



## **Inclusive Teaching in Universities**

For students who are LGBTIQ+

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## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
"Queering" the Classroom	3
Western Australian Examples	4
Example 1: Centre for Human Rights Education (Curtin University)	4
Example 2: History (Curtin University)	4
Example 3: Cultural Studies (Curtin University)	5
Example 4: Primary Education (Edith Cowan University)	5
Example 5: Law (University of WA)	5
Example 6: Project Peacock (University of WA)	5
Key Findings	6
Key Finding 1: Perspective	6
Key Finding 2: Lived Experience	6
Key Finding 3: Embedding	6
References	7
Appendix 1: Respectful Communication	8
Appendix 2: Student Questionnaire	9

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## Introduction

Exclusion of particular social groups occurs in hierarchical power systems that are based on the innate characteristics of a socially accepted majority. Heteronormativity deems lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, or queer (LGBTIQ+) people to be socially deviant (McBeth, Nolan & Rice, 2011). LGBTIQ+ people have historically been devalued because of socially constructed “failings”, and as a result often experience discrimination that can have serious effects on their health and wellbeing (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012).

While universities are often thought of as progressive and inclusive settings, LGBTIQ+ people continue to face interpersonal and institutional discrimination (Ward & Gale, 2016). These students will often experience concerns for their safety and high levels of “minority stress”, which stems from this conflict between dominant and minority values (Mirowsky & Ross, 1989; Pearlin, 1989). As a result, this population has higher than average university drop-out rates (Ward & Gale, 2016).

Offord and Ryan (2012) suggest that these concerns become more relevant in formal education systems when a pedagogy of human rights (as opposed to a discrete subject) is employed, grounded in critical explorations and experiences. Students must be “introduced to a living environment of human rights living and practice, where the social, political, and cultural dimensions of their life are recognised, validated, challenged, and transformed.”

This report will briefly discuss the theoretical underpinnings of “queering” curriculum in a university context, before providing a range of examples of inclusive practice work currently being implemented by Western Australian academics. Finally, the key findings from this data are presented to provide academics with a three core concepts for introducing inclusive practice into their own teaching. A comprehensive review of curriculum is beyond the scope of this report, however *The Higher Education Academy* offers a high level online guide for inclusive curriculum by subject (Morgan, 2011).

### “Queering” the Classroom

In a study documenting their experiences at The University of Western Australia (Dau & Strauss, 2016), many LGBT students said they did not disclose their identity due to fear of discrimination (53.7%), their identity had disrupted their academic progress (20%) or ability to socialise (30.8%), and that they had experienced (15.9%) or witnessed (24.9%) discrimination on the basis of identity. Some also reported that their learning experiences had been less than ideal. While universities work to address many of these environmental issues through staff-led “Ally Networks” and student-led “Queer Departments”, there has been less of a focus on addressing issues in the classroom (Ward & Gale, 2016).

What does it mean to “queer the classroom”? Queer theory, which was a development of gay / lesbian and (to a lesser degree) feminist politics, was first articulated in the 1990s. The scope of it is broader than sexuality, gender, and bodies as it disrupts societal assumptions about any existing oppositional binaries and fixed identities (Hill, 2004; Watson, 2005). As such, rather than simply illuminating the problems marginalised groups face within dominant hierarchies, queering the classroom should create new narratives by inviting all students (not just those who are marginalised themselves) to think critically about how their own lives are constructed within a heteronormative world (Allen, 2015). Educators must also engage in their own process of accountability and reflexivity where they are “constantly thinking about how they are thinking and teaching while they are doing it” (Hawke & Offord, 2011).

The University of Birmingham have developed a [best practice guide](#) specifically for LGBTIQ+ inclusivity in curriculum (Ward & Gale, 2016). Their model focuses on inclusive language, positive role models, and diverse curriculum content layered with Banks’ (1994) three-level approach of building awareness combined with additive and transformative measures (see Table 1).

Table 1: The Ward-Gale Model for LGBTQ-inclusivity in Higher Education

	LANGUAGE	ROLE MODELS	CURRICULUM CONTENT
INCREASING AWARENESS	Avoiding abusive and discriminatory language	Signposting to LGBTQ organisations and events	Basic acknowledgement of gender and sexual diversity
ADDITIVE APPROACHES	Avoiding hetero-normative and cis-normative language	Access to mentors for LGBTQ-identified students	Inclusion of topics, themes and readings about LGBTQ identities
TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE	Critical engagement with queer/trans inclusive language	Role models and allies in the teaching and learning environment	Critical approaches to pedagogy, supporting social engagement and action/inclusive professional practice

## Western Australian Examples

In 2019, a small group of staff from Curtin University and the University of WA came together to discuss their work on LGBTIQ+ inclusive teaching. At that meeting, it was suggested that a larger network consisting of academic staff from all WA universities be developed to share and discuss ideas. In 2020, the first meeting of the “Curriculum Queering Network” was held with good attendance and continues to communicate online until such time as it can meet again in person. These examples are provided as a result of consultation with this group.

### Example 1: Centre for Human Rights Education (Curtin University)

The Centre for Human Rights Education (CHRE) is a centre for research, postgraduate teaching, critical scholarship and advocacy. Through these channels, the CHRE gives oxygen to human rights issues that are often unexplored, unregarded, complex, and derived from multiple contexts. Staff collectively see it as their responsibility as human rights educators to foster a “learning community” culture, whereby their own diverse lived experiences and those of students are incorporated as part of the learning experience. In addition to this, all course curriculum is designed with explicit inclusion of LGBTIQ+ and PWD perspectives (readings) and lived experiences (guest lectures), which informs discussions throughout the course. See *Appendix 1* for an example of a message sent by Associate Professor Caroline Fleay to students at the beginning of each semester to ensure that respectful communication is maintained given the potential for exposure to so many different perspectives.

### Example 2: History (Curtin University)

The history program is currently undergoing a curriculum queering process consisting of the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives, opportunities for students to bring their own LGBTIQ+ lived experiences to their work, and ongoing staff education on appropriate language and LGBTIQ+ historical figures. In addition to this, the process is being promoted to students, the broader school / faculty, university management, and externally. Dr Bri McKenzie has also developed a 90-minute curriculum queering workshop, which was presented at the annual *WA Teaching & Learning Forum 2020*. This workshop will be made available to all Curtin staff.

### **Example 3: Cultural Studies (Curtin University)**

“Queer Queries” is an informal cultural studies cross-university reading group that explores queer texts on a monthly basis. It provides an opportunity for university students and staff at all levels and from all disciplines to be exposed to LGBTIQ+ perspectives and lived experiences in a low-pressure environment. In addition to this, Dr Maddy Magladry incorporates LGBTIQ+ perspectives and personal lived experiences into their teaching practice. See *Appendix 2* for an example of a questionnaire distributed at the beginning of each semester to get to know students and expose them to content that is inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people and PWD.

### **Example 4: Primary Education (Edith Cowan University)**

The undergraduate primary education program is currently being audited for LGBTIQ+ inclusion. Several units have seamlessly incorporated the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ perspectives, historical figures, and contemporary lived experiences as they relate to each topic (as opposed to a focus on identities). Students have been very receptive to this approach. However, many other units contain only superficial LGBTIQ+ inclusion (a specific focus for one week) or none at all. Dr David Rhodes is leading this audit process, with a view to embedding LGBTIQ+ inclusion in all areas of the course in line with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership standards. As such, this work will also have implications for teaching across all disciplines in a higher education context. It should be noted that progress on this work has been enabled by structural changes and support at the university level.

### **Example 5: Law (University of WA)**

*Gay Humanism and Higher Education - A Rights Based Approach (2019)* by Assistant Professor Melville Thomas includes discussion on university inclusivity for LGBTIQ+ law students:

*Gay Humanism links traditional humanities disciplines, such as history, law, literature and jurisprudence with emerging disciplinary fields, such as cultural studies and gay and lesbian studies, to assert a new gay humanism for educators. The human rights topics will include questions that are currently being debated nationally and internationally as well as barriers to gay peoples' human dignity. The book encourages interested students, academics, legal professionals and policy makers to tackle the questions of how domestic law can reflect international human rights law and standards for the benefit of LGBTIQ people in the post-AIDS world. A trans-disciplinary focus as developed in this book to compliment established disciplines such as law, history, literature and psychology may lead to a fundamental change in higher education in the future, where lesbian and gay world-views are elevated to an equal footing with the dominant learning culture and not marginalized by centuries-long unquestioned assumptions of traditional educational discourses.*

### **Example 6: Project Peacock (University of WA)**

The university offers several inclusive practice workshops to staff, covering topics such as unconscious bias, ethical intervention, LGBTIQ+ allyship. Project Peacock was recently launched as an extension of the in-person “Ally” training. It is a series of three self-paced online modules designed to support staff to be more inclusive by developing a deeper understanding of the LGBTIQ+ population and encouraging practical actions to support LGBTIQ+ students. Central to the modules are videos of students, staff, alumni, and members of the wider community sharing their lived experiences. Project Peacock is intended to be made available for use by other universities in the near future.

## Key Findings

The research, theory, and examples discussed in this report support the notion that effective inclusive teaching for LGBTIQ+ people in universities must have their perspectives and lived experiences deeply embedded in the learning experience, as discussed by Offord and Ryan (2012). As such, those three key findings are presented below and brought to life by Pedersen, et al.'s (2011) "ingredients for teaching anti-prejudice".

### Key Finding 1: Perspective

Human rights pedagogy must be grounded in **critical explorations and experiences** where all dimensions of the lives of those participating (educators and student alike) are "recognised, validated, challenged, and transformed" (Allen, 2015; Chinn, 2014; Hawke & Offord, 2011; McKinney, 2014; Offord & Ryan, 2012). Ward and Gale's (2016) model refers to this as "diverse curriculum". In the examples, academics ensure that a range of historical figures / readings / discussions are employed throughout the learning experience *in the context of their subject area*.

The "perspective" ingredients for teaching anti-prejudice (Pedersen, et al., 2011) are:

- Commonality and difference: It is important for students to feel similarities with LGBTIQ+ people for empathy, as well as to openly discuss differences to avoid any notions of homogeneity.
- Group identities: Encourage students to reflect on how their own identities are constructed within a heteronormative ableist world, and how that may have formed any prejudices they hold.
- Source and function of attitudes: Students should first understand where their attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ people came from (e.g. family values, media, etc) in order to deconstruct them.

### Key Finding 2: Lived Experience

An environment of **human rights living and practice** is central to human rights pedagogy (Allen, 2015; Offord & Ryan, 2012). Learning communities draw upon engagement with the diverse lived experiences of educators, students, and guests to affect empathy and understanding. It is important in these forums to explicitly maintain respectful communication given the potential for exposure to different perspectives. Ward and Gale's (2016) model refers to this as "positive role models". In the examples, academics draw upon their own / colleagues lived experiences as well as those of their students throughout the learning experience *in the context of their subject area*.

The "lived experience" ingredients for teaching anti-prejudice (Pedersen, et al., 2011) are:

- Involving the audience: The lived experiences of students are just as valuable as those of educators and guests, and gives them a sense of responsibility for the process.
- Contact: Personal contact with individual LGBTIQ+ people is a powerful way to facilitate positive attitudes and reduce prejudice toward these cohorts more broadly.
- Multiple voices: When a variety of people from different backgrounds repeat similar themes, it is more likely to create sustainable change in attitudes.

### Key Finding 3: Embedding

A **pedagogy of human rights** must be employed, as opposed to viewing human rights as a discrete subject (Offord & Ryan, 2012). Structural support at a broader university level is an important enabler of this work, which may include advocacy at executive levels, community-building, and staff education programs. Ward and Gale's (2016) model refers to components of this as "inclusive language". In the examples, academics ensure that this work is embedded throughout the learning experience *in the context of their subject area* rather than simply including a superficial one-week focus.

The "embedding" ingredients for teaching anti-prejudice (Pedersen, et al., 2011) are:

- Provision of information: Enabling staff to understand the importance of inclusive teaching for LGBTIQ+ people is an important starting point for them to engage in the process.
- Alternative talk: Part of the education process for staff will be how to use inclusive language.
- Evaluation: Formally documenting and regularly evaluating inclusive teaching work can provide valuable information over time for the university and other educators.

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# Appendix 1: Respectful Communication

Associate Professor Caroline Fleay, Centre for Human Rights Education (Curtin University)

*As we progress through the unit, just a reminder about the need for respectful communication.*

*Before posting, do think through how you express your views on what we explore in this unit, and your views on what others have posted. Unfortunately communicating in writing online means that we can't see how what we have said is received by others, so the need for care in what we are writing and sharing with others is really important.*

*All of us here at the Centre consider that there are important approaches to discussion to keep in mind when we engage as a human rights advocate, which includes engaging with each other. These approaches are based on deep listening, open mindedness, respectful dialogue, care with language and having empathy for others. And it means being mindful that one of the basic problems in the world is a denial of human diversity and lived experience.*

*The onus on us when we may not have ever met or known, for example, someone who has come here as an asylum seeker, is to reach out with empathy and try to understand their experience of living in a world where they do not have the protection of their state. To do this, we have to learn, be informed, and carefully navigate how to understand their lived experience, and think through what kind of language we should use in discussions about this. This principle exists for all markers of differences, whether based on race, religion, gender, sexuality, age, able-bodiedness, and so on.*

*We have a duty of care for others when engaging – doing no harm – especially if we don't understand their situation. As we go through this unit, if any of you are feeling unsafe, or unsure, about sharing anything on Discussion Board, please do let me know, I would be happy to chat about it with you.*



## **Appendix 2: Student Questionnaire**

Dr Maddy Magladry, Cultural Studies (Curtin University)

*Help me get to know you!*

*Student ID:*

*What is your preferred name?*

*What pronouns do you want me to use? (she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, he/him/his or others)*

*What course are you studying, and which year?*

*Is there anything else you would like me to know about you?*

*Is there anything you need for the classroom to be safer, accessible or more comfortable?*

***Thank you! Please fold this up and hand it back to me before class ends.***

***Looking forward to working with you this semester.***