

Teacher Choices for Inclusive Learning

Equity-Minded Pedagogical Decision Making

What if your words had the power to instantly make students and their families or caregivers visible or invisible? They do. Whether it's a broad pedagogical decision or as specific as a single word, it sends a message. Below are a few examples that promote equity-minded decision making; teacher choices you can make that create more inclusive learning environments and communication experiences for all.

Pedagogical decisions

While some of these may seem obvious, they are often not happening consistently or systemically in school settings. Each are important decisions that promote access, opportunity and more equitable outcomes.

Instead of...	Use...
Singular representation (Perspectives, histories, values and identities from one group's perspective; typically, more dominant groups)	A variety of voice and cultural representation (work to de-center dominant narratives and expand to include traditionally absent narratives.)

Rationale

Students need to see themselves represented in curricular choices as well as have "windows" into other worlds that do not reflect a students' lived experience. Always use materials and examples that have been vetted for anti-bias and are free from stereotypes.

Instead of...	Use...
English Only	Multilingual supports

Rationale

The United States is one of the only countries that prioritizes monolingualism over multilingualism in some instances. Choosing resources and providing support including websites and online options with multiple languages or translation available not only provides access for all, but affirms that being multilingual is an asset, not a deficit.

Instead of...	Use...
Digital only learning or assignments	A blend of dynamic, high quality analog options and digital

Rationale

- **Not everyone** has access to internet or digital. When we lead with digital options, we communicate that it is the preferred mode. Analog becomes the afterthought or the "band-aid" to a deficit. Leading with dynamic, high quality analog options "flips the script" and helps to ensure that those that can't access digital have high quality and engaging activities as well.

General considerations

Below are some general concepts to consider when making suggestions about student assignments.

- Having strong relationships with your students, families, and caregivers; including knowing what they like to do or have access to, is always better than making assumptions based on your own perspective and experiences.
- Check your assumptions and privilege when suggesting activities like gardening, cooking, outdoor spaces, saving money, etc. These may be experiences or concepts that are not familiar or accessible to all.
- Choice is connected to privilege. Additionally, for some people in some families, offering choice indicates “you don’t know me.” For other families, giving the child choice might conflict with hierarchical family structures or family roles (elders, etc.) If a student is not engaging with “choice” options, providing a personalized suggestion might be enough to get them started.

Teacher Choices for Inclusive Communication

Equity-Minded Word Choice

What if your words had the power to instantly make students and their families or caregivers visible or invisible? They do. Whether it's a broad pedagogical decision or as specific as a single word, it sends a message. Below are a few examples that promote equity-minded word choice decision making; teacher choices you can make that create more inclusive learning environments and communication experiences for all.

Word choice

Without intentional language, our words marginalize some groups because of inequities that exist. Unconscious "us" vs. "them" messaging is divisive and damaging. Being intentional in our word choice communicates an understanding of the need to be inclusive to the variety of backgrounds and identities represented. Using equity-minded messaging in all communication will support the positive and welcoming experiences for which we strive to create.

Instead of...	Use...
Deficit based language (labels or phrases that cast a negative or "lacking" connotation).	Asset or strength-based language (labels or phrases that recognize abilities, diversity, or variety of value systems).

Rationale

If one's unique strengths and abilities don't match what is preferred or valued within the dominant cultural norms, students, families or caregivers may be mislabeled, misunderstood or underserved. When we begin by making decisions based on what a person is missing or doesn't have; we overlook the strengths and unique abilities that we all possess.

Examples

- Navigating poverty vs. struggling with poverty
- Navigating mental health vs. struggling with mental illness
- Matching student strengths and needs with support vs. helping disabled people

The words we use to describe student characteristics can carry deficit or asset-based connotations as well. When you're tempted to use words from the left, swap them out for a word on the right.

Stubborn	Independent
Needy, lacks independence	Social, extraverted, outgoing
Asks too many questions	Inquisitive
Slow, thinks too long	Thoughtful, reflective
Hyperactive	Energetic, lively
Blunt, rude	Direct
Impulsive, low control	Eager

Instead of...	Use...
Parents, family, mom, dad, etc.	Caregiver

Rationale

Caregiver encompasses the variety of adults that students may live with from biological relatives, to foster or guardian relationships. *Consider the context of your end goal. If your goal is for students to engage with someone or something (not necessarily a caregiver) restructure your sentence accordingly. It may also be appropriate to use a combination, “families and caregivers” depending on the context.

Examples

- Ask caregivers to support students with this activity.
- *Consider the context: “Find someone or something to listen to you read, it could even be a pet or a plant!” vs. “Ask a caregiver to listen to you read.”

Instead of...	Use...
House or home	Learning environment, learning space, or restructure your sentence

Rationale

Students may not live in a house. They might live in an apartment, trailer, be staying with friends or relatives or live in a shelter.

Examples

- “Look for shapes around you.” vs. “Look around your house for shapes.”
- “Activities need to be completed outside of school.” vs. “Activities need to be completed at home.”

Instead of...	Use...
“Commonly found materials”	Find out what materials are available to students; provide materials or alternatives as needed.

Rationale

What might seem like “common” household materials, may not be true for every student. Suggesting items, they “should have” around the “house” could create unnecessary feelings of inadequacy. We can avoid calling out situations that students find themselves in, beyond their control, by not assuming. Don’t assume everyone has even seemingly simple items like paper or pencil, always check with caregivers first and provide what is needed. Be sure alternatives are equitable swap.