

Applying a Social Justice Lens in the Classroom: Scenarios for Discussion

Scenario A

- Anna identifies as Latina and is in a large class with 250 students where she is the only Latina student as far as she knows. She is excited about the class and hopes to major in the discipline. But, as she sits through the first few weeks of classes and looks through the future readings, she notices that there are no references to Latino/Latina/Latinx people either in class or the readings listed in the syllabus. She begins to doubt herself because she can't see herself reflected in the materials and discussions and wonders if this major is for her.

Scenario B

- Whitaker is an outgoing student eager to engage in class activities. However, he is legally deaf and asks the instructor to wear a microphone so that he is better able to engage in the class activities.
- Dr. Moore is willing to use the microphone so Whitaker is able to engage in class activities. However, Whitaker does not always offer up the necessary microphone. Dr. Moore is conflicted because sometimes Whitaker does not offer the microphone for use and asking for the microphone or checking to see if Whitaker is able to engage with content may bring undue attention to the situation.

Scenario C

- An introductory biology course is taught by an instructor that gives three exams and a final. The syllabus lists topics and the instructor sticks to these topics each day with a clear lecture via powerpoint slides. The instructor is an engaging lecturer that many students like. There is a textbook and a campus help center that the instructor sends struggling students to.
- Taylor is a student the system is struggling to support. Neither of his parents attended college. He earned a very low grade on the first exam, and it seems that everyone else knew what to study and how to study. High school was a breeze, but he doesn't even know where to begin to approach this class.

Scenario D

- Chee La is a Hmong student who has recently begun to identify as non-binary and has steeped themselves in the history of BIPOC LGBTQ+ people. They begin to notice that their instructor assigns essays on both Asian and transgender people but the scholars are all white and cisgender. The instructor also regularly assigns essays that explore the strengths and accomplishments of cisgender men and women. But, Chee La notices that the studies provided on transgender people focus exclusively on their oppression, such as their negative treatment in the medical field, without reference to their strengths or accomplishments. As the semester wears on, Chee La begins to feel negative toward themselves and the class.

Defining Social Justice	Themes	Infusion Guidelines	Classroom Interventions
<p>Social justice recognizes the inherent dignity of all people and values every life equally.</p> <p>It calls for both personal reflection and social change to ensure that each of us has the right and the opportunity to thrive in our communities, regardless of our identities.</p> <p>When we acknowledge that oppression exists and work together to end systemic discrimination and structural inequities, we increase the promise of a more just world.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research and study systemic oppression 2. Center the voices of the minoritized 3. Research, study and always engage resistance 4. Interrogate the canon 5. Teach intersectionality, intersectionally 	<p>Choose: Topics that have connectivity with real world issues</p> <p>Complicate: An analysis of power</p> <p>Challenge: Conventional thinking where power is hidden</p> <p>Encourage: Vision against apathy. "Hope is a discipline!"</p> <p>Acknowledge: One's own positionality</p> <p>Foster: A questioning of power</p> <p>Be: Aware of silences and the silencing of minoritized voices</p>	<p><i>As a group, develop a policy, activity, discussion technique, or some other intervention to address at least one of the provided scenarios through a social justice lens.</i></p>

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These definitions, themes, and infusion guidelines derive directly from the work of Dr. Lisa Brock. Please visit the [Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership](#) at Kalamazoo College for more resources and materials. Additionally, Mariame Kaba popularized the social justice mantra of "hope is a discipline!" See especially her interview on the podcast *Beyond Prisons* ([January 5, 2018](#)).