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### Diverse learners

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## Diverse learners

### Abstract

This chapter explores student populations in terms of their diversity and special needs and is designed to provide you with a broad grounding in this topic. Beginning with an overview of commonly used terminology in this field, the chapter moves to the learners themselves, providing key statistics and insights into various VET equity cohorts, including an understanding of how learners are 'officially' categorised and defined. The focus then changes to an analysis of key Commonwealth legislation and related policies in the area and an example of a State response. The final sections of the chapter are aimed at providing practical insight into how you, as a VET practitioner, might accommodate and support different learners.

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## **CHAPTER FIVE: DIVERSE LEARNERS**

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### **Abstract**

*This chapter explores student populations in terms of their diversity and is designed to provide you with a broad grounding in this topic. Beginning with an overview of commonly used terminology in this field, the chapter moves to the learners themselves, providing key statistics and insights into various VET equity cohorts, including an understanding of how learners are 'officially' categorised and defined. The focus then changes to an analysis of key Commonwealth legislation and related policies in the area and an example of a State response. The final sections of the chapter are designed to provide practical insight into how you, as a VET practitioner, might accommodate and support different learners.*

### **Introduction**

If you are working in vocational education and training (VET) in Australia, you are working in one of the most highly differentiated educational sectors in terms of student diversity and background. For example, in 2011 the total intake of VET students was 1.9 million and of these 4.7% (or 87,700) were Indigenous students, 8.4% (119,400) were students with a disability and 15.3% (287,600) were students of non-English speaking backgrounds (Kearney, 2013). This diverse student population means that you will encounter learners who are at different stages of learning. Some may have been out of education for many years, while others will have little formal education or perhaps no education at all. When referring to the concept of diverse learners there is a myriad of terms that are encountered. Some of these are used interchangeably and, also, may have a range of definitions. The first sections of this chapter provide some working definitions of common terminology to assist you to understand how the terms such as *equity*, *equality* and *social justice*, are formally understood in relation to diverse groups. An overview of the legislative and policy frameworks that apply to disadvantaged Australians is then detailed and this is followed by current definitions of VET equity groups. The chapter concludes with considerations of how you, as a VET teacher, might implement strategies to deal effectively with these diverse learners.

### **Definitions and applications of relevant terms**

When referring to the concept of diverse learners there are a myriad of terms that are encountered. Some of these are used interchangeably and also, may have a range of definitions and so this introductory section will provide some working definitions of common terminology to assist as you read through this chapter. One of the most commonly used terms in this field is '*equity*'; in this book we use this with reference to

social development as opposed to financial equity, such as the equity held in a financial investment. Social equity is characterised by a sense of fairness, that everyone should have the same level of access to community resources and also, opportunities. In educational discourses, equity is regarded as being fundamental to the economic and social development of countries. The opportunity to equitably participate in education provides the basis for better health outcomes, higher salaries and greater lifespan (OECD, 2012).

### ***Equity and equality***

The terms *equity* and *equality* are frequently used interchangeably but there are subtle differences between these concepts. Both equity and equality are similarly focussed on fairness. Whilst equity refers to ‘a belief that there are some things which people should have... basic needs that should be fulfilled’ (Falk, Hampton et al., 1993, p. 2), the concept of equality is based on the assumption that everyone starts from the same level and seeks the same outcomes. Guy and McCandless (2012) provide the example of a child entering school without English as a first language. Whilst, all the children have *equality* of access to English language instruction, unless the non-English-speaking student receives additional tutoring this will not represent *equitable* access.

These authors also chart the development of the term equity and how it has been applied, describing how its understanding and use has moved from philosophical bases to an increased ‘structural’ and ‘administrative’ foci (p. 56). This movement is perhaps most clearly indicated by the increased usage of terms like social equity and equality in political legislation, institutional policy documents and, also, educational support interventions, issues considered in the sections below.

#### **TASK 5.1: *How are the terms equity and equality used in your training organisation?***

Using your organisational website, search for these terms and note the following:

- How many times are these terms used in documents?
- In what types of documents do they appear?
- Are they used in the most appropriate context?

### ***Social Justice***

Equity and equality can be regarded as sitting under the umbrella term of *social justice*, which broadly refers to providing individuals with the opportunity to reach their potential. Social justice implies the need for equal rights for all regardless of gender, geography or social position. When social justice is spoken about, it generally relates to the need for governments and political organisations to actively address issues of poverty and also, injustice. Globally, there are huge inconsistencies in access to basic health and education facilities leading to many examples of social injustice in ‘*the form of repression, discrimination, harassment, or simply the failure to redress inequalities*’ (Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning).

*At the most basic level, for Indigenous peoples, social justice means that our lives will not be dominated by a foreign rule of law which fails to adequately support or take into account our unique identities and aspirations. It means that our voices will enter into a dialogue from which all peoples in a society negotiate the type of society they live in.*

**Professor Mick Dodson, Co-Chair  
Reconciliation Australia**

Considering these concepts provides a basis for understanding the nature of disadvantage and how factors external to learners impact upon educational participation and access. When we talk about *disadvantaged* students there is a need to avoid blaming the individual for problems and issues; instead recognising the broader social and cultural factors that impact upon each person. When students are blamed for low participation in education or poor educational outcomes, this is known as a *deficit perspective* or a *deficit model* – there will be further discussions about deficit thinking later in the chapter.

In order to address issues of disadvantage and educational inequity, there are various measures adopted to promote *inclusivity* amongst student populations. To achieve inclusive education, both the philosophical and teaching practices encountered by the learners should respect their particular individuality and personal circumstances. The Adult and Community Education (ACE, 2011) sector has developed six principles to assist in developing programs, which are socially inclusive. These principles include developing a *learning centred* focus, providing *wrap-around* and *joined –up* support services that focus on partnerships with the student and also the adoption of *a system of planning to encourage learner persistence*. The ACE Social Inclusion Toolkit<sup>1</sup> provides a repository of resources as well as background information on social inclusion; this resource is freely available on the internet, providing additional reading on this topic.

## **Legislation and policy guiding educational provision for students with diverse needs**

Three terms will be used in this section – legislation, policy and policy initiative. *Legislation* in this context refers to any law (also referred to as statutes or acts) enacted by parliament or a statutory body. Laws are enforceable. *Policy* on the other hand outlines a course of action or a plan that may influence changes in your workplace. It is influenced by social, political and economic contexts. Policies are created at a range of levels – not just at a government level. Private and public institutions and organizations through to local clubs and groups develop policies to achieve their directives. It is expected that policies conform to legislation. A policy can be changed or adjusted by the organization it is developed by, legislation, on the other hand can only be changed by a statutory or governing body. A policy initiative refers to the introduction or beginning of the process or action linked to a policy.

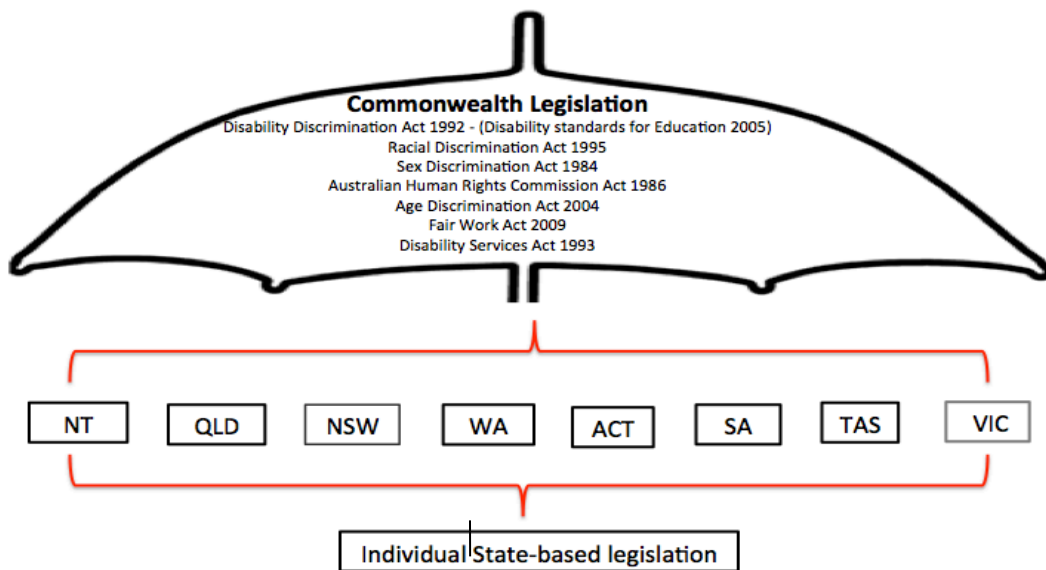
### ***Legislation – Commonwealth and State***

Education providers, within all sectors (including private and community training institutions) throughout Australia, have an obligation to provide appropriate educational provision for all students and adhere to relevant legislation and acts. In particular, providers and their employees have a legal responsibility to avoid discriminating against anyone based on age, gender (and gender choices), race, or disability. This is mandated through Commonwealth and associated state legislation relevant to a range of diverse groups, which is referred to as anti-discrimination legislation. The umbrella diagram (Figure 5.1) below contains five key pieces of anti-discrimination legislation that are relevant to you as a teacher in the VET sector.

### **Figure 5.1. Commonwealth and state equity legislation**

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<sup>1</sup>© State of NSW, Department of Education and Communities (State Training Services) 2012.



*Note: At the time of writing, new Commonwealth legislation has been drafted that encompasses the 5 Anti-Discrimination Acts listed above; however, it is yet to be passed. This new legislation will be referred to as the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Bill.*

As can be seen in Figure 5.1, in addition to Commonwealth legislation each state and territory throughout Australia has associated state-based anti-discrimination and workplace legislation that will impact on you as a VET teacher. It is important that you consider how this legislation is interpreted within the policy frameworks of your institution.

### ***Policy initiatives***

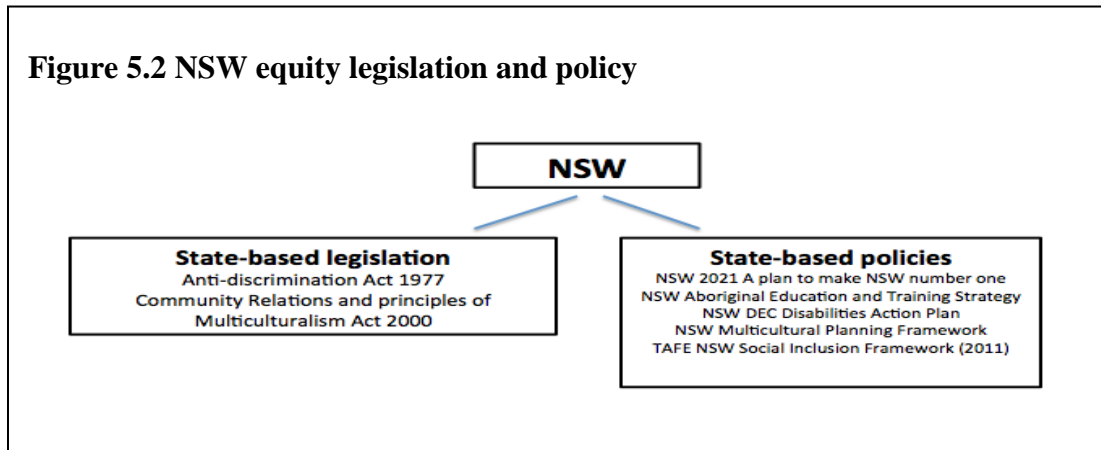
Aside from the broader legislation, there are policy initiatives that seek to support diverse learners. At a Commonwealth level two examples of policy initiatives to increase social inclusion through systemic and social change include 1) *Social Inclusion Principles for Australia* (Australian Government, n.d.) and 2) *The National Statement on Social Inclusion—A Stronger Fairer Australia* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government, n.d.). These initiatives are based on social justice and inclusion priority reform.

A policy initiative that has been specific to the VET sector is the National Vocational Equity Advisory Council's *Equity Blueprint 2011 – 2016: Creating futures - Achieving potential through VET* (Bowman & Callan, 2012), which calls for systemic reform. One of its key features of this policy is its advocacy for a '*universal design*' for VET programs to ensure equitable access and participation by all, in particular those referred to as *disadvantaged learners*. This design is discussed at some length later in this chapter and specific equity groups in the next section. The Blueprint claims that VET systems and processes '...do not adequately take into account the particular circumstances' of this group, highlighting the barriers to pathways created by the system. Each Australian state and territory has a range of policies and initiatives relevant to government context, priorities and focus.

### **TASK 5.2. State/territory equity legislation/policy:**

Figure 5.2 provides an example of relevant state-based equity legislation and policies for NSW. Investigate your state/territory legislation and policies and then identify policies and current policy initiatives relevant to the VET sector.

**Figure 5.2 NSW equity legislation and policy**



## **Implications of equity laws and policies for VET teachers**

As a teacher you are obligated to deliver high quality programs that respond to the needs and abilities of all students. While no Commonwealth or state anti-discrimination legislation itemises specific adjustments to avoid discrimination, for students with disabilities, the Disability Standards (2005) do indicate that RTOs must consult with these students about any adjustments they may require to participate in programmes. The process below applies when students have disclosed their disability.

### ***Disability Standards for Education (2005)***

The right to participate in education and training without discrimination is relevant to the rights and inclusion of all diverse groups. However additional or subordinate legislation exists that is specific to the needs of students with disabilities and guides equitable education provision. The *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (DSE) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006) assists education providers and their employees to understand their legal responsibilities in providing specifically for students with disabilities. The core objective of this subordinate legislation is to seek to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. In terms of delivery these standards call for providers to make *reasonable adjustments* to meet this objective in all required contexts, including work placements.

### ***Reasonable adjustment***

As a VET practitioner it is very important to understand what constitutes a reasonable adjustment (RA). An adjustment may be minimal, such as providing written notes for a student with poor fine motor control, or additional time to complete a task. More substantial, such as providing assistive technology, computer software or brailled texts, or more extensive, such as building modifications (Conway, 2014), may be required. The adjustment needs to be justifiable and not undermine academic integrity. That is, it must ‘uphold the integrity of the qualification’ (QLDDET, 2010, p 5). Reasonable adjustments (RA) need to enable the student to demonstrate competence and the dimensions of competence (if required) including both the knowledge and the practical skill component on ‘the same basis’ as a student without a disability. Figure 5.3 below shows an example of a reasonable adjustment process that may assist VET teachers in supporting a student with a disability, who has requested an RA.

**Figure 5.3: Reasonable adjustment process (QLDDET, 2010)**

Student discloses disability and requests need for reasonable adjustment



RTO

1. Requests evidence of disability
2. Determines eligibility
3. Consults directly with student

To avoid direct or indirect discrimination, open dialogue and ongoing consultations with all students not just those with visible needs are encouraged. If a student complains to you of discrimination then treat their complaint in a professional manner through the use of due process according to the policy in your institution. If this isn't done, there is a danger that your response may be 'harshly judged in hindsight and set the tone for any litigation that may follow' (Baker, n.d.). Where a case of discrimination is identified and the education provider does not take appropriate action the 'aggrieved person or someone on their behalf can make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) about non-compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)' (DEEWR, 2010, p10). Below are examples of direct and indirect discrimination cases that were brought before the Commission for conciliation

Type of discrimination	Definition	Example
Direct Discrimination	'Occurs when one person is treated less favourably on the basis of an attribute (such as sex, race or disability) when compare with how a person without the attribute would be treated in the same or similar circumstances' (AHRC, 2008)	A student with an intellectual disability was refused enrolment into a VET course because of his disability.  Resolved through conciliation. (AHRC, Conciliation register)
Indirect Discrimination	'Occurs where there is a requirement or condition that applies generally, but has the effect of disadvantaging a particular group and is unreasonable in all of the circumstances' (AHRC, 2008)	A student failed a course because she was unable to attend a final exam due to going into premature labour. Requirements for the course stated that non-attendance at the final exam would result in a fail grade.  Resolved through conciliation. (AHRC, Conciliation Register)

### Task 5.3: Formally dealing with discrimination

- 1) For those of you who teach in an Australian context investigate the grounds for claims for discrimination in relation to disability on the AHRC website and particularly ways in which cases have been dealt with.

or

- 2) If you have experienced teaching in a country other than Australia - investigate the relevant anti-discrimination legislation and whether it allows for cases to be dealt with in similar ways to those on the HREOC website. If not, investigate whether legislative provision exists that refers to discrete groups of disadvantaged people

In your capacity as a teacher working at the 'coalface,' knowledge and understanding of legislation and policy may not appear to be a priority in your delivery. These mechanisms, however, serve as an important framework for educational systems, providing all staff with the required knowledge to enable access and participation for students with diverse needs and particularly those who have been formally identified as belonging to specific equity groups. The following section provides details of the composition and range of these equity groups.

### Categorisation and numbers of VET equity group students

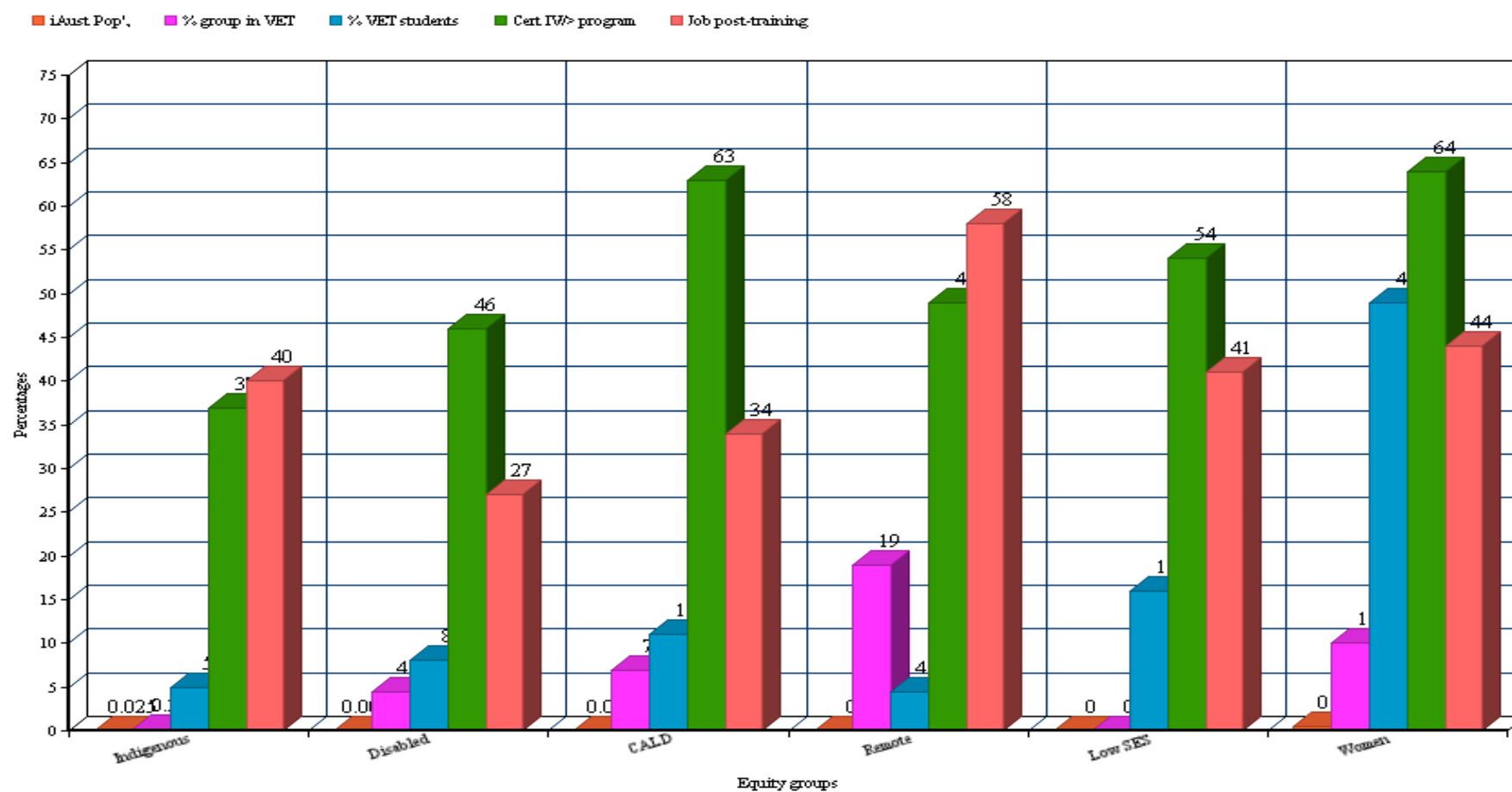
Until recently, the National Vocational Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) had policy responsibility for meeting the target that members of all equity groups participate, achieve and transition to work and higher education at rates that, at a minimum, match those of other cohorts. In 2011, NVEAC identified six equity groups that were singled out for special monitoring in order to track their progress towards meeting this target. These groups were: (a) Indigenous Australians, (b) people with a disability, (c) people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, (d) people living in remote and very remote areas, (e) people from low socio-economic backgrounds and (f) women.

In a national review of the VET publicly-funded student data collected by AVETMISS (Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard) (Department of Education, 2012). Rothman, Shah, et al (2013) found that equity groups were well represented within VET training relative to the total population of VET learners. Figure (5.4) below shows the key findings from this review relating to the following categories:

- *The number of students in each equity group who studied VET programs in 2011,*
- *Their percentage of the total VET student cohort and the whole equity group,*
- *Study level*
- *Employment status post study and*
- *for Indigenous, disability, CALD and women groups, the total population of people who identified as belonging to these groups<sup>1</sup>.*

What is common to all the members of these groups is that, relative to percentage of the general population (10%), they are very well represented in VET programs.

Figure 5.3 VET equity group participation 2011



However, many students in these equity groups study at Certificate levels (I) and (II), essentially preparatory courses. In particular, just over one-third of Indigenous students, and just less than one half of students with disabilities and remote/very remote students, enrol in Certificate (III) or higher program levels. In the case of women, while an average of 64% study at Certificate (III) level, as they only comprise 49% of the total VET student cohort, there are considerable numbers who also study at lower levels.

What must also be understood is that these categories are not necessarily exclusive of each other. For example, while data for low socio-economic students is incomplete, it is likely that most of the groups singled out by NVEAC will belong to one or more equity categories. That is, a large number of Indigenous VET students who live in very remote regions are likely to be women and be socio-economically disadvantaged. The profile of Maria that is featured in the implications section of this chapter also reflects a person who fits within more than one NVEAC category.

In addition to the six key equity groups that have been the focus of discussion so far in this section, NVEAC has identified a further five groups who may be experiencing 'difficult life chances' and for whom VET may offer a 'second chance' opportunity for learning. These are identified as students:

- *with less than a Year 12 or equivalent level of schooling,*
- *returning to learning after a long absence from previous study or work*
- *upgrading their skills following a redundancy and*
- *returning to the broader society after incarceration.*

Another group that has been identified by NVEAC who may need to be considered within an equity framework are those who neither work nor study in a formal sense. While there is some consensus, regarding the validity of the NVEAC selection of the key equity groups (except, in some cases, for the category of women), there is less consensus about which groups might comprise a subsidiary collection. For example, Loretto (2010) and others have found that workers aged over 55 years constitute a group that suffer considerable disadvantage, particularly if their levels of education and training are low and if they have worked in what have traditionally been seen as low-skilled jobs.

#### **Task 5.4: Planning implications for one equity group**

1. Select one equity group with whom you are familiar.
2. Identify two implications for teaching this particular group and consider how you might approach teaching your content area

It is one thing to know legislative and policy requirements but another to consider how to address the specific needs of equity groups and, indeed, all students in your VET setting. The following section outlines two strategies, namely adopting a strength-based approach and a universal design for learning that have been shown to be helpful in meeting this objective.

## **Teaching for inclusivity**

So far this chapter has provided you with a grounding in understanding some of the requirements you need to be aware of as a VET practitioner and also the nature of some diverse learners. This concluding section is designed to enable you to put theory into practice.

### ***Adopting a Strength's Based Approach***

The previous sections indicate how we, as educators, need to remain conscious of the obstacles that students face in their learning journeys and avoid perceiving these challenges as somehow the students' fault. This is known as deficit thinking, which often involves blaming the student rather than the constraints (i.e. poverty, low levels of education) that individuals operate within. Sometimes deficit thinking is so deeply embedded in policy in this area that it appears 'taken for granted' or invisible. For example, in the last decade there has been an increase in references to raising aspirations amongst young people in Australia, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds. However, this emphasis on the need to raise or build aspirations implies that certain groups do not already have such goals, which is an example of embedded deficit thinking.

Appadurai (2004) argues that 'aspirations' are dictated by access to cultural and economic resources and that the rich or powerful have greater capacity to aspire because they are able to draw upon a broader range of these resources. Appadurai is not the only theorist to argue that access to education and educational aspirations are class-based. Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, is probably best known for his work on the school system and how this reproduces inequality by exalting certain cultural practices usually associated with the dominant classes. Bourdieu (1986) argues that individuals enter the educational system with different types of capitals, which are defined by their social background. Capital can be economic, such as resources or wealth, or cultural, that is, advantages inherited through parentage or social position (Bourdieu, 1986). For Bourdieu, success in learning is not necessarily a result of natural abilities but rather relates to how certain capitals are more valued by the education system. As Bourdieu and Passeron explain, there is an 'affinity between class cultural habits and the demands of the educational system or the criteria which define success within it' (1977, p. 22). These 'affinities' can include knowledge of certain music and literature, certain ways of speaking or even opportunities to travel.

Whilst most of us are not in a position to change the structures of society, we can provide the tools for students to consider their place in the world. Education can provide a space where students can learn to question, reflect and evaluate their life goals and horizons. This can begin by simply positioning learners as knowledgeable and empowered to recognise the skills and knowledge that they bring to the learning experience. This type of validation can be a powerful experience for all learners but for those who have experienced inequity or inequality, such strength based approaches to teaching have the potential to be life changing on a personal and public level. Critical education theory or critical pedagogy recognises the responsibility of education to enable everyone to 'explore the possibilities of what it means to be citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in ... democracy' (Giroux, 2010, p. 2).

Paulo Freire (1921–1997) is regarded as one of the key theorists in this area, his 'pedagogy of the oppressed' (1970; 1998) focused on approaches to education that empower students. To achieve this, Freire identified the need for students to have equal participation in their learning and also encouraged to question their place in society. Whilst Freire focused on differences in social class, the underpinnings of critical education theory have emerged across fields and disciplines informing thinking about race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, if you interested in learning more about this philosophy and the various applications, some key theorists in this area include Bell Hooks, Peter McLaren and Joe Kincheloe.

### ***Universal Design for Learning***

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) the second strategic focus of this chapter is an inclusive framework that enables educators to design and deliver curricula that meets the needs of all learners. It focuses on making curricula accessible to all learners from the outset, through providing flexible and multiple options for the delivery of, and ways to interpret content and for engagement in the learning process. It is not about adjusting or modifying a curriculum that has previously been developed for the ‘average learner’ or individualising for a specific student. (Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST), 2011).

Where educators design and develop curricula based on a ‘one size fits all’ premise, ‘they fail to provide all individuals with fair and equal opportunities to learn by excluding learners with different abilities, backgrounds, and motivation who do not meet the illusive criteria for “average”’ (CAST, 2011). A UDL approach enables educators to recognise the variability of learners, particularly through ‘offering paths for those currently disenfranchised’ (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014, p. 48). UDL reduces the need for reasonable adjustments. It encourages educators to reconsider their teaching strategies, to look beyond ‘chalk and talk’ delivery and literacy based assessment, and focus on the variability of ways in which students learn and engage with subject matter.

UDL is based on three key principles. These are:

**Principle 1:** To support recognition learning of essential content educators need to provide multiple means of representation (the ‘what’ of learning).

**Principle 2:** To support strategic learning, educators need to provide multiple means of action and expression (the ‘how’ of learning)

**Principle 3:** To support affective learning, educators need to provide multiple means of engagement (the ‘why’ of learning). (CAST, 2011; Glass, Meyer & Rose, 2013)

Translating these principles into the classroom requires educators to provide flexible and varied ways for students to engage in the learning process, as well as providing a range of ways for the students to demonstrate and express their understanding and mastery of a topic. In addition, the strategies used by the teacher to present or disseminate curriculum content, needs to reflect learner variability. A single teaching and/or learning strategy does not necessarily suit every learner in the class, however a range of strategies allow the student to process information and engage.

UDL enables educators to view diversity as the norm and therefore focus on creating a positive environment in which all students are motivated to learn and can learn. The table below incorporates the three principles of UDL, key questions to consider when planning within this framework and a range of practical examples.

Principles of Universal Design for Learning	Key questions to consider within the UDL Guidelines.	Practical Examples
<b>Principle 1:</b> Provide multiple means of representation (the ‘what’ of learning).	<b>Presentation of information to learners (the ‘what’):</b> What range of options are planned to: extend the comprehension and understanding of all learners? enable students to be able to understand key symbols and	Ensure visuals are accessible – font size and type; colour and contrast; limited relevant text Concept explanation and understanding- use practical real-life examples; Provide a glossary of key words/concepts – include visuals or translation (if required)

	expressions? assist all learners perceive what needs to be learned?	Use images, metaphors and technology to present authentic experiences. Provide electronic or hard copy lecture notes Providing alternative formats – large print; audio files; e-books; digital text; videoed lectures
<b>Principle 2:</b> Provide multiple means of action and expression (the ‘how’ of learning)	<b>Acting strategically and expressing themselves (the ‘how’):</b> What range of options are planned that will assist all students to: act strategically? express themselves fluently? physically respond?	Provide checkpoints and prompts for self monitoring Alternative tools and assistive technologies to enable response to tasks – mouse, joystick, voice control, adapted keyboard, customised overlays for keyboards Present understanding of content through multi-media; technology; role play; visual art; 3D construction; poster; manipulatives; social media Scaffold learning that is embedded into digital software or e-learning sites.
<b>Principle 3:</b> Provide multiple means of engagement (the ‘why’ of learning).	<b>Engaging with each lesson (the ‘why’):</b> What range of options are planned to enable students to: regulate their own learning ? maintain motivation and sustain effort in their learning? engage and interest all learners?	Vary structure of face-to-face sessions – include lecturing, group and individual work opportunities, discussion, and active learning approaches. Contextualise content and delivery to learners’ lives and experiences Provide quality feedback – individualised and informative not comparative
CAST, 2011; Glass, Meyer & Rose, 2013		Kinash 2010; CAST 2011; Queensland VET Development Centre 2012; Woodcock, Dixon & Tanner, 2013

## Classroom-based activities to support diverse learners

Whilst UDL provides a systematic way to design curricula and lessons that enable all learners to engage and access and comprehend content, teachers also need to develop a toolkit of practical classroom-based activities that can be adapted and used creatively. Below are some examples that you may find useful to add to your toolkit and have found to work well with adult learners.

### *Teaching with visual images*

Rather than provide a text-based lesson consider how you could present content or key concepts using a range of images, including literal or metaphorical images. Begin by using a previously delivered lesson, as you already have content and sequence to be transformed into visual images.

*Ideas to put this into practice:*

- Use PowerPoint software – you can adjust timing of images according to your explanations and discussions with students.
- Laminating photographs, images, illustrations, cartoons linked to key questions or

topic of discussion – in groups students can discuss and identify relevant images.

- Problem solving –presenting a series of images and students to identify correct sequence of events or identify cause and effect, possible interventions etc. For example: conduct a risk assessment related to a specific worksite
- Create a gallery or visual map of shops and locations in the local area. Particularly good when working with students from NESB to develop communication skills (Eastwood, Coates et al, 2009)

### **Addressing the diverse needs of your learners**

In order to apply some of the knowledge you have acquired in this chapter and also, to encourage you to seek out additional information, the following two cases outline two students' stories. Work in groups to examine each case and answer the questions that follow, considering in particular how strengths-based and UDL approaches might be used as starting points. You may need to consult additional websites and other resources.

#### ***Snapshot of Maria***

Maria has recently commenced in a class that you are teaching and you notice that she is very quiet and does not engage with the other students in the class. You are aware that Maria is a newly arrived migrant who has spent the last year learning English. Thinking that perhaps Maria might be shy, you leave the situation for a day or two but when you see no improvement, approach Maria for a chat after class.

Speaking to Maria, you reflect that she seems almost frightened by you. You persevere in the conversation and while Maria seems to understand what you are saying, she does not respond beyond uttering monosyllables. You talk to Maria about the need to talk to other students, as there is a lot of group work in the program.

A week later, another student approaches you and expresses concern about Maria. Not only is she very uncommunicative but also she seems frightened all the time. The student also says that at times Maria seems to almost 'enter a trance' and often whispers to herself during class time.



#### **Task 5.4a: Application of strategies to Maria's snapshot**

In groups, discuss the following:

- Identify the possible cultural, social and academic elements that may be impacting on Maria's behaviours.
- What immediate changes to the learning environment might you consider to:
  - *Motivate Maria to engage with the lesson?*
  - *Enable her to express herself and comprehend academic requirements?*
  - *Present content so that she can comprehend it?*
- Whom do you think you should speak to about Maria to support her learning needs? Personal needs?
- What are your responsibilities in relation to Maria and the rest of the class?
- Do you have any legislative responsibilities? If yes, then please explain what they might be.

- As Maria is choosing not to disclose the reasons underpinning her fear what support personnel in your RTO could you liaise with to help you to support her in the classroom?
- Review the vignette and make suggestions about alternative ways of dealing with this issue – what would you have done differently if the situation occurred again?

### ***Snapshot of Sam***

Sam, a 20 year-old male, has changed his VET course 3 times this year. He is now in your class. He is always keen to engage in discussion and group work and his comments are always well articulated and relevant. It is apparent that he has a good grasp of the core content. He also participates in practical based sessions and frequently assists others in their understanding of how to complete the task.

During theory teaching sessions he sits at the back of the room and uses his computer to copy notes that are presented on the IWB (Interactive Whiteboard). Instead of typing them he uses *Dragon Dictate*, which is a speech to text software that converts his oral speech to written text. You have overheard some of the other students complaining to each other that this interrupts their learning.

In addition, after you mark his first written assignment you notice that his ability to write in a coherent and logical manner does not reflect his ability to clearly speak his understanding. His spelling is atrocious and his ideas are all over the place and lack form. You are confused because of how he presents in class, but he has not disclosed any difficulties to you.

### **Task 5.4b: Application of strategies to Sam's snapshot**

In groups:

- Identify the key concerns – what are they telling you about Sam and his learning needs?
- When planning content delivery and assessment, which principles of UDL would you consider in regard to Sam's needs? Discuss some practical examples.
- Considering Sam has changed his course 3 times this year, discuss whom you could initially discuss your concerns with?
- Think about the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* – what is your legal responsibility in relation to Sam?

Talk about what you would do when you consult with Sam if he does not want to disclose his difficulties because of his fear of the stigma associated with literacy difficulties?



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