

Inclusive Curriculum and Course Design

“Teaching a particular culture, history, gender viewpoint or sexuality whilst neglecting others amounts to a value judgement on the worth of peoples’ collective experiences, both past and present, which often alienates certain groups of [students]” (hooks, 1994)

This resource offers research-informed guidance on preparing diverse and inclusive curriculum that reflects the diverse student cohort in your classes and sends a clear message to all about the value Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in teaching and learning.

Inclusive curricula have a positive impact on the experience and outcomes of all students. A joint report from UUK and the NUS, [BAME attainment at UK Universities \(2019\)](#) states: “A greater focus is needed from universities, working with their students, on ensuring that BAME students have a good sense of belonging at their university, and on understanding how a poor sense of belonging might be contributing to low levels of engagement and progression to postgraduate study.” Research, nationally and at the University of Kent, shows that reading lists that consider the diversity of the student body improve students’ engagement. Further research also shows that culturally sensitive curricula overall are associated with higher student interest (Quinlan et al., 2022). Even small changes to your curriculum could make a big difference to your students.

As De Sousa Santos argues, the goal does not have to be to throw the prevailing literature into the dustbin of history, but rather to include ‘Eurocentric critical tradition in a much broader landscape of epistemological and political possibilities’ (2014: 44). Follow these steps to broaden the landscape of your curriculum:

1. Diversify your course content

The University of Kent’s [Diversity Mark programme](#) highlights the importance of diversifying reading lists to help create a sense of belonging and increase student cultural competencies. Start by contacting your division’s subject librarian. They can provide you with resources that highlight key books, articles, networks as well as podcasts relating to marginalized voices.

2. Be culturally sensitive

Much work remains to create curricula in which teaching attitudes, methods and materials relate to, affirm and respect students’ diverse cultures, identities, and contexts. “Culturally sensitive curricula can address those racial equality gaps as well as support the development of culturally competent graduates equipped for social change,” state Thomas and Quinlan

(2021). A more culturally sensitive curricula will increase meaningful academic interactions with teachers and increase their interest in your subject. It may also improve attainment and produce more culturally competent graduates. Use the CSC Educator Self-Reflection Tool (Thomas and Quinlan, in press) to evaluate and enhance the cultural sensitivity of your module, considering how you portray diverse people and perspectives in your curriculum, the interactions in your classroom, and methods used for assessment.

3. Value students' lived experiences

Welcoming and valuing lived experiences in the classroom is a central focus of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy actively engages and develops critical awareness of cultural practices and social structures that reproduce privilege and domination (McConnell, 2023; Sweet, 1998). Heavily influenced by the works of Paulo Freire (1997) and bell hooks (1994), the focus is on student–staff partnership, transformative education, person-centeredness, and anti-oppressive principles.

To put these theories into practice, teach in ways that engage students as collaborators and co-creators of knowledge. To dismantle multiple interlocking systems of oppression, try making personal connections with your students and invite them to get to know each other and support each other. In the process you can care for one another, learn from each other, and create a sense of community and commitment to advancing knowledge in a shared space. (See also the [CSHE Guide for Building Rapport](#) with students).

Encourage students to produce work inspired by their own experiences, or link theories and ideas to their own examples, not just offering your own. Encourage students to collect information from their own environments such as local communities and discuss relatable issues. Read more about this at the [Student Success blog](#).

4. Decolonise the curriculum

Decoloniality moves to expose the underlying coloniality within Western modernity (Quijano, 2007). Decolonial scholarship interrogates how knowledge is produced; de-naturalising and critiquing Western knowledge as neither superior nor universal. “Decolonizing the curriculum is not only about disrupting and dismantling normativity of the Euro-American vantage point; it is also about nurturing capacities to imagine alternatives” says Dutta (cited in Shahjahan et al, 2021).

Ask yourself whose voices are neglected in this curriculum? What have women written in your field? What have Black or Asian or South American writers contributed to our understanding of this field? How do these perspectives critique or reshape the contours or boundaries of your discipline?

To put this into practice, contact the library who have a collection of decolonising reading lists, journal articles and Global South publishers. Suggest that students and staff set up a decolonising the curriculum reading group. Create opportunities for students to be creative,

such as developing a series of decolonising the curriculum podcasts or zines. Check out the online [Acknowledge Repository](#), which has best practice examples on how to decolonise the curriculum. Kent Law School established a student-led movement and wrote this manifesto with key tips and recommendations: <https://decoloniseukc.org/manifesto/>

5. Make your content accessible to all

Accessibility is about removing barriers so that everyone has fair and equal access. In education, this involves overcoming any barriers that might occur for students or staff with learning differences or disabilities. Everyone has the right to fair and equal access to digital and physical services such as learning resources, information, and online systems as well as buildings and equipment. And it's the law! The Kent accessibility website explains why it matters: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/accessibility>

Creating clear heading structures, writing in plain English, making your content work with or without sound, enabling it to be read aloud, all benefit everyone. It is inclusive design and it is useful design, which means better engagement from your students. Start with Kent's web [guide to accessible documents](#).

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