



*Journal of Advances and  
Scholarly Researches in  
Allied Education*

*Vol. IX, Issue No. XVII,  
January-2015, ISSN 2230-  
7540*

## **POLICY PERSPECTIVE ON CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

AN  
INTERNATIONALLY  
INDEXED PEER  
REVIEWED &  
REFEREED JOURNAL

# Policy Perspective on Continuous Professional Development

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**Abstract – The Equality Act 2010 is the legislation surrounding the topics of equality and diversity. Academic staff has a responsibility to deliver teaching and learning that meets the required standards mentioned above. This could mean paying attention to the needs of the students, ensuring you consider inclusivity and accessibility. Additionally, make it clear to students that you have a zero tolerance policy toward discrimination by letting them know the ways you expect them to interact with each other, and deal promptly and efficiently with inappropriate behaviour if it ever occurs. By finding opportunities within your teaching to prompt students to work collaboratively in diverse groups through creative and respectful techniques, you can add value to the learning experience for everyone.**

**Keywords: Equality, Diversity, Education**

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## INTRODUCTION

Promoting equality and diversity in education is essential for teachers, academics and students. The aim is to create a learning environment where all students can thrive together and understand that individual characteristics make people unique and not 'different' in a negative way. By stressing this message from early education onwards, it will have an impact on how they treat others right through to higher education such as university degrees or apprenticeships, and beyond.

Discrimination is essentially bullying - something that is all too common in education surroundings such as in school playgrounds.

One 13-year-old girl was bullied due to having autism, a condition that put her within the disability category of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act. Fellow pupils called her names due to her mental health condition, which was present from early childhood and characterised by great difficulty in communicating with others and forming relationships. She not only endured abusive language but was also physically attacked. The perpetrators saw her condition as a difference to exploit.

She told her parents, who complained to the school about the problem. They felt the teachers' response was inadequate and didn't stop the bullying. The situation caused her to feel depressed and isolated, feelings that led to self-harming, and she was forced to move schools as a result.

This highlights how important it is for the education sector to push for diversity and equality. In this case, the school let the girl down and she suffered significant distress due to having to switch schools to escape the problem. Additionally, she may have left the bullies behind, but with her self-esteem at rock bottom and the prominence of social media, the issue wasn't easily 'fixed'. The problem should have been dealt with at its source (the bullies) much quicker, to prevent it from getting that serious in the first place.

Developed, shaped and utilised by the same individuals who shape and experience traditional learning and teaching environments, these virtual environments are equally susceptible to normalisation and othering, if not more so if they are perceived as neutral and therefore not subject to the same interrogations as traditional pedagogies. Putting aside the problems underlying the assumption that all students have an equal ability to access technology-enhanced learning, we must not forget that students – and teachers – bring their embodied and cultured identities to the technological and virtual spheres.

Of course, all of the above have significant implications on learning and teaching processes with interrogations of, and changes in, practice impacting on quality enhancement and assurance systems, learning and teaching strategies and policies as well as partnership, and other relationship development, mechanisms. Perhaps, though, the biggest implication is that of staff capacity. While such activities do not require that staff are equality and diversity experts – universities already employ individuals with this expertise – they do require staff

development in equality and diversity-related learning and teaching as well as sufficient time, recognition and resource for the development of relevant evidence-based pedagogic and curricula approaches. Section A of this compendium explores the staff development question and highlights different approaches to capacity building, including incorporation into existing learning and teaching development, widening of existing equality and diversity development, and creation of bespoke development activity.

## **POLICY PERSPECTIVE ON CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Is diversity included within your teaching methods? Do you make reference and use examples from a variety of cultures, religions and traditions? Do you challenge stereotypes? Here are a few classroom activities and ideas that you can use and adapt to help promote multiculturalism in your school:

### ***Themed weeks***

Host 'African week', 'Islam week' or 'Disability week' and teach your students all about the chosen topic. You could try different foods, listen to music, play games, learn facts and watch videos. Try and incorporate the theme into each area of the curriculum to reinforce the topic and maintain interest.

### ***Use diverse images in resources***

When you pick books, posters and activities for your students, make sure that they include people from different backgrounds or with disabilities to show that these differences are 'normal'. Avoid resources where stereotypes are used.

### ***Make use of current news events***

Promote debate and discussion by raising current issues and seeing what your students understand about the situation. For example, find a story where someone was fired for being too old – what do your students think about this? How would they challenge it?

### ***Quizzes***

Host weekly quizzes on a set theme and learn how much your students know about different cultures, religions, disabilities etc. You could even assign the task of writing the quiz to 2 students each week so that they are involved in doing the research.

### ***Sample food***

Set up a French café, Indian restaurant or American diner in your classroom and let your students sample foods typically eaten in the corresponding culture. What do they like or dislike about the foods? How is it different from what they normally have for dinner? Teach the students the reasons why certain foods are (or are not) eaten in certain countries.

### ***Male or female?***

Explore the idea of stereotypes – provide each student with a list of 10 professions and ask them to decide whether each is a 'man's job' or a 'woman's job'. Go through their answers as a class and see what stereotypes people have. Is it fair that these stereotypes exist? How would they suggest these stereotypes are challenged?

### ***True or false?***

Present the class with some facts about people with disabilities, another culture or based on the protected characteristics and ask them to decide whether the facts are true or false. Are they surprised by the correct answers?

### ***Learn languages***

Teach your students a few words in French, Spanish, Afrikaans, Chinese etc to raise their awareness of language barriers around the world. If you have students in your class who speak another language, ask them to help. What are the benefits of speaking more than one language?

### ***Hold debates and discussions***

Divide your class into 2 teams. Provide one team with a statement, e.g. 'I'm a woman working in an office and have been told I can no longer work there because I recently became pregnant'. This team must defend this statement. Ask the other team to give advice and challenge the statement. How do both teams feel afterwards? Which team would they prefer to have been on and why?

### ***Hearing/sight/physical impairment games***

Play games to raise awareness of different physical disabilities. Can your students put on a jumper with just one hand? Can they guide a friend around the classroom with a blindfold on? Can they lip-read what the characters on TV are saying with the sound off? Use these activities to show the difficulties that people face and explain how these people learn to overcome them.

### ***First impressions***

This is a good activity for older students. Watch the YouTube video by the Guardian, but pause it after 10 seconds, 16 seconds and 24 seconds, taking time to ask the students what they think is happening in the video. Do their perceptions change as the video goes on? Get the students to justify their responses. You can find the video **on YouTube**.

### ***Tell stories***

Find a few stories that challenge perceptions and stereotypes, such as the tortoise and the hare which proves that first impressions can be deceiving. These

kind of stories will encourage your students to think about their beliefs and look at the world in a different way.

### **Celebrate occasions**

Host an event for Chinese new year, Diwali, Easter, Ramadan etc to raise awareness of different cultures and religions. Explain why each occasion is celebrated and ask your students what they enjoy most about them.

### **Play music**

Listen to music from around the world or create your own using percussion instruments. Introduce your class to instruments from other cultures that they may not have seen before and to different styles of music. If you have children with diverse cultural backgrounds in your class, perhaps they could do a show-and-tell?

## **CONCLUSION**

Diversity and Equality can cover all areas of society, but whatever the area, it works on the basis of nine protected characteristics: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and civil partnerships, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion and belief, Sex and Sexual orientation.

The Act includes a public sector equality duty. This requires public bodies, including education institutions, to:

- Prioritize the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimization
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between people with different traits listed as protected characteristics

To achieve this, institutions need to remove or minimize the disadvantages suffered by people from the relevant groups by taking steps to meet their needs and encourage them to participate in group activities. All of this can be tackled by combating prejudice and promoting understanding between people with differences. These solutions can be particularly effective in educational settings such as schools and universities.

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