Culture As a Gauge Towards Social Justice

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The inclusion of culture in the design of information and communication technologies is a hollow cry for change and the inclusion of others. This paper explores interdisciplinary research across the fields of library and information sciences, open education, and instructional design and technology to examine representations of culture in social justice contexts. A literature review from 2015-2020 begins to situate this study. The findings reveal that to move towards an education in social justice requires both vicarious experiences and live interactions. Further, the article ends with a critique of social justice as a concept that challenges the non-oppressed to give up an unmeasured amount of power and privilege.

Demands for social justice cry out from the highest mountaintops to the lowest valleys worldwide. Crying to be heard and calling for action become sentiments of people when there seems to be more disruption than order. The current social, political, and economic climate has brought to the forefront demands for social justice across places, spaces, and people. This is actualized in social movements (Black Lives Matter, Me Too, Dreamers), political statements like Democractic Socialism, the health pandemic COVID-19, economic deprivation (unemployment, food insecurity), education (fully online), and a world on the brink of suicide. The need for social justice is a global agenda.

Current academic research poses social justice as a rising topic in teacher education (Fabionar, 2020); artificial intelligence (Krupiy, 2020); library and information sciences (Jaeger et al., 2016), health care (Pickover et al, 2020), learning analytics (Aguilar, 2018), and business (Gill, 2019). Disciplines are finally getting 'woke' to the need to consider social justice within the fabric of practices, processes, and policies.

Culture as a gauge towards social justice is a metaphor that represents a shift in the world to issues specific to the human condition. Instead of focusing on the larger issue of culture, social justice is a palatable subcategory that allows communication from people across cultures. Therefore, social justice is one of the many gauges that represent our culture. Gauges in culture are measures and social justice is a measure of equity, tolerance, acceptance, representation, affirmation, differences, transformation, collaboration, autonomy, agency, injustice, voice, and vote as represented in this article.

Defining social justice is as complex as understanding its application. In T. Simmons MacKintosh's 1840 treatise, he understood social justice as the highest standard on the "scale of civilization" (p.68). Social justice, as defined by MacKintosh (1840) removed the causes (like drunkenness) that lead to crime; thereby superseding the need for punishment. Today, social justice seems to be an international endeavor brought on by consistent inequities and

inequalities throughout the world and across all human needs (i.e., food, water, air) and conditions (i.e., unemployment, homelessness, sickness). The United Nations defines social justice as an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. Social justice, thereby, can be advanced through the removal of barriers faced by people such as age, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, and religion (United Nations, 2021). It would seem social justice's definition continues to evolve, and its application as a catalyst for the greater good of humanity remains the same.

This article explores interdisciplinary research across the fields of library and information science, open education, and instructional design and technology to examine representations of social justice. Other fields were excluded to maintain brevity and focus.

This review of literature provides an examination of journal articles published between 2015 and 2020 with the goal of using qualitative research to understand the research and practice behind social justice. This time period was chosen because of the growing social and political issues in society and the emerging impact of social justice as a topic in information literacy fields. Although these fields are thought of as separate entities, they intersect as information and communication technologies that look at literate practices in technological formats.

This review of literature seeks to answer the following questions: How is social justice positioned in information and communications technology research? Are these manifestations of social justice authentic? What is the next step for research on culture as a gauge towards social justice?

The sections that follow include theoretical framework, methods, social justice in library and information sciences, social justice in open education, social justice in instructional design and technology, social justice and culture, implications and conclusions, and next steps.

Theoretical framework

An examination of social justice must be told within the context of its creation—Culture and Critical Theory. Culture is all that there is and could ever be, and it includes those things made by humans and nature made (Young, 2009). Therefore, social justice is a cultural artifact. Critical theory proposes that all knowledge "is historical and broadly political in nature" (Friesen, 2008, p. para 3). Further, critical theory seeks to "make problematic what is taken for granted in culture, so that a degree of social justice can be had by those who are oppressed" (McCarthy, 1991, p. 226). Therefore, Culture and Critical Theory enable the critical examination of human conditions like oppression. Oppression means that one group has domination over another. This can be seen in how theorists examine oppression.

Fanon (1963) examined the psychology and nation-state of the oppressed that is enacted through colonization. Anzaldúa (1987) captured the psychology of resistance to human oppression as it relates to borderlands and Mexicans. Freire (1968) critiqued the psychology of oppression through dehumanization and further examined the pedagogy of the oppressed that is situated within the dynamics of teacher education. These theorists and their theories provide a window into the human condition of oppression within society. The solution to oppression is currently touted as social justice.

Methods

Qualitative research involves the collection and study of a variety of empirical materials such as texts that "describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). It privileges no one methodology over another. Thus, this is a traditional review of literature, not a systematic review. Traditional literature reviews offer a written appraisal of that which is already known about a topic with no prescribed methodology. It builds on existing work with a focus on descriptions and brings the work together critically (Jesson et al., 2011). Traditional literature reviews may also focus on broad patterns and generalizations or gaps in the research (Cooper & Hedges, 2009).

The author used their university's AOK One Search library database. In particular, the specifications of the search included an advanced search, years 2015-2020, and the subject terms. The initial search was conducted for the terms 'social justice + library and information science'; this search yielded 32 journal articles excluding reports, books, and dissertations/theses. The database automatically excluded duplicates. The same database process proceeded for the terms 'social justice + open education' that yielded 26 journal articles. Lastly, the terms 'social justice + instructional design and technology' returned 38 articles. A total of 96 journal articles were reviewed; however, only 15 met the criteria, as described next, for this article.

First, each article was reviewed to determine how social justice was positioned in the article. Was social justice just mentioned or did the term have any significance in the paper? If social justice had no significance in a paper, then the article was eliminated from the review. Second, if a paper passed the first criteria, it was reviewed for patterns. Next, the author determined whether an article focused on social justice in the context of research contributions or practical contributions (McKenney & Reeves, 2019). Each article was then categorized as research or practice. This labeling happened organically as this is typical of qualitative research.

Educational design research aids in explicating the literature review because it is the "pursuit of varied kinds of theoretical understandings in the design and development of educational interventions" (McKenney & Reeves, 2019, p. 30). The outputs of this educational design research are two contributions: research and practice. Research contributions focus on research investigations that can lead to theories. Practical contributions focus on an intervention or solution to the problems in practice (McKenney & Reeves, 2019). This review is divided into these two contributions and across the three interdisciplinary areas mapped to social justice.

Social Justice in Library and Information Science

This section explores the research in social justice and library and information science from 2015-2020. It separates out those articles focused on research versus those focused on practices such as teaching and professional development. Of note is how the research articles frame the learning of social justice: What does social justice look like in library and information science? Can anyone learn about social justice? What does one have to do to be a social justice advocate? Is it that simple?

Research

"Information as a human right" is considered a social justice perspective in library and information science (American Library Association, 2016). Naidoo & Sweeney (2015) proposed a social justice framework for librarians to help social studies teachers become advocates in their classrooms. This research suggests that librarians become informed about critical pedagogies (Freire, 1968; hooks, 1994); acknowledge the non-neutrality of technological tools, and be cognizant of the privileges of certain users and experiences. A list of websites and children's books are provided to further understand and teach towards social justice. Kumasi & Manlove (2015) conducted a survey of one hundred Library & Information Studies faculty from programs accredited by the American Library Association (ALA) to determine their facility for explicit diversity and/or social justice content. The findings revealed that all stakeholders (administrators, faculty, students) must:

1. Learn how power and privilege permeate the discipline and society;

2. Examine the ways in which knowledge is constructed and by whom;

3. Advocate for inclusion and multicultural curriculum reform in library and information science; and

4. White faculty, in particular, must join multicultural curriculum reform.

This research suggests social justice in library and information science requires advocacy and action by all stakeholders. Further, the knowledge to be a social justice advocate can be acquired from self-teaching, surveys, websites, and children's books. There are different degrees of social justice involvement across individuals, programs, departments, and universities; however, advocacy and action are required tenets. If information is a human right, then

why don't all people have access to literacy? How do we get to a fully literate society? Can literacy be acquired without power, privilege, access, or others cooperation?

Practice

Practices have also been approached as ways to inform librarians and help them to take an advocacy and action stance toward social justice (Branch, 2019; Roberts & Noble, 2016). Branch (2019) conducted a study using concept mapping as a methodology to help librarians engage in critical information literacy skills and to highlight social justice as a path for learning outcomes. Cooke and Kitze (2016) sought to teach social justice as a theme in library and information science courses with the hope that it would foster inclusive, critical, and "culturally competent professional engagement" (p. 108). Similarly, Roberts & Noble (2016) co-taught a course on race, sexuality, and gender in library and information science. Among other assignments, one project asked students to demonstrate their ability to discuss privilege within the context of power, race, and gender embedded in social practices. These teaching practices enacted by librarians and university faculty are believed to be liberatory in educating students about systemic racism, oppression, diversity, gender, and other disparities.

This suggests that social justice in library and information science can be taught but requires advocacy and action to become actualized. The requirements of who can teach such a course are not clear – besides being librarian faculty at an institution of higher education. Thought questions: How do faculty know that they are teaching a social justice agenda? What experiences can faculty share as evidence of their knowledge of or advocacy for social justice? Further, what should students do with this information, and how do they know they understand the concepts of social justice correctly? How do people know when they are participating in an injustice? Is advocacy and action enough to demonstrate one's alliance to social justice?

Social Justice in Open Education

This section explores the research in social justice and open education from 2015-2020. It separates out those articles focused on research versus those focused on practices that should be done to foster equity in open education. What are the concerns in open education? Why are researchers providing "how to" practices as ways that promote social justice in open education? Why are these frameworks and suggestions numbered and methodical; what assumptions can be made about why these frameworks and guidelines have been created?

Research

The advent of open education has brought about frameworks and research tied specifically to the equity aspects of social justice. For example, Lambert (2018) argues for a more equitable definition of social justice in open education that includes three principles: redistributive (allocation of materials and human resources), recognitive (recognition and respect for cultural differences), and representational (equity in representation and political voice). The equitable definition of social justice states:

> Open Education is the development of free digitally enabled learning materials and experiences primarily by and for the benefit and empowerment of non-privileged learners who may be under-represented in education systems or marginalized in their global context. Success of social justice aligned programs can be measured not by any particular technical feature or format, but instead by the extent to which they enact redistributive justice, recognitive justice and/or representational justice (Lambert, 2018, p. 239).

In this definition, these principles of social justice are deliberate, intentional, accessible, and action-oriented approaches that should inform learning, design, and technology. Lambert's (2018) definition digs deep into what social justice is and further what it could be to all. That is, social justice is about equalizing resources (material and human), providing equity to marginalized groups, and enabling voice and vote.

Practice

Open education research provides prescriptive versus descriptive approaches to the practices of social justice. By example, drawing from Nancy Fraser's (2005) tripartite theory that offers a framework for social justice steeped in three dimensions: economic, cultural, and political, Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter (2018) propose an Open Educational Resources (OER), Open Educational Practices (OEP), and Social Justice framework. This framework proposes to move away from misrecognition (reinforcing dominant perspectives), misrepresentation (lacking the right discourse, policies, or norms) and maldistribution (economic inequality). Instead, the authors offer a modified social justice framework that is inclusive of ameliorative or affirmative responses that address injustice with reform and transformative responses that address the "root causes of inequality" (Hodgkinson-Williams & Trotter, 2018, p. 219). Croft & Brown (2020) argue for the reframing of OEP to be equitable, inclusive, and respectful of differences. Further, to develop more inclusive designs in OEP, four pedagogical practices are offered:

1. Cultivate an appreciation for difference;

2. Create space for collaboration and contribution;

3. Respect student autonomy and privacy; and

4. Facilitate conversations around academic integrity and open education.

These frameworks and associated research seek to transform open education, from where it is -- to where it needs to be, in order to impact individuals, groups, and societies, and further address social justice in any substantive way. This means there is much growth needed so that open education does not just address the needs of dominant cultures, but social justice is able to penetrate localized people in authentic and culture-specific ways. Some thought questions: Why does OEP not include more pedagogical practices? When research proposes frameworks for OEP, does this mean the current state of research does not provide such guidelines or the current research is not getting social justice right?

Social Justice in Instructional Design and Technology

This section explores the research in social justice and Instructional Design and Technology from 2015-2020. It separates out articles focused on theory from those focused on practice. Of note is how the research articles frame the learning of social justice. What does social justice look like in instructional design and technology? How is learning conceptualized in a social justice context in the field of instructional design and technology?

Research

Theoretical and conceptual notions of social justice in the field of Instructional Design and Technology is an area where more voices need to be heard. The concept of social justice is not new, but its research and practice continue to reinvent themselves. Bradshaw (2018) poses social justice as a "blind spot" in Instructional Design and Technology (p.336). Is it blindness, as in cannot see, colorblindness, or just intentional blindness? Bradshaw (2018) argues social justice considerations must be made in one's personal and professional dealings. This means social justice work must be integral to one's being. Further, these concepts must be learned in context with other knowledge. Bradshaw (2018) concludes, after examining the history of Instructional Design and Technology and its white male pioneers, that the systemic exclusion of social justice perpetuates an injustice.

Thomas (2017) views social justice as a byproduct of a much larger but underdeveloped conversation toward a critical theory of educational technology. That is, a critical theory of educational technology functions "as a lens to examine the discourses we produce about educational technologies and a prism through which to view and to critique the products and systems we design, develop and implement" (p. 48). Critical theory offers the world hypotheses, a lens to the human condition, and ways toward change.

This review suggests that critical examinations of social justice need to be informed by theory and conceptual ideas; this theory should include research on design, technology, critical theory, ethnic studies, and the like. Theoretical research provides considerations of what social justice truly is in the larger context of society. That is, social justice is inclusive of human beings' ideas; tolerant, if not accepting, of their cultural differences; and provides opportunities for voice, vote, and victory versus victimization.

Practice

The practice behind social justice in Instructional Design and Technology is simple for practitioners as there is a need to do no harm to the learner. Matloob Haghanikar (2019) conducted a study, in a *Children's Literature for Diversity and Social Justice* undergraduate course, that included the use of animation software (Plotagon) to help students develop their transliteracy (consciousness of cultural diversity) and empathy skills that may support an understanding of social justice. Plotagon provided a platform where animated characters could take on the facial expressions, gestures, and body language representative of human emotions or behavior. The findings revealed that the use of the software aided students in empathizing with characters in young adult novels. According to Matloob Haghanikar (2019), students were able to "transform from passive readers into critical thinkers who were willing to promote social justice by creating their custom responses to the books" (p. 220). In a STEM professional development study, teachers created Prezi maps that included their interpretations of social justice in their local/community contexts. One teacher who taught an interdisciplinary STEM course (engineering, robotics, computer science, and aerospace engineering), described how he helped students make connections to the lack of access to clean water and how it might affect people -- comparing for example Rwanda and Flint, Michigan's clean water problems (Kier & Khalil, 2018). The findings demonstrated teachers who exhibited social justice practices were ultimately engaging in teacher agency. For example, teachers participated in online reflections with students, helped students draw connections to social justice, and showed support for student interests and values. In another example, students in a first-year seminar titled *Digital Media and Social Justice* were prepared for the topic of social justice through course readings about electronic waste, privacy, online activism, technology, and social inclusion. Students also had other assignments such as service learning and a digital storytelling project. The findings revealed that the service-learning opportunities tied to sustained human interactions with people unlike themselves in age, gender, and digital literacy proved more valuable in helping students understand and articulate social justice (Finucane et al., 2018).

These practice-based studies suggest that people can learn about social justice (Faloughi & Herman, 2020) and enact these practices in their work as educators. Social justice requires intense interactions with human beings considered the "other." Only then, can true authenticity in work and deeds be achieved. Further, there is no one path to acquiring social justice skills and abilities. It is about getting started and doing it. Thought questions: Who can assist individuals or groups in learning about social justice? How long will it take to learn about social justice? How do individuals develop a critical understanding of social justice?

The Culture Behind Social Justice

What is the connection between social justice and culture? Social justice is one of many byproducts of our culture. Culture is all that there is or could ever be. Our culture is human-made and nature-made (Young, 2021). That said, social justice is smaller than the whole of its creator—culture. Humans operate within a culture and many subcultures. Social justice is a byproduct of our existence. It is a socially constructed phenomenon. It is not nature-made, so it must be human-made, derived, and conditioned. That is, humans give life to ideas and ideologies that become part of the society in which we live. In this case, social justice is human bred, human manipulated, and human born.

Social justice is about balancing the scales of humanity. However, this balance means that those on top must relinquish some of their power and privilege, and those on the bottom are given some semblance of equity or privilege – access, but most of all opportunities to stay on the scale, or even rise to the top.

The implications of social justice in information and communication technology contexts are of greater concern. The advent of artificial intelligence brings to the forefront the same racialized conditions of early print technology. How to best represent "the other" without being racist? These racialized contexts can only be situated in the historical and social contexts in which they were derived. Who are the designers? How are other groups represented in the design and designers? How has the technology been vetted for bias? Do people really care?

The idea is that if people can mediate injustices with social justice, it will all be right. In this sense, social justice becomes an intervention to humanities social ills, like oppression. Social justice is touted as a problem solver, but, as the research indicates, it has not really solved any problems. It is just a linguistic player in the game of humanity.

Implications & Conclusion

This article began with the following questions: How is social justice positioned in information and communications technology research? Are these manifestations of social justice authentic? What is the next step for research on culture as a gauge towards social justice?

Social justice is a microcosm of culture. When we engage in social justice design and technological developments, we move more towards what it means to design with culture in mind. This is exemplified through the research on library and information science, open education, and instructional design and technology.

Social justice throughout the research is positioned as a liberator to educational reform. Much of the research finds value in this movement that borders on people, places, and things of color.

Social justice research and practice must be intentional in reducing inequality and explicit in action (Lambert, 2018). As students sit, read books, watch videos, and search websites to learn more about race, gender, inequity, and injustice, is this enough to teach the true meaning of social justice? For educators, it is our assumption that the acquisition of vicarious knowledge, whether it be through a book or visual medium, can open doors and bring to life that which one has not experienced. Is this enough? Or does social justice need to be experienced? In Finucane et al., (2018) study, they provided students with service-learning jobs that involved opportunities to interact with the elderly and to experience with the elderly what the lack of digital media meant in their lives. In this instance, students move from the vicarious to live. Based on this review, it could be surmised that moving towards an education in social justice requires both vicarious experiences with culturally informed media and live interactions with human beings guided by explicit instruction.

Next Steps: The hard facts of being privileged

As noted by theorists (Anzaludua, 1987; Fanon, 1963; Freire, 1968), oppression is not just physical but social, psychological, and economic. To advocate for social justice requires addressing all of these in deliberate ways, denouncing structures and engaging these issues with deliberate speed.

Changing classroom banter and arguing through the research and researchers does nothing to the reality of social reproduction. That is, social justice is not real. It is just really important for the next decade. Otherwise, the tenants of race, racism, sexism, etc. will continue to rule the day, and those of color will remain the clean-up crew.

The hard facts are that those who are privileged must ultimately give up something to fully enact social justice. Instead of accepting rewards because of one's privilege, those who consider themselves social must deny themselves promotions and other unearned accolades. Otherwise, the divide is not just digital, social, or political, but it will always remain racial and inequitable.

The socially woke must deny power. They must deny privilege. Otherwise, the tenets of social justice and social justice itself are false narratives perpetuated to make some folk feel good.

Social justice is not achievable without those who have the power and privilege to deny, renounce, and shun the power that serves them, and the privilege that is based on the color of skin, birthright, or economic advantage. Only then is social justice achievable. Only then, can social justice be actualized.

Can the non-oppressed truly understand the oppressed or what it means to be oppressed -- on a daily basis? Can the non-oppressed understand and know when they are engaging in oppressive actions or when their advocacy is oppressive? Do the non-oppressed truly care about the oppressed, and what are they willing to give up to achieve equity?

If the non-oppressed stand up for those who are oppressed then they must also stand up when they are receiving undo favor over the oppressed. This is a difficult thing to do--when the non-oppressed have been reaping rewards from an inequitable system.

The question then is: can social justice be achieved in an unjust world? It is noble and even admirable that social justice can be more than just a hollow cry for help. The social unrest by people from all 'walks of life' illustrates the long road ahead. The road to social justice for all is one filled with quiet landmines of resistance, disbelief, dissenters, and disruptors. Only the future can tell if the condition of oppression can be solved or resolved through social justice.

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