

Considerations when planning for a diversity of learners in SPHE

The diversity of students present in all classrooms means that there is no 'one-size fits-all' approach to teaching SPHE. For this reason, the guidance materials in this Toolkit are designed to take account of the diversity of learners in your classroom. For example, some of your students may be engaging with a Level 2 Learning programme (L2LP) while also participating in the Level 3 Junior Cycle SPHE Short Course.

“ **In the case of a student on a personalised L2LP in a school where students are also studying a Level 3 junior cycle Programme, it is anticipated that much of their learning in PE, SPHE, CSPE and guidance-related learning will be done with their peers.** ”

Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines, 2021

Junior Cycle SPHE is designed around broad learning outcomes that, with careful planning, can enable all students to engage. All students have a right to participate in meaningful and relevant learning experiences in all aspects of SPHE.

The following approaches to reducing barriers to meaningful participation in SPHE will benefit and support all students.

“ **Teach the kids that are hardest to reach and you'll teach them all better!** ”

Nicole Tucker Smith

A Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach

Provides multiple means of engagement

Students vary in the ways in which they engage and are motivated to learn in SPHE. For example, some might like to work alone, while others prefer to work with their classmates. In order to meet the needs of all students it's helpful to provide choices for engagement in SPHE lessons and be flexible in expectations for participation. Also keep in mind that a student's engagement is not 'fixed' and can change depending on several factors, including, how they are feeling on a particular day. The choices offered should be intentionally selected to remove any barriers to learning that might exist and to support all students to achieve the SPHE learning outcomes.

Provides multiple means of representation

Students differ in the ways that they come to understand information that is presented to them. Some may understand information more readily through engaging with something concrete, visual or auditory rather than printed text. Using multiple representations to present key ideas and concepts, including pictures, drawings, video clips, photo stories, social stories, will aid understanding for all learners.

Provides multiple means of action & expression

Students differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know. Some may be better able to express themselves in written text than speaking out, and vice versa. There is no one means of expression that will be optimal for all learners; providing options for how students will show evidence of their learning is essential.

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Additional approaches to support a diversity of learners

- All students benefit from knowing what they are going to be learning, and how the lesson is going to unfold. Predictability supports students to feel less anxious and more in control.
- When presenting concepts, use concrete, real life examples/scenarios that are relevant to student's own lives and the variability of life experiences within the class.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for students to ask questions and ensure that the classroom is a safe place to ask questions. Praise students for their questions and not only the on-target or creative ones, but also the simple or sometimes offbeat questions.
- In some instances pre-teaching some terms can be important to ensure that students can participate in a lesson.
- Be aware of the language you use and ensure that it is simple, clear and jargon free. Time spent unpacking/clarifying key words and phrases will support learning for all the students in your class.
- Be mindful of the pace of lessons and allow enough time for students to complete tasks. Use varied and short tasks or break longer tasks into smaller bite size pieces.
- Revisit topics to help reinforce and consolidate the learning.
- Calming techniques, such as breathing, soft music, dim lighting – techniques often associated with helping students to regulate their emotions – can be a useful feature of the SPHE classroom, where quiet moments for reflection can support all students' learning.
- Some students may need individual instruction to support the transfer of learning to their own contexts and daily lives.

Points to consider in relation to Relationships and Sexuality Education

Take a critical look at teaching materials to ensure that they reflect a diversity of people and experiences. Research has found that Relationship and Sexuality Education provision is often ableist which is problematic, as self-esteem can be negatively impacted in individuals who do not see themselves in education materials.

Always use correct language for body parts when describing people and encourage students to do the same. However, it may also be important for students to recognise and understand slang used by peers in social settings (to reduce vulnerability and increase safety).

In navigating relationships, including peer friendships, students need to understand the importance of knowing their own personal boundaries and respecting the boundaries of others. Boundaries can look different for people and contexts although the core messages are relevant to all. (see Junior Cycle SPHE Learning Outcome 3.4)

All students, including those with special educational needs, develop physical and experience sexual and romantic feelings during adolescence. Therefore, all students need to engage with all the learning in SPHE, including RSE. Of course, this should take into account their cognitive ability, stage of maturity and social understanding/experiences.

Further guidance on creating an inclusive SPHE classroom can be accessed on the Toolkit.

See for example: [What makes an inclusive SPHE classroom](#)