TUTOR

Teachers' upskilling aiming at a holistic inclusivity in learning

Introductory to Inclusive education

Strand Six: Inclusive environments

Contents

Introduction

Welcome to the Inclusive Learning Environments unit, which provides guidance on how to create and maintain learning environments that are inclusive of all learners. Through physical spaces, social and didactic methods, we will show you how to create places where everyone feels valued.

Activities based on the first chapters include analysing one's own environment, applying the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and exploring anti-bias education approach.

0.6.1 Creating inclusive learning environments.

An inclusive learning environment is more than the removal of individual barriers - it means that all students have the same opportunities for participation, development, and educational success, regardless of their individual circumstances. Inclusion encompasses physical and structural aspects as well as social and emotional dimensions of school interaction. It affects everyone: students with disabilities or chronic illnesses, with a history of migration, with experiences of current or historical socio-economic hardships, the LGBTQI+ community or other groups that are often affected by marginalization. This understanding of inclusion is influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which emphasizes the right of every person to full participation in society as well as respect for individual dignity, autonomy, and diversity.

This unit explores the question of how schools can create inclusive learning environments in which every student feels welcome and valued. It becomes clear that inclusion is not a state, but a continuous process that requires reflection, collaboration, action, and a willingness to change.

To enable practical orientation, the unit distinguishes between two central levels of action:

- the institutional level, at which structural and organizational framework conditions must be created (e.g. accessibility, protection concepts, diversity strategies), and
- the classroom or teaching level, where educators make concrete didactic and pedagogical decisions to enable an inclusive climate and individual learning.

Both levels are interdependent, complementary, and interrelated. While a place of education without discrimination-sensitive structures and transparent guidelines can hardly support inclusive processes in the long term, even the best measures at institutional level remain ineffective if they are not brought to life in the learning environment. The aim of this unit is therefore to take a systematic look at both levels, to highlight the key features of successful inclusion and to identify specific options for action - for individual educators as well as for the entire educational team.

4

Inclusive framework conditions: Design at institutional level

An inclusive learning environment can only be created if the school or educational institution as an organization creates structural conditions that enable participation and equal opportunities. This is not just about structural accessibility, but also about institutional strategies, pedagogical attitudes, and shared responsibility. Inclusive school development affects the entire education staff, leadership, administrative staff, families, and students in equal measure.

Inclusion means that students do not have to be adapted to the existing system, but that the system is designed in such a way that it is fair to everyone - regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender, or social status, etc. Education Institutions therefore have a responsibility to create spaces in which diversity is not only tolerated but actively valued and included.

Key areas of action at institutional level are:

1. accessibility in the school environment

- Accessibility of buildings, classrooms and toilets, e.g. wide corridors, ramps, elevators, automatic doors (Burgstahler, 2012; Woolner, 2010).

- High-contrast signage, acoustic signals, visual aids (e.g. pictograms),

- needs-based equipment (e.g. height-adjustable tables, lighting control, mobile hearing systems),

- barrier-free digital offerings (e.g. screen reader-friendly learning platforms).

Break rooms, canteens, prayer or meditation spaces, and extracurricular learning spaces must also be accessible to prevent indirect exclusion.

2. diversity-sensitive school design

Education buildings send messages about who belongs through their design - visually, linguistically, symbolically. Diversity-sensitive design includes:

- the visible representation of diversity (e.g. through posters, flags, bookshelves with diverse perspectives).

- Materials that reflect different languages, cultures, lifestyles, and physicality's.

- Additional spaces that take different needs into account, such as retreat spaces for students who need peace and quiet in between (e.g. neurodivergent students, places for prayer, students with mental stress, sensory overload, etc.) or brave spaces/empowerment spaces for certain groups of students - such as LGBTQI+ youth or students with experiences of racism - where exchange, counselling or creative projects can take place;

- Celebrating diversity: events that value cultural and social diversity - such as multicultural project days, cultural heritage weeks or inclusive festivals for various holidays - offer space for encounters, strengthen mutual understanding, and promote a positive attitude towards diversity. Care must be taken to ensure that these types of days and spaces do not become a tick box, tokenistic engagement with diversity and inclusion.

5

> **Consider:**
>
> How can 'culture days' become tokenistic?
>
> What can authentic engagement with other cultures look like in an inclusive educational environment?

3. strengthen diversity in the workforce

A diverse teaching staff brings different perspectives, life experiences, and language skills to the table. It broadens the horizons of the entire community and offers students the opportunity to identify with, or be exposed to, difference. The conscious promotion of diversity in the recruitment of staff sends a strong signal of belonging and representation. There can sometimes be systematic barriers when qualifications are not

recognised, or languages (or the lack of languages) are in play in hiring practices – in these instances the change is needed at policy and institutional (state) level.

4. **protection concepts, anti-discrimination work, and prevention**

Inclusive learning environments require binding structures to protect against discrimination, violence, and exclusion. This includes:

- clear, well-communicated protections, and intervention concepts in the event of bullying, sexualized violence, classist, ableist, racist, and queer-hostile incidents (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 1996), this should include a recognition that some things like racism cannot be addressed under anti-bullying policies or practices and must be named for what they are,

- a low-threshold, and trustworthy reporting and complaints system, which is actioned upon,

- firmly anchored responsibilities in the learning environment, for example through diversity officers or liaison staff,

- mediation programs among peers: If students are trained as peer mediators and mediate in conflict situations, tensions can be resolved at an early stage. At the same time, social skills are promoted and may hold a preventative effect against bullying.

- Reconciliation measures: Restorative justice practices aim to name harm, take responsibility, and restore relationships - rather than simply punish. The aim is to enable students to better understand the impact of their actions and to develop empathy and a sense of responsibility.

Only when those affected know that they are taken seriously and protected can an inclusive learning atmosphere be created.

6

5 Participation and co-determination

Inclusive learning environments promote democratic structures in which all voices are heard – including, and especially those of, marginalized groups, because participation not only creates identification, but also contributes valuable knowledge to institutional development. Possible elements include:

- Active student representatives with real decision-making powers and the ability to act,

- Parent participation in inclusive committees for education institutions with children (e.g. migration-sensitive, barrier-free design),

Participatory institution development with regular feedback formats (e.g. student surveys, future workshops).

6. collegial cooperation and support

Development of inclusive learning environments cannot be achieved alone. Strong, supportive collegiality is central to sustainable change. Institutions can create structures in which educators learn from, and strengthen, each other. This includes:

- Sharing best practice: Encourage educators to share inclusive methods, materials, or strategies - for example, as part of pedagogical conferences, subject groups, communities of practice, or internal training series.

- Mentoring programs: New educators in particular benefit from having contact persons who support them and introduce them to the institution's inclusive guidelines and practices.

- Support groups: Voluntary groups or tandems in which educators regularly exchange views on challenges in dealing with heterogeneity (that is things that are vastly different from each other) not only promote the quality of teaching, but also the well-being of the teaching staff.

These measures promote an inclusive learning culture that is not only geared towards students, but also towards the needs and development of educators.

7 Cooperation within the system

Inclusion is a joint task. Educational institutions need functioning cooperation with:

- Social workers, psychologists, counselling services

- extracurricular specialist agencies (e.g. homelessness organisations, addiction organisations, youth welfare services, integration offices, anti-discrimination agencies),

- inclusion-oriented further training courses for all staff,

- Cooperation with other educational institutions in the region, in the country or internationally - e.g. via exchange formats, further education networks, work shadowing or programs such as Erasmus+, which enable European cooperation and intercultural exchange. Educators can learn from each other, gain new perspectives on inclusion, and transfer successful approaches into their own practice.

These networks support educators in dealing with complex challenges and ensure long-term quality.

8. professionalization and sensitization of staff

Inclusive institutional development also requires continuous reflection and further development of professional attitudes. Regular training courses on diversity, inclusion, anti-discrimination and discrimination-sensitive language help educators and other staff to question their own assumptions, recognize unconscious prejudices and dismantle discriminatory structures. They promote an appreciative and reflective pedagogical practice, which is a central prerequisite for an inclusive education climate.

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9 Evaluation and further development

Inclusion is a continuous process. The effectiveness of measures should be regularly reviewed in terms of quality assurance and adapted on the basis of feedback (e.g. surveys of students, communities, families/parents and staff), research findings (such as the analysis of data on equal opportunities, participation and incidents of discrimination and social developments.

Inclusive lesson design: your contribution as an educator

Inclusion begins at a structural level - but the actual implementation is decided in the classroom. Educators play a significant role in this: they shape learning processes, interactions, and the atmosphere in the environment - and thus directly shape the opportunities for participation of all students. Inclusive practice in the classroom / learning environment means understanding differences as a resource, actively breaking down barriers and consciously shaping social interaction.

1 Consider differentiation and diversity in the learning environment

Inclusive teaching is geared towards the different strengths, interests, and needs of the learners. Through differentiated tasks, different social forms (e.g. individual, partner or group work), visual and auditory support and clear structuring, educators can specifically break down barriers to learning. The use of assistive technology - such as text-to-speech tools or adaptive learning platforms - also enables individual support and accessibility.

At the same time, teaching materials should be selected or designed in such a way that they make diversity visible: Texts, images and case studies that represent different life realities, family forms, skin colours, cultures, religions, gender identities and physicality's promote identification and convey appreciation. Students who recognize themselves in the content feel seen - this strengthens their self-confidence and motivation to learn (Gay, 2010).

8

2. breaking down language barriers

Language differences are one of the most common barriers in the classroom - especially for students with a migration biography, multilingual learners, or those with language development disorders. It is crucial that educators recognize and actively incorporate language resources instead of emphasizing deficits. This includes:

- Multilingual materials and multilingual group work in which first languages may be introduced,
- Learning partnerships in which students support each other linguistically,
- more time for linguistically challenging tasks,
- appreciative and inclusive language that strengthens a sense of belonging.

Metalinguistic activities - such as discussions about language, dialects, or cultural forms of communication - also promote mutual understanding and help to challenge stereotypical language images.

3. actively shaping social dynamics

Inclusion in the learning environment also involves consciously shaping social interaction. Educators can use targeted measures to promote a culture of appreciation, justice, and mindfulness. This is not just about setting rules, but also about setting an example of democratic and respectful relationships.

- Educator's role model function: Students adopt behaviours that they observe. Respectful, appreciative communication on the part of the educator helps to ensure that students also treat each other with respect.

- Targeted promotion of empathy: Exercises on perspective-taking and interactive formats such as role-playing or biographical learning methods can help to challenge stereotypes and strengthen mutual understanding.

- Early intervention in cases of discrimination: Exclusion and bullying must be actively addressed and sanctioned. Low-threshold contact points for affected students and in-class discussions to resolve conflicts help to break down social barriers.

- Raise awareness of unconscious prejudices: Reflection formats for educators and students help to recognize and question discriminatory structures.

4. promote community and strengthen relationships

A supportive emotional climate is a basic prerequisite for successful learning processes. Educators can specifically strengthen their students' sense of belonging and emotional security:

- Community-building activities, e.g. class projects, cooperative games, or intercultural celebrations,

- Peer models such as buddy systems to integrate new or socially isolated students in particular,

- Space for personal topics, through discussions, reflection phases or creative forms of expression,

- clear rules for respectful interaction, which are developed and adhered to together with the class,

- Thematic workshops on experiences of discrimination - they offer space for sensitization, exchange, and empowerment - and help to deal constructively with current or latent conflicts.

Inclusive practice in the classroom is not a rigid model, but an ongoing, reflective process. Educators are invited to question their routines, try out new perspectives - and together with their students create a learning environment in which everyone feels seen, respected and addressed and also performs better (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Battistich et al, 1995; Wentzel, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

5. social-emotional learning as part of inclusive practice

A principal component of inclusive education is the targeted promotion of social and emotional skills - i.e. the skills that enable students to recognize and regulate their own feelings, develop empathy for others, take responsibility, build relationships, and deal constructively with challenges. This field of learning is summarized under the term social-emotional learning (SEL).

Inclusive learning environments benefit particularly from the integration of SEL, as they strengthen emotional security and social interaction - both key prerequisites for educational equity and participation (CASEL, 2024).

Educators can promote SEL in the classroom through:

- Explicit SEL units: e.g. regular class discussions about feelings, friendship, dealing with conflict or self-worth.

- Reflection phases: Time slots in which students can reflect on group experiences or their own behaviour.

- Methods such as role-playing, biographical learning or cooperative problem-solving, which not only teach subject content but also strengthen social skills.

- Integration into subject lessons: Questions about justice, empathy or responsibility can also be addressed in subject lessons.

- Educator as model: An authentically empathetic, clear, and approachable attitude on the part of the teacher is often the most effective SEL learning opportunity.

10

When SEL is systematically integrated into lessons, it not only promotes respectful interaction, but also emotional resilience, a sense of responsibility and the ability of students to participate - key goals of inclusive education.

Reflection questions

- What aspects of inclusive design do you think have already been implemented at your own institution - and where do you think there is still a need for action?

- How would you specifically contribute to creating an emotionally supportive climate in your learning environment where all students feel safe and valued?

- To what extent do you feel sufficiently prepared to deal with linguistic, cultural, or social diversity in the learning environment in a differentiated way? Where would you like more support or further training?

- What specific measures at institutional level would you suggest or support to make diversity more visible and better include marginalized groups?

- As a future educator, how can you help to ensure that inclusive learning is not just a pedagogical ideal, but a reality in everyday life - even with limited resources and time pressure?

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11

0.6.2 The learning environment as a microcosm of wider society

This unit is part of self-directed learning.

The Environment as a Microcosm of Wider Society: Opportunities and Barriers

The educational sphere throughout history has been a microcosm of larger social dynamics, with cultural norms and systemic structures being reproduced within these institutions. Seeing the environment this way enables educators to identify where those opportunities for inclusion exist alongside barriers needing attention in order build equitable learning environments.

Self-Directed Learning Goals for Unit 5.2:

Learning Objectives: By the end of this unit, learners should be able to:

Figure out and develop the ways in which inclusivity and social justice are promoted within them in an educational setting. Identify institutional and systemic biases that hinder inclusion in education, such as systematic elitism, cultural assimilation, and lack of resources. Highlight the way in which societal norms are perpetuated within schooling and ways to counteract their social reproduction. Identify solutions to these areas of access and find ways in which we can be more inclusive.

Key Areas of Focus:

Opportunities for Inclusion: Learn about the classroom as a mirror of society. Consider the impact of representation and diversity among students in building an inclusive learning environment. Look at the role of learning environments in fostering civic engagement and social responsibility. Barriers to Inclusion: Explore systemic bias and cultural marginalization, leading to different inequities. Explore the impact of misappropriation of funds and insufficient educator professional development on communities of colour. Think of how society will fight against it, and institutions will not welcome such a substantial change.

Tasks:

Learning Journal Prompts:

1. **Opportunities**: How can our classroom serve as a model for a more inclusive and equitable society? What specific practices can we implement to reflect and promote social justice?

2. **Barriers**: What are some of the societal barriers that might be reflected in our classroom environment? How can we address these barriers to create a more inclusive learning space?

3. **Personal Reflection**: Reflect on how your own experiences outside the classroom influence your perceptions and behaviours within it. How might these experiences shape your interactions with others in the classroom?

12

The Classroom as a Microcosm of Society

The Classroom as a Classroom; A Mini-Society The classroom as a microcosm of macro social dynamics That schools and educational environments would reflect some of the societal structures, norms, and issues in other walks of life. This perspective defines the classroom as not existing in a vacuum, but rather mirroring the larger cultural, political and economic landscape of society The power relationships and socio-cultural culture here are engendered outside of education, but they are replicated within it as in its reproduction of society since the reflection sphere is also an influential site undermining them.

1. Reproduction of Cultural Norms and Values: Schools and other educational learning environments are transmitters of cultural learning, values, and norms. Many people are often forced to ponder; what is being taught, the way that it is being taught, by whom you are learning, and from whose lens the knowledge is delivered/withheld can at once challenge or reinforce societal norms. Curricula, textbooks, resources, and classroom practices all shape the dominant norms and values students come to take for granted. This can only amplify social injustices of race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and ability.

2. Reflection of Power Dynamics: The authority structure often reflects on classrooms and learning environments as they are based on the power dynamic of society. For example, in much of education the power of the educator mirrors that found elsewhere in society. These interactions may also mirror broader social trends of belonging and alienation, advantage and disadvantage, authority and vulnerability encountered between learners from various perspectives. School rules and regulations, authority structures, and resource allocation can thus be understood as micro-sites that reflect the macro social order.

3. A Space for Socialization and Civic Engagement: Educational environments are especially important sites where young people are socialized into the role of citizen. Whether in social networks, on sports grounds or at school desks: through experiences students can form their own opinion about society and understand what is part of duty, accountability but also civil freedom. In this sense schools are where young people learn how to relate to institutions in a society and learn to understand their place in the broader social fabric.

4. Reinforcement of Systemic Inequities: Getter goes on to describe how schools can also perpetuate systemic inequities that already exist in society, such as class stratification, racial discrimination, and gender bias. Indeed, things like the idea of a "hidden curriculum" in schools (the informal syllabus transmitted by teachers and other staff to students through the manner of exercising official power) often end up reproducing at best social hierarchies or behaviours. Patterns of inequity are woven into the fabric of cultural differences between the schools, as seen in disparities in funding, access to resources, and tracking students based on their backgrounds; these controls evoke greater societal inequities, which further ensure that intergenerational patterns of inequity will not only persist but even help prepare newborn for their respective futures.

Critiques of Viewing the Classroom as a Microcosm of Society:

Not only are the classroom-as-society and teacher-as-citizen views sustainable (for many educators and social theorists, these frameworks support an idea regarded as fundamental to their work), but they also have been critiqued.

Overemphasis on Reproduction

13

Critics point out how there may be a tendency to overemphasize the idea of class society's perpetuation in schools, that little attention is paid to questions around schooling and resistance as well as broader negative or contradictory functions of formal schooling. Although schools operate within a broader societal framework, they are places where students and teachers can work to push back against said norms. Empowering classrooms to help teach students how to question dominant narratives and conversations on social justice and equity.

Underestimating the Agency of Educators and Students

One other criticism is that this view may oversimplify the power of educators and students to make their own environments. An exclusive focus on the classroom as mirroring broader society elides educator and student resistance, both routine and exceptional, to dominant norms, opening sites of contestation and change within the educational system.

Nuanced Understanding of Diversity in Classrooms

Moreover, critics caution that one should never generalize how classrooms mirror social dynamics. As classrooms are literally \of many forms, in that the encounters within them can be different depending on localities, educators' philosophies as well as learners' homogeneity. Such intricate detail could be missed if the microcosm framework were applied too literally.

Relevance to the Course

Seeing the classroom as a microcosm of society is at the heart of this course on what makes educational inclusion possible—and what keeps it from happening. Through observing how overarching societal inequities are perpetuated in schools and other learning environments, educators will be able to question and evaluate their instructional tactics with the goal of fostering a fairer, more inclusive community. Yet simultaneously being aware of the caveats to this perspective pushes educators to challenge and question their classrooms as not only a mirror reflection of society but instead serving as an arena where things can change — powerful and critically engaged spaces.

Opportunities

1. **Modelling Inclusive Practices**:

   o **Representation and Diversity**: The educational setting is a place in which we have opportunity to represent the diversity that exists outside of school. An inclusive and respectful culture can be promoted by making certain that what is taught in classrooms, the conversations being held bear an array of perspectives and identities together with school policies as well. This representation normalizes positive social norms and gives students real role models to look up to as they, too are able see themselves reflected within their own teachers.

   o **Civic Engagement and Responsibility**: Schools can serve as incubators for active citizenship by engaging students in discussions and projects related to social justice, equality, and community service. These activities encourage students to think critically about their role in society and to develop a sense of responsibility towards fostering an inclusive and just world.

2. **Creating Safe Spaces for Dialogue**:

   o **Open Discussions**: The democratic project can be a lesson in incubation within our institutions of learning by focusing on discussions about social justice, inclusivity, and citizenship. These activities supporting students in developing and interrogating their own sense of agency, prompting them to reconsider what they can do for creating a more inclusive world.

   o **Consider**: If the school or educational environment is political and indeed a microcosm of society – can a safe space really be created?

3. **Promoting Critical Thinking**: Classrooms can be the site of these reflective spaces and people are encouraged to talk about difficult, politically charged topics around race, gender identity & power. These conversations will help students identify their own beliefs and prejudices, how to better understand others experiences along the way helping students develop empathy and understanding.

4. **Building Community and Social Cohesion**:

   o **Collaborative Learning**: Creating communities within schools and educational institutions using events, collaborative learning, and group students from different walks to life together. Working together as such not only boosts learning, but fragrances accommodation while teaching students both communal.

   o **Shared Values and Norms**: Schools and educational institutions play vital roles in fostering common values, including those of equity, justice, and respect for diversity. By identifying and then firmly anchoring these values, educators can construct an educational culture that embodies the principles of a decent society.

Barriers

1. **Reinforcement of Social Inequities**:

   o **Systemic Biases**: Schools and other educational institutions, just like society at large can accidentally promote systemic prejudices and inequities. These biases play out in curriculum offerings, the punishment and discipline of students, teaching strategies used by educators as well as what is expected from them pertaining to student effort (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), all methods which may contribute towards an inequitable distribution of opportunities and outcomes among marginalized youth.

   o **Cultural Exclusion**: Other times, the environment can be a barrier if it fails to see or acknowledge student culture. It also makes it seem as if content, policies, or practices that are inherently biased against certain races or ethnicities (those outside the dominant culture) simply arrive fully formed and out of a void.

15

2. **Limited Resources and Support**:

   o **Underfunding**: Schools and educational institutions also mirror the inequality in distribution of resources that is pervasive throughout society in all corners of our planet. Many low-income educational settings operate with stretched budgets, and much of the funding earmarked for these allowances is already allocated to more basic operational costs such as staff salaries and utilities with nothing left over for educational materials or infrastructure improvement. Consequently, these settings often have overcrowded classrooms, outdated materials and substandard facilities that further deepen the divide in educational equity between lower and higher income settings. A lack of resource distribution, underfunding contributes to significant outcomes with systemic racism further exacerbated by an inadequate critical mass and educator support.

   These patterns of chronic underfunding have taken their toll not just on the material environment, but also in reducing educator capacity to more effectively meet the differentiated needs of students. While schools and other educational settings mirror the wider society, such constraints can perpetuate any class and race or gender discriminations in education. Campus recreation is no different, this only serves to compound the disadvantages for students from marginalized communities creating barriers in a cycle that further narrow their path towards upward mobility.

   Addressing these inequities will not occur unless we make systemic change, which includes creating policies that promote equitable resource allocation and implementing student learning standards and professional learning initiatives to support practitioners in developing inclusive, justice-oriented environments for teaching and learning. By not solving these root causes we will continue that cycle and at last, we are only moving further away the people already far behind.

   o **Inadequate Training for Educators**: A number of educators also mentioned the fact that their training does not allow them to i) have an analysis about intersectionality or ii) understand how intersecting issues address themselves within their spaces. But for many educators, in the absence of training about cultural competence and anti-bias education along with experience and practice creating inclusive environments that mirror society as it is, they simply do not know how to do so.

3. **Resistance to Change**:

   o **Institutional Inertia**: Similar to other societal systems, educational institutions are slow in accepting change. Efforts to create an inclusive environment can be met with resistance by those who want things as they are today or see efforts at inclusion and diversity as detracting from the existing system.

16

○ **Societal Attitudes and Prejudices**: Often the pervasive sociocultural beliefs and stereotypes leach into the educational environment, colouring how students perceive themselves as well as their educators and institutional practices. It does not help to establish inclusivity instead creates an unsafe environment for students from minority groups (Gorski, 2017; Hannah-Jones, 2014; Banks, 2008; Gillborn, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Navigating Opportunities and Overcoming Barriers

To leverage the possibilities and eliminate the limitations of how we see educational settings as microcosms of society, educators and administrators must be deliberate:

- **Policy and Practice Reform**: Policies/practices need to be reviewed and reformed periodically by educational authorities, for them to be inclusive and equitable. They conduct curriculum reviews, provide staff professional development, and are working to implement restorative justice practices.

- **Community Engagement**: Furthermore, interacting with the community at large (families, community groups, local agencies, and societies) can be helpful in creating harmony between educational practices and broader societal issues. The idea is that everyone should be meaningfully engaged in the entire process to create a more engaging associated of people looks like all members of community.

- **Advocacy for Resources**: Advocating for equitable distribution of resources is key to addressing inequities experienced by schools that persist in being more marginalized. This could mean speaking up for government investment, applying for grants and working to align with other educational equity-oriented nonprofits.

17

Conclusion

Viewed as a microcosm for the larger society, it becomes clear how much educational settings offer to be powerful places of inclusion and fertile spaces upon which deeper commitments can take root and grow. And thus, educators can create worlds that not merely mirror the diversity of our world, but in fact begin to actively shape a more just and fair society.

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0.6.3 Auditing a learning environment

This unit is part of self-directed learning.

In Unit 5.3, trainees will engage with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Anti-Bias Guidelines and Toolkits to conduct their own audit of an educational environment for inclusivity. They will evaluate both materials, information and resources provided to students, and physical and non-physical spaces, to identify opportunities for improvement and eliminating barriers.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

What is UDL?

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is defined as a "research-based set of principles to guide the design of learning environments that are accessible and effective for all" (CAST, 2025). It aims to create inclusive learning environments. A UDL framework offers opportunities to identify and eliminate barriers to any student in their learning experience.

What are the principles of UDL?

1. Representation: present content in diverse ways
2. Action and Expression: cater for students to use different methods to express what they know
3. Engagement: make learning stimulating and motivating

18

You are asked to engage with the following resources in relation to UDL:

Readings:

Houghton, J. (2022). New to universal design for learning? start here. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 2022(172), 11-22. https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.20525

Maynooth University UDL Teaching and Learning Fellows (2024). *What is Universal Design for Learning (UDL)? Principles and Guidelines,* Maynooth: Centre for Teaching and Learning, Maynooth University. Access at: https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/OER%204.%20What%20is%20UDL%20-%20principles%20and%20guidelines%20Final%20%281%29.pdf

Website:

www.cast.org

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Anti-bias Approach

What is the Anti-bias approach?

The anti-bias approach permeates the entire curriculum, practices, philosophy, and ethos of an educational setting. It comes from Early Childhood Education and Care and was created by Louise Derman-Sparks. Anti-bias is a perspective that requires action and cycles of reflection and action.

What are the Goals of Anti-bias education?

Goal One: Identity

Educators will encourage and promote the students' construction of identities and students will become self-aware, evidence pride in their own family and community, be confident in who they are, and display a positive social identity (race, ethnicity, gender, cultural etc.). This includes learning the correct language and terminology to describe their own, and others' identities. A student's strong knowledge of identities (both their own and other social groups) is the foundation of the anti-bias approach.

Goal Two: Diversity

Educators will encourage and promote empathy, comfort, and positive interactions with people from underrepresented and diverse communities and backgrounds. Students will use accurate language for differences, and create caring, comfortable, and joyous connections with people from different social groupings from their own. They will learn the differences and similarities between themselves and other people and understand that identities can be similar and different at the same time – identities are fluid.

Goal Three: Justice

Educators will encourage and foster students' abilities and capacities to critically identify bias and to identify and acknowledge the hurt that bias can cause. Students will identify and understand injustices as well as have the language to be able to name and describe the harm injustices create.

Goal Four: Activism

Educators will provide the tool and encourage the ability and confidence of a student to stand up and call out bias and injustice on behalf of themselves and others. Students will be empowered to act when necessary to call out and stand up against injustice, prejudice, and biases. This goal encourages perspective taking, positive interactions, and conflict resolution strategies.

Derman-Sparks & Edwards, (2019). Understanding Anti-Bias Education: Bringing the Four Core Goals to Every Facet of Your Curriculum. NAEYC.org. Access at: https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2019/understanding-anti-bias

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You are asked to engage with the following resources in relation to Anti-bias education:

Derman-Sparks, L., Keenan, D.L., & Nimmo, J. (2022). *Online Material for Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs: A Guide to Change, for Change.* Teachers College Press. Columbia University. New York & London. Access at:
https://www.antibiasleadersece.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Appendix_LeadingAntibiasEarlyChildhoodPrograms.pdf

https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/LFJ-Social-Justice-Standards-September-2022-09292022.pdf

https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards

Self-Directed Activity:

1. **Environmental Audit Report:** Can you conduct an audit of your classroom or learning environment using the Anti-Bias or UDL approach?

2. **Action Plan for Inclusion:** How would you adapt and incorporate the Anti-bias or UDL for inclusive education for the future in your practice and learning environment?

3. **Curriculum Evaluation Exercise:** How would you begin to audit your curriculum using one or both?

20

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