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Global perspectives on inclusive curricula: places, practices and pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Many universities are now developing inclusive curricula with the intention that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve learning outcomes. But what in practice is an inclusive curriculum? This panel organized by the European and South Asia ASIS&T chapters will explore understandings of inclusive curricula by engaging with academics from different regions including Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan and the UK. By gathering a multiplicity of practices and perspectives from panel members and the audience, we seek to create a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities in developing inclusive curricula.

KEYWORDS

Inclusion; Education; Curricula; Curriculum Transformation

INTRODUCTION

We are living in unprecedented times, characterized by interconnected global concerns. These challenges range from the current environmental crisis to growth in inequalities, an increasing recognition of structural racism, and more (Reiter 2018). Scholars have argued that a significant portion of these crises are the result of the imposition of economic, social, and political systems that get replicated across the world (Escobar 2016). As a result, they suggest that there is a necessity to recognize the plurality of the world and acknowledge local sensitivity rather than adopting a model that is universally applicable (ibid).

Universities, schools, and colleges all around the world are currently grappling with how to incorporate these realities into their curriculum. There has recently been a surge of interest in developing inclusive curricula for educational institutions, which serve as spaces for the production, preservation, and reproduction of knowledge (Bunbury 2020). This interest aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their background or other immutable characteristics, have an equal opportunity to achieve learning outcomes (Morgan & Houghton 2011). The term "inclusive curriculum" refers to a "a multidimensional concept that includes the celebration and valuing of difference and diversity and consideration of human rights, social justice and equity issues, as well as the social model of disability" (Hornby 2014 p.1). This approach requires care in efforts to promote inclusion and equity within educational systems, as these must be relevant to the local context (Ainscow 2020).

The field of information studies encompasses a variety of subfields and areas of study (Figuerola, García Marco & Pinto, 2017). Although some topics might be more easily able to embed inclusivity (e.g. libraries, information for development (Jimenez et al. 2022)), others, such as technical topics, present a greater challenge. Most importantly, adopting an inclusive information studies curriculum will vary depending on the local context. This panel will explore the challenges and opportunities associated with developing inclusive curricula for information science and technology-related fields of study. Our panelists come from various geographic contexts where debates about inclusive curricula differ. We will discuss what it means to create inclusive curricula and how this can lead to more inclusive teaching and learning.

PANEL ORGANISATION (90 MINUTES)

This panel organized by the South Asia and European ASIS&T chapters brings together academics from different regions to discuss their experiences of designing inclusive curricula and what inclusion means to them. Sophie Rutter will introduce the panelists and moderate the discussion.

Canadian context. Julia Bullard (8 minutes)

Canada presents an awkward and contradictory position with regards to inclusivity. The official policy of multiculturalism and its actions in immigration and resettlement contribute to the benevolent image Canada projects to the world. The findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015) have disrupted this self-image for many non-Indigenous Canadians. Since the work of the TRC

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began in 2008 and since the publication of its final report and calls to action in 2015, more Canadians and Canadian institutions are growing to understand the historic and ongoing violence of settler colonialism and its impact on Inuit, Metis, and First Nations Peoples. In Vancouver, British Columbia, and at the University of British Columbia, the global diversity of the population means that many residents and students lack knowledge of Canada's history. For this reason, inclusive teaching often means bridging the experience of students with lived experience of racism and anti-Indigeneity in Canada with that of students (both domestic and international) reckoning with their false image of Canadian benevolence.

Julia will discuss how this context impacts teaching at the graduate level in the School of Information and how a self-assessment process across the department's instructors has helped to identify points of strengths and weakness in inclusive teaching. The project included a survey to instructors reporting on their own practices and course design relative to an inventory of inclusive teaching practices (Mac, 2019), consultation with students on their prioritization of these practices, and the development of an internal, peer-to-peer resource on syllabus language, assignment design, and other factors. This project surfaced needs for inclusivity in multiple aspects of teaching: within the course content (objectives, topics, readings), in course design (assignment formats, accessibility), and in course implementation (inclusive language, flexibility, support for student experience). Julia found that the elements students reported having the biggest impact on their experience of inclusion in the course are those that are the most labor-intensive on the instructor's part: including theories and models from systematically marginalized perspectives, reading lists featuring the same, and flexibility in assignment format; partially due to others being common amongst the instructors: gender-neutral and respectful language in instructor's materials and assignments that invite students to apply their own lived experience.

Pakistan context. Syeda Hina Batool (8 minutes)

In Pakistan, the development of 'inclusive culture' in the education system is very disappointing. Unfortunately, the understanding of equality, social justice and inclusion has been well documented in government policies rather than practiced. The country committed to provide quality education to all children by 2015 (Caceres, et. al., 2010) during the world education forum. The representatives from the Asia Pacific region developed consensus that the education system should be flexible to individual needs (child, youth, adults) and in nature (formal and informal). It was generally agreed that efforts should be made to provide equal opportunities to excluded and unreached children. The Asia Pacific members defined inclusive education as "All must have the opportunity to receive a basic education of good quality that focuses on the 'whole' person, including health, nutrition and cognitive and psycho-social development" (UNESCO, 2000, p.58). The reality is that special schools and postgraduate institutions are rare in Pakistan. It is less likely in rural areas that girls, children of economically unstable families, children subject to abuse, and children with disabilities will attend school. The position is better in urban areas with regard to girls' attendance in schools. With respect to gender discrimination, a content analysis of English language textbooks of grade 9 and 10 revealed that women as a character and in images have been given less representation than male characters. Women's invisibility in textbooks at school level determined the message that women are insignificant in the society (Shah, 2012).

Syeda will highlight the scenario of challenges faced by a developing country (Pakistan) which may contrast the ground realities of developed nations. Syeda will also reflect on the efforts made by the international organizations in Pakistan on the provision of 'inclusive education' for example, a USAID project (ENGAGE). Moreover, Syeda will mention the recommendations made by the researchers on the possibilities of inclusive education in Pakistan.

Aotearoa New Zealand context. Jennifer Campbell-Meier (8 minutes)

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Te Tiriti o Waitangi - The Treaty of Waitangi (1840) has become the cornerstone for Crown agencies and institutions to acknowledge their obligations and apply the principles of the treaty in policies and protocols. The Treaty principles include "the duty to act in good faith, reasonably and/or honorably; principle of partnership; and the principle of protection or active protection" between the Crown and the indigenous Māori people (Morrison & Huygens, 2019). These principles have been applied by the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) through their body of knowledge (BOK) which includes an element that focuses on mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge systems) (LIANZA, n.d.). Inclusivity for the Information Studies Programme at Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington, has focused on integrating mātauranga Māori into the curriculum to align with the LIANZA BOK and to meet the obligations that Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington has to the Māori people.

Jennifer will discuss how the Information Studies Programme team have integrated mātauranga Māori into the curriculum, as well as how they enable students to engage with information services and systems that support biculturalism. Oxborrow (2020) identified the importance of learning about and engaging with mātauranga Māori within the information professions, to better support our communities and our Māori colleagues. Jennifer will also

discuss how our non-Māori faculty members are developing their own skills and knowledge of mātauranga Māori and opportunities for further integration of mātauranga Māori and Indigenous knowledge within the curriculum.

South Africa context. Ina Fourie (8 minutes)

Ina will give a high-level discussion on reported concerns and practices in South Africa with specific reference to initiatives at the University of Pretoria and the Department of Information Science. South Africa's deeply troubled past and Apartheid Policy, ethnic and language diversity impacted on education. Since the 1994 elections, the ANC taking over Government, and attempts to redress the past there has been many calls for transformation, equity, inclusion and decolonization (Asante, 2020). Universities have policies of equity adherence in appointments and student intake and many institutions, including the University of Pretoria, have formed Committees for Transformation and for Curriculum Transformation. Interpretations of inclusivity, inclusive curricula and transformation and Africanization are blurred (Baron, 2018; De Beer & Kriek, 2021; Knoetze, 2021; Themane, 2021). South African universities host students from different indigenous ethnic groups, including Ndebele, Xhosa, Zulu, a strong South African Indian cohort, white people including Afrikaans and English-speaking South Africans and people of color, in addition to strong Asian communities and many students from other African countries, including Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Uganda and Nigeria. Cultural, language and traditional differences are vast. Inclusivity goes beyond ethnic, racial, language and cultural respect and inclusion. It extends to disabilities (physical and learning problems), gender preferences and religion and stigmatized diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Soudien, 2016). The Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (EBIT) Committee for Curriculum Transformation has been making attempts to address curriculum transformation; some examples will be mentioned. Attempts in the Department of Information Science will also be explained e.g. an undergraduate module on indigenous knowledge and the start of a project on creating a Third Space for discussions between Faculty and students based on work by Hansen, Fourie and Meyer (2021).

UK context. Andrea Jimenez (8 minutes)

The growing emphasis on inclusive curricula in Higher Education (HE) in the United Kingdom is informed by a combination of increased student diversity, legislative changes, and a broader recognition of universities' role in perpetuating inequalities (Batty & Reilly 2022; Bhambra et al. 2019). Scholars have begun to question how, for example, Universities in the UK are too prone to focus on educating elites in the image of the European white man (Gopal, 2021). This has resulted in an increase in efforts within universities to decolonize curriculum and incorporate intersectional feminist agendas into teaching. Although encouraging, scholars and activists are concerned about the term's uncritical adoption by institutions, co-option into neoliberal agendas, moving away from its radical origins, limiting its focus to diversifying reading lists and public messaging (Jimenez et al. 2022; Moosavi, 2020). Others have noted that many of these initiatives serve as tick boxes and tokenistic exercises on behalf of the university rather than true transformation (Loyola and Gosal 2022).

Andrea will discuss how this background motivated the design of a project to co-design an inclusive at the University of Sheffield's Information School. The Information School is undertaking continuous efforts to innovate our teaching to better respond to the challenges of the 21st century (e.g. decolonizing our curriculum, embedding Education for Sustainable Development and embedding EDI in teaching spaces design). Andrea will describe these experiences and an ongoing participatory project for the design of inclusive curricula across all Information School programs. These experiences will be discussed to reflect on challenges and opportunities of an inclusive curriculum in the context of an Information School in a UK university.

Engagement with the audience (50 minutes)

After the presentations, Sophie Rutter as moderator will facilitate a discussion between the panelists and members of the audience. The audience will be asked to share their experiences and perspectives. Example discussion questions include:

- 1) What does the term "inclusive curriculum" mean to you?
- 2) Why are inclusive curricula important?
- 3) Are there initiatives at your institution you would like to share?
- 4) What opportunities and challenges do you see in developing inclusive information science and technology curricula?

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The growing diversity of the students in the educational institutions raise the concern to debate about 'inclusion' as a belief system. It is crucial for educators and practitioners to address the issues related to language, culture, gender, religion and multiple disabilities at international forums. Therefore, the overall aim of the panel is to develop the basic understanding about 'inclusive curriculum practices' as situated in different cultures and situations. The

panelists will highlight the meanings, significance, practices and challenges as grounded in their own contexts. The discussion on inclusive curriculum from different perspectives will inform the practice of professionals. Additionally, the panelists' talk will broaden the landscapes on how 'inclusive curricula' can be helpful in assisting the progress of socially, economically and culturally deprived communities. Moreover, a key takeaway of this panel would be the knowledge sharing on 'inclusive curriculum' global collaborative efforts and pedagogies.

PANEL MEMBERS

Syeda Hina Batool is a postdoc research fellow and visiting professor at the UBC School of Information, Canada. On a permanent position, she is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Information Management, University of the Punjab, New Campus, Lahore, Pakistan. Her research interests focus on examining information literacy instruction and related literacies (health, digital, workplace, visual, media etc.), through a qualitative research lens. Her recent projects focus on investigating 'social justice within public libraries' and 'provision of library services to special users'.

Julia Bullard is an Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia's School of Information where she examines how communities instantiate their values in infrastructure, particularly through the design of knowledge organization systems. Her current work focuses on how catalogs can more fully represent LGBTQIA+ communities and how traditional cataloging represents Indigenous topics. She has worked on the UBC iSchool's Equity and Diversity since founding it as a task force in 2018. Currently, she is leading a department-wide initiative to incorporate more inclusive practices into Masters courses.

Jennifer Campbell-Meier is a Senior Lecturer at Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington. Her research focuses on 3 primary areas: Digital Inclusion, Information Behavior, and LIS Professional Development. Her research is unified by her commitment to develop LIS professionals capable of engaging with communities and instilling life-long information literacy practices to support critical evaluation of information.

Ina Fourie is a Full Professor, Head of the Department of Information Science, and Chair of the School of Information Technology, University of Pretoria, South Africa. She is a Steering Committee member of the African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics (ACEIE) at that Department and holds leadership positions in ASIS&T Board and the European Region of the iSchool organization. She is an experienced information behavior researcher and is currently working on marginalized communities in everyday life contexts.

Andrea Jimenez is a lecturer in Information Management at the University of Sheffield's Information School. Her study focuses on the influence of digital innovation, social innovation, and entrepreneurship on socioeconomic growth. Her method is influenced by critical viewpoints like intersectional feminism, decolonial methods, and data justice. In addition, Andrea oversees the internationalization and decolonization of the Department's curriculum and is currently a PI on the Information School's inclusive curriculum project. Andrea is a member of the University committee working on the race equality charter application.

Sophie Rutter is a senior lecturer in Information Management at the Information School, University of Sheffield, UK. She is the current chair of the ASIS&T European Chapter (2022-2023). Her research aims to develop knowledge on how people use information, to inform communication strategies and technology development. She is also interested in inclusive user research and is working on a project that aims to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in usability testing. Sophie is also a co-I on the Information School's inclusive curriculum project.

CONCLUSION

The formation of this panel and interaction with ASIS&T participants promises to broaden perspectives on designing inclusivity and to generate connections among practitioners and instructors working in different contexts. The panelists' work in specific initiatives will help connect abstract ideals of inclusivity to on-the-ground work, while the diversity of their experiences means that their specific challenges and priorities will resonate with different attendees. We hope this discussion can further the ongoing conversation in this community on how to make information science an inclusive field for students of all backgrounds.

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