



EDUCATION

Principles of inclusive curriculum design

Anticipatory
Flexible
Accountable
Collaborative
Transparent
Equitable

Generic considerations

- cost and financial considerations;
- embedding student and staff well-being;
- promoting student engagement;
- use of technology to enhance learning;
- responding to different approaches to learning;
- avoiding stereotypes and celebrating diversity;
- making reasonable adjustments.

Introduction

It is the responsibility of every member of staff within HE to respond to the requirements of equality legislation. The basic principle that can and should be universally responded to is that **it is attitudes, barriers and other forms of discrimination within the system rather than individual characteristics or deficits that are the cause of disadvantage**. Employing an inclusive approach is underpinned by the adoption of other principles of inclusive curriculum design, summarised in the adjacent text box and discussed in the introduction section of this guide available at www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/inclusion/disability/ICD_introduction.pdf

May and Bridger assert, in respect of developing an inclusive culture, “making a shift of such magnitude requires cultural and systemic change at both policy and practice levels” (2010: 2). In essence this change is represented by a shift in focus from responding to the ‘needs’ of individuals or specific groups of students to an approach that anticipates and plans for the *entitlements* of the evolving student population. Thus the onus is on institutions and subject communities to change and adapt their policies and practice rather than expect this of individual or specific groups of students.

There are many generic considerations of inclusive curriculum design, summarised in the adjacent text box, which are discussed in the introduction section. The focus of this section is on subject-specific considerations for those in those subjects aligned to education. Here examples of innovation and effective practice are provided to demonstrate that effective practice for one group can and should be effective practice for all. The examples, resources and ideas included in this and other subject guides have come from the sector. They were obtained directly in response to a general request made to the sector during 2010, from a review of the HEA Subject Centres or from recommendations made by colleagues teaching in the specific subject.

Where there are examples in other subject guides that may be particularly relevant or worth reviewing for further adaptation these are flagged. However, notably inspiration and ideas for curriculum design can come from many sources, therefore reading strategies employed and ideas in other subject areas can be a useful source of new ideas.

Inclusive curriculum design: subject-specific considerations

Making educational links with other subjects

As noted in the QAA benchmark Education “can be seen as a ‘subject’ defined by its curriculum content and drawing selectively upon the methods of contributing disciplines of psychology, sociology, philosophy, history and economics. Others regard education studies as a ‘discipline’ with its own academic community, its own distinctive discourse and methods of enquiry” (QAA, 2007a: 2, para 2.3). It is therefore not a surprise that many inclusive curriculum ideas and examples relate to ways in which course designers from other subjects have applied educational theories and good practice. Many resources offer the basis for or act as a catalyst for supporting collaboration between academics from a range of disciplines. It can apply to educationalists in Teaching Enhancement or Development Units (for example, Institute for Enhancement of Learning, undated; The Open University, 2006).

Responding to professional bodies

Professional bodies for teacher education programmes typically expect students to: “Understand how children and young people develop and that the progress and well-being of learners are affected by a range of developmental, social, religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic influences” (TDA, 2010: 18). While these requirements ensure the implications of gender, disability, race and other equality issues are covered, there is a danger of ticking the box to cover everything within the curriculum. Mapping where and how equality and diversity issues are covered within the curriculum is one way in which an inclusive curriculum design approach can help promote the coverage (see activity outlined for teaching about assessment criteria). It can be useful to consider how skills as well as content can broaden students’ learning so that they not only have experience of an inclusive curriculum but are equipped to deliver one themselves. One strategy is to make explicit the decisions being made to address an inclusive design. Another may be to engage students in decisions or invite them to suggest further ideas for how to enhance their own educational programme. This can also help students to identify strategies they can use themselves.

Developing reflective practitioners

One professional requirement within Education courses is the [development of students as reflective practitioners](#). This requires students to routinely reflect on and improve their practice, and take responsibility for identifying and meeting their developing professional needs (TDA, 2010: 7a). Opportunities to reflect on their previous educational and life experience as well as the ongoing teaching experiences they encounter in school can be integrated into the curriculum. Students may not always wish to disclose certain identities or experiences and the goal of curriculum designers should be to create an environment where students feel comfortable to do so. Where students feel comfortable they may draw on their experience; however, this needs to be complemented with research and policy initiatives to stimulate broader discussion about the influence of a range of factors that impact on learning and place these issues in an academic context.

Developing students' ability to become reflective practitioners can be assisted using curriculum content covering topics that may impact on inclusion. Students can also reflect on their past and current experience to help them understand how life as well as educational experience can influence a student's capacity to learn.

For example, at the University of Central Lancashire the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programme for students training to teach in the post-compulsory sector explores the issue of violence and learning (Appleby, 2008). Using a discussion paper as stimulus students discuss the 'hidden' nature of violence and how as educators they will probably be in contact with students who are victims of violence. This approach allows students to recognise complex issues and consider the impact of violence on future learning.

It also helps them to realise that "non-attendance, lack of concentration and difficulties in prioritising learning can be viewed differently when the learner's experience and the complexity of their life is central to teaching and learning" (Appleby, 2008).

The Philosophical and Religious Studies, and Sociology, Anthropology and Politics subject guides include examples of how to deal with controversial subjects.

Recognising the benefits of comparing educational systems

Schools, colleges and universities have students who have studied in other countries with different approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and the role of the student and

teacher. To prepare teachers as future teachers it is valuable to extend their understanding of other education systems. Sheffield Hallam University aims to help students to recognise the benefits of comparing education systems and support a wider university commitment to inclusion of international students by asking third-year Education students to research education systems across the world and compare them with the British system. During the learning process international students share their experience of their home education system. The international students are briefed and present to small groups of British students; there were approximately 120 British students involved in total and 28 international students from 14 countries. Feedback from students was very positive:

It was fun to help other people understand the system in my country. I also found out some interesting things about the education system in other countries. Estonian student

It was a really fantastic experience to discuss the education of primary school with lots of local students; they are active and eager to learn. By raising many questions and thinking critically we both get a better understanding of the education of primary school between the UK and China. Chinese student

And as Bromley notes, “Not only does this activity offer a valuable opportunity to introduce international perspectives to our home students, but international students are encouraged to reflect on their experience of teaching and learning and, in discussion with us, consider how it impacts on their experience as students in a different academic culture. We have also found that the British students who are involved with the session are more likely to engage with integration activities and many continue to see the students from other countries in a more social context. British students continue to attend English Conversation Club – an activity held twice per month, where international students and British students meet to engage in a range of activities which are designed to support integration and cultural awareness” (Bromley, 2010).

For examples of student collaborative activities see Art, Media and Design, and Information and Computer Sciences subject guides.

Avoiding assumptions about specific students by embedding targeted provision within the curriculum

For a long time, staff working with dyslexic students have advocated that making lecture notes available beforehand, is a strategy that benefits all student wishing to familiarise themselves prior to the lecture. The same principle applies to

good practice for other groups. Johnson (2008) notes, “focusing attention on the perceived needs of one group – such as international students – can result in benefits for all students”.

Johnson argues that because university tuition focuses on the content of what is taught, academic study skills tend to become invisible and taken for granted. What can seem obvious to academics may not be obvious to students from different educational backgrounds, for example mature students and those from lower socio-economic groups (Johnson, 2008). An example from the University of Bristol shows how a strategy initially developed to support academic writing for international students was welcomed by other students. The intervention initially used additional workshops in academic skills to introduce students from different pedagogical backgrounds to Western-style critical thinking. Students educated in the UK, expressing a desire to develop their own academic skills, also found these workshops valuable.

Johnson’s study shows that the benefits of embedding academic study skills within an initial teacher training curriculum rather than as a separate activity can extend beyond the initial target group. She recommends explaining “what gains marks and what doesn’t and then encourage Education students to relate this to their own educational background and practice, building on what they already know and constructing their own methods for learning” (Johnson, 2008).

Teaching about assessment criteria

While all students benefit from transparent and clear assessment criteria, students studying education also need to learn about the assessment criteria for subjects they will teach, and learn how feedback can be used by students to identify next steps for learning and by teachers to help them plan future teaching and learning activities.

Collaborative learning tasks can also aid student engagement in assessment. An example from an ESCalate workshop at the University of Gloucestershire (2008) describes the conversion of an individual assessment in which students audited the National Curriculum for specific issues into a collective and collaborative venture with the introduction of a wiki. The assessment originally asked students to identify common approaches between curriculum subjects, for instance skills of questioning, communication and evaluation. This has now been modified by creating a wiki for each group of students on Blackboard (the virtual learning environment) that contains the National Curriculum (NC) statements for KS1, 2 and 3 for the Foundation Subjects and Religious Education put into strands to demonstrate progression across the key stages.

The assessment has been converted into a group assignment for Year 1 students who are guided through the process by discrete steps that involve students:

- getting into groups so that each student is responsible for one subject;
- adding the relevant Early Years Foundation Stage statements for their subject;
- making initial comments on other students' additions;
- synthesising the many statements so that common elements are merged, which enables them to identify key concepts/ skills and progression across the key stages for their subject;
- adding further comments on other students' subjects.

The groups then work together to identify common themes (such as questioning and evaluating) that are evident across different subjects. They highlight, code or link these occurrences and then as a group write a culminating statement discussing the common themes in the NC and progression across the key stages from EYFS to KS3. (This is an extract adapted from ESCalate (2008). For further examples, see *Diversifying assessment methods in teacher education: Reviewing and developing practice*: <http://escalate.ac.uk/4573>.)

The ESCalate activity described above is easily adapted to identify coverage and gaps of equality and diversity issues in different subjects. Highlighting inclusive issues by asking students to audit content and sharing their findings will allow students to draw on their experiences and to learn from the insights of their peers. It also has potential for students studying Education to audit the content of their own degree programme, thus engaging them in the process of helping to enhance the inclusive content for themselves and future students.

Using the web tool 'Wordle' to create a word cloud of common words from feedback can help identify key and common writing issues (Bell, 2010). All written feedback is pasted into Wordle, which creates a single image for discussion by and with students. The website (www.wordle.net) converts the text into a word cloud. This approach can be used as a basis for students' reflection on their feedback or as a basis for group feedback to students. Providing **formative feedback** quickly can increase all students' appreciation of what is being assessed and subsequent engagement in assessment. It can help students explore together assessment criteria and engage with the issues more openly because they do not have to share or disclose feedback on their own work. For trainee teachers this is an approach they could adopt with their own students.