



DIVERSITY FOCUS
research | consulting | training

BUILDING RACIAL LITERACY AND INCLUSIVE TEACHING PRACTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Practical Guide for Educators and Academic Staff



About This Guide

Teaching and learning environments shape how students experience participation, belonging, safety and representation within higher education.

The Australian Human Rights Commission's [Racism@Uni](#) study highlights that students often experience racism within tutorials, classrooms and broader learning environments.

The report also identifies:

- Low racial literacy
- Gaps in inclusive teaching capability
- Limited curriculum reform
- Inconsistent responses to racism within classrooms

This guide supports educators and academic staff to strengthen:

- Racial literacy
- Inclusive teaching practice
- Culturally responsive learning environments
- Respectful dialogue
- Anti-racist educational practice

What Is Racial Literacy?

Racial literacy involves recognising how:

- Race and racism shape experiences
- Bias and systemic inequities operate
- Institutional cultures influence participation and belonging
- Language, curriculum and practice can either reinforce or challenge exclusion

Racial literacy also involves developing the confidence and capability to:

- Engage respectfully across difference
- Respond appropriately to racism and discrimination
- Support culturally safer learning environments
- Reflect critically on teaching practice and curriculum

Why Inclusive Teaching Matters

Inclusive teaching is closely connected to:

- Student wellbeing
- Participation and engagement
- Psychological and cultural safety
- Academic confidence
- Sense of belonging

Students are more likely to engage meaningfully when they:

- Feel respected and represented
- Experience safer learning environments
- Can participate without fear of humiliation or stereotyping
- See diverse perspectives reflected within curriculum and discussions

Reflection Areas

1. Learning Environment and Participation

Reflection Questions

- *Do students feel psychologically safe participating in learning spaces?*
- *Whose voices are most visible within discussions?*
- *Which students may participate less frequently and why?*
- *How are disagreements and difficult discussions facilitated?*
- *What messages do students receive about whose knowledge is valued?*

Reflection Prompt

Consider a recent tutorial or classroom discussion.

- *Who appeared most comfortable participating?*
- *Who may have remained quieter or less visible?*

2. Curriculum and Representation

The Racism@Uni report highlights concerns about tokenistic inclusion and the limited integration of diverse perspectives into the curriculum.

Reflection Questions

- *Which perspectives and authors are centred within the curriculum?*
- *How are First Peoples' perspectives included?*
- *Are diverse knowledges meaningfully integrated or added superficially?*
- *Are students encouraged to examine power, representation and systemic inequity critically?*
- *How are global and non-Western perspectives engaged respectfully?*

Reflection Prompt

- *What assumptions shape what is considered “core” knowledge within the curriculum?*

3. Responding to Racism and Harm in Learning Spaces

Students may experience:

- Stereotyping
- Exclusion
- Discriminatory comments
- Racialised assumptions
- Silence following harmful incidents



Reflection Questions

- *How confident do educators feel responding to racism or discriminatory behaviour?*
- *What support exists for staff managing challenging moments?*
- *How are students supported when harm occurs?*
- *Are harmful incidents minimised or addressed appropriately?*

Practical Considerations

- Responding calmly and clearly
- Acknowledging impact
- Maintaining respectful discussion expectations
- Avoiding public shaming approaches
- Following up with impacted students where appropriate

4. Respectful Dialogue and Academic Freedom

Universities must balance:

- Academic freedom
- Freedom of expression
- Respectful engagement
- Well-being and cultural safety

Reflection Questions

- *How are respectful dialogue expectations established?*
- *Are students supported to engage critically without personal attack?*
- *How are emotionally charged discussions facilitated safely?*
- *What role does racial literacy play in respectful dialogue?*

Practical Strategies

- Establishing discussion agreements
- Reflective facilitation practices
- Encouraging curiosity and listening
- Creating multiple participation pathways
- Allowing space for reflection and pause

5. Educator Reflection and Ongoing Learning

Inclusive teaching practice requires ongoing reflection rather than perfection.

Reflection Questions

- *What experiences or perspectives may shape my teaching practice?*
- *Where do I feel confident or uncertain?*
- *How do I respond when challenged or uncomfortable?*
- *What ongoing learning may strengthen my racial literacy and inclusive practice capability?*

Reflection Prompt

- *What would ongoing growth and accountability look like within my teaching practice?*

Practical Actions for Universities

Examples include:

- Reviewing curriculum representation and diversity
 - Creating safer classroom participation practices
 - Using inclusive discussion facilitation strategies
 - Incorporating diverse scholarship meaningfully
 - Addressing discriminatory language respectfully and clearly
 - Embedding reflective activities into teaching practice
 - Strengthening cultural responsiveness in assessment and feedback
 - Encouraging critical reflection on systems, power and representation
-

Team Discussion Activity

Reflect Together

Use the reflective questions below during leadership meetings, professional learning or planning sessions to help guide dialogue.

- 1. What currently supports inclusive and culturally safer teaching within our faculty or department?*
- 2. What challenges do educators experience when navigating difficult classroom conversations?*
- 3. How are students impacted when racism or exclusion is ignored or minimised?*
- 4. What professional learning or institutional support may strengthen educator capability?*
- 5. What practical changes could improve participation, belonging and cultural safety within learning environments?*

Closing Reflection

Anti-racist educational practice is not limited to responding to incidents of harm.

It also involves creating learning environments where students feel safer, respected, represented and able to participate meaningfully.

Building racial literacy and inclusive teaching capability is an ongoing process of reflection, learning and institutional responsibility.



Prepared by Diversity Focus
www.diversityfocus.com.au