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Building MultiStories: Embedding the library services for inclusive teaching and learning in a diverse curriculum.

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Building MultiStories: Embedding the library services for inclusive teaching and learning in a diverse curriculum.

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Building MultiStories: Embedding the library services for inclusive teaching and learning in a diverse curriculum

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Abstract

There is an expanding shift in the academy to pedagogical developments that aim to address the shortage of custodians of knowledge from Black and ethnic minorities as a contributing factor in sustaining systemic racism and stereotypes in higher education (Rollock, 2016). Further to this, Appleton (2019) states that decolonising will only take place and be successful if there are real structural changes in the module, programme, inside the classroom and across the university to create equity and fairness of experience and outcome for every student irrespective of their background. *Building MultiStories* is constructed as a process whereby staff and students, together, work to identify changes to their curricula, to resources and to assessments that consider alternative epistemologies. The initial pilot took the approach of embedding information literacy teaching from the library services into a business module, *Diversity in the Workplace*, to develop the skillset of the students, to search for, discover, and critically analyse resources through the lens of diversification. This enabled them to interact with potentially new materials and knowledges and to reflect on this. A *Discover Diversity* library collection, will be further expanded based on the students' recommendations.

Keywords: diversifying curriculum; information literacy

Introduction

Recent student-led campaigns like ‘Why is my curriculum white?’ and ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ have made it impossible for higher education institutions to ignore the Eurocentric nature of knowledge and have galvanised a movement to decolonise curricula (Andrews, 2020; Arday & Mirza, 2018; Rhodes Must Fall, 2015; NUS, 2015). There is increased awareness in the student population and a corresponding call for action. Diversifying the curriculum is one means of responding to the expectations of a diverse student body that advances the decolonising of curricula in a more comprehensive manner (Darby, 2020; Rollock, 2016).

Building MultiStories is a collaborative project with students that aims to address and engage with this topic and process, as a preliminary step towards a more universal approach to diversifying the curriculum at our university. Current approaches focus on individual responses in a single classroom or module, as this project does, when a strategic, sector-wide response is required in higher education to effect substantial and sustained change (Schucan Bird & Pitman, 2020; Sleeter, 2016). The project embeds skills-based training from the library services into the formal curriculum, equipping students with the skills to engage actively with the process. Creating and executing the project required the application of a variety of intellectual skills from staff and students: concise interpretation, succinct reasoning, and informed library research.

Context and Process

TU Dublin’s Strategic Plan (<https://www.tudublin.ie/explore/about-the-university/strategicintent/2030/>) embraces diversity as a strength and selling point of studying at our University. A single story can dispossess many and create a power structure, but *Building MultiStories* can challenge the hierarchy of knowledge in higher education by developing critical awareness in students of the need for diversity in the curriculum, a core aim of the project and the focus of this paper.

Diversifying and decolonising the curriculum are now established terms in the academy (Lindsay, 2020; Yancy, 2019). It is important to distinguish diversifying the curriculum from decolonising the university (Appleton, 2019). Diversifying the curriculum is a first step on a continuum of enabling change and inclusivity in curriculum content that aims to redress Western knowledge hegemony, ensuring that existing curricula become well-informed and reflective of a more inclusive content that represents a diverse student population.

Decolonising the university is a much broader approach of “identifying ways in which the university structurally reproduces colonial hierarchies; confronting, challenging and rejecting the status quo; and reimagining them and putting alternatives into practice for the benefit of our academic integrity and our social viability” (Keele University, n.d.). In the context of the university, Gopal stipulates “re-examining the definition of knowledge itself – including what and how we come to know – in very fundamental ways” (2021, p.880). Decolonising the curriculum/university is beyond the scope of this project. Rather, we aim to diversify the curriculum through the reading list, assessment type and process, and through classroom discussions.

Diversifying the curriculum also applies to assessment. Recent research by O’Neill and Padden (2021) on diversifying assessment methods, enables us to accommodate the diverse learning needs of students, both of which are aims of this project (Advance HE, 2019; National Forum, 2019). Embedding choices with respect to assessments, or even the co-creation with students of their assessments (Ryan et al., 2020), can help to reduce barriers and challenge “the cultural norms and knowledge of dominant groups” (Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2021, p.29). Haxton (2021), in a keynote speech entitled *Chemistry For All: Global, Diverse, and Fit for Purpose*, extends decolonising the curriculum to the choice of assessment apropos the brief, topic, and format of assessment making it culturally accessible, expansive, and pedagogically robust. Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (n.d.) refers to the danger of a single story becoming the powerful and dominant story that is told continuously. Limiting sources to peer reviewed or scholarly materials subjugates perspectives from outside the academy and is contrary to our approach to engaging with diverse sources as used in this paper.

Building MultiStories enabled the pilot implementation of a different approach to teaching: it embedded skills training to enable and support active academic engagement and development, and the development of a diverse assessment. The four key aims of the project were as follows:

1. Develop critical awareness in students of the need and benefit of diverse sources. Students were placed in ethnically diverse teams and required to identify three resources that they would recommend adding to their course resources (reading) list. One of the recommendations had to be sourced from the Global South, defined as

subjugated places and peoples¹ (e.g., South America, South Africa, Indigenous Populations, etc.). Materials selected were permitted from the following (Appendix 1):

- 1 x academic article (e.g., journal paper, report, book chapter)
- 1 x newspaper article
- 1 x podcast-audio/video/blog/visual-graphic (one from this list)

Teams were tasked with writing up their team findings in a report: critically evaluating the materials that they selected and assessing how they could be used for teaching and learning purposes. Students also submitted an individual reflection on the process on what was it like to work in a diverse team, what made them uncomfortable about the assignment, why it is necessary to consider diverse knowledge sources, how they have developed their diversity competence, how they would present their learning to an employer and whether they would recommend this assignment to be continued.

2. Begin the process of diversifying the library collections. The [Discover Diversity Collection](#), which is considered a living output of the project, will continue to grow through a Patron Driven Acquisition Model.
3. Develop the research skills and information literacy of students to find, consider and utilise diverse resources. Inclusive referencing was a core part of this training.
4. Develop a framework for colleagues in higher education to diversify the curriculum, that will support teaching staff in adapting and developing their approach to teaching, learning and assessment, and to develop the requisite skills in themselves and their students.

Building MultiStories was supported by Incubator funding as part of the IMPACT Project at TU Dublin (<https://tudublinimpact.wordpress.com/accelerator-and-incubator-fund/>).

It is time to diversify the curriculum: Engaging with the literature

Diversifying and decolonising the curriculum are so intertwined in the literature that decoupling them is a difficult task. While the distinction between both terms has already been acknowledged by the authors, the scholarship used in this paper combines both perspectives to enhance understanding, while foregrounding the approach on diversifying the curriculum

¹ <https://globalsouthstudies.as.virginia.edu/what-is-global-south>

in particular. It is often mistakenly assumed that diversifying the curriculum is about stripping White male authors from the reading list (Muldoon, 2019). The challenge, however, is for predominantly White educators to interrogate their knowledge sources and not to disconnect their social positioning from their racial identity (Fitzsimons, 2019; hooks, 2012) as this can impact directly on students from diverse backgrounds in terms of inclusion and belonging in a learning environment (Rowan, 2019).

Diversifying the curriculum is not about eliminating White male scholarship from the reading list. It aims, instead, to expand the traditional canon of knowledge to include other voices that have been side-lined, in order to liberate the curriculum and student experience, to promote balance, equity and social justice (Banks & Banks, 2005). This is a process of including a wider range of perspectives in curricula that have traditionally been narrow in their focus of content, usually by consisting of an over-emphasis of White male authors. While often unintentional and implicit, “the curriculum is an ideological project devised by the powerful in society - meaning mostly straight, white, Western men with a ‘Eurocentric’ bent on things like science, reason, and rationality, among other proven epistemological and pedagogical frameworks” (Lindsay, 2020, p.450). Higher educational institutions, in particular, “continue to be complicit in reproducing White privilege,” (Arday, Belluigi & Thomas, 2021, p.299).

Diversifying the curriculum requires and enables us to look inside the classroom with a critical pedagogical lens, for divergent thinking, for group compositions for teamwork, for controversial classroom-based discussions, for evidence of ethnicity-proofed syllabi and for racial literacy in delivery where matters of race are foregrounded, as is the impact of being a minority in the classroom (Blaisdell, 2016; Gunn, Morrison, & Hanesworth, 2015).

Pedagogies are shaped by and through different formations of knowledge, as well as identity, and so it is crucial that we think through teaching and learning in relation to questions about curriculum and assessment. These are not separate entities of practice but relational practices in higher education and are connected to questions of equity, inclusion and recognition. (Burke & Crozier, 2013, p.7)

By making visible what is hidden in the curriculum, we can better understand how cultures and structures enable some learners to succeed and others to be less successful (Cotton et al, 2013).

The students we teach come from diverse backgrounds. This has implications for a pedagogical approach that reflects that diversity and promotes inclusive content. According to Keele University's (2020) *Manifesto for Decolonising the Curriculum*, "Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students are the first to feel the effects of a White curriculum. They find themselves under-represented and under-stimulated by the content of their curricula, with their histories, narratives and experiences omitted from mainstream discourse," (2020, p.109). Inclusive teaching in higher education can develop a sense of belonging where all students can participate.

Inclusive reading lists have a role to play in diversifying the curriculum and in *Building MultiStories* to reflect the diverse student body in our classrooms (Schucan Bird & Pitman, 2020). This is one of the most apparent ways that the University Library can contribute to a diverse and inclusive curriculum. The development of a diverse library collection can be a way to engage your users with both the concept and the content, as is evident from the [Liberate Our Library](#) initiative at Goldsmith's College, University of London (2021).

Connell advocates a mosaic approach to epistemology that "offers a clear alternative to Northern hegemony and global inequality, replacing the priority of one knowledge system with respectful relations among many" (2018, p.404). However, what is often missing from these discussions is the skill required to find and engage with these knowledges in an impactful way. A reflexive recourse to the web search engine as a first point of investigation has the potential to limit and bias the information that comes back from a search. Recent studies into algorithms and their inherent bias, often along racial and gender lines, highlight this (Kantayya & Hoffman, 2020).

The University Library has a key role to play in the inculcation of information skills in students and staff to develop their approach and ability in the search for and use of information, and knowledges. Professional librarians are required to train to teach Information Literacy, defined as a "set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning" (ACRL, 2016). This step is key, but often missing in the move to diversify curricula. *Building MultiStories* uses the library to underpin a curricular move towards more, and more diverse, voices.

Development of these skills and their impact on students can be seen in the quotations below:

I have always found it difficult to use library resources. Once we did the workshop...I realize it is not as difficult as it seems, I can leave Google Scholar behind. (Student 1)

One element I found interesting was how even when using filters, a lot of non-related content comes up. This is interesting as it shows and proves how much content is really out there and being constantly produced by academics, news sites and ordinary people. One must tightly consider and reflect about keywords and filters before researching. (Student 2)

The main element that I found as an advantage was the ability to limit the search for resources. This was a major advantage as I am used to spending hours trying to find credible academic sources through Google Scholar. (Student 3)

I developed my diversity competence through the discovery and research of different types of sources. (Student 4)

From reading through numerous articles, book chapters and journals It has opened my eyes up to a real-world problem that was going on without it affecting my life too much. (Student 5).

Pedagogical reflections

Employers have come to realise that they will be employing more graduates from diverse backgrounds. Ireland's workforce is increasingly multicultural with over 15% of the workforce of migrant descent (Joseph, 2020). A diverse team assignment reflects the diversity of our student population at TU Dublin, and promotes an inclusive teaching and learning environments for all. Integrating and celebrating our diversity, can foster a culture of inquiry and can challenge the stereotypes we have of others. Studies have shown that interacting with different ethnic groups is a potent way for learners to augment the educational benefits of diversity and to use this diversity competency in the workplace (Haring-Smith, 2012).

Students benefited from engaging with a diverse team for the assignment and by reflecting on the rich and diverse heritage of learning from countries and continents in the Global South (Andrews, 2016; Mirza, 2017). When we interact on campus with others who have different backgrounds and life experiences to ours, this can open multiple perspectives and points of view, and help us to understand difference. Key learnings for students were an appreciation

of difference, an acknowledgment of whiteness on reading lists and the benefits of working in a diverse team, which were evident in the reflective component of the assignment. A sample of student reflections is provided below:

...it allows students from a less diverse background like myself, a chance to experience what it actually is like to work as part of such a team. It will benefit students when they go into the workplace as many are now becoming more diverse. Another reason why I would recommend it as it allows students to research different cultures. It also benefits as it makes students use correct and credible sources. (Student 6)

I would recommend this [assignment], I found it to be very informative, not because of the research but because of how it makes you think. It opened my eyes a lot to the realities of peoples' lives that I would usually be oblivious to. (Student 7)

People who decide to only talk to similar people don't know what they are missing in terms of openness and self-education. I am proud of being part of diverse projects like this one, and I will present my learnings to an employer as being open-minded and belonging to a generation that accepts everyone, from everywhere. (Student 8)

I personally enjoyed working in the diverse team as usually if the circumstances were different and we got to pick our teams I don't think I would have found myself in this group. I would have just stuck to my friend group for the assignment. (Student 9)

I am more enlightened on all kinds of diversity issues and the benefits of inclusion. I have learnt that working in a diverse environment encourages expressing different ideas and fosters creativity. Now I have high ambitions and confidence to work with diverse groups and join a company that champions diversity. (Student 10)

I would recommend this [assignment] because it forces the student to divert out of their comfort zone and expand their knowledge towards diverse cultures. (Student 11)

There is one dissenting student voice who would not recommend the assignment to develop diversity competence but instead would prefer diversity competence to develop naturally during tutorial time:

I would not recommend this CA [continuous assessment] because, I prefer to face the diversity in a direct way not by finding documents which explain the diversity...According to my way of learning, I would have preferred that the conclusions reached by this Board were brought about by activities during the tutorials, through interaction between the students. (Student 14)

Diversifying the curriculum requires targeted interventions like the *Building MultiStories* project for the epistemological transformation of the academy. By adhering to a critical and inclusive pedagogy we confront the construction of knowledge and curriculum content (Brookfield, 2019).

Recommendations

The *Building MultiStories* project recommends our framework that includes the following feasible steps to assist staff in diversifying the curriculum:

1. Include a diversifying curriculum statement, stating that your module is in a process of becoming increasingly informed and reflective of more inclusive content that represents a diverse student population.
2. Consider a Diversity Curriculum Diagnosis (DCD), by assessing how much diversity is included in a module/programme in relation to content, assessment and classroom environment. UCL's *Inclusive Curriculum Healthcheck* (2018) is a good starting point. A DCD could be adopted as an assessment type for students to complete and present.
3. Emphasise contributions from multiple theoretical perspectives and communities within the curriculum. Include content, ideas, analogies, examples, stories and imagery that is culturally accessible and pedagogically robust.
4. Embed structured opportunities through assessment for inclusive learning whereby students work with peers from a diverse background.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to diversify the curriculum by considering alternative epistemologies and knowledge sources, enabled by embedding information literacy teaching from the library services into a module. A primary mission of higher education is the discovery and distribution of new knowledge. We need to commit now by working with other ways of knowing: diverse and inclusive curricula, information literacy and critical skills, must become a central value in our collective endeavours. Planned efforts to increase diversity can be measured by reviewing and including the students' recommendations on the module resources and in the deliberate formation of diverse student teams. The students' individual reflective pieces capture valuable in-depth student feedback qualitatively.

Hearing someone's story who is different from how you look, you realise that we are just all humans and want to be treated the same regardless of how different we are. This is something that a lot of people need to hear and that's what I got from this [assignment]. (Student 12)

As an African Irish student, reading what other students like myself speak about their experience made me feel understood. (Student 13)

Facilitating students with opportunities to engage with a more inclusive and diverse approach to their assignments promotes a widening of their perspectives and an appreciation for listening to other voices. The students who were involved are to be commended for their engagement and commitment to this initiative that took place entirely online due to the Covid-19 global pandemic. This project will continue and develop over the coming academic

year(s), moving to a second campus and subject area. It is a living, iterative undertaking that will evolve as its participants learn and as our students' needs develop and adapt.

Let's continue *Building MultiStories* in Irish higher education.

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Appendix 1

Examples of acceptable content

Academic Articles, Reports, Book Chapters:

Journal Article: Racial Hierarchy in Retail

Walters, K. (2018). “They’ll Go with the Lighter”: Tri-racial Aesthetic Labor in Clothing

Retail. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 4(1), 128–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649217710662>

Research Report on Islamophobia in Higher Education

Institutionalised: The Rise of Islamophobia in Higher Education, January 2021 by Sofia Akel (Race Equity Lead) Centre for Equity and Inclusion London Metropolitan University [here](#).

Book Chapter

DiAngelo, R. J. (2012). *What does it mean to be white?: Developing white racial literacy*. Chapter 3: Socialisation

Source: *What Does It Mean to Be White? Developing White Racial Literacy* (2016), pp. 27-43.

Published by: Peter Lang AG Stable

URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45157297>

Newspaper Article Examples:

George Nkencho shooting: Racial tensions in Dublin’s suburbs

Source: The Irish Times, January 9, 2021 by Conor Gallagher

(<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/george-nkencho-shooting-racial-tensions-in-dublin-s-suburbs-1.4452459>)

Some taxi drivers’ bumper stickers target immigrants

Source: Dublin Inquirer, April 17, 2019, by Erin Maguire

(<https://www.dublininquirer.com/2019/04/17/some-taxi-drivers-bumper-stickers-target-immigrants>)

UK white female academics are being privileged above women and men of colour.

Source: The Guardian Newspaper, July 28, 2020, by Kalwant Bhopal

(<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jul/28/uks-white-female-academics-are-being-privileged-above-women-and-men-of-colour>)

Misogynoir: Where racism and sexism meet.

Source: The Guardian Newspaper, October 5, 2015 by Eliza Anyangwe

(<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/oct/05/what-is-misogynoir>)

Audio/Video content examples:

Podcast:

RTÉ's The Black and Irish Podcast available now "One country, many voices"

Source: [here](#) and all episodes available on *Spotify*.

YouTube:

Dr Eburn Joseph in conversation with Dr Fionnuala Darby, TU Dublin

Benjamin, R (2019) The New Jim Code? Race, Carceral Technoscience, and

The EDI Directorate at TU Dublin recently invited Dr Eburn Joseph to join a conversation with Dr Fionnuala Darby on Critical Race Theory, which introduced by Dr Philip Owende, December 10, 2020. Audio recording available [here](#)

(<https://www.tudublin.ie/explore/about-the-university/equality-and-diversity/news/dr-ebun-joseph-in-conversation-with-dr-fionnuala-darby-tu-dublin.html>)

TedTalk:

From park bench to lab bench – What kind of future are we designing? By Professor Ruha Benjamin at TEDx Baltimore

'Whose voices are missing at the lab bench when important decisions are being made?'

Source: [here](#) (25 minutes duration)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RrX4hjCr0>

Blog Examples:

INAR – Irish Network Against Racism

<https://inar.ie/category/information/responding-to-racism-blog/>

ENAR – European Network Against Racism

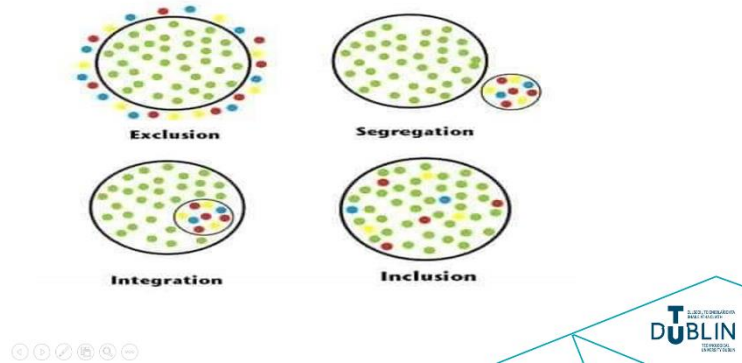
<https://www.enar-eu.org/Blog>

Education in Ireland: Student Ambassador Programme – Hear our stories

<http://blog.educationinireland.com/blog/>

Visual/Graphics Examples

Example 1



Example 2

