, Inclusive Pedagogy, Inclusive Learning Environments, Inclusive Course Design

Introduction

In the United States, post-secondary institutions have recognized not only the importance, but also the complex nature of, inclusion. In response, campuses have enacted a variety of approaches to foster inclusion of all students – especially those from minoritized social identity groups. Some post-secondary inclusion efforts (e.g., training, workshops) are aimed at faculty members who spend significant time teaching and advising students, and thus, have a direct influence on how included students feel on campus. In fact, Bernstein (2010) argued that "every teacher [should] treat every course as an opportunity to learn how to create better learning environments and generate richer educational experiences" (p. 4). This manuscript offers rich detail about a professional development workshop series designed for faculty members at one U.S. institution. The goals of the workshops were to increase instructor knowledge of campus inclusion and to offer tangible strategies for fostering inclusion in their spheres of influence – including teaching, advising, mentoring, service, and research. The forthcoming pages detail the history, design, implementation, and outcomes of those workshops.

Higher educators often want to be excellent and inclusive, but they are rarely prepared to teach inclusively, or teach at all. There is an abundance of resources available on inclusive teaching. However, for busy faculty – especially novices who are just beginning their journey toward inclusion – the literature can feel like an unwieldy mix of theory, empirical studies, opinion, and promising practices. A review of the literature reveals an array of issues, paradigms, terminologies, and recommendations that could be of interest to teachers striving to be equitable and inclusive. Just a few of those different bodies of literature are referred to as: culturally-sustaining (Cole, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012); indigenizing or decolonizing (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012; Grande, 2004; Tejeda et al., 2003); transgressive (Hooks, 1994). Other pedagogical literatures are grounded in particular theoretical paradigms, and thus, offer unique approaches to pedagogy. For instance, some teaching literature is informed by critical race theory (Bhattacharya et al., 2019; Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002; Tuitt, 2012, 2016), LatCrit theory (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Valdes & Bender, 2021), critical whiteness theory (DiAngelo, 2011, 2018; Frankenberg, 1997; Gillborn, 2007; Leonardo, 2002), and feminist theory (Maher & Tetreault, 2001; Shrewsbury, 1987). While there are certainly overlapping perspectives in these writings, there are also many differences. Faculty seeking to be more inclusive must sift through these writings to determine which best align with their worldview and which are applicable to their disciplines, courses, and laboratories. As such, educators can become frustrated with the plethora of pedagogical writings that sometimes contradict each other, offer competing inclusion strategies, or are written by and/or for instructors in different disciplines and fields. This study illuminates a faculty inclusion workshop series intended to provide scholarly-informed pedagogical strategies to educators who may not have the time to make sense of the plethora of literatures available. Specifically, it offers an overview of the *Inclusion Workshops for Faculty* at the University of Rhode Island (URI) in the United States. Details include the planning (history, framework, context), implementation, and outcomes of the faculty inclusion workshops.

Workshop History, Guiding Framework, & Context

The history, overarching framework (Adams & Love, 2009), and socio-political context for the *Inclusion Workshops for Faculty* at the University of Rhode Island (URI) are described in this section. URI is a public research university with roughly 18 000 students and 1 180 faculty members. The impetus for the inclusion workshops occurred in January of 2017 when the author (Vaccaro) presented a plenary talk about inclusive excellence at a pre-semester meeting for faculty. The feedback from that presentation was overwhelmingly positive and Dr. Vaccaro was subsequently invited by the Office of the Provost, Academic Affairs Diversity Task Force, and Office for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning to build upon the talk and develop an inclusive teaching series for faculty. Between August 2018 and August 2021, Vaccaro developed and facilitated a total of 47 workshops for full and part-time faculty at the University of Rhode Island. The total number of attendees was 1017.

Each workshop was designed to last 2 hours. However, it can be a challenge for instructors to find that amount of time to dedicate to optional professional development. With this challenge in mind, it was determined that the most effective way to engage teachers was to bring the workshops to them. As such, all deans and department chairs were encouraged to use pre-existing meeting times to schedule the workshops for faculty in their units. This strategy afforded faculty the opportunity to participate in the inclusion work-

shops at a day and time they had already reserved for department meetings. This delivery strategy also led to discipline-specific audiences at each session. The commonality of scholarly background among attendees fostered robust disciplinary conversations and sharing among participants.

Design & Foundational Framework

This section summarizes the workshop design and overarching guiding framework (Adams & Love, 2009). It begins with a broad snapshot of the three-part series, noting the scholarly roots and socio-political context. Then, an overview of each of the three faculty development workshops is provided. The content for the inclusion workshops was informed by varied literatures noted in the introduction. However, the specific framing of the workshops was inspired by a 2009 chapter from Adams and Love. In that work, Adams and Love (2009) described a four-quadrant framework for use in faculty development workshops for social justice. They argued:

> These four quadrants are based on (1) what our students, as active participants, bring to the classroom, (2) what we as instructors bring to the classroom, (3) the curriculum, materials and resources we convey to students as essential course content, and (4) the pedagogical processes we design and facilitate and through which the course content is delivered. (Adams & Love, 2009, p. 7)

These quadrants informed the development and implementation of the University of Rhode Island's *Inclusion Workshops for Faculty*. The series of three URI workshops were titled: 1.) *Introduction to Equity & Inclusion*; 2.) *Inclusive Course Design*; and 3.) *Inclusive Teaching*. In the following section, details about each of these workshops being summarized. However, it should be noted that there were some commonalities among the workshops. Specifically, all faculty workshops contained the following core elements: information sharing, promising practices, reflection, and action planning.

As noted by Vaccaro (2013), learning about social justice requires a faculty to engage in self-work, to create inclusive classroom environments, and to adopt social justice curricula. This work often requires the acquisition of new knowledge. As such, each workshop began with a brief presentation of key insights from pedagogical/theoretical/empirical literatures (c.f., Adams & Love, 2009; Bernstein, 2010; Kishimoto, 2018; Oleson, 2021; Tharp & Moreano, 2020; Tuitt et al., 2016). With the goal of providing tangible inclusion strategies, all workshops also included a plethora of examples of promising practices for inclusion. To model engagement and engage participants in a community of scholarship (Boyer, 1990) all workshops also utilized small discussion groups. In these groups, participants were invited to reflect on the information presented and discuss possible applications to their work. In hopes of inspiring participants to immediately apply their new learning, all workshops concluded with time for action planning. Specifically, participants were asked to make a list of 1-3 inclusion strategies they would implement immediately into their courses. The post-evaluation workshops (described in a later section) also include questions about faculty action plans. The anonymous evaluation served as a reminder to implement at least 1-3 inclusion strategies.

Socio-Political Context

The specific content of each workshop is listed in the forthcoming section. However, the content was regularly updated to reflect the evolving global and United States socio-political realities. Just a few of the relevant phenomena that shaped the delivery and/or content of the workshops during the first four years included:

- COVID-19 global pandemic
- U.S. White House restrictions on "Divisive Concepts" via "Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping" (M-20-34, September 22, 2020) – later rescinded.
- Black Lives Matter movement
- Violence against Asian Americans (heightened by disinformation about the origins of COVID-19)
- Increased anti-transgender legislation

For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the historically in-person presentation to move to a remote format. That meant participant engagement changed to include more structured engagement using the chat and breakout functions in zoom. Also added to the workshops was a focus on the challenges of ensuring inclusion via remote or online learning. In September of 2020, the U.S. political backlash against social justice education manifested in many forms – including an executive order from the U.S. Executive Branch whereby supposedly "divisive concepts" – such as critical race theory, white privilege, intersectionality, systemic racism, positionality, racial humility, and unconscious bias were barred from government trainings. This executive order was later rescinded in January 2021. Although it was unclear if, and how much, the executive order would impact classroom teaching at a state public institution like URI, the executive order was introduced to attendees as important context to contemporary inclusion efforts broadly, and their teaching efforts specifically. Additionally, the ongoing forms of violence directed at people of color, transgender people, and other minoritized groups were included as important influences on both the content and delivery of the workshops. In sum, the socio-political context was an ever-changing, but important contextual backdrop to, the URI *Inclusion Workshops for Faculty*.

Workshop Series Details

This section offers a brief overview of each of the three *Inclusion Workshops for Faculty.*

Workshop 1: Introduction to Inclusion

The first workshop introduces teachers to basic concepts of inclusion. Using the first two quadrants from Adams and Love (2009), the session focuses on the inclusion (and exclusion) experiences and perspectives that faculty and students bring to the classroom. The session begins with an overview of empirical research on campus experiences for minoritized students. The PowerPoint slides cover foundational and contemporary writings about campus climate (Garvey et al., 2018; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann 2013; Nicolazzo, 2018; Oxendine et al., 2020; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Victorino et al., 2019) and more specific campus microclimates (Vaccaro, 2012). This body of research emphasizes grave educational, interpersonal, and

health consequences of negative, hostile, and unwelcoming climates for students from minoritized social identity groups. Since campus climate is all-encompassing, it can feel overwhelming for educators who want to make a positive impact. As such, the workshop pivots from campus climate broadly to microclimates (VACCARO, 2012) and corresponding spheres of influence such as classrooms, laboratories, offices, and other department spaces. In small and large groups, workshop attendees are invited to imagine specific ways they can foster inclusion and improve the microclimates in each of these specific spheres of influence.

The other focus of this introductory workshop is to encourage faculty members to engage in deep self-reflection. By far, one of the most consistent concepts in the inclusive pedagogy literature is the importance of increasing faculty self-awareness and knowledge. Scholars note that creating inclusive classrooms begins with personal reflection to inspire culturally inclusive growth (GILPIN & LISTON, 2009; HURTADO & GUILLERMO-WANN, 2013). Pope et al. (2019) specifically call upon educators to engage in personal work in order to achieve social justice competency. To successfully enact inclusion, educators must:

> consistently challenge themselves to increase their awareness and knowledge of self, of others, and of the relationship between the two; understand[ing] systems of oppression and inequities to create a deeper understanding of structural barriers within higher education; and develop the advocacy and action skills essential to eradicating the structural barriers, eliminate inequalities, and create multicultural change on campus and in society (POPE et al., 2019, p. 6).

Developing competencies to enact inclusion and social justice is a lifelong process. Workshop attendees are often at very different stages of this journey. Some may have extensively engaged in deep reflection over their careers while others may never have never considered "self" as relevant to their course material or teaching. In small groups, workshop attendees discuss their own personal identities and professional journeys towards enacting inclusion and social justice in their spheres of influence.

The final segment of this workshop (and all others) is dedicated to action planning. Attendees are asked to document 1-3 inclusion strategies that they will implement within each of their spheres of influence (i.e., classrooms, laboratories, offices, departments, disciplines/fields). They are also invited to consider how they will continue to engage in personal reflection in order to become a more inclusive educator.

Workshop 2: Inclusive Course Design

The second workshop builds upon Adams and Love's (2009) third quadrant: inclusive course design. Scholars have long argued that the development and design of course curricula and syllabi are important indications of an instructor's perspectives on inclusivity (ADAMS et al., 2000; DANOWITZ & TUITT, 2011; DRACUP et al, 2018; GAIR & MULLINS, 2002). As such, this workshop focuses specifically on the design of syllabi and course content. The workshop begins with a PowerPoint presentation about five key issues in inclusive course design: 1.) signaling inclusion from day one; 2.) increasing visibility and representation; 3.) avoiding stereotyping and deficit portrayals; 4.) designing for accessibility; 5.) and ensuring affordability. After providing brief information about each of these topics, participants are invited to discuss the application of these five issues in their courses.

The first key issue is the importance of promoting inclusion from the very beginning of an academic term. Explicit messages of inclusion from teachers can foster an inclusive

learning environment – which is incredibly important for all students, and especially salient for those from minoritized backgrounds (Tuitt, 2016; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016, 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2019). The workshop offers a variety of specific strategies faculty can use to signal the importance of inclusion. For instance, faculty can create a brief statement of inclusion (or a longer inclusive teaching statement) for their syllabus. Another strategy is to craft a live (or recorded) course welcome where instructors talk explicitly about the importance of inclusion and how they plan to foster it in the course. Other ways to visibly signal inclusion to students is to prominently display one's gender pronouns and diversity-related certifications (e.g., safe zone) on their syllabus, virtual course portal, or office door. Finally, faculty are encouraged to include the locations of inclusive campus resources (e.g., offices, services, programs) and gender-inclusive restrooms on the syllabus and/or in other course materials.

The second and third key issues are related: the invisibility of diverse peoples and/or hypervisibility and deficit portrayals of people from minoritized groups. Scholars have long noted the importance of critical reflection on whom a course includes or excludes (del Carmen Salazar et al., 2009; Gair & Mullins, 2002; Sidman-Taveau & Hoffman (2019). Specifically, Sidman-Taveau and Hoffman (2019) encourage teachers to evaluate their curricula for "misrepresentation or gaps in representation of diverse" peoples (p. 124). In the workshop, faculty are encouraged to consider the following questions: "Whose perspective is the history of your field told through?; Are scholars from minoritized backgrounds involved in discoveries, theory development, research, but not acknowledged?; In what ways is your course designed to include minoritized peoples, diverse topics, or social justice issues?"

In college courses, exclusion or deficit portrayals of minoritized people and topics may be unintentional. For instance, Vaccaro et al (2021) described how an inclusive LGBTQ professional development workshop helped raise awareness among clinical faculty who had not realized that the only time LGBTQ people appeared in clinical training was in a case study about HIV and AIDS. In that professional development workshop, faculty awareness was increased, and they subsequently created less stereotypical case studies that included LGBTQ patients in non-deficit ways. During the second *Inclusion Workshop for Faculty*, teachers also read and hear quotes from diverse college students about the positive impact of seeing themselves reflected in non-deficit ways in the curriculum. For instance, one student quote shared in the PowerPoint was from a college student who explained: "It was so affirming and exciting to read an article from a Latina leader in my field."

The fourth key issue covered in this workshop is accessibility of course content. Workshop participants learn about the concept of universal design (c.f., Burgstahler & Cory, 2010). Then, instructors are introduced to a variety of strategies to increase accessibility such as: closed-captioning videos, making handouts/slides available; enlarging handouts/materials; ensuring materials are screen-reader accessible; and using a microphone. Allen's (2018) suggestions for online accessibility are also covered and include: writing clearly and simply; using limited colors and high contrast; using headings; including descriptive link text and alternative text; and simplifying table structures.

The fifth key issue covered in the workshop is affordability. As the cost of post-secondary education continues to rise, it is imperative that teachers consider the affordability of their course materials including textbooks, lab materials, field trips, computer programs, and other curricular supplies. Strategies for affordability include using open educational resources (OER), adopting reduced-cost course materials, or placing a copy of course texts online.

The final segment of the workshop is dedicated to discussion and application of workshop topics and individual action planning. In small groups, workshop participants are asked to apply workshop content to their specific courses. Discussion prompts include:

"How inclusive are your course materials for all students? What can you do to make them more accessible and affordable?" The workshop concludes with action planning time whereby attendees document two specific ways they will design their courses to be more inclusive.

Workshop 3: Inclusive Pedagogy

Building upon Adams and Love's (2009) last quadrant, workshop three focuses on teaching and pedagogy. This workshop began with a PowerPoint presentation synthesizing common tenets of inclusive and equity pedagogies noted in the literature (e.g., Adams & Love, 2009; Kishimoto, 2018; Oleson, 2021; Tuitt, 2016). The presentation summarized best practices in inclusive and equity pedagogy and offered tips and strategies for implementation. For instance, the literature consistently notes the importance of building trust and sharing power with students (Brookfield & Preskill, 2012; Tuitt, 2016; Vaccaro, 2013). As such, the workshop covered strategies such as collective community norm-setting and trust-building activities. When educators are explicit about their perspectives and strategies for equity, it can enhance trust with students. As such, workshop participants are provided sample syllabus statements, teaching philosophies, and classroom activities designed to illuminate an instructor's equity stance and approach to classroom inclusion. Participants also have an opportunity to reflect on the possible impact of their pedagogical decisions on students. For instance, teachers are asked to consider the first impressions they make with students and how those impressions might foster or impede trust-building and inclusion. In small groups, instructors brainstorm strategies they can use to set a tone of support, build trust, and engage in meaningful interactions with students.

One of the crucial ways inclusive pedagogy is enacted is by addressing exclusion when it emerges from, and between, students. As such, workshop participants explore a variety of strategies for challenging exclusion and supporting students when discrimination occurs in the classroom. For instance, Bell et al (2016) suggest the following strategies for responding to offensive and hurtful comments from students: Address and name the exclusion directly; ask clarifying questions; provide space for silent reflection; and/or invite discussion about impact and how people are feeling. In breakout groups, workshop participants discuss these strategies. In small groups, they also talk about effective (and ineffective) past examples of challenging exclusionary comments in their classrooms.

The final 30 minutes of the workshop is dedicated to the discussion of case studies detailing common forms of exclusion such as: students using racial slurs, minoritized students being excluded during group projects, suicidal ideation from gay students, and misgendering of transgender students (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Nicolazzo, 2018; Oxendine et al., 2020; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Rankin et al., 2010; Vaccaro, 2012; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016, 2017; Victorino et al., 2019). Workshop participants review the scenarios and either role play, or brainstorm possible solutions to the case situations. In small groups, participants learn from one another and derive a variety of inclusive pedagogical strategies that they can apply in their classrooms. As with all the workshops, the session concludes with action planning. Participants identify 2-3 inclusive pedagogical strategies they plan to implement immediately in their classrooms.

Output: Workshop Outcomes/Evaluations

This section provides selected evidence regarding the success of the workshops. Immediately following each workshop, attendees are invited to complete an anonymous, online workshop evaluation. Those evaluations largely show the workshops are successful. Over 95% of workshop attendees agreed or strongly agreed that "This workshop helped me become a more inclusive educator." Nearly all (96.8%) of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that they "gained new knowledge about inclusive classroom strategies." Additionally, 89% agreed or strongly agreed that they "gained tools to help me design more inclusive courses." For an overall workshop rating, 72% of participants noted "excellent" and 23% rated the workshops as "very good." In sum, anonymous evaluations showed that attendees overwhelmingly reported learning new information and finding overall value the *Inclusion Workshops for Faculty*.

One of the main goals of the workshops was for the faculty to learn new information about inclusion. Open-ended evaluation comments reveal that attendees did indeed learn new concepts. For example, one participant noted "I liked the syllabus ideas and the accessibility things were new to me." Another main goal for the workshop was for instructors to develop a plan for inclusion. These plans were not intended to be complicated or onerous. By contrast, the plans consisted of 1-3 specific strategies that faculty would implement immediately in their classes. Attendees shared their action plans both during the workshops and via the online evaluations. Through these two venues, all workshop participants documented at least one (but usually more) tangible action steps for inclusion. Many attendees reported that they planned to utilize specific inclusion strategies learned in the workshop. For example, one responded noted that they intended to "use Allen's study for accessibility in my classes and include pronouns in my syllabus." Other workshop participants created action steps that were unique to their department or discipline, but still inspired by workshop content. For instance, one attendee planned to apply new knowledge learned in the workshop to "review placements for field experience course" for inclusion and exclusion. In sum, evaluation data suggest that the *Inclusion Workshops for Faculty* were successful at achieving the intended goals.

Conclusion

Higher education literature provides educators a plethora of resources for inclusive teaching. However, the faculty may not have the time or energy to delve deeply into this scholarship. Thoughtfully designed faculty development programming, rooted in this scholarship, can help educators learn research-informed strategies for fostering inclusion. This study detailed the design, implementation, and outcomes of successful *Inclusion Workshops for Faculty* at one higher education intuition in the United States. The success of these workshops offers concrete suggestions on how to facilitate thorough, and inclusive, program development. The first set of suggestions is interpersonal in nature. Ideally, faculty development is conducted among a community of learners. To build such community, faculty developers must build trust and rapport at the outset of a program and encourage risk taking and ongoing reflection amongst participants. The second set of suggestions involves providing faculty scholarly resources and best practice materials. In the *Inclusion Workshops for Faculty*, such content was separated into course design and pedagogical delivery. For instance, five key issues in inclusive course design included: 1.) signaling inclusion from day one; 2.) increasing visibility and representation; 3.) avoiding stereotyping and deficit portrayals; 4.) designing for accessibility; 5.) and ensuring affordability. However,

there may be other content-related issues relevant to specific disciplines or country contexts. Providing participants scholarly-informed literature about inclusive and socially just pedagogy is also essential. Instructors are experts in their disciplines, but rarely have had exposure to pedagogical literatures. It is important that faculty developers help workshop attendees learn basic tenets of equity pedagogies. Finally, the last suggestion for faculty development workshops is to require an action plan. Workshop attendees are more likely to implement workshop learning into their own courses if they develop a concrete and personalized plan of action.

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