*Include*All - Inclusive by Design: Curriculum content and discipline specific practice

What are the key issues?

As discussed at the start in Core Concepts: Introduction, the content of a course and modules is of course as an important part of inclusive design as the delivery, in providing a positive learning environment for all our students. The underlying principle is about enhancing and enriching the curriculum rather than an intrusion into academic freedom.

Our teaching is bound up in sharing our interest, knowledge and research into our own discipline. However it is useful to recognise this is rooted in our own context, experience and culture and tied up in our socio-cultural influences, educational experiences, identity and culture. We can then start to assess our own biases and challenge them.

Sometimes without realising or stopping to question, the core sense of a discipline can be rooted in a white, western/Eurocentric, and often male, arena. This of course can be off-putting for many students, signalling that they do not belong or that their views are not valued. 'What we include in the curriculum and how we teach it are intrinsically linked and together form the basis of the dominant culture provided by the students' department' (Gunn, 2010, p5). Allen (1998) was challenging this as far back as 1998 with the suggestion that, for instance, Black students were impeded by the systems and prevailing stereotypes and questioned why Black history and culture did not seem relevant in curricula.

Our students are, of course, not just acquiring skills and knowledge, but also preparing to work and practice in diverse communities, often in a global context. Broad and relevant materials across the diversity of human experience will help them do that.

What are the implications for teaching and learning?

Age diversity
Assumptions about what interests and abilities a particular age group has crops up in all kinds of unlikely places. Students in their seventies are just as capable (or not) as younger students when it comes to technology enhanced learning. Challenging stereotypes like this and respecting age is important especially in a University like

ours which has such a diverse age range of students. Students will go out into employment and professional situations to work with people of all ages.

Racial, ethnic and cultural diversity

UK society is now a multicultural one, so images, case studies and examples need to reflect this and be checked for racial bias or negative views of certain races or cultures. However bias may go deeper than this. Historically research and knowledge has often been based on a white, western/Eurocentric viewpoint. For a different perspective have a look at the following clip on YouTube – students giving their views on 'Why is my curriculum white?' - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dscx4h2l-Pk and also http://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/why-is-my-curriculum-white/

Sadly, a small percentage of respondents to a recent major survey by the National Union of Students described the learning environment as 'racist'. In the same survey Black students reported the learning environment to be cliquey and isolating; felt left out and invisible to lecturers; found that the curriculum did not reflect issues of diversity and did not feel able to bring their perspective as Black students to lectures and seminars. This resulted in them feeling their views were not valued. They also felt their questions or concerns were treated with derision due to a perception from staff that they had less academic potential than their peers (NUS, 2011).

It is this kind of experience that can lower confidence and engagement in learning and can contribute and lead to lower attainment (ECU/HEA, 2008). This is despite the higher numbers from minority ethnic backgrounds coming into higher education. There is often a greater emphasis placed on education as a means to improve for first, second and even third generation migrants (Alexander and Arday, 2015).

We now have a specific strategy in place to close our attainment gap and looking at the content of the curriculum can be one area that supports this.

Gender diversity

Consideration of gender has several areas for reflection with respect of curriculum:

- Recognising that there may be a tendency towards male, white reading lists

- Challenging a traditional male or female dominance of a discipline and looking at encouraging, for instance, women into computer coding and engineering and men into nursing or early years education.

- Recognising that there are many different ways of being 'male' or 'female'.

- Ensuring the learning environment is free from sexual harassment and challenging inappropriate language and behaviour.

- Recognising that gender is not binary – due to the complexities of their situation, the lack of awareness and degree of transphobia, there is a high incidence of mental ill-health and risk of suicide amongst transgender students. An atmosphere of acceptance and respect in the classroom is crucial (ECU, 2010).

Sexual diversity

The dominant norm historically in research and literature is heterosexual so it is good practice to try to find, use or develop materials that challenge this. Reflect the historical and current contributions of LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual) people and a range of different relationships and families.

Worrying over 46% of LGB students surveyed had received homophobic/biphobic remarks from other students and even staff (ECU, 2009). Students had fears for physical safety, overheard frequent disparaging remarks, encountered stereotypical attitudes and a lack of visible role models. Many still felt they had to hide their identity. If unchallenged, the atmosphere created by homophobic remarks and attitudes may make LGB students feel excluded and not valued, lowering attainment or possibly resulting in the student leaving.

(Dis)ability diversity

The use of the Social model in advocating removing barriers should be continued as a theme in content. Images portraying disabled people as sufferers or victims should be avoided. Concentrate on positive images and on what people can do, not what they cannot, and challenge how things can be done in your particular subject area. Use a variety of images and role models who happen to be disabled.

Student experiences:
'They just looked startled to see Storme zoom in': when will university drama departments wake up to the needs of disabled students? (Birkett, 2013)

Religious diversity

Recognise the impact of global culture and religion in curriculum content, not just Western, Christian viewpoints, history or contributions.

What works really well?

- One way of enriching the curriculum, and in the process becoming more relevant and therefore more inclusive to a greater diversity of students, is to look at broadening the scope of such things as:
    - reading lists
    - examples
    - case studies

- o discussion topics

- o film clips

- o quiz questions

- o assignment themes

- o exam questions

- o posters and illustrative materials in the learning environs

- Be wary of resources which portray people at victims or which denigrates.

- Be aware of the effects of power, privilege and domination, seeking out silent/minority voices. It is possible, in some instances, to use students' own experiences to do this but do not ask an individual to speak on behalf of a particular group; instead use open ended questions to enable them to recount their experiences and observations. For role models and mentors seek voices via YouTube, television programmes or TED (www.ted.com/talks)

- Try to embed discussion of issues in the mainstream curriculum rather than singling out areas such as 'women's issues'.

- Try to cover all perspectives, or if not available, discuss with students why alternatives might not be available.

- Use correct or more appropriate language and challenge the use of inappropriate language and behaviour. This helps create a respectful environment where all students feel their voices can be heard and are valued.

Discipline specific practice

Ideas for enhancing and enriching practice in specific disciplines have been collated by the HEA (Higher Education Academy) and by the University of Worcester SCIPS Project (Strategies for Creating Inclusive Programmes of Study):

- HEA inclusive practice in a range of specific disciplines: www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Disability/Inclusive_curriculum_design_in_higher_education

  www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/11103?utm_source=The+Higher+Education+Academy&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=5724475_EEDCMay15

- SCIPS Project creating inclusive programmes of study (based at the University of Worchester); guidance on the full range of subjects taught in HE: www.scips.worc.ac.uk/

References and background reading

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Checklist for reflection: Curriculum content

Do I:

Structure my teaching activities to enable all students to share their values and beliefs with in a culture of mutual respect and dignity for all?	✓
Use group activities to facilitate student's understanding of how working with people of diverse backgrounds enriches their own learning?	
Manage the learning environment to enable all students to participate fully?	
Challenge stereotypes in my discipline/subject area?	
Make use of the different experiences and backgrounds of my students?	
Seek out role models – guest lecturers, video clips/ interviews; case studies?	
Actively seek minority views in my subject area?	
Challenge inappropriate language in my teaching sessions?	

Reflection into action

Having reflected on the above, my key priorities for making my teaching more inclusive are:

Changes I would like to introduce	By when	Indicators that it has made my practice more inclusive

This document is part of an inclusive practice 'toolkit' - *Include*All. The whole Toolkit, as one complete document or as separate documents, can be found on the University website at www.staffs.ac.uk/inclusivepractice .

It is split into four sections: Core Concepts; Inclusive by Design; Enhancing Practice; Checklists for Self-reflection.

The *Include*All Toolkit has been developed by: **Dr Marjorie Spiller** (Academic Development Unit); **Alison Hunt** (Equality and Diversity Manager); **Dave Allman** (Head of the Student Enabling Centre); **MINDSET Project Team** (Faculty of Arts and Creative Technologies).

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