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Diversify or Decolonise? What You Can Do Right Now and How to Get Started

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The Conundrum

People deeply interested in the needs of their students, especially students who have not been traditionally represented in academia, face the challenge of how to make academia a welcoming place for them. This process often involves changing what and how we teach, a challenge made difficult by austerity measures, precarity of employment, pressure to maintain the status quo, and potentially also the isolation that instructors of colour often face in their departments and universities. Indeed, though this chapter has a focus on making change for the sake of students, I hope that the inquiry suggested within will help educators and staff of colour within the university, as well. In addition to these concerns, there is also the reality that it can be hard to determine how to even begin making changes to the curriculum, in part because the terminology and scholarship around

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curricular change is confusing at best. Scholars often use diversity and inclusion terms interchangeably or use them in ways that do not reflect the intent of the theories behind them. As such, finding the right resources or deciding which of these measures you can implement in classes or one's academic department is made that much harder.

With this terminological conundrum in mind, I have divided this chapter into four main categories. Part One, "Defining the Terms" provides definitions and clarifications for key terms in the diversity and inclusion sector. The purpose behind these definitions is to help readers determine which of these terms best describes their goals. The remaining parts focus on practical ways to actually get started on making positive changes in one's curriculum. Part Two, "Individual Instructor Viewpoint" asks guiding questions of individual instructors. Part Three, "Departmental Viewpoint" provides a list of the types of questions a departmental leader might ask themselves when assessing their department. The chapter concludes with Part Four, "Tips for Moving Forward" which provides a few brief tips and a short list of resources in the space that remains.

Defining the Terms

Equity Versus Equality

The terms "equity" and "equality" are often used interchangeably, but they do have distinct differences. First, I would like to clear up the misconception that equality has to do with sameness. When one speaks of two people being equal, one does not mean that those two people have the same things, are similar in mind, or composition. Rather, equality speaks to having the same worth. So, when the Declaration of Independence (US, 1776) says that "all men are created equal" what it means is that all men are created with equal value and are thus deserving of equal rights, equal representation, and equal protection under the law. Of course, reaching towards the ideal inherent to any of these terms is the work of years and decades and centuries. Yet, despite equality being a worthwhile goal that human governments and systems still have not

reached, the term equality does not encapsulate the same meaning as equity.

Equity is not just a fancy version of equality, as it is sometimes used. Equity is less about sameness of value or rights and more about fairness. As Gutierrez (2012) says, "when we look for evidence that we are achieving equity, we should not expect to find that everyone ends up in the same place" (p. 18). She further defines equity along four dimensions: access, achievement, identity, and power. Access, as Gutierrez (2012) uses the term, refers to material, tangible resources available to students as they pursue their education. I would add that access should also, as (dis) ability scholars and activists use the term, refer to those material and structural resources that allow for students to truly be included in the educational process. These materials include the obvious ones, such as technology, textbooks, affordable housing, and sufficient food. Access also encompasses less obvious resources, like a rigorous and inclusive curriculum, a welcoming classroom environment, appropriate classrooms and teacher-student ratios, and student support centres. Further, it also includes accommodations for neuro-diverse students and (dis)abled students.[1] Through this lens, using a common equity metaphor in US Education circles, equity does not mean that children trying to see over a fence to watch a ball game all get a box to stand on (despite having different heights), nor does it mean that they get the number of boxes to stand on they need to actually see over the fence. Equity that truly considers access would change the fence from wood to chain link (acknowledging that sometimes there does need to be a fence).

Achievement refers to student outcomes. Equity as it relates to achievement would mean that there is an "inability to predict… achievement and participation based solely on student characteristics such as race, class, ethnicity, sex, beliefs, and proficiency in the dominant language" (Gutierrez 2002, p. 153). This is not to say that equity is colour-blind, or any other type of blind, but that those identities should not be determiners of student outcomes if academia is equitable.

Identity is central to designing an inclusive curriculum, one that is both a mirror and a window to all its students. They should have an opportunity to see themselves in the curriculum (mirror) and to see the world outside themselves (window). Every class will not provide both a

mirror and a window to every student, but an equitable curriculum would be comprised of a multitude of classes that, woven together, allows for students to see identities both similar and dissimilar to their own, and not just as related to race, ethnicity, and culture, but also gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, and other identity markers. This is possible not just in the humanities, but in Gutierrez' own mathematics courses (2012). Theorists, inventors, scientists, writers, artists of every discipline have amongst their members those with a kaleidoscope of identities that can be used as mirrors and windows within a course's reading list and a department's curriculum.

These sorts of mirror/window changes to the curriculum are part of what is meant when people refer to diversifying the curriculum, yet diversity for its own sake is not enough for equity, for true fairness. Power must be added to the equation. What does it mean for students to do well in the classroom, only for the status quo of academia writ large and the society as a whole to continue with the same power structures? I have no definitive answer for this, but educators should consider how their own classrooms reinforce the power structures of the status quo. How? This can be done by considering who talks in the classroom and who decides not just the reading lists but also the curriculum as a whole and by providing ways for students to use the theories and applications of your discipline to critique academia and society. By not just considering, but actively using alternative notions of knowledge right alongside the Western notions of knowledge that built one's discipline (Gutierrez 2012).

Diversify or Decolonise?[2]

Deciding whether or not to call alterations to academia's structures and curricula diversifying or decolonising depends strongly on what these terms actually mean. There is some contention over the difference between diversity and inclusion as terms and movements. I argue, however, that true diversity work is inclusive. It is only because one can easily observe diversity serving as a check box used to qualify for a grant, for special government status, for appeasing stakeholders. This type of diversity work is not inclusive. For example, the mirror/window method of

deciding what works to include in a reading list or how to build a department's curriculum is diversity work. So is recruiting students and staff of colour, for example. But in diversity work, the mere presence of people of colour is not enough if the power structures remain the same. True diversity work pushes towards a curriculum and an academia that does not consider it sufficient to be satisfied with having people of colour in the academy; it instead drives academia towards a reality in which people of colour have equitable access and achievement, their identities are not merely accepted but valued as integral to building knowledge in the disciplines, and their whole selves have power while at university and beyond.

Decolonisation differs from diversity work in that its aims are different. As Tuck and Yang (2012) describe it:

> Decolonization is not a metaphor. When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot be easily grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. (p. 3)

Decolonisation literally means to take apart the results of colonisation and, in settler colonial situations, give land and resources back to the people from whom they were taken and, in an imperial context, ensure that power and reparations are given to those in the metropole who are there as a direct result of colonisation. This is unsettling, and so it should be. It is meant to be. Thus, I recommend caution when using the word decolonise. Use it only if you really mean to be dismantling, if you really mean to tear down the master's house (Lorde 1984). If not, if you mean to improve the academy that already exists, to improve a university on the land it stands on, if you have no intention of convincing the current owners of the land and bricks to give those things up, then perhaps stick to using the term diversify, in tandem with equity.

There are, of course, other ways to consider decolonising the syllabus, that are not quite as literal as Tuck and Yang's (2012). Garcia (2018) suggests using the term to examine the colonial matrix of power "that is grounded in historical coloniality" operates in our contemporary world

(p. 133) and are related to race, ethnicity, class, and colonial mentalities related thereto. As Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot (2005) propose, this way of viewing colonisation would consider eight dimensions: institutional mission, culture, power, membership, climate, technology, resources, and boundary management. Looking at decolonising academia through these frames allows for practical, important, structural work that is not just lip-service or metaphor; however, it is not as potentially career-ending and suggesting you want to not just radically change, but tear down the status quo.

Extending the metaphor of the children trying to watch the ball game discussed in the equity section above, diversity work would make the price of watching the game accessible enough to the children that they could just go into the ballpark, sit down, and watch the game. Decolonial work should do the diversity work, but in the United States would find out which indigenous people the land originally belonged to and cede the land rights back to them, while in the United Kingdom might consider who really profits from the game and who does the labour. If formerly colonised people are doing the labour now and are disproportionately not profiting, then something needs to change in that equation. This is, of course, an imperfect metaphor, but I hope both instances of its use shed some clarity on how these terms differ and yet relate.

What, then, should one do with these understandings of diversity, decolonisation, equity, and equality? You need to ask yourself the hard questions teachers and department leaders need to consider in order to assess the status quo and decide which of the terms best apply to what you can do in your present environment and what you might work towards in the future. Below, I have included two sections of questions to guide this inquiry. The first is for individuals. It includes questions related to self-assessment and course assessment, the latter of which is further broken down into four sections: course description, reading lists/syllabi, assignments, and teaching practices. The second section is for departmental leaders, in their various titles and levels at the university. I mean this to include Chairs, Deans, and any other administrator that makes decisions about curriculum and student services. The aim for this part of the chapter is to be immediately practical, as opposed to theorising, but not acting. That is so prevalent in academia. My hope is that you find it useful.

Individual Instructor Viewpoint

Getting started with diversifying your own courses:

- Self-Assessment:

    – Why do you want to diversify your curriculum?
    – Set short-term and long-term goals (you do not have to overhaul your entire syllabus and teaching practice in one go)
    – What seems the easiest to do to meet your goal?
    – What seems the most daunting?
    – Do you know of texts, scholars, and so on related to your course topic?
    – How do you feel about teaching race or gender?

      Do you feel ready to deal with potential controversy?
      Do you feel confident you can create a space where minoritised students feel safe in your classroom when these topics come up?

    – Have you examined your own biases/cultural sensitivity?

      Consider the resources in: Cress, C. M., Collier, P. J., & Reitenauer, V. L. (2013). Learning Through Serving: A Student Guidebook for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement Across Academic Disciplines and Cultural Communities (2 edition). Sterling, Va: Stylus Publishing

- Course Assessment: start with the smallest chunk and work your way out

    – Course description:

      What does it say? Is it accurate?
      Does it include anything from non-White, non-Western scholars/ scholarship?

– Module Outlines/Reading Lists/Syllabi: Consider the following areas

Theories
Methods
Authors of articles
Who are the knowledge makers in your field? Which ones do you acknowledge?
What perspectives do you acknowledge?
What issues do you consider vital or important? Whose issues are they? How are they framed?
Do you spend time unpacking race and gender, and how these constructs relate to your course topic? Hint: From biology to ballet, there are few areas where race and gender do not relate.

– Assignments:

How much weight do you give to "standard" English usage? Is it appropriate, given what you teach?
Do your assignments expect minoritised students to expose their trauma? Is it necessary?
Do your assignments ever allow students to bring their experiential and cultural knowledge to bear on the subject at hand? Many social sciences consider those areas worthy of research by White scholars, but somehow not appropriate for scholars of colour to investigate.

– Teaching practices:

Track who you call on most often, who you question, who you agree with, who is silent, who speaks, and so on.
Do you ever expect students of colour to represent their entire group when teaching?
Do you expect women to do classroom clerical work?

Departmental Viewpoint

Specific areas of inquiry for your department to consider:

- Do you have any scholars of colour/BAME scholars in your department?

  - If yes, what supports do you have in place to ensure their success and retention at your institution?
  - If yes, are they taking on extra burdens, particularly around mentoring students of colour/BAME students or doing diversity work? If yes, are these extra burdens recognised via pay or tenure/promotion benefits?
  - If yes, have you asked them (in a way that protects them from retaliation) about their experiences in your programme? (Things that are going well, things that could improve)
  - If no, what proactive steps are you taking to recruit scholars of colour?

- What theories are taught in your department?

  - Do they include contributions from scholars of colour/BAME scholars?
  - Are traditional theories examined from multiple perspectives?

    If yes to the above two, do your course descriptions acknowledge this?

  - Do you have any scholars of colour teaching your theory courses?

- What methods/methodologies are taught in your department?

  - Are the colonial historic and present-day impacts of these methodologies discussed?
  - Are participant-centric, ethical methodologies taught?
  - Do methods courses include contributions from scholars of colour/BAME scholars?

If yes to the above three, do your course descriptions acknowledge this?

– Do you have any scholars of colour teaching your methods courses?

• Does your department offer any courses explicitly about race or gender?

  – Are these classes electives or required?
  – Are any of them taught by scholars of colour?
  – If they are taught by scholars of colour, what supports do you have in place to support them from potential complaints from students?
  – How frequently are these courses offered?

• Do you offer pedagogical training around teaching race or gender to your scholars? Key areas for training include:

  – Cultural sensitivity/humility
  – Implicit bias
  – How to create an inclusive classroom space
  – Specific teaching strategies that neither exoticism nor minoritise your students
  – Suggestions for assessment practices

Tips for Moving Forward

Do the above questions make you feel a bit overwhelmed? My main tip individual instructors can use to fight the overwhelming feeling is to do the self-assessment first. Tackling those questions will already be mentally and emotionally draining work if taken seriously. Give yourself the time to process the results of the self-assessment. Afterward, choose just one area in the course assessment. Then pick one subsection of that area to focus on making a change in for the upcoming term. In the meantime, do the first teaching practice question, in terms of tracking who you call on the most, who you question/challenge, who you agree with, who is silent, who speaks, and so on—this teaching assessment will help you feel like you're doing something practical, because you are.

Notes

1. I use (dis)abled students instead of the person-first language popular in most Education circles because (dis)ability activists and (dis)abled scholars contest person-first language. For more on this topic, see: https://www.thinkinclusive.us/why-person-first-language-doesnt-always-put-the-person-first/

2. I use the British spelling for 'decolonising 'in the main body of the text, due to the majority of my fellow chapter contributors working in the United Kingdom. However, many of my citations regarding the topic are US scholars who spell the word as 'decolonizing'.

References

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Resources

The Kaleidoscope Network – Decolonising the University.: https://research.kent.ac.uk/sergj/kaleidoscope-network-decolonising-the-university/

The Syllabus Clearinghouse.: http://www.myacpa.org/syllabus-clearinghouse-0

Law Modules and Syllabi

National History Center – Decolonization Resource Collection: Sample Syllabi
https://nationalhistorycenter.org/decolonization-resource-collection-sample-syllabi/

UCL – https://research.kent.ac.uk/sergj/kaleidoscope-network-decolonising-the-university/

Education Modules and Syllabi

UC San Diego – http://courses.ucsd.edu/syllabi/WI18/922625.pdf

Pedagogy

https://liberatedgenius.com/2018/decolonize-your-syllabus/