



Inclusion in International Higher Education: European Perspectives & Insights

#ACATHINKS

JANUARY 2021

**Inclusive Internationalisation:
An invitation to ask honest, perhaps uncomfortable questions
instead of ticking 'diversity' boxes**



EVA JANEBOVÁ

Eva Janebová, Ph.D., is the Founding Director of the Institute for Excellence in Internationalisation (IEI) at Palacký University. Her qualifications and experience were gained from Charles University, Columbia University, and the University of Minnesota where she was the very first Mestenhauser Fellow in 2018. In her 20 years working in international education, Eva has focused on curriculum development and quality assurance, and has served as academic advisor to the Council for International Education Exchange and the Czech Ministry of Education. Her recent academic work includes 'Mapping the Dimensions of Inclusive Internationalization' (with Christopher Johnstone) in *Inequalities in Study Abroad* edited by [Suzan Kommers](#) and [Krishna Bista](#), and is the author of "The Challenge of Culture" in *Mestenhauser and the Possibilities of International Education* forthcoming from Routledge in 2022.



CHRISTOPHER JOHNSTONE

Christopher Johnstone, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Comparative and International Development Education at the University of Minnesota. His research focuses on inclusivity in education, from schools to the internationalisation of higher education. He currently serves as Director of Graduate Studies for the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development. He has published over 60 books, journal articles, and chapters, and his recent work has appeared in the *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *Higher Education*, and *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* and he recently published the book *Considering Inclusive Development Across Global Educational Contexts*.



CHRISTOPHER MEDALIS

Christopher Medalis, Ph.D., is co-founder of the Institute for Excellence in Internationalisation where he serves as Senior Internationalisation Advisor. Chris is an international education expert with more than 30 years leading strategic initiatives, university internationalisation, and grants and academic exchanges for governments, universities, foundations, and corporations. Christopher served as Senior International Advisor at Palacký University Olomouc, and currently is Director of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at the School for International Training (SIT) in Vermont, USA. His career in the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East includes the U.S. State Department's Education USA Regional Director (REAC) for Europe, Director of Global Scholarship Programs at IIE in New York, and Director of IIE Europe in Budapest. He serves as an advisor and reviewer to the National Science Foundation, European Commission, ministries of education, private foundations, and NGOs.



Inclusive internationalisation is not about ticking boxes in an organisational 'to do' checklist but about a willingness for international educators to ask disruptive questions that address the structures that maintain exclusion. Inclusion is more than a checklist to tick; it is a commitment to interrogate the underlying assumptions and culturally ingrained biases within our organisations and do something to change them.

MOVING BEYOND CHECKLISTS!

There are no shortcuts to providing excellence in higher education, and definitely none to making education international and inclusive for everyone. We suggest that moving away from performative actions and 'compliance' towards 'disruption' may be the only way to create truly inclusive internationalisation. We suggest this because universities are increasingly seeking to appear inclusive in order to appeal to students, partners, and the general public. Strategies like **inclusion checklists** and performance metrics can provide an easy way for universities to comply with the so-called 'rules of inclusion' and believe they are doing something; but the more important approach is to question and challenge the structures that have created exclusion in internationalisation in the first place.

The first step is to ask the honest, uncomfortable questions about why internationalisation is not inclusive. Searching for answers might be discomforting, and will probably be dependent on national, cultural, and institutional contexts. Asking such questions requires courage, honesty, and empathy. The answers might reveal unspoken power structures or cultural biases that we may not want to acknowledge or may reveal that our institution's leaders may be benefiting from. But only when these questions are asked and answered can we make internationalisation more inclusive.

THE TWO-SIDED COIN OF INCLUSIVE INTERNATIONALISATION

Identity politics have forced international educators to rethink their practice and examine which specific groups have been excluded over time. Indeed, in recent years our practice has changed, and an increasing number of scholarships and other affirmative action programmes have increased the inclusiveness of internationalisation. It is dangerous, however, to assume that these programmes are all that is needed to 'do inclusive internationalisation'. Inclusive internationalisation is about addressing the barriers experienced by historically marginalised and under-represented groups and simultaneously creating structures, practices, and institutional cultures that make such programmes obsolete. Equity programmes are a pathway to equal opportunities and are necessary as a first step, but overall structural and attitudinal change must be named as the end goal. For example, Erasmus is setting up an unprecedented scheme with dedicated funding to contribute to equal footing of students with their peers (European Commission, 2021). There are limitations to these models, however, as they might isolate and stigmatise the individuals or groups they are trying to help (see Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019, European Union, 2019).

For this reason, universities must redouble their efforts to both 'integrate' through affirmative action programmes and then 'include'. While specific accommodations will always be needed for some individuals and groups of individuals, we must also change our institutional systems to be more responsive and accessible to diverse or plural populations (Johnstone & Edwards, 2019). Internationalisation processes should be designed and delivered so that all stakeholders can meaningfully participate with as few specific accommodations as possible. Our proposal, then, is for a two-sided process between which leaders must constantly toggle. Diversity checklists are useful in sensitising leaders to the barriers that exist for individuals. With knowledge of these barriers leaders can ask honest and uncomfortable questions about societal discrimination and prejudices that may be reflected in our staffing, organisations and institutional cultures. By then focusing on systems, international education leaders can focus on both 'universal' and 'plural' inclusion (Johnstone, 2022). In this way we can ensure that the gains made are really gains for everyone, not just a few, while at the same time constantly evaluating how perceived universal gains may create new barriers.

The simple question, 'Who gets to dance?', metaphor which Gozik used in the December 2021 ACA Think Piece in connection to study abroad (Gozik, 2021, p.2), gets to the core of the issue. We should ask this question not only in relation to providing mobility access to groups of students (and some staff) but also in connection to all forms of international(isation) activities. We need to investigate to who is engaged in internationalisation activities at home, who is represented in developing the internationalisation vision for the institution, who negotiates and decides priorities, who has a say in resource flows connected with internationalisation, who is co-teaching and collaborating in research, and how do power disparities play out in international partnerships (Janebova & Johnstone, 2020).



The term inclusive internationalisation emerged from the perceived inadequacy of internationalisation to engage different stakeholders across the university in the internationalisation process (Janebova, Johnstone, 2020, p.115). One of inclusive internationalisation's goals is to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to engage in internationalisation if they wish. As much as we pay attention to the student learning experience, we should pay attention to the international teaching and working environments at our universities, as the extent that academics and non-academics are included in internationalisation activities will influence the overall inclusivity of learning environments and campuses. As noted above, such inclusion means taking care of those who have historically been excluded while redesigning systems and institutional cultures so the benefits of internationalisation can be experienced by all.

CAN WE EVER SAY WE DID IT?

Gozik (2021) suggested that an inclusive space is one where everyone gets a chance to dance to a playlist to which they contributed (University of Michigan, n.d.). We extend this metaphor, suggesting that inclusive internationalisation might need a large dance hall where everyone could contribute to the playlist and dance when and where they chose. At the same time, there might need to be a 'quiet room' for dancers who prefer a spoken word performance, or no music at all. The point is that leaders must continue to adjust the dance hall dimensions (and all-inclusive practices) indefinitely because, as Ainscow and Miles (2008) stated, one can never really say 'okay, we did it, we're inclusive'. Inclusive internationalisation is not an outcome, but a process that is constantly revised and revisited. There is not an endpoint to inclusion, but rather a cycle of effort, critical reflection, further changes, and hope.

SPACE FOR DARING QUESTIONS

Creating space for identifying systemic failures for particular populations and for all who wish to participate in internationalisation means engaging in conversations at our universities. It means developing an 'accessibility discourse' that seeks to create an internationalisation approach that is adaptable and responsive to all prospective participants, and goes beyond simple 'awareness raising' activities that often lead to no action (European Commission, 2021). The question of *Who gets to dance?* immediately triggers the next deeper question...*why are some not dancing?* Returning to our point at hand, why are some stakeholders not participating in internationalisation activities? Some choose to not participate. However, for those who wish to participate, internationalisation leaders must ask who is represented in developing the internationalisation vision for the institution; why some stakeholders are excluded from priorities and resource flows connected with internationalisation; why some study programmes defined as local and others accepted as international and carry different value on campus; why do some departments have powerful partners and other have none; why do a 'traveling elite' continue to dominate activities while other staff have never been abroad. Once we start asking, many more questions come up, and all provide insights into where we can start to address inclusion gaps.

Here are some personal statements we keep hearing from colleagues around us that might inspire us to unpack the layers of how discrimination in society, the power structures of our institutions or the personal contexts may play out in our engagement in internationalisation.

- I'm not part of hierarchy because I'm a woman
- I'm a single parent, and I can't afford to pay for babysitting while I'm gone
- I'm exhausted by my teaching activities and don't have energy to focus on the extra demands of internationalisation
- My department does not see internationalisation as priority, and I don't have access to resources or training in internationalisation
- I don't have personal connections abroad and I don't have anyone to mentor me
- I can't speak a foreign language and meeting international colleagues stresses me out
- I can't afford to participate in activities
- My identity is not reflected in internationalisation activities
- I am not a researcher, so there is little in terms of partnership engagement for me



These statements reveal numerous structural barriers, personal advantages and disadvantages, collegial prejudices, and other cultural, gender and age biases. Many individuals will experience multiple advantages, but for others their disadvantages will intersect, such as gender and academic discipline (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019, p. 25). Internationalisation will perpetuate these injustices and disparities unless challenged head-on by its leaders and by stakeholders who have traditionally been excluded from its activities (Janebova and Johnstone, 2020). Inclusive internationalisation, then, needs to be framed within the discourse of equality, social justice and diversity (Singh, 2021) in order to be institutionally and globally relevant in the 21st century.

ADMINISTERING OR LEADING CHANGE

When the questions have been answered, internationalisation leaders need to engage in innovative problem solving to identify solutions. This requires collaboration across the institution and leadership. There is a difference between administration and leadership in internationalisation. The former have administrative titles, and often manage portfolios of programmes. In order to maintain a status quo while performatively 'including', this group might be satisfied with ticking boxes. Internationalisation leaders need to have the courage to have tough conversations and the audacity 'to rumble with vulnerability' as Brené Brown calls it in her inspiring book *Dare to Lead* (Brown, 2018, p.17). According to her, leaders must expose themselves by taking risks and admitting mistakes. They must also invest time attending to their own and colleagues' feelings and fears in these tough conversations. Otherwise, they waste time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behaviours. Imagine if all higher education leaders were trained in empathy, were committed to both universal and plural inclusion, and never used control, fear and blame as management tools.

Internationalisation leadership does not just come automatically from the university hierarchy, although there may be leaders in high-ranking positions. Inclusive internationalisation, however, must move toward distributed or dispersed leadership (Lewis, 2021, p.8), bottom-up change, and engaging with students as agents of change (ACA, 2021, p.3). Potential leaders come from a variety of organisational levels and roles within universities. These leaders must be given autonomy to make decisions in their areas of responsibility and make the changes necessary to foster inclusion.

Diverse representation in the leadership is key to advance inclusion. Although leadership for inclusive internationalisation can come from all spaces within a university, the truth is that some stakeholders hold more power than others. If high-ranking officials are not representative of the diverse and growing body of prospective participants in internationalisation, they may not have the knowledge or desire to enact changes that are reflective of an institution's diversity. Focusing on inclusion is a choice that all leaders can make, and representational diversity in powerful positions at institutions can facilitate such change.

IS EXCELLENCE IN INTERNATIONALISATION EXCLUSIVE OR INCLUSIVE?

Internationalisation is widely acknowledged by universities as a vehicle for enhancing quality (Marioni, 2019, p.6) and inclusive internationalisation can powerfully transform institutions. However, a fundamental challenge in higher education is that universities have traditionally been built on exclusivity in order to achieve excellence. The current focus on inclusion in our universities reflects a shift away from this exclusivity. In order to ensure that internationalisation is also inclusive we need to move from the valorisation of student mobility as the predominant approach to internationalisation. As Joseph Mestenhauser wrote decades ago (Mestenhauser & Ellingboe, 1998, p.33), defining internationalisation narrowly in terms of mobility has proved to be damaging to higher education. Fortunately there has been a visible shift in national and institutional policies over the last couple of years to maintaining the right of all students to internationalisation as part of a quality higher education (e.g. NUFFIC, 2021) as well as to a broader understanding of what is the 'international experience'.

'Inclusive internationalisation' broadly defined, can encompass nearly endless initiatives. For example, focus on flexible work modalities to increase staff opportunities; affirmative action programmes to increase participation in mobility programmes; shared leadership and decision-making on internationalisation strategy; and rethinking how internationalisation itself is defined and implemented at an institution. All these initiatives depart from valorisation of student mobility as the primary approach to internationalisation. As participation in these programmes increases and as the dimensions of internationalisation expand through representative deliberation, critics may fear that internationalisation will become irrelevant. We argue the opposite. In our eyes, inclusion is excellence. Through a process of tough questioning, considerations for both universal and plural inclusion, distribution of responsibility and decision-making, and a never-ending pursuit of institutional improvement, internationalisation



becomes a high-quality initiative through the process of inclusion. Higher education has a mandate to transform society. Internationalisation can aid in this role and can promote inclusion, but can only do so if it is experienced and led by all members of university communities. As international educators, we must have the strength to keep asking the honest, sometimes uncomfortable, questions which dismantle old attitudes and structures, and build opportunities for all.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

European Commission (2021). Brussels, Belgium: Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. Retrieved from http://sepie.es/doc/convocatoria/2021/implementation-inclusion-diversity-apr21_en.pdf

ACA (2019). ACA input paper Towards a 2030 Vision on the Future of Universities in Europe. http://www.aca-secretariat.be/fileadmin/aca_docs/event_presentations/ACA-2019-April_Reflection_Paper_Inclusion.pdf.

Ainscow, M., & Miles, S. (2008). Making education for all inclusive: Where next?. *Prospects*, 38(1), 15–34.

Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to Lead*. Vermilion.

Clayes-Kulik, A-L., Jorgenson, T.E., & Stober, H. (2019). Diversity, equity, and inclusion in European higher education institutions: Results from the INVITED project. Brussels: European University Network.

European Union. (2019). Erasmus plus mobility guide. Brussels, Belgium:

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/erasmus-plus-programme-guide-2019_en_1.pdf

de Wit, H., & Jones, E. (2022). A Missed Opportunity and Limited Vision for Internationalization. *International Higher Education*, (109), 5-6. Retrieved from <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ihe/article/view/14471>

Gozik, N. J. A House Where All Belong: Re-envisioning Education Abroad through a Systemic Approach. ACA Think Piece. December 2021. Retrieved from <https://6kywp25ru3q2da9io37dyvc8-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ACA-2021-12-21-Think-pieces-December-Article-8-A4-02.pdf>

Hickey, S., Sen, K., & Bukonya, B. (2015). *The politics of inclusive development: Interrogating the evidence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Janebova, E., & Johnstone, Ch. (2021) Mapping the Dimensions of Inclusive Internationalization. In Kommers, S., & Bista, K. (Eds.). (2020). *Inequalities in Study Abroad and Student Mobility: Navigating Challenges and Future Directions* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367855130>

Johnstone, C., & Edwards, P. (2020). Accommodations, accessibility, and culture: Increasing access to study abroad for students with disabilities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 24(4), 424–439.

Johnstone, C. J. (2022). Conceptualising inclusive development by identifying universality, plurality, sociality, and relationality. *Journal of International Development*, 1– 11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3622>

Marioni, G. (2021) Internationalization of Higher Education: An Evolving Landscape, Locally and Globally IAU 5th Global Survey. Retrieved from https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_5th_global_survey_executive_summary.pdf

Mestenhauser, J. A., & Ellingboe, B. J. (1998). *Reforming the Higher Education Curriculum: Internationalizing the Campus*. American Council on Education/Oryx Press Series on Higher Education. Phoenix: Oryx press.

NUFFIC (2021). Major role for internationalization in MBO quality agendas (n.d.). https://www.nuffic.nl/nieuws/grote-rol-voor-internationalisering-in-kwaliteitsagendas-mbo?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=nn_59

Singh, T. (2021). Reshaping Policy for Inclusive Internationalization. In EAIE Forum member magazine. Winter 2021, Amsterdam.

University of Michigan. (n.d.) Defining DEI. <https://diversity.umich.edu/about/defining-dei/>



*This article is the last in the series **Inclusion in International Higher Education: European Perspectives & Insights** of our "ACA Think Pieces". Each contribution in this series has explored the multi-faceted nature of inclusion from a different international education perspective, including, for example: concrete advice regarding developing strategic inclusion plans for inclusive higher education mobility, synergies of excellent inclusion practices from the Erasmus+ youth sector relevant for higher education, activities that have proven to be successful at an institutional level. The articles were authored by expert colleagues in internationalisation of higher education and inclusion, and were published on ACA's website towards the end of every month from March 2021 until February 2022. Our upcoming series will focus on strategies and practices in digitalisation starting at the end of March 2022. Keep an eye on our social media channels and our website for the first publication in the new digitalisation series of the "ACA Think Pieces"!*