


Chapter 11

Teaching Beyond Bias: Creating Inclusive Classrooms and Curricula

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author explores the pervasive issue of bias in higher education, both explicit and implicit, and its detrimental effects on the learning environment. Drawing on personal experiences and research, the author illustrates how micro-aggressions directed at faculty, particularly those of different racial backgrounds, underscore the larger systemic challenges faced by African American educators. The author emphasizes the importance of understanding and differentiating the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion while advocating for a curriculum that fosters an inclusive environment. She identifies cultural, racial, and socioeconomic biases in the educational system and provides insights on how these biases manifest in classroom interactions. Ultimately, the author argues that educators must actively engage in practices to confront their biases and create an inclusive curriculum that respects and values diversity, thereby ensuring equitable opportunities for all students.

INTRODUCTION

One afternoon, while teaching my undergraduate course on Word Analysis Skills, I began to circulate around the classroom to check if any students needed assistance with their assignments. When I approached one student, I pointed out that she had misspelled a word that I had written down. The term in question was “rime,” which refers to a key concept in phonological awareness that teachers use

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-9914-9.ch011

to help emergent learners develop their reading skills. The student had spelled it as “rhyme,” which is a homonym but incorrect in this context. When I corrected her, she appeared surprised and, with a snarky remark, said, “I just thought you spelled the word wrong.” I quickly responded, “I don’t misspell words.”

I quickly responded because I recognized that this was a microaggression directed at me as an African American faculty member. Although subtle, her remark suggested that she believed I lacked intelligence (Pittman, 2012). Research has shown that African American faculty often face similar racial microaggressions during classroom interactions with White students. Racial microaggressions are described as “subtle, stunning, often automatic... exchanges which are 'put downs' of Blacks by offenders” (Pierce et al., 1977). Additional studies (DeCuir-Gunby, et al., 2020; Harlow, 2003; Pittman, 2012; Turner et al., 2008) have indicated that White students frequently challenge the authority and credibility of African American faculty. While racial microaggressions continue to persist in society, they are deeply connected to implicit bias that people don’t even realize they have.

In this chapter, readers will read about the significant bias in higher education. Both explicit and implicit biases are apparent in faculty, staff, and students. Readers will also more clearly understand how African American faculty can go beyond the bias and create an inclusive and safe environment that welcomes diverse people and provides equity.

IMPLICATIONS OF SB 17

In 2023, a significant change occurred within Texas higher education when Governor Greg Abbott signed Senate Bill 17 (SB 17) into law on June 17. This legislation requires public universities to reevaluate their approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by mandating the closure of DEI offices across all institutions. The bill specifically prohibits these universities from establishing or maintaining any DEI offices and restricts several associated practices.

As a result of SB 17, faculty and administrative staff faced an urgent need to adapt to the far-reaching implications of this law, affecting various university functions, committees, and student initiatives. Notably, the bill bans mandatory diversity training and prevents hiring departments from soliciting diversity statements from job applicants—documents meant to demonstrate a candidate's commitment to creating diverse academic environments.

Despite the bill's contentious nature, an amendment was introduced to clarify that it would not interfere with course instruction, faculty research, student organizations, guest speakers, data collection, or admission practices (McGee, April 19,

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