

Resource Guide

Active Listening to Support Inclusive Teaching

"We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very special kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know." - Carl Rogers

Active listening is a communication practice where an individual intentionally and authentically concentrates on another person in order to convey sincere interest. As educators, active listening can help create a space where students can think more clearly about what they are saying and thinking. As a result, active listening can be a powerful tool to help establish care for all students and facilitate student agency, as well as support an inclusive teaching environment. (Rogers, Lyon, & Tausch, 2014).

The following are just a few suggestions to help you consider how to incorporate active listening techniques into your teaching.

Be attentive to body language: Consider appropriate posture, body movements, facial expressions, and eye contact when talking with students. (Gray and Madson, 2007) When students are talking in class, move towards their general vicinity, make eye contact, and express attention and interest.

During classroom discussions, practice reflective speaking skills when talking with students: Using any number of active listening techniques can promote dialogue but also provide a space for understanding and acceptance. Garber (2008) offers five tips that utilize many of the same tenants of active listening to provide a space for inclusive dialogue through the practice of **paraphrasing, repeating, probing, clarifying** and **remembering**. Paraphrase student comments to make sure you understand what they are communicating. Reflect back feelings and content clues to help demonstrate an awareness of any emotions associated with their comments. Also, show how student comments have value by remembering and reiterating the main issues and points made by the student.

Incorporate active / reflective listening activities into teaching: Consider using in-class teaching strategies to provide a space for students to practice active listening. For example, have students "pair-up" and restate one another's' interpretation of concepts related to class. Encourage students to paraphrase one another's comments, ask for clarification, and clarify any points that they might not understand. Use the activity to help students practice reflecting on the others main intent rather than analyzing, judging or leading the conversation. (Garber, 2008)

Resources

Gray, T., and Madson, L. (2007). Ten Easy Ways to Engage Your Students. *College Teaching*, 55(2), 83-87.

Garber, P. (2008). 50 communication activities, icebreakers, and exercises (1st ed.). Amherst, Mass: HRD Press.

Rogers, C., Lyon, H., & Tausch, R. (2014). On Becoming an Effective Teacher: person-centered teaching, psychology, philosophy, and dialogues with Carl R. Rogers. (1st ed., pp. 67-76). New York: Routledge.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at ctl@slu.edu.