Culturally Inclusive Environment

General Information Folio 1:

A culturally Inclusive environment requires mutual respect, effective relationships, clear communication, explicit understandings about expectations and critical self-reflection. In an Inclusive environment, people of all cultural orientations can:

• **freely express** who they are, their own opinions and points of view;

• **fully participate** In teaching, learning, work and social activities; and

• **feel safe** from abuse, harassment or unfair criticism.

A culturally Inclusive university means that:

• **individual students** can participate fully In classes, aim to study better, aim to achieve better academic results, experience less stress and have enhanced career prospects;

• **all staff** can Interact more fully with other staff and students, and can extend and develop their own cultural awareness; and

• **the university as an organisation** benefits from culturally diverse staff and students through exposure to alternate perspectives and experiences.

To establish an environment where diversity Is genuinely valued, equity needs to be embedded Into the core business of each work area within the university. Policies that dictate what we should, or should not do, are often described as lip service' - meaning they exist to satisfy a legal requirement but are often not put Into practice. Implementing such policies requires a shift In emphasis from the concept of equity being an 'add-on' policy to being an active and positive valuing of diversity In all that we do.

The Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Practice (CDIP) Toolkit has been developed to assist members of the University of Newcastle community with:

• translating policies that are related to Inclusiveness; and

• valuing cultural diversity In everyday practice.

Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity Is commonly Interpreted In relation to ethnicity. Nonetheless, the term should be understood within a broader context where It recognises the unique attributes of all Individuals.

The CDIP Toolkit will focus Initially on the ethnic, religious and language dimensions of cultural diversity.

It Is also Important to acknowledge the various elements of Australian cultures, Including Indigenous Australian people's cultures, when understanding cultural diversity. Often 'cultural diversity' Is considered only In the context of people from countries outside Australia.

The Diversity Wheel

This model has been Included as just one of the many models that have been developed to Illustrate the various dimensions that can contribute to the complexity of cultural diversity. This model Illustrates both the primary and secondary dimensions of diversity that exert an Impact on each of us at home, work and In society. While each dimension adds a layer of complexity to Individual Identity, It Is the dynamic Interaction among all the dimensions that Influences self-image, values, opportunities and expectations. Together, the primary and secondary dimensions of diversity give definition and meaning to our lives by contributing to a synergistic, Integrated whole — the diverse person .
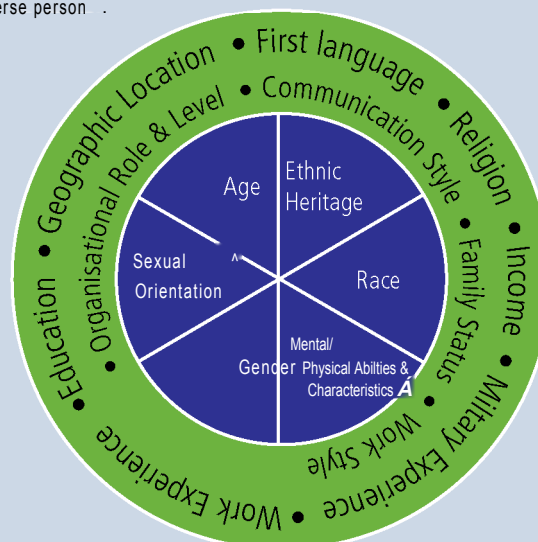
Primary dimensions of diversity

The primary dimensions of diversity Include age, ethnic heritage, gender, mental/physical abilities and characteristics, race and sexual orientation. These six differences are termed core dimensions of diversity because they exert an Important Impact on our early socialisation and a powerful, sustained Impact on our experiences, values, assumptions and expectations throughout every stage of life.

Secondary dimensions of diversity

Key secondary dimensions of diversity Include, but are not limited to, elements as Illustrated by the outer circle. Generally, secondary dimensions are less visible and many contain a greater element of choice. Despite the presence of the term 'race' In everyday language, and Its use In various policies and statements referred to throughout this toolkit, the new Macquarie ABC Dictionary under 'usage' of the term states: Because the 19th century classification of humans Into distinct races has been challenged scientifically, and has been misused, many now prefer to avoid this term when referring to a group of humans, and to replace It with another term such as 'peoples' or 'community.'

Inclusive practice

At the University of Newcastle, we understand inclusive practice to be the use of Interactive strategies that acknowledge and value cultural diversity. Students and staff can benefit from culturally inclusive practice and experience diversity as a resource that enriches our teaching, learning, research, service provision and other work. If we don't adopt Inclusive practices, the result is that some individuals will feel marginalised, isolated and discouraged. We may also miss valuable opportunities to learn about alternate experiences.

'At the base of intercultural understanding is a recognition of the ways in which two cultures resemble one another... Resemblances usually surface through an examination of the differences'.

Valdes 1986 p 49

Inclusive practice enables all students and staff to get the maximum academic, personal and social benefit from their experience at the University of Newcastle. An Inclusive environment on campus contributes to making the University a safe, enjoyable and productive place for everyone in the university community, and can enhance our Interactions with the wider community.

Enhancing cultural inclusiveness is an incremental, two-way process

Inclusive practice is dynamic. Cultural inclusiveness addresses and supports the needs of people from diverse cultures and values their unique contribution. It involves ongoing awareness raising, where negotiations and compromise may be necessary. At the same time, people from diverse cultures must be supported to understand the University of Newcastle's academic, administrative and social culture. Most of all, it is important to regard cross-cultural interactions as an opportunity for all of us to learn.

A good start for thinking about culture - your own and others' - is noticing what you find surprising, or perhaps disagreeable, about people's activities, attitudes and expectations. When this happens think about the cultural 'rules' being applied (Carroll 2000).

According to Lado (1957 p 110), 'Culture is synonymous with "the ways of people." More often than not, the ways of people are praised by that same people while looked upon with suspicion or disapproval by the others, and often in both cases with surprisingly little understanding of what those ways really are and mean.'

The following quote shows how expectations about roles, responsibilities and relationships of teachers and students can vary.

'If the lecturer does not answer a student's question in class, but asks the other students what they think, in my country we would think that teacher is poorly qualified or lazy. But in Australia this way of not giving the answer... is common In our class, even when the professor Is our teacher'.

(3rd year Botany Student from Thailand)
(Ballard & Clanchy 1991 p1)

Respectful relationships

Respecting diversity entails more than tolerance. The term 'tolerance' implies that something must be endured, or 'put up with.' When genuine acknowledgement, appreciation of, and interest in diversity Is experienced, respectful relationships develop. Apart from avoiding the occurrence of disrespectful behaviours, engaging in respectful relationships means demonstrating a positive appreciation of people and their cultural values.

Respectful relationships extend beyond individuals to include aspects of special significance to particular cultures. For example, in the case of Indigenous Australians, this includes respecting their history of Australia, which is an alternate perspective to'white' history. Locally, it also means acknowledging and respecting Traditional custodians or guardians of the land on which the University's campuses are located.

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