Title: How 'diverse' is your reading list? Tools, tips and challenges

Introduction: The shifting context for curricula reform in the UK

Around the world, there is a strong and growing imperative to develop inclusive and diverse reading lists in higher education. Such reform of syllabi constitutes a small but important step in the process of transforming university curricula. In the UK, the content of curricula in higher education has long been a site for contestation (e.g. Andrews, 2019; Peters, 2018) with the recent Black Lives Matters (BLM) campaigns underscoring the importance of reforming curricula as part of efforts to address racial inequalities and decolonise the university (Bhambra et al., 2018; Doku, 2020). In historical perspective, calls for reform have been anchored in a range of narratives. In the past decade, developing global curricula was part of the 'internationalisation' of UK universities who sought to adopt an increasingly global outlook and develop syllabi fitting for the growing international student cohort (Luxon & Peelo, 2009; May & Spalding, 2014). Simultaneously, the growth of the widening participation agenda, with a focus on equal opportunities for UK domiciled students, highlighted the need for curricula to foster student success for all students irrelevant of background (Bowl, 2018). In more recent years, the drive towards 'equality' has gradually been replaced with an agenda based on 'diversity', and then 'inclusion' and so mirroring the discursive shifts observed in other organisations (Bowl, 2018; Brewis, 2019; Oswick & Noon, 2014). Whilst the drivers for curricula reform have shifted, institutional responses of UK universities have long been subject to critique for inserting perspectives into syllabi without challenging mainstream content or practices (Clifford & Montgomery, 2017; Robson, 2015), recognising historical inequalities (Ahmed, 2007), or questioning the neoliberal frameworks within which such strategies sit (Gyamera & Burke, 2018). It is only more recently that the agenda for curricula change has been shaped in line with a 'transformational' approach that challenges 'traditional views and assumptions; encourages new ways of thinking; and reconceptualises the field in light of new knowledge, scholarship and ways of knowing' (Kitano, 1997, p. 23). Current calls for decolonisation often fit within this framing by highlighting that

curricular are deeply implicated in the processes of producing/ reproducing inequalities whilst holding the potential for transforming higher education and delivering societal change more widely (Andrews, 2019; Heleta, 2016; Le Grange, 2016; Luckett & Shay, 2017).

The interrogation of reading lists, as an initial step towards curricula transformation, has attracted growing attention from UK university students, staff and institutions. Student led movements have questioned the dominance of Eurocentric and male authors on university reading lists and called for an overhaul of their syllabi (e.g. #WhyIsMyCurriculumWhite, Alternative Reading List Project, #Decolonise my curriculum). Academic staff have begun to empirically analyse the composition of reading lists with a focus on the authorship of recommended readings (e.g. Colgan, 2017; Phull et al., 2019) and institutional toolkits are emerging to encourage individual staff to do just that (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018; UCL, 2018; UUK & NUS, 2019a; Ward & Gale, 2016). This chapter considers these four toolkits together with lessons from a social science case study (reported in Schucan Bird & Pitman, 2020) to identify practical recommendations for students and staff who are interested in reviewing their own syllabi, with a particular emphasis on authorship.

A social science case study and four toolkits

The case study was undertaken at a research intensive university in the UK with the project constituting part of, and funded by, the local 'Liberating the Curriculum' initiative (a working group that aims to advance inclusivity in higher education curricula). The team consisted of one British female academic of European descent and one International male post-graduate student of Middle Eastern descent. This staff-student partnership reviewed the gender, ethnicity, and geographical affiliation of all authors included on the reading list for a post-graduate module on social science research methods. The project found an equal proportion of female and male authors included on the reading list, with the majority categorised as non-BME (Black or Minority Ethnic) and affiliated to universities in Europe, North America or Australasia. The process undertaken by the team to identify

and categorise the demographic characteristics of the authors constitutes the basis of the recommendations set out below. To complement these and explore institutional approaches towards inclusive curricula reform, four toolkits will also be examined. These toolkits aim to promote curricula that are inclusive (UCL, 2018) or decolonised (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018), target particular inequalities such as the BME attainment gap (UUK & NUS, 2019a), or advance the issues of particular groups in higher education, i.e. LGBTQ (Ward & Gale, 2016).

Ten tips for reviewing the authors on reading lists

1. Use theoretical tools

Reviewing the authors listed on syllabi is becoming an increasingly popular method for exploring bias and exclusion, principally in terms of gender and ethnicity, in teaching materials (e.g. Phull et al., 2019; UUK & NUS, 2019b). Such analysis is only meaningful, however, when a theoretical framework is used to guide the project and interpret the findings. A reading list dominated by male authors, for example, is not inherently problematic but requires theory to diagnose and justify the critique. There are a variety of theoretical frameworks within which to situate an analysis of curricula, vis-à-vis reading lists, that recognise the dominance of Eurocentric and masculinist knowledge structures (e.g. Santos, 2018; Tickner, 2013). Such assumptions form the basis of some toolkits (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018) but not all.

The case study invoked the concept of *representation* (Pitkin, 1972) to recognise and analyse the reading list as a representative device. By using this theoretical tool, it was possible to draw conclusions about whether the reading list accurately represented the student or scholarly body in terms of gender, ethnicity and geographical affiliation. This provided an underpinning theoretical rationale for problematizing the dominance of particular authors, e.g. non-BME authors from the Global North, when the student and staff community is changing and becoming increasingly diverse.

2. Engage students

Staff-student collaborations arguably chime with an agenda for genuinely inclusive or transformative curricula (Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill, 2019; Wijaya Mulya, 2019). Yet, there is a dearth of institutional schemes that utilise student-staff collaboration for curricula reform (Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill, 2019) and the engagement of students in the *process* of interrogating curricula/ reading lists is typically absent from toolkits (UCL, 2018) or framed in relatively vague terms '*Talk to students about what kinds of content they would like to see addressed*' (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018, p. 10). The case study was undertaken collaboratively by a staff and student team, drawing on the student's expertise as both a representative of the wider student cohort (having attended the module and utilised the reading list under scrutiny) and a co-researcher. Collaboration was invaluable, enabling student views to shape the research, draw meaningful inferences from the findings, and engage with wider issues about curricula design (Bovill et al., 2011). As there is limited understanding of student views of, or reactions to, diversity in curricula (Wolff, 2016), any attempt to examine a reading list should necessarily engage with local, discipline specific student cohorts. In doing so, student opportunities for engagement should be meaningful and appropriately rewarded as part of a truly inclusive approach (Cook-Sather, 2020; Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill, 2019).

3. Engage staff

Whilst staff are contributing to numerous initiatives pertaining to diversity in reading lists (UUK & NUS, 2019b), there is also a history of resistance to such agendas within academia (Last, 2019; D. Stokes, 2019). Many institutional toolkits recognise 'discussion is key to change' (UUK & NUS, 2019b, p. 9) and so engaging staff, generating awareness and facilitating conversations is integral to the work of inclusion (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018; UUK & NUS, 2019b; Ward & Gale, 2016).

The case study did seek to engage staff in the project, but only at the end of the project via a presentation of the findings. Both members of the team were pleasantly surprised by the level of staff interest in the project but also recognised that conversations about diversity in the curricula can create discomfort and/ or resistance. On reflection, the team decided that early and regular engagement with staff would have been preferable. Such engagement would then allow colleagues 'to engage with these issues proactively, to share their experiences and ideas, to challenge, debate and revise the ideas and to identify where their own teaching can be transformed' (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018, p. 21).

4. Be reflexive

Reflexivity has played a central role in debates about curricula reform. Engaging with issues of diversity means that individuals become 'embroiled in an embodied struggle' occupying raced and gendered spaces (Azumah Dennis, 2018, p. 193). In practice, this means acknowledging and exploring the interaction between individual social locations and the wider structures that are subject to critique (Azumah Dennis, 2018; hooks, 1994; Last, 2019; Luckett & Shay, 2017). The team endeavoured to actively reflect on the racialized, gendered and ranked position of both staff and student. The team acknowledged that the positionality of each member influenced their research priorities, methodological approach, and interpretations of the findings. For example, the staff collaborator held a particular interest in gender and knowledge production that shaped the project and its methods. Having experienced post-graduate study in the UK as international student, the student member approached the study and interpreted the findings through a lens of student belonging. Toolkits and guidance for staff, however, rarely encourage such reflexivity. The focus remains solely on the way in which the teaching content relates to a particular 'orientation to the world' (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018).

5. Seek resources

Published examples of reading list initiatives, whilst mainly small scale, suggest that projects are time and resource intensive (Schucan Bird & Pitman, 2020; UUK & NUS, 2019b). In the case study, the team took between 10 and 15 minutes to review each author on the reading list (n=144) which amounted to 4 days just for the data collection stage. Funding for the project included student time but did not extend to staff involvement or longer term activities e.g. dissemination. Therefore, the staff member undertook the project in her own time in order to be an active partner and facilitate meaningful staff-student collaboration. Whilst some toolkits acknowledge the 'time intensive' nature of curricula reform and the need for dedicated resources (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018, p. 21), others framed the activities as teaching practices that could be integrated into the existing academic cycle (UCL, 2018). 'Formally integrated and properly resourced opportunities' are needed within our institutions and across the sector (UUK & NUS, 2019b, p. 8) to recognise the time and intellectual investment required for curricula reform and inclusive approaches.

6. Determine which author characteristics are salient

Existing reviews of reading lists, including the featured case study, have tended to focus on gender, geographical location and ethnicity of authors (e.g. in political science add authors from zotero Colgan, 2017; Phull et al., 2019; Sumner, 2018), (Hagmann & Biersteker, 2014; Mngomezulu & Hadebe, 2018; Tickner, 2013). Whilst existing reviews of reading lists present a useful starting point, there remains a range of other categories that could (and should?) be interrogated. The Equality Act (2010) in England and Wales identified nine characteristics that warrant protection from discrimination and harassment in higher education (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership). Should an assessment of reading lists consider all nine characteristics? A growing body of literature contends that it should: critical disability studies (Goodley, 2013) and queer theorists (Smith & Lee, 2015), for example, argue that disability and sexuality should be considered. Further, there could also be additional characteristics beyond The Equality Act, such as social class, which warrant

exploration. Deciding on which vectors of difference to interrogate is difficult, and there is a lack of advice on such matters. Toolkits and guidance tend to be broad, prompting teaching staff to consider the 'demographic profile of authors on the syllabus/ programme' (Decolonising SOAS Working Group, 2018, p. 9) without stipulating which demographic features to consider (or how). The case study decided to focus on the gender, geographical location and ethnicity of authors in line with the interests of the team and the wider debates that were occurring at the time (such as #WhyIsMyCurriculumWhite and #Decolonise my curriculum). Pragmatics also played a role as it appeared, on first glance, that it would be relatively straightforward to collect and analyse data on these characteristics.

7. Collect and manage data

The process of reviewing a reading list requires an explicit and systematic approach to collecting and managing data about each author and/ or publication. A simple spreadsheet that contains all references, including authors, is recommended. The reading list used for the case study was relatively short with 57 publications and 144 different authors but still required an orderly approach to data management. Each publication was listed, together with the author (s) and associated information. The spreadsheet became long and somewhat unwieldly but the team also became familiar with the individual publications and each author as the data collection progressed.

Following the creation of a spreadsheet, it is then necessary to decide on the most appropriate system for identifying and classifying the data about each author. What information or sources should be used to provide data on, for example, the sex/ gender of the author? How should sex/ gender of the author be categorised? Such questions are not straightforward and need careful consideration. The team engaged in a series of discussions to arrive at the methods outlined below. Unfortunately, toolkits for developing diverse/ inclusive/ decolonised curricula do not tend to offer fine-grained methodological detail or guidance on these issues.

The case study examined the gender, ethnicity and geographical location of each author, manually collecting data from a range of data sources to do so. There are also a range of studies that have employed machine learning techniques to classify individual's ethnicity or gender by their names (AlShebli et al., 2018; Freeman & Huang, 2015; West et al., 2013). Whilst this approach can analyse vast amounts of data with potentially high levels of accuracy (AlShebli et al., 2018), such approaches are also seen to disguise and normalise racial inequity (Gillborn et al., 2018). The manual collection of data was adopted with data sources primarily included the publication itself together with institutional websites or online professional platforms (such as Research gate or LinkedIn). Other sources, such as personal sites or social media entries, were occasionally chanced upon but the team considered these to be less ethical sources of data (see discussion below).

The identification and classification of data on the author's geographical location was most straightforward and was based on the author's university affiliation, determined by the contact details stipulated on the publication. The team found that identifying author's gender and ethnicity, however, was more challenging in both conceptual and pragmatic terms.

The case study categorised the gender/ sex of each author as 'female'/ 'male'/ 'unclear'. Whilst such binary categories are increasingly recognised as inadequate for capturing diverse gender and sexual identities (Hines, 2006; Ward & Gale, 2016), the team were influenced by the methods used by previous studies (Eigenberg & Whalley, 2015; Schucan Bird, 2011) and driven by pragmatism. This approach meant that it was possible to deduce and categorise the sex/ gender of the author via first name and pronouns.

The team were faced with similar challenges in codifying the ethnicity of authors. Whilst existing studies of academic authorship have tended to use ethnic groupings (AlShebli et al., 2018; Freeman & Huang, 2015), there is no consensus on the most appropriate terms to use for the scientific study of ethnicity and race (Bhopal, 2004). The use of overarching categories such as 'Black or Minority Ethnic' or 'White' are somewhat 'blunt' instruments that are unable to take into consideration the

nuances and locally defined populations (Bhopal, 2004; Song, 2018). Further, there is virulent debate about whether a terminology of 'race' should also be used to meaningfully measure difference (Roth, 2016; Song, 2018). Following complex debate, the team decided to utilise categories that had been defined by an independent and well-respected body in the UK, the Institute of Race Relation. This body refers to 'BME' as the 'terminology normally used in the UK to describe people of non-white descent'. Decisions about author's ethnicity were based on photographs and surnames. Whilst extrapolating demographics from photographs is relatively unproblematized in other studies (e.g. Eigenberg & Whalley, 2015), this approach meant that the findings were mainly based on assumptions and demographic proxies, with limited possibilities for ensuring accuracy (Mügge et al., 2018; Sloan, 2017). In order to validate the data, it may be better to confirm the characteristics of the authors by asking the individual authors themselves (Sloan, 2017) or wider scholars in the same field (Dickersin et al., 1998). In the process of data collection, the team began to feel uncomfortable when making assumptions and applying rigid, broad categories to individual authors without their knowledge. The team felt as if they were complicit in re-inscribing difference when current scholarly debates recognize that categories of ethnicity and gender are imprecise and fluid (Bhopal, 2004; Roth, 2016).

8. Analyse data

On completion of the data collection, the team had a large spreadsheet listing all of the publications and authors on the reading list together with the coding for their gender, ethnicity and geographical location. As mentioned above, the analysis should be guided by a pre-existing theoretical framework. In the case study, the team explored whether the characteristics of the authors according to gender, ethnicity, geography bore any resemblance to the wider scholarly community in the field and/ or the attending students. Using the concept This team endeavoured to collect data on student and staff cohorts. Difficulty in finding this information- whether are local, national or global levels.

Second, collecting data on a number of demographic factors provides an opportunity to analyse intersectionality and authorship. The potential for such analysis may be limited by the size of your reading list and the scope for drawing meaningful inferences from small numbers of authors for each category. Further, analysis should aim to attend to the normative underpinnings of intersectional work (Hancock, 2007).

How to take into recognise author contribution and value practice of authorship varies across disciplines. Single authorship is most prominent in some academic fields, such as the humanities, whereas multiple authorship is typical of others, such as medical and natural sciences (Helgesson & Eriksson, 2019). The analysis, therefore, should consider and adhere to discipline specific conventions.

9. Consider ethical and data protection issues

There may be a range of ethical concerns to consider when reviewing the authors on reading lists. This chapter briefly considers informed consent and anonymity. First, is it necessary to gain informed consent from each of the authors on the reading list? Possibly. The review process includes collecting personal data and making judgements about, for example, individuals' gender or ethnicity. However, if the data is derived from documents, text or observations taking place in public online space then informed consent may not be necessary (Hudson & Bruckman, 2004; Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011). As Convery & Cox (2012) propose, a form of 'negotiated ethics' may be helpful to recognise that particular types of data collection may not require informed consent whilst others do. An author's geographical affiliation, for example, may not require informed consent because such information is intentionally public (Willis, 2019) yet categories of gender and ethnicity are not explicitly presented as public data and so may arguably require consent. The case study did not seek consent but endeavoured to use publicly available information to verify the data collection process. Second, should the project anonymize the authors when analysing or disseminating the work? The centrality of personal demographics and author identities in the project make the issue of anonymity

particularly complex. As Wilkinson and Thelwall (2011) suggest, revealing the identity of an individual may simply involve the transference of identity from one public space (online) to another (academic publication). This may, or may not, be potentially sensitive so good practice procedures for data protection should be followed to ensure that data about individuals remained confidential. The case study did not initially maintain the anonymity of authors when presenting the findings to specialists in the field and this generated useful discussion about ethics and positionality. It is therefore recommended that thorough consideration is given to all potential ethical and data protection matters at the start of any project.

Unfortunately, toolkits and guidance for staff do not consider the potential ethical concerns of curricula reviews. There was one exception(Ward & Gale, 2016) that briefly considered the ethical implications associated with applying identities/ categories to populations who do not self-identify with that category.

10. Get started…

Reviewing the authors on reading lists is fraught with conceptual and methodological difficulties and so, understandably, teaching staff may shy away from such practices for fear of failure or criticism (Last, 2019). Yet, such critical reflection offers hope of curricula innovation and the potential for wider educational and societal change (hooks, 1994; Luckett & Shay, 2017). Whilst institutional cultures may be slow to change, 'progressive academics and lecturers must take the lead' (Heleta, 2016, p. 8) and hopefully this chapter provides a catalyst for doing so.

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