SEXTANT

Article

SEXTANT
Masculinities, Sexualities & Decolonialities
Vol. 4(1) 1-25
© The Author(s) 2026
https://doi.org/10.65621/MNJJ2684

Reimagining the Inclusive Curriculum: Decolonial, Queer and Intersectional Approaches in Education

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Abstract

This article examines decolonial, queer, and intersectional feminist theoretical orientations to advance inclusive education grounded in social justice. Conceptualising inclusion as an ongoing praxis rather than a symbolic commitment to diversity, it explores how educational practices can challenge and transform structures of oppression. It examines decoloniality in knowledge production, including concepts related to curriculum decolonisation and the hidden curriculum, considering how inequalities are reproduced within higher education. It engages with decolonial, queer, and critical pedagogies, alongside intersectionality, to identify possibilities for transformative inclusive pedagogical interventions and offer considerations for educators and educational researchers. This provides a conceptual foundation for the *SEXTANT* special issue, 'Inclusion in Education: Practices, Politics, and Possibilities', and concludes with an overview of the issue's diverse contributions.

Keywords: pedagogy, decoloniality, intersectionality, queer pedagogies, hidden curriculum, diversity, equity, and inclusion

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SEXTANT: www.sextantnotes.com ISSN: 2990-8124
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Introduction

In contemporary education, inclusion has become 'a governing standard [...] throughout the world' that, underpinned by tenets of social justice (Ashamn, 2015, p. 8), is variously defined but broadly refers to the acceptance of all students, irrespective of their identities, backgrounds, and circumstances, through the design of physical, cultural, social, and pedagogical dimensions of educational environments that recognise diverse experiences and enable participation for all (Ashamn, 2015; Krischler, Powell, and Pit-Ten Cate, 2019). However, while inclusion is often heralded within higher education policies, it is unevenly interpreted and applied across institutions (Sheppard, 2025). As Ahmed (2018) posits, while universities may present institutional 'missions' that use the languages of diversity, equality, and inclusion, this does not necessarily 'translate into creating diverse or equal environments' and frequently operates to allow these institutions to avoid real, substantive change (p. 333). Indeed, institutions' commitments to inclusion are too often symbolic and, ultimately, hollow. This is because, as Stewart (2017) argues, 'diversity and inclusion rhetoric asks fundamentally different questions and is concerned with fundamentally different issues than efforts seeking equity and justice'. Moreover, as Day and colleagues (2022) suggest in their collection exploring diversity and inclusion in higher education, 'promoting inclusivity requires collective action by a diverse range of persons, with the goal of abolishing inequality', and such action necessitates deep engagement with decolonial frameworks (p. 10). As educators, this involves confrontation with the tensions in advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives while navigating careers in academia, which is historically embedded in institutionalised systems of oppression and discrimination.

This article therefore examines decolonial, queer, intersectional feminist theoretical orientations with a view towards social justice and *genuine* inclusive education. Here, we define inclusive education as an approach to teaching and learning that moves beyond unsubstantiated, symbolic commitments or tokenistic incorporation of diversity into existing frameworks, and actively responds to and challenges oppression within and beyond the classroom. In this frame, inclusive education is a praxis that involves a dedication to cultivating, through continuously contesting and reimagining the mechanisms of exclusion that structure broader society and are reproduced within educational systems, transformative academic communities characterised by diversity, equity, and solidarity. To elaborate upon the theoretical foundations informing this conceptualisation of inclusive education, this introductory article explores key concepts of coloniality and decoloniality, particularly in the context of knowledge production, and examines the broader movements surrounding the decolonisation of curriculum within higher education institutions. The article also explores the concept of the hidden curriculum, with particular

attention to how queer and decolonial perspectives can disrupt the ways inequalities are reinforced through curricula. The article then turns to foundational perspectives in decolonial, queer, and critical pedagogy, before introducing the concept of intersectionality and offering a point of departure for inclusive pedagogical interventions.

Through this discussion, the article offers important considerations for educators, educational researchers, and others interested in advancing inclusive approaches to teaching and learning, while providing a conceptual basis for the contributions of this *SEXTANT* special issue on inclusive education. This special issue brings together contributions from educators, researchers, activists, and students whose work engages with decolonial, queer, intersectional, and emancipatory pedagogical perspectives and seeks to unsettle racism, heteronormativity, classism, ableism, and other oppressive structures in education. Contributions include two reflective papers, four research articles, two live conversations, and a book review, alongside a podcast series, visual poem, two photo exhibitions, and a collection of pen illustrations.

Decolonising, Queering, and Reimagining the Curriculum

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1991) asserts 'the obvious fact' that there is no single, universal centre from which to view the world; rather, different peoples inherently perceive their own cultures and environments as central (p. 9). Therefore, as Ngũgĩ contends, higher institutions of learning should reflect the 'multiplicity of cultures, literatures and languages in the ways they allocate resources for various studies' (p. 11). However, historically, knowledge production has been dominated by Eurocentric frameworks that marginalise other ways of teaching, learning, and understanding the world. Peruvian theorist Aníbal Quijano (2007) introduced the conceptual framework 'the coloniality of power' to describe how race was established as a fundamental axis of power during European colonial domination, shaping the modern colonial world system and sustaining global inequalities which have persisted beyond the formal 'end' of colonialism. European colonialism, in which non-European cultures were violently dominated, exploited, and annihilated, was 'legitimised' through the framing of non-Europeans as inherently inferior. This ideology not only dehumanised colonised peoples but also reinforced Europe's position as the sole bearer of rationality and progress and led to a relationship where Europe became the 'subject' and non-European cultures the 'objects' of knowledge (pp. 172-174). As Quijano argues, '[i]t is the instrumentalisation of the reasons for power, of colonial power in the first place, which produced distorted paradigms of knowledge' (p. 177).

Envisioning an epistemological praxis that seeks to eradicate coloniality and the dominance of the purported 'totality' of Eurocentric learning, Quijano (2007) introduces decoloniality, which he proposes 'is needed to

clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings, as the basis of another rationality which may legitimately claim some universality' (p. 177). Building from Quijano, Mignolo and Walsh (2018) define decoloniality as 'a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice, and praxis' (p. 5) that confronts and disrupts the 'lasting legacies of the past' (Mignolo, 2020, p. 612). As higher education institutions have evolved within colonial frameworks and continue to perpetuate colonial power structures (Basu, 1989; Smith, 2001; Stein and de Oliveira Andreotti, 2017; Patel, 2021), decolonial discourse often identifies education as a key site for dismantling these systems and fostering more diverse knowledge practices, while acknowledging the inherent tensions in efforts to decolonise institutions moulded by coloniality from within (Shahjahan *et al*., 2021).

Although the subject is not new, over the past decade, decolonial scholarship and activism, led by Black and Indigenous thinkers and voices from the Global South, has sparked renewed interest in how higher education institutions continue to uphold colonial power structures. Recent student-led movements across South African universities, ignited by the 2015 'Rhodes Must Fall' protest at the University of Cape Town, highlighted the deep-rooted racism within these institutions, where Eurocentric research, literature, and educational systems are privileged and presented as the most legitimate forms of knowledge, thereby reinforcing racialised hierarchies (Heleta, 2018; Le Grange, 2020). Concurrently, the 'Black Lives Matter' movement in the United States emerged in response to rampant anti-Black police violence and murders of Black Americans, fueling protests on college campuses that brought attention to the invisibilisation of Black scholarship and marginalisation of Black individuals within these institutions (Lee, 2018; Pimblott, 2020; Hall *et al.*, 2021). These international movements, which called for 'decolonising the curriculum', also inspired protests across British universities, where campaigns such as 'Why is My Curriculum White?' at the University of London challenged the exclusion of racially minoritised perspectives and the lack of critical engagement with colonialism, chattel slavery, and racism in university courses (Pimblott, 2020; Housee, 2021).

Decolonising the curriculum, as defined by Fellner (2019) is 'the interconnected processes of deconstructing colonial ideologies and their manifestations, and reconstructing colonial discourse through Indigenous counter-narratives' (p. 284). By integrating diverse epistemologies, histories, and voices, particularly those of historically minoritised and Indigenous communities, educators can unsettle the colonial positioning of Eurocentric knowledge as absolute or superior. Furthermore, through critically examining and centring the counternarratives of Indigenous peoples and other historically minoritised groups, educators contest colonial renderings of history, research, and knowledge, creating space for serious engagement with epistemologies that have been invisibilised,

suppressed, or erased. This involves not simply acknowledging these systems but actively valuing and incorporating their methodologies and worldviews as fundamental to reshaping the educational landscape, for, as Heleta (2018) contends, 'decolonization at universities must encompass more than a change of the materials used to teach [...] the attitude to the materials used in the curriculum is as important' (p. 58).

In addition to exposing the Eurocentric teachings embedded within higher education institutions, scholarship around decolonising the curriculum has emphasised how these institutions fail to actively account for structural inequalities which prevent genuine inclusion for students and staff from diverse backgrounds, highlighting issues related to objectification, power, tuition, housing, and employment (Albertus and Tong, 2019; Begum and Saini, 2019; Abu Moghli and Kadiwal, 2021; Hollinsworth and Singh, 2024). As such, the process of decolonising curriculum must extend beyond rethinking what materials are formally taught. As Carpenter and Lee (2010) suggest, curriculum does not only encompass course content; it 'is also evident in how content is presented, why, by whom, where, when, with whom and for how long' (p. 100). In this way, in addition to the formal curriculum that structures academic content, higher education institutions perpetuate a 'hidden curriculum', a concept first introduced by Jackson (1968) to describe the implicit lessons, values, and norms that students learn in school. As Anderson (2001) describes, the concept of hidden curriculum is frequently employed in education research in the following ways:

> 1) to mean a kind of indoctrination that attempts to maintain social privilege-or esoteric knowledge and practices-and that is imposed together with the formal, taught curriculum
> 2) to refer to the subtle effects of the setting in which formal education occurs
> 3) to refer to the unstated rules necessary for successful completion of formal education studies (Anderson, 2001, p. 30).

In their study examining the experiences of women of colour[2] in American sociology graduate programmes, Margolis and Romero (1998) describe forms of hidden curricula such as stigmatisation, stereotyping, absence, and exclusion which posed significant barriers to these individuals' learning experiences and academic careers. For example, interviewees described how stereotyping related to their race, social class, and gender, as well as the underrepresentation of faculty of colour, impacted their relationships with faculty and prevented mentorship opportunities. A more

[2] Terms referring to historically minoritised racial groups have been retained as used in studies referenced. The authors recognise that the ways such umbrella terms are applied, interpreted, and experienced vary across cultural contexts and that no single term is preferred by, or can accurately capture the diversity of, the various communities it attempts to represent.

recent study (Webb *et al.*, 2021) exploring experiences of hidden curriculum of Black and minority ethnic (BME) undergraduate students at a British university highlights themes such as 'super visible ethnicity', describing how participants specified the race of BME lecturers, but did not specify the race of white lecturers. This exemplifies a hidden curriculum in which whiteness is perceived as the norm, reflective of the broader predominance of white academics in UK universities. As such research demonstrates, the formal and hidden curricula within higher education institutions converge, reinforcing hegemonic power structures and perpetuating inequalities. While the formal curriculum often reflects Eurocentric perspectives, the hidden curriculum subtly transmits the ideals and norms that sustain the marginalisation of students and educators from historically minoritised backgrounds. By defining how knowledge is produced, validated, and shared, both forms of curriculum contribute to the continuation of colonial ideologies, preventing genuine inclusion and diverse representation within academic spaces.

Scholarship has specifically explored the hidden curricula of sexuality and gender cultivated within educational institutions (Carpenter and Lee, 2010; Cheng and Yang, 2015; Mckendry and McKenna, 2020; Donovan *et al.*, 2023). As this research shows, these hidden curricula operate to reproduce heteronormativity, 'the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent […] but also privileged' (Warner, 1999, p. 5), reifying a binary sex/gender system that regulates experiences of sexuality and gender. Carpenter and Lee's (2010) study investigating the hidden curriculum of undergraduate teacher education in New Zealand found that the 'underlying curriculum assumption was that the world is heterosexual', and that such a curriculum may be manifested through an absence of meaningful discussions of sexual diversity in course content; varied attitudes towards, and comfort levels in speaking about, sexualities among staff and students; and lack of visibility of openly LGBTQ+ individuals in educational institutions. Furthermore, hidden curricula of heteronormativity work to reinforce narrow understandings of gender: from the tolerance of anti-queer jokes and the circulation of narratives attributing particular characteristics and abilities to certain genders, to the absence of gender-neutral facilities or effective measures to combat sexual harassment, they limit opportunities for learners along gendered lines, invalidate and invisibilise trans and gender-diverse experiences, and sustain and normalise misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia, with repercussions for the personal, academic, and professional development of all learners (Cheng and Yang, 2015; Mckendry and McKenna, 2020). For educators, Mckendry and McKenna (2020) assert the importance of disrupting heteronormative ideas early in students' academic careers, suggesting that 'opportunities to transition from a cis-normative hidden curriculum to a gender-diverse visible one' are frequently presented (p. 109). They illustrate this through STEM disciplines, where educators could

encourage students to critically interrogate the limitations of data presenting only two genders or experiments that aim to measure differences between men and women (p. 109).

Queer issues and perspectives are too often dismissed as irrelevant or marginal in education, leading teachers and students to internalise their invisibility. However, as Sumara and Davis (1999) assert, 'curriculum has an obligation to interrupt heteronormative thinking', with the integration of queer perspectives enabling curriculum to become a vehicle to 'interpret the particularities of the perceived differences among persons, not merely among categories of persons' (pp. 191-192). Such thinking can be viewed as deeply interconnected with the project of 'epistemological decolonization' (Quijano, 2007, p. 177), which seeks to identify and challenge the historical processes of violence through which the ways of knowing of colonised peoples have been erased or made peripheral. Modern conceptualisations of gender and sexuality are rooted in such histories, with decolonial scholarship emphasising how the Early Modern European framework of sex and gender was utilised to legitimise colonialism and define racial categories, presenting Indigenous peoples as 'Other', inferior, wild, and lacking humanity (Nandy 1988; Lugones 2007, 2010; Bertolt 2018). Diverse, culturally-specific, and non-heteronormative organisational systems of gender and sexuality have long preceded colonial encounters (Towle and Morgan, 2002; Juang, 2013), and, introducing the concept of 'the coloniality of gender', Lugones (2010) argues that 'the modern hierarchical dichotomous distinction between men and women became known as characteristically human and a mark of civilization' (pp. 72-73). Thus, recognising and exploring the diverse ways in which systems of gender and sexuality have taken form across cultures and historical periods can unsettle contemporary Western assumptions about sex and gender, revealing binary and heteronormative arrangements as socially constructed rather than immutable (Juang, 2013, p. 717). However, Towle and Morgan (2002) 'caution against using caricatures of other cultures to advance locally situated arguments' and stress the importance of instead 'examin[ing] the content and complexities of gender in each specific cultural setting' (p. 490).

In this way, queer perspectives provide important pathways for unearthing and resisting the ways in which Eurocentric approaches to teaching and learning are shaped through, and productive of, colonialist systems of categorisation which hierarchise and delimit experiences of gender and sexuality, as well as other dimensions of identity and oppression such as race, disability, and social class. As Sifuentes (2021) posits, brought together, decolonial and queer thinking can illuminate the construction and continuity of colonial forms of knowledge and ways of being 'infused with narratives of linear human and identity development, oppositional binary thinking, competitive hierarchies, and mechanistic analyses of people, cultures, and environments' (p. 2068) Designing a decolonial queer

curriculum, therefore, extends beyond the foregrounding of Indegenous, local, and marginalised knowledge and the inclusion of diverse LGBTQ+ representation in course materials (although these remain vital steps). Curricula should move beyond a 'tolerance' framework, which fails to question the production of heteronormativity and discrimination, towards proactively embedding LGBTQ+ issues and perspectives across all aspects of education (Page, 2016; Smith and Jaffer, 2012; Whitlock, 2013). This also entails challenging the assumed stability and foundational premises of categories, such as masculinities, femininities, sexuality, citizenship, nation, and culture, central to the ways in which education organises and produces knowledge (Britzman, 1995). Crucially, this involves creating spaces in which educators and students can interrogate how their understandings of gender and sexuality have been produced, examine the colonial legacies that continue to inform these understandings, and consider how these interrelate with other inequalities and experiences of identity, community, and belonging. Creating such spaces requires, in turn, that efforts to decolonise and queer curricula are supported by pedagogical commitments to these critical interrogations, alongside practices that actively reflect them. For example, this might involve attending to gender identity and expression in everyday pedagogical interactions through the intentional and reflexive use of pronouns (Nemi Neto, 2016). In the next section, therefore, we turn our attention to pedagogy more broadly.

Decolonial Queer and Intersectional Feminist Approaches to Critical Pedagogy

Recent decolonial scholarship has emphasised the vital importance of decolonising both the curriculum and pedagogy within higher education institutions, advocating for a radical rethinking of the ways knowledge is produced, validated, and circulated (Fellner, 2018; Heleta, 2018; Shahjahan *et al.,* 2021). Literature on decolonial pedagogy frequently highlights teaching and learning approaches that centre the histories, perspectives, and knowledge traditions of Indigenous and historically minoritised communities (Wildcat *et al.*, 2014; Louie *et al.*, 2017; Charles, 2019; Sinclair, 2020; Fernández and Ferreira, 2023). For instance, Wildcat and colleagues (2014) advocate for the decolonisation of education in the settler-colonial United States through a land-based pedagogy rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems and relationships with land and nature. Such decolonial pedagogical approaches often prioritise collaborative and participatory methods that place greater value on 'community knowledge over institutional legitimacy' (Shahjahan *et al.*, 2021, p. 87). By amplifying the voices of those historically excluded from dominant academic discourses, decolonial pedagogy confronts the hierarchical structures that perpetuate colonialism in education. It decentralises Eurocentric knowledge and reimagines how learning is structured, making it more reflective of diverse ways of knowing.

Queer contributions to decolonial pedagogy often reflect on the interrelated nature of colonialism, heteronormativity, and racialised hierarchies. For example, Nichols (2017), who argues the contemporary classroom is 'a microcosm of the settlerscape [...] sustained by white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics' (p. 45), explores how bodies, identities, and power operate in this space. As a gay man, he describes the moment of disclosing his sexuality to his students as pivotal in transforming the classroom dynamic, as his authority as a 'white male' is destabilised in ways that prompt some (white) students to question his 'agenda', while simultaneously creating opportunities for students occupying 'marginal' positionalities to challenge these perspectives (p. 51). As such scholarship illustrates, queer decolonial pedagogical practices and decisions can reconfigure the power relations, interactions, and experiences that constitute teaching and learning. Offering six tenets of a 'queer-decolonial pedagogy', Sifuentes (2021) puts forward a framework comprising: historicising senses of place and identity; unsettling linear narratives of time and development; facilitating intergenerational dialogue; supporting the bodily autonomy of students; creating an environment of safety and healing; and navigating the roles of both 'host' and 'guest' in teaching and learning contexts.

Much of this work in decolonial and queer pedagogy extends or interacts with ideas from critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy, which emphasises the importance of education as a means of liberation and social transformation, has developed around the work of Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire. In Freire's (1970) influential work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he criticises formal education for perpetuating structures of oppression. He introduces the concept of 'banking education', in which teachers are seen as the sole authority and source of knowledge, while students are treated as passive recipients or empty containers to be filled with information. In this traditional model, students are expected to memorise and replicate information without engaging critically, divorcing learning from their own experiences and understandings of the world. Freire argues that this approach reinforces existing power dynamics and suppresses creativity, inquiry, and genuine dialogue. Freire (1970) advocates an alternative approach: 'the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world' (p. 79), which he calls 'problem-posing education'. Instead of treating students as passive vessels, this model centres the active, collaborative engagement of students and teachers. In this way, education becomes a powerful process of dialogue and co-learning, where both teachers and students reflect on their experiences and critically examine their relationship with the world, for, as Freire (1998) describes, '[w]hoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning' (p. 31). Through this dynamic exchange, learning becomes a collaborative process that not only deepens understanding but also encourages critical consciousness,

empowering students to challenge oppression and become agents of change within their communities.

Critical pedagogy, as Damianidou and Phtiaka (2016) contend, involves 'understanding the suffering, raising awareness, recognising the oppression and enhancing the voice of the less powerful' and therefore necessitates an active practice of empathy, where teaching and learning encompasses understanding, sharing, and responding to the feelings and experiences of others (p. 238). However, decolonial scholars argue that empathy can reproduce colonial hierarchies through essentialist conceptualisations of who extends and who receives empathy according to social and geopolitical positions (Pedwell, 2016; Zembylas, 2019). In this way, as Mezzenzana and Peluso (2023) suggest, 'ontological categories of "otherness" are made and undone in everyday processes of empathising' (p. 2). Therefore, although critical educators may propose empathy as a strategy for fostering understanding and connection among diverse groups, without meaningful engagement with decolonial thinking, these educators run the risk of sustaining existing power imbalances (Zembylas, 2019) and contributing to a 'feel good' politics of diversity that alleviates the discomfort of white, socially-advantaged individuals, while often simultaneously serving as a marketing strategy for higher education institutions (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 51-81). Zembylas (2019) advocates for critical pedagogy that is thus reconceptualised through decolonial thinking, allowing for 'action-oriented empathy and solidarity relationships that seriously engage the demand posed by decolonization without falling into the traps of naïve multiculturalism or liberal cosmopolitanism' (p. 415). As Zembylas posits, decolonial empathy is an action-oriented practice that moves beyond superficial expressions of understanding 'the Other's' suffering. It requires acknowledging the structural conditions that underpin oppression and the colonial histories that inform how empathy is constructed, while calling for concrete actions aimed at dismantling systemic inequalities (pp. 414-417).

In *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), Black feminist scholar bell hooks extends the transformative potential of critical pedagogy by integrating interconnected analyses of race, gender, and class, emphasising the importance of understanding the complex social positions students occupy. Characterising her own teaching practice as emerging from the convergence of Freire's work and the 'lived pedagogy' of the Black teachers—particularly women—she encountered growing up in the U.S. (p. 52), hooks outlines a pedagogical approach specifically developed to address the fact that students from historically minoritised groups are situated within institutions that have continuously silenced or excluded their voices. She calls for the integration of teaching strategies that affirm these students' presence, their right to participate, and the diverse ways in which they contribute (p. 84). This approach, as hooks argues, is rooted in the understanding that 'we all bring to the classroom experiential

knowledge, and that this knowledge can indeed enhance our learning experience' (p. 84). Grounded in 'the mutually illuminating interplay of anticolonial, critical, and feminist pedagogies' (p. 10), hooks's teaching approach brings to the fore the social positionalities of both students and educators, offering an intersectional perspective.

The term intersectionality, as Collins (2015) describes, refers to 'the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities' (p. 2). While frequently employed in multi-disciplinary research as a 'range of theoretical and conceptual tools' (Yuval-Davis, 2015, p. 93), intersectionality is deeply rooted in the Black feminist movements of the 1970s and 80s (Collins, 2015, pp. 7-10), including the political activism of the Combahee River Collective. This group of Black American feminists was 'actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression' and highlighted the 'interlocking' nature of these dominant power structures (Taylor, 2017, p. 15). Building on this legacy, Crenshaw (1991) frames intersectionality as both an analytical and political framework to explore how these systems 'interact to shape the multiple dimensions' of social life and generate distinct forms of discrimination (p. 1244). Exemplifying the intersectional nature of constructs such as race and gender, Crenshaw explores the employment experiences of Black women in the United States, explaining:

> many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood [...] the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244).

Collins (2015) argues that, although intersectionality often functions as a research tool for analysing complex social inequalities, it also carries substantial transformative potential beyond academic settings. She suggests that, as a form of critical praxis, intersectionality can illuminate structural injustices, envision alternative social possibilities, and actively contribute to societal change (p. 17). However, Collins asserts that, as an academic field, intersectionality is embedded within the same power structures it seeks to critique, ultimately failing to decentre academia or fully acknowledge its roots in Black feminist activism (pp. 6-10). Furthermore, Yuval-Davis (2015) posits that, while intersectional approaches to research and activism were developed in response to identity politics that highlight and reinforce singular dimensions of identity, intersectionality has sometimes been utilised to produce 'a kind of fragmented identity politics' that homogenises specific groups of people, such as Black women (p. 93). As Yuval-Davis contends, rather than

explicitly focusing on historically minoritised people, intersectional analysis should be applied to all individuals in order to 'avoid the risk of exceptionalism and of reifying and essentialising social boundaries' (p. 93).

In the context of teaching and learning, intersectionality can serve as a valuable framework for both recognising the nuanced and intersecting social positions of students and faculty and for structuring curricula that critically examine how identities are constructed and understood within prevailing colonial systems. For example, Craven (2019) offers an intersectional pedagogical approach that, in line with queer decolonial thinking, highlights the historical construction of identity categories such as gender and sexuality while acknowledging how such catergorisation within dominant systems of oppression have produced both 'repressive ideologies *and* radical political identities' (p. 204). Outlining a prototype syllabus for an introductory course in 'Women's and Gender Studies', Craven utilises intersectionality as a 'historicized analytic and historicizing method' to explore the diverse, culturally specific, and historically situated ways in which gender and sexuality are positioned within oppressive ideological frameworks and identity-based politics (p. 204). As Craven demonstrates, facilitating such a course, where intersectional ways of learning and understanding are highlighted by disrupting the dominance of Eurocentric systems of knowledge, represents 'one small way we can contribute to decolonizing work' (p. 223). Moreover, as Craven proposes, through such a pedagogical approach, learners become equipped with the tools to contest and deconstruct systemic injustices beyond the classroom. This resonates with hooks's (1994) vision of education as a transformative practice that actively challenges the silencing and exclusion perpetuated by traditional pedagogical models within colonial institutions. The integration of decolonial, queer, and intersectional perspectives into critical pedagogy not only affirms the voices of historically minoritised groups, but also dismantles essentialist boundaries, cultivating a classroom environment where diverse social positions and systems of knowledge are recognised as sources of strength and insight. As educators who promote critical engagement with intersecting systems of oppression, we must continually reflect upon and problematise how these systems configure educational spaces and dynamics. Decolonial, queer, and intersectional approaches to critical pedagogy remind us that education is not only a site for critical analysis, but also a platform for actively reimagining and rebuilding a more equitable and inclusive classroom and world.

So where, as educators committed to inclusion, can we begin? An inclusive teaching and learning praxis, as envisioned through decolonial, queer, and intersectional feminist frameworks, involves challenging the lack of diversity and the erasure of Indigenous knowledge, marginalised histories, non-Western perspectives, and their intersections, within both formal and hidden Eurocentric, heteronormative curricula. However, as

Begum and Saini (2019) argue, decolonising the curriculum goes beyond merely diversifying teaching and learning methods; it 'specifically acknowledges the inherent power relations in the production and dissemination of knowledge' (p. 198). An inclusive praxis, therefore, interrogates positionality, which can be understood as one's subjective perspective from 'where meaning is constructed [...] according to experiences, discourses, and practices' (Tien 2019, p. 530). Acknowledging social positions and power dynamics as educators is integral to decolonising and queering teaching and learning, as it allows us to critically examine how our own backgrounds, privileges, and biases, along with those of our students, shape the educational experience. Reflecting on positionality encourages us to deconstruct how knowledge is understood, shared, and validated, recognising how individuals' diverse perspectives influence these processes. By embracing plurality in the production of knowledge, and by collaboratively and creatively engaging with our students as co-learners, we can align with hooks's (1994) conceptualisation of the classroom as a democratic learning community that confronts how the 'politics of domination are often reproduced in the educational setting', while valuing varied ways of knowing and being (pp. 39-40). In doing so, we may create space to, as hooks describes, 'receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world' (p. 40).

Special Issue on Inclusion in Education

This article has explored possibilities for transformative inclusive pedagogical interventions through engagement with decolonial, queer, and intersectional perspectives. Challenging what Ahmed (2018) describes as the 'non-performativity' of institutional commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (p. 333), these critical frameworks call for the active reimagining of educational practices to destabilise entrenched structures of power and create spaces in which historically minoritised perspectives and intersectional experiences are actively centred. We now turn to the contributions of this *SEXTANT* special issue on inclusion in education, which extend this discussion through rich and compelling reflections, research insights, case studies, and creative interventions.

Opening the collection, Daisy L. Breneman and Tara N. Parsons offer a pedagogical reflection on the design and development of an Introduction to Justice Studies course, exploring how the values and principles underpinning Justice Studies can inform more critically engaged teaching and learning practices. Drawing on their course redesign process, the authors offer practical examples and insights relevant to educators both within and beyond the discipline. They remind us, for example, of the importance of ongoing critical reflection, of intellectual and personal humility and self-compassion and care, and of understanding justice as partial, contextual, and continually evolving: 'no matter how we strive

toward justice, we will need to continue to grow and learn, to respond to changing contexts, and to imagine something more' (Breneman and Parsons, p. 39).

Huyen Tran Le Khanh's contribution further highlights the transformative potential of critical reflection in advancing educational justice. Drawing on lived experience of navigating Western academia as an Asian student, Tran Le Khanh makes a powerful case for moving beyond institutional frameworks of 'equality of opportunity' towards actively decolonising teaching practices and deconstructing conceptions of 'legitimate' knowledge. Examining the limits of equality of opportunity as an emancipatory framework, the author considers the disadvantages faced by students occupying non-dominant positionalities, including barriers to meaningful participation, sense of belonging, and well-being, as they experience and negotiate academic spaces where certain cultural, national, racial, and class perspectives are treated as the norm.

Arathi Anil's contribution expands the examination of the limitations of institutional inclusion frameworks by considering how concepts of diversity and inclusion 'travel' across geographical, cultural, and epistemological contexts. Informed by the author's experiences teaching in British and Indian higher education institutions, the article explores how frameworks of diversity and inclusion in the global North fail to engage with non-Western experiences and understandings of inequality, such as caste-based forms of exclusion. Conversely, frameworks developed in the global South may give insufficient attention to the ways dimensions such as sexuality, gender, and disability intersect with locally specific systems of marginalisation. In response, Anil proposes 'intersectional translation' as a decolonial pedagogical practice that, while locally situated, recognises inclusion categories as historically and socially produced, encourages reciprocal engagement between different knowledge traditions, and approaches teaching and learning as affective and shaped 'by the emotional textures of institutional life' (Anil, 2026, p. 61).

Deepening the exploration of whose identities and experiences are recognised, valued, and legitimised within educational settings, Ayami Minemura's contribution turns to the regulatory structures through which gender, sexuality, and intimacy are understood. Adopting an asexual-informed analytical lens, the article examines conventional approaches to consent-based sex education across school-based and university contexts, and identifies the heteronormative and compulsory sexual assumptions that inform dominant understandings of intimacy and consent. Minemura introduces the concept of the 'love=sex equation', 'the presumption that an intimate relationship will as a matter of course be a sexual one, and that sex within it is therefore already expected' (Minemura, 2026, p. 71), to understand how consent is rendered implicit within intimate relationships, enabling and normalising sexual violence. Overall, the article

emphasises the broader implications of compulsory sexuality for sex education, extending beyond asexual learners to all students.

Patrick Campbell further investigates how gender norms are reproduced and negotiated within educational settings, focusing on the performance of masculinity among male school teachers. Campbell's qualitative study examines how male teachers engage with dominant constructions of masculinity in navigating their positioning as role models for boys. Drawing from vignette-based interviews, it explores the gendered performances of five early-stage male teachers in English state schools, identifying three configurations of masculinity: 'one of the lads', 'leader-of-the-pack', and 'conflict and domination'. Highlighting the tensions and contradictions in these performances, the findings demonstrate how these educators challenged conventional gender expectations while also reproducing them through practices of authority, competition, and dominance. In examining these narratives, Campbell reflects on the important role of schools and educators in both reinforcing and disrupting dominant understandings of gender and masculinity.

Shifting from the critical examination of institutional structures towards practical approaches towards enacting institutional change, Lucie Bevazaha, Daniel Elliott, Vaishnavi Kannan, Eleanor O'Kelly, Sofia Mashkantseva, Amaliia Shmyhovska, and Elin Stüer present the University for All Student Partnership Programme at University College Dublin as a case study of student-staff collaboration and co-creation. Through two initiatives, the Incluza-Palooza festival and the Module Accessibility Review, the authors demonstrate how students can actively contribute to the design, implementation, and evaluation of inclusive educational practices. Reflecting on both the opportunities and challenges of embedding student partnership within a complex institutional context, the article identifies important considerations for developing similar initiatives, including recognising and compensating students' contributions, building trust, accommodating students' lives through flexible participation, and grounding activities in Universal Design for Learning principles.

In a joint interview, Bhargabi Das and Ana Ivasiuc further explore possibilities of transforming educational practices through collaboration and critical reflection. Drawing on their teaching experiences, the conversation considers how decolonial and intersectional pedagogies can challenge the dominance of Western knowledge systems and create greater recognition of marginalised and Indigenous ways of knowing. Das and Ivasiuc discuss practical approaches to developing more inclusive and liberatory classrooms, including co-teaching, co-creating knowledge with students, embracing vulnerability, and adopting student-centred approaches to teaching and assessment that are creative, flexible, and centre joy. As Das emphasises, decoloniality is not simply an ideal to uphold but 'a practice that we have to constantly engage with every day'

(Das, Ivasiuc, and Schilling, 2026, p. 142). The conversation thus proposes decolonisation as an ongoing process of critique, care, and resistance, while inviting a radical reimagining of possibilities for higher education.

The impact of institutional practices and cultures on experiences of inclusion and exclusion are further illuminated in a panel conversation with Warner Standing Bear, Isabelle Blum, Gregori Meakin, Caroline Pierce, Simon Gray, and Alexa MacDermot. This Neurodiversity Panel, held at University College Dublin, brings together students and staff to discuss their perspectives on neurodiversity within the university. The conversation explores neurodivergent experiences of campus life, learning, and institutional support, while identifying opportunities to create more inclusive and accessible environments. The panellists discuss challenges relating to sensory environments, masking, diagnosis, identity development, and access to institutional support, as well as the importance of community, social connection, and inclusive spaces in enabling a sense of belonging. The discussion advocates for a holistic understanding of neuroinclusion grounded in Universal Design, flexibility, and recognition of diverse sensory, cognitive, and social experiences, and stresses the importance of involving neurodivergent students and staff in policy and practice development.

Turning to broader developments in educational studies, Amber Thibeault reviews *Schooling Misogyny: Exposing and Eliminating the Influence of the Manosphere in Education Settings* (2026), by Stephanie Wescott and Steven Roberts,[3] which offers a critical examination of the manosphere, misogyny, and gendered violence within Australian schools. Drawing on feminist and masculinity studies, teachers' lived experiences, and contemporary cultural and digital influences, it explores how misogynistic attitudes become normalised and reproduced within educational institutions. The book offers practical guidance for teachers and school leaders, positioning schools as important sites for challenging misogyny, transforming gender norms, and preventing gendered violence.

The special issue also brings together creative, visual, and digital contributions to offer alternative ways of engaging with questions of inclusion, decoloniality, accessibility, and belonging in education. The UNITE Podcast, by the UNITE Erasmus+ Consortium (University Network for Inclusive and digiTal Education), introduces a five-episode series exploring key challenges and opportunities in fostering inclusive, accessible, and equitable higher education. Featuring academics, educational experts, and students from across the UNITE partner countries, the series addresses decoloniality and intersectionality, stereotypes and bias in academia, accessibility and disability inclusion,

[3] Available at: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003630364.

and the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) in education, encouraging critical reflection on educational practices, technologies, and cultures.

Anjalee Nadarajan's visual poem, 'artificial intelligence artificielle', explores themes of artificiality, environmental crisis, human dignity, and resistance in the context of the global transformation towards AI. Situated within wider conversations about inclusive education, where AI is sometimes presented as a means of enhancing access and learning opportunities, the work offers a vital counterpoint, inviting us to consider the wider ethical, environmental, and human implications of these emerging technologies.

The issue also includes two digital galleries, developed from exhibitions initially held live at University College Dublin (UCD). The UCD Inclusive Digital Map[4] presents 'A Space for Every Story' a virtual showcase of contributions from a student photography exhibition on inclusion and belonging across UCD's campus. The selection of photographs and accompanying student narratives offer a visual exploration of how inclusion is experienced by students in institutional settings, highlighting aspects of university life from accessible seating, ramps, and sensory trails to community-building activities and social spaces supporting international, LGBTQ+, and neurodivergent students. Prospera Tedam presents 'Ordinary Objects, Extraordinary Stories', a photo exhibition to mark Black History Month at UCD, which includes photographs and visual artifacts contributed by social workers. These powerful images explore systemic and interpersonal racism, with themes of resistance, allyship, community, and self-reflection emphasised in the accompanying narratives.

Finally, through a series of pen illustrations, Catarina de Carvalho Lopes presents impressions from the 'AWARE' student training programme, hosted by the UNITE Erasmus+ Consortium at the University of Lisbon in May 2026. The illustrations capture moments from the in-person training, bringing to life the exchanges between students and facilitators from universities across Czechia, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain. Together, they reflect on sessions exploring decoloniality, intersectionality, academic stereotypes, VR as a tool for empathy and inclusion, and ways of rethinking accessibility in university spaces and everyday practices. Depicting key moments of reflection and tension during the training, these illustrations highlight the significance of engaging students as co-learners and active contributors to institutional change.

This special issue aims to stimulate dialogue on dismantling educational systems and practices that perpetuate inequality, and to enrich ongoing

[4] See https://www.ucd.ie/idm/.

debates on the limitations, tensions, and transformative possibilities of inclusive education in our contemporary world. Taken together, the contributions to this special issue invite us to consider what it might mean, and what efforts it will take, to realise these possibilities. We invite you to read on and engage with these contributions, consider the questions and challenges they raise, and join us in reflecting on how, as educators, learners, and those invested in resisting oppression in and beyond the classroom, we can envision and enact a more inclusive, equitable, and just educational environment.

Acknowledgements

This issue is supported by the Erasmus+ Consortium, UNITE: University Network for Inclusive and DigiTal Education.

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Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Statement on AI Use

The authors declare that the artificial intelligence (AI) tool Grammarly was used to assist in manuscript preparation. AI was used solely for language editing and grammar checking, and all content, interpretation, and conclusions are the authors' own.

Special Issue Funding

Editorial costs associated with the publication of this special issue were supported by the UNITE project, funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme – Key Action KA220-HED – Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education (Project Code: 2023-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000162181). The authors received no specific financial support from UNITE for the research or authorship of this article.

The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them or for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

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