Liberating the Library through student-staff partnerships

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Introductions

Oluwapelumi Durojaiye : Edu-Intern

Catherine Batson : Faculty Engagement Manager
Liberating the Library – why?

- At Surrey there are 17,000 students, 42% identify as BAME

What motivated me to want to be part of liberating the library?

- Life experiences
- Everyone benefits from a diverse curriculum, I found in my business programme that the case studies being used do not represent the realities of a diverse modern community
- I see my work as a call to action to seek alternative stories like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her TED talk ‘The Danger of a Single Story’
- Re-imagining academic life, to enrich the experience of my peers and future students. I don’t want students to be disappointed with their course, feeling that the resources have little relevance and exclude them. A small change to teaching material could make a huge impact on how students respond to the module
Inclusive Publishers Index

African Books Collective
Focus: African published books on subject areas such as African Culture, Economics, History, Languages, Law, Politics, Science, Technology and Medicine
Description: African Books Collective (ABC) is an African owned, worldwide marketing and distribution outlet for books from Africa - scholarly, literature and children's books.

African Journals Online (AJOL)
Focus: Open Access Journals from Africa
Description: Historically, scholarly information has flowed from North to South and from West to East. It has also been difficult for African researchers to access the work of other African academics. In collaboration with hundreds of journals from all over the continent, AJOL works to change this, so that African origin research output is available to Africans and to the rest of the world.

Ayebia
Focus: Focus on fiction and non-fiction, from African and Caribbean writing
Description: Ayebia aims to be the first port of call for established and budding writers who require a publisher who has an affinity with and an understanding of where they are coming from.
Student Voices Video on Diversity

“Diversity to me means including and celebrating people regardless of their gender, sexuality, race, background, culture or religion.”

Ruth - Civil Engineering

“It's about the inclusion of students from different backgrounds, different cultures with different ideas.”

Sanayaa - Nursing

Kieran - Creative Writing

James - English Literature

Gbemisola - Law

Joel - English Literature

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Student-Staff Partnership

Student-Staff partnership is a concept that is defined in different ways and has several purposes and practices:

- Transformative experiences
- Important in this project that the student is the leader and expert in the project bringing their lived experiences
- Student as the change agent
- We worked together each bringing something different, in order to enrich and make the projects more effective
- Making connections with others which energises our practice and helps its articulation
Reflections - Student

Positives

- Working with the library team has been an inspiring journey for me
- Satisfaction in raising awareness of diverse and marginalised voices
- Decided I want to stay in education and represent BAME women
- Impact on the design of the curricula in the Department of Politics
- Skills – project management, research skills, software skills, relationship management and communication
- Huge improvement in my self-confidence

Challenges

- Time management – I found it difficult at first to structure my time.
- Working independently
- Starting a new job can be intimidating
- Coping with meeting clashes
- Not all voices are heard equally. We need to be more critical of traditionally dominant narratives
Reflections - Staff

Positives

▪ Essential to the success of this project is centring it around the lived experience of our students

▪ Success of the co-creation and co-produced elements: Students, academic and professional staff reviewing and collaborating to change pedagogic practice in curriculum development

▪ Enormous gains in mutual understanding and personal and professional development for both of us

▪ Pelumi’s work contributes to our continued work on educating academic colleagues on the value of online reading lists and the necessity to support students to critique the established canon

▪ Learning to be disruptive, librarian’s and students guiding on inclusive practices

Challenges

▪ It was time intensive for Library staff to properly support and facilitate the Edu-intern Liberating the library projects – definitely need more advanced planning.

▪ Risk of tokenism – projects mustn’t end here

▪ Positioning of content and encouraging safe spaces for critical debate

▪ Challenging power relationships and ensuring space is provided to perspectives which may otherwise be under-represented.

▪ Challenge assumptions that universities are already fully inclusive
Next steps

- Explore how the on-going work on decolonising the curriculum can be advanced through the Student Curator project.
  - Establishing a student led collection of fiction and non-fiction that explores areas of minority voices
  - Improve the % usage of Student Curator purchases in online reading lists
- Promoting importance of open access materials during current move to online/hybrid learning

“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
Next steps

- Inspire curiosity
  - Help our academic colleagues question their reading lists – build on engagement work with academic colleagues in CPD capacity, through summer work on re-designing modules for the online/hybrid learning, new staff inductions

- Provide tools to help academics to be aware, identify and find marginalised voices – develop Inclusive Publishers Index, online guides, tools for discovery and awareness, student suggestions using the new online reading list software

- Build on experience of co-producing interventions with students – wider reading list audits, reading list focus groups, critical user experience studies
Cover image credit: Matt Harrop, The British Library, Turner Contemporary Margate, via Geograph (Licensed under a CC BY-SA 2.0 licence)

LSE Students Union Liberate my Curriculum https://www.lsesu.com/campaigning/student-reps/liberate-my-curriculum/

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie The Danger of the Single Story https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en
“…we must be careful to not fall into the trap of only adding token diversity to the curriculum. The goal must be to truly transform the university knowledge base. Adding a few more diverse authors to reading lists or offering optional modules in subjects mostly neglected is not action enough.”

Professor Kehinde Andrews, Professor of Black Studies, Birmingham City University