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***Facilitating diversity and inclusion as measures of quality: the case of an Inclusive Curriculum Framework (0548)***

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**Introduction**

Students learn from each other. Moreover they learn more from other students who challenge their world view and bring multiple and diverse perspectives into the classroom As Brink (2009) argues “the university is an educational institution. Our business is about knowledge. That means that we have to learn...and we learn more from those people, those ideas, and those phenomena that we do not know, than from those we know only too well.” These multiple perspectives can come from the internationalisation of our student cohorts but they can also come from our home students. Indeed it is important to recognise that the cultural differences and divides between our ‘home’ students themselves are often as great, or indeed greater, than between our home and international students (Haigh, 2009). Therefore, educational environments are important sites for the development of intercultural knowledge and broader diversity skills. They offer significant opportunities for intercultural communication and mixing from which greater integration and social cohesion might emerge and through which inter-cultural competencies can develop.

Social integration is not, however, an automatic by-product of campus diversity (Tienda, 2012). Students must be helped to achieve this. We argue that universities and university teachers have a central role in enabling the development of inter-cultural competence in their own institutions and classrooms by actively facilitating interaction, challenge and critical discussion. There many ways to achieve this. The starting point however is for our Universities to embrace diversity as a measure of quality with inherent value (Brink, 2009). Higher Education Providers must not only champion the notion of inclusivity, but consciously and strategically facilitate inclusive practices across institutions by providing mechanisms which articulate and drive this agenda. In the remainder of this paper, we introduce an Inclusive Curriculum Framework which has been adopted in a post-1992 University as a curriculum design tool to drive the inclusivity agenda (McDuff and Hughes, 2015). By curriculum we refer to how students engage with their learning and not simply the curriculum content (Barnett and Coate, 2005). The framework is premised on two key principles i) that diversity has an inherent value for learning and ii) that University teachers must actively strive to ensure the inclusivity of their curricula by addressing the Framework’s principles from concept to review.

**An Inclusive Curriculum Framework**

Our Inclusive Curriculum framework places narratives of diversity and inclusion in the centre of curriculum design. The principles of the framework can inform a myriad of different scales from a University’s mission to an individual teaching session. The multi-dimensional nature of the framework allows for different, often multiple implementation and intervention

points. Indeed it facilitates the operation of inclusive practices from concept to review. Specifically it identifies three key principles inclusivity. These are i) to create an accessible curriculum, ii) to enable students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and iii) to equip students with the skills to positively contribute to and work in a global and diverse environment (see figure 1). We argue that, together, these principles ensure curricula value and support diversity and demonstrate the strength that this diversity offers to the learning of all students. These principles are elaborated on below.

### **An Accessible Curriculum**

University curricula must be inclusive of, and accessible to, students from a range of diverse backgrounds, including a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds. As Read et.al. (2003) have noted for well over a decade “academic culture is not uniformly accessed or experienced” (p. 275). Arguably, the accessibility of our learning environments has become even more crucial given the internationalisation of higher education. Learning styles are acknowledged to be culturally-specific and disciplines which have experienced significant international student recruitment have begun to address cross-cultural course design and delivery mechanisms. Without intentional strategies which ensure students have the relevant socio cultural knowledges and the skills to participate, we contend that students from non-traditional backgrounds or indeed international students cannot become fully active members of the UK academic knowledge community.

### **Ensuring that students see themselves reflected in the curriculum**

The second principle, ensuring that students see themselves and people ‘like them’ reflected in the curriculum, is crucial in encouraging the curricula in higher education to challenge grand Eurocentric narratives which de-legitimate and marginalise indigenous knowledges (Tange and Kastberg, 2013). It is clear that curricula which are centred on the knowledge of dominant groups does not serve the needs of socially diverse classrooms. We argue that consideration of this principle should extent to consider how our own teaching and learning practices embrace and celebrate the backgrounds of our students (Mbembe, 2016). Strategies such as co-creation should be encouraged to enrich the curriculum and ensure that diverse perspectives are celebrated in our curricula. It is clear that engagement with, and the utilisation of, the diverse experiences of students by academic teachers must be encouraged and nurtured.

### **Equipping students to work in a globalised and diverse world**

The final principle of the Framework is equipping students with the skills to work in a globalised and diverse world. Our starting point with this principle is that if students are exposed to multiple perspectives and life-worlds and learn to respect diversity and difference in the classroom, then they will be better equipped to work collaboratively with others from a variety of cultures, backgrounds and positions in the workplace (Svensson and Wihlbord, 2010). We argue that University teachers have a central role to play in enabling

the development of inter-cultural competence in their own classrooms by actively facilitating interaction through, for example, prescriptive group formation.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we argue that if Universities embrace diversity as having inherent value and reinforce this through their processes and practice, then they have a greater chance to be 'hopeful spaces' where patterns of exclusion can be disrupted and intercultural competencies can be formed (Lee et al. 2012). Mechanisms such as the Inclusive Curriculum Framework can be implemented to actively encourage practices which challenge students to engage with diversity and difference, and with people who are different from them in order to enrich the learning for all.

## **References**

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