

# Inclusive teaching for university students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds: Recent national research findings

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# Overview

- **An overview of the research**
- **Conceptual framework**
- **Findings**
- **Summary**
- **Questions**





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# An overview of the research

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Effective teaching and support for students  
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# National project research team

- Professor Marcia Devlin (Project leader)
- Professor Sally Kift
- Professor Karen Nelson
- Ms Liz Smith
- Dr Jade McKay



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# An overview of the research: Methods

- Literature review
- A national environmental scan of effective policy and practice
- Interviews with 89 *successful* students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds (3 universities with high concentration)
- Interviews with 26 experienced staff (6 universities with extensive experience)





# An overview of the research: Methodology

- **Definition of low SES:** postcode of home address + parental educational attainment
- **Success focus – student success and effective practice:** What works? What contributes to success?
- **Data analysis:** Coding in NVIVO; Thematic analysis; Frequency analysis





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# Conceptual framework

## ‘Bridging socio-cultural incongruity’ (Devlin, 2011)

Rejecting deficit conceptions that either:

- Students are ‘the problem’; and/or
- Institutions are ‘the problem’.

Instead, seeing the facilitation of student success as a joint venture toward *bridging* socio-cultural *incongruity*.





# Conceptual framework

The incongruity is between:

- the social and cultural capital of the low SES students

and

- the social and cultural of the institutions in which they study.

Neither is in deficit, they are simply *incongruent*, at least initially.





# The 'bridge'



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# Other 'bridges'



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# Other 'bridges'



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## The data revealed four major themes:

### **An empathic institutional context:**

- Employs inclusive teaching characteristics and strategies;
- Enables student agency;
- Facilitates life and learning support; and
- Is cognisant of students' financial challenges.





# The data revealed four major themes:

## An empathic institutional context:

- Employs inclusive teaching characteristics and strategies;
- Enables student agency;
- Facilitates life and learning support; and
- Is cognisant of students' financial challenges.







## **Findings related to inclusive teaching:**

- 1. Know and respect your students**
- 2. Offer them flexibility, variety and choice**
- 3. Make expectations clear, using accessible language**
- 4. Scaffold your students' learning**
- 5. Be available and approachable to guide your students' learning**
- 6. Practice reflectively**





## Findings related to inclusive teaching:

- 1. Know and respect your students**
2. Offer them flexibility, variety and choice
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6. Practice reflectively





# 1. Know and respect your students

## Understand their context

- They have to undertake paid work;
- They often have caring responsibilities;
- They often have multiple roles;
- They are very 'time poor'.





# 1. Know and respect your students

## Understand what they *bring* to tertiary study

*...students who came from public high schools tended to do better and last longer,... have fewer fails ... so progress faster at university, than students who came from private schools or ...religious schools...simply because they never had the resources handed to them[,]....they always had to fight for everything and they were much more independent learners. [COL\_013]*





# 1. Know and respect your students

## Understand what they *bring to tertiary study*

*...stats have shown in our course that, generally speaking, our low SES students tend to do better. They're slightly better motivated and probably more capable students...[COL\_014]*





## Findings related to inclusive teaching:

1. Know and respect your students
2. **Offer them flexibility, variety and choice**
3. Make expectations clear, using accessible language
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## 2. Offer students flexibility, variety and choice

### Use a range of teaching strategies

*...how I'd like to design it, if I have power over the design, is to make sure that it does actually come from where the students are ..., so it's flexible enough that they can... bring in their world, but then it actually challenges them to go beyond that [but]...it's always starting from where they are.*

*[COL\_008]*





## 2. Offer students flexibility, variety and choice

### Teach with technology

- This offers flexibility and choice about place and pace of study
- This allows low SES students to meet their other responsibilities and not miss out on classes
- This allows low SES students to connect with others and receive peer support







## 2. Offer students flexibility, variety and choice

### Teach with technology

*The uploading of lecture [recordings] with the PowerPoint slides attached to them, I think, has been a big step. I've had lots of students say that they find that much more involving than reading stuff. Hearing the voice and then seeing the slides at the same time ... I think the impact of that is still quite strong [COL\_002].*





## 2. Offer students flexibility, variety and choice

### Teach with technology

*... all the online technology was fantastic and the eLive [Eluminate] sessions, I really enjoyed them because you connected with people and the lecturer about the topic [STU\_001]*

*I have to travel a bit further than most people so if I just have a really short day...I just go online. The online module ... the lectures ... being recorded ... [are] very useful for me.*





## 2. Offer students flexibility, variety and choice

### Teach with technology

*I felt that teachers who wanted to use that technology have been probably a little bit more effective [STU\_051]*





## 2. Offer students flexibility, variety and choice

### Be flexible with assessment (mode)

*...assessment should offer a range of ways...in which the students can present their work. So... they have been able to do it on-line, as a report, as an essay, ...as a collection of interview information. [COL\_001]*





## 2. Offer students flexibility, variety and choice

### **Be flexible with assessment (deadlines)**

*I need flexibility because with work arrangements and everything sometimes that all changes and I just need a few days' flexibility here or there. [STU\_036]*

*...for me, with three kids .. whether it be extensions, or special consideration, ...I definitely think those things have helped me get through. If they weren't available, I don't know what I would've done. [STU\_054]*





## Findings related to inclusive teaching:

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2. Offer them flexibility, variety and choice
3. **Make expectations clear, using accessible language**
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### 3. Make expectations clear, using accessible language

#### Make assessment criteria available and understandable

*... for continuous clarification as to what is required...there are typically hundreds of questions that are then filtered back to the course convenors, and the way that those are then answered, such that everyone can see all of the responses, is critical in demystifying what's being asked of us a lot of the time...[STU\_056]*





### 3. Make expectations clear, using accessible language

*I think the other thing with assessment is the students need to understand the criteria sheet, or the rubric...of what the lecturer or... tutor is looking for. I think it's very difficult for them to do a piece of assessment if they're not clear on the guidelines of what they're supposed to be doing. [COL\_001].*







## Findings related to inclusive teaching:

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## 4. Scaffold your students' learning

### Teach (and make sure students learn) the discourse

*A good example of that is when you might set an essay task...which requires some degree of reflection on literature. Now, a culturally rich student audience will say, 'Essay. Yes, I know essays. I know what they are. ...we learnt how to write an essay ...I know how to get hold of literature and review it, and critique it, and so forth'. The students who come from a less well-endowed background may look at you and say, 'You know, I've really not written very many essays, or I haven't written any at all', and they may also be puzzling ... about what an essay ... is, and 'What do you mean by critiquing the literature?' So they're not stupid, but the point is that they don't have this cultural knowledge about how you write an essay [COL\_016].*





## 4. Scaffold your students' learning

### Teach (and make sure students learn) the discourse

*I didn't know anything about a research essay before going in, but once they explained it and gave me a little brochure on how to write a research essay, I was able to go away, read that again, and then produce that essay and then now I know for next time what to do, so that was helpful.*

*[STU\_010]*





## 4. Scaffold your students' learning

### Employ a developmental approach to assessment

*We got taken through ... step by step. A lot of time you're sort of just given assignment tasks and then just sort of having to work it out for ourselves. Uni was really good in kind of easing us into it and telling us not to expect ourselves to know straight away. [STU\_007]*






## Findings related to inclusive teaching:

1. Know and respect your students
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4. Scaffold your students' learning
5. **Be available and approachable to guide your students' learning**
6. Practice reflectively






## 5. Be available and approachable to guide student learning

### Availability

*Support from the lecturers ... or the tutors [helped me succeed]. When they make themselves available, where they make appointments with you to discuss things that you're not clear about, that's the best help that I've had actually [STU\_009].*





## 5. Be available and approachable to guide student learning

### Approachability

*I find some lecturers are really approachable if you've got a question and some aren't at all.  
[STU\_095]*





## Findings related to inclusive teaching:

1. Know and respect your students
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6. **Practice reflectively**







## 6. Practice reflectively

*...I stepped back and said well what do they need to know from this unit? What are the core skills? What are the really valuable things that I can give them in the short time I've got with them that are going to be lasting? and then [I'd] focus on that.  
[COL\_003]*



## 6. Practice reflectively

*...in terms of the need of making inherent expectations explicit and even [making explicit] some of the hidden cultural assumptions that are in the way I'm marking, judging and assessing, I've really had to soul search about why do I prioritise the fact that having a linear argument that's written in a direct and rational way is superior to somebody who might write in metaphor in a circular way? [COL\_009]*





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# Summary

- 1. Draw on what they bring and make them feel they belong (because they do)**
- 2. Give them choices, where feasible and appropriate, including through technology**
- 3. Use plain language**
- 4. Stage and support their learning**
- 5. Be approachable and helpful**
- 6. Reflect and make changes as necessary**





# Some questions


- What is 'doable' in your context?
- What are the obstacles?
- How might the obstacles be (at least partly) overcome?
- What support do you need?





# Your questions, comments

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# A word about standards

*I think the first thing I would say is don't make assumptions about the students ... I think you should always teach students with the expectation that they can excel and that they are capable and have capacity [COL\_008].*

*We take students who are low socioeconomic and first in their family to go to university and all those sorts of things and last year and the year before that we had 25 per cent of them graduate with distinction. For those that are resilient enough to stick it out they are doing okay [COL\_023].*







## A word about standards

*I always had in my mind that paying money to go to university, that I wasn't just going to be there just to get a pass. That would have been pointless if I was paying hundreds of dollars to attend these classes. I was going to give it my best shot and get the best marks that I possibly could [STU\_035].*

*... my lowest grade I have received overall so far has been a credit, so it's been mainly high distinctions, distinctions, and credits [STU\_064].*



# A word about standards

*... I have been quite dedicated and trying to achieve high results [STU\_041]*

*... I love anything to do with the science subjects. I excel at them and love them ... they're very challenging, I mean, don't get me wrong, it's not that I think that they're easy, but I think that's part of their attraction – they're not easy [STU\_082]*

*I guess just my attitude. I have so many of my friends say, 'Oh, yeah. All I need is a pass and I just want to get a pass.' But I want more than that ... So I ... work hard to get the marks [STU\_022].*





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