



I-CARE Model: An innovative design for inclusive teaching

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Abstract

The role of higher education teachers is pivotal in guiding multicultural and multinational students through their academic journeys, from their first day on campus to graduation. This period is marked by significant personal growth, development, and the formation of lifelong friendships. However, students often face challenges such as difficulties in "settling in," feelings of isolation, and mental health struggles. To enhance students' well-being, it is crucial to prioritise their well-being within the educational framework, as it significantly impacts their post-academic lives.

This paper explores the concept of well-being in education, drawing on the "therapeutic turn in education" and the New Economic Foundation's five well-being approaches: "keep learning," "connect," "be active," "take notice," and "be engaged." Contemplative pedagogy, which promotes mindfulness and connections between personal experiences and the world, is highlighted as a method to foster well-being and a sense of connection among students.

The paper also addresses the importance of inclusion in teaching practices, a legal requirement under the Equality Act in the UK. It emphasizes the need for a revising mindset in teaching, akin to revising textbooks, to continually improve and adapt teaching methods to be more inclusive. The I-CARE model and Gibbs' reflective cycle are proposed as frameworks for evaluating and implementing inclusive teaching practices.

Recommendations from the UCL Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion guidelines are discussed to support the implementation of inclusive practices. These include recognizing personal responsibilities as educators, supporting students' diverse needs, and enhancing the curriculum with diverse perspectives. Interactive teaching methods are suggested to improve student engagement and peer-to-peer connections, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity.

By adopting these approaches, higher education institutions can create an environment where all students feel valued and included, ultimately enhancing their academic and personal development.

This piece explores inclusion as a vital aspect of teaching practice. It draws on scholarly literature to highlight the importance of selecting and evaluating changes to be implemented in educational settings. First, it discusses the concept of inclusion as depicted in academic literature. Then, it explains the motivation for choosing inclusion as an area for improvement. Finally, it proposes criteria for assessing inclusion as a change in professional practice.

Keywords: Inclusivity; Inclusive teaching; I-CARE model; Contemplative Pedagogy; Sustainable Development Goals

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1. Introduction

The role of a higher education teacher involves witnessing the journeys of multicultural and multinational students, both undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PGT), as they progress from their first day on campus to their graduation ceremonies. Students' time in academia represents a period of significant personal growth, development, and the formation of lifelong friendships. However, some students may face challenges related to "settling in," feelings of isolation, and struggles with mental health (Capper & McVitty, 2022). To optimize students' well-being during their university journey, it is essential to position their well-being at the heart of their education, as it profoundly impacts their post-academic lives. Ecclestone and Hays (2008) discuss the "therapeutic turn in education," while the New Economic Foundation proposes five well-being approaches: "keep learning," "connect," "be active," "take notice," and "be engaged" (Steurer & Marks, 2008). Contemplative pedagogy, which encourages students to practice mindfulness and establish connections between their personal experiences and the world around them, fosters well-being and promotes a sense of connection with others (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Bush, 2011; Levy et al., 2011).

The idea of "connectedness," often referred to as belonging or inclusion, is frequently examined in relation to demographic differences such as educational background, gender, ethnicity, or language. These differences can influence how accepted students feel (Capper & McVitty, 2022). Houghton and Anderson (2017) discuss how developing a sense of belonging can impact student retention and encourage active participation in learning.

2. Rationale for the inclusion aspect of teaching practice

Implementing inclusion as a practice is a legal requirement for Higher Education Institutions in Scotland, England, and Wales under Section 91 of the Equality Act (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010). Therefore, staff members have a personal responsibility to promote inclusion, which entails creating "a culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging and is valued for their unique perspectives and contributions" (Blicher and Scott, n.d.).

3. Approaches to Evaluating Change

To achieve inclusivity in teaching practices, the literature provides valuable insights. The concept of maintaining a revising mindset, as discussed by Lenox and Gaterud (n.d.), serves as a guiding principle for improvement. While the authors focus on revising textbooks, there are relevant parallels between revising written materials and reassessing teaching practices. These commonalities include taking a step back, embracing change, thinking holistically, considering students' perspectives, and diversifying formats.

The similarities between the revising mindset for textbooks and inclusive teaching practices include, first, the importance of stepping back from prepared lesson plans and teaching tools (such as lecture slides) to allow time for reflection and recognize potential changes. Secondly, soliciting feedback on teaching practices and being open to suggestions from more experienced colleagues can introduce new methods for improvement. Thirdly, adopting big-picture thinking fosters an understanding of courses as part of a broader student experience, connecting to the larger context of higher education and quality assurance. Fourthly, revising course materials from the students' perspectives—focusing on accessibility and manageability—can enhance the relevance of teaching methods. Lastly, changing the formats of teaching sessions—from on-campus lectures to one-on-one consultations, group tutorials, site visits, and self-directed study—can help maintain a revising mindset and ensure inclusivity in teaching practices. This aligns with the findings of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010) that emphasize fostering a sense of belonging and voice (Blicher & Scott, n.d.).

While exploring the CARE model of revision introduced by Lenox (Lenox & Gaterud, n.d.) and reflecting on the meaning of inclusion in the UK higher education sector, this model has been readapted to support inclusive teaching practices based on self-reflection. The following segment (Table 1) presents the modifications made to the CARE revision model (Fig. 1) to enhance inclusivity in teaching practices (Lenox & Gaterud, n.d.).

The focus of this paper is on inclusion in teaching practices. To revise these practices from the perspective of inclusivity and belonging, the revision mindset and the I-CARE model (Table 1) can be employed as criteria for evaluating changes that promote inclusivity in teaching. Additionally, Gibbs' reflective cycle model (1988) can be utilized to thoroughly explore the various phases related to change that lead to inclusive teaching practices. This model provides a structured approach to learning from real experiences, encouraging self-examination and ensuring that learning occurs while planning for future actions. It can serve as an effective evaluation and planning tool for implementing and developing inclusive teaching practices alongside the I-CARE model, guiding the process of change and inclusivity in education.

To support the implementation of inclusive practices, recommendations from the UCL Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (UCL, 2017) can provide useful areas for updating teaching practices. These recommendations emphasize the importance of:

Recognising personal responsibilities as a teacher, particularly regarding the influence on students, awareness of racial stereotypes, understanding the concept of race, and sharing best practices.

Supporting students in their learning by pronouncing their names correctly, ensuring access to personal tutoring, initiating open and welcoming conversations in informal settings, inviting opinions during discussions, and being mindful of students' diverse needs. This ensures full participation by encouraging students to share their opinions or take specific roles in group tasks and mixing groups to facilitate interactions among students from different ethnic backgrounds.

Understanding the impact of an inclusive and diverse curriculum on students' experiences and sense of belonging. Enhancing areas such as reading lists or lecture contexts with diverse authors, approaches, and cultures can prevent a narrow perspective and promote richer viewpoints.

Table 1 I – CARE Model of Revision. Adapted from the CARE Model of Revision (Fig. 1)

I	CARE Model of Revision (I – Inclusion)
C	What can I cut and clarify in my teaching practice to embrace inclusion?
A	How can I best address the feedback I have received on cultivating inclusion in my teaching?
R	How can I use my reflection to re-order and refresh my teaching materials and approaches to promote inclusivity through my practice?
E	Can I incorporate more examples to ensure that my teaching is relevant to students?

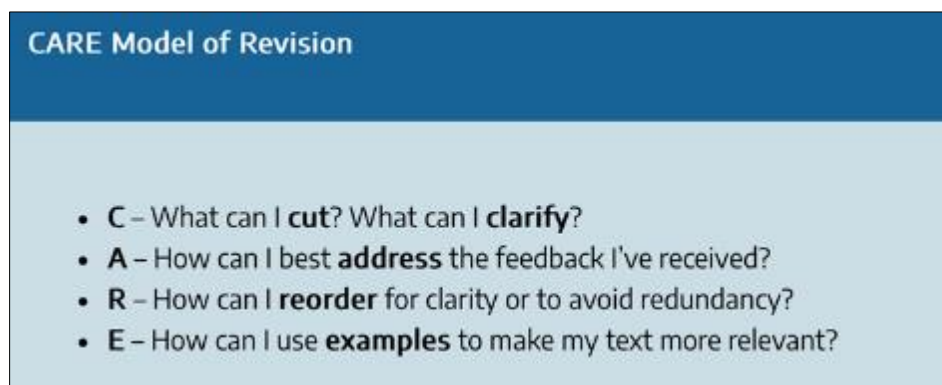


Figure 1 CARE Model of Revision. Source: Lenox, S. and Gaterud, A. (n.d.). The revising mindset. In Blicher, H., Gaterud, A., Scott, V., Vold, V., Hooper, M.W., and Lenox, S. Doing the Work: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Open Educational Resources. Pressbooks. Available at: <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/dothework/chapter/2-3-the-revising-mindset/>. (Accessed 1 May, 2025)

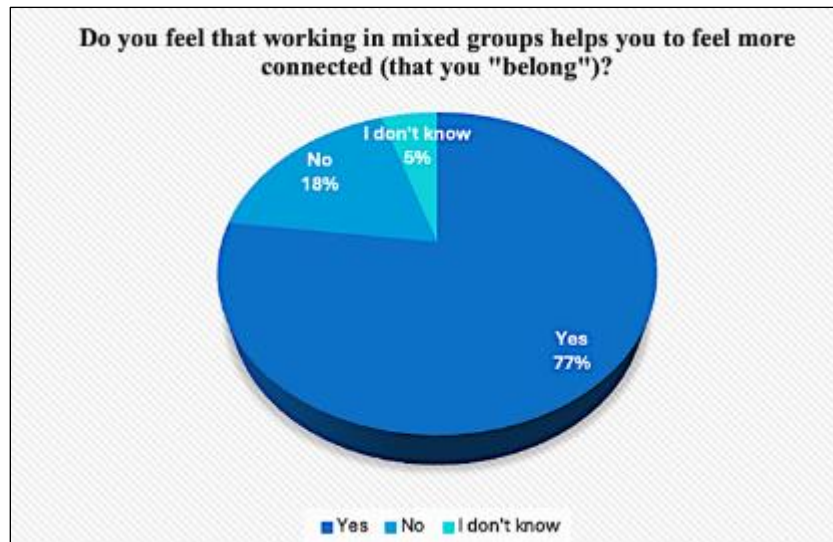


Figure 2 Levels of connectedness among the course's (UG) students. Source: author's own

4. Updating Teaching Practices

To improve student engagement and peer-to-peer connections, interactive teaching methods could be introduced to encourage collaboration among students from different ethnic backgrounds. For instance, a cohort of second-year undergraduate students enrolled in a branding course consists of individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds with varying communication skills. It has been observed that interaction among students, especially during breaks, is minimal or even absent. To address this, instead of allowing students to choose their own groups for collaborative activities, the teacher will mix groups to prevent students from forming cliques based on proximity. Implementing interactive teaching methods can help avoid isolating individuals and create an atmosphere that welcomes new ways of thinking (UCL, 2017). By fostering interactions among students from different ethnic backgrounds within this course, they can develop a stronger sense of belonging and connection to the university, as well as feelings of empowerment, safety, value, and inclusivity. According to a study by Capper and McVitty, a stronger sense of belonging is linked to friendships and increased familiarity with peers in a course, indicating that forming close connections contributes to a sense of belonging and improved mental health (2022).

As a result of these updates to teaching practices, students have reported feeling a greater sense of belonging and inclusivity in the classroom. This sentiment was captured through an anonymous poll assessing students' experiences (Fig. 2), where 77% of participants indicated that the mixed groups implemented this semester for collaborative work supported their sense of belonging and connectedness.

5. Conclusion

Inclusion in higher education is not merely a legal obligation but a moral and pedagogical imperative that shapes the academic and personal journeys of students from diverse backgrounds. As this paper has explored, fostering a sense of belonging and well-being is essential to student success, particularly in multicultural and multinational learning environments. By integrating contemplative pedagogy, the principles of the I-CARE model, and reflective frameworks such as Gibbs' cycle, educators can critically reassess and adapt their teaching practices to be more inclusive, responsive, and student-centred.

The parallels drawn between revising written materials and revising teaching practices underscore the importance of flexibility, empathy, and continuous improvement. Practical strategies—such as diversifying teaching formats, encouraging peer interaction, and embedding diverse perspectives into curricula—can significantly enhance students' sense of connection and engagement. Moreover, the recommendations from institutions like UCL provide actionable guidance for educators to support students holistically, from pronunciation of names to inclusive group dynamics.

Ultimately, inclusive teaching is a dynamic, ongoing process that requires educators to remain reflective, open to feedback, and committed to creating environments where all students feel valued, heard, and empowered. By placing inclusion and well-being at the heart of pedagogy, higher education can truly fulfill its transformative potential.

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