

CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING DESIGN

We know that learning, is a complex social activity that is influenced by a range of factors including such aspects as:

- previous educational experience
- approaches and strategies to learning
- confidence with learning
- maturity
- life experiences
- access
- stability (financial, residential)
- support (family, peers etc.)
- values

Further, learning is shaped by who we are, for the purposes of this resource, our cultural character. This resource aims to develop understandings of how the learning and teaching can take cultural diversity into account in a seamless embedded model that reflects an interculturally responsive approach. The benefit will be to have more comfortable learners and staff leading to improved educational and social outcomes.

WHAT IS INCLUSIVE DESIGN?

Inclusive design is an approach that places the student at the core of the curriculum design process. It requires a comprehensive response to – who is my student and how best can I engage my student to support successful outcomes? Inclusive design does assume values and ethics around fairness, respect and equity. It is a way of considering and responding to student needs in a way that takes into account various needs. Usually, practitioners who take up this approach find that all students benefit.

An inclusive design approach, as stated, puts the student at the centre, so it looks different depending on who is being considered. For instance, if you are designing a course that tends to attract professionals who are working during the day, an inclusive approach might be to schedule classes in the evening and/or to provide a blended approach. For students who have disabilities, ensuring that the class is scheduled in an easily accessible location is an example of inclusive design. You might provide slides as notes to students with learning difficulties prior to class so that they have the opportunity to consider key themes and engage in discussion. If you have Muslim students your lesson planning might take prayer times into account etc.



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Other inclusive design elements might include:

- flexible approaches to delivery (scheduling of sessions, online materials, peer-based learning opportunities etc.)
- various assessment methods that take into account specific learning needs and circumstances (e.g. students with high level of anxiety might need to have breaks to deal with the stress of engaging in a class they find difficult; clear criteria that is unpacked for students not familiar with academic expectations around the text type as appropriate to an Australian context; timely feedback that is clear, focussed and meaningful to the student);
- drawing on digital technologies or tools to ensure students can access notes and materials (e.g. fonts that are easily recognised by software for the vision impaired)
- drawing on a range of readings and resources that reflect cultural diversity and various perspectives (e.g. indigenous viewpoints, faith based philosophies etc.)
- links to resources that unpack culturally framed theories and notions e.g. the notion of coffee meeting can be quite foreign
- curriculum design elements (opportunities for students to bring in own experiences and learnings for discussion, case studies that represent a broad range of cultural situations and perspectives),
- mixed classroom interaction opportunities (balance of peer, collaborative, individual study situations promoting an exchange of ideas and experiences, and modelling inclusivity as a VU graduate attribute)
- inclusive teaching strategies (e.g. explanations of key terms for students who are new to the discipline as represented in Australia)

The resource, [10 Tips: Becoming an Interculturally Inclusive Teacher](#) has more ideas to assist you.

WHY BOTHER WITH INCLUSIVE DESIGN?

Inclusive design provides a way to respond to student needs leading to a range of possible benefits:

- Increased student satisfaction as the curriculum is more engaging and permits deeper participation than it otherwise might;
- Contributes to a strong institutional approach to creating an inclusive and respectful culture;



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- It constitutes a pre-emptive approach – rather than wait for a student issue, being proactive and designing best practice delivery is far more sensible than waiting for a student problem that requires, what can be, challenging and stressful attention;
- Stronger personal-professional satisfaction - taking a respectful and responsible approach to working with students in a holistic way can be very rewarding in itself.

There is an increasing level of understanding of the importance of ensuring that education is both accessible to and inclusive of all students. Government policies reflect societal values and expectations around equity, accessibility and rights that permit widening participation. These expectations are also reflected in VU policy and principles, reinforcing the University's commitment to a positive and constructive student experience. There are times when reasonable adjustments are made to aspects of the learning experience to ensure a considered response to special learning needs is provided for the student. You may be asked to consider these by a student and/or disability support officer at the University. Also, keep in mind that when developing a curriculum it is important to consider the impact of design elements on all of your students to ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate in the learning experience.

REFLECTION

1. What sort of adjustments have you made, consciously or not, to respond in a reasonable way to student needs?
2. How were these informed? (E.g. your own experience, special consideration requests etc.)
3. Thinking about your current student cohort, to what extent do you feel confident that you have responded in an inclusive manner and what more might be done to ensure culturally inclusive principles characterise your teaching?

