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Addressing Elephants in Your Classroom: Navigating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Mental Health While Trying to Teach Tech- A Case Study Using Live Audio Classes

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes preliminary research into pedagogical examples that incorporate topics that address diversity, equity, inclusion, and mental health. By specifically looking at participant feedback from self-assessment assignments in the framework of live audio classes, needs were identified, and pedagogical approaches were taken to incorporate and address these usually neglected elements within a classroom focused on teaching technical applications. This paper is written for educators that teach technology who would like to explore a case study where the author consciously attempts to address topics that are currently front and center in the face of educators. This work responds to calls within the field to strive to improve accessibility, welcoming diverse genres, radiating inclusiveness to all races, gender, and gender identities.

1 Introduction

Within the Live Audio Production concentration of the Music Industry degree program at Millersville University, experiential learning is a key component that underwent emergency modifications for students to continue their education while adhering to required COVID 19 restrictions. As those restrictions loosened, emergent needs became apparent within the classroom community in the realm of social-emotional wellness, mental health, connection, and support for vulnerable students. After reemerging from the pandemic, conversations also shifted toward a greater awareness of mindfully addressing diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Instructors needed to pivot to redefine how they are teaching content while addressing these needs. "Post-pandemic education challenges us to reform our consciousness causing us to ask ourselves 'What kind of educator are we going to bring forward as a result of this challenge and how can we bring forward more communal, sustainable, equitable, and viable forms of education?'"[1].

The topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion have taken greater significance within the consciousness of many over the last two years. Taking the time to acknowledge the needs of a specific set of people within a classroom can be invaluable. "Teachers aren't just 'knowledge dis-

persers' but organizers of events which students meet with a purpose. Teachers are the co-creators of the academic learning space." [2]. This can look like activities such as celebrating and listening to individual student backgrounds, acknowledging, and working to understand the point of view of others, embracing what areas students might already have knowledge while giving opportunity for potential leadership within an activity and working to create opportunities where inclusion and empowerment are at the forefront of activities or situations where more support is needed.

While the topic of bullying is an unfortunate element that is ever present within the culture of the live event workforce. Bullying is also one aspect that can affect overall mental health which can align with suicide prevention. To attempt to address these issues and also attempt to measure how "conditions of extreme stress, long hours, pressures, and personal conflicts" the Behind the Scenes Foundation, (BTS) a non-profit, 501c3 organization for the entertainment technology industry developed a survey to address these needs. "The survey [3] reached almost 3,500 individuals who self-identified as part of the entertainment industry." "This survey while given in 2019 prior to the pandemic identified many significant factors that have only increased since that time." The findings are significant in that 91 percent of respondents reported feelings of anxiety, and 82 percent reported feelings of depression. A concerning data point of the survey was that 44 percent of the survey population experienced thoughts of suicide. [3] Suicide is listed as the 10th leading cause of death in the United States [4] and research shows that these numbers are higher in the industry category of "Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media" [5], with "Women in Canada in the Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media have the highest rate of suicide of any occupation." [6] With statistics as incredibly dire as these, it could be inferred that this is a work hazard that needs to be addressed at every stage of education both inside and outside of academia, as well as the workplace. The author is trained as a "Mental Health First Aider" through the Behind the Scenes Organization which has partnered with the National Council for Mental Wellbeing to begin to offer mental health first aider training. Whether for a recording class or live audio class, the basic premise of our gig is to work with other people. At some point, critical life and communication skills to address bullying prevention need to be taught somewhere along the way. The PACER's

National Bullying Prevention Center states "Practice role-playing activities, play games, create art, explore feelings, and establish a clear set of behavioral rules. These strategies reinforce positive relationships and behaviors and is one of the keys to helping people get along, which ultimately can help prevent bullying." ("Questions Answered - National Bullying Prevention Center - PACER") [7] Utilizing role playing activities can be helpful for students to start to be able to identify types of language around bullying and how to negotiate it when it happens.

2 Background

The author is fully aware AES is an organization primarily focused upon the technical aspects of audio engineering. This article is an attempt to share how the author approached and embraced these needs while teaching live sound reinforcement during the years 2020-2022 within classes that were heavily focused on learning technology and live audio engineering skills. The author is a nationally Board Certified Music Therapist (CBMT Cert#14830) [8], and certified mental health first aider [3] with a background as a Modern Band Fellow the last two years through the "Little Kids Rock" / "Music Will" Organization [8]. The research question that has been the driving force of the author's purpose for improving student performance within the live audio classes was this: "How can an instructor increase student interest, rebuild student to student connection and belongingness, while creating meaningful assignments that aren't overwhelming for the students? A secondary question emerged: "How can an instructor better connect with students while maintaining validity, relevancy, and professionalism to increase student performance inside and outside of the classroom?" These questions serve as the primary research focus of this paper.

The key issues observed within classes included the following: 1) Students had trouble coping with rigor in assignments, handling deadlines, and in some cases turning assignments. 2) Occasional peer-to-peer bullying occurred when one student was more versed in knowledge of the subject than another. Class culture needed to be rebuilt to support both different levels of knowledge and group teamwork, while providing opportunities for self-reflection, communication, de-escalation skills. 3) Knowledge inequity of the subject within the classroom was occurring and there was a

need to celebrate the areas students might already have a background in to give an empowering voice without creating situations where student knowledge was marginalized but less knowledgeable students were supported during the learning process. 4) How to improve learning and retention for typical students as well as students with educational disability accommodations that related to issues around having a time constraint within the classroom.

To first develop a metric to measure what the issues were in the classroom, the author created a scenario and question for self-assessment by the students. Students were to read the first chapter of the "Live Sound Operator's Handbook by Bill Gibson [9] entitled "The Changing Qualities of a Live Sound Engineer." This resource listed nineteen points of criteria for the position. The question posed to the students was for students to give an open-ended response after utilizing the reading. The question asked was "What are some aspects mentioned in Chapter 1 that you might want to improve upon during this semester in your own journey as a sound engineer?" The results included answers that fell into four main categories: technical skill improvement, understanding other genres/listening skill improvement, self-improvement, and interpersonal skill development.

3 Findings

Out of fifty (50) total student responses, the responses were split into four main categories in which the results can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: This table shows a few percent values.

Skill Area	% of Answers
Technical skill improvement	36%
Understanding other genres/ listening skill improvement	26%
Self-Improvement	22%
Interpersonal skill improvement	16%

The highest category had 36 percent of responses indicating a desire for technical skill improvement with responses such as "improve skills working with mixing consoles" and "improve understanding of how to use different mics." The next highest category was 26 percent of responses indicating desire to better understand

other genres and improve listening skills. Responses given in this category were to "improve on being more open minded when it comes to genres that I'm not personally a fan of", "need to expand my musical taste", "get better at mixing other kinds of music I'm not familiar with", in addition to ear training focused answers such as "better emulating that "recorded sound in a live setting" and "I feel as though I am not as proficient in recreating that type of sound live and that could be one main thing that I would like to work on" or "I want to work on my ears" or "improving mixes within rooms". The third category of rank was focused on personal self-improvement with 22 percent of responses indicating desires in this category such as "I want to work on my attention span and attitude". The fourth response category had to do with interpersonal skill improvement topics where 16 percent of the responses were answers such as "I'd like to improve upon my ability to work with other people", "try to branch out and talk to new people. Having social anxiety is rough, but I think I can change it as long as I'm doing something I love."

4 Discussion

When looking at the categories with the lower three percentages, and eliminating the traditional focus of the class which is technical skill improvement, these can be compared with the key problem areas mentioned in the Background section of this paper. This combination resulted in four concepts to explore:

1. Understanding Genres / Listening Skill Improvement. Within this category, looking to embrace and understand unfamiliar music while learning about technical aspects specific to that genre such as mixing. Finding common ground with other people to embrace diversity, and find a common ground interpersonally to understand and embrace unfamiliar music.
2. Self-improvement. Within this category, trouble coping with rigor in assignments, difficulty in handling deadlines, or not turning in assignments can be addressed through changing the way material is given and assignments are assessed. This category needs to leave students feeling empowered no matter where their knowledge base, while accommodating student learning and learning styles.

3. **Interpersonal Skill Improvement.** Within this category a class culture of working with others and utilizing teamwork, support, communication skills, and opportunities to practice self-reflection and de-escalation. This also includes acknowledging and understanding behaviors that can be addressed through bullying prevention and understanding how to cope with scenarios that might be present in a workplace within the music industry.
4. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.** While these three items are vastly different from one another, there are elements of these that can be addressed from the standpoint of an individual wanting to learn about music that is different than what that individual is familiar with. Under the lens of this category, diversity also connects with the idea of cultural appropriation. From an instructor's standpoint, it is critical that the instructor does not present or frame any kind of music as "lesser than" another kind of music. To further explore this point would result in a much deeper dive than the context of this paper. It is well stated by Karen Howard that "in terms of music education, cultural appropriation usually refers to the taking of non-Western and nonwhite genres and performance practices and carries connotations of dominance and exploitation." "In the United States, cultural appropriation most often happens across racial lines. For music educators, this typically features white teachers using elements of a marginalized culture without demonstrating an understanding of the historically and emotionally significant elements of the music culture" [10] When teaching a diverse set of students, taking the time to ask about background and listening helps each individual student feel heard and seen. This also can be said for subcultures within the classroom, such as the LGBT+ community, students for whom English is a second language, and many others.

An area that equity has become an issue in these classes is how much time students actually get to learn on a mixing console. People who are more engaged students always try to be in front of the console generally get more hands on learning time. The author has had to be extremely vigilant to make sure the quieter and less confident students have an equal amount of time and are also checked to make sure they are grasping concepts. The introduction of additional lab time helped to create

a more practical solution which paired students with studio techs and allowed more time on the equipment which led to greater mastery of the concepts.

Addressing the element of inclusion in this setting often comes in the form of dynamic group engagement. Avoiding group settings where the leaders and the slackers self-divide is critical, so designing group work where everyone has a role or function, and participates, has been key. Examples of this can be seen in the Modern Band and Group Quiz activities.

5 Activities

In the next section, six activities are detailed as examples of how to teach "tech" while creating a safe space for students to build their personal self-esteem, improve interpersonal relationships and skills, and for the educator to incorporate human-centered teaching elements that are foundational for future skill building on many levels while also addressing elements of diversity, equity, and inclusion. All of these were utilized within the author's classroom, and in some cases had a pre and post event survey or way to document feedback about the activity. The author intends to continue with future research in this area and to be able to add to the repository of learning experiences to make the connection between technology of teaching live audio strong with the human connection for optimum learning.

5.1 Activity 1

5.1.1 Audio Mixing Show and Tell

This activity takes the familiar activity of "Show and Tell" within a classroom setting combined with a live audio twist. The student brings in their favorite song and plays about a minute of the song for the class. They are to talk about the song for five minutes and describe what musical elements they love about the song, how long they've been a fan of the song/artist/band, and how someone would approach the mix of this song within the genre. The idea is that they pull from some of their personal knowledge, but also do some research into the specific mixing elements that might be encountered at a show. This activity can be taken a step farther by requiring research activity where, after the show and tell, everyone needs to pick a genre they don't know, research it, and create a "cheat sheet" for that genre. All the genres are combined into a larger class database of genre specific mixing information for students to use in future applications.

5.1.2 Areas this activity addressed

Understanding Genres / Listening Skill Improvement

- Students are learning about other genres, but from the people that love them.
- Incorporates listening and ear training but beyond the realm of familiar music and genres

5.1.3 Self-improvement

- Addresses self-improvement in conjunction with the category above. Students get to share a piece of themselves by sharing their favorite music, but the greater benefits come from the other categories.
- Students who had more knowledge in the areas of their own music can validate their identity, speak their truth, and have their voice heard. All these things lead to more self confidence that work in conjunction with strengthening the peer-to-peer relationships.

5.1.4 Interpersonal Skill Improvement

- Students can learn and connect with their peers in a way that they may not have been able to prior. Sharing music can lead to more discussions in and out of the classroom, but also helps people to develop a more empathetic approach to working with people and the music they love. When the "WHY" behind someone's personal choice is known we tend to connect easier and respect the other person's opinion and musical choices. Encounters such as this are valuable for students working within the field with musicians that they may or may not connect with their music.
- This activity is a subtle group culture building activity. People may learn about new music, or they may find peers that have music in common that they never knew. If the secondary activity is applied, there is more team work involved, but the primary component is creating a space for students to learn to connect to others, and to learn about the nuts and bolts of how to make that song / genre sound great on stage.

5.1.5 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- This is an activity that can often go into the area of diversity because sharing music is an extremely personal activity. Many times, students tend to be open about why they connect to the song, and it might be because it helped them through a tough time in their lives. Be prepared for an emotional component during the "why do you love this song" portion. This activity is excellent for early semester icebreakers, but also if you are noticing that the class needs some cohesion. This allows everyone to be included and have a small platform to be seen and heard, while talking about something they love and the details of how to approach it in a live setting.

5.2 Activity 2

5.2.1 Incorporating Elements of Modern Band Pedagogy

For those unfamiliar with Modern Band Pedagogy, it is essentially an approach to teaching music utilizing commercial instruments such as guitar, bass, keyboards, drums, voice, and rapping. In addition, hip hop, song-writing, and beat making utilize known vernacular of popular music that students are already familiar with in their daily lives. It is a highly approachable way to teach how to play/sing the main instruments in such a way that music can be made almost instantly.

Within my past live audio class sections students have been primarily made up of people who are majoring in other instruments and often don't have a background in "rock band" instruments. When needing to have something played in these classes, often the task was left up to the instructor or students who might know how to play the instrument. This was an extremely inefficient use of time and was impossible to be an effective instructor when not near the sound board. When incorporating the Modern Band curriculum into the Live Audio classes, not only did they break down the barrier that was preventing a more effective learning environment, but it also added many more elements.

5.2.2 Mini Modern Band Activity

On the website that holds many modern band charts and teaching resources, there is a database of several songs and their easy version chords for guitar and piano. A simple bass fingering chart, and the drum set beat written in a unique form of iconic notation.

Seven charts were pulled from this database. They had three chord songs that were simple and that the students would either know or be easily familiarized with. The class voted on their (three favorite) charts. This became a unique identifier as classes were later known for the charts chosen at a later "Hallway Concert" performance. Students were taught to play all the instruments, of all the parts of each of the three songs. This was done in a rotational fashion, and the class of 16 was divided into thirds. One group was playing the song, one group was singing the song, and one group was at the console mixing the band.

5.2.3 Areas this activity addressed:

Understanding Genres / Listening Skill Improvement

- Students had to learn new instruments on the fly and listen to each other to make the song successful.
- Students who were mixing the group were directed to listen not only to the mix of the group, but also addressed genre specific mixing that was unique to that genre, such as pop, metal, and hip hop, or rap, which addressed the category of embracing and understanding unfamiliar mixing.

5.2.4 Self-improvement

- Prior to this activity, students were not comfortable playing these instruments or singing. By the end of the semester, they were comfortable playing the instruments, and had the knowledge to be able to understand the instruments beyond just playing them. The students were versed in how to use amplifiers, direct boxes, place microphones, and understand monitor mixing from the standpoint of being a performer.
- The additional time of being able to mix live groups in a low pressure situation prior to a higher pressure situation helped to build confidence in a way that was incremental yet able to be accessed quickly when needed in high pressure situations.

- The result of students having this advanced knowledge is that students were confident in their ability to mix and be in a live performance environment, worked in the industry on a local level, and later worked with major live event companies that tour.
- This was another hands-on approach to learning equipment that far exceeded book work or quizzes on technical aspects. The approach of simply making music to utilize the music for mixing purposes gave students with varying learning styles a much more dynamic experience.

5.2.5 Interpersonal Skill Improvement

- Students who had more knowledge in the areas of playing the instruments were utilized as tutors through the process during both the music making and the mixing process
- This activity requires an enormous amount of teamwork to keep the music going while learning group communication skills on the music making side, as well as communication skills on the engineering side. Engineers learn to communicate with the musicians, ask about specific monitor needs, communicate with other student engineers about what they are hearing, and learn what needs to happen for changes to be made in a time sensitive low pressure situation.
- Students learned to trust what they were doing, incorporated rap into music being made, and when the group voted to use songs such as "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" by The Tokens or "I Want Candy" by Bow Wow Wow, the students would sing as they cleaned up the classroom and brought the experience out into the halls of our music school. This helped build group culture, and incorporate teamwork.

5.2.6 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Utilizing music from different styles and genres allows students to begin their journey into these genres, but it also allowed students from various backgrounds and ethnicities within the class to feel heard that they had an audible voice for suggestions. The criteria were that the genres had to each be different.

- This activity addressed equity as well as inclusion because so that no one was left behind. If people struggled with an instrument, this was a place where they were not alone. Students were able to struggle and have success together. Students who were knowledgeable on an instrument weren't allowed to play that instrument to create a more equitable activity.

5.3 Activity 3

5.3.1 Family Feud Style Quiz Game

Creating games such as an end-of-the-week verbal quiz where there are two teams sitting directly across from each other. Two levels of questions: Individual Level where students are responsible for knowing the knowledge that was presented and are responsible for responding and earning points. Group level where more difficult questions and tasks are asked, and the group must work together to obtain the three points for the group. Double final question where a more complex question is asked the same of each group and each group's answer is compared to the other and the teams work together to score the final answer. The team with the most points "wins".

Areas this activity addressed:

5.3.2 Self-improvement

- A game such as this is a way to assess student retention, while creating gentle peer pressure throughout the week. This learning process leads up to the group class quiz. This activity motivated students to study harder. It should be noted that two students actually told the author in the hallway the day before the game "We can't wait to do the quiz tomorrow!"
- Students feel empowered when they answer the question correctly in front of the group.
- Every student's voice was heard no matter their level of knowledge of the material.
- Documented students with ADHD and needed special time accommodations embraced the challenge and were far more engaged in this verbal and logic style form of testing.

5.3.3 Interpersonal Skill Improvement

- Because there were two elements in play – the individual responsibility to answer questions, and then the need for the group think to answer questions, the issue of a hierarchy of student knowledge disappeared. It put everyone on the same playing field and allowed everyone to shine when it was their turn. When someone didn't answer the question correctly, someone from the opposing team had the opportunity to answer the question. Group support occurred in two ways, with the first being clapping and support no matter when someone got the answer, but support still when someone missed an answer. There was also group support when there was a group question was asked. With no person left behind, the activity created a culture of teamwork and support.

5.3.4 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- This activity primarily addressed equity and inclusion as it was a group activity that everyone was participating in, but it had elements of requiring individual accountability and readiness for the team, but also inclusion of everyone needed to answer questions as a team.

5.4 Activity 4

5.4.1 On Campus Activity - Hallway Concerts

- This activity took place in the main foyer of the music facility. This served the purpose of creating a low stakes event that added enough pressure for a positive group experience yet gave students independence to oversee their own musical act from start to finish. The class decided who would play the concert, then they helped with the setup of the live audio equipment at the location. The lead up activities in class included planning input lists, premeditating mixing needs, equipment lists, and then some light marketing. Students were assigned to be in pairs that were responsible for individual acts and would rotate in and out with each act.

- This activity occurred toward the beginning of the semester so that students would have an opportunity to have a low stakes concert as their first experience. The author would stay with the students at the console during the entire show and help remind students with details of stage management, placement, flow of a concert, and mixing elements when needed.

Areas this activity addressed:

5.4.2 Self- improvement

- This activity for many was their very first time working with live event equipment from the perspective of an engineer and stage tech. While it worked on technical skills, it also helped with self-esteem, empowerment, and overcoming anxiety.

5.4.3 Interpersonal Skill Improvement

- Because of needing to work within pairs, this was a good introductory activity to work with another person to solve problems during the event.
- The team element of preparing for the show was also key for communication and planning purposes, but also group thinking on how to design a stage plot and input list that worked effectively for roughly ten acts in one evening.

5.4.4 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Students got to have a voice and chose the musical acts. The genres were diverse, with performers both music majors and non-majors. Students got to work with those artists they brought in to showcase. This event embraced diversity, equity, and inclusion by utilizing student act choices, group participation, students' voices being heard, and everyone was involved in the process from beginning to end.

5.5 Activity 5

5.5.1 Off Campus Activity – Launch Music Conference and Festival

This activity was in conjunction with a partnership between Millersville University and the Launch Music Conference and Festival. As a supporting stage sponsor, we were able to have a stage for three days that operated as a double stage where dozens of acts in all different genres played while the students from the Live Audio classes helped to run setup, live mixing, stage management, and general problem solving.

This activity was toward the end of the semester so that students would have enough knowledge coming in that they would be able to handle the basics of a large event. This was a higher stakes event that truly stretched students out of their comfort on several levels. None of the students had ever been to a conference, a conference center, and in some cases had never parked in a parking garage or had to find their way to the room inside the convention center. The event itself generally ran from 6pm to 1am over three days, and the bands on the dual stage were running nonstop.

- Students were placed in teams that ran throughout the days and rotated shifts in different positions while the shows occurred.

Areas this activity addressed:

5.5.2 Self- improvement

- This required several elements of overcoming the fear of the unknown. Unfamiliar venues, situations, large crowds, unfamiliar music, unfamiliar people, and unfamiliar with how conferences work. The students that participated in this activity described the experience as being transformational.
- Several students battled anxiety due to the unknown and needed to be coached through the process of breathing and thinking the logic of the next step. While this seemed like a big event, in the grand scheme of things, it was a low to medium stakes event with small crowds and lots of room for error and correction. There was also coaching from the author and from other professionals.

5.5.3 Interpersonal Skill Improvement

- This was a very important activity for interpersonal skills. As students relied on each other, consulted with each other, learned how to approach a situation like this where meeting new people and going outside of the interpersonal skill comfort zone is the normal and expected activity at a conference. Many of the students reported that they wished that they had been even more outgoing and took more advantage of the experience than they did.

5.5.4 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- This event demonstrated to students that diversity in music making, acceptance of creativity, and self-expression is alive and well in the real world.
- The areas that the author will address for future participation is that of equity and inclusion of the event. A factor that became an unexpected issue was that of parking. Some students had a car and could afford parking, some students did not have a car, and some had a car and could not afford parking. The cost of the parking became an equity and inclusion factor that was difficult to navigate. To better support these elements in the future, a system of support for funding of transportation and parking should be in place so that something as simple as parking does not become a barrier to a potential life changing experience.

5.6 Activity 6

5.6.1 Mindful Culture Role Playing

This activity utilizes materials and scenarios from the Behind the Scenes Mental Health First Aider training that the author attended. It was specifically created for the live event industry to address situations and scenarios that might exist within a workplace. This activity was focused upon identification of bullying, identification of mental health issues, and even some elements of general customer service skills.

When alumni of our program come back and describe the type of culture and occurrences that have happened when out on tour, it becomes clear that strong interpersonal, negotiation, deflection, recognition of bullying and gaslighting, recognition of gender bias, racial bias,

and a general "breaking in of the new person" can exist on many levels. In addition, the need for personal resilience under great pressure, little sleep, long hours, and the absence of one's personal support system when on the road can be challenging.

The procedure uses the DESC approach to confrontation and de-escalation of a bully (Describe, Express, Suggest, and Consequences). Students are to think of a time that they might have been bullied or seen someone else be bullied and draw upon this to create a short script. The key to this is for students to write their own script first, then share all the scripts in class. Having the class guess what the DESC answers are to the scenario first is key to this activity. Then have the students read their personal answers and discuss the differences.

This is an activity that requires students to think quickly and takes time to master, and even someone with a lifetime of experience can get trampled by expert "gas lighters." This simple activity may have nothing to do with your tech class, but it could have enormous impacts if someone is being bullied and eventually quits the industry vs. someone who has the skillset and self-esteem to stand up for themselves and proudly take their place in the music industry.

Areas this activity addressed:

5.6.2 Understanding Genres/ Listening Skill Improvement

- Not applicable

5.6.3 Self-improvement

- This provides an enormous tool for self-improvement, self-esteem, and being able to handle toxic situations with clear and concise communication.

5.6.4 Interpersonal Skill Improvement

- This provides an opportunity for students to learn this skill, to practice their communication inside the classroom, and more immediately, interpersonal relationships on a daily basis inside and outside of the classroom.

5.6.5 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- This tool set provides an effective communication tool for people who might need it because they are being targeted for any reason. Bullying of people in subgroups that identify as LGBTQ+, ethnic subgroups, or any other group can be targeted within the workplace. Every person deserves to learn how to de-escalate a situation and know how to talk to the offender, and who to talk to after the situation has happened quickly and efficiently.
- Identifying and addressing bullying situations saves lives by avoidance of mental health crises escalating to the point of suicide. Preventing escalation can prevent future mental health issues and preserve a safe and happy quality of life.

6 Concluding Thoughts

Within higher education, the pandemic has highlighted the need to re-envision how to teach in multiple ways. Since diversity and inclusion topics have been recently brought to the forefront of world dialogue, the focus upon addressing and dismantling systemic inequities within our educational approach, prioritizing mental health and wellness, decolonizing teaching, and learning and developing new models of education have become paramount. Creating space for students to build and rebuild peer and instructor connections, while improving retention of learning and technical skillset creates an invaluable educational experience opportunity. The job of the members of academia and in any educational role is to help build and support a workforce of knowledgeable future professionals and community leaders. The author's goal was to encourage and support peers to consider using experiences to remind us of our humanity: differences, emotions, connection, and compassion, and incorporating more human-centered teaching style. Together we can address those elephants in the room that are ready to be identified, fed, and let out to find the pasture.

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