Inclusive Teaching: Bringing Out the Human in Us

During a teaching and learning event in January, I was chatting with a faculty member about their teaching. All of a sudden they said: “It is only the second week of classes but I was the one putting the tent cards beside each student with their name on it and Klodiana the shock and surprise that I actually knew their names said it all. Some got over the initial shock and even managed to smile. It really doesn’t take much for the students to feel valued and included.” They went on to say that they don’t get to do this in every course they teach but once they did, it showed students that their names actually mattered to them, that THEY mattered.

That got me thinking about all the wonderful teachers that I have had the privilege to work with on a daily basis, and how different they all are. There are those who are quite serious when they teach and then others who thrive on humour, those who love to tell stories and then those who prefer silence and reflection. What they all have in common though is that they care about their students as individuals. They take a genuine invested interest not only in students’ progress in the course but in them as a whole person, including their needs, aspirations, and interests.

Engaging with students often goes hand in hand with acknowledging the whole of who we are as teachers. Although it doesn’t take much to feel naked in the classroom, it is quite unsettling or even terrifying for some of us to show our vulnerable and caring side. It requires that we go off the script and expose ourselves to judgment, criticism, and hurt (or is it discovery, laughter, and joy?). As Parker Palmer said in The Courage to Teach (2017): “Teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability” (p.17). It requires effort and bravery to show our human side with all of its allure and imperfections.

It seems to me though that there isn’t much space for bravery when all the teaching and learning metrics are built around the tangible aspects of higher education. How do we negotiate and reconcile those metrics in order to chart the intangibles—like ethos of belonging, well-being, and all the interactions that form the fabric of life. What would a brave space look like and feel like on our campus? A space where we don’t automatically ask in the hallways how are you and keep on walking without really listening. Or where we don’t lock our doors because we have yet another paper to publish or a grant to write? Instead why don’t we celebrate our vulnerabilities, smile and laugh with our students and colleagues, and call our students by their names? Let’s imagine a place where wellness, becoming, and belonging intersect. Now that to me is inclusive teaching.

Dr. Klodiana Kolomitro
Educational Developer & Adjunct Assistant Professor

Featured Stories

A home for equity and diversity clubs on campus
New space for student groups working to advance social justice to open this spring.

Capturing diversity on campus
Photography initiative aims to reflect growing student diversity at Queen’s.

Polishing the Chain
Ceremony is a reminder that the relationship between Queen’s and Indigenous peoples is ongoing and not just a moment in time.

Featured Events

Queen’s Women’s Network Celebrates International Women’s Day, March 8
Ka’tarohkwi Festival of Indigenous Arts, March 6-26
Queen’s Cares Showcase 2019, March 13

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