Digital tools are largely Western products, dominated by American and Western European interests; as such, they can somewhat colonize the spaces and networks depending on them, including by making the “other” invisible or tokenized, if not silenced or oppressed.

This chapter begins with some critiques about the illusions of inclusion in digital spaces, adapted from a two-part article that I wrote with Shyam Sharma for Hybrid Pedagogy using a postcolonial perspective, and then moves on to a more focused account of possibilities of creating more open and inclusive spaces and networks, subverting existing digital power structures based on some open online work one or both of us have been involved in. Then I offer some practical directions while remaining critical of the potentials of colonizing treatments of non-Western participants in digital spaces. This work is an attempt to use my grasp of Western digital discourse, as partial insider, to metaphorically “subvert the master’s house using the master’s tools,” something Audre Lorde suggested was impos-

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sible (and may yet be). The intention is to highlight the importance of creating more equitable opportunities for marginalized or excluded voices from the global peripheries and the margins of geopolitical centers themselves in digital spaces. I argue that this needs to be done by outsiders, insiders, and semi-insiders alike because it is just and beneficial to everyone to diversify communities and enrich learning and sharing for everyone in increasingly globalized digital spaces.

The title of this chapter echoes a blog post I wrote previously on the topic of “unbearable white maleness” of the field of educational technology. I mention how all kinds of lists of digital pioneers, innovators, etc., are overwhelmingly white and male. Keynote speakers at our conferences are often largely white and male. The bibliographies in our writing are often largely white and male (Sara Ahmed also discusses the politics of citation and what inclusions/exclusions in our citations imply). If it is so challenging to find non-white, non-male scholars and leaders in this field, then it is a problem of our field of vision. Is it an issue with the field itself (that in general has barriers towards females and minorities) or in our vision (that we don’t see them, that we selectively see the white and male ones)? Probably both. Privilege is complex — and many of the minorities we would end up including will be people of some form of privilege in terms of education, class, etc. But what I have found in attempting to be more and more inclusive is that inclusion, while valuable for its own sake, also has practical utility in how it can enrich and transform a conversation. If we (dominant and subaltern and intersectional) listen to the diverse voices we include, if we include them by empowering them to include themselves and speak

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on their own terms, we can potentially subvert the hegemonic whiteness of the digital.

We began our article “Bonds of Difference: Illusions of Inclusion” with a Nepalese proverb: “A bull that went blind during the monsoon forgets that the world is not always green.” This old (and somewhat odd) saying provides an analogy for the blind spots around those of us who may be parts of dominant groups and have (moved into) privileged status but, rather ironically, forget what we left behind or how the world is changing. In the first part of the article, subtitled “illusion of inclusion,” we credited MOOCs for bringing to light the vast inequities in international higher education when it went virtual and viral, then discussing the lack of inclusiveness in the design and use of ostensibly “global” platforms, tools, pedagogies, and modes of collaboration across national and cultural boundaries. In spite of good intentions (and sometimes blatant pretensions of altruism and respect), platforms like the once wildly popular xMOOCs only exposed and intensified fake universality of design and practices in transnational higher education. Inclusion, we suggested, cannot be achieved by imposing or assuming local values as universal, representing others as tokens, refusing to look beyond those who are already in, denying the hegemony of power, or using stories of those who have bought in to suggest inclusion of everyone from everyone.

Thanks largely to the advent of MOOCs, more scholars around the world are engaged in conversations about cross-border higher education today than ever before. As teachers who are interested in the prospects and pitfalls of emerging academic technologies and pedagogies for learning and teaching across national, social, and cultural contexts, we have been sharing our experiences in different venues. While the hype about the private higher education industry’s push for massive open online courses as the future of cross-border education rages on, we find ourselves much more interested in smaller-scale conversations about teaching and learning in all their confusing complexities.

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5 Bali and Sharma, “Bonds of Difference.”
in different contexts. Essentially, we were brought together primarily by our different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives; it is within the interest in difference that we share ideas, interests, and concerns.

**Bonds of difference**

So, how did the two of us come to share the critical view of MOOCs and what they brought to light about transnational higher education and educational discourse? Maha is a faculty developer and teacher educator at the American University in Cairo who got her PhD from Sheffield, UK; Shyam, is an assistant professor of writing now in New York, a man who hailed originally from the hinterlands of western Nepal (via the routes of education and professional careers in east India, Kathmandu in Nepal, and Kentucky in the US). Because we value (and indeed benefit from) our different identities, ideas, experiences, and perspectives based on our respective backgrounds, we come together in that valuation of difference. However, we are also aware that we are connected by our shared appreciation of difference as it is defined in Western or Westernized academic communities that we are part of.

We started our conversation through a common interest in MOOCs. Our collaboration seems worth noting as a powerful testimony to the idea that networks build communities these days. We had been reading each other’s work for about a year, due to our critical, skeptical, “outsider” perspective on MOOCs. The spark for our professional dialogs came when Shyam noticed a twitter conversation Maha was having using the #FutureEd hashtag, which spilled over to emails and responding to blog posts that we and others in our networks wrote. We critique MOOCs from a global South perspective, providing constructive feedback because we are both interested in the possibilities of what could be called a “humane” pedagogy where educators exchange ideas and students participate in learning across contexts, rather than a one-way traffic of information in the name of education. During those email exchanges, we felt that what
we were discussing privately needed to be shared with the world, and we started the Google Doc that became this article. [As a slightly humorous side note, we co-wrote this paragraph synchronously while chatting on the margin, and when the paragraph was complete—with the two of us completing each other’s sentences—Shyam wrote “Wow” and Maha said “keep it keep it keep it” when he tried to delete it. Several paragraphs in this article have our voices interwoven such that we cannot differentiate where one’s voice starts and the other’s ends.] The shared dissatisfaction about the vast blind spots created by supposedly shared spaces of MOOCs led us to start a new project called EdConteXts (which I elaborate on below), inviting fellow educators from around the world to share their stories and ideas about teaching in their own contexts.\(^6\) We hoped to highlight to educators the significance of context in terms of geopolitical and material conditions, limitations and opportunities, perspectives and experiences.

My ultimate interest is to contribute constructively to the conversation of emerging academic technologies and pedagogies on the front of cross-border higher education. I am both cognizant of the limitations of technology and passionate about exploring its potential, as “digital agnostics.” So, I start by sharing some of the major concerns that temper our enthusiasm about emerging academic technologies for cross-border education, followed by positive potentials of the same developments, giving concrete examples from our personal experiences as academics from the global south who are participating in the emerging spaces for learning and teaching.

In writing the two-part article with Shyam for *Hybrid Pedagogy*, from which I draw some substance here, we were inspired by the journal’s interest in pedagogical alterity.\(^7\) The editors invited “a cacophony of voices” in their call for papers. While the variety of voices that the call seemed to envision did not cover

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\(^7\) Jesse Stommel, “CFP: Pedagogical Alterity: Stories of Race, Gender, Disability, Sexuality,” *Hybrid Pedagogy*, 7 January 2014.
the marginality of academics in and from non-Western contexts/backgrounds, at least our Western-educated selves could identify with the key issues and perspectives in the invited conversation. Like the editors, who draw on the idea that “Difference is not our deficit; it’s our operating system” from Fiona Barnett and Cathy Davidson of HASTAC, we were inspired by the idea of looking at difference positively, as a resource and not a problem. And yet, while parts of us wanted to positively respond to the call to challenge the tendency to view difference as a deficiency, we were also keenly aware of the potential risks that the call may embody insofar as it assumes the desirability of difference, originality, reinvention, and such other ideals/objects as universal rather than local. We shared experiences of how the very attempt at inclusion can inadvertently lead to exclusion. As a simple example, using the metaphor of the “operating system” in order to describe difference as a universal default can exclude many in our communities who will not draw the same inference from the vehicle and/or the tenor of the metaphor. We found it problematic to refer to all humans as having the “same” operating system based on difference (in itself a denial of “difference,” if we ever saw one). We are aware that the idea of “difference” itself has different meanings and values for members of different contexts and communities. In certain contexts in our social and professional lives, diversity, divergence, and dissent mean different things for us compared to our colleagues with whom we “theoretically” found common bonds in the celebration of difference.

Different notions of difference

Educators are increasingly embracing the idea of diversity around the world. Many even go further and value dissidence as means of constructive and productive exploration of ideas and rethinking of educational practices. This may make it seem

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as if educators around the world are teleologically moving toward the idea of promoting difference, reinventing education, challenging conventions and so on. But the challenge arises when the attempts to pursue the above objectives are based on assumptions, contexts, and perspectives assumed universal by those at the global “centers” and hard for others beyond those centers to relate to. So, in spite of all the good intentions, the harder one tries to challenge the current exclusionary systems in favor of accommodating diverse agents and issues, the more entrenched one can be in one’s own “local” context, worldview, and frame of reference. For example, a teacher of philosophy who is based or educated in the Euro-American culture may try to promote critical and independent thinking, originality and rejection of convention, novelty and creativity; but a young man in, say, Nepal, may find these “concepts” more fascinating than practically useful. Participating in the philosophy course may still provide him some cultural capital based on learning the ideas; but unbeknownst to the philosophy teacher, the young man may jeopardize his standing in and prospects in his local society, education, and workplace. An Egyptian woman, on the other hand, may be familiar with the notion of criticism on the street, but have no educational experiences of critiquing the authority of the teacher or the text. It may take years, not just a semester or two, for her to be able to behave critically in an educational setting. She may feel a nagging discomfort, a loss of her innocence as she is encouraged to question hidden agendas. Her initial attempts at critical thinking may create social problems as she starts to rebel indiscriminately against other authorities in her life and becomes perceived as “rude.”

There are also contexts/times when critical thinking (as understood in the North American context as leaning towards skepticism) as a prerequisite to citizenship is not necessarily the most highly valued approach: during times of political uncertainty and conflict, people might be in need of a more con-
In these cases, the teacher who is trying to teach the importance of critical and creative thinking might need to learn that these ideas will need to be translated very differently in different contexts. Needless to say, no local value systems can be valid and meaningful universally.

Difference tends to induce discomfort, which individuals and communities try to overcome or avoid in some way. One of the responses to difference—as when scientists deny the influence of context/culture, politics, economics, and material conditions on the shape and direction of their inquiry—is to “deny” it altogether, to say that there is no difference but a universality of subjects, methods, perspectives, and understanding. A second problematic response to difference—as when those who study society and culture “reify” cultural differences—is to seek and find distinctions, creating silos of sociocultural values, norms, and practices. This approach makes people look for difference, and find it, as when they try to understand cultures and societies by “contrasting” them wholesale, instead of paying attention to how people and societies are increasingly malleable and complex. It puts people and societies in containers defined by distinctions. Thus, the celebration of difference goes in the opposite direction of denying it and tends to overshadow complex overlaps between differences and similarities among societies and cultures.

A third response to difference is to try to recognize differences as a normal and default condition of human life and society. At first, this sounds like an absolutely true description of reality, a practical middle ground between the two extremes above. But on a closer look, this view can also easily go too far. This view “universalizes” difference on the basis of certain local conceptualizations and valuations of difference. Those who assume the universal value and meaning of difference don’t realize that it means different things in different contexts to different people. The universal valuation of difference starts by assuming one’s

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own ground as home, one’s own terms as the fulcrum around which everything else has to turn, whereas difference is intersectional and dynamic. Different in what context, different from what, different from whom, different in what way?

Thus, we postulate that we cannot find common bonds if we forget the paradox of trying to find similarity in difference. If differences are to be valued, they may need to be understood in their own terms, the confusions that they create being tolerated, the complexities that they give rise to be appreciated. That is, for instance, when we say that we can and should all question conventions, be critical and creative, strive for originality, and so on, certain assumptions and conventions still undergird these ideals and ideas. The attempts to create “bonds” through shared spaces, agreed-upon ideas, common denominators, collaboratively derived perspectives may ultimately fail when the foundation of the entire attempt is one party’s familiar territory, when participants of a discussion are from many and vastly different contexts/backgrounds, and when the perspectives are only common via mimicry of those at the center by those in the peripheries. Thus, we urge our readers to be aware that whenever we try to “find” bonds by embracing differences, we might be impoverishing our ideas, weakening the very bases of our bonds.

Fake universality and illusions of inclusion

What are some of the ways we experience exclusion as young non-Western academics? There are the small ways, like the joking cultural reference on Twitter to having a beer or tattoos (excludes Maha as a practicing Muslim). There are the well-intentioned claims that show lack of awareness of global injustice, like a claim that university should not be about getting jobs. In theory, this may sound right almost universally, but claims of “learn before you earn” are slogans that mean nothing for someone who needs to earn so they can live. Some people cannot afford to learn first and earn later. This tendency takes more serious forms when canons of knowledge are assumed to have inherent value and referred to repeatedly. For example, Martha
Nussbaum attempts (in her 1997 book *Cultivating Humanity*) to reform liberal arts education by making it more inclusive of other cultures (including opening up space for knowledges of marginalized peoples) while she continues to refer to liberal arts education from the perspective of the ancient Greeks. She insists that the study of philosophy is inherently valuable for a liberal arts education, despite the fact that the majority of academic philosophers in the US are white and male, who are constantly referring to canons that are largely white and male, becoming largely unwelcoming to difference. And of course, she accepts liberal arts as the ideal approach to “reinvent,” rather than one approach of many that could have been explored. This is not unexpected given that she is an American philosopher. What is strange is that she does not recognize that her recommendation of inclusiveness was paradoxically not used in her book even as she advocates it.

Then there were the mind-bending claims that MOOCs would make “quality education” accessible for millions of students around the world who “have not had such access so far.” In the absence of considerations about the relevance of content, linguistic, technical, and intellectual accessibility in the delivery, and appropriateness and effectiveness of pedagogy, the idea of “quality education” just becomes absurd. A teacher may use bland and non-context-restricted questions and learning objectives in the course, but such an attempt is also bound to find a common ground by denying, reifying, or universalizing contextual differences. For many disciplines, subjects, and issues, it may be ultimately impossible to educate anyone in the entire world by using a one-size-fits-all course and from the convenience of one’s laptop.

We have observed that quite often, in the attempt to make their teaching more inclusive, teachers in the global North include superficial or incidental references to other cultures. What our colleague Dorothy Kim called “referential tokenism” — or a

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mention of diversity to claim inclusion — cannot take the place of true inclusion in teaching/learning or professional networking. Attempts at inclusion can only be authentic and meaningful when we make the content, process, and outcome of education more egalitarian, open, and inclusive.

Teachers who want to create meaningful learning environments for participants from vastly different backgrounds must construct and design their courses with an awareness of the fractals of contextual, cultural, and material differences from the ground up — not by treating those differences as an afterthought and by using superficial gestures. As long as the teaching and learning experiences are only envisioned within the dominant worldview, incorporating patchwork elements about or from diverse others will only serve to distort or reify the differences rather than allowing the stakeholders from different backgrounds to truly participate in learning and sharing ideas. Without rethinking the assumed universals underlying the course design, content, and pedagogy, the canon of established Western knowledge will live on, embellished here and there by some exotic accessories.

Of course, we all have our own unconscious, habituated ways of thinking about the “world out there.” And of course, what I say above does not diminish my appreciation and regards for teachers/scholars who are trying to be inclusive and respectful toward diverse groups of people from around the world. But I do want to emphasize that the moment teachers try to cross their local contexts and invite participants from other contexts, they should also start becoming aware about how their local worldviews and understanding are bound to be incomplete and insufficient. I want to urge teachers to acknowledge that their ideas and teaching methods may not be very meaningful in many different contexts around the world. If educators from dominant contexts were to cultivate and foster such awareness sufficiently, that would add value and incentive for educators from different places or with knowledge about different places to join cross-border educational initiatives, to share their knowledge, to make greater and more positive impacts.
The coming together of educators across borders clearly promises tremendous possibilities for the advancement of education within and across borders. It is the vision of such positive opportunities and possibilities that inspire me to join the conversations, critiquing constructively where we see opportunities for improvement, appreciating what we find beneficial from our local and global perspectives.

As we discuss in the second part of the article, inshallah, subtitled “participation as inclusion,” inclusive communities and collaborations can only happen when we stop assuming that we can do so by simply creating the space and inviting everyone to it. We must ask what principles of learning and sharing the spaces are based on. Whose contexts and values undergird the space and whose voices are being heard/unheard, misunderstood/ununderstood, privileged/marginalized, or stereotyped/glamorized.

**Bonds of difference: Participation as inclusion**

We [the minorities] and you [the dominant] do not talk the same language. When we talk to you we use your language: the language of your experience and of your theories. We try to use it to communicate our world of experience. But since your language and your theories are inadequate in expressing our experiences, we only succeed in communicating our experience of exclusion. We cannot talk to you in our language because you do not understand it.11

What Lugones and Spelman describe above can be illustrated by considering the Arabic word *mazloum* (مظلوم), which has no direct English translation. It means “the person against whom injustice has been done,” but the connotation is so much deeper than that. It is as strong as the word “oppressed” but actually

oppression is a different word in Arabic, idtihad (اضطهاد). When educators try to make complex experiences “legible” to diverse communities of learners and colleagues, those attempts can be problematic in ways that belie the sincerity and commitment of the educators. In our attempts to be legible, “the relative simplicity and platonic orderliness of the [simplified, legible] vision [which] represents rationality” that we use may be tantamount to “authoritarian power,” a power that “demolish[es] the old reality if necessary.”

Top-down attempts to educate the world, enlighten the ignorant, liberate the deprived — whether or not such terms are used or accepted by educators whose voices are inevitably heard through the mechanisms of power and privilege — can make our “rational Utopia fail horribly.” Any grand vision to develop educational/pedagogical models that fit every society, promote learning and knowledge-making globally, bring educators together that are based on certain local understandings and worldviews can be, in the words of Rao again, “generally dangerous, and a formula for failure, [in] that it does not operate by a thoughtful consideration of local/global trade-offs, but through the imposition of a singular view as ‘best for all’ in a pseudo-scientific sense.” In fact, even as we critique such grand visions, we become keenly aware that the very basis of our critique may be singular, limiting, and exclusive of other critical perspectives. Thus, we urge that any educational initiatives that strive to engage people and ideas from across borders and contexts incorporate people and perspectives from as many contexts as possible in the very construction, development, and promotion of those initiatives.

Full inclusion may be an impossible goal, not just across sociocultural and geopolitical borders but also within those borders. However, educators can and should strive for genuine

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
attempts toward inclusion by not assuming the local to be universal, by inviting colleagues and other learners to participate on their own terms, and by developing a high sense of tolerance and openness about difference. Howard describes the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy, because “teachers must be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to students’ social and cultural realities.”

Prospects for productive participation

How can educators strive for inclusion? For example, moocs, however un-inclusive their practice has become since the idea was taken over by corporate interest, were originally developed and experimented as a “connectivist” pedagogical model, which continues to thrive in parallel with the more famous/funded moocs on platforms like Coursera and EdX. Adapting xmoocs to other languages (like the Arabic Edraak) is a very small and limited step. I have since collaborated on multiple open online educational experiments meant to embody participation as inclusion, which we discuss next.

Inclusion by participation

To promote equity, inclusion, and participation of educators from across geopolitical and cultural borders, two (admittedly imperfect) initiatives stand out: EdContexts.org and Virtually-Connecting.org.

**Edcontexts.org** is “an informal network and community of teachers, scholars, students, researchers, and others interested in promoting conversations about education in and across con-

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texts around the world.” Several educators from the global South started this website/blog to counter the largely Western discourse on education, to provide nuanced, localized perspectives from people who are living in different areas of the world. We launched it soon after the Bonds of Difference articles were published (the idea of the website and the articles had emerged in parallel). We invited a diverse team of facilitators, and actively solicit posts by educators from the global South, or some educators from the global North who are highly sensitive to contextual conversations in education. Most of our posts are not written by facilitators; for some time, we posted f5f (“favorite five finds”) by linking to the work of others that we appreciated and wished to promote. We recognize that while we have provided this avenue for a different perspective on education, our website still uses English language since all of us (facilitators) do not speak the same language as each other or as our writers. And of course we use WordPress on Reclaim Hosting and Twitter and Facebook for promotion (all of them US-centric technologies).

VirtuallyConnecting.org was co-founded by Rebecca J. Hogue and me “to enliven virtual participation in academic conferences, widening access to a fuller conference experience for those who cannot be physically present at conferences. Using emerging technologies, we connect onsite conference presenters with virtual participants in small groups. This allows virtual conference attendees to meet and talk with conference presenters, something not usually possible.”

Conferences are all about networking and building social capital — conferences that livestream sessions for virtual participants do not achieve this as they only allow minimal interaction via text boxes among virtual participants or on Twitter. While this is better than nothing, Virtually Connecting goes beyond that and gives virtual participants an opportunity to have a live conversation with onsite presenters/participants/keynote

speakers. By doing so, we expand and extend conference conversations — and in turn enrich the onsite conversation by the perspectives coming in from outside.

Compare the situation of a full-time academic and someone who is an adjunct or graduate student or international scholar. The amount of money a full-time academic receives that could pay for three or four conferences a year might be the same as the money needed for an international scholar to attend one conference a year, and is likely an amount an adjunct does not get at all, and that graduate students do not regularly have access to. Moreover, many people attend conferences but do not get opportunities to have in-depth conversations with others onsite, particularly keynote speakers. As virtually connecting has evolved, conversations with keynotes and onsite participants have grown to have a stronger participant voice. Rather than virtual participants simply asking onsite speakers questions, we are having multi-way conversations, discussing complex questions, and striving for deeper understanding and even solutions. Keynote speakers have thanked us for helping them expand their thinking or extend the conversation beyond the keynote speech itself.

Even though Virtually Connecting sessions are open to anyone to participate (up to the 10 person limit of a Google hangout on Air), we recognize that the experience remains exclusive in the following ways:

1. Conversations are conducted in English;
2. Synchronous livestreaming video requires a minimum infrastructure that supports it, suitable time zones, and digital literacy and willingness for the person to speak live and recorded. Having a team spanning different time zones expands the possibilities;
3. Despite a growing team of virtually connecting buddies, some people might still be uncomfortable requesting to join one of these events if they do not know any of us personally; we have been largely promoting ourselves on Twitter which not everyone uses;
4. We are using Google hangouts, with all the ethical issues that come with using Google products. Other options for synchronous communication are available but none offer the free, livestream & record (with immediate upload to YouTube) options.

One could argue that Virtually Connecting is on others’ terms because most conferences and onsite speakers are Western and the majority of the team (including the co-founder Rebecca) are Western. However, we call it on “our terms” because the initial pilot of #et4buddy was meant to meet a need of mine, and the technical design and approach were all made to fit a developing country context (e.g., Google hangouts poses much fewer technical problems for my internet setup than any other synchronous tool). While Virtually Connecting serves the needs of scholars in the Western world, too, it targets mainly people with limited access to conferences and who are thus less privileged in an academic context—it not only gives us access to listen; it gives us voice and presence.

Inclusion on others’ terms: #TvsZ, ConnectedLearning.tv & #DigiWriMo

By inclusion on others’ terms, we mean that we joined already-existing initiatives, and while participating in them, attempted to make them more inclusive. By participating as a facilitator of #TvsZ (a Twitter game initially designed by Pete Rorabaugh and Jesse Stommel), the game became more conscious of cultural nuances, timezone differences, bandwidth limitations and potential for linguistic and cultural enrichment of the experience when a large number of participants from Egypt joined.19 When Shyam and I co-facilitated ConnectedLearning.tv in July 2015, we brought in an internationally and ethnically diverse set of guests to discuss topics such as equity in ed tech, trans-

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media, educators across contexts, and emerging trends in open scholarship.\textsuperscript{20} When I was invited to facilitate Digital Writing Month (originally created as part of Hybrid Pedagogy), my first thoughts were to include others to co-facilitate and to invite a diverse group of guest contributors.\textsuperscript{21} However, again, we realized that all of our guest contributions were in the English language (and when Maha wrote about this, one participant from Singapore taught us some Chinese).

\textbf{And yet}

Such collaborative, open, online experiences have that potential of including and spreading the power of participants’ voices. Educators need to remember that the attempts to work, learn, and teach across vastly different contexts around the world are no small feats, and therefore, the challenges remain sticky and they deserve continued attention and dedicated attempts to address them. In any of the examples above, language and digital fluency as well as technical access can lead to exclusions. In any situation where people supposedly are given “equal voice,” vocal or eloquent or influential minority voices can have the power to silence others. People are different on many levels, and those differences should not be generalized, idealized, or viewed in monolithic ways.

Educators can delight in the fact that there are promising developments from the perspective of sensible pedagogy and effective teaching and learning. At the same time, they should also realize that there are still tremendous needs for further thinking in the particular case of engaging learners and educators from different national, cultural, and geopolitical backgrounds.

As I, Maha, tweeted during the Digital Learning Research Network conference:


We shouldn’t stop striving for inclusion but we need to recognize our limitations & shifting complexity of ever reaching it\textsuperscript{22}

Also:

Minority voices will almost never be truly heard in a room where dominant perspectives exist. Too much struggle\textsuperscript{23}

Looking back at each of the examples above, we have been working with the master’s tools, the technologies, as well as the approaches, developed in a Western world, using the English language, but trying to make way for a non-Western perspective to influence how it is used.

Cultivating awareness, empathy, and openness

To echo an old saying, drastic changes demand drastic adaptations. As educators, we are able to share our ideas literally across the world, with thousands of learners and colleagues, and with a great deal of added affordances that emerging technologies provide to educators and learners. However, the same developments have also exponentially increased the need to be aware and tolerant about differences, to be willing to accept failure and even misunderstanding, to cultivate empathy in the face of complexity and confusion. The same developments that have opened up unprecedented opportunities for cross-border education and scholarly discourse have also served to expose, quite frankly, embarrassing realities about the status of cross-border education. Most strikingly, otherwise serious and sensitive educators from dominant societies and academies log on to supposedly “open” spaces online, set up curricular and pedagogical mechanisms on their own terms, then all but forget the vastly different contexts of the majority of participants whom they claim they are benefiting. But on the heels of such exposures of

\textsuperscript{22} Maha Bali (@Bali_Maha), Twitter post, 17 October 2015, 6:47 a.m.
\textsuperscript{23} Maha Bali (@Bali_Maha), Twitter post, 18 October 2015, 2:32 p.m.
parochialism, insensitivity, and lack of awareness have come a
number of new developments, as we discussed above.

The fact that educators can now reach out to thousands
also means that they need to slow down, to invite participants
from different contexts for genuine participation, to listen and
learn from others, to enrich their own understanding. It is also
equally necessary to not simply criticize, find faults, and pass
judgments when new opportunities bring about new challenges
and blind spots. Criticism seems necessary, but that shouldn’t
be an end; it should be a means. What are the ways in which we
can make critique more useful and productive? Thus, we urge
that educators across borders offer different perspectives as a
necessary, constructive addition and enrichment for the ongo-
ing conversations about cross-border education — and often the
lack thereof.

In the *Hybrid Pedagogy* call for proposals we were drawn
to the quotation from Paulo Freire: “the great humanistic and
historical task of the oppressed [is] to liberate themselves and
their oppressors as well.” We certainly don’t see the many well-
intentioned and intellectually inspired colleagues from Europe,
North America, and elsewhere as “oppressors” of any kind.24 We
are in fact sympathetic to even those who buy into and promote
open education as a means to “save” the world out there from its
own ignorance and backwardness; for instance, when we come
across courses whose design and execution signals no consider-
atation for how participants from vastly different contexts around
the world may partake of the course/community, we simply
view that as an opportunity for pointing out the weakness in
the pedagogy and curriculum. We write with the understanding
that there is a positive need for constructive dialogues in the
world of cross-border higher education more than ever before.

There is no guarantee that goodwill of educators in one place
will translate into goodwill across contexts, or that goodwill
when implemented will result in universal social good. And

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York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 44.
we are not suggesting we give up on offering education across borders. I am suggesting that such an education cannot be assumed to represent or meet the needs of diverse others unless it involves those diverse others on deeper levels. Even if those diverse others are still a privileged subset of what and whom they represent (as academics often are), we cannot assume that we know. We should always assume there is more to know, and that others might know it better.

As Sidorkin states in “Toward a Pedagogy of Relation,” “polyphonic truth is a much more workable concept than any other form of knowledge. Relations thus are not describable by one person. Instead, a group of people can describe relations, and then one person can describe their description.”\(^\text{25}\) We want to go further than having one person offer their description to the world, like an anthropologist, and instead give each person the space and voice to describe without an intermediary, as in autoethnography (see this “untext,” collaborative autoethnographic accounts of the #rhizo14 MOOC).\(^\text{26}\)

Working with and through each other should not be seen as a liability, a hassle. It is a process that can transform us. We remember Bakhtin here: “I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another… I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another.”\(^\text{27}\) Indeed, we wrote this document through an exploration of our similarities and our differences, through learning about ourselves as we reveal ourselves to each other and to the potential reader. Our experience tells us that we approach all knowledge in this


way, recognizing that our own knowledge is *always necessarily* “partial,” as Ellsworth suggests: partial as in biased, partial as in incomplete. Jamaica Kincaid reminds us of the impossibility of a (colonized) people giving an accurate account of their own events — the important thing to remember here is that Western/white accounts are also inherently incomplete, inaccurate and biased, and that the only way to get a clearer picture is to continually make room for more lenses, recognizing the power dynamics and intersectionality in doing so.

With Edcontexts.org we envisioned tapping into the experiences and expertise of scholars from different contexts in order to create a shared platform for growing new ideas, forging new relations, and cultivating awareness and empathy. We intended to make knowledge-making and knowledge-sharing in and across many and different contexts a truly open enterprise, open in its many senses — as ongoing, allowing access, exposed to the outside, making the inside exposed, unfolding, and accepting of anyone. We are grateful to all fellow educators from around the world who have contributed to EdContexts.org and we hope to continue promoting (inshallah) the voices of educators who may not feel comfortable, be heard, or taken seriously in transnational platforms that are dominated mostly by the same dominant groups of people, Western white men, regardless of good intentions.

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