

Creating Effective Learning Environments

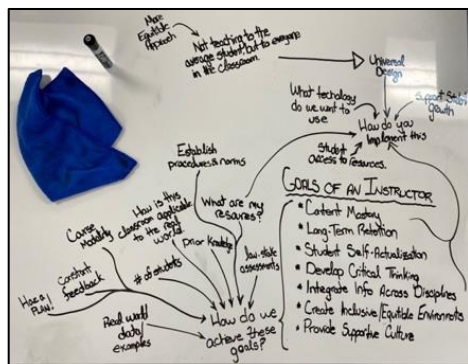
Competency Information

Competency Description When creating effective learning environments, instructors aim to promote an equitable classroom that supports universal access to instructional material. Students entering postsecondary education have different scholastic skill sets influenced by various factors such as privilege, socioeconomic class, and geographic location. However, traditional teaching practices can be inequitable and disadvantage underrepresented students, hindering their ability to achieve learning goals. To overcome this issue, instructors must implement an educational framework to accommodate individual learning differences. Providing students multiple ways to acquire and demonstrate knowledge and encouraging engagement can help create an equitable and effective learning environment.

Competency Development I enrolled in the College Teaching Institute (CTI; three-day workshop) to enhance my competency in creating effective learning environments. The workshop was designed to help participants improve student success and performance by designing inclusive learning spaces. One of the event's highlights was a keynote speech by Dr. Melanie Cooper, who has spent much of her research career developing evidence-based approaches to improving chemistry curriculum and education. Dr. Cooper shared her evidence-based approaches to enhancing curriculum and instruction, emphasizing the importance of designing "performance-based" learning objectives. In addition, the workshop focused on creating an equitable environment that supports accessibility and universal design strategies, as well as planning inclusive teaching strategies that recognize/address diverse learning needs.

Additionally, I attended a workshop given by Dr. Shahnaz Masani on *Instructor Noticing: Learning to 'notice' the socio-cultural learning environment to promote equity and inclusion*. During the workshop, we spent time 1) Identifying common racialized narratives in higher education by seeking out stories of racially marginalized students, and 2) worked with the three components of the racial noticing framework and applied them to respond to racialized interpersonal interactions in the classrooms.

Artifact



Artifact 1. My whiteboard notes during a think-pair-share exercise with cooperative groups during Dr. Melanie Cooper's presentation on *Five Easy Steps to Effective Peer Instruction*.

Written are goals of instruction that can help guide the design of a course/lesson.

**Artifact
Rationale**

To create an effective learning environment for a classroom, instructors need to set universal goals for the classroom and specific learning objectives before designing and implementing an instructional activity. These goals can 1) help guide the design of a course by establishing what you want students to gain from the activity, 2) define the evidence that will convince you that students have gained knowledge from the activity, and 3) the approach that might make the lesson/activity equitable (and what approaches make it less equitable). The whiteboard notes outline the goals of instruction, and how to achieve them through equitable practices. This artifact showcases my competency in designing structured and equitable learning environments, demonstrating my ability to set clear goals, measure student learning effectively, and implement inclusive teaching strategies.

**Interpretation
/ Reflection**

Participating in the CTI helped me develop a strong competency in Creating Effective Learning Environments. The workshop by Dr. Cooper reinforced my commitment to implementing evidence-based practices to ensure *ALL STUDENTS* have equal opportunity to learn and succeed in the classroom. During the CTI workshop, the first activity that Dr. Cooper had us do was quick brainstorming sessions on specific topics in small groups. Topics we brainstormed included 1) goals for instruction (see whiteboard notes), 2) what factors to consider when designing a course, 3) what factors to consider when implementing a course, and 4) equitable and inequitable teaching practices.

For me, the most interesting lists we synthesized were on equitable and inequitable teaching practices. Seeing practices considered inequitable, such as curving grades, assigning grades only based on high-stakes exams, and traditional lecture-based education, was eye-opening. These practices are how I was primarily taught in my undergraduate education and how I still see students being taught today. I understand that some of these practices may make it "easier" for instructors in a classroom, such as reading off of slides or infrequent grading, but I think we need to challenge ourselves to adopt better practices.

Additionally, Dr. Cooper emphasized the importance of setting a classroom culture through norms or establishing procedures. An instructor needs to set universal goals for the classroom and specific learning objectives before designing and implementing an instructional activity. These goals can help guide the design of a course by establishing what you want students to gain from the activity, defining the evidence that will convince you that students have gained knowledge from the activity, and approaches that might make the lesson/activity equitable (and what approaches make it less equitable). The workshop also equipped me with essential skills, including backward design, writing performance-based learning objectives, and learning how to create equitable and inclusive classrooms that are universally designed.

Dr. Masani workshop on *Instructor Noticing* was extremely valuable in strengthening my confidence in creating effective learning environments as it equipped me with a framework (i.e., Attending to racial phenomena, Interpreting racial phenomena, Responding to racial phenomena) to notice isolated, spokesperson, stereotyped, ignored, dismissed, disrespected, and gaslit narratives in higher education. By the end of the workshop, key takeaways were realizing that it is critical as the instructor that I pay attention to who is talking, who is being listened to, and who is valued as classrooms are social-cultural, gender, disability, (etc.) influenced interactions.

I feel that having competency in creating effective learning environments is critical as it directly supports students' success in the classroom, and creating equitable environments can boost students' confidence and motivation to learn. As I go forward in my career in teaching, I hope to incorporate these evidence-based practices in my classroom.