

Primer on Inclusivity and Equity – Making the Virtual Classroom Reflect a Broad View of the World

Date: October 13, 2020

Online learning is for everyone. At Bayfield Design, we create content that reflects the cultural and social diversity of Canadian communities. We strive to develop course content that includes many different backgrounds and experiences while celebrating diversity in thought, race, belief, gender identity, sexual orientation, culture, and life experience. Through the characters we develop to help teach elementary subjects, in our multimedia content and the language we use to teach and describe concepts, we reinforce a broad, inclusive, and diverse worldview in all our learning content.

Bayfield Design was created from the content arm of Virtual High School. Our team has been developing online content for *all* learners since 1995. Much has changed since then, and Bayfield Design’s approach and best practices have evolved over the years alongside an increased global awareness of and sensitivity to equity and inclusivity.

Characters – Portraying People

In the elementary grades, students are guided through their courses by teacher and student characters, each with their own unique backstory. These characters represent various ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds so that students can connect on a personal level. Below are three examples of over 40 fully developed, diverse characters included in our Grades 1–6 content.

<p><u>Caleb</u> Grade 4–6 Language</p>  <p>9-year-old of Metis decent living in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Caleb’s Mom is an artist and his Dad is an architect.</p>	<p><u>Ms. Berry</u> Grade 4–6 Math</p>  <p>Middle-aged, mixed-race teacher living in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia with her friend.</p>	<p><u>Duncan</u> Grade 1–3 Science</p>  <p>9-year-old boy of Caucasian ethnicity living with Down syndrome from Barrie, Ontario. Duncan’s mom is a writer and his dad is a therapist.</p>
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Media - Portraying Life

Bayfield Design strives to ensure that the widest spectrum of experiences possible are reflected in the videos and images displayed in the online learning environment. We want to expose learners to the rich tapestry that is Canada. While we do portray upper-middle-class traditional families in some cases, we also work to include more diverse situations that reflect many lifestyles, wherever possible. Bayfield Design aims to ensure that images displayed fit naturally within the context in which they are used and do not appear awkward or forced. The sections below illustrate some of the considerations given to media selection in more detail.



Income

Learners come from many different backgrounds and income levels. We ensure that the images within our courses reflect a broad view of different levels of income and various living situations. This is reflected in:

- Family activities: highlighting events such as hiking or game nights as opposed to tropical vacations
- Material belongings: being mindful of items such as gaming consoles or expensive toys
- Transportation: representing transportation modes such as public transit, cycling or walking in addition to travel by private automobile
- Regional location: ensuring rural, urban and suburban living situations are displayed
- Employment situations: representing adults who are self-employed, work shift work or are stay-at-home parents of any gender, in addition to traditional “9 to 5” jobs.

Ethnicity

- Look for opportunities to actively enhance diversity in media.
- Ensure people from particular ethnic backgrounds are not portrayed in stereotypical ways.
- Ensure that the image fits the context; don’t use an image just for the sake of enhancing diversity.

Disabilities

- Being mindful of how people with disabilities are depicted
- Using different types of disabilities; not just physical
- Normalizing and bringing awareness to people living with disabilities

Family and Relationships

- Choose images that depict diverse forms of family; e.g. single-parent, blended families, biracial families, same-sex parents, adoptive families, etc.
- Ensure that all forms of families are displayed in positive, non-stereotypical ways.
- Ensure that diverse living situations are displayed; e.g. apartments, shared sibling bedrooms, multi-generational families, etc.

Gender Roles

- Ensure that men, women, and individuals who do not identify as a specific gender are shown in diverse careers, activities, clothing, and entertainment choices.
- Ensure images do not reinforce stereotypes.

Body Types

- Ensure that a variety of body types are displayed in media.
- Ensure that body types are not displayed in stereotypical or derogatory ways (e.g. muscular people being heroic, thin individuals participating in sports, larger individuals being lazy or eating junk food).



Language – Words Make Worlds

A word's explicit and implicit meaning can change over time as well as the context in which it is used. Many words that were once considered acceptable in a learning environment are no longer so. We recognize the power of words in creating and reinforcing a world view of what is and is not “the norm”.

With that in mind, Bayfield Design strives to remain at the forefront of the use of inclusive and unbiased language. It requires careful attention to avoid the use of language that promotes or reinforces stereotypes either directly or indirectly. Bayfield Design trains all writers on how to avoid this type of language in all forms of communication. Avoiding biased language hinges on both an awareness of the inherent or implied meaning of chosen words as well as their context. Bayfield Design specifically attends to the following areas:

- Avoiding the use of adjectives as nouns, focusing instead on person-first language
- Removing gendered language and avoiding using male as the default gender
- Addressing Indigenous people and communities with respect and in proper contexts
- Addressing mental illness with person-first language
- Recognizing when person-first language and identity-first language is appropriate and when it is not

We are conscious of including multicultural narratives in our prescribed reading materials, whether that means works by established authors or content produced in-house. We also represent as many different religious and cultural holidays as possible when such content appears in our courses. When students and their families connect to content on a personal level, it leads to more engaging and meaningful learning experiences.



Summary

This primer is a brief glimpse into the considerations of course developers at Bayfield Design to ensure course content is unbiased and inclusive. Bayfield Design uses detailed Best Practice documents to guide staff towards diverse and inclusive course content. These are living documents that are updated regularly to reflect the changing cultural landscape. With that in mind, Bayfield Design always welcomes feedback on its course content and strives to ensure it remains the Gold Standard for inclusive and equitable course design.