Collected Wisdom on What May Hurt and What May Help Promote a
Sense of Safety and Inclusion in Our Classrooms

Language

What May Help	What May Hurt
Referring to individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered	Referring to "homosexuals"
Referring to sexual orientation	Referring to sexual preference, or the choice of a gay or lesbian lifestyle
Using "people first" language—a child with autism, a women with severe and persistent mental illness	Labeling individuals by their disability (e.g., a schizophrenic, an autistic child)
Saying someone has a disorder, or using "people first" language	Saying someone "suffers from" or is "afflicted with" a disorder
Referring to partners instead of spouses	Conveying the assumption that all students are heterosexual
Using terms like embrace, welcome, and enjoy when it comes to diversity	Using the expression that someone is "tolerant of" or "tolerates" gays and lesbians. Imagine saying "I tolerate" Latinos or White people.

Classroom Situations

What May Help	What May Hurt
If deemed pedagogically necessary to have violently disparaging words used in the classroom, prepare students ahead of time, provide explicit instruction about the unacceptability of the words, process reactions after the fact, and provide explicit instruction about how to respond to the use of such words by others in practice situations	Using words with violently disparaging connotations and histories, especially without adequate preparation specific to the words or in the absence of a shared sense of classroom safety, or without adequate processing after the fact
Never singling out individual students as spokespersons for any group they may belong to, even if they have offered their views on topics in the past	Turning to a student while discussing a particular group or asking the student to speak as a person from that group. Failing to explicitly correct students who treat other students as spokespersons for a group they may belong to
Welcoming comments of international students about social problems, solutions, and other conditions in their countries	Failing to respond positively to such contributions; suggesting that what happens in other countries is irrelevant to the learning of SSW students
Modeling appreciation of international students in the classroom, encouraging students who have not mastered English to speak, letting them know ahead of time you will ask them a particular question so they can be prepared, ensuring that international students are readily included in small group activities	Failing to notice that other students are excluding international students, conveying a lack of appreciation of the difficulty of doing graduate studies in a foreign language
Including authors from diverse groups on the syllabus and extolling their contributions to the course's topic area	Including only authors from a narrow range of backgrounds

Seeking out reading materials suggested by students of diverse backgrounds and incorporating them into future classes	Failing to respond positively to student recommendations of good sources of information on diverse groups or good authors on the course topic from diverse backgrounds
Including examples of diverse families in case examples and classroom exercises, and being sure that case examples include a variety of strengths	Excluding certain family types from case examples—e.g., gay couples, lesbian partners with children, grandparents raising children, single parents, older adults
Including examples of diverse families in case examples and classroom exercises focusing on social problems	Including only or primarily certain groups in examples of individuals or families with "problems"
Including examples of diverse families in case examples and classroom exercises, and being sure that case examples involving each group include a wide range of strengths and problems	Conveying an assumption or not directly countering student assumptions that some social problems affect almost all members of certain groups—e.g., all African American women have low birthweight babies; all Latino men are domineering
Explicitly teaching and/or countering assumptions held by some students that low income indicates family or individual pathology	Conveying the assumption that low income indicates family or individual pathology. Failing to address a student's comment that low income should be considered part of a child's mental health disorder
Explicitly teaching and/or countering assumptions held by some students that any particular family structure indicates family or individual pathology	Conveying the assumption that single parent families have deficits. Failing to address a student's comment conveying this assumption.
Modeling moral courage by countering student comments that are disparaging of any group	Failing to address student comments that are disparaging of any group, e.g., a comment suggesting teachers shouldn't have to prevent bullying of gay or lesbian students
Working hard to change the classroom climate or course content that one or more students perceives as disparaging to a minority group	Telling students who report feeling that the classroom climate is unsafe or disparaging to their minority group that they should consider dropping the course
Recruiting a small group of culturally sensitive students to be your eyes and ears during the course—to raise their hands to bring attention to actions or comments that were insensitive or potentially insensitive	Trying to monitor all classroom dynamics while running the class, and missing incidents that make one or more students feel unsafe. Processing these events may not necessarily confirm that something offensive occurred, but processing them is critical for creating safety.