

Diversifying the Curriculum: Building MultiStories

Dr Fionnuala Darby and Lindsay Dowling

Technological University Dublin

In this case study, a senior lecturer and a data librarian outline a collaborative student-staff partnership approach to diversifying the curriculum on a 'Diversity in the Workplace' business module. Through successful co-creation and identification of new sources of knowledge, wider opportunities for both partnership and diversity in the curriculum have been identified for the whole institution.

Introduction and Context

Building MultiStories is a joint collaborative process by staff and students to identify changes to their curricula, to resources and to assessments that consider alternative epistemologies and diverse knowledge sources by embedding information literacy teaching from the library services into a module. The result is the construction of an intellectually expansive and more pedagogically sound curriculum that embeds student voice, partnership and decision-making in the process. By diversifying the curriculum in a collaborative way with students, *Building MultiStories* aims to address and engage with under-represented voices in our approach to institutional change through innovative practice in curriculum design and implementation.

TU Dublin's strategic [plan](#) embraces diversity as a strength and selling point of studying at our university. Diversifying the curriculum can challenge the hierarchy of knowledge in higher education by developing critical awareness in students of the need for diversity in the curriculum and supports [Sustainable Development Goal](#) No. 4, that of a Quality Education. Change is enabled by inclusivity in curriculum content that represents a diverse student population and aligns to the University's strategic intent of having the 'largest number of diverse learners'.



Numbers at a glance

- 46 students** [as partners in co-creating diverse knowledge sources for the curriculum]
- 2 staff** members driving the initiative - academic and professional services
- 10 diverse student team assignments** completed
- 33+ new library acquisitions** for the development of the 'Discover Diversity' collection [capacity building]
- 3 TU Dublin-wide Seminars/Workshops: 177 participants** across all events [inclusive]
- 1 x Framework to Diversify the Curriculum** in Higher Education [sustaining, institutional approach]

Project Outline

If one of the primary missions of higher education is the discovery of and distribution of new knowledge then we need to be working with other ways of knowing in practice to ensure that diversity and inclusion become a central value in how we do our work.

Research skills and information literacy training was provided by Library Services (Lindsay Dowling) at the TU Dublin Blanchardstown Campus, to students on a year three 'Diversity in the Workplace' business module (delivered by Dr. Fionnuala Darby). The module provided the axis of enablement for students to unpack how certain knowledge has been omitted pedagogically from the curriculum. The students we teach come from diverse backgrounds. This has implications for a pedagogical approach that reflects that diversity and promotes inclusive content.

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. 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. When we interact on campus with others who have different backgrounds and life experiences to us, this can open multiple perspectives and points of view, and help us to understand difference.

"...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]

"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]



Image 2: An artist's summary of the project

Project Action	Brief Description
Action A	A selection of resource recommendations by the students are included on reading lists and in the library's Discover Diversity Collection , a living output of the project that continues to grow. Resources are identifiable as they are 'tagged' as being contextually aligned to the collection using a book plate.
Action B	Seminars and training were organised, with University College London and Goldsmiths College , both places themselves undergoing similar processes. It was an opportunity for us to learn from their experiences. All students and staff were invited to these events. A CPD accredited training session for teaching library staff was also achieved from this project.
Action C	We developed a framework that supports colleagues in higher education to diversify the curriculum by following our 4-step model of planning ahead for inclusive content, developing research skills and information literacy, ensuring an inclusive classroom environment enabled by pedagogy and assessment and by sustaining diversity in the curriculum by committing to changes and sharing learnings. Our framework was developed using a 'plus one' design approach, whereby adding, changing or adapting just one thing each year, a module can be gradually transformed to include greater awareness and new knowledge. Our interactive framework is available at; Building MultiStories_a framework by hello on Genially

Reflections

Due to the global pandemic the students must be commended for their engagement and commitment to this initiative that took place entirely online (Action 1). Our approach focussed on a single module response, when action at a strategic, sector-wide level is required at our University to effect substantial and sustained change in diversifying the curriculum. Embedding a race equity mindset will be implemented across the University Schools structure by adopting the Framework for Diversifying the Curriculum with students in pedagogical settings. This is one of the targeted initiatives in the action plan for an Intercultural University at TU Dublin that is currently being implemented. To sustain our endeavours *Building MultiStories* continues and develops by moving to different a subject area and driven by colleagues at the Tallaght campus at TU Dublin. The process 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* at TU Dublin.

A detailed account of our work been published in the *Irish Journal of Academic Practice* and is available to access and download at; ["Building MultiStories: Embedding the library services for inclusive teaching and learning in a diverse curriculum." by Fionnuala Darby and Lindsay Dowling \(tudublin.ie\)](#)