Inclusive School Practices Toolkit

Q&A: Curriculum Adjustments Practical

This tool has been developed as part of the *Inclusive School Communities Project*, funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency. The project is led by JFA Purple Orange.

Introduction

The Inclusive School Communities Project hosted eight webinars in May and June 2020 on various topics including learning-at-home, curriculum adjustments, data-informed decision making, data collection methods, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Instruction (DI), and inclusive school practices. This included the 90-minute webinar titled ‘Curriculum Adjustments: A Practical Guide to Implementation’ presented by Loren Swancutt, which was delivered three times to different groups of participants (3, 17, 25 June 2020). This tool was written by Loren Swancutt following the webinars and provides brief responses to a selection of questions raised by participants. Readers are encouraged to visit the Inclusive School Communities website and watch the webinar recording that expands on the content in this tool <https://inclusiveschoolcommunities.org.au/resources/webinars>.

Equitable access to age-equivalent curriculum is a fundamental concept of inclusive education. Research demonstrates that when students living with disability are included in curriculum alongside their same age peers, they achieve increased results across a range of outcomes. Despite the benefits, curricular inclusion of students requiring such levels of adjustment poses a challenge of practice for teachers. The webinar responds to that challenge by providing a practical way to plan for the inclusion of all students in their age-equivalent curriculum. A facilitated process is modelled, and webinar participants had the opportunity to engage in the practice.

Questions and Answers (Q&A)

1. **Why is it important for teachers to have clarity of the curriculum intent and its flexibility before considering curriculum adjustments?**

Before teachers can make authentic and appropriate decisions about how to equitably support students to access and participate in the curriculum, they first need to know what the curriculum is demanding. Without clarity of what students need to know, understand and be able to do, they are at risk of making assumptions about student potential, and/or implementing strategies that will jeopardise the learning intent. Once teachers are clear on the curriculum demands, they can then consider what students will need in order to engage with and progress through the content. Being aware of the flexibility of standards-based curriculum, allows teachers to implement a variety of responsive strategies that result in age-equivalent content being accessible to all students.

1. **How can we support classroom teachers to build their confidence and capability in regards to making curriculum adjustments?**

Job-embedded, contextual professional learning is the most responsive way for teachers to increase their professional knowledge and capability. That is, working alongside teachers to model the processes and practices that are necessary, and doing so in a manner that directly relates to their teaching experiences and student cohorts. Co-planning and co-teaching, instructional rounds, and instructional coaching are all ways that teachers can be supported to build their confidence and capability in this area.

1. **How do you determine what alternate level of curriculum is suitable for a student who is accessing substantial curriculum adjustments?**

This process is evidence-driven. Data of the student’s capability in relation to content of a learning area should be gathered. The data should represent what the student knows, understands and is able to do when high-quality teaching practice has been implemented. The student data can then be used to map their learning progression on the scope of achievement. Once strengths and challenges have been identified, decisions can be made in regards to what level best represents the next steps in learning for the student.

1. **Is providing alternate/varied summative assessment tasks fair?**

Yes. The definition of fair is not about all students getting the same, but all students getting what they need. It is based on equity over equality. The standards-based curriculum supports this principle in that it is deliberately designed to be flexible in how students engage with and demonstrate their learning. It stipulates what students need to learn, but does not specify how they need to learn it. This allows teachers to make responsive decisions about curriculum input and output that are fair and equitable. Student performance should be judged against the curriculum standard, not against other students. This means that student demonstration of learning can occur in diverse ways without impacting the integrity of the curriculum intent.

1. **How can teachers provide substantial and extensive curriculum adjustments alongside peers during lesson delivery?**

There are a variety of pedagogical approaches that support the delivery of instruction in a way that is responsive to the diverse curriculum needs of students. An important aspect is to align the variation of content complexity so that it is evident what the knowledge and skills of the lesson will look like for each student. The lesson can then be designed using universal principles. That is, developing tasks in ways that provide for a variety of access and participation, and include a range of scaffolds and supports. In addition, approaches like station teaching allow for different tasks and activities to be facilitated with varying degrees of teacher instruction; and peer-tutoring and cooperative learning supports all students to engage in socially valued ways. When using an explicit instruction framework, variances in complexity can be built upon during the ‘I do’ phase, with adjusted questioning, scaffolding, and targeted teaching being implemented during the ‘We do’ phase. During the ‘You do’ phase, students can engage in similar tasks that have been adjusted in complexity.

More Information

**Inclusive Education for the 21st Century** provides a rigorous overview of the foundational principles of inclusive education, and the barriers to access and participation. It explores evidence-based strategies that support diverse learners, including specific changes in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices, and the use of data. Loren is the author of Chapter 9 Making adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. https://www.booktopia.com.au/inclusive-education-for-the-21st-century-linda-graham/ebook/9781760873448.html

**School Inclusion – From Theory to Practice** is a website created by Loren to share and unpack school-level design, implementation and leadership processes that support the realisation of inclusive education in Australian schools and school systems. https://school-inclusion.com/

**School Inclusion Network for Educators** is an initiative of All Means All, a nationwide multi-stakeholder alliance for Inclusive Education. SINE is a national network for education professionals seeking to ensure that they support diverse learners in their classrooms and schools. SINE has a closed, Facebook group with supporting resources available via the All Means All website. https://allmeansall.org.au/sine-school-inclusion-network-educators/

The **Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE)** is an initiative bringing together organisations that share a commitment to advance Inclusive Education in Australia and across State and Territory education systems including government and non-government schools. https://acie.org.au/

Acknowledgement

This tool was written by Loren Swancutt, National Convenor of School Inclusion Network for Educators (SINE) and founder of School Inclusion - From Theory to Practice. Loren is a substantive Head of Inclusive Schooling at a government high school in North Queensland. She has 11 years of teaching experience across both primary and secondary settings. Loren is a doctoral candidate at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Visit Loren's website for more information http://school-inclusion.com/

