

A comment on the workshop:

Inclusiveness for Better Study Results



In the last week in which WUR celebrated its 100th anniversary, on 18 September 2018, a group of academics from various fields, as well as a few doctoral students, participated in the workshop 'Inclusiveness for better study results: how to foster a truly inclusive environment on campus'.

The participants got together to dive in, and explore in depth crucial topics in the field of inclusion and cultural sensitivity, such as: micro-aggressions (for other-beings) and its negative health effects; how unconscious bias can shape decision making; and more importantly, what kind of strategies can help individuals become aware of their own cognitive biases and, in the end, is it possible to create a more inclusive environment on campus.

Self-awareness

One part of the workshop focused on creating experiential learning opportunities that helped participants recognize instances of micro-aggressions by becoming self-aware of unconscious biases and assumptions on behavior. Examples with good intentions, but hidden unconscious messages are: " 'I love your people' or 'you speak such good English' ". An interesting book on hidden biases is ["Blindspot. The Hidden Biases of Good People"](#). The participants were also introduced to a repertoire of teaching or facilitation strategies to aid students in self-reflection and learning. Various instances of cultural challenges faced by some international students at Wageningen University were discussed.

Creating inclusive environments

The other part of the workshop focused on how to provide concrete knowledge on how micro-aggressions are constructed, what are the biases behind them; what can be the negative mental and physical health effects for those who suffer them, which often also translate in an impact on studying, such as decreased focus, productivity, and underperformance. A first step to create a

more inclusive environment, that is safer and fair for all, would be to listen to student stories, since they are the ones who experience it.

An inclusive environment can be created by:

- representation from all students with various cultural backgrounds in different academic structures; for example, student bodies on campus.
- institutions that have strong consequences for those who bully and harass others
- training students about the dangers of stereotyping and discrimination and ways in which they can use a more inclusive language when talking to others from different cultures (example: students learn not to tell foreigners about the "Dutch hour" but rather, they are taught how to negotiate across cultures)
- teachers are taught about implicit bias and stereotyping
- Inviting a diversity of voices to discuss and review academic and social practices on campus.

A nice example is provided by the University of Pennsylvania in the USA, where students can apply to participate in the Intercultural Leadership Program. This brings together a group of domestic and international students for a series of workshops and projects, with the aim of nurturing "an intercultural community of leaders who are ready to take on issues they are passionate about, learning more about communities different than their own, and make a lasting impact." More information on how universities support cultural diversity can be found [here](#).

Creating open spaces

Participants brought in dilemmas such as: how can adaptation to the Dutch educational system be promoted, while at the same time, remaining sensitive to the needs and hopes brought by international students? To what extent educational practices need to be adjusted in order to also reflect cultural sensitivity? How can Dutch populations remain and become aware of the challenges that international students face because of language or cultural barriers? The solutions, clearly, are not "one-size-fits-all" formulas, but rather, will come from creating open spaces for discussion and learning to identify micro aggressive communication in oneself and others. An interesting tool to use is the [Implicit Associations Test](#).

The work ahead is challenging but fascinating, and at the end of the day, many participants seemed motivated to take the next steps in the promotion of more inclusiveness on campus.

September 2018

This training session was organised by 4TU.CEE and facilitated by:

Marijke Van Oppen, Intercultural Trainer Wageningen University

Jessica Price, psychologist and intercultural trainer from Bremen

For more information contact: 4TU.CEE@wur.nl