How simple guides contribute to an inclusive education and active learning

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> *"The best teacher is the one who suggests rather than dogmatizes, and inspires his listener with the wish to teach himself."* Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton

Across the world, Universities are becoming more [inclusive](). This means that Universities are expected to offer an inclusive learning environment, full participation and academic achievement of diverse students. Universities should respect diversity and equality, enable participation and remove barriers to student success.

Given that UWL student community is incredibly diverse, indicating that our students represent different ethnicities and religions and varying socioeconomic backgrounds, it is important to take these characteristics into account when developing learning materials and ensure that teaching styles meet the needs of a diverse group of students. The [University of Derby]() has designed a study pack as a resource for academics to use with their students, which have been proven to have positive outcomes on student performance, especially with students who are less prepared for studies in Higher Education. The strategic planning department at UWL has updated this study pack in order to meet the needs of UWL students and curricula. This pack is now known as the [Guides for Success]() and aims to help academics reflect on how to embed inclusivity in all aspects of the academic cycle.

Guides for Success

The eight guides are available on the UWL Teaching Hub: [Guides for Success]()

- **Fit to Submit:** Coursework Checklist: Provides a checklist for students to work through prior to the submission of work to eliminate common mistakes
- **Fit to Sit:** Provides top tips for exam preparation, during the exam and reflection for future exams.
- **Improving your Confidence:** Top tips to encourage students to build their confidence.
- **Study Skills for Successful Students:** Shows students an outline of key skills which are displayed by successful students and encourages them to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses for PDP.
- **Improving Academic Writing:** Gives students an overview of the main issues to consider when writing a paper and provides advice on how to approach the process.

- **Understand Your Students**: Identifies some of the issues which can cause students to perform poorly, fail or withdraw and encourages discussion around common anxieties, academic and personal concerns.
- **Understanding the Assessment:** An activity for students to complete when handed an assignment in order to make sure they fully understand what is expected as an outcome.
- **Plagiarism:** A Guide for Students: Provides a definition of Plagiarism and explains to the students the importance of compliance when producing work for submission.

We believe that these guides contribute to an inclusive education and active learning. They are simple and easy to be deployed into class and online, and they force students to stop and reflect on what they are doing before an assessment is submitted. That pause allows potential behaviour change which is ultimately the key for success.

Featured Guide

Below is an example on how one simple guide can help you create an inclusive learning environment during teaching. The 'Understanding your Assessment' guide is an excellent tool to encourage active learning, and maps on two key principles for an 'unmissable' session purposed by Revell and Wainwright (2009):

- a high degree of student participation and interaction and
- a clear structure which enable students to identify key points and make integrative links with other areas of the course to encourage students to construct meaning using a deep rather than surface approach to learning

The **Understanding the Assessment** guide has been developed to help students understand summative assessments via an active participation. It is a formative activity to help students receive sufficient advice and guidance, and encourage a self-directed and reflective learning by allowing them to reflect on their own learning, skills and abilities.

Specifically:

This formative activity is divided into six steps:

1. The academic displays and outlines the assessment criteria and relates them to the learning outcomes as given in the module. (S)He explains the purpose of the summative assessment and how it will help students to demonstrate subject knowledge and develop their skills. The academic sets clear expectations on what (s)he expects from them as an outcome of the assessment.

The following steps encourage group work. However, it is evidenced that some students may not welcome a group discussion activity. Thus, it is important the academic to explain the purpose of using group work and interactive learning and how such group activities can benefit them. Also, letting students to choose who will be in 'their' group may be challenging and end up having monocultural groups, as in such group activities students seem to be in groups with people who share similar values. Thus, to ensure diversity, the academic should encourage multicultural groups.

2. Here the activity encourages students to be in groups in order to discuss the purpose of the assessment and understand any key terminologies. This step is crucial, as it provides students with the opportunity to 'review & reflect' on their skills and abilities to fully understand the main direction of the assessment which will help them to develop critical and creative thinking.

3. Following an 'in group' discussion, the academic encourages students to join other groups in order to explore common themes or initial ideas, and to identify recourses to help them with the assessment. Also, students will have the opportunity to explore different perspectives that will encourage a dialogue among and between students. This step will enable them to collaborate with each other and to consider various viewpoints on the topic that contribute to a deeper understanding of the assessment.

4. Here the activity requires students to share themes or ideas from their groups, and any issues and concerns they may have in a full class discussion. This step encourages a high degree of student interaction and maps to the principles of a student -centered approach to learning, as moves students from passive receivers of information to active participants in their own discovery process.

5-6 The last two steps of the activity allow time for questions and answers, reflection and an overall summary of the topics which were presented and discussed. The academic clarifies any matters raised and identifies further resources and support to students with the assessment. (S)He provides a clear link on how this activity is linked back to the objectives of the session and, if appropriate, encourages students to reflect on the feedback received from previous assignments to avoid similar errors.

Food for thought….

As an academic myself, I know that just telling course teams that they have to embed inclusivity and diversity into their teaching is unhelpful. Just as we took an Institutional approach to disseminating SAP2, we also want a systemic approach to addressing inclusion in the curriculum and assessment. Different people naturally prefer a certain single different learning style, as various factors influence a person's preferred style. Such factors comprise social environment, educational experiences or the basic cognitive structure of the individual. Thus, the structure of the class should promote learning and the most effective way of achieving this is to actively engage students in their learning.

Thus …

> **Teaching** is not showing someone how to do something

> **Teaching** is inspiring students to teach themselves.

References

Revell, A. & Wainwright, E. (2009). What Makes Lectures 'Unmissable'? Insights into Teaching Excellence and Active Learning. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 33*(2), 209-223.