ENGLISH

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 the 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 english. 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

English is a subject that the majority of students will have encountered in their compulsory education. It is easy to assume that students will find the transition to studying the subject in higher education a straightforward one. Despite the familiarity with the subject, it is helpful from an inclusive design perspective to be explicit about the benefits of student engagement and highlight the differences with previous study of the subject. The following inclusive design ideas illustrate some ways in which:

— equality and diversity content might be integrated into the curriculum;
— interaction with people with different life experiences can provide both stimuli and a real-life focus for writing and wider forms of communication;
— e-learning strategies can shape the way students engage with the content and skills the curriculum is designed to cover.

A core consideration when building an inclusive curriculum in English and related subjects is to ensure coherence and opportunity for students to pursue issues of relevance while developing the skills and technical competences required for the degree. Mapping content and experiences with students is helpful in identifying the gaps; collaboration with researchers and academics in other subjects can support the filling of gaps in ways that are inspiring as well as inclusive. The National Union of Students (NUS) and HEA encourage a range of student engagement activities including self-reflection and student representation in the annual cycle of departmental review of the English curriculum (NUS and HEA, undated: 15).

Developing presentation skills

Group discussion and presentation are core elements of the English curriculum and this can cause anxiety among students. Equality issues (content) may be integrated into the design of a module to develop specific speaking and listening skills of debating and rhetoric that can "help develop a range of subject-specific and transferable skills, including high-order conceptual, analytic, and communication skills of value in graduate

Connecting with schools

A variety of strategies for encouraging interaction between undergraduates and secondary-age pupils that supports transition are outlined in the new Seed guide: *Working with Secondary Schools. A guide for higher education English* (Green, 2010).

employment" (QAA, 2007b: 1). The processes outlined lend themselves to other content and topics. Engaging students in the process of identifying where and how to incorporate equality and diversity issues into a programme and its component modules is another way of enhancing the overall inclusive approach.

> A case study from the University of Edinburgh 'Turning the Classroom into a Debate: Arguing about Racism in *Heart of Darkness'* (Bolaki, 2008) describes the introduction of a debate into a weekly tutorial programme to cover the topic of racism. Rather than avoiding controversial issues it is possible to use equality and diversity topics to ensure an inclusive approach within an overall programme.
>
> The activity involved dividing the tutorial groups and providing them with separate instructions (the level of prompting and support depending on the stage in the programme and students' skills).
>
> — Group 1 (Prosecution): Your mission is to demonstrate that Achebe is right.
> — Group 2 (Defence): Your mission is to defend Conrad's Heart of Darkness against Achebe's criticisms.
>
> By assigning students to represent a specific view they are also encouraged to consider alternative perspectives and have their assumptions and stereotypes challenged. To heighten the realism external referees for the debate were invited, of which one student said:
>
> *Introducing external referees was such a good idea. It throws us students slightly outside our comfort zone and really stimulated heated discussion and a desire to impress!*

Group activities of this kind work best when topics are likely to generate a range of views. Debriefing and opportunities for self-reflection as well as establishing clear ground rules are an important element of a debate, especially for students not familiar with this form of communication.

Embedding academic communication skill development

Developing oral communication skills is important for higher education and future employment; embedding skill development and giving all students the confidence to discuss issues orally can be supported by the following two examples from the University of Gloucestershire. Stibbe (undated 1) and

Stibbe (undated 2) highlights the importance of building in time for the process of skill development during a programme.

An approach was adapted from the business world to explore issues of language and gender. The initial stimulus for the 'Open Space' (Sibbe, undated 1) discussion was:

— a 2000-word essay that explored relationships between language, gender and a selection of one or more of the following aspects: biological sex, bodies, sexuality, media, identity, and ecology.

The essay criteria included standard academic referencing and the open brief encouraged students to explore aspects of interest and meant they arrived at the *'Open Space'* prepared, which gave confidence to all students to discuss the topic. The two-hour mini *'Open Space'* began with an explanation of the 'four principles' and 'law of two feet', which govern this type of interaction.

The four principles

1. Whoever comes are the right people;
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have;
3. Whenever it starts is the right time;
4. When it's over, it's over.

The law of two feet

If at any time during our time together you discover that you are neither learning nor contributing, use your two feet and move on.

Following instructions about how the discussion would operate, the content was then decided. Students generated a list of topics, everyone then signed up for groups that met and discussed topics.

Inclusive features of this 'open space' approach include providing an opportunity for all students to prepare to participate, engaging students in identifying the focus of discussion and providing a range of topics to discuss.

In another project, designed to *'develop oral skills of rhetoric'* (Stibbe 2), a style of communication they may not be familiar with, English students worked together to develop individual presentation skills and engage in peer assessment and self-evaluation using person-centred approach. The activity involved students assuming different roles:

— facilitator who introduces and runs the group;
— speaker who prepares and delivers a speech according to agreed guidelines;
— evaluator who offers positive and constructive feedback;
— sub-evaluator who identifies the rhetorical devices, such as the three-part list, contrast, metaphor, that students are expected to use in this activity;
— timer who keeps time and stops the speaker if required;
— 'um-counter' who notes the 'ah', 'um', 'er' and verbal crutches 'ok', 'right';
— audience who is an active listener.

By embedding communication skill development, students learned not only from doing but also observing others: "evaluating others develops critical evaluation skills which can be applied to your own work enabling you to evaluate yourself better" (Stibbe 2, undated).

Designing a relevant curriculum using everyday and research stimuli

Developing opportunities based on everyday issues or research for English students can help them to appreciate the "continuing social and cultural importance of language" and "awareness of how different social and cultural contexts affect the nature of language and meaning" (QAA, 2007b: 4). For the students, using everyday experiences can help to provide relevance and give voice to marginal voices. Ideally ideas for everyday stimuli will emerge from students own experience or research interests such as the examples below, thus allowing research and teaching to be mutually beneficial.

— The University of Sheffield, School of English project *'Storying Sheffield'* provided a focus for students to interact with their local community (Stone, 2010). In this project, undergraduate students and people from the city with no family background in higher education work and study together to produce, record, and collect stories, fragments of stories, and many other diverse representations of the lives of Sheffield people, and the 'life' of Sheffield (Stone, 2010) www.storyingsheffield.com.

— The Arts and Humanities Research Council project *'Moving Manchester: mediating marginalities'* provides a resource that students could use as stimulus for exploring literature relating to migration (Peacre, 2010). This project investigated how the experience of migration has influenced creative writing in Manchester since 1960. It investigated the city's unique writing cultures and traditions and considered how Manchester's writing is inflected by place, both local and global (Peacre, 2010) www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/movingmanchester/index.htm

— As an alternative stimulus for discussion about use of *literacy in everyday life* see photographs from the Literacy Research Centre (undated), University of Lancaster (www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/resources/images). Students can be encouraged to share their own photographs as well as comment on those designed to challenge their views about literacy in the lives of other people.

Similar case studies are described in the History, Classics and Archaeology subject guide.

Increasing student engagement through the use of technology

As noted in the generic considerations technology can support inclusive curriculum design. In the following example it is used to enable all students to engage and interact in lectures (a typical teaching activity in English) without having to risk public embarrassment of a wrong answer, or attracting attention to themselves. There are many interactive devices available that can be used in a variety of ways to allow all students to share ideas in a non-threatening manner, learn from others and express a view without speaking in front of a big group.

This case study from the University of Manchester shows how 'Turning Point' was used to increase student interaction during a lecture, and use the outcome of this interaction (survey) as the basis for future tasks undertaken by the students. The activity involved:

1.   A live survey conducted during a lecture using 'Turning Point' that consisted of a sample of disputed usages of language, which students have to judge as acceptable/ unacceptable. The lecture is thus (inter)active and thought-provoking, and provides the groundwork for the seminar task.

2.   Students' own attitudes and two interviewees' attitudes in a written take-home survey. Students are asked to jot down some comments on why they (don't) accept each usage, and are expected to trace the origin of any two grammar myths. (The total number of disputed usages is reduced from 50 to 25.)

3.   The follow-up seminar/tutorial is devoted to discussing critically and analytically the students' survey results: their own and interviewees' attitudes, research literature and 18th-century grammar rules.

4.   Brief lecture and seminar finding summaries are presented in the lecture after the seminars have taken place; this validates student work and provides a global conclusion to the three-fold activity. (Extract from Yáñez-Bouza, 2010.)

Another example from Kendall (2008) illustrates in a video the process of developing a poem on the page into a work that can be read digitally. She shows one way to encourage students to experiment with PowerPoint, which is a form of technology that is easily available and avoids prejudicing the class in favour those who have superior knowledge of and access to computer software.

See also Economics, Health Sciences and Practice, and Physical Sciences subject guides for other examples of student engagement in module design.