Centering Learner Agency and Empowerment
Online Instructional Design Strategies to Promote Voice and Choice

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Takeaways

1. Learners across identity groups broadly benefit in their development of critical thinking skills and cognitive engagement skills when they can learn from and engage with one another, particularly in the online space.

2. Voice and choice provide a platform to cognitively engage and empower students in their learning.

3. Voice and choice also validate learners' lived experiences, honor their cultural knowledge and proximity, and provide a platform by which they can contribute to the knowledge of the collective.

4. Learning theories and frameworks that support inclusive design include but are not limited to the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Framework, Psychosociocultural Framework, Validation Theory, Personalized Learning Environments, and Universal Design for Learning.

5. Learner agency democratizes the learning experience, increases the diversity of ideas and perspectives, recognizes and appreciates students' lived experiences, encourages dialogue and collaboration, and promotes student engagement.

REFLECT

1. Assess your online learning environment to uncover potential assumptions, biases, and barriers to learning.

2. How can you design opportunities that allow instructors and learners to collaboratively co-construct the online learning experience?

3. How might you promote learner agency within your online design and teaching practices?

"To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin."
– bell hooks

Prepare Your Learners

1. Acknowledge potential concerns students may have.

2. Openly indicate willingness to support diverse learner needs.

3. Build in opportunities for students to ask for and receive assistance.

Support Your Learners

1. Provide prompt, consistent, and reassuring communication.

2. Provide representative exemplars allowing students to imagine their future successful selves.

3. Give frequent, timely, and meaningful feedback.

Design for Your Learners

1. Select applicable and interesting materials and activities reflective of diverse backgrounds and value systems.

2. Incorporate topics grounded in learners' diverse histories and experiences.

3. Include intentional curricular alignment that encourages diverse ways of knowing.