Chapter 6
Six Practical Principles for Inclusive Curriculum Design

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ABSTRACT

Within the context of the Australian higher education sector, this chapter aims to draw together the principles of inclusive curriculum design and Universal Instructional Design (Silver, Bourke, & Strehorn, 1998) to provide lecturers and curriculum designers with concrete advice on how to design curricula that are both inclusive and accessible. Through a review of the literature and the introduction of six practical principles, the chapter sheds light on the importance of inclusive curriculum design for all students, and, more particularly, students studying in online, distance, or blended modes.

INTRODUCTION

Moving [inclusion] agendas 'from the margins to the mainstream' (Thomas et al., 2005) remains a significant challenge. It necessitates a shift away from supporting specific student groups through a discrete set of policies … towards equity considerations being embedded within all functions of the institution and treated as an ongoing process of quality enhancement (May & Bridger, 2010, p. 2, emphasis added).

As lecturers and support staff, we have been conscious of the limitations placed on students with disabilities and aware that this is an area with which we need to engage. Have we fully understood, however, that the way in which we design our courses determines who can access information and knowledge and who cannot? Have we unwittingly become the gatekeepers of learning and the wealth of opportunity that learning provides? Do we realise what we need to do to ensure that our curricula are inclusive and that the

impact on both students and our central university support units is enormous when we do not adopt inclusive curriculum principles?

This chapter aims to address some of these questions by suggesting that there are six constructive principles that underpin inclusive curriculum design in general and, more specifically, for online, distance and blended learning. In short, this paper aims to provide concrete guidance about designing inclusive curricula for lecturers and curriculum designers--the gatekeepers of learning.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THE AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

In recent years, there has been a push within the Australian higher education sector for greater social inclusion. The *Review of Australian Higher education Final Report* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) has the following amongst its recommendations:

That the Australian Government increase the funding for the access and participation of under-represented groups of students to a level equivalent to 4 per cent of the total grants for teaching. This would be allocated through a new program for outreach activities and a loading paid to institutions enrolling students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Funding for the Disability Support Program would be increased to $20 million per year. (p. xxiii)

This recommendation serves both as an affirmation of the need for greater participation by formerly previously under-represented groups in higher education plus an acknowledgement that such participation requires in turn increased funding support and institutional incentives.

There is increasing evidence that this push for inclusivity and its encouragement of a diverse student body has not only a sound ethical basis, but also a sound pedagogical basis, too (Antonio, 2001; Antonio, Chang, Hakuta, Kenny, Levin, & Milem, 2004; Barron, Pieper, Lee, Nantharath, Higbee, & Schultz, 2007; Blimling, 2001; Chang, Denson, Sáenz, & Misa, 2006; Denson & Chang, 2008; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Maruyama, Nirebim, Gudeman, & Marin, 2000; Milem & Hakuta, 2000; Nelson Laird, 2005; Pascarella, Palmer, Moye, & Pierson, 2001; Smith & Schonfeld, 2000; Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund, & Parent, 2001; Zúñiga, 2003; Zúñiga, Williams, & Berger, 2005). This growing body of literature suggests that "being part of a diverse educational community can enhance growth and development in important skills like leadership, critical thinking, and cross-cultural communication" (Higbee, Katz, & Schultz, 2010, p. 1).

On the whole, research in this area has, however, tended to focus on mostly on racial and ethnic diversity. Even within discussions of social inclusion in higher education, disability frequently remains marginalized (McCune, 2001; Higbee et al., 2010). It is thus part of our aim in this paper to emphasize the importance of inclusion agendas being cognisant of students with disabilities, and to make concrete suggestions, using principles of inclusive curriculum and Universal instructional design (UID) (Silver, Bourke, & Strehorn, 1998) of ways in which this may be achieved sustainably.

INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM AND UNIVERSAL INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Along with the push for greater social inclusion in the higher education sector, there is a concomitant development of a body of research about inclusive curriculum design (Chapman, 2008; El-Ayoubi, 2008; Hockings, 2010a; Hockings, 2010b; Hockings, 2005; Hockings, Cooke & Bowl, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; May & Bridger, 2010; Otten, 2003). Hockings defines inclusive

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