a prelude to inclusive student-centred pedagogies in higher education

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Innovative Faculty Development towards Inclusive Student-centred Pedagogy (I-ScP): a reflective and transformative approach

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EDITORIAL

A prelude to inclusive student-centred pedagogies in higher education

Roeland van der Rijst and Elia Fernández-Díaz

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Higher education institutes should create conducive and inclusive teaching environments in order for all students to have equal opportunities to thrive academically. In response to the evolving higher education landscape, faculty adapt their approaches and curricula, giving proper attention to voices that have been historically undervalued, ignored, or even marginalised. But what are the components of inclusive teaching and what do faculty, students, and support staff need to change and re-design to create inclusive and conducive learning environments in their contexts. In this book the authors present ideas and reflections on contemporary teaching in higher education to offers faculty and staff tools to navigate the various dimensions of inclusive student-centred pedagogies in higher education. This book includes material that will raise awareness of inclusive teaching especially related to the design of student-centred learning, lesson plans, multimodal representation of content, peer observation of teaching, and educational action research.

A considerable number of faculty members at higher education institutes tend to adopt teaching approaches that are not always tailored to the needs of *all* students leading to the undesirable exclusion of some. The first step for faculty is to become aware of the various needs of their students and second to develop the specific competences for inclusive student-centred practices. When faculty members take up their responsibility and agency, they will be able to establish inclusive and equity-driven learning environments where all students can succeed personally and academically. Inclusive student-centred practices urge all stakeholders for the provision of effective support structures and

processes for both faculty and students, online and on-campus. Lack of inclusive student-centred practices in contemporary higher education institutes can be overcome when students are positioned as equal partners who inform and work together with faculty towards the design of conducive learning environments. In this book various themes are explored related to inclusive student-centred pedagogies and faculty development opportunities which were developed based on evidence collected in various European universities.

In an international project, called COALITION (2023), faculty from six European universities collaborated around the topic of inclusive student-centred pedagogies in higher education. During this project in-depth understanding of inclusive teaching and practical tools for faculty and academic developers were constructed, tested, and validated in various higher education contexts. The key mission of the project involved exchanging faculty development practices and dissemination of knowledge and expertise about inclusive teaching. The targeted population were teaching faculty and faculty developers. This project aimed to empower them to make teaching practices more inclusive, disseminate their insights to the academic communities in their university, and collaborate with partnering universities. Faculty and support staff benefited from the opportunity to exchange experiences, ideas, views, and good practices with each other and with faculty and staff from other universities. This book presents the insights gained in this international project within a community of practices that allow an in-depth understanding of the inclusive practices developed in different university contexts.

Conceptualising inclusive student-centred pedagogies

Inclusive student-centred pedagogies are those educational approaches that aim to create a welcoming, equitable, and engaging environment in which every student has the chance to participate meaningfully and reach their full potential. It is a transformative educational approach, emphasising active student engagement, individual autonomy, and tailored learning experiences in order to contribute to an equitable learning environment, where every student feels valued, respected, and supported. As students have diverse learning

needs, teachers need to use a range of approaches and strategies to support their learning potential. This involves making teaching flexible, developing opportunities for digital literacies, rethinking the design of assessment processes, and providing tools to improve teaching by promoting faculty development.

Digital equity and assessment

Specific attention is given to digital equity and why digital literate faculty members are key to effectively teaching lectures and seminars which are inclusive for all students. In some cases technology can become a barrier to educational opportunities for students. The conversation about digital equity and taking actions to achieve inclusiveness is an ongoing process with new technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence, virtual reality) being developed and implemented in teaching. Assuring and sustaining access for faculty and students to technology, both hardware and software, abundant financial resources, and development opportunities for digital literacies, al needs continuous attention. In any contemporary higher education institutes a variety of on-campus, online, hybrid, and blended teaching formats are provided. For each mode of teaching different elements need to be considered when designing inclusive teaching for all. But overall, we recognise that there is a benefit to pursue access for every student even when not able to come to campus. Other benefits can be found in opportunities to utilise a multitude of modalities in learning activities. This creates opportunities for students to select preferred modes of learning for the tasks provided. Overall, faculty need to identify and remove barriers for students in order to pursue access for all in our higher education institutes.

As the assessment practices drive the learning processes of student, it is essential to purposefully design inclusive student-centred assessment practices. An essential element of inclusive assessment practices is the variety of formative feedback moments in which every students can reflect on and understand their learning progress. As student groups are diverse in contemporary higher education in many ways - culturally, linguistically, and personally - assessment formats should provide opportunities for all students to express their learning in a multitude of ways. This book provides a description of

inclusive assessment and a variety of suggestions and illustrations of inclusive assessment practices. The better way to design inclusive assessment is to include students as co-creators of the assessment practices (cf. Cook-Sather et al., 2021). In that way faculty get a deep understanding of the diversity in the student cohort and students can voice their interests and preferences.

Faculty development affordances

This book describes not only the theoretical underpinnings of inclusive teaching but also provides understanding of faculty development initiatives which are helpful to sustain inclusive student-centred pedagogies in higher education institutes.

Educational action research is not only a process to accomplish change in teaching, but also to grow as a faculty members and to ultimately change higher education and society. Sustainable change occurs through collaborative discourse. Conversations in conducive environment in which all voices are heard and all can participate equally are the basis for any regenerative process. Action research utilises the principle that teaching is a continuous search. It is a critical inquiry approach to changing teaching and faculty. And this inquiry approach is also of interest for re-thinking and redesigning affordances for faculty to learn and to develop their teaching. Academic developers might use action research in collaboration with faculty, students, and support staff to developing critical agency of all.

This book discusses the use of specific instruments and tools that can support reflection on action, such as the redesign of lesson plans and peer observation. Faculty develop and grow not only through formal training, but by conducting and designing lectures and seminars in every day teaching practice. Through a systematic and reflective process of redesign of lesson plans faculty will grow. Therefore, the process of redesign of lesson plans is both beneficial for creating inclusive student-centred pedagogies as well as for continuous faculty development. Furthermore, observing peers teaching practices can help faculty to get inspired and find ways to develop their own teaching. Peer observation protocols can effectively be used as self-development tools. The core learning principles behind peer observations is reflection on practice and deliberate practice. Both for the

observer and the observed peer observation serves as a way to reflect on own practice and on conceptions of good teaching which supports a learning culture in the organisation. Peer observation of teaching fosters the attitude of continuous learning and improvement, which is relevant for the individual growth of faculty, but also for the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the sharing of ideas about teaching stimulates collegial conversations in the discipline and across disciplines (Christensen, Møller, & Pedersen, 2023). Overall, peer observations of teaching supports the growth of faculty's critical agency to change existing practices in their classrooms and re-consider structures which for ages have seem to be rigid but in fact are as permeable as any social construct.

Concluding remark

This book first describes a conceptual framework and then provides various ideas, resources, and materials for developing university teaching into inclusive student-centred practices. We know, that there is much more out there which is relevant for inclusive student-centred pedagogies, and we did not aim of intent to review all. But the authors share their understanding and practices at their units and universities for all to benefit. Only through sharing our practises we can learn from each other and be inspired to change our teaching practices for the best. Overall, the call for inclusive student-centred pedagogies is a call to develop our teaching and learning, to pay attention to all those voices which are unheard for too long, and to embrace the diversity in our institutes as beneficial for the further creation of new knowledge in our disciplinary fields. There are various ways to develop teaching into inclusive practices. But many, if not all, are supported by trustful collegial conversations, empathy towards all, and some courage and agency to change the system for the better.

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CHAPTER 1

Inclusive student-centred pedagogies

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1.1 Transformative teaching approach

Inclusive student-centred pedagogy is a teaching approach that aims to create a welcoming, equitable, and engaging environment in which every student has the chance to participate meaningfully and reach their full potential. Student-centred pedagogies are transformative teaching approaches which emphasise active student engagement, individual autonomy, and tailored learning experiences (Mat & Jamaludin, 2024). By emphasising inclusivity, this pedagogy acknowledges and values the diversity of students' backgrounds, abilities, interests, and experiences. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, it prioritises adaptability and responsiveness to the unique needs of each learner, making education accessible and relevant to all.

This approach revolves around active student engagement, viewing students not as passive recipients of information but as active participants in their own learning process. Faculty using this teaching method often adapt their instruction to align with students' personal interests, prior knowledge, and learning patterns, whether visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, or a blend of modalities. Recognizing that students bring a range of experiences and skills, inclusive pedagogy encourages collaboration, peer learning, and open communication to help students build on their strengths and support each other.

To support diverse learning needs, inclusive and student-centred teaching often incorporates differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, and formative assessment, allowing faculty to monitor and respond to individual progress continually. Moreover, this approach promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-reflection, empowering students to take ownership of their learning journey.

Ultimately, inclusive student-centred pedagogy contributes to a more just and compassionate learning environment, where every student feels valued, respected, and supported. By fostering a sense of belonging and emphasising each student's potential, this approach equips learners with the confidence and skills to thrive both academically and personally, laying a strong foundation for continuous learning and active participation in society.

1.1.1 Student involvement and participation

To implement an inclusive student-centred teaching approach, it is essential to ensure that students actively participate in the learning process and engage in personal meaningful learning experiences (cf. Sun & Xu, 2024). Three key aspects should be emphasized to enhance student participation and engagement (see Figure 1.1).

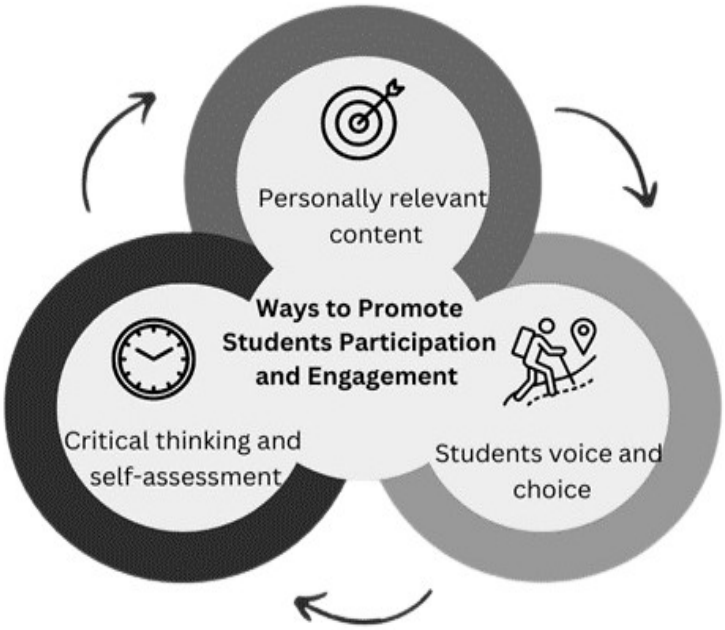

Figure 1.1 Ways to promote students' participation and engagement

Empowering students to voice their opinions about the learning process, suggest ideas, and make decisions that shape their academic experience, supports a sense of ownership and engagement essential for advanced learning. When university students are invited to propose research topics aligned with their interests, choose from a range of assessment methods, or

participate in the co-creation of course materials, they become active partners in their education. For instance, allowing students to influence the selection of course readings or project formats encourages them to connect more deeply with the material. Moreover, gathering student feedback on teaching approaches or curriculum adjustments signals a commitment to an adaptive, student-centred learning environment. This involvement not only enhances motivation but also prepares students for the professional autonomy and collaborative decision-making that will be vital in their future careers.

Students are encouraged to actively engage in self-reflection, which involves a thoughtful evaluation of their learning patterns and an assessment of their progress over time. This process of self-reflection is vital in helping students gain insights into how they learn best and the effectiveness of their study habits. By critically analysing their approaches to learning, students can determine which strategies are working well for them and which may need adjustment. Through structured self-assessment practices, such as reflective journals, peer evaluations, or progress checklists, students are empowered to identify both their strengths and areas for improvement. For example, a student might realize that collaborative group work enhances their understanding of a subject, while solitary study may yield other results. This awareness fosters the development of critical thinking skills, as students must analyse and synthesise information about their learning experiences.

Through incorporating principles of inclusion and equity in the curriculum, faculty can build a towards an inclusive education system (cf. OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2017). Enriching the curriculum with examples, activities, and tasks that resonate with students' personal lives, interests, and real-world experiences is a powerful pedagogical strategy. By integrating content that aligns with students' unique perspectives and everyday realities, educators create a more meaningful and engaging learning environment. This approach goes beyond traditional methods by making the material more accessible and relatable, which can significantly enhance student motivation and involvement. By connecting theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios that students encounter in their daily lives, learners can better grasp the relevance of the subject matter. Such connections not only reinforce the material but also encourage critical thinking, as students evaluate and discuss issues that are pertinent to them.

Moreover, incorporating personally relevant content allows students to draw on their own experiences and backgrounds, fostering a richer classroom discussion. For example, in a literature class, students could be encouraged to relate themes from a novel to their own life stories, cultural contexts, or current events. This not only promotes a deeper understanding of the text but also validates students' voices, encouraging them to share and learn from one another.

1.2.1 Safe and supportive environment

Sustainable Development Goal 4 on qualitative education (Target 4.3; United Nations, 2015), is aimed to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university and it emphasises that 'stronger non-discrimination policies are necessary to guarantee equality of opportunities' for low-income students, students with disabilities, refugees and displaced students, and students of ethnic minorities or underrepresented religious communities. 'Enabling access to quality higher education for these and other discriminated groups is central for social justice and social cohesion' (UNESCO, 2022, p. 2). Although higher education institutions promote inclusive student-centred pedagogies, some social obstacles and insufficient awareness among university academia exists which makes the progress of students from underrepresented groups toward graduation and employment more complicated (cf. Geertsema & van der Rijst, 2024). In their study Dignath and colleagues (2022) conclude that 'teachers' belief systems about the inclusion of students with special needs may explain gaps between policy and practice' (p. 2609).

In order to help faculty to develop their agency and competence in ensuring safe and supportive learning environments, they should be supported and provided with knowledge and skills for implementing inclusive student-centred approaches for students including those with different disabilities and form underrepresented communities. Goodall and colleagues (2024) in their study offer implementation of universal design procedures where 'universal design for learning challenges the "one-size-fits-all" approach to education by appreciating learner variability and diversity and making curricula more expansive and flexible' (p. 439).

1.2 Teaching methods and recommendations

In 2017, the Latvian Academic Information Centre conducted a national study on student-Centred teaching approach in universities and colleges in Latvia (Akadēmiskais informācijascentrs, 2017). The results of the survey, completed by representatives from 41 higher education institutions, indicated that there was a need to enhance student involvement in both the learning process and content development. Student-centred education requires not only changes to the curriculum but also the adaptation of the entire learning environment to meet the diverse needs of students. The study emphasizes that universities and colleges should assess and upgrade the support mechanisms and services available to students with special needs and those from various social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Additionally, it is important to consider whether library resources are easily accessible to all students, including offering round-the-clock access to the library. The study environment plays a key role not only in addressing social dimensions but also in ensuring the effectiveness of the overall pedagogical process.

1.2.1 Differentiated instruction, active learning, and diverse teaching materials

To effectively implement inclusive student-centred pedagogy, we propose to be founding our teaching approaches on differentiated instruction, active learning, and the use of diverse teaching materials.

Differentiated teaching involves adjusting lessons to meet students' individual needs. Faculty tailor content, learning processes, and assessment methods based on each student's readiness, interest, and learning profile (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2018; Tomlinson et al., 2003). This approach ensures that students with different skill levels all have an entry point to learn effectively. For instance, advanced students may receive more complex tasks, while those needing extra support are given simpler ones or additional resources (Heacox, 2017). This flexibility allows faculty to foster a more inclusive and balanced learning environment (Hattie, 2009). Our colleagues provided recommendations for working with students with special needs:

> *Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each student with special needs provides the information needed to develop individual learning plans that matches each student's ability to study, learn and acquire skills and competences in the class and subjects.*
>
> *Use inclusive or neutral, clear language in communication. It is important for the educator to know what the disabilities of particular students are so that he/she can adapt the learning materials to the needs of the particular students.*

Active learning engages students directly, encouraging them to participate in discussions, collaborative group work, projects, and practical exercises (Prince, 2004). This method moves beyond passive listening, as students actively construct their knowledge through interaction and hands-on activities. Active learning promotes deeper understanding, critical thinking, and communication skills (Freeman et al., 2014). For example, students working together on a project learn from each other's insights and are more likely to retain knowledge than through lecture-based instruction alone (Chi & Wylie, 2014). One of our colleagues explained from their teaching experience:

> *Be patient and tolerant to students and your colleagues. Although as educators we know our field, content of the subject, teaching methodology, but we may have different perceptions of what we see and experience in the class, at the institution, in the team, in our relationships with students.*

The use of diverse teaching materials, such as visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic materials, makes learning accessible to students with various learning needs and patterns (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016; Vermunt & Donche, 2017). Learners benefit from a variety of learning materials and activities which stimulate visual, through diagrams, videos, and illustrations, auditory through discussions, music, or podcasts, and kinaesthetically through hands-on activities and physical engagement with the material. By incorporating multiple types of resources, faculty create a learning environment that helps students to develop their learning patterns in various ways (Biwer et al., 2020). Our colleagues gave suggestions from their teaching practice:

> *Identify the individual needs of students with special needs, for example, there may be students with autistic spectrum disorders in your class, and their behaviour, perceptions, attitudes to studying may be different.*

Use digital technologies and tools that, for example, help to visualise learning materials, audio recordings, audiobooks, assistive text production devices etcetera.

Be understanding and as inclusive as possible in the organisation of the study process, in the use of language, in communication with students in order to promote meaningful learning and to create an environment that is safe, that promotes learning rather than aversion to subject content, that helps the student to perceive the learning visually, aurally and kinaesthetically.

1.2.2 Educational models and key principles of inclusive student-centred pedagogy

Inclusion can also be understood as the result of a historical evolution within the educational environments. Educational scholars who focused on students with disabilities in national systems classified educational systems into four main categories: exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion (cf. Mezzanotte, 2022; see Figure 1.2). These four categories can be translated into four categories of group interactions and acculturation in educational environments in higher education.

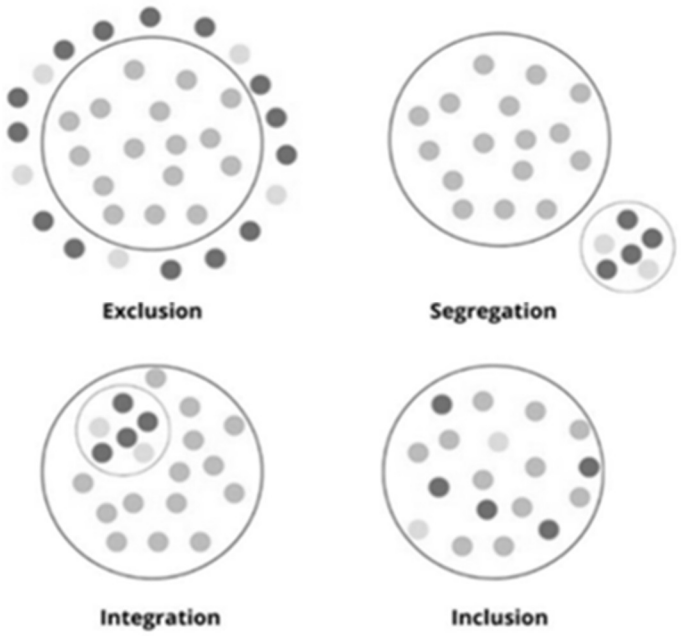

Figure 1.2 Classification of educational systems (adapted from Mezzanotte, 2022)

Exclusion in education happens when students are, explicitly or tacitly, denied access to activities or face barriers like fees, eligibility requirements, or with-in group desirable behaviour.

It is not limited to "out-of-school" students but includes various forms, such as restricted entry to honours classes, limited access to internships, or high fees for international mobility. *Segregation* refers to educating diverse groups separately, such as students with disabilities only able to attend online, division of education by students' first-in-family university attendance, age-segregation, or mono-gender grouping. *Integration* places all students in mainstream settings, but all students must adapt to the unchanged environment, often without individualized support (UNESCO, 2017). This means that students from underrepresented groups, female students, and student with disabilities do not have the same affordances to grow academically. Integration and inclusion are distinct concepts but are sometimes confused in policy and literature. *Inclusion* is a process that removes barriers to ensure all learners can be present, participate, and succeed. It focuses on adapting the system to meet students' needs, recognizing that exclusion arises from the system, not the individual (UNICEF, 2014). The key principles of student-centred teaching approaches are depicted in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 Key principles of learner-centred approaches (adapted from Parrish, 2019)

It suggests that students' knowledge and experiences are validated, which means that their backgrounds and personal experiences are valued in the learning process. The content of instruction is relevant to the students' needs and interests, indicating that the material is designed to resonate with the students' needs, interests, and curiosity. students are encouraged to make choices about course content and activities, giving them a say in what they learn and how they engage with it.

The interactions and tasks are designed to reflect how language is used in the real world, ensuring that practices have real-world applications, which is particularly useful for language learning. Additionally, students' first language and culture are viewed as valuable resources, making their cultural backgrounds assets in the educational process. The tasks are structured to challenge students and promote higher-order thinking skills, pushing students to think critically and solve complex problems. Finally, students gain skills that are applicable both inside and outside the classroom, emphasizing the transferability of what they learn to real-life contexts beyond academic settings. These interconnected principles form a holistic view of student-centred instruction, placing the learner's experience and needs at the centre of the educational process.

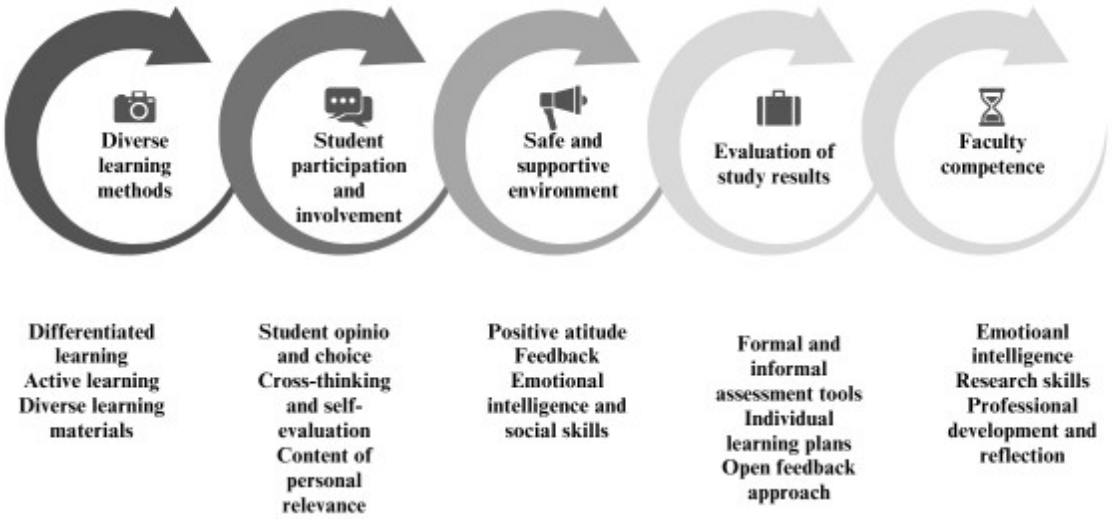

Figure 1.4 Inclusive student-centred pedagogy

1.3 Conclusions

In order to realise inclusive student-centred pedagogies in our higher education programs it is necessary to educate our faculty and support them in obtaining the relevant competences. Those competencies should focus on how to provide safe and supportive learning environments, effectively use diverse teaching methods, ensure student participation, engagement, and learning, and critically and transparently evaluate the results (see Figure 1.4).

The teaching practices used by faculty have an impact on student learning. Since students have diverse needs, interests, and learning patterns, faculty should use a range of approaches and strategies to support students' learning. Assessment for learning should be designed to enable all students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, free from any barriers related to personal characteristics unrelated to the assessment criteria and free from any evaluator bias. Flexibility in addressing diverse student needs is essential for building an "education system that promotes equity and fosters inclusion" (OECD, 2023).

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CHAPTER 2

A framework for inclusive student-centred higher education

Elena Marin and Roeland van der Rijst

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2.1 Evidence based components

There is an increasing awareness among educational researchers, faculty, students, and academic leadership that contemporary higher education programs should facilitate all students and therefore need to develop inclusive student-centred pedagogies (Korthals Altes et al., 2024; Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021; Trinidad, 2020). Due to globalisation and widening access to higher education programs student populations diversify (Geertsema & van der Rijst, 2021). Teaching faculty are exploring new teaching approaches to give all students a voice in class and beyond. The increasing awareness of the strengths of inclusive teaching are amplified by the multiple global crises, which present various challenges to higher education institutes (van der Graaf et al., 2021). Among these challenges are the rapid digitalisation of education and the amplification of previously muted and suppressed voices. This digital transformation has heightened the awareness that traditional face-to-face teaching models may not be suitable for all students, particularly those who are underprivileged and underrepresented. In response to this evolving landscape, educators must adapt their teaching methods and curricula, giving attention to voices that have been historically undervalued. Even now higher education is back to on-campus teaching, the awareness that we need to foster conducive and inclusive teaching environments stays. But what evidence based knowledge do we have which competences faculty need to develop in order to create inclusive and conducive learning environments in our higher education programs?

Implementing inclusive student-centred pedagogies that address the needs, aspirations, and ambitions of all students, irrespective of their background or identity, can

help rectify these disparities. Such approaches ensure that every voice is heard through various channels and that students are regarded as equal partners in their education. This call for educational reform is underscored and promoted by the European Union through initiatives like university alliances and European agencies that advocate for inclusion, and also by the United Nations through the Sustainable Development Goals. The pedagogical role of faculty should evolve towards fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment where all students can achieve academic success. This necessitates enhancing inclusive student-centred teaching practices and supporting faculty to develop their understanding of their voice and agency in higher education (Kusters et al., 2024; Whittaker & Montgomery, 2014).

In response to the aforementioned challenges in higher education, inclusive student-centred pedagogies call on stakeholders to establish effective support structures and processes for both faculty and students. The lack of inclusive student-centred pedagogies in current higher education practices often manifests as a conflict between student agency and faculty control (Reeve, 2009). To address this conflict, educational scholars advocate for stronger inclusive student-centred pedagogies that empower students as equal partners (Cook-Sather at al., 2021; Schuetz, 2008; Ottenhoff et al., 2024; Zepke et al., 2010). As any educational reform, this also involves informing and supporting faculty about designing supportive learning environments (Wang et al., 2025) and providing feedback on course design, instructional practices, engagement opportunities, attitudes, tools, and assessment methods (Katsampoxaki-Hodgetts, 2022; Stevens et al., 2024; Van der Rijst et al., 2019). Admiraal and colleagues (2019) emphasize the need to integrate advanced technologies that may transform higher education by enabling more personalised and inclusive learning experiences and at the same time can help tailor education to individual students' needs, and through enhancing inclusivity. Another key aspect is related to the way higher education institutions can address cultural and social barriers and start fostering a culture of inclusion, tackling biases, and ensuring that all students feel valued and supported (Lee et al., 2020). It is important to take into consideration the fact that students with special education needs, from underprivileged social and cultural backgrounds, or underrepresented identity groups often face specific challenges, such as inclusion into mainstream classrooms and

misunderstanding of their needs by faculty members (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017; Mamah et al., 2011; Morina, 2016). Not least, some higher education institutions may face challenges such as faculty members' lack of knowledge, skills, experience, and confidence in implementing inclusive practices (Taylor & Thompson, 2021). Institutional barriers, including policies, and resource constraints, can also hinder inclusivity and therefore the main drive of this European-wide project, COALITION, was to support faculty in higher education to change current pedagogies for the benefits of student learning. The project aimed to offer teaching faculty a space for academic and personal support and development so that they feel ready to face the needs of their diverse student populations. In order to produce educational content and implement processes and tools to support faculty members, first an analysis was conducted to understand which competencies faculty need to develop inclusive student-centred pedagogies.

2.2 Faculty competence framework

Before providing ideas and tools to navigate the various dimensions of inclusive student-centred pedagogies in higher education teaching practise and providing material for shifting practice towards inclusive teaching, we need a lens to look at teaching practices and the competencies of faculty. Therefore, we first needed to develop a framework based on current practices in our universities.

2.2.1 Method of development

The framework for inclusive student-centred pedagogies was developed in a study into the perceived needs and experiences of teaching faculty and students at European universities (COALITION, 2023). Data was collected at six universities in Greece, Latvia, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and The Netherlands. Through online questionnaire surveys to teaching faculty (*n*=264) and to students (*n*=548) a quantitative description of the needs and experiences of inclusive teaching in higher education was performed. The questionnaire surveys took into consideration both institutional context and individual perspectives. The survey consisted of 46 statements, and participants rated them on a 5-point Likert-type scale from "strongly agree"

(1) to "strongly disagree" (5). The questionnaires for both teaching faculty and students focused on four main topics: (1) Accessibility and resources that faculty can use to facilitate inclusion; (2) Faculty willingness to support inclusive student-centred approaches; (3) Curricular adjustments by faculty focussing on inclusive teaching approach (curriculum design, teaching method, and assessment); and (4) Faculty ability and concerns in order to facilitate active learning with diverse students. The survey instrument was piloted and used to identify any expected competencies among faculty members involved in inclusive student-centred pedagogies, as well as their faculty development needs across various teaching, learning, and assessment methods. In order to get an in-depth understanding of the survey results semi-structured interviews were conducted with teaching faculty and students. These interviews shed light on faculty intentions, actions, and expectations regarding inclusive teaching. The interview data was coded and then the results were categorised into re-occurring themes. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the research protocol was approved by the institutional review boards for research ethics. The analysis of survey and interview data lead to the construction of a framework of faculty competencies for inclusive student-centred pedagogies in higher education.

2.2.2 Description of the framework

The final framework consists of five dimensions, which encompass the accessibility and resources provided faculty can use to support inclusion in both face-to-face and online activities. Additionally, it addresses the commitment of faculty to adopt inclusive pedagogy approaches and implement curricular adjustments to support these methods. And furthermore, the framework emphasis that faculty should promote the active learning and engagement for all students, aiming to create an inclusive educational environment that accommodates diverse learning needs and approaches.

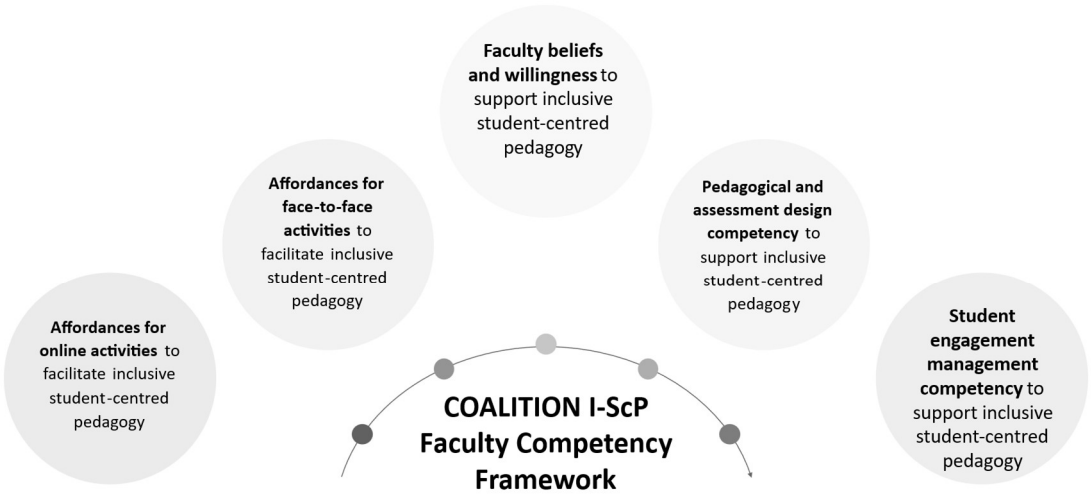

Figure 2.1 Framework of faculty competence for inclusive student-centred pedagogies in higher education

2.2.3 Affordances for face-to-face activities

The first dimension aims at dealing with *affordances for face-to-face activities* that faculty can use to facilitate inclusion and is divided into four categories:

- *Learning environments* targeting creating inclusive standards for interaction within the community at the beginning of the semester to establish an atmosphere of inclusiveness and staying mindful of unseen obstacles that could disrupt a fair learning environment.
- *Faculty development support* is organised by higher education institutes, for example in the form of a teaching & learning centre, faculty development centre, or educational centre of expertise which organises the provision of support for teaching and learning and also enables access to units that provide technological support and education research.
- *Architectural facilities* pay attention to access for all, for example through wheelchair access, lifts with braille displays, modular desks, and a variety of

classroom spaces for group work as well as individual work. All to reduce barriers to adopting inclusive pedagogies.

- *Equipment and technological support* is adapted to the needs of the student and the learning resources are adapted to the social, cultural, and cognitive needs of students.

2.2.4 Affordances for online activities

The second dimension switches the focus to *affordances for online activities* for inclusive practice. Four categories were distinguished:

- *Learning environment*s that are built on inclusive standards for online interaction with the teaching faculty and online and on-campus peers, and support the development of a community at the beginning of the semester to establish an atmosphere of inclusiveness and staying mindful of unseen barriers that could disrupt an equitable online learning environment;
- *Faculty development* support which provides pedagogical and technological support specific to online teaching.
- *Technological facilities and equipment* are adapted to online teaching (e.g., sound quality, video quality, connectivity quality) that allow to adopt inclusive pedagogies during learning activities and also favouring group work.
- *e-Learning resources* that are adapted to the social, cultural, and cognitive needs of students, favouring students to collaborate as equal partners in the online learning environments.

2.2.5 Faculty beliefs and willingness

The third dimension focusses on *faculty beliefs and willingness* to support inclusive student-centred approaches has four categories which all target faculty values:

- *Developing awareness* about students learning needs, interests, and patterns.
- *Embracing diversity* in the classroom and the unit and university community
- *Willingness to adapt* to students' different ways of learning.

- *Encouraging perspective-taking* in the classroom based on non-judgmental approaches to discussing cultural, social, racial, gender or religious or any other type of identity.

2.2.6 Pedagogical design competence

The fourth dimension emphasizes faculty's *pedagogical design competence* to support the inclusive student-centred pedagogies, and has a set of four categories emerged for the analysis of the data:

- *Designing for flexible learning* which flexible learning objectives that can be adapted to the needs of each student; including learning activities that foster inclusive participation; adapting teaching to cater for diverse students' needs.
- *Designing with a variety of approaches* designing learning activities that take into account learning differences in various modes (e.g., oral, written, online, face-to-face) and creating group learning activities that allow students to collaborate in an inclusive community of learning (e.g., peer feedback activities, project-based learning, challenging the taking for granted assumptions and values).
- *Designing for student autonomy* empowers students' progressive autonomy and control regarding self-regulation and learning products.
- *Continuous professional training* to develop the repertoire for teaching in an inclusive way.

2.2.7 Assessment design competence

The fifth dimension deals with *assessment design competence* to support the inclusive pedagogy approach. Faculty need to develop the competence to:

- *Design for variation of assessment techniques* taking into account learning differences in various modes (e.g., oral, written, online, face-to-face) and provides opportunities for students to take control over their learning and use those assessment techniques.

- *Flexible time for assessment* provides opportunities to adapt the assessment time to the needs of the students or adapt the moment of the assessment.
- *Continuous professional training* to design and use inclusive assessment techniques in various modes and moments.

2.2.8 Managing active learning and engagement

The last dimension of inclusive student-centred pedagogies emphasized faculty competence to in-class managing *active learning and engagement* of all students by providing:

- *Providing feedback* in a variety of modes (e.g., oral, written, online, face-to-face, individual, group) and recognizing the barriers to students' participation and engagement. Facilitating discussion among students so that different perspectives are shared.
- *Mentoring students* during their learning process to take charge of their learning and develop appropriate self-regulation skills.
- *Time management skills* assist in managing the workload while approaching inclusive pedagogical approaches.
- *Managing various interactions* is the ability to teach in an inclusive environment by creating opportunities for interaction among diverse learners, for example through peer learning and by actively supporting students who require communicative technologies (e.g., Braille, sign language, online readers) and by preventing labelling others as having additional needs.

2.3 Conclusion

We described the framework for faculty competence in inclusive student-centred pedagogies which was developed in a study on the needs and experiences of teaching faculty and students at European universities. The framework highlights faculty willingness to purposefully design teaching approaches and assessment to cater to diverse students' needs, indicating a proactive engagement for inclusive teaching. In the interviews faculty showed willingness to adjust teaching and assessment methods to take into account student

differences and ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their learning. An interesting finding was that faculty were willing to encourage students to engage in discussions and share their perspectives and ideas for the learning environment and activities. This forms a basis to develop student-centred pedagogies. Furthermore, the framework provides a structure to develop opportunities for faculty to develop their competence for inclusive student-centred pedagogies. In conclusion, faculty in higher education have affordances to engage in inclusive teaching in both on-campus and online activities and are willing to make curricular and assessment adjustments. Next step is to better understand how we can support faculty in developing their teaching and how we can foster their continuous professional development. Continued efforts will undoubtedly lead to a more inclusive and equitable higher education experience for all students.

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CHAPTER 3

Assessment for inclusive student-centred learning

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3.1 Introduction

An essential element of any educational change or implementation is the assessment practice. Especially for the implementation of inclusive student-centred teaching faculty have to reflect and design assessment practices in which all students get ample opportunities to show their progress.

3.1.1 Relevance to Inclusive student-centred learning

Inclusive student-centred practices are complex, encompassing a variation of learning objectives, pedagogical approaches, and instructional techniques. In a European-wide project (COALITION, 2023), inclusive teaching is placed at the centre of all learning and teaching at our universities. We make the premise that quality higher education pedagogy can emerge from the aim of teaching for diverse student needs (Hunt & Chalmers, 2021) and should be seen as an additive to 'good teaching' at university (Hellstén, 2008). The current understanding of student 'learning-centeredness' implies a holistic approach to what higher education teaching and learning ought to deliver in current times. It goes beyond mere skills development for future employability (Denman & Hellstén, 2022) or the decoding of current artificial intelligibilities of machine learning. Universities are currently struggling with the task, that some might consider undesirable, of redefining their learning and teaching ethos for a generation of

learners who are not necessarily devoted to learning in the 'traditional' ways (Denman et al., 2023). This undeniably brings forth a number of issues about what, how, when, and where it is appropriate to consider inclusivity in higher education assessment practices.

In order to set out an approach for the future of inclusive assessment in higher education, particularly in Europe, we turn to a comparative approach within and across cultural, national, economic, and political spheres. We begin with considering assessment as a *cultural practice* which also makes it necessary to recognise considerations of the taken-for-grantedness (Ninnes & Hellstén, 2004) of cultural 'know-how' and the specificity that is implied in the assessment, evaluation, examination, appreciation, and recognition of academic knowledge and skills. The obligation of cultural know-how in all assessment activities might, in light of artificial intelligence, currently be considered as 'old school'. For example, including names from different places around the world, examples of visuals including personas from a range of cultures, identities, and ethnicities. Or using language in the learning tasks that can promote a sense of belonging for a broad variety of our students. This in turn will lead to an increase in motivation for student learning, achievement, and retention.

However, our everyday observations insistently show that in many university lecture halls and seminar spaces mainstreaming is still the cultural default. Is it the case that when we paint a picture of pedagogy, we go with the mainstream? For example, when we nominate case examples in assessments or assignments, do we readily use local names such as 'Emma' and 'John', rather than 'Unna' and 'Aslak', or do we more often use traditional family and gender roles in examples and case descriptions rather than opting for LGBTQIA+ examples? How many university course examinations allow for the assessment task to be written, e.g. in the native language of the student authors (Petocz & Reid, 2008)? Can we imagine an assessment culture grounded in the diversity of student backgrounds within our cohorts? When it comes to inclusive learning, our know-how about different cultures makes a big difference to what is learnt and how it is learnt.

Most university assessment policies and practices are tied to a national accreditation system that regulates what is to be learnt and the criteria by which the learning outcomes are assessed (Hunt & Chalmers, 2021). Most assessment practices are designed to adhere to the national regulations. The task of inclusive student-centred pedagogies becomes one in which academic freedom and scientific evidence-based knowledge inform the pedagogical decision-making and agency of faculty.

3.2 Issues and examples of inclusive assessment practices in higher education

3.2.1 Assessment as a reflection of cultural values

Positioned within an inclusive higher education setting, faculty need to recognise how different identities, cultural, ethnic, generational, gender, and others, influence student learning and ways of expressing their learning. Examples of inclusive assessment practices show that any inclusive assessment starts with the awareness and understanding the diversity of values and understandings of what we mean by knowledge, learning, and achievement. For example:

- Some cultures might value oral communication and narrativity as a source of knowledge, while others might question the validity of the oral form of knowledge.
- Some cultures have ways of conceptualizing knowledge (e.g., relational, holistic) that may be overlooked or ignored in current higher education assessment approaches that tend to prioritise individualistic forms of learning and assessment (Buchanan & Hellstén, 2020).

By framing assessment as a cultural practice, educators are supported to examine how current assessment practices may inadvertently privilege certain norms while marginalizing others. Inclusive assessment practices aim to acknowledge the various ways of knowing, understand diversity as the essence of our who we are (Nieminen,

2022; Tai et al., 2021; Tai et al., 2022). Therefore, educators as designers of assessment practices must understand how current norms and values can impact student learning and assessment. Consequently, inclusive assessment practices should aim to accommodate various ways of knowledge sharing, and to some extent challenge, or disrupt contemporary educational practice.

3.2.2 Assessment practices as inclusive heuristics

In higher education, assessments are also used to navigate students into the disciplinary cultures, values, and expectations of the academic communities. These practices go beyond the measuring of learning to reinforce specific sanctioned cultural ideas about merit, discipline, and competence (Foucault, 1961).

- While assuming objectivity (Denman, 2019), standardised testing can become inadvertently culturally biased, exemplifying a narrow view of knowledge and understanding that may not always account for the nuanced ways in which students might wish to define and express themselves.
- Inclusive pedagogy should therefore promote the use of formative assessments (with continuous feedback on the learning process and ample opportunities for reflective practices) over mere summative assessment (involving judgment). This will prevent the undesirable practice and side effects of penalising students who do not perform well amidst high-stress, or time-pressured environments. These students may demonstrate deeper understanding through formative assessment methods (Denman & Hellsten 2022).

In short, higher education assessment should be a tool not just for judging academic achievement and up-skilling, but also for diagnosing the learning process, helping students regulate their own learning, and facilitating their belonging and cultural integration into academic life (Denman & Hellstén, 2022).

3.2.3 Comparing power dimensions of inclusivity

Assessment in inclusive higher education should involve recognising the disciplinary and academic power subtleties at play. Assessment practices are never neutral, they reflect national accreditation frameworks and institutional impact structures that define preferential types of knowledge and how these are sanctioned.

- Some students may face systemic barriers, or inequity and inequality, that prevent them from performing well on traditional assessments, for example, those students with neurodiverse abilities, non-native speaking students, students with family care, or students from first (in family) generation university students (cf. Thomas & McCormick, 2017). Acknowledging inclusive assessment as an embedded cultural exercise brings attention to the systematic barriers students may experience and how assessment practices should be changed and adjusted to provide more equitable opportunities for showing achievement.
- Many students in today's university cohorts are new to higher education teaching and learning and have no social or academic compass for orienting themselves in the academic community (Curtis, 2020). Therefore, cultural inclusion in assessment practices should involve creating alternative and innovative forms of assessment, such as portfolios, project presentations, or collaborative assessments, which provide opportunities for deep engagement, aligned with the cultural values and learning preferences, for all students.

3.2.4 Engaging in communities of assessment practices

Cultural practice involves reciprocal engagement, and in inclusive higher education, this can be enacted by considering students as co-creators of the assessment process. This may include:

- Incorporating the student voice in the development of assessment criteria, by allowing for reflection on the alignment of assessments with students' learning processes.
- Involving students' participation in self-assessment and peer assessment. Such participation can encourage an exchange of ideas about learning, which will enhance understanding and respect for diversity (Reierstam & Hellstén, 2021).

3.2.5 Linking the world in inclusive assessment

Current globalized academic environments each have different cultural and linguistic practices in assessment. Especially international students can often find themselves in new unfamiliar educational and academic communities where the approach to learning and assessment deviates from what they are used to. Comparing the differences between various assessment practices can help faculty adopt assessment practices that support a broad range of learning approaches:

- In an inclusive teaching and learning setting, assessment should have a flexible format in order to anticipate variations in learning preferences. For example, in Sweden, group work, discussion forums, and collaborative learning tasks are, by many students, appreciated more than individual tasks.

Assessment methods are not neutral or universally applicable. Rather, they are embedded in cultural contexts that reflect values, assumptions, hierarchies, and power dimensions. To make assessment inclusive, it is important to design assessment heuristics that can account for cultural and linguistic diversity, promote academic equity, cater to neurodiverse students, and accommodate the ways students with various backgrounds and identities engage with and validate their learning. This approach not only enhances the fairness and relevance of inclusive assessments but also nurtures a more inclusive, diverse academic environment that values all students' learning potential and capabilities.

3.3 Faculty perspectives

All faculty involved in assessment practices should be aware that they have agency to make their assessment practices inclusive. It may be difficult for faculty to refrain from imposing one's own cultural values and assumptions when evaluating student work. But, when educators feel culturally knowledgeable about their own reflective selves, they will welcome and appreciate the diversity of their students' input into the learning context and assessment experiences. Continuous inclusive and reflective practice (cf. Schön, 1992) helps in seeking to minimize one's own bias, by ensuring that assessment practices are fair and equitable across diverse groups of students. A collective cultural and linguistic literacy will have a positive influence on how assessment is organised, designed, delivered, and interpreted by both students and faculty. In other words, inclusive assessment builds new pathways to the co-creation of learning and assessment methods in higher education.

3.4 Resources and illustrative examples

3.4.1. Assessment rubric co-creation and personalization

Including student voices in the development of assessment criteria can be one way of making an assessment more inclusive. Literature on the development of assessment rubrics suggests that co-creating rubrics with students can have several benefits (Andrade, 2005; Reddy & Andrade, 2010). Based on the review of stronger and weaker examples of previous student work, students can suggest (new) assessment criteria for their own work. This can help them in becoming more familiar with and getting a deeper understanding of both the assignment goals as well as the assessment criteria (Andrade, 2000). Furthermore, involving students in the development of assessment rubrics can also allow for some degree of personalisation. For example, at Leiden University, some programs allow students to add personalised assessment criteria to an otherwise standardised assignment rubric. Such an addition allows the faculty

member to also assess the attainment of learning objectives that are specific to an individual student (or a group of students in the case of a group assignment).

3.4.2 Two-stage exams

The importance of group work, and collaborative learning in inclusive teaching practice has been noted throughout this chapter. One particularly interesting format in this regard is the idea of the two-stage exam (Gilley & Clarkston, 2014). In a two-stage exam, students first engage in an assessment activity individually. Then, after handing in an individual answer sheet, they retake the same exam in a small group setting. The second-stage group exam allows students to discuss and compare different answer options with each other. Especially for multiple choice-type exams, the two-stage exam has shown great potential concerning peer learning and deep elaborative processing (Gilley & Clarkston, 2014; Levy et al., 2023). We could also regard two-stage exams as an inclusive assessment practice. Students who are not familiar with a certain exam format can learn much from students who already have experience with the test format. For example, students can learn how to best approach an unfamiliar exam format and the types of problem-solving required to do well. Two-stage exams are sometimes implemented as summative (graded) exams (e.g., Gilley & Clarkston, 2014). However, there are also examples of formative (ungraded) two-stage exams. For instance, during the COALITION project, at the University of Crete, a two-stage exam for a formative assessment was developed and successfully implemented. Likewise, at the Leiden University medical department, some faculty implemented a two-stage exam in the context of team-based learning (Gullo et al., 2015; Parmelee et al., 2012). In this particular setting, students engage in a so-called Readiness Assurance Test to activate prior knowledge before they start working on an in-class group assignment. The Readiness Assurance Test has a two-stage setup where students first take a test individually and then retake the same test in a small group. This allows for peer learning

and ensures students start collaborating on the group assignment with comparable levels of prior knowledge.

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CHAPTER 4

Digital equity for inclusive teaching practices

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4.1 Equitable access to online education

Digital equity in education refers to the idea that every learner should have equal access to relevant educational resources. This not only means equal access to digital e-books and assignments, but also to hardware, software, and connectivity to the internet, and even to digital skills and meaningful and culturally relevant content (Voogt & Knezek, 2008). However, digital equity is more straightforward to define than to realize in higher education, especially since universities have limited funds and rely on the allocation of resources. Therefore, it can be challenging, not to say impossible, to achieve fairness in every student's access to technology and digital tools. Regardless, research shows that digitally literate faculty are key to effectively conducting classes online and designing digital environments that facilitate learning (Öhrstedt et al., 2024; Tate & Warschauer, 2022). Digital equity in education is achieved through digital inclusion with trained faculty and universities that acknowledge and make adjustments for imbalances and unequal access. Technology should not be a barrier to educational opportunities, and it should allow all students to engage with others in an online learning community.

As we approach pedagogy in higher education through an inclusive student-centred lens, we must acknowledge that inclusion in this digital era requires equitable access to multimodal tools and the internet. Furthermore, it requires providing training to help students use those tools so they can participate on equal terms. It is therefore crucial to help build skills and digital literacy which includes being able to use and critically assess information, even more so in times of generative artificial intelligence based on large language models. Inclusive student-centred pedagogies in online learning means providing students with access to course material, the

teaching faculty, and their fellow students by creating opportunities for contributing, engaging, and participating in activities.

In previous research as well as what has been gleaned from interviews with faculty in the participating European universities (COALITION, 2023), certain critical aspects as well as important features appear. Frameworks and models are developed and used to structure the patterns and categorize the aspects that contribute to access and successful engagement in online learning (cf. Chapter 2). An example of a framework relevant to online learning is the Communities of Inquiry model which includes three interrelated aspects, the importance of teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. Together these aspects stress the importance of creating a communicative and interactive course design (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001). Such a design can be achieved by setting an encouraging climate, creating a supportive discourse, being transparent about course expectations, and providing a clear structure (Garrison, 2019). Another relevant framework that represents access to online learning environments is Tate and Warschauer's (2022) conceptual framework, a three-dimensional model that speaks of how access is provided through physical, human, and social resources. Tate and Warschauer (2022) describe the benefits as well as challenges of online learning. Among the benefits are additional possibilities of access, flexibility, and convenience whereas reduced achievement, less sense of community, and requirement of self-directed learning are listed as challenges. Universal design for learning is a pedagogical approach that embraces flexibility and aims at providing multiple means of engagement, representation of content and multiple ways of expression and action, which can help design effective online learning for all students (CAST, 2018).

Research shows that students with special needs find online courses more challenging than other students (Goegan & Daniels, 2022; Moriña, 2019). This might equally well count for students of underrepresented or minorized groups. These students generally face additional challenges and barriers in digital environments and they are more at risk of being disadvantaged by teaching faculty who lack technological pedagogical competence (Öhrstedt et al., 2024). However, diversity means by definition that there are different needs and prerequisites to succeed. Digital equity includes meaningful, high-quality and relevant content in various

languages for participatory citizenship and the right to participate in higher education (Willems et al., 2019). Effective student motivation and engagement are key to quality online education (Huang & Wang, 2022; Wang et al., 2025).

4.2 Inclusive digital learning

Digital equity is an ongoing process which requires that barriers are continuously identified and overcome to make adjustments for imbalances so that opportunities, and not just the resources, are equal in order to create inclusive digital learning. In the interviews (COALITION, 2023), faculty and students mostly focused on inclusive classroom teaching. Certain aspects were identified that pinpoint needs, challenges, and opportunities to create digital equity. Several of these aspects overlap with what has been found in previous research. These aspects relate to physical, human, and social resources that are also part of Warschauer's framework. Also, they are in line with the model of Communities of Inquiry in creating conducive learning environments.

4.2.1 Resources and access to technology

One of the interviewed faculty members stated that universities can be very high-tech and advanced in terms of digital tools, but the facilities are still not equipped with all the new technology. Sometimes the computer in the classroom does not work, or other equipment like features in the online meeting software are not working. In other words, technology may be lacking or malfunctioning. Lack of resources to obtain proper equipment is also mentioned as a challenge. This is discussed concerning the need for better technology for recording lectures to make material accessible before and after courses. Faculty also refer to the lack of technological support specific to creating effective online teaching:

> *Even though I am technically skilled, it didn't work. I was able to solve it in a different way, but still, we cannot expect everything to work perfectly the way we think, we may have to realise that our ambitions may move faster than reality so to speak. There are always both technical and social issues.*

In one case the lack of student resources is mentioned but the professor also comments that this can be catered for by the university:

> *Well, access to technology is crucial for students to participate fully in academic and social activities. However, not all students have access to the necessary technological resources,*

such as laptops or high-speed internet, which can create barriers to inclusivity. We do have some nice programmes to help students get a laptop.

4.2.2 Course design and format

When it comes to course design there is general agreement that there is not a one-size-fits-all teaching approach, if the course is to be inclusive and flexible:

> *That's why the courses are both online and face-to-face, so we don't exclude anybody in that respect [...] As well as the material, not only reading, it's also video, so in that respect, anyone can access it according to their particular needs.*

One of the professors explains about the challenges of hybrid teaching. Although it can be important for inclusivity for the students who have young children:

> *I think that [hybrid teaching] might be a question of inclusion. From the student part, I think some are older, they have children and Easter break may not be as easy for them to come here and we can't really not schedule during all of these breaks [...]. I have moved things into Zoom because I have understood that there is a break. Nobody has said that they refuse to come in [to campus] but I understand that we won't have as many come in and that's also a shame I think for the whole group. It's a technical problem but it is also a pedagogical problem having these two groups that don't meet ever. As a teacher, you are too busy trying to teach and then you lose all of them online, and the worst part is that even if you can manage everything you usually have two students who show up in person and it is just not worth it for them. Some students also say that they can't be online, "it's not good for me" or "I can't because I don't learn things, I have to be here". I have no idea how to get around that, it is just not satisfactory.*

Depending on student background some will appreciate the online format, either for practical reasons or possibly for other reasons, such as neurodiversity where research shows that it can be less stressful to take an online course from home (Öhrstedt et al., 2024). The course format and whether to have online options or not has pedagogical implications and is a matter of fairness in access to education. The pros and cons should be considered, but more importantly how to make sure the course aligns with what is mentioned initially in the syllabus. Barriers should be identified and access for various groups should be a priority. Students' satisfaction with online learning depends on contextual factors such as flexibility and inclusive practices whereas lack of socialisation and perceived standards contribute to negative emotions (Masalimova et al., 2022; Zaimakis & Papadaki, 2022).

4.2.3 Course material

Digital and technology-based material can be found in various forms in all courses. Faculty state that they prefer electronic course material because it is accessible to all students, "who are not print-disabled", and it helps those who are hearing impaired. One faculty member suggests that digital teaching can be developed in order to make course content and assessment more inclusive. The professor mentions adding "talking books" and producing subtitled videos. This faculty member shares some examples of how digital technology can enhance learning activities:

> *I find the activities linked to technologies very useful; for example, I get them to make banners and posters… I suggest that the students make […] very small and simple things*.

Faculty refer to how technology can enhance teaching by providing multiple means of representation as a tool to help students who find it hard to concentrate:

> *I do try to offer things in different modes and approaches, also during my lectures, that are not just listening and watching. Especially with students nowadays with their short attention span no more than three quarters of an hour, and even that is often impossible […], so I do adapt it [the course design] to that*.

4.2.4 Communication and feedback

Previous research shows that feedback and communication become even more important in online courses (van der Rijst et al. 2024; Wang et al., 2025). Low faculty interaction correlates with student failure and dropout in higher education (Means & Niesler, 2021). Students easily feel left to themselves and insecure about what is required of them (Öhrstedt et al., 2024). In the interviews, faculty expressed that most feedback is provided during the seminars or in the on-campus lectures, but individual feedback is also given on students' written assignments. For example, this faculty member describes how video is used as an alternative form of feedback to give oral comments on texts:

> *This is what I do when I comment on the student's text, through the video, from the beginning of the student's text; at the same time, I comment and am in the position of both the reader and the writer at the same time. This is what e-class does not have, nor does Google. I have been forced to create, to find a tool that gives it*.

The faculty member refers to an online tool. The multitude of options and tools that can be used points to the need for faculty to know where to find the resources and know what works and how

it can provide more inclusive education for the students. When it comes to communication in general not much is said in the interviews, but some faculty members comment that students should make use of the out of lecture time. Some indicate that they use email, calls, or that they sometimes create messenger app groups. According to previous research online teaching is challenging due to reduced face-to-face interaction and unclear communication. This has proved particularly stressful concerning preparations for examinations (Tai et al., 2022).

4.2.5 Online course climate

According to some of the models mentioned in the introduction, an inclusive online environment means setting up a classroom climate that is conducive to learning. A sense of community and peer relationships have proved to facilitate inclusion and enhance learning (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). In digital environments, the absence of community has been associated with issues in learning (Beck & Normann, 2009). Faculty acknowledge that inclusive teaching takes different forms in different environments, such as on-campus, hybrid or full online teaching. This in turn means that faculty need a repertoire of adjustment strategies for each of those teaching environments. Many faculty members recognize the dynamics in the online group compared to campus-based teaching, as is illustrated in this interview fragment:

> *There are really different challenges in that online environment than when you're in a lecture room. So, it matters whether people already have something in common, or whether they're just random people who don't know each other.*

One of them also refers to online bullying with unpleasant comments in the chat or digital meeting room. This can make it difficult for a faculty member to prevent students from feeling excluded. Previous studies show that certain students with special needs experience online distance education as more challenging for social as well as academic purposes. The social connection is important for motivation, discipline, and retention (Öhrstedt et al., 2024; Tate & Warschauer, 2022).

4.2.6 Teaching skills and faculty development

Faculty mention the need to be familiar with a lot of technological tools for creating flexible and equitable online learning opportunities:

> *Some students have finished university and no longer have mail, so what are we going to do? They can't get into Teams, what do we say now? They don't have easy access. There you are obliged as a teacher to know many tools. That's what inclusive learning is all about, okay? It's about that because you can't throw out people who don't have academic mail or don't have easy access to Teams, okay? Also, you have to have knowledge with everyone, for everyone. So, you have to know e-class.*

It is apparent that digital tools are seen as necessary or complimentary and faculty members acknowledge how they can be used to promote inclusion. Surprisingly few express how they have dealt with online education and made adjustments during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there is an apparent need for faculty to have professional development in digital literacy. One faculty member mentions how they created collegial exchange during the pandemic to facilitate peer learning.

> *During the pandemic, we had three times per semester sharing good practices when everyone had to teach [online] and we had to learn from each other. I arranged those workshops [...]. I think within the department you can do these kinds of small workshops where teachers are forced to discuss what they do and just talking about it usually gives you some ideas because you start to think about "what am I doing".*

Another faculty member is referring to the lack of readiness to teach inclusively online:

> *So, this is where the digital tools are connected, right? It's connected to digital readiness which doesn't exist, I mean in teachers. Why doesn't it exist? Because they don't think it's important, because they don't know them [the tools], because they don't understand how they can use them.*

This faculty member believes that teachers are lacking the knowledge and skills how to use digital tools in teaching as well as the willingness and interest in using them. The necessity to invest time in the ability to use online technology is made explicit by another faculty member:

> *I'm very happy that I haven't had to teach online for a while, so I'm not so into that, say, that whole thinking about online didactics, I am not into that anymore. But that's definitely something you need to make more time for as a teacher. If you teach online, of course, it is difficult [when you lack digital teaching experience].*

4.3 Practical takeaways

Below is a list of relevant considerations and practical takeaways in order to provide digital equity, based on COALITION data and previous research. Digital equity requires transparency and clear communication to students about course structure, learning goals, and expectations.

Communication and interaction are always important but are critical in online courses. It should not be taken for granted that students or faculty have the required skills to use digital tools. Universities should provide professional training on why and how to use tools in order to develop courses that make use of technology in the best possible way to give students opportunities to participate on equal terms and develop relevant skills for the future.

4.3.1 Before a course/ at the start-up

- Plan for varying modes of representation of content, engagement, and expression that works for various students.
- Plan to include digital tools that you feel comfortable using and try to systematically expand your repertoire.
- Start-up by identifying student backgrounds and the range of special needs in the student group to give students access and opportunity to engage, contribute, and participate.

4.3.2 During a course

- Communicate regularly with the students and make room for students so they can ask questions, for example at the beginning and end of every session, and virtual meeting.
- Use different modalities to present and engage with content.
- Offer study counselling and assistance to help structure the studies.

4.3.3 Faculty development

- Identify what has been challenging in terms of digital literacy and skills and communicate with the leadership.
- Create workshops between colleagues to share good equitable online practice and experiences.

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CHAPTER 5

Peer observation for faculty development

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5.1 Reflective collaborative practice

Peer observation, when effectively implemented, serves as a powerful reflective tool for professional growth, particularly in fostering inclusive teaching practices (MacKinnon, 2001; Peel, 2005; Tobiason, 2023). Historically, peer observations have been utilised for evaluative or performance-based purposes that do not necessarily align with the principles of the social model of inclusion (Hockings, 2010) and inclusive student-centred pedagogies (Katsampoxaki-Hodgetts, 2023). These purposes often include assessing colleagues' performance, providing feedback aimed at correcting perceived deficits in teaching practices and modelling teaching to showcase excellence or enforce compliance. However, we now shift the focus from these evaluative uses to the potential of peer observation as a means for professional development.

In higher education, where teaching methods must continuously adapt to meet diverse student needs, peer observation offers faculty a unique opportunity to reflect on their practices, gain new insights, and refine their teaching strategies. When approached with a reflective mindset, using structured rubrics, and engaging in meaningful post-observation discussions, peer observation can significantly enhance teaching practices. This chapter guides how faculty can effectively use peer observation as a tool for self-development, with a particular focus on inclusive teaching practices. It aims to transform the perception of peer observation from a punitive assessment tool to a means of introspection and community building (O'Keeffe et al., 2021).

Fletcher (2018) summarised the literature on peer observation of teaching into evaluative models, developmental models, and collaborative models of peer observation

(see Figure 5.1). Where evaluative models of peer observation focus merely on monitoring teaching quality to ensure compliance with the standards, developmental models aim to encourage faculty self-reflection on what constitutes good teaching (cf. Yiend, Weller, & Kinchin, 2012). The collaborative models intend to improve teaching through dialogue and mutual reflection. However, as Brookfield (1995) noted, peer observation often reproduces existing power dynamics within academic institutions. In evaluative and developmental models, power imbalances can lead to detrimental, unfair, and unsustainable outcomes unless critical reflection is at the core of the process. Even in collaborative models, tensions may arise if both parties feel entitled to offer unsolicited advice or promote agendas that the other is not prepared to embrace.

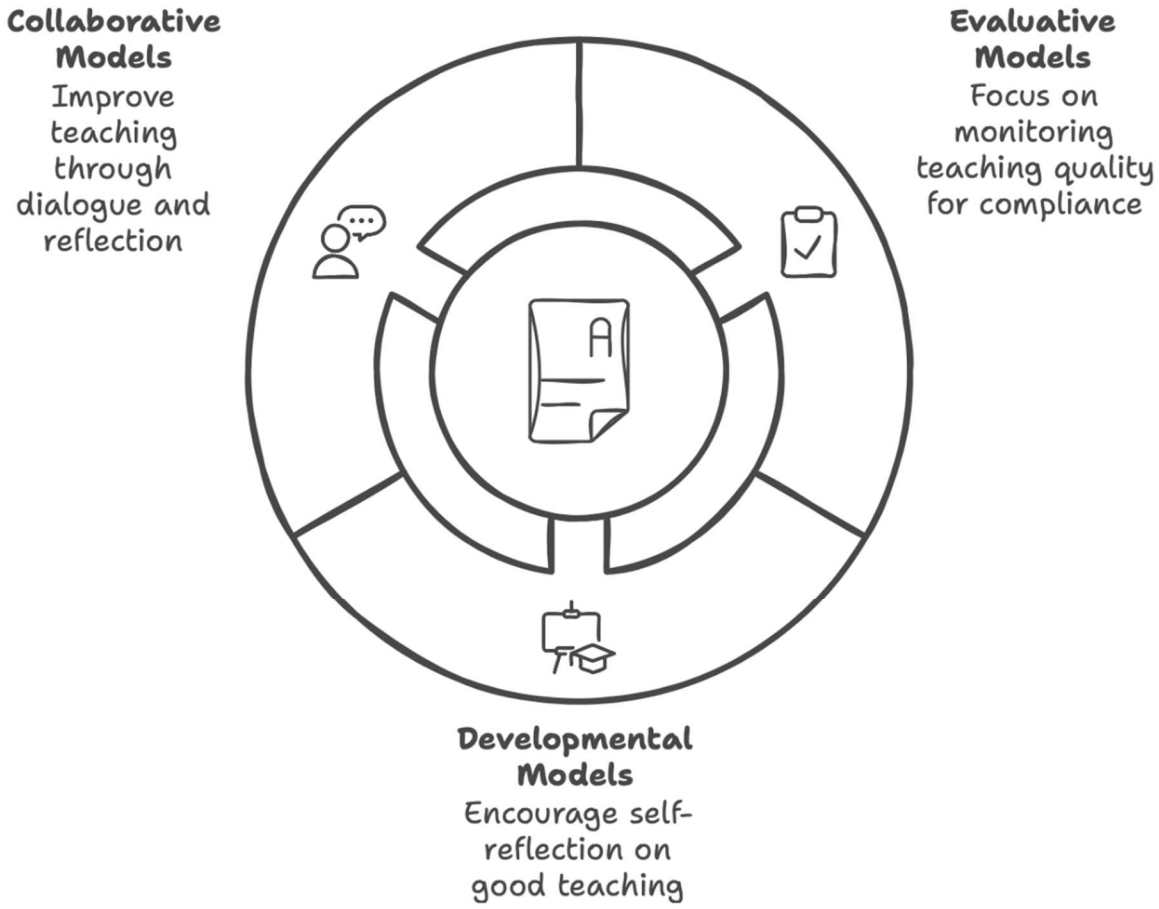

Figure 5.1 Models of peer observation (based on Fletcher, 2018)

This chapter discusses the benefits and challenges of using peer observation as a reflective tool for self-development, particularly from the observer's perspective. Emphasis is placed on the critical reflection practices that enable faculty to continually reassess and realign their own inclusive teaching practices. As Darling-Hammond (2000) emphasised: 'helping faculty develop the capacity to inquire systematically and sensitively into the nature of learning and the effect of teaching is a central goal of academic development'.

5.2 Collegial dialogue and sense of community

Examining what constitutes 'good teaching' has been a focal point of global research in higher education (Kember & Kwan, 2000; Ottenhoff-de Jonge et al., 2021; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). The challenges faced by academics, such as navigating increasing diversity in disciplines, meeting growing student expectations, responding to new demands in inclusive course design and delivery, and adhering to the rising emphasis on professional qualifications, render a clear definition of good teaching as complex and multifaceted. Researchers have long recognised the value of reflexive peer observation schemes for academic development, which vary in scope and approach. Donnelly (2007) highlighted the importance of purposeful critical reflection on classroom practice and the challenging of assumptions through shared reflective dialogues with colleagues. Such practices encourage active self-development, with participants focusing on reflecting upon their own teaching rather than assessing or judging others' practices.

5.2.1. Obeservee's learning by focusing reflective practice

Self-reflection and peer observation are not new concepts. Their theoretical foundations are rooted in experiential learning cycles, such as those described by Dewey (1933) or Kolb (1983), and Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, if observation involves critical self-reflection rather than a mechanical process. Reflecting on practice is considered conducive to enhancing faculty's self-efficacy (Korthagen, 2004). Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) emphasise the developmental potential of peer observation, noting that 'reflection is viewed as a means by which participants can develop greater self-awareness about the nature and

impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development.' However, the pressure on the faculty member being observed can make this practice stressful and counterproductive, despite good collegial intentions.

Peer observation is often conducted within a formal review process mandated by institutions, designed for quality evaluation, teaching improvement, and the dissemination of best practices. Depending on the specific objectives, this process may involve administrators, senior faculty members, or colleagues, leading to various power dynamics between the observer and the observed. It is crucial to understand how these dynamics can affect learning outcomes. Traditionally, the learning opportunities provided by peer observation have been analysed from the perspective of the observed faculty member. However, there is growing recognition of the significant benefits that peer observation can offer to the observer. Bell and Mladenovic (2008; 2015) found that changes in teaching often result from a reflective process, with many tutors in their study citing the benefits of observing the teaching of another faculty member over receiving feedback.

According to Brookfield (1995) and Amundsen & Wilson (2012), the focus on reflective practice rather than outcomes equips faculty members with a process they can use throughout their academic careers, adaptable to various contexts, including solitary reflection after teaching or collaborative reflection with colleagues and students on curriculum design. Non-evaluative peer observations, conducted across the campus or within departments, can diminish the stigma of evaluative observation by fostering collegial dialogue and strengthening a sense of community.

5.2.2 Observer's learning through a student's perspective

The substantial learning advantages for the observer are increasingly acknowledged by scholars such as Hendry and Oliver (2012), who draw on social cognitive theory, and Tenenberg (2016), whose interpretive-phenomenological analysis suggests that peer observation reduces the 'cost' in terms of time and effort for both parties. Marin and Katsampoxaki-Hodgetts (2024), assert that participants who are willing to reflect on their

teaching seem keen on learning new teaching strategies, affirming their current practices, recognizing challenges, and benefiting from feedback received during peer observation.

Another key advantage of this approach is that it allows observers to view a lecture or seminar from a student's perspective, stepping away from concerns about content and class management. This shift in perspective enables observers to focus on how students engage with delivery modes, resources, materials, and learning activities. Hendry and colleagues (2021) emphasized that a significant part of the peer observation experience involves watching students' reactions to their colleague's teaching and noting their level of engagement.

5.3 Practical issues & samples

In this section, we examine the Greek context to illustrate how collaboration among university authorities, policymakers, and academic developers within the University Centres for Teaching and Learning can disrupt a non-reflective and non-inclusive academic culture. We highlight how these efforts culminated in the European project COALITION (2023) and explore how faculty at our universities perceived the use and efficacy of peer observation of teaching as a reflective tool. Additionally, we share reflections from faculty in Greece and Latvia who participated in this peer observation project.

5.3.1 Disrupting academic culture: the Greek experience

Transforming existing academic culture requires time and sustained effort. In the Greek Higher Education context, peer observation was first introduced in 2019 at the University of Crete under the name 'Open Amphitheatre.' Initially, this initiative aimed to counterbalance potential faculty resistance to student-centred teaching and learning policies, as well as to mitigate top-down pressures for compliance. The intervention was bottom-up, initiated as part of the teacher training initiative, which primarily sought to facilitate the exchange of teaching practices.

Two faculty members from each department participated, with the freedom to choose whom they would observe across campus, ensuring their anonymity throughout the

process. It was made clear that peer observations were intended to improve the observer's own teaching practices. Faculty members were provided with a peer observation protocol to guide their observations and subsequent reflections on their own practices. A typical follow-up involved organising a roundtable discussion to disseminate the impact of peer observations and address four key questions:

- *What were the key takeaways from participating in "Open Amphitheatre"?*
- *How did it contribute to the improvement of your teaching practice?*
- *What changes are you planning to make to your module as a result?*
- *What changes do you recommend for faculty development at our university?*

This practice is ongoing, and the positive feedback received from participants has inspired the integration of peer observation into the faculty development processes in other universities.

5.3.2 Qualitative data from faculty during the European project

Reflective reports provided by COALITION faculty participants reveal several key themes regarding the use of peer observation as a tool for academic development. A recurring theme is the effectiveness and structure of observation protocols, which were highlighted by nearly all participants. Action-oriented reflection on teaching practices, with an emphasis on inclusivity, was widely recognized as a key benefit of the peer observation process. Collaboration, adaptability, and the need for continuous professional development were frequently noted as essential components for improving teaching practices. Table 5.2 below summarizes the identified themes and their prevalence across participant responses.

Peer observation extends beyond mere critique; it serves as a reflective exercise that enables educators to view their teaching practices through the lens of another observer. For example, one participant emphasized the significance of this reflective aspect, stating, 'It provides an opportunity to reflect on one's own practices from a different observational perspective' (GR1). This reflective process can lead to substantial changes in teaching approaches, particularly in enhancing inclusivity.

Table 5.1 Summary of identified themes and their prevalence across participant responses

Prominent themes	**Attributes**	**Narratives**
1. Effectiveness and Structure of Observation Protocols (Frequency: 7)	Clear, Structured, and Comprehensive Protocols	Many respondents appreciated the clarity, structure, and comprehensiveness of the observation protocols. They found the combination of numerical and descriptive feedback particularly effective as it provided areas they needed to focus on. (GR1, GR2, GR3_SP, GR4_SN, GR6_AP, LV1_A)
	Ease of Use and Open-Ended Questions	More experienced faculty preferred the observation forms with open-ended questions and the ability to reflect freely. (GR2, GR5_SE) but most participants opted for multiple choice or Likert type scale PoPs as they provided more guidance regarding what they should be noticing.
	Challenges with Specific Protocols	Some noted challenges with understanding certain terminologies or found the protocols restrictive in certain disciplines, like natural sciences. (LV1_A)
2. Reflection on Teaching Practices (Frequency: 6)	Self-Reflection and Improvement	Faculty highlighted the importance of self-reflection facilitated by the observation process, which helped them evaluate and improve their teaching practices. (GR1, GR3_SP, GR4_SN, GR6_AP, LV1_A)
	Realization of Challenges and complexity of ISCP	The observation process allowed faculty to realize the complexities and challenges of inclusive teaching, such as adapting to diverse student backgrounds. (GR1, GR4_SN)
3. Inclusive Teaching and Learning (Frequency: 6)	Importance of Inclusivity	Many respondents emphasized the importance of inclusivity in teaching and how observing their peers helped them understand different inclusive strategies. (GR1, GR2, GR3_SP, GR4_SN, LV1_A)
	Diversity in Student Engagement	Faculty observed the value of varying levels of student engagement based on their backgrounds, stressing the need for adaptable teaching methods to ensure inclusivity. (GR1, GR6_AP)

4. Collaboration and Exchange of Ideas (Frequency: 6)	Discussion of Inclusive Teaching Issues	Faculty frequently discussed inclusive teaching methods with their colleagues, which led to a valuable exchange of ideas and strategies. (GR1, GR2, GR3_SP, GR4_SN, LV1_A)
	Interdisciplinary Learning	Observing colleagues from different disciplines was noted as a way to gain new perspectives and learn diverse teaching approaches. (LV1_A)
5. Adaptation of Teaching Methods (Frequency: 5)	Incorporating New Strategies	Several faculty members expressed their intention to adopt new teaching strategies observed in their peers' classes, such as using interactive tools and promoting a positive classroom environment. (GR1, GR2, GR5_SE, GR6_AP)
	Flexibility and Adaptation	The importance of being flexible and making real-time adjustments during lessons was a significant takeaway for many faculty. (GR3_SP, GR4_SN)
6. Challenges and Limitations (Frequency: 3)	Disciplinary Differences	Some faculty members noted that the observation protocols or inclusive strategies might not be directly applicable across different disciplines due to the specific needs of each field. (GR3_SP, LV1_A)
	Technical and Logistical Issues	Challenges such as technical difficulties during online observations or the specificity of fields like natural sciences were highlighted. (LV1_A, GR4_SN)
7. Continuous Professional Development (Frequency: 3)	Need for Ongoing Reflection	Continuous professional development through reflective practices was emphasized as crucial for improving teaching quality and adapting to the evolving needs of students. (GR4_SN, GR6_AP, LV1_A)

5.3.3 Structuring peer observations for maximum impact

A well-structured peer observation process is crucial to its success. Participants in the project underscored the importance of having a clear, concise, and comprehensive observation rubric that may also serve modelling purposes. One participant noted, ‘The

specific observation rubric was beneficial... it effectively encompasses all essential skills required for delivering an inclusive lesson' (GR3). Another emphasized the value of combining 'descriptive and numerical feedback,' which facilitates a balanced evaluation that is both qualitative and quantitative (GR3). Using a structured observation rubric that includes both qualitative and quantitative measures ensures a thorough assessment of all aspects of teaching, particularly those related to inclusivity.

5.3.4 Fostering inclusive teaching through peer observation

Inclusive teaching is a cornerstone of modern education, and peer observation can significantly enhance these practices. Many participants observed that peer observation provided insights into how their colleagues addressed inclusivity in the classroom. For instance, one participant reflected, 'Making real-time adjustments to the lesson was crucial... ensuring that everyone could actively participate' (GR3). Another participant highlighted the importance of 'good communication with students, genuine interest in their development, and creating a pleasant atmosphere' as essential components of inclusivity (GR4). Peer observation can help identify and implement strategies that promote inclusivity, such as making real-time adjustments during lessons, fostering open communication with students, and creating a supportive classroom environment.

5.3.5 Engaging in reflective discussions post-observation

Post-observation discussions are a critical component of the peer observation process. These discussions provide a platform for faculty to exchange ideas, clarify observations, and discuss potential changes in teaching practices. One participant emphasized the value of these conversations, noting, 'I engaged in a discussion with the colleague I observed regarding inclusivity issues... underscoring the importance of recognizing individual student challenges' (GR3). Scheduling post-observation discussions to reflect on observed practices and share insights with colleagues offers excellent opportunities for professional growth. These conversations should focus on constructive feedback and practical strategies for enhancing teaching, especially in addressing the diverse needs of students.

5.3.6 Implementing changes based on observations

The ultimate goal of peer observation is to improve how teachers design learning environments. Many participants reported making changes to their teaching as a direct result of observing their peers. For example, one faculty member decided to 'incorporate inclusive tools and teaching methods to sustain the pace and engagement of the class,' such as using 'multiple-choice questions and polls' (GR1). Another participant planned to 'promote a classroom environment where students feel free to express themselves without the fear of judgment' (GR2). Actively implementing changes in teaching practices based on insights gained from peer observations can positively impact both faculty and student attitudes toward teaching and learning. Involving students in providing feedback on strategies that enhance engagement, participation, and inclusivity can also yield significant benefits.

5.3.7 Continuous professional development through peer observation

Peer observation should be viewed as an ongoing component of professional development, rather than a one-time event. Participants in the project stressed the importance of integrating peer observation into regular teaching practice and came up with an action plan triggered by their observations. One participant expressed a desire for more frequent peer observations and involving students to receive more frequent feedback, stating, 'We need peer observation, self-analysis, and more frequent feedback from students' (LV1). By and large, the COALITION experience with peer observation demonstrates that, when structured and implemented thoughtfully, it can be a powerful tool for fostering reflective teaching practices, promoting inclusivity, and supporting continuous professional development.

5.4 Resources: illustrative materials

Several valuable resources support the development of reflective peer observation protocols. Since peer observation is frequently accompanied by follow-up discussions and peer coaching, novice faculty members are encouraged to consult the paper by Newman and colleagues (2019) for insightful guidance on providing effective peer feedback. Figure

5.1 summarizes the key takeaways from their work. If we had to choose the most important tip from this paper, it would be ‘check assumptions’ before thinking, asking, saying or doing anything that may jeopardize the outcome of peer observation.

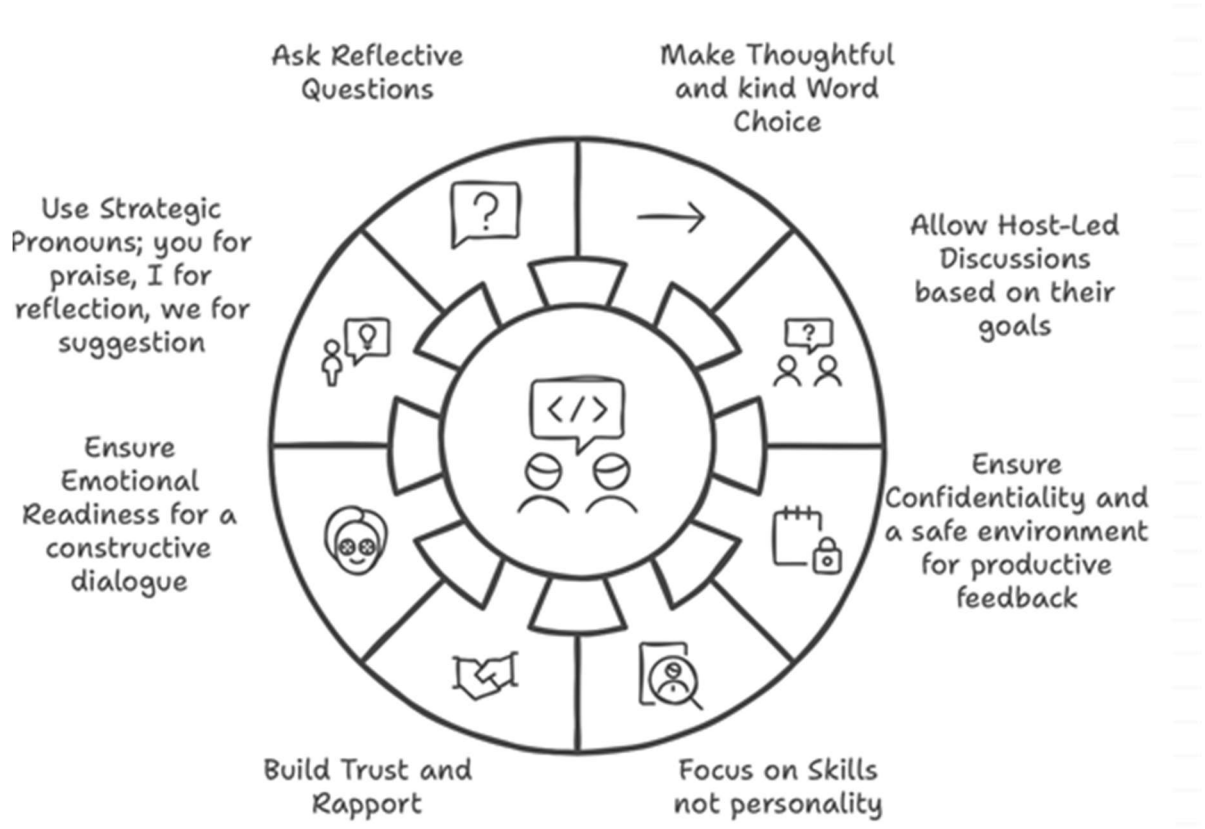

Figure 5.2 Guidelines for providing appropriate feedback on teaching (adapted from Newman et al., 2019)

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, peer observation, when approached as a reflective practice, offers faculty a valuable opportunity for professional growth. By focusing on critical reflection and community building, peer observation can move beyond its traditional role as a tool for evaluative assessment, instead becoming a means of fostering inclusive teaching practices and continuous self-improvement that leads to faculty agency and relevant action plans.

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CHAPTER 6

Lesson redesign for inclusive student-centred curricula

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6.1 Visible and action-based process

Designing an inclusive student-centred lesson plan requires faculty to consider the diverse needs of all students, ensuring that every learner has equal opportunities to access and understand resources, engage with the material, learn effectively, and succeed academically. However, in designing courses focused on formal learning outcomes that are not linked to concrete activities, faculty often prioritise content delivery over student-centred activities (Evans et al., 2017; Robinson, 2012) and place more emphasis on employability than on the learning processes themselves (Brown Wilson & Slade, 2020). As a result, it remains unclear how well faculty claims of student-centred teaching align with their actual teaching philosophies and practices.

According to Katsampoxaki-Hodgetts (2022), aligning all components of a lesson plan—such as content delivery modes, student engagement, assessment, and resources—with inclusive student-centred pedagogies can play a crucial role in making these processes more visible and action-based. This alignment activity itself can also serve as a beneficial process for faculty development. In this chapter, we will explore the steps faculty members can take to develop such lessons, focusing on the alignment of content delivery, student engagement, resources, and formative assessment with inclusive pedagogical practices. This approach is informed by a thematic analysis of reflective reports from six faculty members who applied these principles in their teaching and shared their experiences following peer observation (see Chapter 5), along with a discourse analysis of four lesson

designs during the COALITION project. This analysis is further supported by quotes from the respective faculty members in follow-up semi-structured interviews.

6.2 Relevance of the topic

Student agentic engagement, where students actively participate in shaping their learning, has been advocated as a primary aim of higher education by educational scholars (Schuetz, 2008; Zepke et al., 2010), but it is rarely included as a distinct element in lesson design. Encouraging faculty to create lesson-specific, student-centred instructional activities that include action-based components and foster student agentic engagement has been shown to actively contribute to a supportive learning environment (Reeve & Shin, 2019). The alignment of lesson plan components with inclusive student-centred pedagogies involves incorporating engagement data into lesson plans (Banta et al., 2009) and combining design with self-reflection and self-regulation. Although descriptions of expected student conduct and ownership are uncommon (Eberly et al., 2001), emphasizing student agency as a key inclusive component can better demonstrate how students are engaged, as agency is something they do rather than possess (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Moreover, rather than relying on knowledge transmission only, faculty reflections on their lesson plans can be further enriched by student feedback and engagement opportunities (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017).

While faculty are not typically required to detail how students will be engaged during lessons, Biggs and Collis' (1982) taxonomy of learning outcome provides a constructive framework for students' cognitive development which can broaden the scope of lesson plans from merely discipline-specific content knowledge to fostering of student agency, skills, and literacies through scaffolding of the learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The alignment between student actions, learning outcomes, assessment, and the overall teaching and learning process is often not evident (Biggs, 2014; Roseler et al., 2018). Yet, Katsampoxaki-Hodgetts (2022) used this alignment as a driver for educational development and demonstrated its reflective and developmental potential. In this context, Bloom's taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) helps clarify measurable outcomes using action verbs that aim to align

instructional practices or specific learning interventions, maximising their effectiveness in driving change (Garfolo & L'Huillier, 2015). Additionally, inclusive student-centred lesson plans were preceded by peer observations with rubrics that delineate key components of inclusive student-centred pedagogies (see Chapter 2 and 5) and were accompanied by reflective reports designed to make inclusive student-centred components in the lesson plan visible to the participating faculty members. Also, the lesson plans were developed specifically to be implemented as part of an action research initiative (See Chapter 7) that followed the lesson plan design.

6.3 Practical issues of developing inclusive student-centred lesson plans

To gain deeper insights into faculty's values and goals, and how these manifest in lesson design, discourse analysis was conducted to compare the lesson plans of two science and two humanities faculty members who participated in the COALITION project (2023). Discourse analysis, an established qualitative method, allows researchers to examine overt or covert layers of dominance, control, and power as manifested in language (Rogers, 2004). This aligns with Habermas' (1976) view of language as ideological, and Fairclough's (1989) understanding of critical analysis as essential for revealing the interconnectedness of ideas and other discourses (intertextuality; cf. Lemke, 1992). In line with this, Wodak and Ludwig (1999) assert that language 'manifests social processes and interactions,' while Kress and van Leeuwen (1990) value different modes of representation when analysing educational texts. Overall, discourse analysis focuses on teacher language, context, power dynamics, and intertextuality, for example, as expressed in lesson plans.

Several key themes emerged regarding approaches to inclusivity, engagement, and learning outcomes. Both the science and humanities faculty members emphasised the need for inclusivity in content delivery. In fact, both recognize the importance of presenting content in multiple formats to cater to different learning styles as an inclusive practice. Professor 1 (science) incorporates 'diagrams, flowcharts, and infographics,' while Professor 2 uses 'videos and animations.' Humanities faculty also adopt multimodal approaches;

Professor 3 includes ‘multimedia presentations’ and ‘accessible documents,’ while Professor 4 uses interactive tools like ‘cloud surveys and role-play’ to engage students.

Also, Professor 1 (science) highlights the importance of using ‘plain language,’ ensuring that content is ‘accessible’ and fostering an ‘open, friendly academic environment.’ Similarly, Professor 3 (humanities) focuses on using ‘inclusive language’ that avoids assumptions about gender or other identities and emphasizes ‘diverse examples and references’ to ensure that all students feel represented. Interestingly, during the interview, Professor 1 highlighted the need to design lessons with an emphasis on skills, not just content:

> *I believe that student skills should go beyond knowing Krebs cycle [red. series of biochemical reactions] or any such disciplinary content. Knowledge-based resources can now be accessed easily anywhere. Students need to learn how to study, how to select key information in order to understand, to learn how to cooperate, to collaborate as team members, to express their opinions and views, and justify them using evidence, to think critically. (Professor 1)*

Professor 2 (science) introduces inclusivity through the use of ‘visuals, multimedia resources, quizzes, and real-life examples,’ while Professor 4 (humanities) suggests peer assessment and group work to enhance student involvement in content delivery. Both fields acknowledge the importance of making content accessible and relevant to all students, but the science faculty seem to focus more on technological and linguistic adjustments, whereas the humanities faculty seem to emphasize social and cultural representation. In the interview, Professor 4 stated:

> *This way you give students a really active role and you do not have to try and make groups homogeneous because student diversity can bring more benefits than you think. You make them learn from each other and at the end everyone has benefited somehow as a community of inquiry, cooperation, trust, common goals, and interests. This can be of benefit for teachers too. (Professor 4)*

The teacher's language reflects strong engagement with the discourse of inclusive pedagogy. Terms like ‘scaffolded approach,’ ‘inclusive lessons,’ ‘reflective practice,’ and ‘student engagement’ are frequently used, signalling a deep familiarity with educational jargon that aligns with contemporary pedagogical theories. The frequent use of these terms

suggests an internalisation of these concepts, which are presented as both essential and beneficial. For instance, the use of the 'scaffolded approach' implies a methodical approach to supporting student learning, drawing from Vygotsky's theories of cognitive development. Additionally, metaphors such as 'building bridges' (Professor 4) are used to describe the process of connecting with diverse students, reflecting a conceptualisation of education as constructing connections rather than merely transferring knowledge. This metaphorical language suggests a view of university teaching that emphasizes relationships and adaptability over rigid structures.

The teacher language reveals a complex negotiation of power within the educational university system. On the one hand, both science and humanities faculty position themselves as authorities in their lecture halls and seminar rooms, with significant control over lesson design and pedagogical approaches. For example, two faculty members discuss how they adjust their methods based on their observations and reflections, indicating a sense of autonomy (Professors 2 and 4). However, this authority is mitigated by a discourse of collaboration and mutual benefit, particularly in the context of inviting students to co-design inclusive learning environments.

All four faculty describe peer observation as a reciprocal process, where both the observer and the observed benefit from inspiring inclusive lesson design. This challenges traditional hierarchical structures in university education, where observation might be seen as a form of surveillance, evaluation, or compliance with top-down pressures. They perceive peer observation as a prerequisite to lesson design and frame it as a collaborative and reflective practice that empowers faculty to improve their teaching. This discourse subtly shifts power from institutional authorities to the faculty themselves, who become active agents in their professional development. The following quote from a Humanities faculty member illustrates these points:

> *What helped me a lot, was that it made me realise how I can connect pedagogical theory with research, I teach inclusive education in my classes and I am always looking for alternative ways of teaching and learning. It was great that we discussed with colleagues and they shared their ideas and perspectives on how inclusive*

> *classes should be. What really helped me was that it inspired me to engage my students as researchers in my classes doing inquiry... because engaging them in a lecture is fine but then I was inspired by the peer observation form that I used... I got this really great idea of asking students to conduct empirical surveys with regards to our lesson outcomes. (Professor 4)*

The broader socio-political context of Greek university education shapes the teacher's language significantly. The emphasis on inclusive pedagogy and reflective practice can be seen as a response to both local and global educational trends that prioritise equity and student-centred learning, while the references to inclusive practices, such as adapting lessons for students with different learning needs and using diverse teaching strategies, reflect broader European educational policies that promote inclusion and diversity in higher education.

Furthermore, the faculty's narratives about the challenges of implementing these practices, such as the difficulty of knowing students' backgrounds, highlight the practical limitations within their local university context. These challenges may be exacerbated by larger systemic issues, such as large cohort sizes and limited resources. The faculty narratives thus reflect both an aspiration to align with global educational ideals and a recognition of the local constraints that make this challenging within their universities.

Moreover, the teacher language is deeply intertextual, drawing on multiple discourses within the field of university education. References to pedagogical theories, such as multiple intelligences and multiliteracies (Professor 3 and 4), position faculty within a global discourse on inclusive university education. Additionally, Professors 1 and 2 often align with official educational policies that emphasize student engagement and reflective teaching.

There is also a connection to broader narratives in education about the role of technology in facilitating inclusive education. For instance, a humanities faculty member discusses the use of tools like Padlet to enhance student engagement and participation (Professor 3). This aligns with contemporary educational narratives that advocate for the integration of digital tools to support diverse learners. The intertextual connections between the teacher language and these broader educational narratives suggest that their

perspectives are shaped by a wide array of influences, from local educational policies to global pedagogical trends and educational research.

When it comes to learning objectives, all interviewed faculty members employ Bloom's Taxonomy, yet their emphasis differs. Professor 1 (science) outlines objectives across all levels of learning objectives, from *Remembering* to *Creating*, and incorporates inclusive objectives such as encouraging students to 'explore how different cultures approach medicinal healing.' On the other hand, Professor 3 (humanities) integrates inclusive objectives such as 'collaboration, communication, and reflection,' which are intended to foster a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives. This difference may reflect distinct focuses of the disciplines: science faculty seem to structure objectives around the mastery of content and technical skills, while humanities faculty tend to incorporate broader social and reflective skills.

Both science and humanities faculty design activities to cater to diverse learning preferences. Professor 1 employs a 'flipped classroom approach' and encourages peer teaching to allow students to 'showcase their unique strengths.' Similarly, Professor 2 integrates group projects and case studies that leverage students' diverse perspectives. Humanities faculty seem to be placing greater emphasis on dialogue and critical thinking. Professor 3 uses activities like think-pair-share and Socratic discussion to engage students in critical analysis and reflection. And Professor 4 emphasizes collaborative activities, such as role-play and group presentations, which encourage students to express themselves and engage in problem-solving.

Engagement is a central concern for all faculty members. Professor 1 (science) ensures a 'balanced mix of individual, pair, and group work,' while Professor 2 incorporates class discussions and digital platforms like blogs to encourage expression. Humanities faculty, such as Professor 3, use structured reading and peer review activities to ensure that students are actively involved in their learning. And Professor 4 facilitates engagement through interactive group work and discussions, often focusing on real-world scenarios.

Accessibility of resources is also a shared priority. Professor 1 mentions the use of ‘assistive technologies’ and ensuring that online resources are ‘compatible with screen readers.’ Professor 2 similarly ensures that all digital content is compatible with screen readers and accessible through ‘high-contrast colours and readable fonts.’ Professor 3 (humanities) also emphasizes the provision of resources in diverse formats and ensuring that materials are ‘accessible to students with different learning needs.’ Likewise, Professor 4 adds a focus on peer assessment and group-based problem-solving activities, which not only make resources more accessible but also encourage students to actively engage with and contribute to the learning material.

Last but not least, both science and humanities faculty challenge the idea that fully inclusive design is possible, given the limitations of time, resources, and knowledge about students. Professors 1 and 3 argue that while inclusivity is an important goal, it is unrealistic to expect faculty to know every aspect of their students' backgrounds. Instead, they advocate for a more practical approach, where inclusivity is about providing a range of learning opportunities rather than tailoring activities to every individual.

6.4 Resources: illustrative insights for an inclusive lesson design

Thematic analysis of the faculty members' six reflective reports gave rise to valuable insights into the efficacy of aligning lesson design with inclusive student-centred pedagogies. Faculty reported several key takeaways including increased awareness, enhanced teaching practices, but also described challenges. In fact, designing for inclusivity raised awareness of the diverse needs of students and the importance of accommodating these needs in all aspects of teaching (Professor 1, 2, and 3). In terms of enhanced teaching practices, faculty found that incorporating inclusive practices not only benefited students but also enriched their own teaching practices, making them more reflective and adaptable (Professor 3 and 4). Yet, although the process was beneficial, faculty identified challenges such as time constraints, resource limitations, and the need for additional training in inclusive practices (Professors 2, 3, and 4).

6.4.1. Identification of content

The first step in designing an inclusive lesson is to identify the content that will be taught. Faculty should ask themselves: What content do I want to teach and what changes will I make in order to make the learning assignments and environment more inclusive?

- ✓ *Diverse Perspectives:* Ensure the content includes diverse perspectives and examples that resonate with all students. For example, Professors 1, 2 and 3 emphasized the importance of using inclusive language and integrating diverse examples to foster a welcoming environment.
- ✓ *Multimodal Content Delivery:* Modify the content to be accessible through various formats, such as visual, auditory, and textual. Professor 3 mentioned the challenge of finding and incorporating diverse materials that are accessible to all students, highlighting the need for careful planning.

6.4.2. Identification of inclusive student-centred learning objectives

Once the content is identified, the next step is to determine the learning objectives. Faculty should consider questions such as: What do I expect each of my students to be able to do or know and are there learning objectives that I can add to foster inclusive pedagogies?

- ✓ *Diverse Cognitive Skills:* Use a taxonomy to create learning objectives that address both lower and higher-order cognitive skills. This approach ensures that all students, regardless of their starting point, can progress in their learning.
- ✓ *Inclusive Objectives:* Include objectives that promote inclusivity, such as developing skills in collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. Professor 2 suggested breaking down complex tasks and allowing students to demonstrate understanding in various ways, catering to neurodiversity and diversity of students' abilities.

6.4.3. Inclusive learning activities

The design of learning activities should reflect inclusivity, ensuring all students can participate and learn effectively. Faculty should reflect on the following design questions: What activities have I designed to facilitate learning for all students and how can I observe that student learning actually happened?

- ✓ *Varied Activities:* Design activities that cater to various learning preferences and profiles, such as group work, individual tasks, and interactive sessions. Professor 4 highlighted the importance of using technological tools like quizzes and polls to engage students' anonymous responses and project student learning during the process.
- ✓ *Formative Assessment:* Align assessment with learning outcomes by using formative assessments that provide feedback during the learning process. Professor 3 recommended incorporating self-assessment tasks, allowing students to reflect on their learning and identify areas for improvement.

6.4.4. Identification of engagement opportunities for all

Engagement is key to student success, and faculty should provide opportunities for all students to act and express themselves. They should consider questions such as: Have I provided opportunities for all students to act and express themselves and am I using various digital media and modes beneficial for student learning?

- ✓ *Digital Tools and Media:* Utilize digital tools and media to create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment. Professor 4 emphasized the use of educational technologies and media to engage students, particularly those who may not be physically present in the classroom.
- ✓ *Collaborative Learning:* Encourage collaboration through group work, peer review, and discussions. Professor 3 focused on the importance of group discussions and peer review tasks to foster a collaborative learning environment.

6.4.5. Provision of resources

Resources should be accessible and appropriate for all students. Faculty should reflect on the following questions when designing an inclusive lesson: Are resources accessible to all students and how can I ensure these resources and their content are appropriate for all students?

- ✓ *Accessible Materials:* Ensure that all resources, such as readings, videos, and online tools, are accessible to students with different needs. Professor 3 noted the challenges of creating or finding accessible versions of materials, underscoring the importance of this step.
- ✓ *Relevant yet diverse Resources:* Select resources that are relevant and reflect diverse perspectives, catering to the varied backgrounds and interests of students.

6.4.6. Multiple representation of input

Finally, faculty should evaluate whether they are the only source of input and consider how to present content in multiple ways to accommodate all student needs. They should reflect on questions such as: am I the only source of input and have I made any changes that allow all students to take agency over their learning?

- ✓ *Multimodal Representation:* Present content using various formats—lectures, videos, interactive tools—to cater to different learning preferences. All faculty members recognized the need to incorporate multiple representations of content, including digital and interactive methods.
- ✓ *Student-centred Learning:* Provide students with choices in how they engage with and demonstrate their learning. Professor 2 and 3 described experiences with interdisciplinary and multi-environment approaches and highlighted the benefits of allowing students to take ownership of their learning.

6.5 Conclusion

Inclusive student-centred lesson design is essential in higher education. By carefully considering content, learning objectives, activities, engagement opportunities, resources, and multiple representations of input, faculty can create learning environments that support all students. The reflective experiences of faculty demonstrated the value of this approach, as well as the challenges that must be navigated to implement it effectively. Ultimately, structured lesson design not only enhances student learning but also contributes to the professional growth of faculty, fostering a more equitable educational landscape.

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CHAPTER 7

Action research for promoting inclusive teaching

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7.1 A critical approach to educational change

In this chapter, we will first argue for the use of educational action research in the current faculty training scenery in contemporary higher education. Secondly, we will justify the relevance of using this strategy by showing the opinions of faculty from different universities who have participated in staff development processes established within the framework of a European-wide project on inclusive teaching in higher education. The COALITION (2023) project aimed to foster professional development in higher education, promote critical teaching, and enhance reflection on praxis through action research processes. Finally, we will illustrate with guidelines and resources how educational action research can be used in university teaching.

We live in a globalised, technologically accelerated, changing world, with economic, social, health, and war crises. It is a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world (Stein, 2021). At this juncture, higher education must improve the way it faces the challenges of joining the knowledge-based economy, the information society, and global culture from a critical and emancipatory perspective.

However, the mercantilist and meritocratic tendencies established in the university context, in the so-called era of accountability, have prioritised training for employability of a utilitarian nature (Ball 2012, 2016; Sparkes, 2013) to the detriment of democratic, activist and collective training processes (Fernández-Díaz et al., 2018; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009). At the base of the strong regression, we are witnessing lie the strong neoliberal and neoconservative pressures that reach all educational sectors (Giroux, 2013; Rivas, 2020; Säfström & Månsson, 2021; Starr, 2021). Likewise, in this new scenario, new

training paradigms are required to face a knowledge society characterised by accelerated growth, greater complexity and a tendency towards rapid obsolescence. These training paradigms seek to place the epicentre in the student, assigning the faculty member a new role as facilitator and overcoming the traditional form of transmission and accumulation of knowledge (Katsarou & Tsafos, 2013; Moore & Gayle, 2010). At the same time, there is a demand for a new conception of academic training and a revaluation of the teaching function that encourages the motivation of university teaching staff and recognises efforts aimed at improving quality and educational innovation through the development of policies focused on lifelong learning in the field of university teaching (Imbernon, 2017).

In short, the intended transformations of the training paradigm inscrutably entail the need to rethink educational change and professional development from a critical and inclusive approach in order to respond to the diversity of the student body in face-to-face and virtual contexts, promoting the creation of communities of practice to investigate the necessary changes in the university curriculum (Bonafé, 2014).

7.2 Action research for transformative development

Faced with the design of short-term, externally devised training processes, we need to promote the creation of collaborative environments that seek to reflect on practice in order to achieve sustainability of the changes and ensure the professional development of the faculty involved (cf. Rumiantsev et al., 2024). The mere updating of conceptual and methodological references without experiential support does not guarantee changes in teaching practice, and it is necessary to implement contextualised, systematic and participatory processes that address the cyclical and non-linear nature between beliefs, practices and transformations, as well as to establish and consolidate collegiate learning groups and communities where faculty learn to give and receive critical support (Curry, 2008; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

We will now explore the role of action research as a tool that enables the design of formative processes focused on collaborative inquiry and the transformation of practice based on the principles of equity, inclusion and quality (Katsampoxaki-Hodgetts, 2022b).

That is, formative processes aimed at creating communities of practice that promote reflective and collaborative sharing of experiences among faculty in order to improve and systematise the design of learner-centred inclusive teaching practices (Netolicky, 2016; Rahman, 2023). Several studies show the relevance of action research in the sustainability of experiences that promote curricular transformation and faculty development (Gibbs et al., 2017). In this line, international contributions from different communities of practice that use action research approaches to implement training processes to promote critical and inclusive teaching stand out (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016; McFadden & Smeaton, 2017).

Underlying action research is a way of understanding teaching as a process of continuous search, and research, to introduce progressive improvements to teaching. Fundamental to this process is the reflective exploration of the teaching practice by the teaching staff themselves. Action research, therefore, is a means of optimising the teaching-learning processes that translates into an increase in professional development for teaching staff. As a methodology oriented towards educational and social change, action research can be characterised as a process that is built from and for practice, aiming to improve it through deliberate transformation, while at the same time seeking to understand it, demanding the participation of the subjects involved. From its origins, action research has been configured as a spiral of cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection to implement a critical and systematic analysis of the situations under study and improvement. Today, because of the participatory convergence between different approaches, groups, and collectives, the incorporation of emerging emancipatory methodologies is proliferating (cf. Fernández-Díaz et al., in press). In this context, the spiral of cycles continues to be rethought as a juncture to favour the ecology of knowledge, proposing alternatives to linear, excluding, and hierarchical rationality. Action research encompasses a whole philosophy of life and is a process that requires commitment, an ethical stance, and persistence at all levels (Fernández-Díaz, 2024). Table 7.1 summarises some of its essential characteristics (Bausela, 2004; Rowell et al., 2015).

Table 7.1 Essential characteristics of educational action research

Characteristic	*Description*
Democratic	It offers the potential for professional, personal, and collective reflection in order to understand one's own practices while influencing the institution. It intends to contribute to the creation of knowledge that improves the quality of life of the participants.
Polyhedral	It focuses on practice in order to understand it within the circumstances in which it takes place. It is an interactive, cyclical, and reflective problem-solving process. It requires genuine collaboration between participants so that decisions can be made in a way that integrates the feeling of the whole. It involves a variety of methods aimed at creating action-relevant knowledge for all participants.
Transformer	It involves changes not only in classroom situations but also in the underlying approach and in the elements that interfere in the dynamics and goes beyond the mere educational situation or practice to transform the perception and the actual context of action.
Functional	It achieves faculty development by increasing their understanding of practice, not by adding to it, but by solving the problems that surround their professional life.
Committed	It requires a social context of exchange, discussion and contrast and therefore requires a type of context that makes possible the elaboration and reconstruction of professional knowledge that avoids secrecy, in permanent dialogue with other conceptions in order to reconceptualise and contrast ideas.
Contextualised	It involves contact at the classroom level, and the intervention of the professionals involved in spatial and temporal coordinates linked to their work possibilities and availabilities.
Continue	It requires a medium-long term process projection, in order to be able to accommodate the joint detection of needs, the analysis of expectations, the adaptation to demands, joint planning, development and continuous revision of the process.

Global concerns, such as achieving inclusive, equitable, and quality education, can be implemented through action research. In this way, the contextual isolation that usually prevails in the usual short-term educational dynamics can be broken down and paths for sustained community improvement can be found, giving priority to horizontality and democratic decision-making. In other words, it paves the way for devising a reflection capable of questioning preconceived ideas and seeking proposals for improvement, improving the collaborative work culture and overcoming the meritocratic inertias that prevail in the current university context (Jayadinata et al., 2022; Jordan & Kapoor, 2016).

7.2.1 Action research and inclusive teaching: a valuable combination

Within the framework of the COALITION project, a staff development initiative has been implemented in various European universities through an action-research methodology in order to ensure that participating faculty members receive support and training from their peers to promote the development of inclusive practices in different contexts. Using different information-gathering instruments, such as interviews, reports, and task analysis, we have been able to obtain an overview of the main findings and difficulties encountered in the reflection on the inclusive practices implemented.

Through thematic analysis conducted in the above-mentioned material, we identified five main themes that were mentioned by the majority of the participants, each of which is composed of sub-themes. Here we present the themes and sub-themes we identified along with illustrative extracts from the material documenting our findings.

Theme 1: Impact on teaching practices

a) *Use of Group Work:* Collaborative assignments, group discussions, and peer feedback. Use of tools like online survey forms, quizzes, and shared documents for enhancing inclusivity and cooperation.

> *Students worked in diverse three-member groups to complete a project, allowing them to collaborate and leverage each other's strengths.*

b) *Differentiated Instruction:* Tailoring learning activities to diverse student needs, for example, providing multiple formats of learning materials.

> *I have ensured that these tools were accessible to everyone and provided materials in multiple formats.*

c) *Changes in Assessment Practices:* Some faculty members planned to modify their assessment methods to better address students' unique learning needs and preferences.

> *As a result of this action research, I would increase the use of formative assessments that are more personalised to student needs, offering a variety of ways for students to demonstrate their understanding, focus more on flexible groupings within the classroom to allow students with similar learning needs to collaborate while ensuring opportunities for mixed-ability interactions and incorporate more scaffolded feedback loops, where students receive timely, constructive feedback, allowing them to correct and learn from their mistakes throughout the course.*

d) *Shifts Toward Experiential Learning:* Action research led some faculty members to incorporate more hands-on and experiential activities, such as role-playing and peer feedback, into their lessons.

Theme 2: Impact on faculty

a) *Increased Awareness of Inclusion Issues:* faculty reported that action research helped them recognize the challenges and exclusions that students face, particularly in relation to gender, socioeconomic status, and cognitive diversity.

> *Action research has helped me become aware of what inclusion is in practice and identify firsthand the problems and exclusions that students encountered through the tools I used.*
>
> *As a result of this action research, I will implement more student-centred and collaborative learning activities to promote active engagement and participation among students.*

b) *Collaboration with Colleagues:* Action research fostered collaboration among faculty, allowing them to share strategies, reflect on outcomes, and develop more inclusive practices together.

c) *Openness and respect to students' voices:* Action research made faculty more open to their students' voices.

Try to listen to your students, elaborate their views and respect them. Be humble and not authoritarian. Do not worry if you are losing control. We are humans, let's do it together.

I learn every day from my students. I ask them to evaluate my way of teaching and suggest changes, so the lesson is not boring. They often talk about test questions and say that it is far away from their reality and ask me why I put this. I want to remember that my students are my teachers and we can construct the lesson together.

d) *Reflection and Adaptation:* Faculty emphasised the importance of continuous reflection and adaptation, identifying areas for improvement based on feedback and observations during the action research process.

By committing to continuous improvement through action research, I contribute to a dynamic, responsive, and effective educational environment.

I ask students to ask more questions or provide informal feedback so that I have time to redesign the lesson the next time. So I am always open to redesign.

This reflects a commitment to ongoing professional development and adaptability in teaching strategies.

e) *Commitment to Continuous Improvement and to Continuing Action Research:* Many faculty members expressed a strong likelihood of continuing to use action research in the future, recognizing its value in fostering continuous improvement in teaching and student outcomes.

I am highly likely to implement action research again because it provides real-time feedback and allows for continuous improvement. The iterative nature of action research makes it effective for understanding and adjusting teaching strategies to promote positive learning behaviours.

Theme 3: Impact on students

a) *Improvement in Student Engagement and Participation:* Faculty members noted increased student engagement and active participation when inclusive methods like group projects, case studies, and open dialogue were implemented.

Students who were previously disengaged became more active in class discussions.

Higher levels of student engagement and participation in learning activities.

b) *Development of Critical and Soft Skills:* Inclusive teaching strategies led to better engagement and the development of both academic and social skills, reinforcing the

importance of creating equitable learning environments. Reports mentioned that students developed collaboration, communication, empathy, and critical thinking skills.

> *Students developed critical and soft skills such as collaboration, communication, empathy, and critical thinking.*
>
> *The extent to which it improved behaviour was noticeable in how students interacted with the material and each other, showing increased motivation and self-regulation.*

c) *Change in Class Dynamics - Sense of Belonging and Support:* Several reports highlighted that inclusive teaching created a more supportive and respectful environment where students felt valued and part of the learning community.

> *Additionally, they [the students] reported a stronger sense of belonging and feeling valued in the classroom.*
>
> *Students who were previously disengaged or hesitant to participate became more active in class discussions and activities. They reported a stronger sense of belonging and feeling valued in the classroom.*

Theme 4: Difficulties and challenges faced

a) *Time Constraints:* Limited teaching time was frequently cited as a challenge that restricted the full implementation of inclusive tools and action research. This reflects a fundamental constraint faced by faculty, where ambitious inclusive teaching strategies clash with the practical realities of tight course schedules.

> *Firstly, the limited teaching time does not give much room to make extensive use of the inclusion tools. The nature of the course.*
>
> *Also, since inclusive practices can be time-consuming, I had to make extra planning and preparation. Moreover, I had to ensure effective collaboration and communication among all students.*

b) *Difficulties in Balancing Diverse ways of Learning:* Faculty found it difficult to cater to different cognitive levels, socioeconomic backgrounds, and learning preferences within a single course.

> *Ensuring equity while addressing diverse cognitive and emotional needs required careful planning.*
>
> *The most difficult part of designing this action research with inclusion as the first priority was balancing the diverse needs of all students while maintaining academic rigor. Ensuring that the differentiated strategies catered to a wide range of abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles required thoughtful planning.*

c) *Technological Barriers:* Some faculty members faced technical difficulties, such as poor signal quality, that hindered the successful integration of online tools and apps in teaching, indicating the resistance faculty might encounter, not just from time and other practical constraints, but also from the attitudes and engagement levels of students.

d) *Resistances From Faculty and Students*

> *To exclude other factors that would hinder the evaluation of action research in terms of inclusion such as indifference, lack of motivation [from students] as well as to integrate this action into modern medicinal chemistry.*

Theme 5: Training needs identified

a) *Need for Institutional Support:* Faculty expressed concerns about the lack of pedagogical training and incentives for inclusive practices in higher education. Group work and peer feedback were essential in fostering inclusion, but these activities need careful facilitation to ensure participation from all students, especially those less confident or introverted. Especially, faculty members in science disciplines noted that they lacked formal training in inclusive teaching and pedagogy, which made it challenging to implement action research effectively. Faculty mentioned that university systems prioritize publications over teaching quality, leaving little motivation or support for conducting action research to improve teaching practices.

> *Like most faculty members in the sciences, I have not been trained in teaching. Usually, teaching is done through personal experiences, right or wrong, without considering many contemporary issues that pedagogy addresses.*

7.3 From theory to action

The project has made it possible to generate a European-wide community of practice to promote formative scaffolding among faculty for the achievement of inclusive teaching through action research. For this purpose, different training tools and processes have been developed and used. For example, the *COALITION Workshop on Action Research* (https://goo.su/eH0O) explains the basic characteristics of a methodology that supports teaching and reflecting at the same time. Both theoretical approach and experiences developed in the university context are provided in this workshop. The workshop shows

some examples of improving teaching and curriculum through action research and others that highlight how action research can support faculty development.

This training resource also answers questions related to educational action research and its use in higher education, such as what faculty, support staff, and students gain from the action research procedures or the difficulties that they may face. Finally, it focuses on the reflective nature of action research and proposes some means for fostering reflection in the community of practice formed to conduct each action research.

We have illustrated how action research in higher education is used as a means of developing faculty members' capability to teach and facilitate learning as it entails the enhancement of pedagogical practice through reflection and participatory research into practice (Gibbs, Angelides, & Michaelides, 2004). After a theoretical review of the need to claim the use of action research as a strategy to promote the transformation of university teaching practice in order to achieve inclusive teaching and promote professional development taking into account the current university context, we showed the findings by landing squarely on the analysis of the experiences under the training process. Finally, relevant materials and resources have been provided, sharing the formative experiences developed under the COALITION project.

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CHAPTER 8

Towards agency to change the system

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8.1 Trust through conversations

Developing teaching and learning into inclusive student-centred practices entails much more than only a redesign of our lectures, seminars and workgroup sessions. We, as faculty and support staff, need to re-position ourselves and our units and institutions and re-think what we value as our core missions (Ottenhoff et al., 2024) and which relationships we need to care for (Geertsema & van der Rijst, 2021). Only through the understanding that we live and work in larger communities, and by realizing that we need to guide those communities and all who reside in them, we become aware that the actions we take are related to those we work with (van der Rijst, 2024). This relational positionality (Santucci et al., 2024) lies at the fundament of the contemporary focus on inclusive teaching and student-centred pedagogies in our higher education institutes.

Changes in teaching and learning have a variety of origins. Some changes are induced from the need to educate for new or altered jobs and professions, while others are enacted by new insights from research in the taught discipline. Individual faculty members and faculty teams make careful considerations about what to include in the curriculum and how to educate their students (cf. Vereijken & van der Rijst, 2023). The professional conversations are guided by the faculty's conceptions of the discipline, the level of the students, and the intended learning objectives. Therefore, the academic conversations between faculty are often related to creating awareness and adapting beliefs and conceptions (Cook-Sather et al., 2021). In the various affordances for faculty and educational development described in this book (peer observations of teaching, lesson redesign, and action research) collegial conversation is central and the key to all change.

The direction of change is more often bottom-up instead of top-down. The assumption is that the development of faculty's agency will lead to sustainable change and resilience of the curricula and programs. On the one hand, agentic faculty are able to make careful curriculum decisions which consider both the core epistemology of the taught discipline and the potential futures of the students (Kusters et al., 2023). On the other hand, agentic faculty can change the system, even if university leadership does not provide direction (Rumiantsev et al., 2020). Especially when developing university teaching into inclusive student-centred practice, seemingly impermeable structures need to be rethought and adapted through agentic action taken by faculty and students. This edited book provides ample ideas and tools to re-work the existing structures in our higher education institutions.

8.2 Inclusive student-centred pedagogies

The authors of this book stressed that faculty are in a strong position to use inclusive pedagogies and lead by example to foster student agency. Through educating the new generation of academics and providing them with literacies and agency. Faculty have the power to give new hope for the future. Therefore, inclusive student-centred pedagogies provide a pathway to enrich our world (Molbaek, 2018). Student participation in education design is empowering students to voice their opinions about the learning process and supports decisions that shape their learning experience. Students who participate develop a strong sense of ownership and engagement which is essential for learning. Including students as partners in curricular decisions becomes essential for further developing an education system that promotes equity and fosters inclusion (Chapter 1). Crucial in developing university teaching towards inclusive practice are the competencies of faculty. The chapters in this book dive into critical aspects of teaching, such as assessments and the use of technologies for learning.

8.2.1 Assessment for learning

Some advocate for the backward design of teaching and learning. Considering what should be learned and how best to assess that learning can help to align all parts of the teaching

and learning process. This principle also is effective for designing inclusive teaching as inclusive student-centred pedagogies should also include inclusive assessment. Chapter 3 provided a description of inclusive assessment practices what to emphasize and what to pay extra attention to. Designing assessment forms that support the learning processes, formatively and continuously, will help students to reflect on their own learning. Specifically interesting insight was that inclusive assessment practices should cater to the variety of students' ways of knowing and learning. For faculty, this means to be culturally and linguistically literate, as nowadays student cohorts are in many ways diverse. The authors also provided suggestions for including students as co-creators of the assessment. The strong benefit is that the assessment will then be better aligned with the students cultural and linguistic backgrounds and their personal preferences. This potentially will provide better ways for students to show what they have learned compared to tests and assessments designed by faculty alone.

8.2.2 Digital equity

Chapter 4 described why and how digitally literate faculty are key to effectively conducting classes which are inclusive for all students. The main purpose is to prevent technology from being a barrier to educational opportunities. In order to achieve that purpose, the conversation about digital equity and taking actions to achieve inclusiveness is an ongoing process. Assuring and sustaining access for faculty and students to technology—hardware, software, and digital literacy—needs continuous attention, and abundant financial resources and development opportunities. In any contemporary higher education institute, a variety of on-campus, online, hybrid, and blended teaching formats will be provided (van der Rijst et al., 2023). For each mode of teaching different elements need to be taken into account when designing inclusive teaching. We recognise that there is a benefit to arranging alternative access for every student even when they are not able to come to campus. Other benefits are the ample opportunities to utilise a multitude of modalities in learning activities. This creates opportunities for students to select preferred modes of learning for the tasks

provided. Overall, faculty need to identify and remove barriers for students in order to allow access for all to the affordances higher education institutes provide.

8.2.3 Lesson redesign

In order to implement student-centred pedagogies, faculty will need to redesign their lessons, lectures, seminars, and workgroup sessions. Chapter 5 described a discourse analysis of faculty experiences with lesson redesign for inclusive practices. Practical issues and illustrative insight gave ample reflection on the redesign of lessons in higher education. Various challenges were identified, among which time constraints, resource limitations, and the need for additional faculty training in inclusive teaching. In addition to the benefit of making lesson plans adaptive, the redesign process also provides faculty with reflection on their own teaching and student learning. These reflections assist faculty in their development. Overall, the lesson redesign process not only amended the learning environments into conducive practices but also assisted faculty in their own personal growth.

8.2.4 Educational action research

In the chapter on educational action research, it was argued that action research is not only a process to accomplish change in teaching, but also to grow as a teacher and ultimately change higher education or even society at large (Chapter 7). Sustainable change occurs through collaborative discourse (cf. Rumiantsev et al., 2024). Conversations in a conducive environment in which all voices are heard and all can participate equally are the basis for any regenerative process. Action research utilises the principle that teaching is a continuous and iterative process. It is a critical inquiry approach to changing teaching practices and providing opportunities for faculty development. This inquisitive approach might also be of interest for rethinking and redesigning affordances for faculty to learn and develop their teaching. Academic developers might want to use action research in collaboration with faculty, students, and support staff to develop critical agency of all the stakeholders involved.

8.2.5 Peer observation of teaching

In the chapter on peer observation of teaching it was argued that faculty can effectively use peer observation as a tool for self-development (Chapter 5). However, before faculty in our universities can really benefit from peer observations, there is an urgent need for some systemic, cultural, and structural changes. First of all, peer observation should be considered as a formative and collaborative way to stimulate the growth of the observe and observant, as well as the institute as a whole. It should, however, not be used for the normative evaluation of teaching for programs or even individuals. The core learning principle behind peer observations is a reflection on practice (Schön, 1992). Both for the observer and for the observed the practice serves as a way to reflect on one's own practice and what is conceived as good teaching in the discipline. This practice can support a learning culture in the organisation. Second, peer observation of teaching fosters the attitude of continuous learning and improvement, which is relevant for the individual growth of faculty, and the continuous development of learning opportunities for students. Furthermore, shared observations and conceptions can stimulate collegial conversations about teaching and learning in the discipline and across disciplines. Overall, peer observations of teaching supports the growth of faculty's critical agency to change existing practices in their classrooms and to re-consider structures which for ages have seemed to be rigid but in fact are as permeable as any social construct.

8.3 Suggestion for practice

The chapters in this book provide ample suggestions for practice and show that each setting has its own needs and affordances. In general trustful conversations, empathy towards the other, and awareness of your own positionality concerning others' history and identity can help to develop one's own path. Further suggestions for developing inclusive student-centred practices are described for three stakeholder groups who have a special role in teaching and learning in higher education.

8.3.1 Suggestions for faculty and students

Generally, the process of re-developing teaching and learning is supported by a deep understanding of our positionality and what we can achieve. For example, through developing trustful long-term relationships, we can achieve strong sustainable change (Felten et al., 2023). Furthermore, having an open mind and a constructive attitude helps develop inclusive teaching and learning environments (Stevens et al., 2024; van der Rijst et al., 2019). These attributes are also helpful for being able to work together with students in redesigning teaching and learning. Redesigning teaching and learning, but also assessment and evaluation of teaching, with students as co-constructors can be most beneficial for developing sustainable inclusive teaching. Teachers should empower students so they can show their learning progress in various ways. Student feedback is essential for continuous faculty development, it is through feedback we learn (Christensen et al., 2023).

8.3.2 Suggestions for academic developers and designers

Academic developers and educational designers have a special role in our universities. They reside in the liminal space between educational knowledge and the disciplines. They cross bridges and close gaps between faculty in the disciplines and knowledge from educational research. They have the difficult task of continuously translating back and forth between theoretical educational concepts and actual educational practice. Residing between a rock and a hard place also provides some advantages and strengths. Academic developers have the ability and opportunity to build trustful relations and be the cement between the stones in the academic structure. The best suggestion for academic developers who aim to contribute to inclusive teaching and learning is to always aim to support faculty in their personal growth. In general, as an academic developer, you can direct them and show them, but you can never tell them what to do. Design helpful teaching approaches and innovative tools, show faculty how to work with those tools, and then let faculty decide for themselves when and how to use them in teaching and learning activities. Educational innovation is much more than the mere digitalization of teaching. As faculty need time and space to

experiment and develop, we also need to advocate for the institutional provision of sufficient professional space and time for faculty development in our institutes.

8.3.3 Suggestions for educational leadership and policy makers

Last, but not least, educational leaders and policy makers can provide space and time for faculty to develop and innovate their teaching and to grow as academics. This time and space is necessary for developing inclusive student-centred pedagogies. The circumstances under which faculty can function well within the university are those circumstances under which faculty can develop their own teaching philosophies. A university teaching vision can help to create a corporate identity and might be useful for mere brand development purposes. However, the real impact on teaching practice is through the practice of teaching with attention for every individual student, as opposed to teaching to the middle or teaching to the majority (mainstreaming). Policy making and leading an academic unit are supportive functions in the university. Staff in those roles should support teaching, research, and outreach and not confuse or overthrow them. Therefore, they should argue in favour of academic freedom and against government or policy control over teaching, research, and outreach. Leadership should support faculty and students to develop conducive and inclusive classroom practices. Furthermore, as the faculty members also serve as role models for students, establishing a diverse teaching staff is critical for creating inclusive teaching and learning. Having a diverse teaching staff enables us to expose students to a diversity of perspectives, which can contribute to more equitable and conducive educational learning environments (Doornkamp et al., 2019).

8.4 Concluding remark

This book described various resources and materials for developing university teaching into inclusive student-centred practices. But there is much more out there. Only through sharing our practices we can learn from each other and be inspired to change our teaching practices for the better. In short, the call for inclusive student-centred pedagogies is a call to continuously develop our teaching, to also pay close attention to voices that have been

unheard for too long, and to embrace the diversity in academia as a potential catalyst for the further creation of new knowledge in our disciples. There are many ways to reshape our teaching into inclusive practices, but most, if not all, are supported by trustful collegial conversations, empathy towards others, and the courage to reshape the academic system as agents of change.

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