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Title: How to tame a dragon: Scoping diversity, inclusion and equity in the context of an OER project

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Abstract

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) are almost taken-for-granted concepts in the broader context of open education, and specifically in the context of Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives, projects and practices. GO-GN, a Global OER Graduate Network, set out to investigate and develop its DEI guidelines. This paper reports on the processes and findings of scoping DEI in the context of GO-GN. It also presents some of the project findings and provide the foundations of GO-GN guidelines for DEI. We then suggest some pointers for other OER practices and practitioners in embracing and foregrounding diversity, inclusion and equity.

Introduction

Diversity, inclusion and equity are almost taken-for-granted concepts in the broader context of open education, and specifically in the context of Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives, projects and practices. How can an OER project, for example, be ‘open’ and not also embrace diversity, inclusion and equity? Is it possible that in the hype and promise surrounding OER practices and projects the aspects of diversity, inclusion and equity are not carefully interrogated and considered?

This paper reports on the processes and findings of scoping diversity, inclusion and equity in the context of the Global OER Graduate Network (GO-GN), founded in 2013. Early in 2019 the GO-GN supported an initiative to consider and map the notions of diversity, inclusion and equity in its project and practices. A range of interviews were held with experts and practitioners in the context of open education and OER. Expanding on the analysis of these interviews, a workshop was held in March 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya where a small group of experts and practitioners gathered to destabilise many of the taken-for-granted assumptions pertaining to diversity, inclusion and equity and further define and scope these concepts in the specific context of the GO-GN. This paper will present some of the findings of this project as well as provide the foundations of GO-GN guidelines for DEI. We also intend to suggest some pointers for other OER practices and practitioners in embracing and foregrounding diversity, inclusion and equity.

Diversity, Inclusion and Equity: An Overview

The desire to provide comprehensive and sustainable educational opportunities for diverse student population is a key goal of many educational systems and policies around the globe. Observations indicate that this is fraught with many challenges of which at the centre lies the issue of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Diversity can be conceptualized in different ways depending on the context it is viewed. In educational context, it encompasses unique differences in the race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ability, religious or political beliefs, or other different ideologies of students. Thus, educational providers seek to accommodate these differences in its activities and policies.

As regards to equity, Demeuse, Crahay and Monsuer, (2001), based on OECD (1993; 2003) provides insight on four basic interpretations of equity. They include: (1) Equity of access or equality of opportunity: Do all individuals (or groups of individuals) have the same chance of progressing to a particular level in the education system? (2) Equity in terms of learning environment or equality of means: Do all individuals enjoy equivalent learning conditions? This question is generally taken to mean: Do disadvantaged individuals or groups benefit from a learning environment equivalent to advantaged individuals or groups in terms of the level of training of their teachers and other staff, and the quantity and quality of teaching resources and approaches? (3) Equity in production or equality of achievement (or results): Do students all master, with the same degree of expertise, skills or knowledge designated as goals of the education system? Most particularly, do individuals from different backgrounds achieve, over the period of education or training, equivalent outcomes? Do all individuals have the same chance of earning the same qualifications when they leave, and can they do so, independent of their circumstances of origin? This concern about equality in achievement is founded on an ideal of corrective justice (Crahay, 2000) and is inevitably accompanied by a desire to narrow the gap between high and low performers from the start to the end of their programme of education (Bressoux, 1993) (4) Equity in using the

results of education: Once they have left the education system, do individuals or groups of individuals have the same chances of using their acquired knowledge and skills in employment and wider community life? Rawls (1971) in his Theory of Justice argued that to achieve society's equity goals institutions should be biased in favour of the disadvantaged in terms of resource allocation.

Ainscow & West, (2006), cited in Ainscow (2016) noted that inclusion has to be seen as a never-ending search of finding better ways of responding to diversity and learning how to view differences more positively as a stimulus for fostering learning. It should also be concerned with the identification and removal of barriers. Further, inclusion should involve particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement. This indicates the moral responsibility to ensure that those groups that are statistically most at risk are carefully monitored, and that, where necessary, steps are taken to ensure their presence, participation and achievement within the education system

Diversity, inclusion and equity in the context of OER

While the notions of diversity, inclusion and equity are germane to the debates and discourses pertaining to education in general, they may be still on the periphery of the discourses and practices surrounding, supporting and emerging from OER. These three terms are different, and often overlap, and in many respects mutually constitutive. For example, if there was not diversity, inclusion and equity may not have been part of the discussion. Inclusion as a phenomenon and practice may also only come into being when issues pertaining to diversity are discussed, and when there is evidence of exclusion which may point to inequality and the need for equity. Equity emerges from attempts to address exclusion but goes one step further than equality. Equity, as we will discuss later in the paper means more than inclusion and equality, and point to the dedication of resources and intentions to address, for example, structural inequalities of the past and or present, and to break the repetitive cycle of injustice.

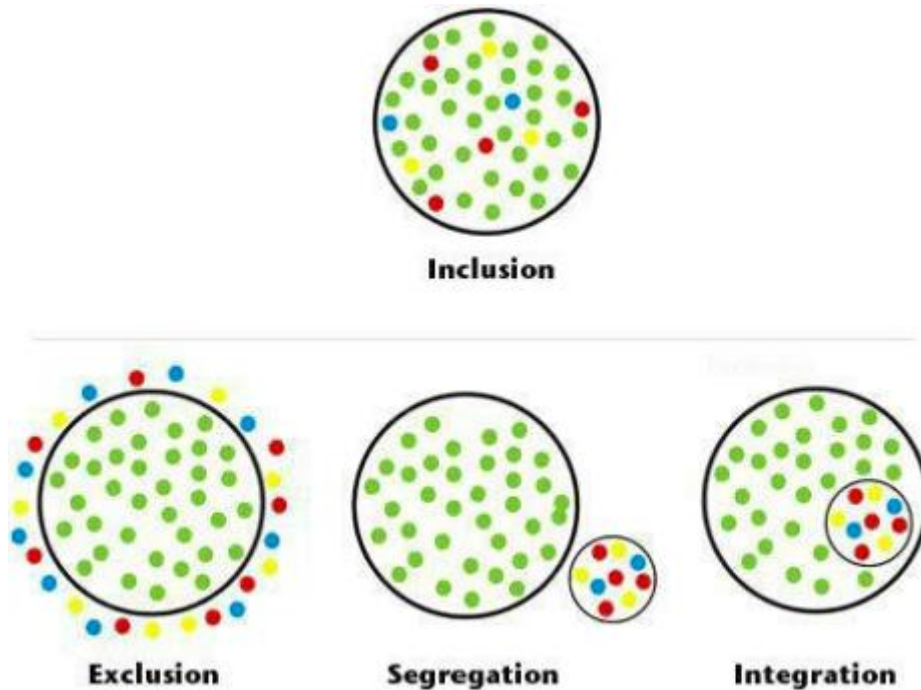
Diversity

More often than not, diversity on the context of OER refers to the diversity of licencing and materials than to diversity in the OER community or diversity as a focus of the OER community (e.g. Bossu, Brown & Bull, 2011; Olcott Jr, 2012). Gaskell (2019) refers to diversity as a value such as 'openness' and Yuchi and Zhujun (2019), for example, speaks of OER's potential to address the diverse needs of educators and learners. OER also has the potential to address a greater diversity of learner needs, such as students living with disability (Navarrete, Peñafiel, Tenemaza & Luján-Mora, 2019).

In the context of this paper, we propose a more radical approach to diversity in OER and embrace Thomas (2019) who quotes Fobazi Ettarh who said "Diversity is not abstract." In mapping diversity in the context of OER, Thomas (2019) mentions the following elements namely accessibility, language, culture and post-colonialism, economic disenfranchisement and divides as well as "barred from access." As such, diversity is much more than a value but an intentional commitment to embrace differences whether in language, geopolitical location, gender, educational context, and/or culture. Diversity as a value in OER is an intentional and active embracement of difference. An interesting question that arise in the context of diversity and inclusion is whether there would be certain values or ideological positions that the OER community will *not* embrace and *not* include? Will the OER community's commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity therefore, per se, mean that discursive positions and practices such as, but not limited to racism and gender inequality be consciously *excluded*?

Inclusion

Inclusion, like the notion/value of diversity above, may mean different things for different individuals and stakeholders. As the below diagram by Villegas (2017) illustrates, inclusion is very different from integration. Villegas (2017, below) illustrates the notion of 'inclusion' in contrast to exclusion, segregation, and integration.



Considering the danger that inclusion, in the context of OER may often resemble integration and not full inclusion and inclusivity, it is crucial to consider the criticisms against the philosophy and practices emerging from, for example, intercultural education (Dasli, 2019). Inclusion should be much more than just respect for/of difference and diversity but be a critical disposition allowing to question and disrupt dominant narratives that promote exclusion and discrimination based on gender, race, culture or language, for example. Inclusion may often take the form of tolerance which resemble 'integration' in the diagram proposed by Villegas (2017). Dasli (2019) states that "tolerance conceals an asymmetric relation of power between the tolerator and the tolerated, which reveals itself only when the stronger party chooses not to interfere with the disapproved behaviour" (p. 225). Translating this critique of tolerance to the discourses pertaining to inclusion in OER, this would foreground the differential positions of power of the one who includes and the one who is included. (Also see McLaren, 2018). Like our position pertaining to diversity above, we have to also ask what will *not* be tolerated, or included? In following Dasli (2019), our foregrounding of the seemingly incompatible elements in diversity and inclusion, we do not attempt to resolve them, but rather to engage with these seemingly incommensurable elements in diversity and inclusion. The final element of this paper, namely, the notion of 'equity' may actually help to provide guidance pertaining to these incommensurable nuances.

Equity

It is crucial that we critically engage with the difference(s) between equity and equality. Equality means to provide everyone an equal opportunity to participate or to measure everyone according to the same criterion. In many instances, organisations and/or individuals will be proud to state that they provide equal opportunities to all, or, in the case of equal opportunities for different race groups, would then claim, 'we don't see colour'. Equality assumes that treating everyone the same is 'fair.'

Equity, on the other hand, considers treating everyone the same or 'not seeing colour' as unfair. Fundamental to equity is the reality of (often) intergenerational and structural inequalities based on any one or a combination of characteristics such as race, gender, socioeconomic background, culture, and/or language. Equity, in the context of OER, it is crucial to understand that 'free' or 'open' does "not inherently eliminate interlocking structures of oppression such as systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and more" (Williams & Anastasi, 2018).

Diversity, inclusion and equity

In this paper we therefore propose that we cannot and should not consider diversity and inclusion without *also* considering equity. While it is possible to embrace diversity and inclusion from a disposition of equality, we argue that this would not be fair taking into account the legacy of intergenerational and/or structural exclusion and discrimination. Embracing all three means an intentional and active engagement with those communities, individuals, and/or issues that were excluded in the past. Next, we present GO-GN, a global network of OER

researcher, and discuss its attempts to be more diverse, inclusive and equitable and better fulfil its mission as organisation that promote and contribute to knowledge in open education globally.

Global OER Graduate network

The Global OER Graduate network (GO-GN) is a global network of PhD students involved in projects, policy development and implementation strategies on open educational resources (OER). It is funded by the Hewlett Foundation under its OER program, and hosted by the Institute of Educational Technology, at the Open University, UK.

Doctoral researchers are at the core of the network and around them are over two hundred (200) experts, supervisors, mentors and interested parties that connect to form a community of practice. GO-GN emerged out of the need to develop and explore new knowledge in the broad OER field linked to a variety of disciplines; provide a solid foundation for the introduction and implementation of OER innovations; monitor and evaluate the outcomes of institutional, national and international OER initiatives and increase evidence and guidance for OER in practice.

GO-GN leaders understand that they have a responsibility to create an inclusive community, and to champion, promote and apply equality and diversity principles, while fulfilling the network's aims of raising the profile of open education research, supporting PhD candidates in the field, and developing openness as a process of research. A huge part of their role is to facilitate connections among those interested in open education research; on many occasions these connections develop into strong ties, and peer support thrives.

With approximately 200 formal and informal community members, GO-GN currently supports 61 PhD candidates registered at universities in 14 countries, with a further 15 having already graduated. However of these, only 17 (24%) conduct their research in the Global South: India (4), Brazil (2), South Africa (2), Nigeria (2), Uruguay (1), China (1), Kenya (1), Fiji (1), Rwanda (1), Sri Lanka (1) and Mauritius (1).

The concern is there that, even with all the efforts put into place to be open and a willingness to be diverse, the Global South is still under-represented within this community, which means that GO-GN is not reaching those who could potentially benefit the most from being part of the network. In order to address this gap and assist the fulfilment of its mission, GO-GN has embarked in a quest to uncover and reflect on how things are done, and together with its community, learn what needs to be done differently, and how. As result, the opportunity to develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) project emerged, and thus identify how open research communities such as GO-GN can be more diverse, equitable and inclusive.

Process and approaches

This was a multi-phase project. In phase 1, nine interviews were carried out with stakeholders working within open education in the Global South, or with research interests in relation to global education. The interviews were structured around nine questions that attempted to uncover experts' views, perspectives, and experiences about DEI and how GO-GN could further meet DEI principles and practices. The interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts were imported into qualitative analysis software (nVivo). The analysis examined responses to the questions included in the interviews, and also trends across the dataset.

The next phase of this project was to conduct a two-days workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, in late March 2019, where invited OER experts from Africa shared their experiences and views regarding DEI. A similar workshop was conducted during the last GO-GN Seminar in April 2019 in Galway, Ireland, where GO-GN members themselves were able to participate and provide their views.

Participants' insights gathered during these two workshops combined with the findings from the interviews form the foundations of a strategic plan and guidelines that will underpin the future GO-GN endeavours in DEI. Next some preliminary findings and suggested DEI guidelines will be discussed.

Findings and Recommendations

Participants across all phases of this project were specifically asked their views and perspectives on each of the three principles individually; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. As expected the answers were rich and varied. As an attempt to fairly represent our participants views and make this representation easier to readers, we classified the answers in three categories: *meaning, context and recommendation*.

Diversity

Even though diversity can mean different things to different people depending on their context and life experiences, most participants agree that the *meaning* of diversity should consider but should not be limited to culture, race, ability, reproductive status, health, criminal record, class and appearance. As

highlighted by participants, it is important to acknowledge the range of *contexts* underpinning diversity and the limitations of people's understanding of diversity in order to take appropriate actions. As a *recommendation* for GO-GN to be more diverse, participants suggested that a diversity assessment within the network should be conducted. This would help GO-GN leaders and members to further understand and support the network, its needs and potential for further collaboration.

Equity

In terms of equity, most participants highlighted that the distinction between equity and equality should be understood by the GO-GN network; so that the network is able to help further those who need support the most. Also, the *meaning* of equity should recognize barriers which might be intergenerational, and part of a historical legacy affecting individuals and communities. The *context* in which equity should operate should embrace an openness to critics and equal participation of members of the network; thus, nurturing ownership and deepening open practices. *Recommendations* from participants included: to review GO-GN mission and vision to closely align those with DEI concepts; to review the network's registration form to include elements such as disability, race, religion, nationality, gender.

Inclusion

According to participants the *meaning* of inclusion should consider and acknowledge the marginalized voices, it should provide a sense of belonging to GO-GN participants, and create opportunities for them to feel valued, welcomed and respected. In terms of *context*, most participants mentioned that inclusion should recognise fairness and promote justice in all practices. Participants from the workshop in Nairobi in particular, stressed that the context and scope of inclusion in GO-GN should be considered and clearly define – so that limitations to inclusivity are understood. Recommendation from participants included that GO-GN should acknowledge the injustices of the past; that additional resources (beyond financial) should be allocated to excluded students (e.g. disable, single mothers, carers).

More generally, participants made several suggestions to help GO-GN to promote DEI within the evolving and developing concepts of OER and openness in the Global South. These recommendations included:

- To seek partnership with Global South universities to enhance GO-GN visibility and reach;
- To use members (students and alumni) as ambassadors to GO-GN in their respective countries;
- To offer workshops and seminars in Global South countries to build capacity in OER to create stronger ties and collaborations in these countries
- To consider opening up GO-GN for master students since they are the majority
- To provide small research grants to disadvantaged students from the Global South

This preliminary findings and recommendations were then shared amongst GO-GN leaders and the network more broadly, and the response and suggestions were prompt and positive. Despite the fact that the DEI guidelines are still under development, GO-GN was already able to make several commitments to unsure DEI principles are embedded across all its activities. These commitments include:

- To inform all the members, stakeholders, friends and sponsors that an diversity, equity and inclusion guidelines are in operation and that they are obliged to comply with its requirements and promote fairness at all cost. The guidelines will also be drawn to the attention of funding agencies, stakeholders, new members and all other interested parties.
- To create an environment in which individual differences and contributions of all members are recognized and valued.
- To create an open research community that promotes dignity and respect for everyone irrespective of race, sex, disability, religion, nationality or gender.
- To make open research capacity building and development opportunities available to disadvantage students from Global South.
- To encourage researchers and practitioners who feels they have been subject to any form of injustice to raise their concerns so that GO-GN can apply corrective measures for future growth.
- To regularly review all GO-GN open practices and selection procedures so that fairness, diversity, equity and inclusion upheld at all cost.

Conclusion and further discussion

GO-GN has a big role in facilitating connections among researchers and practitioners who are interested in OER. It also has the responsibility of creating an inclusive community through championing, promoting and applying diversity, equity and inclusion principles, while fulfilling the network's aims of raising the profile of

open education researches, supporting PhD candidates in the field, engaging with alumni, as well as developing openness as a process of research especially in the Global South and beyond. In this paper, we attempted to explore the definitions of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in education and more specifically in OER. We then presented GO-GN's efforts to develop a DEI strategy by leveraging and collaborating with its network through a DEI project. Some preliminary findings and recommendations were discussed and based on these recommendations GO-GN has already commitment to a series of principles and activities.

The preliminary findings revealed that most participants engaged in this project were aware of the foundations of the DEI principles and concepts, which enabled to researchers to make meaningful connections between data and knowledge. It is interesting to observe that participants' insights about DEI were mostly related to current and/or future individuals participating in the network, mainly PhD students, including how to reach, connect, include, support students not only from the Global South, but also students who live in developed countries but are excluded and disadvantaged due to disability or because they are the main carer for their children or family member. However, participants do not seem to have engaged much with DEI in the context of OER. For example, issues related to the scope of OER research in GO-GN under DEI guidelines; what would be considered equitable, diverse and inclusive OER research; would this change (reduce or broaden) the concept of openness and open education that it is currently in place in GO-GN? Also, as highlighted previously, would there be certain values or ideological positions that the OER community will *not* embrace and *not* include? There are many questions that remain unanswered. One reason for this could be that this project is the first attempt to specifically address and develop a DEI strategy for GO-GN, and that the above questions could be investigated and addressed in future stages of this particular development.

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