Challenges of addressing equality and diversity in the university curriculum

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“In becoming ‘lecturers’ and not simply ‘researchers’, academics accept a duty to teach: to step, however temporarily, into the world of the professional educator…” (Hunt, 2007)
Fundamental questions

• Who deserves the opportunity to learn in Higher Education?

• What conditions advance learning for all students once they are enrolled in Higher Education? (Chang, 2002)

• Is curriculum about content or student engagement with it? (Or both)
Student's contributing factors to learning in Higher Education

Academy’s contributing factors to learning:
1. Personal assumptions;
2. Individual practices;
3. Dept. practices;
4. Disciplinary practices

Societal Influences
1. Parental assumptions;
2. Socio-political influences;

Reconsidering Learning from the ‘Big Picture’
How does ‘being different’ effect the following?

- Student’s orientation and motivation;
- Student’s learning intention and approach (Marton et al, 1997);
- Student’s ability to adapt (Ashcroft & Foreman Peck, 1994);
- Student’s level of intellectual development and information processing (Perry, 1968);
- Student’s self-efficacy and attendant resilience (Dweck, 1991);
- Student’s experience of anxiety and threat (Rogers, 1951; Fransson, 1977);
- Student’s quality of interactions with peers and tutors (Smith & Bath, 2006; Waite & Davis, 2006);
Academic environment contributing factors:

- Curriculum approaches (programme design & implementation including assessment processes);
- Newness & size of subject (Gibbs, 1989);
- Academic’s approach to teaching (Trigwell & Prosser, 1999);
- Accessibility via the transparency of the discipline’s requirements (Lea, 2004; Haggis, 2003);
- Impact of power relations on alienation and engagement (Mann, 2001);
- Abstract or authentic situations of disciplinary learning (Lave, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991);
- Tacit values & hidden curriculum (Margolis, 2001)
Possible sites of classroom tension:

- Conflicts regarding a topic of relevance to an identified group;
- Students’ of a minority group feeling as if they need to censor themselves in classroom environments or academic activities for fear of negative repercussions;
- Lack of integration of relevant examples into the curriculum.
- Intersecting diversity agendas.
Reflective questions:

• How much do our attitudes to and practices of learning, teaching and assessment assume norms that might not be representative of all our students?

• How would we know?
Equality and Diversity Legislation calls on us to reconsider our practices.

- Do our disciplines, curriculum, and their activities take into consideration:
  - Implicit value judgements about racial difference?
  - Implicit value judgements about physical abilities?
  - Implicit value judgements about gender?
  - Implicit value judgements about sexual orientation?
  - Implicit value judgements about age?
  - Implicit value judgements about religion?

Systemic bias expressed in cultural systems? (Trevor Philips)

What are the universities’ cultural systems?
Taxonomy of approaches to internationalization (useful metaphor?)

Programme design that:

- ‘aims to bring the foreigners up to speed’;
- provides courses on other cultures;
- allows for separate but equal development of minority courses;
- ‘builds a bi-cultural learning environment’;
- Develops generic skills in such a manner that students are able to adapt to whatever social milieu they encounter.

Hypothesis:

• “A discriminatory classroom climate is at least in part created by daily communicative activities that indirectly and directly discriminate and are not followed by any swift attempt to be addressed.”

• Useful resources for auditing your practice:
  1. Race Relations Toolkit
  2. LGBT Youth Scotland Toolkit

