

‘Process inclusion’: Defining and introducing a process-conscious approach to inclusive teaching

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Abstract

Implicitly, process-based practices and designs have been gradually developed in the field of inclusive education. However, there is a lack of established definitions that explicitly articulate the notion of process thinking within the context of inclusive teaching. This article seeks to establish such a definition by introducing the term ‘process inclusion.’ Rooted in the established research concept of process ethics, ‘process inclusion’ is offered, first as a stand-alone definition, and, second, as a pragmatic teaching approach with process thinking as the point of entry for producing inclusive learning environments. ‘Process inclusion’ as a teaching approach is exemplified in this paper by incorporating three research-ethical methods—process consent, member checking, and reflexivity—tailored to the teaching context. Empirical examples from real-life teaching scenarios are used to illustrate how the practical implementation of ‘process inclusion’ may look in learning situations in higher education. These examples serve to illuminate its potential to cultivate belonging among increasingly diverse student populations.

Points of interest

- Teachers’ ability to cultivate inclusive learning environments has been shown to support students’ motivation and academic achievement. However, many teachers lack the time, training, and tools to teach inclusively and need accessible resources.
- This article therefore introduces ‘process inclusion’ as a pedagogical concept to raise teachers’ awareness of inclusion as an ongoing process, not a one-time solution.
- The concept is accompanied by corresponding teaching strategies inspired by process ethics.
- ‘Process inclusion’ offers a practical, flexible, and easy-to-implement approach to help educators teach more inclusively.
- It is designed to support teachers across disciplines, regardless of their prior experience with inclusive teaching.

Keywords

student diversity, UDL, teacher strategies, process, belonging

Introduction

The inclusion of an increasingly diverse student population depends on our ability to produce an inclusive environment in higher education. This has been, and remains, a pressing issue. For decades, disabled students have reported encountering barriers that exclude them from higher education (Fuller et al., 2004; Grimes et al., 2021; Holloway, 2001; Kendall, 2018; Svendby, 2020; 2024). Researchers have identified barriers at multiple levels, including a lack of universal design, ableist assumptions, stigmatization, physical obstacles, and the historical devaluation of this group in higher education (Dolmage, 2017; Kerschbaum et al., 2017; Moriña & Orozco, 2020). Globally, institutions of higher education have shifted toward inclusive practices in recent years, but progress has been slow compared to other educational levels (Pérez-Esteban et al., 2023).

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Notably, it has been established that academic staff's ability to cultivate inclusive learning environments significantly influences disabled students' motivation and academic achievement. On the one hand, awareness among academic staff serves as a significant facilitator, while on the other hand, the absence of awareness functions as a disabling barrier for this group of students in higher education (Köferli et al., 2024; Langørgen & Magnus, 2018). Unfortunately, academic staff often lack disability awareness, knowledge, time and resources necessary to appropriately encounter student diversity (Chhetri, 2025; Colón et al., 2018; Kendall, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to promote disability awareness and provide academic staff with low-barrier inclusive tools. This paper contributes the approach of 'process inclusion' as a concept that may be used as a stand-alone term, as well as a concrete pedagogical tool that aims to be straightforward to implement in lecturers' everyday practice to enhance inclusiveness in teaching. Throughout the paper, 'process inclusion' is placed in single quotation marks to signal that the concept is developed and established in this article. In the following, I unpack how 'process inclusion' differs from, overlaps with, and complements existing frameworks.

The uniqueness of 'process inclusion'

Over the years, several approaches have been introduced in the field of teaching with the shared aim of embracing diversity in the learner population. Examples comprise, but are not limited to, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, culturally responsive pedagogy, and participatory pedagogy. Like the concept presented in this article – 'process inclusion' – these approaches share an ambition to produce an inclusive learning community in which learners with diverse prerequisites can realise their learning potential, regardless of differences such as, for example, functional variations. In what follows, I focus on what is perhaps the best-known and most widely adopted of these approaches – UDL – and use it as a point of comparison for 'process inclusion'. This seeks to demonstrate the uniqueness of its contribution and the gap it fills in the field, as well as the ways in which it overlaps with or supplement existing frameworks.

UDL origins from Universal Design (UD) in architecture. It was designed in 1980s by the US organisation CAST who transferred the core ideas of accessibility to the context of education. The UDL framework consists of a set of principles and guidelines (see www.cast.org for a full description). Three key principles in the UDL framework are multiple means of engagement (the why of learning), multiple means of representation (the what of learning) and multiple means of expression & action (the how of learning). In UDL, emphasis is placed on the rigid role of school curricula and on how the methods, means, and materials used to teach and assess students can exclude learners when these—rather than the curriculum—are positioned as the problem. One cornerstone, therefore, has been the digital revolution and the ways in which it might support disabled students in educational contexts (Anastasiou et al., 2025). Overall, UDL has introduced a well-founded critique of the exclusion of disabled students in the educational system, while also presenting a framework for increasing accessibility. Moreover, it has been instrumental in bringing issues of accessibility, diversity and disability to the forefront of educational debates, and has offered teachers a structured framework for reconsidering their pedagogical practice.

Despite its popularity and widespread international use (Bray et al., 2023), UDL has encountered ongoing criticism over the years. Main concerns that have been raised are that the framework lacks definitional clarity, faces challenges with operationalisation, and currently appears to have limited evidence of effectiveness (Zhang et al., 2024). In a recent examination of UDL, Anastasiou et al. (2025) problematize that UDL is promoted as a universally applicable framework, which may risk undermining recognition of individual needs that cannot be met by its design. Also, its key element of multiple means of representation fails to account for well-established evidence in research showing that cognitive loads may adversely affect learning. Taken together, these critiques are currently part of a broader scholarly discussion about inclusive education. They do not negate the contributions of UDL, but they do point to certain limitations that are relevant when positioning 'process inclusion' in relation to UDL. Below, I unpack what 'process inclusion' uniquely enables, beyond existing approaches to inclusive and universal design for learning.

Firstly, ‘process inclusion’ is a theoretical term that articulates inclusion as an ongoing process. This aspect appears so far to be insufficiently developed or specified in existing frameworks. ‘Process inclusion’ may be used as a stand-alone label to formulate this aspect of any practice. As such, it may be used in relation to UDL or other frameworks that seek to enhance inclusion in teaching over time, thereby clarifying the durational factor. In this sense, ‘process inclusion’ is offered as a complementary lens that highlights the still implicit, yet ongoing, processual work through which existing inclusive frameworks are enacted in practice.

Secondly, ‘process inclusion’ is a tool; a practice. A key feature of ‘process inclusion’, which distinguishes it from more elaborate frameworks is that it does not require engagement with extensive lists of principles or the mobilisation of a large apparatus to achieve its aims. Relatedly, it does not provide, nor does it presuppose, the kind of comprehensive design guidance that, for instance, UDL require. Rather than representing a full and predetermined system, ‘process inclusion’ offers a mindset that aims to support teachers to be more inclusion-conscious in learning situations. Inspiring actions that arise from this are considered part of the overall objective, regardless of how ambitious or successful the outcomes may be. As a practice, therefore, ‘process inclusion’ is successfully established even if only one process inclusive strategy is incorporated in the learning setting – and even if it ultimately turns out to fail as an inclusive practice. The approach strongly recognises the reflexive value of ‘learning by doing it wrong’ (Svendby, 2021).

Thirdly, unique for ‘process inclusion’ is that its foundation is built on established research-ethical concepts. Consequently, academic staff members are often already familiar, from their own research practice, with process-ethical strategies on which ‘process inclusion’ draws. Without much training, therefore, many may find it accessible to use strategies they already know, transferring and adapting these into process-inclusive strategies within their own teaching. This leads over into the final point.

Fourthly, ‘process inclusion’ is comfortable identifying as a pragmatic, easy-access, flexible tool. The concept does not purport to be universal or inclusive of all students. It is admittedly context-based, particular and specific to the teacher and group involved in any given environment. This fluidity may render the practice somewhat abstract, but it is also its strength, as it opens up rich creative possibilities.

Overall, ‘process inclusion’ offers a complementary lens that foregrounds inclusion as an ongoing, context-based process, as opposed to a fixed system. Rather than suggesting that existing frameworks on inclusive teaching are unaware of the durational aspect, ‘process inclusion’ seeks to make this implicit dimension explicit and conceptually available as a distinct focus in its own right. As a pragmatic and flexible tool, it aims to support teachers in developing more inclusion-minded practices through even small, context-specific strategies. It builds on established research-ethical concepts that many academic staff already know from their own research work. Therefore, it does not presuppose training or an extensive knowledge base on inclusion, diversity or accommodation, and may relatively easily be implemented in any teaching setting.

Methods

Positionality and data

The ‘I’ in the text speaks from the perspective of an engaged researcher and lecturer in the field of inclusive education. Over the past six years, I have examined inclusion in higher education, addressing topics such as the importance of raising lecturers’ awareness of students’ invisible disabilities (Svendby, 2020), the lack of diversity training among newly hired academic staff and its potentially exclusionary consequences for some students (Svendby, 2021), and insufficient prioritization of accessibility at the institutional level (Svendby, 2024). In 2023, I published a lecturer guide on how to produce inclusive learning environments (Svendby, 2023). This work, combined with my experience of teaching in higher education, serves as the foundation from which the concept of ‘process inclusion’ is derived.

The initial idea of the concept arose when I looked into my approach to inclusion as a teacher, tracing its development from the start of my teaching career to the present and exploring how it has shaped the learning environment in my courses. This reflexive review stems from a growing awareness of how my perspective on inclusion has evolved over the years. To assess this, I revisited my teaching diary, which I have kept throughout my years of teaching. Although not a systematic record, the diary contains sporadic notes and reflections on teaching and situations that have occurred in teaching settings. Furthermore, the diary contains several ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973). This refers to textual elaborations of my teaching experience, which include context and much detail. These passages have been valuable in the process of writing this article since taken together, they capture my evolving way of framing and understanding inclusion as the years pass.

My practice of keeping a diary and using my experiences as data comes from my background as a social anthropologist. I am trained to use my body as an instrument (Musante, 2015), engaging in attentive presence and picking up on people’s ‘minor grunts and groans as they respond to their situation’ (Goffman, 1989, p. 125). Documenting everyday life in written excerpts and analysing such material as data is an established research technique (Ottenberg, 1990), and in examining my teaching experience, I have used it to explore my different approaches to inclusion. In addition to reviewing the diary, I examined other relevant materials, including student feedback, study plans, and course evaluations that I have kept since the beginning of my teaching career in 2013.

Analytical approach and ‘recognizability’

Reading through and comparing the data revealed my focus at the time through the choice of words, structure, curriculum, and topics. In this analytical process, I specifically searched for experiences and reflections related to inclusion, as well as changes in my teaching practice and mindset, to trace my development toward becoming a more diversity-conscious educator. This analytical strategy was loosely based on qualitative content analysis. I reviewed the empirical material with an interpretive lens, looking for ways of thinking, meaning, patterns, and – most importantly – change over time related to my understanding of inclusive teaching.

In selecting and analysing illustrative examples, my memories played a central role. I deliberately revisited episodes I recall as formative, focusing on experiences that contributed to my growth and a deeper understanding of inclusion. Thus, the analytical process I engaged in while reviewing the data was interpretive and personal. I use methods that are anchored to me as a subject, for example, my memories, my thoughts and feelings about specific teaching settings, and reflections on the past in comparison to the present. This approach aligns with an autoethnographic orientation, where one seeks to gain new insights on the topic under examination via one’s own experiences (Karlsson et al., 2021). One consequence of this orientation is that the findings and reflections in this article are not generalizable in the traditional sense. Instead, my findings are specific and context dependent. Despite this, it is plausible to assume that other lecturers in higher education will find elements of my findings and reflections resonant with their own practice. In line with Delmar’s (2010) reasoning, what is unique in any given situation, nonetheless exhibits typical features and recognizable patterns that gain meaning for recipients when related to similar experiences in their own lives. According to Delmar, this recognizability also constitutes a form of generalizability in qualitative analyses. Here, I adopt this understanding of recognizability as a basis for generalizability, and hope that others will be able to relate to and make use of my ideas in their own teaching practices.

Ethical considerations

In writing about myself, I inevitably write about others. This calls for extra care in avoiding harm to others (Sparkes, 2024). In this context, the aim is not to provide factual accounts of specific events, but to share experiences that resonate with fellow educators and encourage dialogue on inclusive teaching practices, while safeguarding the integrity and anonymity of those appearing in my stories. Although grounded in real-life teaching scenarios, all examples have been generalized to maintain ethical

standards. This process involves exercising creative freedom by merging elements from various teaching situations, student interactions, timelines, and settings into cohesive narratives. As a result, while the examples cannot be linked to specific sessions or individuals—since I have designed similar activities and encountered similar situations on numerous occasions over the years—they remain deeply rooted in my lived experiences and reflect genuine moments from my teaching practice.

Discussion

Inclusion: a fixed routine or a flexible approach

Overall, upon exploring the diary and teaching material, I found that my initial approach to inclusion was teacher-led and guided by a predetermined standard from the outset. For example, I began each semester with a prepared introduction in which I signaled openness to diversity and accommodation. I applied universal design principles to all materials, used a microphone during presentations, and strategically incorporated group work to ensure that students who, for various reasons, preferred smaller group discussions also had the opportunity to engage. Over time, I approached inclusion with a more flexible and open mindset. Instead of following a fixed routine, I made creative adjustments throughout the semester to promote inclusion. My strategies were shaped by and adapted to the level of student involvement and my own creative capacities.

The main difference between the two teaching approaches described above—both striving for inclusion—is that the latter approaches inclusion as a continuous process rather than a fixed routine. In hindsight, I realize that a process-oriented approach cultivates a learning environment that transcends inclusion and aligns with what Powell and Menendian (2024) describe as ‘belonging.’ In their understanding, ‘belonging’ involves not only feeling like a full member of a community but also being affiliated, included, and recognized in a way that enables the individual or group to exercise agency. Under belonging, ‘you are fully able to participate in the norms, setting, and, ideally, in co-creating the culture and life of the organization’ (Powell & Menendian, 2024, p. 137).

In the following, I begin by defining ‘process inclusion’ as a concept. I then present some general considerations that demonstrate the value of adopting a processual perspective. Finally, I illustrate the practical implementation of ‘process inclusion’ by incorporating three research-ethical methods—process consent, member checking, and reflexivity—tailored to the teaching context.

Defining ‘process inclusion’

‘Process inclusion’ is the teacher’s continuous, purposeful and creative evaluation and adaptation of teaching strategies in response to students’ diverse and changing needs. It treats inclusion as an evolving, imaginative process rather than as a fixed state or as the use of a fully specified framework. Unlike established models which are built on comprehensive sets of principles and design guidelines, ‘process inclusion’ isolates and foregrounds the processual dimension of inclusion itself, offering a pragmatic and relationally grounded way for educators to work with inclusion over time through ongoing adjustments, dialogue with students, and reflexive attention to emerging dilemmas. ‘Process inclusion’ is thus both a theoretical concept, highlighting a process-based aspect of inclusion, and a practical approach. It aims to cultivate belonging for as many as possible in a given setting through strategic awareness of the group’s needs. Rooted in collaboration between educators and students, and acknowledging the inventive practices that emerge from it, it ultimately seeks to produce responsive learning environments.

In this paper, ‘process inclusion’ is used in the context of teaching in higher education, but it may be applied to other contexts, such as workplaces or social organizations where producing inclusive environments is a goal. It may also be applied across all levels of education, not only in higher education, as it is in this article. It draws on the core principles of process ethics. Here, I adapt three of its key methods—process consent, member checking, and reflexivity—and suggest these as potent ‘process inclusion’ strategies that can relatively easily be transferred to the teaching context. Below, I

present the foundational ideas of process ethics before illustrating the practical application of ‘process inclusion’ empirically.

The value of process-focused thinking

In research, procedural ethics refers to the baseline ethical requirements. These standards, originally developed in the context of medical research, are now widely accepted as general principles, including practices such as maintaining confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and securely storing data (World Medical Association [WMA], 2024). Over time, however, the value of processual thinking has been highlighted through the concept of ‘process ethics’ which emphasizes ongoing engagement. This approach moves beyond procedural ethics and highlights the necessity of maintaining respectful and supportive relationships between the researcher and the study participants. As such, it is crucial to recognize that ethics cannot be treated as fixed elements that are resolved once and for all. Instead, ethics must be managed as an ongoing process that unfolds before, during, and after the project period.

Process ethics frameworks are particularly beneficial for qualitative research projects, as these often involve long-term and complex relationships with participants. Additionally, ethical dilemmas may arise at any stage of the research process, often unexpectedly and in ways that are difficult to anticipate or prepare for in advance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In such situations, adopting a process ethics framework allows researchers to maintain a high ethical standard by proactively addressing the potential for complexity and unpredictability while recognizing that ethics requires continuous attention throughout the research process. For instance, researchers may occasionally make poor decisions in the heat of the moment or errors due to a lack of experience or maturity at the time. However, process ethics provides opportunities to make amends and grow both professionally and personally following such instances.

Inspired by the framework of process ethics, I turn the focus to the transferability of these principles to inclusive teaching in higher education. Here too, complex relationships may play a central role, and dilemmas requiring resolution may arise unexpectedly, often in ways that are difficult or impossible to foresee. Moreover, prioritizing the individuals involved in the setting is essential not only for achieving the goal of learning but also for empowering the students to succeed in the process. When working with a diverse student population, lecturers will benefit from adopting a teaching framework that views inclusion not as a one-time solution but as an evolving process. I propose that, similar to the role of process ethics to ensure the well-being of study participants for qualitative researchers, ‘process inclusion’ can serve as a practical and dynamic framework to help educators cultivate inclusive learning environments to students. Below, I present three empirical examples that demonstrate how ‘process inclusion’ may be enacted in practice.

Practical applications of ‘process inclusion’

Process consent in teaching

In research, informed consent entails that all study participants are informed about the study’s aims and objectives and voluntarily agree to participate. Process consent, however, goes beyond these basic requirements. It is based on the principle that obtaining consent once at the outset is insufficient, as it is impossible to fully anticipate how the study will evolve. Thus, consent should be revisited regularly to ensure that participants remain informed about their involvement and continue to willingly engage in the research.

Adapting the concept of process consent to a teaching context involves reflecting on and implementing strategies to ensure that every student in the classroom is informed of the teaching plan and consents to engage. This ambition highlights one of the key challenges of inclusive design: there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Nonetheless, the goal should be to remain flexible and work toward creating solutions that are acceptable to and supported by as many members of the group as possible. In the following, I

provide an example from my teaching practice to illustrate how process consent in the context of inclusion moves towards this goal.

The example is drawn from a course in special education, where the objective was to study three models of disability: the biomedical model, the relational model, and the social model. To emphasize the differences and similarities between these models, I implemented interactive teaching methods, using a panel debate format as the core activity. While this approach can be engaging for some students, it also carries the risk of excluding individuals or groups who may be unable to or uncomfortable with speaking in front of others.

The principle of ‘process inclusion’ involves taking deliberate steps toward cultivating belonging by ensuring that students are informed about the teaching format and consent to participating. When preparing for the panel debate, the goal was to ensure inclusivity, including students who do not speak in plenary sessions. This was attempted to be accomplished through the following preparations: Firstly, the session was deliberately scheduled toward the end of the semester to ensure that students had time to become acquainted with one another, making them more comfortable speaking in public compared to the beginning of the course. Secondly, to enhance student agency, I introduced the idea of organizing a panel debate beforehand. I invited students to anonymously share their thoughts on whether they would consent to participate in such a session. This took place during one of the preceding sessions, where students were given ten minutes to write their opinions about the activity in an open-ended format. I then collected the notes and reviewed them after the session had finished for the day.

In their feedback, the majority expressed enthusiasm, describing a panel debate as an engaging way to learn about the models. For instance, one wrote: ‘YES!! Let’s debate!!’ However, approximately one-third of the respondents indicated that they would feel uncomfortable participating in a debate in front of the entire class. Interestingly, some of these students mentioned that they would feel more at ease debating in smaller groups. For instance, one student wrote: ‘I think working in smaller groups is better; it allows for much more reflection, and it makes it easier to dare to express your opinion in front of a small group of people.’ Several others noted that, although they would not actively participate, they would still find value in listening to the discussions and learning about the models through observation. One student wrote: ‘I do not want to speak up in class myself, but I am happy to listen to what the others have to say. I like listening to my classmates’. The next time I met the group, I started by presenting a summary of their varied feedback. Then I said to them:

As you can see, there are many different opinions which makes it difficult to find one approach that works for everyone. I have a suggestions for a compromise that takes all perspectives into account, but also requires us all to be open to making some adjustments. Here is my proposal: I will start by asking whether any of you would like to speak during the panel debate. Once those students have raised their hands, I will divide the class into three groups, ensuring that each group includes at least a few people who are willing to speak. I will assign one model to each group and give them one hour to prepare arguments in its defense. When the groups reconvene, the panel debate will begin. Speaking during the discussion will be voluntary. To make it a student-led discussion, I will invite a volunteer in advance to act as moderator and give them time to prepare. If no one volunteers for this role, I will act as the moderator myself.

After presenting this potential way of doing it to the students in plenum, I conducted a second round of opinion-sharing, asking students whether they accepted the framework or still had objections. This check-up was carried out in the same way as before, with anonymous, open-ended written notes during a class session. In this round, the entire group gave their consent to holding the panel debate under the established conditions.

In the course evaluation at the end of the semester - which was carried out in the final course session as an anonymised survey using an encrypted online service—many students highlighted their appreciation

for the activities where their opinions were taken into account. For example, one student wrote: ‘Even though things did not always turn out the way I wanted, I think it is fine, because I got to say what I thought and it felt like it was heard. And sometimes things did turn out the way I wanted as well.’ On the question, ‘Was there anything in particular you appreciated about the course design? If so, please describe it in your own words,’ several students highlighted the debate event as an opportunity that helped them get to know each other better and enjoy themselves, which, in turn, encouraged more of them to participate in discussions during the remainder of the course. One student wrote: ‘I even surprised myself by speaking up during the panel debate. I never thought I would dare to do something like that.’

The inclusive impact of applying ‘process consent’ as here outlined is that the students are empowered to participate on their own terms. This approach encourages active engagement and cultivates belonging within the group, including students who partake in ways other than speaking out loud. From the teacher's perspective, ‘process inclusion’ in this context involves recognizing contributions such as active listening, engaging in internal dialogue, or offering arguments during the preparatory group work.

Member checking in teaching

In research, data collected after obtaining informed consent is considered finalized and ready for analysis. A process-ethical approach that moves beyond this treatment of data is member checking which aims to establish credibility of the data. Member checking entails presenting transcripts of the data to the study participants after the data collection process and allowing participants to review and potentially remove, add, or adjust the data to avoid misrepresentations in the analysis as well as involving participants as active contributors in this phase of the research process (McKim, 2023).

Transferring the practice of member checking to the realm of inclusive teaching entails that the teacher engages in a dialogue with the students about their experiences of the learning environment. In the role of a teacher, one may find that one is successfully applying inclusive strategies. However, the credibility of one's interpretations can be strengthened by checking in with students to assess whether they perceive the strategies as inclusive.

In practice, member checking in teaching can be executed during or after a session by, for instance, gathering anonymous written feedback, using a digital quiz, or facilitating open plenary discussions in the classroom to address the topic collaboratively. The insights gained can then be used to make necessary adjustments to enhance inclusivity. By involving the students along the way, and approaching feedback with an openness to making improvements, the teacher gives way for belonging. Below, I provide an example from my teaching practice to exemplify.

Aiming at inclusion, I always assigned groups from the teacher position to avoid exclusion and the formation of cliques. This was a fixed inclusion practice that I had been using for some years. One day, during a break, I overheard some students talking negatively about this practice among themselves. Therefore, after the break, I wrote the question ‘What is your opinion of, and experience with, the teacher choosing the groups for group work?’ on the board, and asked the students to reflect on it, write an anonymous note, and hand it in to me. This member checking revealed that students had varying experiences with this strategy. On one hand, some students reported finding it inclusive as they did not know anyone beforehand, made friends through group work, and avoided being confronted with the possibility of exclusion when students were allowed to choose groups themselves. On the other hand, some students found the strategy exclusionary, as it exposed or worsened their social challenges when placed in groups with people they did not know.

After the session, I read through all the notes and prepared a summary of the students' different views on the matter. In our next session, I presented the students' conflicting needs to the group in plenum. I proposed adopting a hybrid solution to embrace diversity: students would choose their own groups half

of the time, while the teacher would assign groups for the remaining sessions. Another round of member checking was conducted, this time through an open class discussion in which students expressed their views. This revealed that most students were satisfied with, or at least accepted, this arrangement, as they understood it to be a necessary compromise to balance the group's different needs.

Many returned to the issue of group allocation in the final course evaluation, where they provided anonymous feedback on the entire course through open text boxes in a survey. One student wrote: 'I think it is good to settle on a practice where the teacher decides the groups for the first group discussion, while we can choose them ourselves for the second. We are a bunch that will always have diverse needs, and it is impossible to meet all of them at the same time. That is simply the reality.' Another student suggested that s/he enjoyed the variation: 'I find it exciting to work in groups, both with people I don't know and with people I already know.' Others displayed a positive attitude towards the arrangement, for example, one stated: 'Actually, I really like it when you are the one who divides us into groups, because it means we get to know new people and hear new stories and experiences from one session to the next.'

In this case, the teacher made the final decision after evaluating the feedback, but using member checking, students were able to influence the process by sharing their perspectives. As a result, this approach facilitated a move toward belonging within the learning community, aligning with the principles of the 'process inclusion's' framework.

Reflexivity in teaching

In research, reflexivity is the process of an on-going inner dialogue of one own's positionality and ways in which it may influence the setting, people involved, questions asked, data and interpretations. Transferred to teaching, reflexivity is a practice where one consciously reflects on one's situatedness as educator and its impact on the students and the learning environment. For example, this may involve reflections of who we are as teachers, our relationships with the students, how our engaging with our teaching make knowledge accessible (or not), and ways in which lack of reflexivity inadvertently can disadvantage some groups of students (Ashwin et al., 2025).

To cultivate the practice of reflexivity, teachers may find it valuable to utilize a teaching diary. By taking notes after teaching sessions and describing and reflecting on dilemmas or situations that arose, the teacher can evaluate how and why these were handled in a particular way. Additionally, considering alternative approaches allows for a critical assessment of one's own strengths and weaknesses in the teaching role over time. Engaging with 'process inclusion' entails reflexivity regarding one's encounters with diversity. This process supports growth and development toward becoming a more inclusive educator.

I will illustrate the potential by referencing my unexamined approach to student diversity during the early stages of my teaching career. My lack of awareness in this area led to unintended consequences, as I unknowingly implemented exclusionary teaching practices that created barriers for some student groups in my classes, for example, showing films without subtitles, which prevented students with hearing impairments from engaging with the content. Situations and reactions that emerged in such instances have been incorporated into my reflexive practices, gradually guiding me toward becoming an increasingly diversity-aware educator (Svendby, 2021).

Notably, a reflexive process can be confined to one's own notes and thought processes. However, significant benefits can also be gained by sharing challenges and insights with colleagues. This can be done, for example, during meetings or through publications, thereby contributing to a broader reflexive dialogue within the teaching community. In this way, individual insights from teaching can be shared more widely, ultimately benefiting both educators and students across higher education.

In connecting back to student voices, reflexive practice involves examining their overall feedback on courses. Generally, in courses where I have implemented process consent and member checking, the student feedback has been remarkably positive. For instance, on several occasions, students have disclosed to me in person that, despite experiencing social anxiety or other challenges, they felt so included within the student groups that they felt safe speaking in plenary sessions. To me, these are the kinds of feedback that make it worthwhile and suggest that, when ‘process inclusion’ is implemented, belonging may be achieved for some who might not otherwise experience this in their everyday educational lives.

Ending remarks

In practice, the extent to which staff in higher education can apply ‘process inclusion’ differs. It requires educators to actively recognize and engage with their evolving surroundings. In addition to requiring relational skills, it may be time-consuming and demands a commitment from teachers to prioritize inclusion in their teaching. Furthermore, there are several external constraints that can limit opportunities to experiment with inclusive measures. For example, the extent to which higher education institutions prioritize diversity and inclusion varies significantly. Time pressure and a lack of training among educators are well-documented barriers to the implementation of inclusive strategies, even among those who are initially motivated to embrace them (Sandoval et al., 2020).

There are also variations in the level of flexibility educators have, depending on their discipline, status, and position. For instance, a tenured course leader with allocated time to work on inclusion will have greater freedom to experiment compared to a temporary employee at an institution that deprioritizes inclusion in practice, where the latter might have to use their personal time to implement inclusive strategies. Unfortunately, the latter scenario is a reality for many. This underscores the critical need to acknowledge accessibility at an institutional level, as the responsibility for inclusion cannot rest solely on individual educators. Institutions must take an active role, ensuring that training is mandatory, ongoing, practical, and contextually relevant, enabling staff to effectively create inclusive learning environments for their students (Orozco & Moríña, 2023).

Furthermore, ‘process inclusion’ is likely to take different forms across disciplines and teaching contexts due to considerable variation in, for example, class size, curriculum, and assessment traditions. In subjects that traditionally have small student groups – such as the humanities – process-ethical strategies such as close and frequent dialogue with students, tailored and personalised feedback, co-design of discussion norms, and ongoing relationship-building are often readily available. In large courses with several hundred or even thousands of students, for instance in many STEM disciplines or in online courses, it is more challenging to establish close relational communication. In these settings, it is often more feasible to implement process-inclusive strategies through, for example, surveys and clicker polls that can provide an overview of opinions and needs within the group, thereby giving the instructor opportunities to make appropriate adjustments.

Relatedly, some disciplines allow instructors to involve students in decisions about which cases to use in teaching, modifications of assessment formats, individual choices of supplementary literature, and similar forms of co-determination. Other disciplines operate within more rigid frameworks, where instructors have limited opportunities to change the literature, assessment formats, or teaching strategies. In such cases, process-ethical approaches may instead involve, for example, clearly communicating expectations, establishing channels for feedback, co-designing revision sessions, focusing on how debriefing and feedback are conducted, or giving students some choice in practice tasks.

The framework of ‘process inclusion’ is introduced by a fellow academic and teacher who is well aware of the realities involved, whether they concern institutional and workload constraints or discipline-specific limitations. Having acknowledged these constraints, however, I emphasise that the approach is intended as a hopeful response to the task of embracing an increasingly diverse student body. After all, ‘process inclusion’ is pragmatic and can be implemented relatively easily and without extensive

training. Most teachers will find it feasible to adopt one or two strategies, and to some students, these may make a meaningful difference. The strategies I have used to exemplify ‘process inclusion’ in this paper are suggested as starting points to demonstrate the potential of applying a process-centered approach in teaching. The strategies should be tailored and creatively adapted to suit the specific subject matter, as well as the ongoing needs and dynamics of each unique student group. Finally, I would like to emphasise that the ideas presented in this article are not fixed or finished, but are offered as a contribution under development to the educational community. Further suggestions and developments of ‘process inclusion’ from colleagues are welcome.

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AI

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