

ASCILITE 2025

Future-Focused:

Educating in an Era of Continuous Change

Equity in action: Leveraging cross-faculty collaboration towards inclusive teaching practices

Helmy Cook, Aster Cosmos, Prudence Perry, Elizabeth McCarthy

Monash University

This paper presents the creation of 'implementables': ready-to-implement teaching resources designed to nudge educators towards more inclusive approaches. It addresses the challenge of translating EDI theory into practice. Drawing on frameworks such as CDIO (Conceive-Design-Implement-Operate) and Advance HE's EDI curriculum standards, our group mapped connections between effective learning design and inclusive pedagogical practices. This work highlights the significant overlap between principles of good pedagogy and inclusive teaching practice, and resulted in a resource, Equity in Action, consolidating practical, actionable examples and stretch goals for educators. The work underscores the importance of practical support for educators at varying levels of EDI expertise and advocates for ongoing, community-driven efforts to foster sustainable, meaningful change in higher education environments.

Keywords: inclusive teaching, equity diversity and inclusion, learning design, collaboration, higher education

Background

The Monash Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Sharing Circle was established with the aim of influencing educators, curriculum, leaders, and policy towards implementing positive, equitable, and inclusive teaching practices that respect and celebrate diversity. We are an interdisciplinary group of Educational Designers, many of whom have lived and living experience in EDI, with a passion for inclusive teaching practice. As an informal community of practice, we seek to share inclusive teaching practices and initiatives, and empower third space professionals to enact change.

Educational Design (Learning Design, Learning Experience Design, and Instructional Design) focuses on student-centred design and humanistic learning approaches. The work is advisory and indirect, meaning we influence educators in their teaching practices and focus on collaboration and relationship building. Unsurprisingly, human-centred collaboration techniques, such as humility, adaptability and empathy, are prioritised by Educational Designers (Bawa & Watson, 2017). Therefore, it is a relatively uncomplicated transition for Educational Designers to gravitate towards inclusive teaching practices as human-centred approaches underpin these. The human-centred approach to improving education, as a third-space professional, often involves caring about learning on many fronts, including practice, policy, equity, mental health, and student outcomes. This is evident in the design thinking approach commonly used by Educational Designers that fosters empathy with their learners (Ní Shé et al., 2021).

Educational Designers have significant capability and capacity to advance inclusive teaching practices, whether they hold formal authority or influence informally. Increasingly, it is seen as a professional expectation of Educational Designers to be capable of advising educators in implementing inclusive teaching practices (Lachheb et al., 2023; Kirsch & Luo, 2023).

From sharing to synergy

In a previous paper, From Sharing to Synergy: Cultivating Inclusive Educational Environments Through EDI in CDIO (Authors et al., 2025), we sought to connect two frameworks. The first being the CDIO framework (Conceive-Design-Implement-Operate), for engineering education, which “provides students with an education

ASCILITE 2025

Future-Focused:

Educating in an Era of Continuous Change

stressing engineering fundamentals set in the context of Conceiving — Designing — Implementing — Operating (CDIO) real-world systems and products.” (CDIO, n.d.). The second framework, developed by Advance Higher Education (Advance HE), is a program standard for embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion in the curriculum (Hanesworth, 2019). The Advance HE standard has five domains of education (Curriculum Design, Curriculum Delivery, Assessment and Feedback, Learning Environments and Staff Engagement), and within these domains are established practice standards that seek to embed inclusion in curricula. Drawing on our expertise in educational design, inclusive teaching, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), we articulated the connections between each of the framework standards and principles. In most cases, we also gave strength to this connection with an example of practice and advice for implementation. The work aimed to demonstrate what many of us presumed to be true: good quality learning design is often built with inclusive teaching practices in mind. This also gave us an opportunity to gather our collective knowledge on inclusive practice, and the paper marked our initial effort to empower educators and establish the group as a catalyst for meaningful, inclusive educational change.

Our approach

Our approach to writing was grounded in a deeply collaborative writing process drawing on our collective knowledge. Participation from the broader EDI Sharing Circle was self-selected, with individuals joining based on interest and capacity, and over the four months of work, we maintained a rhythm of regular check-ins, significant asynchronous writing, and finally twelve two-hour workshop-style collaborative writing and reviewing sprints. The process for the mapping and implementables was iterative, adaptive, and decentralised, allowing people to contribute in ways aligned with their strengths and capacity. We collaboratively articulated the connections, revised drafts, analysed for language and tone discrepancies, and flagged sections for further discussion. We unintentionally diffused authorship, often overwriting or reshaping one another’s work with permission, until it became difficult to recall who had originally written what; this created a safe space where edits felt constructive rather than judgmental, and a consistent collective voice eventually emerged. Suggestions and edits were used not to assert ownership but to signal points for discussion, and this culture of openness ensured that the final ‘implementables’ reflected both practicality and possibility, balancing what could be actioned in the near term with what needed further development.

Equity in Action

The mapping was collaborative and rewarding, despite the intensive effort. As we conducted this work, several themes began to emerge. Some of these themes reflected sound pedagogy, such as scaffolding, co-design, and student agency. Others focused more on deliberate and purposeful inclusive practices. This included incorporating a diversity of voices in the curriculum, accessibility in physical and digital spaces, and the deliberate inclusion of different ways of knowing, being and doing. Notably, during the mapping, we identified a considerable overlap in the connections and examples.

Hence, our findings confirmed our initial suspicions: many of the principles of inclusive teaching are already present in good pedagogy. For example, good practice states that learning outcomes should be clear, use simple grammar, be direct, and the language used, whilst discipline-specific, should not be overly complicated (Popenici & Millar, 2015). This is also represented in UDL standards as a need to “clarify vocabulary, symbols, and language structures” (CAST, 2024) to provide equal access to information, particularly for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Other examples align more with equitable practices and are not always considered within good educational practice frameworks. For example, not all good educational practice frameworks include strategies like increasing representation for marginalised communities and exploring learner and educator bias (CAST, 2024). A deeper understanding of inclusive teaching practices is required to implement this example in the curriculum.

We agreed the mapping suited an audience seeking an analysis of frameworks punctuated by practical examples, so for an educator seeking directly implementable practice, we would need to consolidate the ideas. To meet this need, we created a set of actions and prioritised examples that help educators move toward a

ASCILITE 2025

Future-Focused:

Educating in an Era of Continuous Change

more inclusive teaching practice. This addresses a common gap in Higher Education, where there is an emphasis on frameworks and guidelines but less clarity on how to translate them into practice. So, we created a website, [Equity in Action](#), a consolidated resource that showcases deliberate and purposeful inclusive teaching practices, including practical actions and stretch goals for educators. Throughout the process, we removed details that were specific to the engineering discipline with the intent of broadening the applicability of the advice.

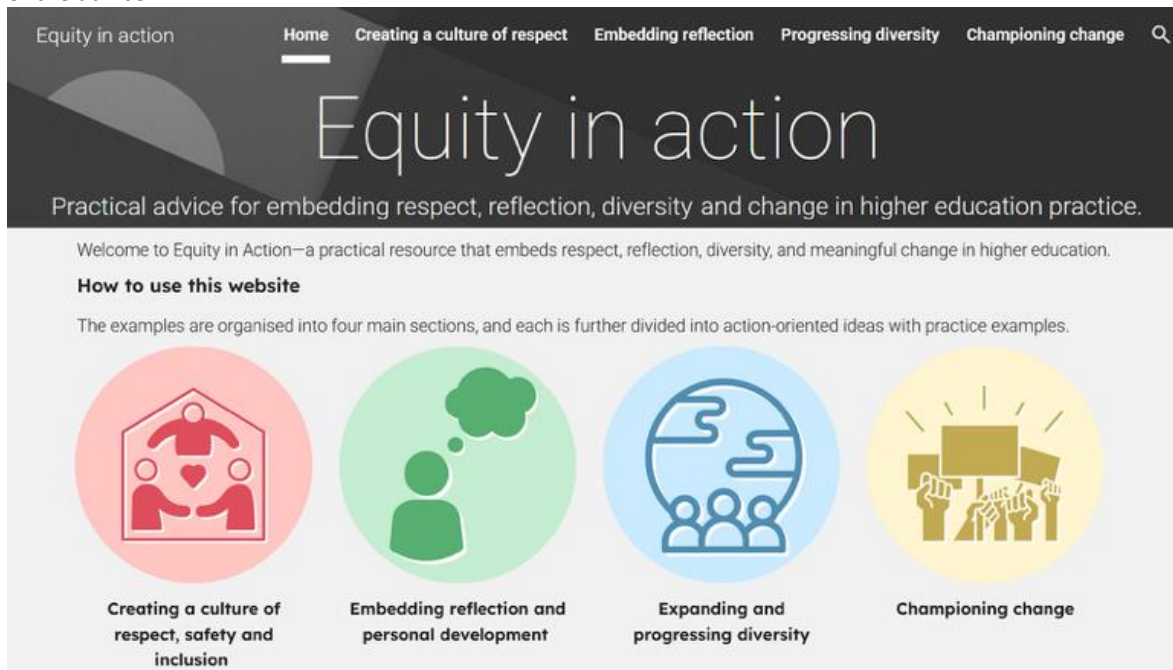


Figure 1. Equity in Action website screenshot

An example practical action from Equity in Action is a list of ways educators can offer students different response modes, formats or tools:

- “Online whiteboards for classroom discussions.
- Physical whiteboard or post-it notes for in-person learning.
- Interactive and anonymous tools, such as in-class polling.
- Chat functions for online learning.” (Monash EDI Sharing Circle, 2025)

This aligns with the UDL guidelines for using multiple media for communication, which emphasises that “such variety reduces media-specific barriers to communication among learners with disabilities, honors forms of communication that have historically been devalued, and increases the opportunities for every learner to develop a wider range of expression in a media-rich world.” (CAST, 2024).

Discussion

Equity practices in higher education tend to focus on philosophy, theory, frameworks, action plans, strategies and policies. While this is critically important to inclusive practices in teaching and learning, we tend to focus on the forest at the expense of the trees. In other words, educators may struggle to move beyond theoretical knowledge of inclusive practices and towards applying that learning in their disciplinary context (Hanson & Burke, 2021). Equity in Action is a valuable resource, but it is designed for those already familiar with inclusive teaching practices and looking for ideas. Educators who are still developing their foundational knowledge and skills in inclusive teaching may be less able to enact the practice if clear guidance is lacking and they are unsure how to apply those ideas.

In tandem with this, higher education has faced significant disruption from global events (COVID-19 remote teaching and the advent of generative AI), further burdening an exhausted teaching workforce. These challenges are compounded by recent political shifts in the US, including the repeal of EDI initiatives, which are

ASCILITE 2025

Future-Focused:

Educating in an Era of Continuous Change

creating huge barriers to progress. Even for Educational Designers, a lack of training and knowledge in inclusive practices, in combination with workload/time constraints and faculty resistance, can lead to low uptake (Kirsch & Luo, 2023).

As an additional barrier, some inclusive teaching practices require a significant curriculum overhaul. For example, identifying and mitigating unconscious bias throughout the curriculum is a lengthy, workload-intensive task and cannot be implemented quickly. In *Equity in Action*, we suggest identifying unconscious bias in the curriculum: “Analyse which perspectives are prioritised in the curriculum and whether inherent biases exist. This is best conducted with multiple faculty and institutional professionals who can contribute perspectives from multiple cultures and backgrounds.” (Monash EDI Sharing Circle, 2025). However, knowing the right questions to ask and the right place to find potential bias would be an insurmountable task for educators with low inclusive teaching confidence, skills and knowledge.

When educators face a difficult pedagogical choice and lack knowledge and time, they may gravitate towards whatever is easiest to implement. With this in mind, we committed to building on *Equity in Action* through the creation of ‘implementables’, to provide instructions, examples, and advice for educators that can be directly implemented with as little time and workload as possible. The implementable becomes a purposeful ‘nudge’, a form of choice architecture that nudges a person towards a specific choice with an improved outcome. It is a way to alter a person's behaviour, often by leveraging the default or easiest option (Thaler & Sunstein, 2021).

This collaborative project demonstrates how cross-disciplinary efforts can move inclusive teaching from theory to practice. The broader intention of *Equity in Action* is to influence universities across diverse fields to foster sustainable, community-driven change and empower educators at all levels to embed inclusive practices in their curricula. We invite educators to engage with the ideas, examples, and implementables of *Equity in Action*, adapting them as needed to different disciplinary contexts. We invite stories of success and struggle so we can ensure *Equity in Action* remains a dynamic, evolving resource that reflects the diverse realities and ongoing challenges of inclusive teaching in higher education.

References

- Bawa, P., & Watson, S. (2017). The Chameleon characteristics: A phenomenological study of instructional designer, faculty, and administrator perceptions of collaborative instructional design environments. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(9), 2334–2356.
- CAST. (2024). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0*. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>
- CDIO. (n.d.). Worldwide CDIO Initiative. Retrieved June 11, 2025, from <https://cdio.org/>
- Conway, M. (2000). Defining administrators and new professionals. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 4(1), 14–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603100081601>
- Hanson, C., & Burke, M. (2021). From Understanding To Action: An Examination Of Transformative Learning In Asynchronous Online Equity, Diversity, And Inclusion Training For First-Time Teaching Assistants. *Proceedings of the Canadian Engineering Education Association (CEEA)*. <https://doi.org/10.24908/pceea.vi0.14861>
- Hanesworth, P. (2019). Embedding Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum: a programme standard <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/embedding-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-curriculum-programme-standard> Accessed: 31/10/2024
- Kirsch, B. A., & Luo, T. (2023). Universal Design for Learning Implementation in Higher Education: Survey of Faculty and Instructional Designers. *The Journal of Applied Instructional Design*, 12(4), 17–33. <https://doi.org/10.59668/806.13414>
- Lachheb, A., Quintana, R. M., Yu, J. H., & Zamora, A. N. (2023). Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice in Action: A Study of Learning Experience Designers' Practices. In B. Hokanson, M. Exter, M. M. Schmidt, & A. A. Tawfik (Eds.), *Toward Inclusive Learning Design: Social Justice, Equity, and Community* (pp. 197–215). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37697-9_16
- McCarthy, E., Cosmos, A., Bui, D., Perry, P., & Cook, H. (2025, June). *From Sharing to Synergy: Cultivating Inclusive Educational Environments Through EDI in CDIO [Paper presentation]*. 21st International CDIO

ASCILITE 2025

Future-Focused:

Educating in an Era of Continuous Change

Conference 2025, Melbourne, Australia. <https://www.cdio2025.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/160.pdf>

Monash EDI Sharing Circle. (2025). *Equity in action*.

<https://sites.google.com/monash.edu/equityinaction/home>

Ní Shé, C., Farrell, O., Brunton, J., & Costello, E. (2021). Integrating design thinking into instructional design: The #OpenTeach case study. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 38(1), 33–52.

<https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.6667>

Popenici, S., & Millar, V. (2015). *Writing learning outcomes: A practical guide for academics*. Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne.

Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2021). *Nudge: The Final Edition*. Penguin.

Cook, H., Cosmos, A., Perry, P. & McCarthy, E. (2025). Equity in Action: Leveraging cross-faculty collaboration towards inclusive teaching practices. In Barker, S., Kelly, S., McInnes, R., Johnson, T. & Dinmore, S. (Eds.), *Future Focussed. Educating in an era of continuous change*. Proceedings ASCILITE 2025. Adelaide (pp. 344-348). <https://doi.org/10.65106/apubs.2025.2673>

Note: All published papers are refereed, having undergone a double-blind peer-review process.

The author(s) assign a Creative Commons by attribution license enabling others to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon their work, even commercially, as long as credit is given to the author(s) for the original creation.

© Cook, H., Cosmos, A., Perry, P. & McCarthy, E. 2025