

(Dis)Comfort Zones*

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Summary The research project (Dis)Comfort Zones examines case studies that deal with the tension that arises when diverse groups come together in an academic milieu. Seeking to create an environment of acceptance and belonging, students and professors work side by side to devise strategies that use “discomfort” as a means of educating.

1. Relevance

In order to build the foundation for progress and understanding, it is important to assess and explore these uncomfortable situations that inevitably arise when students of differing cultures and values mingle in the classroom. Students at a college level begin to think critically as well as develop a fundamental set of values that will affect their interactions in society throughout adulthood.

2. Aims & Objectives

The objective was to provide strategies that better optimize the cooperation and sense of inclusion amongst diverse individuals and to implement them into the everyday life of students. As a result, classrooms evolve into a more welcoming and engaging ambiance.

3. Methods

A team of panellists made up of students and educators were presented with case studies that were written by students to reflect situations they commonly witnessed in colleges. In front of an academic audience from various institutions, they deliberated on strategies to utilize these uncomfortable situations as a way to educate and create an environment of inclusion.

4. Results

The panellists were challenged with finding mutually agreed upon resolution to each case study, and were unsuccessful in some situations. These “taboo” issues that are most commonly swept under the rug were dissected and new tactics that encompass the viewpoints of students and their teachers were brought to light. The difficulty faced was to respect the values of each affected parties all while finding a common ground to bring them together.

5. Conclusions

The resolutions to the case studies that were deliberated on in (Dis)Comfort Zones appertain to not only college life, but have bearing in society as a whole: students in CEGEP are faced with new experiences that define who they will become as adults. The maturation of analytical thinking precedes the development of a set of values unique to the individual which may differ from the values inculcated during their upbringing. If it were not for this crucial step in a young person’s life, we would see no evolution from one generation to the next. This initiation to the conversation around diversity, which is uncomfortable at first, is the building blocks to a tolerant and welcoming society.

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