

SOCIOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY AND POLITICS

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 social, anthropology and politics. 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

Enabling the transition to higher education

Research conducted at Goldsmiths College identified a 'lack of fit' between learning experiences in further and higher education (Van de Steeg, 2002). The project, which worked with first-year Anthropology students and their teachers and with a local sixth-form college, identified a lack of understanding independent learning as the main area of concern for all groups. Many students were confused about what anthropology was and what would be required. Many students found that the learning strategies they had employed during their previous courses did not transfer to studying Anthropology at higher education. Students entering after courses other than A-levels appeared to find the expectations around independent study most challenging although all students underestimated the amount and nature of reading necessary. The project made a number of recommendations, which could be implemented across all Sociology, Anthropology and Politics programmes to the benefit of all students; these included:

- greater incorporation of subject-specific study skills into the core curriculum with an emphasis on introducing and modelling strategies for independent learning;
- building in 'open' spaces for students to "analyse and share their own learning experience and practice";
- circulating a document to all those involved in teaching and in particular to new or visiting staff that highlights the prior educational experience of students and makes suggestions for how delivery might be tailored in response.

The Politics Learning and Teaching Online (PLATO) project, undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Southampton (Ottewill, 2002) responded to concerns among staff about the 'baseline political knowledge' of Politics students at the start of their programme. The PLATO project conducted an online survey of first-year students taking Politics modules about their political knowledge. Rather than viewing students' knowledge as a 'deficit', the PLATO project recognised that it mirrored wider social trends about engagement with politics. They therefore responded to these social trends by reviewing

their curriculum. Review findings highlighted differences in the knowledge of students at the two participating universities suggesting the importance of the “context within which politics is being taught” and the need for tailored curricula to respond to these differences. Students’ interests in the areas covered by the survey were stimulated by this exercise. This suggests that activities that engage students to think about curriculum content are a way of widening the interests and aspirations of all students. This is particularly important when students consider which modules and pathways to select for their degree programme. It was also suggested that the data gathered could be used as statistical material within Politics modules.

Tackling sensitive topics

The Sociology, Anthropology and Politics curricula involve many topics that can be considered ‘sensitive’ with the potential to provoke emotional responses for students and staff. For many sensitive subjects the content is ‘usually complicated’ and focused on “issues on which people often hold strong opinions based on their own experiences, interests and values” (Lowe and Jones, 2010: 2). The challenge for an inclusive curriculum is to provide a learning environment in which all students have the opportunity to have a conversation in a safe, open space.

‘To veil or not to veil’: students speak out against Islam(ophobia) in class

Housee (2010) draws on her experience of teaching in race and gender at the University of Wolverhampton to reflect on how a sensitive and contentious topic – wearing the Hijab – can be incorporated into the curriculum in an inclusive manner that enables all students to participate. She argues that student contributions should be “encouraged and used as an anti-racist tool”. A focus on everyday issues, in this case stimulated by a tabloid newspaper article on a nursery nurse choosing to wear a veil, enables the wider socio-political context to be discussed using critical and problem-posing approaches. Housee is clear that the lecturer’s role as referee is not to be neutral but rather to steer the activity to ensure it remains focused on the session’s learning outcomes.

Sexually explicit materials in the classroom

Sexually explicit material was included in two final-year modules in Criminology and Sociology at the University of Glamorgan (Nolan and Oerton, 2010). Consideration was required at the design stage to allow legal and

ethical issues to be addressed. Gaining 'informed consent' from students so that they were aware of the material they would be expected to engage with during the modules necessitated clear module information and guidance about the potential implications of choosing not to engage with some or all of the explicit material. This is achieved by the following:

Please note: it should be clear that some issues discussed in this module are of a sensitive and controversial nature. These will be recurrent – in lecture presentations and seminar discussions. Students should consider whether they might find such material offensive and whether they would be comfortable discussing these themes when making module choices.

Teaching Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education collates materials including:

- sample lecture notes and slides;
- visual materials;
- video content;
- guidance on how to adapt the material for teaching (C-SAP, undated: <http://www.teachingrace.bham.ac.uk/>).

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

Engaging students through innovative methods

The terminology and discourse of sociological and political theory can be off putting for some students. Enabling students to engage in theory and develop their capacity to apply their understanding to real life situations is enhanced through innovative teaching methods. For instance, Aberystwyth University (undated) runs 'crisis games' twice a year to "connect classroom learning with the real-world complexities of international politics". A range of contemporary global scenarios such as the recent war between Russia and Georgia provide the focus. Students are allocated to teams within which they take a specific role such as a state leader. Another group of students provide regular updates via a newsroom providing regular bulletins with staff "who play the part of the 'Gods', registering all of the secret and open moves made by the teams as well as throwing in unexpected events to shake things up". Taking part in the simulations enables students to develop communication and team-working skills as well as acquiring an insights into aspects of diplomacy that are harder to convey in a classroom

setting, such as the constraints actors operate within and the impact of the pressure and intensity of remaining ‘in character’.

Raising cultural awareness by communicating across boundaries

Equipping students with the skills to discuss complex issues and the cultural awareness to appreciate solutions in one context may not be transferable to another is valuable for future employment. Manchester Metropolitan University devised an *International E-communication Exchange* where Criminology students undertook “focused discussion-based distance learning via email exchange” with students from universities in the United States (Jones, 2006: 1). The project’s aims were to:

- change modes of student communication (individual and group);
- extend communication across cultural and national borders;
- develop the potential to work across such borders;
- develop students’ ICT-mediated interactional skills (Jones, 2006: 16).

The focus one year was on gun crime and the asynchronous discussion with students from the University of West Florida enriched the curriculum by providing access to very different experiences and attitudes. A particular benefit of the exchange was the opportunity it provided for students to “exercise writing skills in a continuous manner” (requiring a different style and fluidity compared with more ‘static’ assignments like essays). This supported many students to build their confidence about writing and participating in group discussions. This was particularly appreciated by students some might describe as ‘timid’ or less confident in classroom group discussions. Key messages include:

- providing clear information about what is required and the time students will need to commit to participate fully;
- using a *Message Showcase* that demonstrates the quality expected in posts and provides a model to follow helps students unsure about how to present their ideas and responses;
- being aware of those students who have more restricted access to ICT and building in opportunities to participate at the design stage, such as organising timetabled ‘drop-in’ sessions in PC labs, which might provide students with less confidence using computers the opportunity to gain additional assistance.

See the Philosophical and Religious Studies subject guide for examples of supporting religious and cultural diversity.