

Embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum: an education practitioner's guide



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1. Setting the scene

It is the responsibility of every member of staff within higher education institutions (HEIs) to respond to the requirements of equality legislation, which makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person on the basis of age, disability, race, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, or religion and belief (Equality Act 2010). Within university schools of education, there have been many efforts to counter discrimination through the development of curricular and pedagogical approaches that promote democracy, social justice and tolerance of difference. These efforts are represented in a variety of programmes, courses and texts that address for example, teaching for diversity, social justice, critical pedagogy, multicultural, inclusive and civic education. A basic understanding is that it is the attitudes, the barriers and the forms of institutional discrimination that exist within systems, rather than attributes of people, that are the cause of disadvantage.

This principle underpins the many different approaches to combating discrimination in education. It is reflected in curriculum design and implementation, in the organisation of learning and teaching, and in the support structures available to students inside and outside the classroom and the lecture theatre, in ways that are intended to be flexible and responsive, collaborative and equitable. Some academic staff in schools of education believe that a discussion of the complex intersectional aspects of student identity and the structural barriers to learning related to, for instance, class, gender, race, sexuality and health belong in the university classroom, at the centre of learning for students in education faculties because developing a situated understanding of these matters is an important part of prospective teachers' emerging professional knowledge. In addition, they consider such matters not only core elements of the curriculum on initial teacher education programmes but on postgraduate courses including masters and doctorates. At the centre of developing inclusive practice is the understanding that barriers to learning are often caused by attitudes and discriminatory practices, frequently based on deficit thinking – where the learner is deemed to be at fault rather than the system.

Since the Equality Act 2010, there is a growing awareness that attributes of people are aspects of identity rather than defining characteristics. As the concept of identity has evolved from a simple unitary notion to one of multiplicity, where people are thought to have many overlapping identities (Foresight Future Identities 2013), the idea of separate targeted anti-discrimination efforts that respond to specific attributes of people have given way to more inclusive approaches that respond to the overlapping identities of all people. Today questions are being asked about how to advance teacher education and professional development in ways that are “responsive to the full range of diversity of students, and that takes account of the multiple markers of identity that characterise both individuals and groups” (Pugach, Blanton and Florian 2012, p. 235). Such responsiveness extends to students of all ages, from school years through tertiary education.

For HEI faculties of education, these issues are addressed in terms of how students on education courses are treated as well as how they are prepared to take up their professional obligations. Consequently, the discussion for education faculties is about how to *model practice* as exemplified by the case studies in this guide.

2. Putting it into practice

2.1 HEI responses to equalities legislation and student need

Legislation on equalities and diversity has led HEIs to respond operationally to the challenge of supporting individuals with a range of student services provision such as support with academic writing classes, disability screening and support, counselling services and so forth. These services may provide excellent support for individual students. An intervention may be recommended and academic staff may be required to make

'reasonable adjustments' in their teaching, particularly for students with disabilities, for example in making an adjustment to teaching materials for students who have dyslexia or sensory impairment.

While such adjustments are an important part of an equitable response to specific difficulties, these individual responses may not be sufficient and may even serve to locate the responsibility for resolving a difficulty in learning outside the curriculum and the classroom. The 'add-on' nature of such services situates the student as having a problem outside of departmental concerns or expertise. This can have the unintended effect of reinforcing deficit approaches to difference that shift the gaze away from the role that institutional structures play in creating or maintaining barriers to learning and discriminatory practices. It may also circumvent the role that faculties can play in ensuring their own curricular and pedagogical practices reflect the spirit as well as the requirements of the Equality Act. Thus, while recognising that student services are indispensable for the important resources they provide, care must be taken to ensure they are used in ways that empower the student to participate in the academic programme. In this vein, the University of Derby (case study 1) has developed a project that aims to improve student experience for black and minority ethnic students.

2.2 Faculties of education – curricular and pedagogical approaches

Arguably, the ideal place to focus on embedding an equalities perspective in schools of education is in the curricular and pedagogical approaches to teacher education and professional development where issues pertaining to teaching diverse groups of learners are taught and can be modelled. Schools of education are uniquely positioned to adopt this type of strategic approach. Teachers' self-awareness, knowledge and understanding of their own situated and contextual practices, especially in relation to equality and diversity and the ways in which this can pave the way for transformational teaching, is well documented in literature. For example, Janks (2010) discusses issues of power and identity within university and school classrooms. The challenge for education is not only to embed understanding of these issues in various programmes, but also to embody them through their own teaching.

Guiding inclusiveness, equality and diversity in education: a text to support your practice

At the University of Edinburgh staff invited colleagues in other schools of education and in local authority schools to collaborate on a book that could be used as a text on initial teacher education (ITE) courses. The book *Social justice re-examined: dilemmas and solutions for the classroom teacher* (Arshad, Wrigley and Pratt 2012) supports students to think about issues of diversity. The text is used as an introduction to key ideas about social justice and provides:

- pre-programme reading;
- a starter text for understanding the themes of equality, diversity and values in education;
- material to inform teaching activities;
- ideas for practice within HEIs;
- a starting point for discussion and development within different courses and teacher education programmes.

Academic requirements for students' participation, performance and attainment are often aligned with competences specified by the different national professional bodies or government agencies that regulate the profession. For example, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) in the new Standard for Provisional Registration ((SPR) GTCS 2012), against which student teachers are assessed, demands that student teachers meet standards related to social justice. Yet ITE programmes in Scotland can be as short as 36 weeks (in other jurisdictions it may be shorter) and this inevitably affects the way that equalities and diversity agendas are taught. Programmes must teach about these elements of classroom practice so students not only have the requisite propositional knowledge, but also the kind of understanding of equalities and diversity suggested in the SPR. This is a complex task linking teacher agency to intra- and inter-personal knowledge, to social justice and to equalities, which in turn demands an approach involving investigation, reflection and reflexivity (Pollard 2008; Dymoke and Harrison 2008). It is unsurprising that research into student teacher awareness and understanding of equalities and diversity suggests that some students

experience this learning as a series of unrelated teaching events across a programme, a sort of box ticking exercise on 'isms' (Hick et al. 2011).

At the same time, little is known about other programmes within faculties of education which are not required to meet the demands of external professional bodies and are not obliged to cover propositional knowledge of equalities and diversity. Although many of these programmes do so, the manner and extent to which equalities and diversity is embedded, and inclusive practices are modelled, is not well known. Clearly, it is important for HEI education staff to review the extent to which programmes achieve professional standards related to equality and diversity.

Supporting embedding equality and diversity: Scotland's framework for inclusion

In Scotland, the Standing Committee for Teacher Education established a working group of representatives of the seven university-based teacher education programmes to work collaboratively to develop a national framework for inclusion. The working group developed a set of principles that aligned with relevant policy initiatives including the UK Equality Act. The framework consists of a series of questions intended to assist students, teachers and teacher educators to examine the implications of the standards for the development of inclusive practice. It ensures that issues of equality and diversity maintain a high profile in teacher education and career-long professional learning opportunities and align with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC) standards. The framework for inclusion is available online at <http://www.frameworkforinclusion.org/>.

Because HEI programmes teach about diversity, it is important not to conflate teaching about equality and diversity with embedding inclusive practices in university teaching. Teaching *about* inclusive practice and teaching in ways that *are* inclusive are different. Modelling inclusive practice might mean teaching radically, using university classrooms as sites for exploration of what makes us different, what creates barriers to learning and what empowers learners. Teaching about inclusive practice involves introducing students to the rich literature on pedagogy that includes critical pedagogy and practitioner inquiry. Both critical pedagogy and practitioner inquiry emphasise understanding power, empowerment, justice and injustices as problematic areas within teaching and learning. They also view teaching as a moral, political, social, cultural and courageous act (see for example, Ball and Tyson 2011; Darder, Baltodano and Torres 2009; Zeichner 2009). At Sheffield Hallam University (case study 2), staff-student partnerships ensure that issues of equality and diversity issues are core aspects of teacher development activities.

2.3 Partnerships with schools

Partnerships between schools and universities may offer a further opportunity for embedding equalities education practice. When undertaking school placements, student teachers have to demonstrate that they take account of learners' needs and can use strategies to support learners and to remove barriers to learning during teaching practice in school. Genuinely working to embed equality and diversity issues in practice requires reflection of tutors' own situated practices and assumptions in relation to equalities and diversity. Practice developed at the University of Cambridge provides an example (case study 3).

3. Next steps

3.1 Overcoming barriers

There will be barriers to embedding equalities and diversity in university classrooms. These may be associated with attitudes of staff who do not think equalities is an important part of the teaching agenda because it is not

discipline specific; it is not part of the content of a course; or the misunderstanding that these issues are covered by lectures on other courses.

There are also the structural and operational systems within universities whereby those who develop programmes are required to 'tick a box' about equalities but do not consider how this becomes part of teaching and learning in a course or how a programme is examined during accreditation or reaccreditation. This is not to suggest that there should be some sort of equalities policing of courses and programmes, but rather to suggest that this could be considered an important part of the process of accreditation. Such a focus would help to ensure that teaching practices within faculties of education are indeed modelling what they claim to teach. In the following section, some considerations for education faculties are presented.

3.2 Leadership

Leadership within faculties of education is central. Heads of school and deans can support the development of inclusive practice by creating spaces for staff to learn, to think and to share good practice. In faculties of education, there is heightened concern and interest in the quality of teaching and learning that students experience. In order to embed equalities and inclusive practice in programmes, attention should be given to the following:

- planning for teaching and learning where coherence is given to how and why equalities practice is embedded in curricular and pedagogical practice;
- considering how assessment practices and procedures are suitable and accessible while providing the necessary challenges. It is important to ensure that issues of equality are scrutinised or they may not be seen as important. For example, moderation meetings and exam boards may often be held too late in the student experience to most effectively address diversity and equality issues. Asking equalities questions of assessment practices and procedures could reduce the time spent by exam boards deciding on the adequacy of student work when issues such as naïve English language expression or performance anxiety interfere with performance;
- providing opportunities for tutors to examine, challenge and change their own practices as teachers and to engage in practitioner enquiry in the same way required of student teachers.

3.3 Classroom teaching and learning

Staff in education faculties have a great deal of expertise that can be used to embed pedagogical issues of equality and diversity in the curriculum. Consideration may be given to the role they might play in leading other HEI subject disciplines in the development of culturally relevant inclusive practices, which open up opportunities for learning about difference and diversity. Such practices might include:

- making links between academic learning and the lived experiences of students so that students' diverse cultural backgrounds inform and sometimes lead the content of the teaching. In some tutorials, this might mean becoming less western centric, in others, it might mean looking at the ways in which class or gender serve to privilege or disadvantage groups in education;
- making links with students between academic discourses on equalities and their own developing identities as educators in practices which include, for instance, critical reflection and practitioner enquiry;
- making classrooms safe places for the discussion of sensitive issues where tutor and students can work in constructive ways with the discomfort of divergent views. For example, transgender wellbeing may be offensive to some overseas students who find the topic alien and inappropriate for the classroom but it might still be an important discussion to have. Advice on working with sensitive subjects can be found in volume 2.3 of the HEA's *Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences* journal (HEA 2010), which covers such topics as race, religion, sexuality and death. Further advice can also be found in Deacy and McHardy (2012) and Rabinowitz and McHardy (2014);
- providing other safe places for discussion such as through student blogs and discussion threads also allows conversations to continue safely and within community 'rules'.

4. Case studies

The studies that follow are intended to demonstrate examples of current practice by education lecturers and also to demonstrate the range of possible ways to embed E&D. They include examples of work across the UK to show how the work of all practitioners can be informed by examples of wider practice.

4.1 Improving BME student experience

Institution: University of Derby.

Institutional contact and contact details: Ang Davey, a.davey@derby.ac.uk, Kath Headley, k.headley@derby.ac.uk, Helen Wilson, h.wilson@derby.ac.uk.

Equality and diversity evidenced through:

Connected to the five areas, articulated in HEA's embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum theoretical overview, of: fostering belonging and engagement; enabling students to reach their potential; facilitating interaction; building exposure and understanding; and encouraging self reflection.

Rationale for introducing an aspect of E&D:

According to the statistics produced by the Equality Challenge Unit (2011 cited in Stevenson 2012, p. 4) 66.5% of white students studying for first degrees received a first class or upper second class Honours degree, compared with 49.2% of BME students. The latest statistics from the Equality Challenge Unit (2014) indicate that 73.8% of white students received a first or upper second class Honours degree, compared with 57.0% of BME students. Therefore, over a two-year period the attainment gap remains although it has narrowed slightly (0.5%).

Summary of the case study:

Following attendance at a BME attainment workshop at the University of Derby where various strategies for improving the student experience were shared, the Roadmap to Success, a strategy for improving coursework grades, was piloted with a cohort of Stage 3 (Level 6) undergraduate students.

The Roadmap to Success is a double-sided A4 document that acts as a checklist for students to ensure they have met the learning outcomes and the academic standards required to attract a high grade for their essays. The checklist includes a series of questions designed to prompt students to consider if they have included everything required and advises students to seek help from their module leader if necessary, and/or a study adviser.

Finally, the checklist advises students to submit their work through Turnitin to obtain feedback on originality so that issues of citing and referencing can be addressed prior to final submission.

Benefits for the students:

The Roadmap to Success checklist was adapted to respond to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the Understanding and managing the behaviour of learners module and issued to all students in the Spring 2013 semester. At the end of this semester, all 36 students in this cohort submitted their coursework. Of these, four were BME students while 32 were non-BME students, a similar profile to the students in a baseline study conducted during the first semester which showed significant differences between BME and non-BME students.

Following the adoption of the Roadmap, the average point score for BME students was 60% and for non-BME students 60.21%, a difference that is not significant.

Students attended a focus group on assessment and feedback in December 2014 and reported that the Roadmap to Success was the *single most important strategy* introduced on their programme of study to support them in succeeding on the programme.

Benefits for the department/team/institution:

University data shows that attainment of good Honours degrees in Education has risen from 57.8% in 2011-12 to 70.4% in 2013-14.

The data for 2013-14 shows 67% of white students achieved a good Honours degree compared with 52% for BME students. Within BA (Hons) Education Studies for 2013-14, 72% of white students achieved a good Honours degree compared with 64% for BME students. Therefore, the attainment gap in BA (Hons) Education Studies is narrower than for the university as a whole (8% compared with 15%).

Changes required by the institution/department/team for effective implementation:

Staff development has been required to introduce the Roadmap to Success and to train staff in using data from the University's Corporate Intelligence Unit. Staff have readily taken on board this new initiative and it is now used for all modules on BA (Hons) Education Studies.

4.2 Engaging initial teacher trainee (ITT) students in co-creating curricular that embed equality and diversity (pre and post entry to the ITT programme)

Institution: Sheffield Hallam University.

Institutional contact and contact details: Maxine Greaves, m.j.greaves@shu.ac.uk, Jenson Grant, jensongrant@madeigital.org, Maxwell A Ayamba, a.ayamba@shu.ac.uk.

Equality and diversity evidenced through:

Connected to the five areas, articulated in HEA's embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum theoretical overview, of: fostering belonging and engagement; enabling students to reach their potential; facilitating interaction; building exposure and understanding; and encouraging self reflection.

Rationale for introducing an aspect of E&D:

An annual survey of NQTs found that 57% of the 2,882 primary-trained respondents rated teaching pupils with English as an additional language as good (38%) and very good (19%). This was not significantly different from the previous year and is one of the lowest rated aspects of teacher training for primary student teachers (National College for Teaching & Leadership, Newly Qualified Teachers: Annual Survey 2014).

Summary of the case study:

A collegial student-staff partnership for innovative change was initiated to develop our understanding of cultural and regional issues and factors that may impact on a broad array of relevant issues.

As part of this initiative, we explore the way in which core principles about equality and diversity are reflected in our work with colleagues and students on university courses and pupils in schools by asking:

- Is 'teaching style' influenced by who you are?
- In what way do core values impact on the schools you work in?
- How can principles relating to cultural identity be maintained in your day-to-day work?

This forms the basis of action planning and goal setting for our courses.

We also observe and critique a range of practices by viewing and discussing videoed examples of adult-child interaction in classrooms and/or undertaking structured observations of peer working with groups of children or young people. Working with peers in groups, students are able to share and challenge understanding through engagement with the ideas of others.

Students then undertake wider reading that helps to deepen and extend professional learning.

Benefits for the students:

This initiative has resulted in student participants stating that the knowledge gained has been relevant to their courses as it linked to theory/practice. Students also recommend this method of learning for future cohorts. Students appreciate the knowledge that has been gained by working on co-creating project-based learning in terms of appreciating other people and gaining transferable skills.

"The experience has further provided me with the opportunity to undertake a project which involved work around the areas of race, masculinity and violence, and to hear human interest stories of people's experiences." (third-year student)

"...prepares one to better understand the nature of teaching in this country where people from all over the world, different cultural backgrounds, subscribe to various religious faith, language etc." (overseas ITE secondary participant)

Finally, students recognise the initiative's relation to the development of employability skills and graduate attributes.

"It has therefore been very beneficial as this experience has helped me support disabled and dyslexic students, as I am now employed as a support supervisor." (graduate)

Benefits for the department/team/institution:

We continue to improve and enrich the delivery of courses through sharing expertise, knowledge and resources with colleagues across disciplines, and via school partnerships and alliances. This ensures both a collective and practical understanding of the elements required to co-construct the curriculum for equality and diversity (including inclusive assessment strategies, benchmarking, monitoring and evaluation).

A 2012 Ofsted report noted: "Trainees become highly reflective, self-motivated practitioners who take responsibility for their own professional development. They are keen to meet their development targets and respond quickly to advice. Trainees are committed to teaching and building effective relationships with pupils and the adults they work with in schools."

Changes required by the institution/department/team for effective implementation:

Continued review of academic practice is used to develop sustained ways of working at department and course level. The involvement of the Student Experience Learning and Teaching Committee (SELTC) helps to align/shape and develop strategic plans on matters related to the student experience, in ensuring a consistency of approach across all academic and professional service areas.

4.3 Primary PGCE Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge – partnerships with schools and enrichment weeks

Institution: Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

Institutional contact and contact details: Jane Warwick (Course Manager), jw322@cam.ac.uk.

Equality and diversity evidenced through:

Connected to three of the five areas articulated in HEA's embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum theoretical overview, these being: facilitating interaction; building exposure and understanding; and encouraging self reflection.

Rationale for introducing an aspect of E&D:

The intervention was introduced to make a virtue of the requirement that student teachers spend additional time on placement in schools by enhancing all students' engagement with the diverse and complex ways that teachers, both in mainstream schools and specialist provision settings, work to teach in inclusive ways.

Summary of the case study:

Two week-long placements were organised where student teachers would specifically focus on developing their knowledge and understanding of how schools respond to learners' diverse needs while ensuring equality of opportunity to learn and succeed.

When focusing on the inclusion of children who had been identified with special educational needs, students were given the opportunity to spend the week in either a special school or a mainstream school setting that identified itself as offering specialist support and expertise.

The second placement undertaken in mainstream settings focused on using the methodology of 'Portraiture' to write a case study that considered a learner's experiences from multiple perspectives – the child, their friends, parents, class teacher, additional agencies.

Benefits for the students:

Student teachers reported how enlightening, enriching and refreshing they found the opportunity to step back from thinking about their role as a teacher and focus on learners' experiences. Being given the time for deep reflection mid-way through their course greatly enhanced their own sense of agency in how they could act to enhance all children's learning.

Benefits for the department/team/institution:

The partnership schools enabling these placements reported the value for staff in sharing the school's expertise, and pleasure in how engaged and interested the student teachers were in the complexities of the provision.

Student teachers submitted the narrative portraits as part of their portfolio of professional development. A few student teachers reported that "this was the best week of the course" with one or two deciding to take up posts in specialist provision settings which had not been considered before this placement.

Tutorial staff saw how student teachers' knowledge and understanding of pedagogy had deepened and become more sophisticated in how they thought about the challenges of responding to diverse needs.

Changes required by the institution/department/team for effective implementation:

The good relationship with partnership schools was essential in planning the placements, as well as their role in hosting. Several meetings were held where university staff worked with practising teachers to identify the objectives and expectations for the student teachers, and then to design appropriate supportive materials including guidance for student teachers and school colleagues. One consideration was how the materials and placement-based activities needed to be flexible enough to respond to the ways in which the partnership schools themselves were diverse.

5. Conclusions

In summary, the previous sections of this short guide highlight that the embedding of equality and diversity in education should take into consideration the following key findings:

- barriers to learning are often caused by attitudes and discriminatory practices where the learner is deemed to be at fault rather than the system;

- embedding E&D should be inclusive rather than targeted, responsive to the multiplicity of identities embodied in students and groups;
- student services are essential, but care must be taken to ensure that faculties do not underestimate the role they themselves can play in empowering students to participate in academic programmes;
- teaching about inclusive practice and teaching in ways that are inclusive are different. The latter involves modelling best practice in ways that may be radical, but which will ultimately support the learner's progress;
- school placements offer the opportunity to demonstrate and reflect on students' understandings and negotiations of diversities;
- HEIs would benefit from considering equality and diversity to be an important part of the accreditation and review of programmes of study;
- embedding E&D requires time and space for anticipatory planning especially in relation to assessment activities and the administrative process of assessment procedures;
- embedding E&D requires time and space for academic staff development activities;
- embedding E&D means facilitating students to reflect on their own experiences, skills and understandings. This can be done through adapting curriculum content, refining pedagogical practices and considering assessment content and methods.

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