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Making the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Mindset Indispensable in the LIS Classroom Through Design, Content, Communication, and Assessment

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Abstract – When we incorporate diversity and inclusion into Library and Information Science course design and content and build communication and learning frameworks in the classroom on inclusive principles, we build a cohort of students who cannot “unsee” these basic principles as they engage in practice. By designing lecture and activity materials that allow students to read and engage with different perspectives about professional values and content, we create opportunities for awareness building and prepare students to engage with the same practices as they join the profession. This chapter provides insights for and examples of how to create courses that bring diversity, equity, and inclusion into its very design.

There is a fairly popular billboard along highways that visually shouts “Unsee this!” in an effort to entice local businesses to rent that billboard space, as everyone who drives by will not be able to forget what they have seen. The same idea applies to fundamental lenses of inclusion when applied in the library and information science (LIS) classroom. When we incorporate diversity and inclusion into LIS course design and content and build communication and learning frameworks in the classroom on inclusive principles, we build a cohort of students who cannot “unsee” these basic principles as they engage in practice. A common theme in LIS education is that the job of librarianship is bigger than cataloging and classification; is broader than simply developing a love of reading in library users; and that libraries of the future are going to look so different from the libraries of our childhoods, and our graduates are going to be the ones creating that difference. By guiding students toward this paradigm of libraries and librarianship as inclusive and diverse organisms that they have the power to influence, they can become players in designing a more diverse and flexible workplace and creating increasingly inclusive services and spaces.

Discussions of inclusion and diversity center on factors that make some groups of people similar and what makes other individuals or groups different, for example, focusing on identities of race, color, ethnic background, age, ability, cultural grouping, religious affiliation, and many other personal characteristics and lived experiences. In keeping with Dali and Caidi’s (2017) diversity by design framework, inclusion in the LIS educational setting takes on layers of integration deeper than simply offering a single elective course entitled “Diversity and Inclusion in Public Libraries,” for example. How can we incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into pretty much every course we offer? Is that even possible? We think it is. Here, we offer a model of how to approach learning and teaching with a diversity, equity, and inclusion mindset that can be used even when previously determined and approved learning outcomes may not clearly specify a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

When considering how diversity, equity, and inclusion might be incorporated into learning and teaching, it is useful to consider a visual model of the overlap between these four areas.

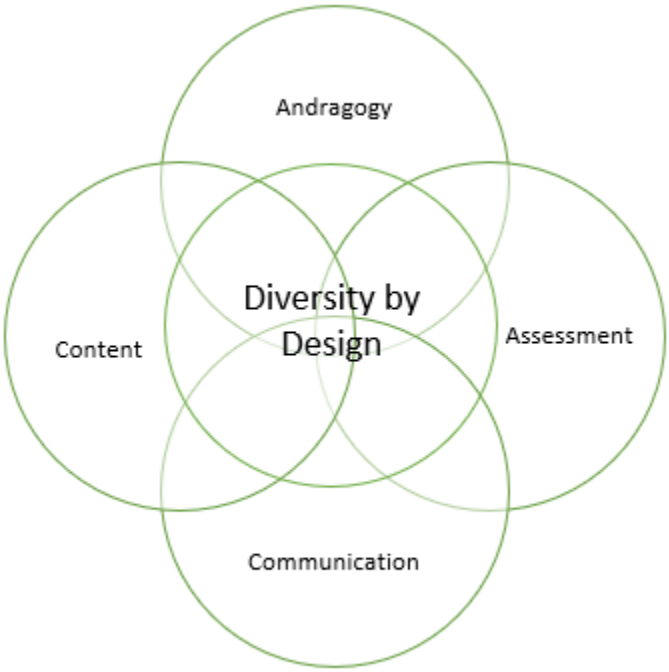

Figure 1: Course Diversity by Design

In this model we see four areas of focus for integrative diversity and inclusion in course development: andragogy, content, communication, and assessment. The following sections will provide an overview of how each may be used to design a diverse learning and teaching experience.

Andragogy

When designing a LIS course, whether we realize it or not, we make decisions about andragogy -- the teaching methods and practices appropriate for adult learning. For graduate level courses and curricula, we develop learning outcomes that align with American Library Association accreditation standards, and we express these using Bloom's taxonomy of higher order learning, employing words such as evaluate, criticize, analyze, compare, defend, produce, design, and develop. Andragogical decisions can focus on how the course will be designed overall, how the content will be delivered, how communication will be encouraged and managed, and how assessment might be used to benefit the learner and evaluate their progress in the course. When designing our courses, diversity considerations can ensure a more inclusive learning experience for students.

The first questions we might ask are: Who is likely to take this course? Is it for Master's students only or could this be opened up to undergraduate and graduate students both? Could doctoral students be enrolled in this course and if so, could they not only learn relevant content to their academic plan, but also add value to the course in a junior-instructor role or through their assessable contributions to the course? What diverse points of view might all students be able to offer each other within the context of this course? What peer-to-peer learning exchanges might offer opportunities for students representing diverse learning styles to engage with one another and enhance one another's learning experiences? What peer-to-peer learning activities might allow for coverage of diverse perspectives and content?

A decision as simple as what the course title will be will influence who enrolls in an elective or what the culture of the course will be. In 2014 the University of Berkeley changed the title of "Introduction to Symbolic Programming" to "Beauty and Joy of Computing" and enrollment of women in the course shifted from being comparable to the national average of about 19% female, to women outnumbering men in the course (50.6%) (Ferenstein, 2014, n.p.). The course has continued to be successful, not simply because of the title, but because the content and

structure are reflective of the title. “Everything that turns women off, we reversed it” the professor leading this change, Dan Garcia, noted in a news interview about the course’s success (Brown, 2014, n.p.). Garcia created more interactive class discussions, more paired activities, and incorporated more discussions about the impact and relevance of computing. These are the types of andragogical decisions that can help us create more diverse cohorts of students and ensure a more equitable and inclusive learning environment.

At the course design level, we can incorporate diversity into the Learning Outcomes for a course as well, which then filters down to the content and assignments for the course. Since learning outcomes are typically set or approved by curriculum committees and cannot be changed quickly in most university systems, having someone at the curriculum committee table, or at least attending the meetings, to advocate for diversity considerations in new or updated courses can help ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion topics are part and parcel of some, if not all, courses within the LIS program of study. This is something that can be discussed at faculty meetings during curriculum planning stages as well. However, when learning outcomes do not have diversity wording, content and assessment items can still incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion, as we will discuss in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Beyond the course title and learning outcomes, we continue to make diversity decisions when we choose whether the course will be online, face to face, or a hybrid of both. Students may perform differently depending on the course delivery method and have variable levels of satisfaction with the course (Fonolahi, Kahn, & Jokhan, 2014; Johnson, Aragon, Shaik, & Palma-Rivas, 2000; Young & Duncan, 2014). It is important to note that students in online classes who have computer skills before they start the course tend to have greater success in distance education (Kebritchi, 2014). What basic computer literacies will be required for students to have a successful experience in your classroom? It is also useful to be aware of where the course fits within the program sequence, as the more online courses a student takes,

the more comfortable and satisfied the student feels with the online learning environment (Rovai, 2002).

Knowles' (1975) theory of andragogy emphasizes the importance of self-direction in adult learning by first, giving students continuous and authentic control over decisions about their own learning, and second, giving students access to and allowing them to choose from a large range of appropriate resources. These are political conditions as much as pedagogical and need to be considered as early as possible when designing a course, as it affects remaining elements of course design, the course content, communication within the course, and assessment of learning.

Some students with diverse learning styles may do better in face-to-face courses, where there is body language and eye contact and the ability to ask on-the-spot questions about the course content. When we think about incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion in our face-to-face course design, we may think of ways we can make sure the lecture can be interrupted with student questions and comments. We may also ask questions that allow student follow-up responses and engagement that may vary the direction the conversation goes.

Informing students at the start of the course that diverse perspectives are welcome and even expected to be brought into the discussion can encourage them to bring cultural or other lived-experience examples into the conversation, broadening the understanding of and appreciation for diverse and inclusive ideas. A statement in the syllabus can call attention to the need for professional and inclusive discussion and interactions in the classroom or online learning environment with wording such as

> Professionalism will be expected at all times, but especially with your interactions with each other in the classroom setting. Because the university classroom is a place designed for the free exchange of ideas, we must show respect for one another in all

> circumstances. We show respect for one another by exhibiting patience and courtesy in our exchanges. Appropriate language and restraint from verbal attacks upon those whose perspectives differ from your own is a minimum requirement. Courtesy and kindness are the norm for those who participate in my class. (U of S C CTE, 2019)

And how to operationalize “appropriate language” and “courtesy” in the classroom can be a topic of discussion for the first day of class.

Learning technologies can be used in both face-to-face and online classes, including PowerPoint and other presentation software, learning platforms such as Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, D2L, etc. for content storage and distribution, and so forth. Accessibility of all of those platforms as well as any other third-party sources of content (databases, software, hardware, websites, etc.) must be considered and ensured in order to be equitable and inclusive of all students, as availability of digital content does not always mean the content is accessible to or usable by potential users.

With our teaching design choices (whether in online, face-to-face, or hybrid/blended courses) we provide our students with opportunities to practice professional communication and collaborative behaviors (student-instructor, peer-peer) that will be useful as graduates. We also know that our graduates will most likely engage in instructional roles in the workplace (i.e., bibliographic instruction/information literacy training, other library instruction) (Santiago, Warren, & Creelman, 2016), and so their experience as a learner in well-designed courses will help them “see” what inclusive course design and instruction looks like.

Content

As noted, diversity topics can be incorporated into course learning outcomes approved by the curriculum committee; however, more often it may be that diverse course content will need to be

mindfully decided upon by individual instructors without learning outcomes to provide that direction. Designing lecture and activity materials that allow students to read and engage with different perspectives about professional values and content creates opportunities for awareness building and prepares students to engage with the same practices as they join the profession.

One of our colleagues tells us she uses Power Point for her lectures and, not long ago, she started including images of the authors of the resources she cited in her lectures. She quickly noticed that almost all of the faces were white and many of them appeared to be male-presenting. Not all kinds of human diversity will be apparent in a photograph, of course, but this is one way that she found helpful as a reminder of the need for bringing diverse expert voices into her course content.

Particular attention should be paid to the selection of text and media materials that represent diversity of race, gender, age, disability, religion, or cultural heritage. These materials may be chosen based on inclusive terminology within the article and/or their clear focus on diversity topics. Inviting guest lectures or panels and recording interviews related to the week's content can provide varied points of view on course topics.

Locating and including resources from other countries and those reflective of different cultural perspectives can also help our students remember that the way our libraries and information organizations operate is not necessarily indicative of how libraries and information agencies are structured and function around the world. Seeing international perspectives on our field of study can not only prepare our students to work a multicultural and international clientele but can also spark interest in international connections and collaborations that will benefit the communities they engage and the LIS profession overall.

When developing course content, we also want to keep in mind the diversity of our own students in terms of learning styles, abilities, and needs. The Universal Design for Learning standards (CAST, 2019) guide us through the formats that are readable and functional for students with physical and cognitive variations. It is no longer a matter of accommodating a minority. Simply put, universal design involves making small but consistent changes that benefit all learners. More broadly, universal design is “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (Center for Universal Design, 2019, n.p.). Universal Design for Learning ensures equitable opportunities to access and engage in learning on multiple and meaningful levels by ensuring a variety of modes of representation, action, expression, and engagement. The Center for Applied Special Technology (2019) asserts that multiple means of representation involve and provide for diverse ways of perception and comprehension of language and symbols.

In more practical terms, facilitating multiple means of perception could mean:

(1) offering options in the size of text, images, graphs, tables, or other visual content: keep in mind that standards for accessibility differ based on whether the content is a presentation that must be viewed from a distance, or whether it is a handout or other materials distributed in individual copies;
(2) offering sufficient and appropriate contrast between background and text or image: for accessibility purposes, provide a very light background, with a very dark text, e.g., white paper, black text;
(3) avoiding the use of color alone for emphasis: use bold, for example, and avoid using pale or “highlighter” colors that may pose challenges with glare and readability;
(4) avoid using such colors as red, which may pose challenges for colorblindness; when considering audio or video recordings, be mindful of the volume or rate of speech or

sound, the speed or timing of video, animation, sound, simulations, and the layout of visual or other elements; also, be mindful of font selections: generally, size 12 or larger Sans Serif fonts are the most accessible and readable; some students with dyslexia and other print disabilities may have other requirements;

(5) facilitating physical action as a way to provide alternative means of action and expression, or multiple options for response and navigation, including the provision of optimized access to and with assistive technologies[1], such as screen readers: build fluencies by offering "graduated levels of support for practice and performance" (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2019, n.p.); and finally,

(6) supporting recruitment interests through diverse means of engagement; sustaining retention efforts, and enabling self-regulation; encouraging students, offering positive and constructively critical feedback on both a formative and a summative basis, and fostering learning experiences that allow for self-reflection on work.

The legal definition of "accessible" is that "a person with a disability is given the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use. The person with a disability must be able to obtain the information as fully, equally, and independently as a person without a disability" (Burgstahler, 2017, n.p.). When approaching course design and implementation, it is especially significant to be mindful of the distinction between accessibility and usability. While a course or classroom (physical or virtual) may meet compliance standards or "the letter of the law," this simply means that minimum guidelines or standards have been met, if only partially. It does not necessarily ensure that the space or the course is usable by all.

[1] "Assistive technology is a tool to meet a need…it can enhance one's abilities or provide access that is otherwise not possible." (Tudora, forthcoming)

Just a few examples of accessibility and usability standards in online courses might include ensuring that Optical Character Recognition (OCR) has been performed on scanned PDF files before being distributed; confirming that PDF files are accessible or accompanied by their Word document equivalent or linked to the HTML equivalent; and ensuring that all documents (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.) are accessible and usable by screen readers, and that there are alternative means of accessing information.

Some students may learn most effectively by listening. Therefore, providing recorded lectures is useful. Recorded lectures, however, may pose challenges for other students who cannot access or use audio materials due to accessibility needs or even situational barriers. These students may learn most effectively through other means, such as written materials. In the case whereby all platforms and required software are accessible and usable with assistive or adaptive technologies, offering multiple or even hybrid approaches to interacting with content (e.g., a transcript or closed captioning to accompany recorded materials) can be useful. By investing in Universal Design for Learning, instructors help ensure equitable access for everyone, everywhere, every time.

Content diversity helps students “see” diversity, equity, and inclusion by giving them a platform for discussion related to diverse topics, at the same time, broadening their understanding of and perspectives on the field/profession. Content diversity also allows all students to “see” themselves equitably in the course content and to note that there may be different ways of approaching a topic or issue. Content diversity and the diversity of formats in which that content is presented support varied learning styles in the classroom, and not only disability inclusion. Students can access an ever-increasing number and scope of resources including text, audio, and audio-video. Some college and university systems and infrastructures will allow for a broader range of learning choices and broader access to resources than others. However, open educational resource options are increasing rapidly, and innovative teaching approaches can, to

some extent, be considered an aspect of academic freedom and even be rewarded in some academic settings.

Communication

Who decides the culture and tone of our course? In some ways, every cohort creates its own culture, but there are many decisions that we, as instructors, can and need to make to ensure that culture is inclusive and treats diversity as a beautiful and welcome part of the learning process. The positive influence of peers in classroom settings can be a strong force in reducing prejudice and encouraging inclusive dialogue and engagement (Paluck & Green, 2009). Discussions about communication within the classroom and expectations for student engagement can begin before the course even commences.

Student-instructor communication is the first communication style we can influence. Always interact with student with respect and professionalism. We know that email and other digital communication media are amazing, allowing one-to-many and many-to-many as well as one-to-one communications that we never would have imagined 30 years ago. However, we also know that text-only interactions do not carry the same nuances that face-to-face interactions might allow. Sarcasm does not translate well online. And once something is typed and sent, there is a permanent record of that potentially dismissive, belittling, or microaggressive post/email/text that will not ever truly disappear, even if later deleted.

For both student-instructor and student-student communication, setting the tone can be as simple as a blurb in the syllabus, and then reiterating this throughout the first few weeks, as noted in the Andragogy section of this chapter, No need to be shy about correcting inappropriate communication in the classroom or in email or other course communication media. It is our role as instructors to teach our students how to interact in an inclusive and professional manner. This does not mean that we cannot have challenging discussions and

debate in our classes. Teaching our students how to ask and respond to challenging questions, to elicit new information, and to strengthen our knowledge bases is part of good andragogy. Such resources as Parker's (2008) *Team Player and Teamwork* can help provide instructors with strategies for developing constructive and collaborative, but still challenging, discussions in the classroom.

There are so many communication tools to choose from now, from social media platforms and discussion boards to online meetings and audio/video recordings, from file transfers and email to video and audio chats. We can use digital features to adjust the speed and volume of communication and to implement closed captioning and assistive translation. We can explore new formats for student-instructor and student-student interactions: Facebook, WhatsApp, Marco Polo, TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr. Allowing students to explore social media for academic communication purposes can help them feel more comfortable with it if/when they need to use it in their professional roles after graduation, and it also opens up a variety of ways to interact with the content for students with diverse learning styles.

We continuously require that students write and improve their writing, switching regularly between informal personal writing (e.g., texts, emails, social media posts, personal blogs, journals) and formal professional writing (e.g., reports, essays, presentations, professional blogs and wikis, and other writing exercises). Explicit discussions of different expectations and communication skills needed for personal, professional, or scholarly writing is particularly important for students who may not understand writing voice and genre nuances. Since LIS graduate students come from many different disciplines, we need to be sure we clearly outline expectations and discipline-specific standards. This can include formatting issues as simple as when to use headers to guide the reader through the content, and when headers are not needed. Other common issues include using first person in reports or using passive voice rather than active.

Language ambiguity in course content and assessment items can also create barriers for students. This is particularly important when working with students with autism spectrum disorders/neurological diversities. The number of students with autism spectrum disorders completing higher education qualifications is increasing (up from 0.7% to 2.4% in the US and UK), although “less than 40% of autistic students successfully complete their studies” (Grubuz, Hanley, & Riby, 2019). For these students, semantic ambiguity can negatively impact sentence comprehension and lead to increased stress levels, lengthen the amount of time needed for comprehension, and result in failure to create meaning from the materials available (Dow, Lund, & Douthit, 2020).

Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act (1973) and Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) establishes that universities receiving federal funding may not discriminate against individuals with disabilities. To create an inclusive university classroom communication design, students will need more than verbal instruction. A careful organization of course materials, consistency in navigation of course sites and lecture prompts, a choice of words, and breaking down assignment instructions and even having parts turned in separately, will help students with autism spectrum disorders succeed, and, as with so many inclusion factors, is likely to provide a better, less anxious learning experience for neurotypical students as well.

In terms of diversity by design, there are many advantages to using digital technology for classroom communication (even when a course is primarily offered face-to-face) for students with diverse needs and learning styles. Digital technology can be an “anytime, anyplace” medium, thus providing almost limitless communication opportunities.

Assessment

Assessment methods designed to require students to critically examine diversity, equity, and inclusion within the context of the course content, be it reference, cataloging, collection

development, management and leadership, technology use, etc., will offer students opportunities to actively engage with the very issues with which they will be interacting professionally and will help ensure that they have the necessary skill-sets. One of the most natural ways to evaluate our students' ability to "see" and appreciate diversity in our course design is to build diversity topics into our assessment strategies.

It is difficult to think of an assignment method that could *not* include diversity, equity, and/or inclusion as an integral part. Reference assignments can ask students to identify and reflect on service to diverse users; cataloging/classification projects can work to create solutions to mis-representations of particular populations; technology courses can be developed with the principles of universal design and usability in mind; collection development policies can be examined for the quality and extent of representation of diversity communities; and so on. Incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion into assignments in any class we teach will certainly help students exercise assessment skills, critical thinking, and awareness related to these issues in educational settings. However, it will also allow them to see how the treatment of diversity, equity, and inclusion as organic and integral to everything we study and do build manifest opportunities for improvement. Ultimately, it will help budding professionals realize that they may be just the person needed to make that improvement and change in the workplace and in the profession.

We also need to consider diversity, equity, and inclusion ourselves when designing assessment items. Higher education in the West tends to privilege mainstream ways of learning--verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical--often not accounting for the diversity of learning styles. Gardner's (1983) *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* revived the age-old idea that there are many ways of learning--not just through basic literacy functions. Naturalistic, intra- and interpersonal, kinesthetic, visual, and musical abilities are less frequently considered in assessment approaches (Barrington, 2007); and yet, taking advantage of these

strategies can encourage creativity in student work, improve motivation and performance, and allow students with diverse learning styles to showcase their unique talents in meaningful ways. What follows is a list of ideas for assessable student outputs that can diversify pedagogical approaches and learning deliverables and may also be more enjoyable to mark than a succession of written reports (Dali, Lau, & Risk, 2018) This is not to say that teaching professional report writing skills is not important, it certainly is! But providing variety in learning outputs throughout a program will allow students to exercise a range of professional communication skills and choose how to best showcase their understanding of the content.

Linguistic assessment items

- Weekly journal entries;
- Oral presentation/podcast.

Logical assessment items

- Research design with formal structure;
- Student creates a logic game related to LIS content that demonstrates understanding of the core concepts.

Kinesthetic assessment items

- Role play reference interview, book challenge, or other professional skill;
- Build or draw a model of a theory or principle discussed in class.

Visual assessment items

- Mural, logo, or poster;
- Produce a professional-quality video or slideshow.

Interpersonal assessment items

- Classroom debate;
- Group work.

Intrapersonal assessment items

- Reflection journal or blog about their own learning progress;
- Progress reports on personal vision/mission/goals/objectives.

Musical assessment items

- Produce poetry or music about LIS theory or process;
- Students choose a piece of music that represents how they understand a concept from the field.

Naturalist assessment items

- Students look for natural patterns in nature/human behavior relevant to theories or concepts introduced in class;
- Reflection piece about information experiences along a nature walk.

Assessment items may be as variable in quality as reports or essays are and having a clear marking rubric that delineates how the output will be evaluated is key to having a useful creative assessment item (Dali, 2017; Dali, Lau, & Risk, 2018).

Assessment is another area of teaching that is often tied to accommodation requests, and our chance to turn case-by-case accommodation decisions into inclusion practices. Developing assignments to ensure that there is little, if any, need for adjustment for disability or emergency cases is a practice saves the instructor from making too many decisions on extensions and

exceptions; ensures parity and fairness in grading; secures early feedback and subsequent revision, and helps to alleviate student anxiety grade-related penalties. For example, allowing a no-questions-asked three-day grace period on all major assignments allows students with disability-related extensions, students with conflicting work deadlines, and students caring for sick children at home to be treated equitably. This practice can also be supported by common courtesy and workplace respect practices, such as the requirement that students inform the instructor in advance that the specified grace period will be invoked; however, they are not put in the position to provide explanations or documentation supporting their circumstances. This gives students the opportunity to negotiate extensions in a mature and respectful way and with no fear of penalty.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of four ways in which course design can incorporate diversity by design – through andragogy, content, communication, and assessment decisions. The sooner diversity questions can be considered in course design, the better; however, not all decisions need to be made before the course is conceptualized. The most important factor is that it be considered, and that the instructor be transparent and open with students with regard to deliberate steps to foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning experience for everyone in the course. Building this principle into the andragogical design and then reinforcing it with content, communication, and assessment, will ensure that students cannot “unsee” the beauty and impact of diversity that we interact with every day as information professionals.

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