The DISCs Project 'Developing Pedagogies' Workshop

PART I: Ways of Thinking about Pedagogy in Higher Education

SLIDE 1:

Welcome to this first short session from the Disciplines Inquiring into Societal Challenges, or DISCs project. I am Karl Kitching, and you can find out more about the project by visiting our website, discs.ie.

The purpose of this first short session is to invite you to consider different ways of thinking about pedagogy in the higher education context, and to begin the process of defining what the purpose of your own pedagogy is. We encourage you to not think of your teaching as being isolated from the injustices that are perpetuated in higher education historically and contemporarily. Contemporary problems in higher education internationally include the huge growth in casualised, teaching-only contracts, and the continued privileging of white, European, male and able-bodied voices and knowledge across different disciplines. While it is not easy, our teaching practices, and the ways we relate to students and communities through our teaching and wider academic service have the potential to engage and support students and colleagues to think in more critical and transformative ways about their discipline, and to take action - not just against injustices in the curriculum or classroom, but against unjust conditions in higher education and wider society.

SLIDE 2:

Formal definitions of pedagogy tend to define it as the interaction of teachers, learners, and the shaping of knowledge in these interactions. Not only is our knowledge of subject content shaped in pedagogical interactions – teachers' knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning theories are shaped through reflection on their pedagogy. More than this, pedagogy is not a technical exercise of developing skills and transmitting abstract ideas. It is an ethical, political, emotional and embodied interaction. In this session, we'd like you to think about the ethical and political purposes of pedagogy, and what your own ethical and political stance on pedagogy is.

SLIDE 3:

There are so many different definitions and versions of pedagogy out there, that it can be difficult to articulate a stance that is unique to our own professional and political commitments. Even a quick web search on pedagogies starting with the letter 'I' reveals a variety of different ways of thinking about pedagogy. For example,

Paulo Freire, is recognised as a founding figure in critical pedagogy movements among others such as bell hooks and Antonia Darder. One of Freire's last publications was a collection of essays called Pedagogy of Indignation (Freire 2013). Rather than view anger and indignation as something that must be contained at all times, Freire argued the expression of such feeling is a critical

starting point in responding to gross human rights violations, authoritarianism and ceaseless capitalist profiteering. Challenging the idea that 'there is no alternative' to these injustices, one of Freire's messages is to hold on both to anger at these conditions and to love for the world as motivations to fight.

Pedagogy of 'inclusion' has become a much more popularised term in education theory and practice circles over the past thirty years. It is often linked to ideas about making education accessible, particularly to people with disabilities and/or special educational needs. From a Universal Design for Learning perspective, a proactive approach to inclusion involves rethinking our teaching practices in a few ways. Universal design offers multiple ways of representing an issue or problem to maximise people's pathways to understanding. It offers multiple means of engaging beyond the traditional lecture format, and multiple means of expressing one's learning through diverse assessment methods. But in her book Radical Inclusive Education, Anat Greenstein (2016) argues we must move past definitions of inclusion that encourage educators to make learners become as normal as possible, as in, to become productive and obedient citizens for the global market economy. Inspired by the disabled people's movement, she argues and exemplifies how learner's personal experiences can be connected with wider social and political issues as part of an open-ended and dialogical process of education.

'Insurrection'
Peter McClaren is one of the foremost American voices in critical pedagogy, and in his book Pedagogy of Insurrection, he makes the case for what he calls a 'Christian socialism', which seeks to draw on Christian hope, Marxist historical materialism and the 'call to help those who suffer needlessly are intertwined'. He does not call for moral absolutism, rather calls for a commitment to changing the world and discovering our humanity through anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-sexist and pro-democratic and emancipatory struggle.

'Inquiry'
Pedagogies of inquiry or inquiry-based learning is an approach that centralizes the learner's capacity to respond to real-world problems and to discover knowledge alongside the guidance, challenging and co-planning of the teacher. This broad approach has become a central feature of curriculum policy internationally. But coming back to Freire, a critical form of inquiry would encourage learners to read not just the word, but the world, that is, to understand and respond to the socio-political circumstances behind a particular issue – for example, is the policy encouragement of inquiry-based learning an exercise in developing technical skills for the flexible economy, more than it is a route to ethical and political consciousness?

'Interruption'
Gert Biesta describes education as an ethical project that, similar to the idea of reading the world, is not about acquiring skills and knowledge as if they were property. Rather education is a project of coming into the world and engaging with the Other as unique beings – this encounter interrupts prescribed ideas about what a person can know or become which are so dominant in skills and employability-focused pedagogies that avoid reflection on the content, purposes and relationships developed through education.

'Indifference'
Bob Lingard uses the term 'pedagogies of indifference' to describe the dominant forms of pedagogy that he and his team encountered in a large-scale Australian pedagogical study. He describes these pedagogies certainly as focused on seeking to care for students, but as ultimately failing to work across differences and inequalities, and failing to be demanding intellectually and in terms of connectedness to the world. He describes pedagogies that make a difference as bridging the politics/instruction divide that tends to characterize some critical pedagogy thinking. Drawing on long periods of observation in Queensland primary and secondary schools, Lingard's team developed statements of productive pedagogies which focus on questions of intellectual quality and demand, connectedness to the world and problem-based curricula, supportiveness in academic and social terms, and working with and valuing of difference. We'll look at these pedagogies in a few minutes.

These are just some ways of thinking about pedagogy, and may spark your thinking about what you value as a teacher, and what the purpose of your teaching is.

SLIDE 4:

So, what might it mean to acknowledge the relationship between our own politics and pedagogy in a more explicit/systematic way? Confronting one's own politics and pedagogy more systematically might mean we need to unlearn certain received or trusted ways of doing things, and consider opportunities to exercise our critical consciousness to build supportive relationships with our students.

A really important question to think about here is who we expect our teaching relationships to change. Do we expect our teaching relationships to change students only? If so, we risk enacting a 'banking' model of education, as Freire called it, where we have nothing to learn from students, and they have everything to learn from us. Consider what ways we could become open to having students' perspectives change us, how we teach, and how we relate to others.

SLIDE 5:

I mentioned earlier the idea of productive pedagogies that comes from a Queensland study of schools led by Bob Lingard. The study developed 20 key criteria for authentic and productive teaching that incorporates questions of power into the ways teaching is conducted. You can find these criteria under four themes at the link at the bottom of the slide. But please note that these criteria are not to be observed in every class or lesson, nor are they technical solutions to be overlaid on existing practices. The Queensland study stresses that there are structural reasons for why certain practices are not very common in education, including lack of investment in professional development. The criteria are therefore put forward in the spirit of sparking reflection, which includes reflection on why opportunities to enact these approaches are sometimes beyond our scope.

The first theme of intellectual demand asks questions such as whether higher order thinking and critical analysis are happening, whether deep knowledge and substantive conversation are developed. The notion of connectedness refers to engaging learners' background and prior knowledge, and also ensuring that the curriculum is connected to real-life contexts and driven by real-life problems.

SLIDE 6:

The theme of supportiveness focuses on whether students have a say in the pace, direction and outcomes of the lesson, whether the classroom is socially supportive and positive, whether students are engaged and whether criteria for judging students' performance are made explicit. The idea of working with and valuing of difference asks whether diverse cultural knowledges are brought into play that go beyond Eurocentric and Western knowledge and voices; whether there are deliberate efforts to increase the participation of under-represented students, and whether teaching builds a sense of community and active citizenship.

SLIDE 7:

At this point, we encourage you to think about creating your own mission statement that describes the purposes and aims of your teaching. Take some time offline to think about what is important to you from what you've heard here, from your own experience with students, and from any of the readings and tools that we recommend from the resources section of the DISCs website. Think about what your commitments are to social justice and how they currently appear, and might appear in the future, in your work with students, colleagues and communities. A pedagogical mission statement often uses phrases like 'I believe' and 'I commit to'. Your ideas of what you believe in and commit to will likely change over time if you are really engaging critical pedagogies for the first time. Regardless of your levels of experience, it's a good idea to revisit your mission statement over time. It's also a good idea to share your mission statement publicly, either with other teachers, or with your students in your first class with them, and in your syllabus.

Speaking of which, the next part of our workshop will focus on how you can re-evaluate your syllabus to seriously engage questions of equity, the conditions of our education system and ultimately to share reasonable and inclusive expectations of your students.

SLIDE 8:

References:

Biesta, G. (2006) Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Lingard, B. (2007) Pedagogies of Indifference. International Journal of Inclusive Education 11(3): 245-266.

Freire, P. (2004) Pedagogy of Indignation. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Greenstein, A. (2014) Radical Inclusive Education: Disability, Teaching and Struggles for Liberation. London: Routledge.

McClaren, P. (2015) Pedagogy of Insurrection: From Resurrection to Revolution. New York: Peter Lang.

PART II: Approaching the Syllabus: Setting Expectations with Students

SLIDE 1:

[no audio]

SLIDE 2:

How do you think HE views 'equity'?; and what do you think 'equity' means in the HE context?

What does it mean to develop an 'equity-mindedness approach' in your own teaching? And do you think your own approach aligns with your institutions' aims?

In most cases, when educators are asked what they think 'equity' means in this context, they will typically refer to matters of 'equal treatment'; 'equal access'; and 'equal opportunity'.

I bring up these questions (about 'equity') because when educators talk about 'broaching the syllabus' or 'setting expectations with students', we're basically talking about issues of 'equality' and 'diversity' – we're essentially asking: how do we instill a sense of 'equity' among the diversity of students in our classroom?

In these conversations, though, it can be easy for us to take for granted what 'equity' or 'equality' actually means.

SLIDE 3:

In the HE context, equity is typically "defined as achieving outcomes on par with a particular standard, such as the average or highest-performing group," by gender, mental/physical ability, and race and ethnicity (Ching 2018, p. 390).

In other words, there is a metric or standard that we have all agreed to (on one level or another), which is itself defined by the terms of the average or highest performing group. And 'equity' is typically described as a matter of enabling everyone to meet this metric or standard of 'success' and 'academic achievement'.

Along these lines, discourses around 'equity' in HE primarily aim to 'get students in the door'

The presumption is that education is itself 'good' and as long as we can get as many people as we can into these institutions, we're combatting inequality.

In this sense, inequality is a matter of not having access, opportunities, and resources. So, if we can give everyone a chance to hit that metric or standard of 'success', we're fixing the problem.

Citation: Ching, C. D. (2018) 'Confronting the Equity "Learning Problem" through Practitioner Inquiry', The Review of Higher Education, Johns Hopkins University Press, 41(3), pp. 387–421, [online] Available from: https://muse.jhu.edu/article/687740 (Accessed 1 August 2019).

In this view, the terms of 'access' and 'opportunity' are typically defined on basis of ideological arguments around who deserves what and on what basis.

So, 'equity in HE' is achievable if we ensure:

- Fair treatment of those who 'deserve to be here';
- Access and opportunity to all those who have the 'academic merits' to enter;
- 'Equal' treatment of every person; and
- Equal distribution of all available resources

Yet while access and opportunity are indeed important, this perspective typically attributes the responsibility for any persisting inequalities to individual students.

In other words, if students are given the access, opportunities, resources, etc., then anyone who is unable to meet the metrics or standards of 'success', are responsible for their own failures.

SLIDE 5:

Such an approach thus recognises inequalities but typically attributes disparities between students to:

- Lack of effort (e.g., 'they didn't try hard enough');
- Lack of preparation (e.g., 'they're not showing up to class');
- Inadequate socialization (e.g., 'they just didn't fit in'); and
- Their perceived individual inabilities (e.g., 'they just aren't equipped to handle this level of learning')

SLIDE 6:

On this note, it is important to remember that diversity and equity are different goals requiring different strategies.

In other words, when we talk about 'equal access' or 'equal opportunity', and 'equal distribution of resources' or 'fairness' – it is important that we are aware that what we're actually talking about is that notion of 'getting students in the door'. We're talking about cultivating **student diversity**.

But just because the campus looks a bit more 'diverse' doesn't mean that it is automatically 'equitable'

All of this is no doubt a result of the wider prevailing discourses and culture around individualism and capital, but the point here is that we need to think about how HE institutions, educators (including ourselves), and even students can tend to focus solely on matters of access and opportunity.

If you think about the emails you get every week on the staff server, for instance, you may notice how institutional discourses tend to centre on fostering individual 'student entrepreneurialism' – i.e., making sure students can market themselves. And while it may seem quite different, much of the collective efforts

put forth by students' unions across the country tend to focus on issues around fee increases. The common thread here is this emphasis on access (e.g., lower fees) and opportunities (e.g., student marketing). Both of these approaches centre on the notion that as long as education is 'affordable' (but not free) and as long as students can 'sell themselves', the university has done it's job.

In what follows, I want us to think about what happens after students enter the door. I want to talk about the **student experience**

Citation: Bauman, G. L., Bustillos, L. T., Bensimon, E. M., Brown II, M. C. & Bartee, R. D. (2005). *Achieving equitable educational outcomes for all students: The institution's roles and responsibilities.* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities.

SLIDE 7:

When we shift the conversation from a 'diversity-centric' perspective, if you will, to an 'equity-minded' one, we are talking not only about access and opportunity but **outcomes**. In this way, centring 'equality of outcome' in our pedagogical endeavours means being cognizant of student diversity and inequity while also questioning both teaching and institutional practices and policies.

That is, thinking about how we not only get as many 'students through the door' but what it means to equitably accommodate that diversity once it's there.

SLIDE 8:

Crucially, this means shifting the responsibility for students' 'academic success' from individual learners to teachers, administrators, and the institutions in which their learning takes place. This requires us to:

- Revaluate assumptions around inequity not only in terms of access but in terms of retention and completion

- Develop a critical understanding of how practitioner and college level policies and practices sustain inequalities

- Develop a willingness to challenge both teaching practices and institutions

SLIDE 9:

In practice this means we must centre students' academic status. According to the prevailing conception, thinking about our students as individual learners with their own particular educational needs, levels of experience, and so forth means thinking about how we can help them 'overcome' their 'deficiencies' and navigate the system. 'Equal access' therefore means opening the doors and then tasking students themselves to break the remaining racial, gendered, heteropatriarchal, ableist, and classist barriers that inhibit their full capacities to not only learn but thrive. By contrast, when we shift our thinking towards 'equality of outcome,' we are recentring our own role in students' learning. In other words, we are shifting the focus towards critically interrogating our own pedagogical and institutional practices and policies. This means asking ourselves

how we teach students for whom English is not their first language; students working multiple jobs; students with children; students with mental, learning, or physical disabilities. It means thinking about our duty of care to students – that is, all the students we have given this 'access' and 'opportunity' to and how it is that we are ensuring they each have a meaningful academic experience. On this account, I would ask that you think about the number of essays you receive from third- or fourth- year students, and how many of them are graduating with the adequate levels of critical literacy and writing skills that you would hope all university graduates would have by the end of their study. Generally, most would answer 'no.' And it's worth thinking about that. Indeed oftentimes, we tend to focus on those star pupils from whom we may gain some immediate sense of success or efficacy in our work and teaching practice, but it is important to remember that we are not just training future academics. We are educating future voters, members of our own communities, and aim to teach the whole wider populace at large.

This leads us to the second point. When we shift the responsibilities of learning from student to teacher and institution, we necessarily must interrogate the ways in which we are ourselves prohibited or inhibited from teaching students each to the best of our abilities. Every one of us is faced with an ever-increasing workload, which means we have less and less time to prepare for courses or individually meet with our hundreds of students. And certainly, very few (if any) of us are trained in teaching students with depression, dyslexia, chronic illness, and so forth. Based on a review of literature, it is also safe to say that very few (if any) of us have had any adequate training in intercultural engagement and gender-consciousness. On a broader scale, we may also note that we are living in a time of increasing job precarity, a homelessness crisis, and rising far-right sentiments. In this setting, HE institutions in Ireland continue to raise student tuition and accommodation fees while also employing more and more staff on a casually-contracted and hourly basis. It is important that we think about how this affects students' learning – and that we ask whether or not 'opportunities' and 'access' suffice to address these issues.

We must also acknowledge the history of exclusions upon which the modern academy is based. It is also important to note that the very disciplines in which we are each working were themselves established in the West at the height of the imperial era. The 'canonical texts' from which we each derive the basis of our own knowledges – and by which we then define the 'metrics' and 'standards' of 'academic success' and 'achievement' – generally deny the existence of non-European non-White Others not just from their analytical purview but from their very conceptual foundations. And while it is typically suggested that the classical texts of our disciplines were written a very long time ago, it is important to remember that many were in fact written within the past century and many still continue to be written as such even today. Moreover, statistics have shown that faculty, administrative staff, and management across Western universities are themselves predominantly white, male, middle- and upper-class, cis-gendered, and able-bodied. Within this context, it is worth noting that calls to 'decolonize the curriculum' – as well as the many historical gains that have increasingly diversified our student bodies throughout the years – were not achieved through the benevolence of our institutions but fought for arduously by mostly students and the communities in which our institutions are embedded.

Finally, we must interrogate all those underlying assumptions and beliefs as well as the institutional cultures through which our work takes place yet we tend to take for granted. In other words, we need to revaluate the metrics and standards of 'success' that have been set along these lines.

Much of this may sound obvious to some of you. And you may be saying that you already do many of these things. But we work in institutions where 'equality of outcome' and the student experience are not necessarily a central concern. Indeed, focusing on *outcome* rather than *access* requires not only opening doors but interrogating how institutions themselves continue to further entrench inequalities at all levels, within and outside their designated spaces. This is a difficult and oftentimes uncomfortable process. On this account, the principal objections to an 'equal outcome' approach tend to rest on arguments against:

a)   Differential treatment where some may argue that the aim is to 'treat all students equally.' That is, to argue that it would be 'unfair' to provide different resources to different students according to their different needs. But this thinking stems from a sort of 'colour-blind' approach that denies the diversity among students. And such thinking persists perhaps because it is much easier and more feasible to say that we must 'treat everyone equally' than trying to think about what it would mean to attend to each and every students' needs – and thereby actually 'levelling the playing field,' so to speak.

b)   The promotion of learning about difference. Some may say that the inclusion of a few writers of colour and women to course reading lists is enough; or that using more examples of different cultures in lectures is a sufficient way of addressing inequality and promoting diversity in the classroom. While curricular diversity is certainly important, altering the contents of a course syllabus does not adequately address the structural inequalities and lack of diversity among senior staff and management. At the same time, regardless of an author's or even staff member's individual identity, such an approach does little to attend to a text's or institution's politics.

c)   Focusing on success. Some will point to the effectiveness of current programmes, policies and practices by citing the odd 'diversity' initiative or particular individuals who've 'managed to make it'. Real life examples may include promoting the fact that we now have a woman from the Traveller community as a PhD graduate since 2019; or by saying that we have a number of 'sanctuary scholars' in each university. On this account, however, less attention is paid to the fact that graduating with a PhD in Ireland as a person from the Traveller community means engaging in discourses about Irish identity and history throughout all disciplines that generally preclude Irish Travellers in every way. And it also means neglecting to consider the myriad of added difficulties 'sanctuary scholars' must face once they enter third-level, not least of which is the racism that they typically experience from both students and staff.

<u>SLIDE 11:</u>

As a starting point, however, I want us to turn to our own syllabi. Specifically, I would ask that you all look at your course or module outlines and syllabus as an 'artefact of practice' – one which outlines the rules of interaction between students and teacher (or classroom norms); and identifies the forms of learning that matter to the instructor.

<u>SLIDE 12:</u>

On this account, I would like to turn your attention to the 'hidden curriculum,' a term which refers to the unwritten, unofficial, unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school.

As discussed, there are those ideals and principles we each strive to adhere to. As teachers, we typically recognize inequalities and want to tackle them. But doing so means thinking about the ways in which we frame and speak about students' 'performance' and 'responsibilities' in relation to our own teaching practices and the institutional contexts in which that work takes place.

The 'hidden curriculum' therefore draws our attention to those implicit academic, social, and cultural messages around conduct and behaviour. For instance, how students should interact with peers, teachers, and other adults; or how students should perceive different races, groups, and classes of people.

<u>SLIDE 13:</u>

As an exercise, I would like you to turn to your own syllabus and critically revaluate the ways in which you frame your relationship to students; students' relationships with one another; and the responsibilities you've established on part of all individuals in your classroom.

Here are some things that you may think about:

While you may tell students that you have an 'open door policy' and your syllabus may mention 'office hours', some may not necessarily understand what it means to avail of your time or what is an appropriate issue to bring to your attention. Do you think you've clarified this with your students?

If a course syllabus does not include persons of colour or women; or is entirely derived from a Eurocentric view of history and knowledge, then the implicit message is that it is only this Eurocentric perspective that is valid, and all others are negligible. Have you discussed this with your students?

If a course syllabus is overloaded with seemingly impossible learning outcomes and three pages of 'suggested readings', students may misunderstand the core aims of the course. In reality, our core aims are not necessarily to meet all those listed learning outcomes as stated in the book of modules. Rather, it is to enable students to critically engage whatever form of knowledge is presented to them. Whether or not that message gets across and how we frame this message is important. Do you think you've sufficiently established the aims of the course with your students?

It is also worth thinking about the many ways in which students may pick up on the 'hidden curriculum' and other messages around conduct and 'performance' beyond the classroom.

That is to say that not everything is derived from our personal interactions with students in and out of the classroom.

Some students may not even read the syllabus or attend your classes, but they are immersed in these broader cultures of exclusivity, individualism, 'success', and so forth.

When we talk about the 'hidden curriculum,' we're referring to those things we don't necessarily say or write out for them in an explicit manner. This includes everything from 'staying silent' about bullying or abuse, to 'not making trouble' when they feel they've been exploited at work. It is worth discussing these matters with your students as well.

SLIDE 14:

All of what we've just discussed is 'fruit for thought.'

There is no expectation from us that everyone radically alter their teaching practices today. Change is a process.

But on a very practical level, there are some things you can do this semester in the module you've selected for the study – which, in the scope of this project, is basically a chance for you to explore these issues in a more focused manner. On this account, I would suggest that you use the first lecture and week of your course to get to know your students and let them get to know you.

Specifically, you can use this time to:

a)   Try out modelling activities by giving students an opportunity to experience the routine of the course on their first day. In other words, rather than telling students your course is 'interactive' and that you would like for them to participate in discussions, spend the first day showing them what this means. Begin the class with a discussion. Open the course for interaction.

b)   Set the tone. Lay out the tone of your course and personal teaching style. Make your politics explicit. Let your students know what the main or principle outcomes of the course are and the choices you've made to achieve them. Draw a line between the 'learning outcomes' as stated in the book of modules and what is actually feasible for you as a group

c)   Collaborative engagement. Let students know that this is a learning journey for you both. Collaborate on the syllabus together. Ask students to establish their own responsibilities and convey their thoughts on what it is they'd like to accomplish throughout the course. In turn, share what it is you would like to accomplish as a teacher

d)   Taking notes. Our memories are not the best resources to rely on. So, it is good to get into the habit of taking notes of the kinds of questions or

activities you think are getting more engagement from students. Keep a small journal for each course you take. Keep track of what types of questions and discussions they engage more; what areas you think they may be struggling with; comments that surprised you. Each group of students you teach will be unique. Take the time to log these differences (even if it's just a couple sentences).

SLIDE 15:

Finally, I just want to take an opportunity to talk about your participation in the DISCs Project.

Simply put, you are our 'research subjects'. In addition to your syllabi, what you write up for the website, your participation in the workshops, etc. These are all points for analysis.

And it's important for you to have agency in terms of shaping your own narratives.

When looking to the existing literature, it is abundantly clear that there is no shortage of pilot programmes in the HE context aimed at tackling inequality, thinking about diversity, and so forth. But changing the minds of individual educators and broader institutional cultures, policies, and practices is a different matter altogether.

As educators, it is important to recognise that this involves a shift in pedagogical beliefs. What does this mean? Well, for one it means that adding new knowledges to our existing repertoires is not a cut-and-dry process. And appropriating some handy 'tips and tricks' here and there doesn't really do much in terms of challenging the foundational issues we've just discussed. As such, working towards a conceptual restructuring and fundamental alteration of the conditions we are currently teaching in means that we must rethink not only how it is we teach but whether or not our teaching aims are valued, supported, or even align with the institutions where we work.

SLIDE 16:

According to Cheryl Ching's (2018) own study on this, the view that students are principally responsible for their own 'academic performance' is so pervasive because it is supported not only by the very institutions in which we teach (which includes our colleagues, departments, and so forth) but also more broadly in the communities where we live. Indeed, the notions of 'merit' and 'individualism' are deeply rooted in society. So, the notion that faculty and universities are themselves responsible for these inequalities alone – or that they effectively work to further entrench them – can be hard to maintain.

Specifically, as you will see from this graphic, Ching talks about how our existing conceptions around teaching and 'academic merit' or 'achievement' align with the broader discourses around 'diversity' and 'inclusion'. So, even if we may know that making education more 'equitable' may require structural and institutional change, it is especially hard when we feel that we do not have the capacities to

enact said change. And many of us tend to fall back into the comfortable patterns of doing things as everyone else does.

Hence, when faced with difficult ideas that would require us to do more than just add a couple 'tips and tricks' to our existing repertoires, we tend to take these ideas and work them to fit our own conceptions rather than rethink them altogether.

And this is why it is so important to remember that every advancement or progression made for minorities and disadvantaged peoples of any kind – be they in the HE context or no – have historically been won by the efforts of organisers, community members, and minorities.

Indeed, calls to 'decolonise the curriculum' are led by students of colour. The admission of women to third-level is owed to feminist activists.

This is why it is also important to remember that teaching 'social justice' to students means more than telling them to 'go out there' and change the world. Oftentimes, they're already doing that. And if by the same breath we demonstrate silence and complicity – or a general reluctance or disengagement from challenging the systems and institutions in which we operate – we are essentially perpetuating the very cultures of exclusion and inequality that we may tell our students to challenge.

Accounting for and thinking about institutional barriers to teaching and learning means we need to be aware of how we ourselves participate in supporting and maintaining those barriers.

Citation: Ching, C. D. (2018) 'Confronting the Equity "Learning Problem" through Practitioner Inquiry', The Review of Higher Education, Johns Hopkins University Press, 41(3), pp. 387–421, [online] Available from: https://muse.jhu.edu/article/687740 (Accessed 1 August 2019).