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Background:

Fundamentals of human health, otherwise called Personal Health Class, is a three credit-hour class offered by students in their pre-medical or pre-nursing training, and those focusing on becoming public health professionals and educators. Through this class, students are expected to understand the basis of good health, gain adequate knowledge of the different dimensions that constitute health and to develop skills for health behaviors that they’re expected to retain for a life time in order to lead quality and productive lives. As future public health practitioners and educators, students are also expected to be able to pass over knowledge acquired to others. The objective of this class therefore is to nurture students into developing life skills that will enable them to live healthy and productive lives by understanding the basis for their own good health, assessing their health risks for various diseases, and instituting behavioral changes that promote health, and nurturing such behaviors to become part of their day-to-day lives for the promotion of a good standard of health even when they are no longer students.

Currently, the key components that define this class are lectures, self-assessment on key aspects of health, and behavioral change projects. However, diversity issues and inclusiveness in this class have not been emphasized. While there’re many axes of diversity that may affect students’ ability to change behavior for health gains, in this innovation for inclusive pedagogy, I will focus on culture and racial disparities as two critical axes of diversity that will be addressed during the fall semester in order to come up with a more inclusive pedagogy for the academic success of students in this class while retaining appropriateness to their cultural context.

Where are we?

Students in my class come from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds and therefore need to adapt their behavioral changes to their cultural and racial backgrounds. To be able to apply the knowledge gained in class to different settings in order to promote their own health for the rest of their lives, interventions must be tailored to meet individual context and must be culturally and racially relevant. Secondly, as the instructor, I also happen to come from a completely different culture, and my accent in the English language is unique and perceived by most students as rather heavy, thereby making learning for my students difficult. Most importantly, however, the diverse background of many students taking this class, and my own cultural background (being a black from Africa) pose double vulnerability to both me and the students. Hence, it will be important to bear in mind the two aspects of diversity axes—race and culture—in the course design for this class.

Where do we want to go?

The goals of my innovations are to enable students understand the basis of good health; gain adequate knowledge about their own personal health and how to apply such knowledge towards health
behavioral changes for the attainment of quality health for them throughout their life. To this end, I’ll create an inclusive pedagogy with a view of achieving learner-centeredness by bringing together the different cultural implications in the discussion of personal health topics; minimizing students and teacher vulnerabilities, accommodating different perspectives during class discussions, and distributing cognitive authority to my students to empower them in accommodating different perspectives and be able to critically think about different health themes in view of their different cultures. Secondly, students will be supported and nurtured into initiating health behavioral changes and developing life skills that will enable them to live healthy and productive lives. This will entail brainstorming their behavioral change proposals to enrich it by incorporating views from different cultural and racial settings.

**Challenges currently obtaining in this class:**

Fundamentals of Human Health classes are generally large, consisting of about 120 students for a double class. It’s therefore difficult to establish closer rapport with individual students so as to understand their individual cultures and vulnerabilities, and to help them minimize their vulnerabilities in order to participate in classroom discussions more freely. Secondly, such large classes compromise learning in that some students engage in other activities while in class because they know the instructor may not detect their lack of attention. I have also come to appreciate that only a few students are actively engaged in this class because of its large size, and most students are inward looking or afraid of sharing personal thoughts and experiences, especially those of a cultural nature and a good section of them are learning by themselves, and not together with others in class.

**How I’ll know if we’ve achieved the goals:**

Based on the knowledge acquired from the lectures, students will be required to make self-assessment of the behaviors they engage in that could lead to poor health, and institute behavioral changes that promote their own health. Each student will be monitored to determine how they institute and implement behavioral changes. Four tests will be done throughout the semester to check students understanding of course content. Students will be required to go over key concepts that they seem not to have understood well. A discussion board will be implemented in which weekly topics for discussion will be posted, and emphasis will be placed on relating the discussion to their cultural context. This will bring out cultural implications to behavioral change.

**How we shall achieve the goals:**

A number of innovations to my curriculum will be instituted based on the principles of differentiation, flexibility, providing adequate instructions to students on how to do required skills, providing a rubric for assignments, and bridging the gap in vulnerability for specific students. These innovations will be achieved under five standards indicated below based on an instructional strategy involving specific learning activities including lectures, reading assignments, self-assessments, practical behavioral change activity outside class and a report thereof at the end of the semester. Topics with common themes will be grouped together in a sequence that flows in accordance with the scheme of learning activities.
1. **Joint productive activity:**

   Ten students will meet with me each day during the first week of semester for a get to know each other deeper for purposes of establishing rapport, and understanding each other’s backgrounds and cultures. This will be the point of entry into opening up discussions on difficult subjects such as divergent cultural views, but also for accommodating different perspectives on any subject. In furtherance of this initiative, the following activities will be implemented:

   a) Foreign/ international students, or at least any two students who have never met before, will be paired with local students for purposes of enabling quick acclimatization and acculturation and to make students open up communication amongst themselves;

   b) Students will be required to present their behavioral change projects to class for brainstorming, and to consult with me at least once or with another student on their behavioral change project so that the activity becomes like a joint activity between one student and another, or between the student and the instructor.

   c) Sitting arrangements in class will be modified to enable students work together in groups so as to encourage discussions during classroom activities.

   d) Students will be encouraged to collaborate in their projects so as to bring cultural differences from other cultures into their project.

2. **Language development:**

   International students, who are not fluent in English language, can face huge hindrances to freely expressing their thoughts, making them vulnerable and therefore hindering their learning.

   To address this problem, I’ll institute the following innovations:

   a) Modeling for students to whom English is a second language will be done by pairing international students with indigenous students, or indeed with other students to whom English is a first language. International students with language difficulties will be encouraged to express themselves in class so as to master the English language and participate freely in class discussions.

   b) To address my own vulnerability due to pronunciation difficulties, I will be collaborating with an indigenous student to improve my pronunciations and accent which most students complain about as rather heavy, making it difficult for them to understand what I am teaching.

   c) In each class, learning key technical jargons applicable to the topic under discussion will be encouraged and students will be expected to express their understanding using such jargons.

   d) I’ll distribute cognitive authority to students by giving priority to them for expressing/ speaking their mind and by allowing them to interject at any time while the instructor is speaking whenever they feel they have not understood an issue being explained.

3. **Contextualization:**

   a) Students will be required to read a chapter in their textbook and come to class prepared to discuss what they’ve read, while putting cultural context to their submission.

   b) Similarly, open/ free discussions in class with a view of achieving multiple perspectives, and bringing cultural context to class discussions, will be encouraged
c) Planned behavioral change activities by each student will be presented to the whole class and brainstormed over to incorporate positive criticisms before each student continues with their individual projects.

d) Application to personal, family, and community experiences will be sought for in class activities. This will allow students to implement activities of their own choice so long as they can achieve the same goals or objectives.

e) Collaboration will be sought between students and their families on behavioral health projects say during semester breaks in order to incorporate cultural aspects into the project.

f) As a way of motivation to themselves, students will be required to sign a behavioral change contract and pledge a reward for achieving their goal. However, emphasis will be placed on initiating and implementing a behavior change, and failure to achieve one’s goals will not be penalized.

g) Behavioral changes over a period of ten weeks of the semester will be encouraged to build on what students already know, or what they are already doing in their lives, or while at home.

4. **Challenging activities:**
   a) I will ensure that students see the whole picture out of the constituent parts of a topic by connecting a past topic with the one under discussion. This will entail assisting students to build on their previous success in order to achieve a complex understanding of difficult topics.

5. **Instructional conversation:**
   a) I’ll guide class discussions with students using appropriate learning goals in mind. In particular, I’ll support students’ views, judgments and rationale by providing substantive texts so as to give them confidence about their submissions.
   
   b) I’ll listen carefully to assess student’s understanding and by questioning, restating, praising, and encouraging students, I’ll make them understand that their submission has been approved.

**Conclusion:**

Using the teacher, peers, and the textbook (Mastering health by Rebecca J. Donatelle) as the major resources, I believe that implementation of the proposed innovations would lead to inclusiveness in my pedagogy by promoting learner centeredness, minimizing individual student vulnerabilities, accommodating different perspectives based on different cultures, and achieving the goal of making students better learners. In this regard, students’ capability to acquire knowledge and apply the acquired knowledge to their own health behavior changes will be enhanced. Through free discussions, students will also develop their competence to impart knowledge acquired to others. Although grading will be based on the syllabus as the standard, flexibility will be observed to accommodate individual student challenges.