

# Harnessing diversity based on different rationales: Exploring lecturers' instructional design choices in progress

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## Abstract

In higher education institutions, students and staff with increasingly diverse walks of life learn and work together. In response, universities frame diversity as a strategic asset, positioning *difference* as a strength in the light of different, conflicting, priorities. This study systematically explores why and how lecturers in a superdiverse context aim to unlock these alleged strengths in the context of specific courses. Taking a longitudinal approach, the study sheds light on lecturers' rationales for harnessing diversity across classrooms and how these rationales inform instructional design choices. Building on this exploration, we offer a model for holistic, agile instructional design that supports lecturers in exploring and making intentional design choices to harness diversity across the classroom in dialogue with their team and students. Our findings underline the need to bridge and synthesise multiple rationales to design purposeful learning experiences that resonate with all stakeholders involved.

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## Practitioner Notes

1. Lecturers intend to harness diversity across the classroom for different reasons, grounded in societal and educational rationales – and in the context of specific modules and student bodies.
2. Lecturer teams have a substantial number of potential levers to pull and adjust when shaping conditions for students to exchange and engage with diverse perspectives and experiences.
3. Teams should explore rationales, needs and interest across the classroom to design and develop opportunities for multi-perspective engagement, interaction and reflexivity that work for all involved.
4. This paper provides a holistic and agile instructional design model that supports lecturers in harnessing diversity across the classroom in practice.
5. Teams should make intentional choices to seek out diverse perspectives and create space for responsive adjustment as integrated part of their instructional design process.

## Keywords

Curriculum design, diversity, purpose, critical engagement, employability

## Introduction

Students and staff with increasingly diverse walks of life learn and work together in higher education institutions (HEIs) across the world. In the wake of global demographic shifts and migration trends, *diversity* has become an important characteristic of campuses, driving increasingly urgent diversity and inclusion agendas worldwide (OECD, 2023). Within organisations, such as HEIs, diversity refers to a descriptor of workforces and student bodies that denotes multiple and dynamic differences and similarities between people (Kirton and Greene, 2022). Kirton and Greene (2022) note that diversity can refer to 'a huge array of differences' that may be social group based, such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, physical ability and sexual orientation, as well as individual characteristics, such as personality, interests, talents, competences, values and experience. This complex, multi-faceted diversity is particularly prominent in superdiverse areas, where university populations mirror complex local demographics. Vertovec (2007) explains that superdiverse populations are characterised by a dynamic interplay of variables amongst multi- origin, transnationally connected and socio-economically varied people. In response, HEIs frame diversity as a strategic asset, positioning *difference* as a valuable resource (Mittelmeier et al., 2023; Ambagts- van Rooijen et al., 2024). However, as noted by Gaisch (2020) and Van Hende (2024), different individuals and stakeholder groups within HEIs interpret this alleged 'strength' in different, potentially conflicting, ways in line with their priorities towards universities' educational, humanitarian and societal missions.

### Building on siloed recommendations for careful Instructional Design

Lecturers are widely acknowledged as key actors in shaping inclusive learning environments and harnessing the potential strength of diversity in Higher Education (HE) (Hockings, 2011; Li, 2024; Teekens, 2003; Weisssova et al., 2024). It is well established that students do not automatically benefit from diverse classrooms by 'osmosis' (Lauridsen, 2020; Oonk et al., 2019). Instead, meaningful interaction across differences requires 'careful design' of the learning experience (Carroll, 2015; Poort, 2020). Consequently, substantial attention has been paid to lecturers' willingness and motivation to 'deal with' diversity, investigating diversity perspectives and underlying paradigms (Mittelmeier et al., 2023; Van den Hende & Riezenbos, 2023) and how relate to student success (Middelkoop & Meerman, 2014; De Leersnyder et al., 2021) and lecturers' willingness to adapt pedagogical practices and curricular choices (Prieto, 2020; Wolfe et al., 2018). Studies suggest that such willingness can be affected by disciplinary, demographic and professional background as well as contextual factors (Calikoglu et al., 2022; Pizaro Milian & Wijesingha, 2023; Ramdas et al., 2025). However, lecturers' individual rationales for recognizing and leveraging diversity often remain unexplored or merely implied. As a result, it is not clear why 'willing' lecturers decide to recognise and leverage diversity across their classrooms and how lecturers' rationales inform their design decisions in the context of specific courses.

Although lecturers' reasons for harnessing diversity remain unclear, numerous studies and idealised lecturer profiles call on them to unlock the potential of their *international, intercultural, inclusive, multilingual, interdisciplinary, cross-boundary* and *mixed* classrooms. Notably, these recommendations stem from overlapping, yet siloed discourses, such as Internationalisation of the Curriculum at Home (Dimitrov & Haque, 2016; Ambagts- van Rooijen et al., 2024), critical pedagogy and decolonization (Killick & Foster, 2021; Misiaszek, 2025), Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (Ramdas et al., 2025; Sanchez-Dias et al., 2024) and education for innovation and

entrepreneurship (Chen et al., 2022; Oonk et al., 2019). Consequently, recommendations are often generic, case-based and grounded in expert perspectives, echoing their discourse's paradigms and theoretical underpinnings (Ambagts- van Rooijen et al., 2024). Moreover, they overlook the complex, messy reality of teaching, where diversity perspectives are often situational, fluid, dialogic (Gaisch, 2019) and design choices pragmatic, ad hoc and based on implicit rationales (De Louw et al., 2024; Louvel, 2013; Priestley et al., 2015). Notably, scholars problematise the gap between institutional narratives, siloed recommendations and day-to-day realities, signalling the lack of comprehensive, longitudinal studies into instructional design for diverse classrooms (Poort & Okken, 2024; Ramdas et al., 2025).

**Figure 1**

*GLAID model (reproduced with the author's consent)*

Design, evaluation and re-design of Group Learning Activities using the Group Learning Activity Instructional Design framework (De Hei, Strijbos, Sjoer and Admiraal, 2016) **			
Step 1 <i>Analyse</i>	<b>Determine:</b> Student characteristics, Teachers' characteristics, Curriculum characteristics, Collaborative premise, Global goals		
Step 2 <i>Design</i>	<b>Interaction</b> (declarative and procedural (domain) knowledge, social, methodological activities)	<b>Learning objectives and outcomes</b> (goal setting, content of learning)	<b>Assessment</b> (means, criteria)
Step 3a <i>Develop (didactics)</i>	<b>Task characteristics</b> (Kind of activities, phases/ sequencing, duration/ frequency of group meetings, performance control)	<b>Structuring</b> (A priori, during GLA, reflection and evaluation)	<b>Guidance</b> (executor, teachers' role, communication mode, duration and timing)
Step 3b <i>Develop (logistics)</i>	<b>Group Constellation</b> (number of groups, group size, heterogeneous or homogeneous, group duration)	<b>Facilities</b> (learning resources, technology resources, space and time)	
Step 4 <i>Implement</i>	Monitoring the instructional process		
Step 5 <i>Evaluate</i>	Evaluating the processes and outcomes		

\*\* Alignment is the key to an effective design. Align the components within each step (horizontal alignment) and align each step with decisions taken in earlier steps (vertical alignment).

### Systematically exploring Instructional Design in practice

In the field of educational sciences, instructional design (ID) models have been developed to guide the systematic development of effective and engaging learning experiences (Merrill, 2013). A widely recognised model is ADDIE, which presents ID as a holistic, agile process outlining five steps: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation (Smith & Ragan, 2020; Van Tiem et al., 2012). Building on this model, De Hei (2016) developed the Group Learning Activity Instructional Design (GLAID) framework. GLAID is primarily developed to support the systematic design of collaborative learning activities, resonating with constructivist pedagogies

that emphasise learning through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework positions an analysis of stakeholders and the conditions and premise for interaction as the starting point for aligned pedagogical, logistical and quality management decisions. Building on earlier studies (De Hei et al., 2020; De Hei et al., 2025), we used GLAID as a lens to explore ID choices in diverse learning environments.

## **Context and scope**

This study took place within a Dutch university of applied sciences (UASes) situated in a superdiverse region. Echoing Vertovec (2007), the university's student and staff population is not only characterised by students' and staff's diverse ethnic and geographical backgrounds, but also by the significant internal differences within ethnic groups. Although institutional numbers are not publicly available, national numbers show that 8% of students in Dutch UASes are international students (Ministerie van OCW, 2025a) and 34% of all first years have a migrant background (Ministerie van OCW, 2025b). Seeing that the latter percentage is significantly higher in programs related to law, administration and business (CBS, 2024), we focused on programs in the business and law/public administration faculties.

In a parallel study (Ambagts, 2026), we found that lecturers across both faculties recognise multiple, potentially intersecting dimensions of diversity across their student bodies, including ethnic, geographical, socio-economic and educational backgrounds, geographical mobility, language proficiencies, religion, work experience and many others. To explore how lecturers harness any kind of difference(s) through design choices, we approach diversity as a broad, multi-faceted concept in the current study. Echoing Kirton and Green (2022), we define diversity as multiple, overlapping, group-based and individual differences and similarities between people across the learning environment.

In this study, we aimed to move past siloed recommendations for 'ideal' lecturers and explore actual lecturers' ID process in action. In this UAS, lecturer teams are responsible for delivering pre-scheduled courses. Annually, lecturers are assigned to coordinate and/or deliver courses with pre-determined learning outcomes and assessments. Typically, course coordinators lead the redesign and preparation of course iterations in the weeks prior to the course. We focused on this semi-structured, iterative and bottom-up process, as it represents the bulk of curriculum (re)design in this and similar HEIs. Following a diverse group of lecturers during the preparation, delivery and evaluation of ten courses in seven different programmes, we aimed to uncover their rationales for harnessing diversity and in a longitudinal setting explore their ID choices in the context of specific modules. We ask, how do lecturers in a superdiverse university of applied sciences harness diversity across the classroom through purposeful instructional design?

**Research Question 1.** Which rationales do lecturers identify to harness diversity across the classroom, as part of a purposeful module (re)design process?

**Research Question 2.** Which ID choices do lecturers make to harness diversity across the classroom in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of specific modules?

**Research Question 3.** How do lecturers' rationales and ID choices relate to each other?

## Method

### Design

To address these questions, we took a longitudinal, qualitative design, combining (1) structured interviews at the beginning of the course, (2) structured observations of facilitated course design sessions and (3) reflective, semi-structured evaluation interviews. The combination of these methods enabled us to produce a fuller account of lecturers' intentions, considerations and actual choices over a longer period of time. Moreover, it enabled us to complement and triangulate data gathered through each method, enhancing completeness, validity and credibility (Clark et al., 2021, p. 557).

### Instruments

We used structured interviews prior to the first design session, we (1) determined whether participants' met our inclusion criteria, (2) gathered the background information reflected below, (3) managed expectations for the design sessions and parallel study and (4) asked for informed consent. During two semesters, we also organised four 'design labs,' inviting lecturer duos to rethink specific, upcoming courses with the explicit aim to harness diversity across the classroom more intentionally. Together with experienced educational developers, we developed four sessions, including structured, dialogical activities, based on a combination of design thinking (Brown & Katz, 2009) and GLAID (De Hei et al., 2016). Mirroring respondents' course preparations, these facilitated activities created space to stimulate and observe intentional choices in all steps of the ID process. In each session, we centralised the challenge to *'purposefully recognise, accommodate and leverage the diversity across their mixed student bodies, including students with different national, cultural and/or educational backgrounds in the design and facilitation of education'*, echoing our definition of the international classroom (Ambagts- van Rooijen et al., 2024). Throughout the sessions, the lead researcher used a semi-structured observation to register lecturers' choices and dialogues. Periodically, both facilitators reviewed and complemented our observations to add to their completeness and validity. After the delivery of their (re)designed course, we invited participants to evaluate their ID choices in a reflective, semi structured interview. We used a canvas based on the GLAID framework (De Hei et al, 2016) and our Purposeful International Classroom Competences (Ambagts- van Rooijen et al., 2024) to frame and guide the interviews, asking probing questions based on our earlier observations to elicit examples and deepen reflections whenever needed.

### Sample

To gather data on the rationales and choices of a fairly representative sample of lecturers, we set out to recruit lecturers in two different faculties (Business and Law & Public Administration), both holding programmes with local and international graduate attributes and ditto student and lecturer populations. We only included respondents who (1) signed up as a duo, (2) had the intention and mandate to (re)design and implement a course during the timespan of the study, (3) perceived a need, or opportunity to harness students' diversity in their course. We took a purposive, sequential sampling method (Clark et al., 2021, p. 378-379). Initially, we attracted potential respondents with invitations, shared via the universities' online portal, internal newsletters and a direct mail to

relevant programme managers. To obtain a balanced sample, we send targeted reminders and invitations to complementary (potential) respondents in our networks.

## Respondents

After two rounds of acquisition, 10 duos (N=20) participated in an intake interview and the first design session. 18 lecturers, still representing 10 duos, participated in the interviews at the end of the modules. The other two lecturers had been involved in the (re)design and implementation of the courses, but dropped out, because of prolonged sick leave. The table below provides an overview of all respondents.

**Table 1**

*Overview of respondents*

## Analysis

After transcribing and pseudonymizing the interviews and observations, we conducted a round of descriptive coding (Saldana, 2016, p.102) in ATLAS TI to identify perceived rationales for harnessing diversity and choices in different steps. To enhance validity, we adjusted our codebook after coding three interviews in parallel and checking for inter coder agreement (Hennink et al., 2020). Following Clark (2021, p. 537), we used an iterative thematic analysis approach to explore and synthesise trends and themes. Finally, we used a comparative approach (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 245) to explore rationales across faculties and programme types and design choices across rationale groups.

<b>Characteristics</b>	
<b>Programme type:</b>	Business (local): 6, Business (international): 4, LPA (local): 2, LPA (international): 8
<b>Teaching experience:</b>	1-3 years: 9, 4-6 years: 4, 7-9 years: 3, 10 + years: 4
<b>Professional experience(s) prior to current position:</b>	Education: 13, Public administration: 3, Research: 5, Business: 5 Nonprofit: 1, Legal: 4, Social work: 1
<b>National background:</b>	Local: 8, International: 12
<b>Focus module:</b>	Language & communication: 2, Professional development, global awareness & global citizenship: 4, (Intercultural) entrepreneurship: 2, Policy, advocacy & negotiation: 2
<b>Motivation to join design sessions:</b>	Strengthening existing course: 10, Rethinking existing (unsatisfactory/ outdated) course: 4, Developing new (part of) course: 6
<b>Sessions attended:</b>	1 session: 2, 2 sessions: 9, 3 sessions: 3   4 sessions: 6

## Ethical considerations

For ethical considerations, we explicitly informed all participants of our study's procedures, goal and voluntary nature. Recognizing the lead researcher's double role as (indirect) colleague, we informed respondents that all data and workshop artefacts would be pseudonymised and

confidential beyond the direct context of the study. The research team was not involved in any of the courses, or teams discussed.

## Results

### RQ 1. Which rationales do lecturers identify to harness diversity in their modules?

Based on our analysis, lecturers across faculties and programme types identified four rationales for harnessing diversity in their modules, broadly categorised into two societal and two educational rationales. As reflected in table 2, respondents across groups identified all four rationales, highlighting nuances depending on context.

**Table 2**

*Rationales for harnessing diversity in the context of specific courses, identified by respondents.*

	Business programmes		Law & Public Admin programmes	
	Local (n = 5)	International (n = 4)	Local (n = 2)	International (n = 7)
<b>Employability:</b>				
<i>To equip students to work effectively in the context of specific and/or interconnected labour markets</i>				
Gain experience	X	X	X	X
Develop professional skills	X	X		X
Develop transversal skills	X	X		X
Explore perspectives and dynamics		X		X
<b>Societal Impact:</b>				
<i>To equip students to contribute to sustainable development and justice in the context of specific and/or interconnected societies</i>				
Engage in design/problem solving	X	X		X
Develop tolerance, empathy, respect	X	X	X	X
<b>Critical engagement:</b>				
<i>To enable students to approach issues from diverse perspectives and lived experiences and question their own</i>				
Recognise plurality	X	X	X	X
Multi- perspective taking	X	X	X	X
Question and develop own position	X	X	X	X
<b>Inclusive learning experience:</b>				
<i>To enable all students to participate in meaningful, engaging and accessible learning experiences</i>				
Increase relevance and motivation	X	X	X	X
Increase ownership and belonging	X	X	X	X

## **Employability**

The first theme that emerged from our analysis was employability: the intention to equip students to work in specific, or interconnected labour markets. Respondents across groups reported that they aimed to leverage diversity across the classroom to create *'a course, or curriculum that better prepares them (all students) for the different contexts they may find themselves working in'* (Patricia, Law & Public Admin). Lecturers across groups aimed to provide students opportunities to *gain experience* in situations that mirrored their future workplaces. In the international programmes, this rationale was framed in the needs of specific fields in globally interconnected labour markets, for example, to gain experience that provide *'insights in holistic and pluralistic corporate landscapes in the context of stakeholder management and multiple value creation'* (Uno, Business). Local lecturers aimed to harness diversity to mirror local professional contexts: *'as a lawyer, you will promote the interests of people who are completely different from yourself and that you may not relate to at all'* (Freek, Law & Public Admin). Additionally, respondents in most groups reported that they aimed to capitalise on diversity in the development of students' professional skills, such as policy negotiation, or transversal skills, such as collaboration and complex problem solving. A lecturer in a policy programme explained that *'policy doesn't happen in a vacuum, they can learn from each other and understand the effect of what they are doing'* (Jude, Law & Public Admin). For lecturers in international programmes, eliciting and exploring cases and perspectives from different industry, political, or legal contexts around the world is an additional rationale.

## **Societal impact**

Societal impact was the second rationale that emerged. Respondents aimed to leverage diversity across the classroom to equip students to contribute to sustainable development and just societies. Based on this rationale, all groups aimed to leverage the presence of diverse student and lecturer bodies to foster attitudes, such as tolerance, empathy, respect and integrity amongst people with divergent, potentially opposing perspectives, experiences and interests. Moreover, most groups intended to leverage diversity across the classroom while addressing complex societal problems as part of challenge, or design-based learning experiences. According to a lecturer from an international Law and public administration programme, this would lead to *'better problem analyses and better solutions'* (Luigi, Law & Public Admin).

## **Critical engagement**

A third rationale that emerged from our analysis is critical engagement. All lecturer groups emphasised that they intended to leverage diversity across the classroom to enable students to approach issues from multiple perspectives and lived experiences, exploring and questioning their own position and values. Respondents in all groups mentioned the intention to let students *'broaden horizons and evaluate personal values'* (Stephanie, Business). Lecturers in international programmes framed these rationales in professional contexts, such as corporate social responsibility or effective public policy making. Lecturers in local programmes connected it to *'personal development: many students live rather in their 'own' bubble. Relating to other perspectives will make you question your own biases or make you learn to do this eventually'* (Freek, Law & Public Admin). Across all groups lecturers intended to harness the group's diversity to create space for plurality and critical reflection, making sure that students do not *'end up*

*thinking there is one best way only, which is the way they are used to, or the way we have taught them' (Harold, Law & Public Admin).*

### ***Inclusive learning experience***

Based on our analysis, creating inclusive learning experiences is another rationale to harness diversity for respondents across groups. Firstly, respondents across groups aimed to harness diversity to make their courses meaningful and motivating to all. Lecturers in international programmes specifically intended to harness students' and lecturers' diverse geographical backgrounds, mobility and work experiences to resonate with students' experiences and aspirations in different geographical contexts. Lecturers in local programmes intended to draw on diverse lived experiences across their group to bring 'abstract' course content closer to their student body, such as lecturers from a local business programme who aimed to make *'our intercultural competence module more relevant for our student population, who is not interested in working, or trading abroad'* (Emma, Business). Across groups, respondents expressed the intention to harness diversity to create ownership and sense of belonging, stimulating students to bring their knowledges, perspectives, cases and experiences to the table. A lecturer from an international business programme emphasised that *'students also have knowledge, they have experiences, they have their internship, they have cultural backgrounds and they also have perspective. They also have heard of cases and they may not have the vocabulary..., but they do have experiences. It's about recognizing those things, to make space'* (Uno, Business).

### **RQ2. Which ID choices do lecturers make to harness diversity in their modules?**

As suggested in the previous section, we found that lecturers in all groups made intentional choices to harness diversity across the classroom throughout the ID process. Analysing our observations and lecturers' reflective evaluations, we identified design choices in different steps of process. Table 3 outlines the ID choices respondents reported in different steps of the design process. The four rationales include employability (E), societal impact (S), critical engagement (C), inclusive learning experience (I)

**Table 3***Instructional design choices for harnessing diversity per rationale*

<b>Instructional Design Choices</b>		<b>Rationales</b>			
<i>to harness diversity across the classroom, identified by lecturers (n = 18)</i>		E	S	C	I
		=	=	=	=
		6	4	6	7
<b>Analysis</b>					
Analysis	<i>Explore perspectives, experiences, needs and interests across the classroom</i> <i>Explore conditions and rationales for harnessing diversities (in the context of specific course, group and curriculum)</i>				
<b>Design</b>					
Purposeful	Exchange, dialogue	7	O	O	O
Interaction	Collective analysis/ evaluation	4	O	O	O
	Collaborative problem solving/ co-creation	3		O	O
	Simulation (debate, negotiation)	3	O		
Learning outcomes	Integrating multi-perspective engagement with professional practices/societal issues	3	O		
	Integrating professional/transversal skills application in diverse contexts	3	O	O	O
	Integrating reflection on interaction, position and values	4	O	O	
Assessment	Requiring and rewarding purposeful interaction across differences	6	O		O
	Requiring and rewarding multi-perspective engagement	4	O	O	
	Requiring and rewarding (individual, or collective) reflection	4	O	O	O
<b>Develop (pedagogy)</b>					
Input & structure	Fostering multi-perspective engagement with (domain) knowledge(s)	4	O	O	O
	Fostering multi-perspective engagement with societal issues	3		O	O
	Explicit, structured instructions/ deliverables	5	O		O
	Rules of engagement	2		O	O
Tasks & activities	Fostering trust and connections	6		O	O
	With space for choice, personalization and differentiation	9		O	O
	Fostering multi-perspective engagement, drawing on diverse perspectives in the group	13	O	O	O
	Fostering purposeful interaction between students (in small groups)	15	O	O	O
	Fostering reflexivity	13	O	O	O
Guidance approaches	To create safe/open space for diverse contributions and dialogue	12		O	O
	To facilitate perspective taking, seeking and exploring diverse perspectives	4		O	O
	To support collaboration and collective agency (coaching, feedback)	4	O	O	
	To facilitate critical engagement and reflection	4	O	O	O
<b>Develop (logistics)</b>					
Group constellation	Diverse groups	9	O	O	O
	Homogeneous groups	1	O		
	Safe groups	4	O		O
Facilities	Dedicated time for purposeful interaction	3	O	O	O
	Dedicated time for reflexivity (in sessions)	2			O
	Physical, or virtual space(s) for purposeful interaction	5	O	O	O
<b>Implement</b>					
Monitoring & adjustment	<i>Create space...</i>				
	To seek diverse perspectives and experiences across the classroom	8			O
	To address 'hot' moments and discomfort	3		O	O
	For responsive adjustment of planned activities in dialogue with students	5			O
	For implementation in dialogue/consultation with team	14	O	O	O
	For differentiation	4		O	O
<b>Evaluate</b>					
Evaluation	Seek feedback and input from diverse perspectives	4			O
	Create space to evaluate in activities and course in dialogue	3		O	O

***Design choices: Creating platforms and imperatives for multi-perspective engagement, purposeful interaction and reflexivity.***

As reflected in table 3, our findings suggest that respondents made multiple choices in the overall design of their course to create platforms and imperatives to harness diversity. Firstly, we found that lecturers integrated methodologies that invite or require multi-perspective engagement in their overall course design, creating platforms for purposeful interaction. A lecturer from an international policy programme explained how his team redesigned two courses, exploring the *'relationship between politics as world view and how you are politically structured ... and started playing around with those ideas and all the different steps we had to take to get to the point of a (policy negotiation) simulation'* (Jude, Law & Public Admin). Typically, integrating solid platforms for interaction required rethinking the overall course structure, prioritizing some activities and removing others altogether.

Secondly, respondents across faculties and programme types chose to integrate multi-perspective engagement with declarative or procedural knowledge, what things are and how things are done (Salaberry, 2008) in their learning outcomes and assessment tasks. In some cases, assessment deliverables required collective analyses, evaluation, negotiation, or creation processes. In other cases, students needed *'content from the group to be able to do the deliverable that is individual'* (Harold, Law & Public Admin). Besides integrating explicitly multi-perspective deliverables in their course design, respondents reported creating imperatives for interaction across differences, by making participation mandatory. Thirdly, respondents reported integrating learning outcomes and deliverables that required reflection on students' own behaviour, perspective and position, based on peer-feedback, vlogs.

***Pedagogical development choices: Creating (safe) space for multi-perspective engagement, purposeful interaction and reflexivity.***

We found that all respondents made multiple pedagogical development choices to create space for multi-perspective engagement, purposeful interaction and reflexivity. As reflected in table 3, these choices affected the input and activities they developed, as well as the approaches they envisaged to guide the students in their learning process. Firstly, our findings suggest that lecturers reported selecting and creating multi-perspective input to make their course meaningful to all, build common ground and provide input for interactions. To accommodate their diverse student bodies, respondents developed input to scaffold interaction and engagement, including either explicit, or open instructions for deliverables and continuous (peer) feedback. Respondents in international programmes shared that they determine ground rules, in dialogue with students. One respondent shared that in *'our classes you will remember QRS. Q for Questions, R for Respect, S for Support'* (Diana, Law & Public Admin).

Secondly, respondents developed tasks and activities with the intention to harness diversity. A third of all participants developed activities *"in order to help the students really trust each other. So, group exercises in order to make them feel more comfortable"* (Diana, Law & Public Admin). Half of the respondents integrated space for personalization in their tasks and activities. In addition, respondents reported developing activities to stimulate exchange, dialogue and perspective taking, requiring students to explore, shift, or integrate multiple perspectives. International programme lecturers developed activities to foster critical engagement, exploring

(domain related) societal issues from multiple perspectives, questioning dynamics and fostering reflexivity. For example, respondents in a public administration programme asked students to prepare for a simulated policy negotiation, considering *'What is acceptable to me? What are my habits of integration and bridge? Like, where can I meet people?'* (Jude, Law & Public Admin).

Thirdly, respondents developed guidance approaches to harness diversity. Two thirds of all respondents integrated approaches to build trust, create space for all contributions and elicit diverse perspectives across the classroom. In addition, respondents chose to take on specific roles, including facilitator, coach and mentor, to facilitate dialogue, support collaboration, foster multi-perspective engagement and reflexivity.

***Logistical development choices: Creating dedicated space(s) for purposeful interaction and reflexivity.***

Our findings suggest that lectures made logistical choices to harness diversity, setting the scene for purposeful interaction and reflexivity. Firstly, most respondents reported that they purposefully developed group constellations, based on different criteria. For example, one team from an international Law and public admin programme *'created teams with maximum (national) diversity'* (Mila, Law & Public Admin) to harness diversity in the collective analysis of a policy problem and another team created diverse teams based on the outcomes of a personality test. Besides group constellations, our findings indicate that respondents chose to schedule time(s) and (physical) space(s) for interaction, collaboration and reflection. A lecturer from a local business programme explains how *'we have a moment together in class each week and afterwards students have time scheduled to work on their deliverables together. So, if we completed our consultations, they would continue to work in the classroom'* (Luna, Business). Other respondents reported arranging (multiple) rooms with specific sizes, set-ups, equipment and seating arrangements.

***Implementation and evaluation choices: Paving the way for responsive delivery and purposeful adjustment in dialogue.***

Lastly, our findings indicate that lecturers also made choices to harness diversity in the final two steps of the ID process, paving the way for responsive delivery and purposeful adjustment in dialogue. Respondents reported that they created space to gauge diverse perspectives, experiences and needs across their student body and team and to adjust their plans responsively. In some cases, this entailed being accessible for extra consultation or support beyond the class. In other cases, this required addressing 'hot' moments and dealing with students' and lecturers' discomfort in sensitive, or complex situations. Respondents reported discussing potential adjustments and courses of action within their diverse lecturer teams, to learn from each other in developing potentially controversial assignments for a religiously diverse group, because she *'simply doesn't know how you approach certain things when you believe in Islam'* (Eline, Law & Public Admin). In relation to this, our findings indicate that most respondents across teams made space to implement their course in dialogue with their colleagues teaching parallel classes, recognizing that *'this is key because they are the ones who know what is happening in their tutor groups and with their students'* (Diana, Law & Public Admin). In addition, we found that respondents create space to tweak their plans in dialogue with students. Stressing the need to actively seek out diverse students' perspectives, lecturers reported continuously asking for feedback and input to find what *'does not work or I should do that. It's about a lot of things. So,*

*student input can be very valuable. But it's also very important to have a very active dialogue at the end of the course' (Harold, Law & Public Admin).*

### **RQ3. How do lecturers' rationales and ID choices relate to each other?**

After analysing respondents' collective rationales and design choices for harnessing diversity, we related respondents' rationales and ID choices to each other. As reflected in table 3, we considered lecturer duo's shared rationales, as formulated during the design sessions, distinguishing between (1) **Employability**, (2) **Social impact**, (3) **Critical engagement** and (4) **Inclusive learning experience**. Some duos explicitly identified a combination of two rationales. In our analysis, we considered these participants to be part of both rationale groups, interpreting the primary rationale behind specific choices.

#### ***ID choices to harness diversity for employability.***

Respondents in the employability group reported learning outcomes focused on multi-perspective declarative and procedural domain knowledge and professional communication skills, such as debating, pitching, or negotiation, often in culturally diverse contexts. In line with this, we found that this group integrated analysis of complex professional cases, multi-perspective domain knowledge and the application of professional communication skills in their assessment tasks. Respondents reported developing input to foster multi-perspective engagement with professional practices in diverse geographical and cultural contexts and from diverse stakeholder perspectives. A respondent explained that he incorporated cases from multiple geographical contexts in a tax policy course, *'in Islamic countries interest can't exist in the same way because it goes against the Quran. So actually, the ways in which the policy can be designed, the way in which the financial system works, is extremely different'* (Jude, Law & Public Admin). We found that respondents in this group elicited students' perspectives and experiences in different geographical locations in plenary dialogues and small groups to feed into this multi-perspective engagement. Additionally, respondents reported to leverage their group's diversity to create opportunities for communication skills practice, developing activities to scaffold and frame purposeful, reflexive interaction. We found that respondents in this group created opportunities for adjustment and differentiation, developing flexible lesson plans and seeking diverse input, feedback and ideas from colleagues and students in different steps.

#### ***ID choices to harness diversity for societal impact.***

Respondents who primarily aimed to harness diversity for societal impact, intended to design courses to foster a combination of collective agency, transversal skills, such as perspective taking and collaboration and/or values, such as empathy and respect. They reported integrating transversal skills and reflexivity in their learning outcomes and deliverables. Respondents indicated developing input to engage students with complex societal issues related to sustainability transitions and social justice, taking a local, global or glocal scope. In some cases, this entailed reframing input to resonate with the interests of specific student body. Lecturers teaching an ideologically diverse student body, realised that *'our students did not like diversity at all. So, instead of celebrating diversity, we focused on tolerance'* (Freek, Law & Public Admin), taking complex legal cases as a starting point. Most respondents reported tasks and activities that engaged students with addressing societal problems of their own choice. For example, a respondent explained that students *'needed to develop (legal) strategies to promote diversity,*

*inclusion and equity. They needed to make sure that these strategies were ethical and aligned with sustainable practices, building on (dialogues in) the big group project' (Leyla, Law & Public Admin).*

Moreover, respondents reported developing tasks that fostered collective design, problem-solving processes, drawing on diverse perspectives, experiences and strengths in the group. In line with this, this group reported guidance approaches that explored multiple perspectives and experiences and strengths, supporting individual and collective reflexivity and agency. A respondent coached her students in such processes, asking *'What can you use? How can you each leverage your own network and strengthen each other?'* (Luna, Business). As part of their implementation choices, respondents indicated actively seeking out diverse perspectives across their own classrooms and making time for consultation with their lecturer team to suggest potential guidance approaches and explain rationales behind developed activities.

### ***ID choices to harness diversity for critical engagement.***

Respondents that primarily aimed to harness diversity for transformative learning intended to design courses that engaged students with plural perspectives and dynamics to foster critical reflection and the development of professional positions and identities. Just like respondents that prioritised societal impact, this group chose to integrate collective analyses and collective problem solving, or design approaches in their course design. However, this group additionally reported integrating multi-perspective declarative and procedural knowledge in their learning outcomes and assessment tasks. For example, respondents teaching in an international policy programme designed assessment tasks, asking students *'to analyse how this (complex policy) problem was being approached by different kinds of stakeholders. So how the problem was framed'* (Luigi, Law & Public Admin). To ensure opportunities for critical engagement with and reflection on plural perspectives across the classroom, many respondents intended to make *'participation in the tutorials (or other sessions) obligatory, to make sure that the students will be able to mingle and exchange views'* (Mona, Law & Public Admin).

This group developed tasks, guidance approaches and logistics aimed to facilitate both engagement with plural perspectives (and dynamics) and critical reflection on individual (or collective) positions. A respondent in an international business programme reported developing activities to make nationally diverse student teams collectively evaluate companies' social responsibility collectively *'using established frameworks'* and individually exploring *'what are your personal values are and how do you choose the right company to work for'* (Keanu, Business). In line with this, respondents in this group reported creating space for active dialogue and reflection in the implementation and evaluation of their courses, actively seeking out diverse perspectives and experiences. One respondent explicitly recommended to move past evaluation surveys and to *'have an active conversation with the whole group, like an hour, or so. That brings a lot of insights'* (Harold, Law & Public Admin).

### ***ID choices to harness diversity for inclusive learning experiences.***

Respondents that primarily aimed to harness diversity to create more inclusive learning experiences intended to design meaningful and accessible courses with a heterogenous student body in mind. To avoid barriers to learners, respondents reported integrating purposeful interactions, assessment deliverables and tasks with flexible formats in their course with the intention to adjust to the needs and dynamics in specific groups. One respondent explains that

*'trying to incorporate diversity is being kind of agile, or more like really feeling and drawing on who's there and trying to be flexible' (Uno, Business).* Moreover, lecturers in this group indicated developing input, tasks and guidance approaches to explore and validate plural perspectives and lived experiences across the classroom, approaching students as knowledge partners. Stimulating students' ownership was seen as an important aim: *to 'support students in their own learning process. That it wasn't that they didn't learn, because we said that they needed to do something. But to inspire them, or to help them figure out something because THEY think it's important' (Stephanie, Business).*

Respondents reported developing activities, guidance approaches and logistics to build positive relations and safe and accessible spaces. For example, some respondents chose to negotiate ground rules, while others stimulated translanguaging and practicing new skills in linguistically homogeneous groups to make students *'feel that they can be understood. And if something happened, they can speak in their own language' (Alexandra, Business).* Based on our analysis, respondents in this group emphasised several proactive implementation and evaluation choices aimed to actively seek out and adjust for diverse learning needs in and beyond sessions.

## Discussion

### **RQ1: Lecturers' rationales for harnessing diversity across the classroom**

Our study reveals that lecturers are motivated to make intentional ID choices to harness diversity across their classroom for different reasons, embedded in distinct priorities and rationales. Broadly, lecturers' rationales can be categorised into two major domains: societal and educational. Firstly, the societal rationales relate to employability and broader societal impact. These overlapping rationales underscore lecturers' intentions to equip students to make meaningful contributions to interconnected, diverse and superdiverse (Vertovec, 2007) labour markets and societies, taking a local, global, or glocal scope (Robertson, 1995). These societal rationales resonate with similar priorities in the discourses on Internationalisation of the Curriculum at Home (Eftekhari et al., 2025; Jones & Killick, 2007) and education for (sustainable) entrepreneurship and innovation (Chen et al., 2022; Oonk et al., 2022).

Secondly, we identified educational rationales, grounded in a commitment to enhance the learning experience for all students. Lecturers expressed the intention to enrich educational experiences by engaging students with multiple "other" perspectives, stimulating them to question and develop their own. This resonates with scholars such as Killick and Foster (2021) and Misiaszek (2025) who emphasise the transformative potential of diversity in HE settings. Echoing the discourse on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (hooks, 2014, Ramdas et al., 2025), lecturers emphasised the importance of creating inclusive and accessible learning environments. These environments explicitly explore and validate multiple perspectives and lived experiences, including those of marginalised groups.

Although we anticipated finding different rationales within specific academic disciplines (Bulnes & De Louw, 2022; Eftekhari et al., 2025), our findings did not support this expectation. Instead, our study demonstrates that lecturers—even within the same faculty, programme, or team—in practice draw on diverse rationales for embedding diversity in their courses, as previously suggested by Van den Hende (2024) and Gaisch (2019). Our observations showed that lecturers hardly explore their own and each other's rationales for harnessing diversity unless prompted. At

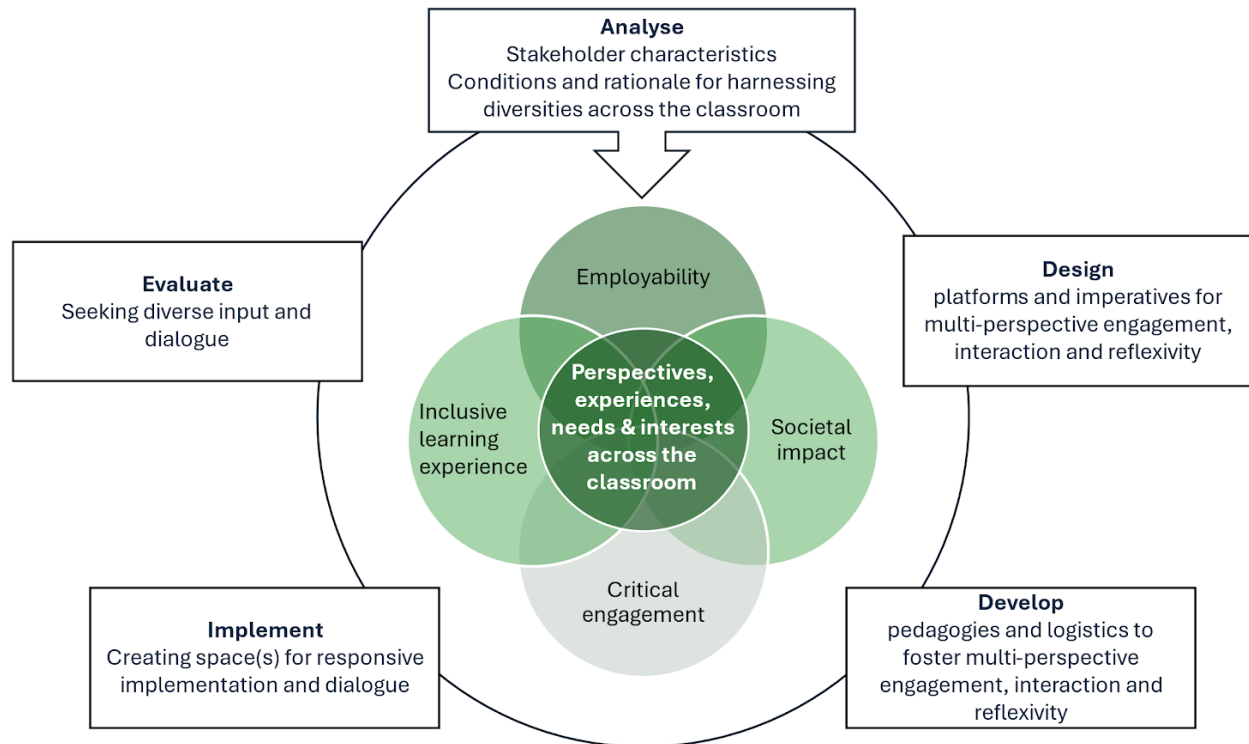
the same time, we found that exploring, formulating and revisiting their specific rationales clarified many duos' common goals, priorities and intended impact. The dialogical analysis of their students' and colleagues' characteristics, as well as their own rationales for harnessing the differences they identified, enabled most duos to move past generic *intentions* to more purposeful design considerations. Interestingly, our study revealed that all respondents cited employability as either primary or supporting rationale in line with the professional focus of universities of applied sciences. Building on this observation, our study shows that rationales can reinforce each other, especially in superdiverse environments, where student populations and regional labour markets are shaped by cultural and demographic complexity. In line with Schimmelpfennig (2022), preparing students to generate innovative solutions in a diverse environment can require lecturers to prioritise both employability and societal impact rationales. Furthermore, multiple teams centralised employability rationales and narratives, primarily aiming to create more inclusive learning experiences in complex groups.

## **RQ2. Instructional choices for harnessing diversity in practice**

Based on our exploration of lecturers' ID process, our findings emphasise that lecturers and teams have a substantial number of potential levers to pull and adjust when shaping conditions for diverse people across the classroom to learn from and with each other through their ID choices. Informed by GLAID (De Hei et al., 2016), Figure 2 visualises lecturers' ID decisions in four interconnected steps: (1) design imperatives and platforms for multi-perspective engagement, interaction and reflexivity, (2) develop pedagogical and logistical approaches and fostering agile, dialogic processes for (3) implementation and (4) evaluation of plans. Notably, all these interconnected choices are based on a foundational, dynamic analysis of characteristics, conditions and rationales for harnessing diversities across the classroom.

**Figure 2**

*Instructional design cycle for harnessing diverse perspectives and experiences across the learning environment*



*ALT Text: Figure 2 reflects a holistic instructional design cycle, centralising diverse experiences, perspectives, needs and interests across the classroom, integrated with four, potentially overlapping, rationales to harness diversity across the learning environment: employability, societal impact, inclusive learning experience and critical engagement. Around these rationales, the figure reflects a cycle, outlining interconnected instructional design choices that guide the dialogical design, development, implementation and evaluation of learning experiences that foster multi-perspective engagement, interaction and reflexivity.*

Approaching ID as a holistic, iterative and agile process bridges the gap between 'idealised' models in which lecturers integrate meaningful interactions in carefully aligned designs (EQUIIP, 2019) and dynamic, messy realities in which lecturers pragmatically adjust to conditions and complexities (Louvel, 2013; Priestley et al., 2015). In line with Universal Design for Learning (Meyer et al., 2014), our study shows that lecturers anticipate and recognise diverse perspectives, experiences, needs and interests across the student body and lecturer team. While much of the literature focuses on pedagogical recommendations, such as adopting specific learning outcomes, assessment strategies, diversity-relevant assignments and guidance methods, our analyses shed light on additional instructional design choices. These choices relate to the responsive, dialogical implementation of their plans on classroom and cohort level.

In line with De Weerd (2024), our study shows that the preparation, delivery and evaluation of courses are team-based tasks, involving collaboration and negotiation between multiple lecturers (De Weerd, et al., 2024). As illustrated by our sample's diverse work experience and

geographical backgrounds, there can be substantial individual differences within those teams (Dang, et al., 2022). Our study shows that course coordinators make intentional quality management choices to seek out and address diverse perspectives and experiences across their team and collective student bodies. Unlike ID choices in the design and development steps, these choices are underrecognized in both theory and practice. Our findings underline the necessity to recognise that responsive and dialogical implementation and evaluation entail intentional choices that are an integral part of ID for harnessing diversity. Moreover, our study underscores that these essential steps require considerable investment in time, effort and educational leadership that are often ignored in recommendations, competence profiles and task allocations alike.

### **RQ3. Making intentional design choices to harness diversity based on different rationales.**

Although lecturers rely on a shared toolkit of ID choices to harness diversity, the specific rationales guiding their choices influence how and where they place emphasis. For those motivated by employability, ID choices were typically framed by learning outcomes tied to professional standards. These lecturers developed student-centred methodologies and assessment tools aligned with dominant paradigms in their discipline or industry. In contrast, lecturers driven by societal impact emphasised pedagogical choices that fostered collective agency, perspective taking and positionality. The group prioritizing inclusive learning environments made comprehensive pedagogical and implementation decisions, choosing to implement flexible and adaptive approaches to teaching in negotiation and dialogue with their students. By contrast, the critical engagement group created opportunities to seek out and engage with diverse perspectives, informing their ID, from design to evaluation choices. Our findings emphasise the need to unearth and explore different rationales for harnessing diversity in the context of specific courses. Moreover, it underlines the need to explicitly identify common goals in dialogue to inform aligned ID choices that resonate with all stakeholders, strengthen alignment and avoid resistance down the line.

## **Conclusion**

Multi-faceted, dynamic diversity across student bodies and lecturer teams is a key characteristic of HE campuses, especially in superdiverse contexts. Our longitudinal study shows that lecturers have different reasons to harness this diversity, grounded in different priorities and rationales which can be grouped into those focused on societal rationales and those focused on educational rationales. These reasons may be informed by their diverse individual positionalities and/or by situational priorities related to specific courses, student bodies and/or team dynamics. Moreover, our study shows that lecturer teams have a substantial number of potential levers to pull and adjust when shaping conditions for students to exchange and engage with diverse perspectives and experiences. Our findings suggest that lecturers' rationales inform their individual and collective focus in fostering multi-perspective engagement, purposeful interaction and reflexivity through intentional and agile instructional design.

The outcomes of our study underline that diversity can bring multiple potential *strengths* to HEIs that equip a superdiverse student population to thrive and contribute to an interconnected, yet increasingly polarised world. Our study confirms that harnessing diversity in this complex environment requires a pluralistic, situational approach, one that creates space for stakeholders to articulate diverse rationales and rethink strategies together (Gaisch, 2019). Recognizing and

embracing this plurality is essential, especially in times when internationalisation and diversity, equity and inclusion rationales and strategies are heavily criticised, questioned and downplayed in the dominant discourse (Latorre et al., 2024; Schiltmans, 2024; Ng, et al., 2025).

### **Implications for practice**

Our findings urge lecturers to investigate their own rationales for harnessing diversity in and beyond specific courses. Above that, our findings urge teams to explore perspectives, experiences, needs, interests across their classrooms and identify reasons to unlock potential strength(s) of specific *diversities* based on shared goals. Our study positions this exploration as an essential step of the ID process, feeding into more intentional, responsive and dialogical design, development, implementation and evaluation. Just like Gregersen-Hermans (2021) and Ramdas et al. (2025), our study underlines the potential to bridge and synergise different priorities and rationales, paving the way to recombine paradigms, principles and pedagogies across discourses. Following our conclusions, we urge universities to steer away from siloed implementation of conflicting yet overlapping strategies to harness diversity based on different priorities. Instead, we recommend creating space for lecturers and teams to analyse diversities across their specific classroom, explore different rationales, identify shared goals and develop IDs to meet these goals in synergy. Participatory professional learning and development trajectories, curriculum innovation, or accreditation processes can provide important opportunities to integrate such spaces.

### **Limitations and recommendations for further research**

Although our longitudinal exploration of lecturers' instructional design choices provided new insights, our study has a number of limitations. Firstly, our number of respondents is small and only represents lecturers in specific disciplines and within one university of applied sciences. Secondly, the interaction with facilitators and peers as part of the design sessions may have impacted participants' decisions during the study. Future research should repeat participatory designs with a different, or broader sample and use designs that do not interfere with lecturers' choices to validate and build on our findings. Furthermore, it would be insightful to also explore the *impact* of individual and collective ID choices, thereby integrating a wider range of respondents, including diverse student samples. Finally, future studies should explore which specific diversities lecturers recognise (or ignore) when making ID choices to unlock the potential strength(s) of diversity based on specific rationales and in specific programme contexts.

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Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Visualisation, Writing – original draft & editing. **van der Zande**: Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Validation, Supervision, Writing-review & editing.

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