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|  | Inclusive practiceAssessment for learning |

*Inclusive practice* is the fifth in a series of professional development experiences on **Assessment for learning.** It is based on information placed in the existing curriculum in Queensland and the QCAA web page titled *Catering for diversity*.

*Inclusive practice* provides a perspective that will stimulate conversation as to how *Assessment* ***for*** *learning* can support inclusive practice. Following the reading are some questions to consider.

The full readings are available at the given website.

**References**

The QCAA web page *Catering for diversit*y [www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/18307.html](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/18307.html)

*Assessment* ***for*** *learning* has demonstrated the capacity to reduce achievement gaps as it enhances student performance particularly for low achievers. To maximise the impact of *assessment* ***for*** *learning*, teachers should ensure they are using inclusive practice, which creates equitable opportunities for all by differentiating instruction and assessment where necessary.

Teachers should plan for inclusive practice to ensure they are meeting the needs of all their students including those who are gifted or who have English as a second language (ESL), learning difficulties or disabilities. When planning, they should consider the impact of the contextual and academic demands of the assessment and classroom organisation on their students and plan for equitable access.

Contextual demands include:

* *Background or cultural knowledge required to complete the assessment.* Students of different ethnicities have varied cultural knowledges. If specific cultural knowledge is required to complete the assessment, the teacher will need to ensure that it is shared. This may occur through small group sharing, peer tutoring or individualised instruction.
* *Social skills required to complete the assessment.* If the assessment is to be completed in groups, teachers need to establish that all students are socially able to contribute to a group situation. Very young children, students with speech–language difficulties, students who have until recently been home-schooled, ESL, gifted, hearing impaired, and Autistic Spectrum Disorder students may not have the skills or feel comfortable in contributing to a social situation, thereby reducing their performance. If this happens, consider pairs rather than groups, partner with an adult, or explicitly specify and teach group roles and provide practice and feedback opportunities before assessment.
* *Physical mobility required to complete the assessment*, including gross- and fine-motor skills. Students with visual, auditory, speech–language or physical impairment, and students with delayed gross- or fine-motor skills may all be disadvantaged by assessments if the teacher hasn’t considered the contextual demands of the task. Adaptive technologies, supporting adults or peers or modifying the task can scaffold learning and performance.

Academic demands include:

* *Subject-specific knowledge, processes and skills required to complete the assessment*. It is important here to consider whether all students have sufficient ability to show what they know. Students who have had prolonged absences, have moved schools or have learning difficulties or intellectual impairments may not have enough prerequisite knowledge to complete the task. Task modifications could include breaking the task into smaller parts, allowing notes or other learning aids to be used, lengthening learning time before the task is completed, or intensive tutorials to enable prerequisite knowledge acquisition.
* *Generic knowledge, processes and skills required to complete the task*. If completion of the task requires skills, knowledge and processes from other disciplines it is important that the teacher check that students have acquired these before assessment. It is also easy to assume that students have study, assignment-writing and other organisational skills, which may not be the case. Students with Attention Deficit Disorder benefit from structured routines and explicit modelling of these skills.
* *Literacy demands of the assessment.* Most tasks require functional literacy, so it is easy to disadvantage ESL students, pupils who have difficulty in reading or writing and those with speech–language impairment. Consider whether it is these literacy skills that you are assessing at this time. If not, consider supporting the student by reading the instructions and allowing them to dictate responses either to a person or on computer. Vocabulary banks, dictionaries, tense, synonym and antonym charts, cloze passages, graphic organisers, generic structure scaffolds and explicit models all help students write and should be built into classroom learning experiences and remain displayed wherever possible. This will prepare these students for the task.

**Classroom organisation** includes:

* *Whole-class/small-group/pair/individual instruction*. A balanced model supports all students best. All students benefit from whole class as they have the chance to learn from others’ responses, but less confident students and those with short attention spans are less likely to actively contribute. Teachers also need to consider their placement in relation to auditory and visually impaired students to ensure they have full access to the lesson. Small-group and individual instruction enable more explicit skill development as the teacher can home in on the competence of the student and target teaching to move them along. Paired work enables practice of learnt skills with a peer.
* *Visual/auditory/kinaesthetic mode of instruction*. Teachers should ensure that they use all modes when teaching new knowledge and skills so that students can learn through their preferred mode. It also allows students with a visual, auditory or physical impairment to participate actively using one of their more developed capabilities. Equally important is students having the opportunity to demonstrate their learning during assessment using their preferred mode.
* *Teacher-directed or inquiry mode of learning*. Both are required to learn and practice new knowledge and skill. Rules and parameters should always be given when starting inquiry mode to focus students, and additional risk assessments may be necessary in some activities, e.g. laboratory work, to ensure all students are safe.
* *Ability groups/friendship groups/interest groups/homogenous groups*. Groups should be fit for purpose. Ability groups may suit when a teacher is seeking to focus on a particular competency and move students to the next level such as guided reading lessons. Homogenous groups enable students to see more and less successful models and learn from each other. Interest groups are desirable when teachers have negotiated learning so that students studying the same content or demonstrating learning in the same manner can maximise learning time. Friendship groups support risk-taking when students are engaging in new learning.

If a teacher is unsure of the possible impact on a student, they should not assume but rather ask the student or guardian, or alternatively provide an opportunity to observe the impact in a non-testing environment. A teacher focused on inclusive practice will create as much flexibility in the assessment as they can whilst retaining its validity and reliability, for example an assessment which is assessing writing requires every student to write in some form, but an assessment that doesn’t specifically assess writing may allow a student to respond verbally. By offering a choice in demonstration modes, a teacher is inviting all students to contribute their best effort. This lowers anxiety, increases motivation and makes success more achievable for all.

## Key ideas

* Inclusive practice benefits all students.
* Inclusive practice requires a teacher to consider contextual and academic demands and classroom organisation in light of their students’ needs.
* Inclusive practice makes assessment as flexible as possible whilst maintaining reliability and validity.
* Assessment *for* learning can only achieve its full potential in an inclusive classroom in which all students are motivated to contribute.

## Questions to consider:

1. Consider your next planned assessment item in light of contextual demands, academic demands and classroom organisation. Who might be privileged and marginalised by the assessment? How can you alter it to give all students the opportunity to do their best?
2. What are the preferred learning modes of your students? You may wish to use a class list and write beside each student their preferred mode as you observe it.
3. Are there any inclusive practices that you want to add to your repertoire? What more do you need to know in order to try them, and how will you find out?