

What Does It Mean to Enhance Equity through Culturally Responsive Planning?

On March 25th and 26th 2024, special guest speaker Hiren Mistry joined the Curriculum Integration sessions to explore a question that intersects all three priority areas: **How might we be more culturally responsive when planning curriculum and working with students in the classroom?** Currently serving in the role of Vice Principal at White Oaks Secondary School in the Halton District School Board, Hiren has dedicated most of his career to developing teaching and assessment strategies to meet the needs of diverse students.

To well-attended sessions, both online and in person, Hiren began by taking a moment to reflect on the Seneca student body, and how much we know about the diverse composition, needs and interests of our learners. We are here, he reminded us, to teach the students we have, not the students we may have had in the past, or the students we might wish we had. This oft-cited mantra is incredibly important, for the more we get to know the students in each of our classrooms today, the better we can respond to meet their needs. Hiren shared the results of a brief survey he conducted with our faculty participants, which showed their strong level of commitment to developing their teaching practices to support EDI in their classes.

Hiren then shared a tool being developed in collaboration with The Teaching and Learning Centre, and invited faculty input. The “Responsive Planning Template” provides a scaffolded thinking process that helps faculty design a lesson with equity in mind.

It is grounded in three core ideas:

1. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) connects all students with the learning process.
2. All students have valuable background knowledge and are able to learn when supported.
3. Evidence of student learning promotes teacher reflection and learning about identity, bias, power, and privilege.

The template stretches beyond alignment to just program and course learning outcomes and considers what it means to be aligned to one’s students themselves. Sample prompts include, “What prior learning and experiences do my students bring to this lesson?”; “How might my students’ interests and identities be affirmed and engaged in this lesson?”; and “Where is there an opportunity for student voice to be present in this lesson?”

These and other questions can guide our thinking and compel us to create space in our classrooms for all student voices, not just the ones who seem the most interested or who put their hands up the most frequently. Pause and reflect on who already shines in the

classroom and whose voices could be better engaged, respected, affirmed, lifted up. As Hiren reminded us, “Educators are the largest group in Ontario entrusted to translate and uphold Human Rights.” Hiren closed with a phrase he learned from renowned Canadian human rights lawyer, Patrick Case: “**Keep mucking about. Strive for improvement, not perfection.**”

