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International Summer Schools as a Platform of Inclusive Education for Doctoral Students

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International Summer Schools as a Platform of Inclusive Education for Doctoral Students

Abstract

This paper is based on reflections on my understanding of international summer schools, drawing from my personal experiences while participating in one of them, which took place in a European country in 2021. I argue that international summer schools can play an important role as an international academic forum in the practice of inclusive education for doctoral students and early career researchers from various perspectives. I use the model of three levels of inclusion advanced by Qvortrup and Qvortrup to justify my arguments in this autoethnographic study. I discuss the study methodology and provide an overview of the timetable followed by the international summer school that I attended. Then, I argue how it provided an inclusive learning experience to the participant students from numeric/physical, social, and psychological perspectives. I conclude by observing that international summer schools need to utilise their transnational nature to initiate race-sensitive, culturally responsive discussions among their participant students. This approach will help to create critical cultural awareness among its students, trying to give a clear picture of the intercultural makeup of the world as it exists.

Keywords: international summer schools, inclusive education, intercultural awareness, cultural diversity, multicultural learning atmosphere

Introduction: What are International Summer Schools?

In the globalised world of today, there is increased migration and exchange of ideas. It often seems that the entire world is at the fingertips of people. Therefore, for inclusive educational development and experience, which are increasingly becoming a goal in many countries across the globe today (Ainscow, 2020; Jackson et al., 2018; Landorf et al., 2023; Nilsen, 2010), students need to avail opportunities that give them internship or summer school opportunities, whether nationally or internationally.

International summer schools (ISSs) as an educational facility can be traced to the early 19th century when world-renowned educational institutions like Cambridge University organised summer schools through short programmes for international students in 1923 (University of Cambridge, 2008; 2024). Nevertheless, the ISSs are a more recent development in higher education in European countries like Italy (Dallari et al., 2011) and Ukraine (Demeshkant et al., 2015). Over the years, the ISSs have gained their reputation and authenticity by involving distinguished academicians and experts from across the world (Demeshkant et al., 2015). This development has facilitated the ISSs in delivering internationally recognised courses based on specific learning outcomes and credit points (DIRI, 2009,

cited in Dallari et al., 2011). Moreover, the Universities hosting these ISSs also have a motive in organising and conducting them because this is beneficial for them from a publicity and promotional point of view by bringing themselves into the international scene. Performing well as summer school host or co-host partner universities may widen their avenues as participant students might consider applying to these Universities for their extended period in a foreign university (Havadi-Nagy & Illovan, 2013). Over the years, the ISSs for doctoral students have become considerably competitive; in other words, they are awarded based on competition (University of Oxford, 2024), where students are selected from a large pool based on specific criteria like their research interest, curriculum vitae, and a supportive letter from the student's supervisor or institution.

Importance of ISSs in pandemic circumstances

The importance of ISSs has possibly reached a new dimension in the wake of COVID-19, which caused tremendous difficulties for doctoral students (Bagchi, unpublished doctoral thesis; Stancer et al., 2023). The difficulties revolved around various aspects of their study (Levine et al., 2021), ranging from arranging fees to creating a research design to acquiring ethical approval and gatekeeper's entry to delay in data collection to difficulty in analysis and write-up stages, and last but not least, to getting visa extension (for international students). Doctoral students experience considerable psychological distress concerning anxiety and depression (Sideropoulos et al., 2022). Barry et al. (2018) contend that doctoral students experience psychological disturbance six times more than the general population, so much so that it adversely affects their completion of doctoral degree. The pandemic also had serious implications for the mental health of doctoral students (Byrom, 2020; Chirikov et al., 2020) due to their isolation and worrying thoughts regarding their own job prospects in specific and the job market and economy in general (Chen et al., 2022; Salimi et al., 2023). A study in Wuhan, China, reports doctoral students' experiences of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to COVID-19-related complications (Li et al., 2021). Another study shows more pandemic-induced disruption among female doctoral students than males, as the former experienced more issues related to general stress and anxiety than their male counterparts (Sverdlik et al., 2023). Most importantly, the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic led to academic isolation among doctoral students as they were removed from their normal study environment with peers and lecturers (Gaeta et al., 2021; Pyhältö et al., 2023). According to Brinkert et al. (2020), factors like self-isolation, social distancing, and working from home resulted in major changes in the daily routine of doctoral students. Scholars also evidence issues around motivation (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020), caregiving responsibilities (Levine et al., 2021), imposter syndrome (Sverdlik et al., 2020), and isolation (Huang et al., 2020) among higher education students during the pandemic. Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that the pandemic created additional challenges in the doctoral students' personal lives. It is known that doctoral students report handling hardships in

balancing responsibilities in their academic and personal lives (Rizzolo et al., 2016). It is necessary to stress here that amidst the pandemic, our personal lives became somewhat entwined with our professional lives and vice versa. This is because we did a lot of professional work at home on the virtual platform while managing our personal lives, which often entered our professional spaces. This is especially true in my case as I worked as a University teaching assistant alongside my doctoral study.

At this point, it is important to mention that summer schools were organised even during COVID-19, albeit less. A world-renowned educational organisation successfully conducted a virtual summer school lasting for a week by enrolling doctoral students drawn from five continents to provide opportunities for the maintenance of their learning experience and engagement with a wider research community (Cullinane et al., 2022). This summer school experience is a significant example as it highlights not only the potential role of remotely conducted summer schools in engaging experienced and beginner doctoral researchers across the world in an enriching intellectual learning experience but also its convenience for being pocket-friendly and environmentally desirable by reducing international travel (Cullinane et al., 2022). However, as the pandemic restrictions were eased, the ISSs provided a welcome break from the lonely and frustrating lockdown experiences (McKenna-Plumley et al., 2021) by offering a prestigious international forum for renewed academic and social networking in an in-person mode. Generally speaking, while the ISSs are conducted for a short duration aimed at stimulating an engrossed and rigorous learning experience, they balance it with an entertainment quotient by organising recreational excursions to nearby touristic locales and socialising events. Apart from having a mainly academic focus (Dallari et al., 2011), the ISSs have a rather interdisciplinary approach and often involve professors and tutors who have experience working in multiple and inter-disciplinary engagements (Havadi-Nagy & Illovan, 2013). This leads the ISSs to provide an opportunity for the professors and tutors to use their diverse experiential teaching strategies, pedagogical procedures, and resources in the wider educational atmosphere, transcending local, regional, and national boundaries (Havadi-Nagy & Illovan, 2013). Therefore, there is a possibility for the professors and tutors to add a complicated, rich, and complementary understanding of the topic under study (Havadi-Nagy & Illovan, 2013). From the above discussion, it can be argued that the ISSs attempt a unique inclusive practice by bringing under one roof experts and students from a range of social and educational domains, thereby offering innovative and enriching learning experiences to their student attendees.

In this paper, I reflect on my understanding and feelings of the ISSs following autoethnography. I do this based on my personal experiences while participating in one ISS, which took place in northern Portugal in 2021. I reflect on the important role that the ISS played as an alternative interactive academic platform in the doctoral journey of an early career researcher from various perspectives. With this view in mind and to fulfil this objective, I attempt to use the model of three levels of inclusion advanced by Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018). Before going into their model of inclusion, it is necessary to have an idea of what inclusive education is. Therefore, the following section focuses on a general discussion of inclusion in education.

Inclusion

Inclusion constitutes an essential constituent element of the education system through which educational institutions respond to a whole range of diverse needs of their students by adopting different measures (Bagchi, unpublished doctoral thesis). It supports restructuring the education setup in order to cater to the necessary changes mentioned (Nilsen, 2010). The history of inclusive education can be traced to Denmark, where inclusive special educational arrangements were guaranteed by law in 1958 for children experiencing disabilities (Gjerløff et al., 2014, cited in Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). The concept of inclusion itself created a dilemma by including within it an implication of exclusion in the sense of excluding some categories of children from general schooling (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Eventually, research showed that children with disabilities could also perform reasonably well in general educational setups, following which there was a merge of special education and general education formats (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). A balanced arrangement of having both education for all and inclusive education for all students was sought formally as an international arrangement through the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) and reinforced by the Luxembourg Charter of 1996. It was signed by all European countries. Inclusive education encourages the removal of barriers that hinder students' participation and achievement and admission of students across a whole variety of capabilities and backgrounds, including those students who may be at risk of experiencing marginalisation, underachievement, and exclusion (Ainscow, 2020; Ainscow et al., 2006; UNESCO, 2005 p. 10). Inclusive education has been explained variedly, which has resulted in complications in understanding and implementing the concept (Ainscow, 2013; Booth & Ainscow, 1998). For instance, while the chief aim of inclusive education is often understood as providing education for children experiencing disabilities, inclusive education will be successful for *all* children with a whole range of different characteristics such as language, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Schuelka, 2018). Thus, the key to successful inclusive practice lies in the fact that it is for every child, with or without disabilities (Schuelka, 2018). This supports the argument that all children have the right to share similar educational space (Florian et al., 2016; Schuelka, 2018; Schuelka & Johnstone, 2012; UNESCO-IBE, 2016). Inclusion is focused in schools concerning the participation and achievement of all children as against their segregation and exclusion (Ainscow, 2013; 2020). The concept of inclusion is deeply connected to inclusive teaching pedagogies, forming the foundation of efficient teaching and learning (Makopoulou & Thomas, 2016). Finally, it is a continuous process involving school transformation for positive, improved, meaningful, and relevant educational experiences for all children (Ainscow, 2013; Schuelka, 2018).

Inclusion following Qvortrup and Qvortrup

Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) draw on Lyons et al. (2016) to observe that widespread literature and empirical studies focused on inclusive education dealing with inclusive teaching practice and barriers to achieving it. To this end, extensive toolkits were also extended for the benefit of schools interested in practising inclusion in their educational practice. In their work, Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) refer to Luhmann's three levels of inclusion. Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) talk about Luhmann's (1995; 1977) three levels of inclusion, which are societal, organisational, and interactional, involving the operating sub-systems within each. The societal level of inclusion may refer to whether a person takes part or not in social discussions or engagements like political talks or sports activities by visiting a football match. Organisational level of inclusion refers to whether a person is included or excluded as a staff member of a firm. Finally, the interactional level of inclusion refers to whether a person is included or excluded from smaller casual circles like people in neighbourhoods, familial bonded people or relatives, and students in a classroom or playground. The systems of inclusion and exclusion in schools are similar to the ones existing in the wider society. "A focus on the complexities of inclusion is not only relevant as a prerequisite for managing inclusion of all children but also as a way of preparing the children for participation in society" (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018, p. 810).

Following this line of argument from the perspective of understanding the inclusion of students in the school community and other community arenas connected to the school, Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) discuss the concept of inclusion involving three dimensions:

- Levels of inclusion (meaning inclusion is a physical and social process and is important for addressing the person's sense of belonging to the community)
- Arenas of inclusion (meaning inclusion means more than the teaching and learning process embracing other domains connected to the school and classroom)
- Degrees of inclusion (meaning a person is not only included or excluded but included and/or excluded to varying degrees)

For the purpose of the present article, I will focus on only the levels of inclusion formulated by Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018). They maintain that inclusion includes three major dimensions: physical, social, and psychological. In levels of inclusion focussing on the "physical" aspect of it, there is an emphasis on the element of quantity over quality. That is, the larger the student population is, the higher the inclusion level. As for the social aspect at the level of inclusion, it is important to see whether the student engages actively socially with teaching, learning, and other social activities taking place within the study community. These two understandings focus on students in total instead of the particular experiences of the individual students concerning inclusion. One example can be taking part in various wider societal charitable events although not feeling a belongingness or 'includedness' by the other

social participants belonging to that community. According to Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018), it is necessary to include and combine data on levels of numeric, social, and psychological inclusion. Thus, the concept of Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) aims at a redefined perception of inclusive education. This they do by holding that a variety of aspects and arenas are connected to the school experience both inside and outside the classroom. These include not only the physical and social requirements but also psychological requirements that encompass activities and practices both inside and outside a classroom and concern a variety of arenas connected to the school. To summarise, three levels of inclusion can be considered in the definition of inclusion:

- (1) Numeric level: Is the student physically included in the community?
- (2) Social level: Is the student socially engaging in the community?
- (3) Psychological level: Does the student feel recognised, accepted, respected, and supported by fellow members of the community, and feels a sense of school belonging?

It can be noted that the concept of Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) is aimed at creating an inclusive school environment, culture, and practice for the existence, engagement, and performance of all students (Ainscow, 2020). Nevertheless, I argue that their conceptualisation of inclusive education is possibly applicable to students at any stage of their education. In the present article, I use the concept of inclusion advanced by Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) for adult University students attending the ISSs at their doctoral level. But before coming to that discussion, I dedicate the following section to the methodology adopted in the present study.

Methodology

Autoethnography was used as a research methodology in the present study. Autoethnography involves a critical study of the self in relation to cultural context/s, one or more (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9), by engaging the researcher in cultural evaluation and meaning-making (Chang, 2008). It sits in the qualitative research tradition; it is interpretive, reflexive, and ethnographic, where the researcher is the subject of investigation (Deitering, 2017; Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Consistency is required in autoethnography in data collected from the self and others and in how they are amalgamated to establish meaning (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). It is a research method where the pursuit of self-exploration and self-analysis assists the qualitative researcher in positioning themselves as a social being within their own history and culture, interacting with the world and with others, and thereby broadening their interpretation of values with respect to others (Starr, 2010). Thus, autoethnography includes the researcher's deeply personal domain, resulting in an enlightened understanding of the culture in question (Muncey, 2005). Autoethnography often stresses transformative learning and emancipatory pedagogy (Deitering, 2017; Eisner, 2004). The transformative value of autoethnography lies in the

thorough analysis of the lived experiences of the self, an examination of the identity in relation to others, and the culture in which we find ourselves (Starr, 2010).

Autoethnography has been criticised for being a self-indulgent, subjective, and personal write-up with limited association with scholarly practice (Anderson, 2006; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Coffey, 1999; Walford, 2009). However, the value of autoethnography lies in its ability for social change and dialogue initiation for social change, which are arguably the most valuable yet least understood aspects of autoethnography (Starr, 2010). Moreover, it is argued that self-study research like autoethnography may encounter methodological challenges concerning the creation of authority based on methodological traditions (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) view that since data expands considerably, the researcher may find it difficult to analyse and honestly report the data adhering to a proper methodological tradition. Nevertheless, scholars contend that autoethnography successfully balances honest emotion, creativity, and rigorous analysis (Deitering, 2017; Méndez, 2013).

In my study, I have used evocative autoethnography, which enabled me to adopt a free-form style and incline towards sympathy and resonance with the reader (Poerwandari, 2021). Following this approach, the deep experiences that I shared, their conceptual insight, and evaluation enabled me to evoke reflexive insight from my reader (Poerwandari, 2021). Some data collection methods used in autoethnography traditionally include interviews, observation, field notes, and research diaries (Morse & Richards, 2002; Wall, 2008). The data used in my study are drawn from my personal notes and reflective diary extracts that I collected during my attendance at a European ISS in Portugal in 2022. There are autoethnographic studies that draw data from diary extracts (example, Ettore, 2005) and reflective journals (example, Duncan, 2004). The present article draws on personal experiences; I write a personal narrative with a focus on my academic, research, and personal life (Tillmann, 2009) to “invite others to think *and* to feel” (Bochner & Ellis, 2022, p. 14). Personal narratives seek to understand a self or a life aspect “as it intersects with a cultural context ... and invite readers ... to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives” (Ellis, 2004, p. 46, cited in Ellis et al., 2011). In my study, I have also relied on my memory of the experiences I had while being present at the research site (summer school) and with the social actors over there (lecturers, fellow attendees). Scholars considerably stress memory as an important tool supplemented by other tools like field notes as the researcher carries their impressions, scenarios, and experiences relating to the field in their heads, all of which may not be recorded (Coffey, 1999; Ottenberg, 1990; Wall, 2008). Like other research methodologies, autoethnography ensures validity, reliability, and generalisability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In the present study, I sought validity through effective story-telling (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), reliability through social construction of knowledge involving a high degree of reflexivity (Gurvitch et al., 2008, cited in Starr, 2010), and generalisability through my honest and rigorous effort to write in a way such that the reader can understand and identify with my feelings and experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 1992; 2000; Starr, 2010) at the ISS. Now that I have discussed my methodology, at this stage, I can try

to link the different inclusion levels advanced by Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018) to the education platform provided by ISSs. But before that, it is essential to give a brief overview of the timetable and routine followed by the ISS that I attended.

ISS timetable: an overview

I would like to start this section by looking at the main topics of inquiry covered by this residential programme, which lasted for a week. The central theme of this ISS was research design. In the ISS that I attended, there were seventy early career researchers or students at various stages of their doctoral study. The ISS framed its timetable by including plenary sessions with an emphasis on the different aspects of research, including research design, conceptual framework, methodology, ethical decisions, and the researcher's reflexivity. It had a presentation on how to publish, which was especially helpful to early career researchers (ECRs) who have plans to publish at some point in their career, sooner or later. The keynote speaker presented a research study based on an Asian city during COVID-19, highlighting the important role of ethics and reflexivity in different stages of a research study, such as data collection, analysis, and write-up.

The ISS included group activities for the participant students, where they were divided into smaller groups to discuss their research study with two experienced tutors designated to each group. There was a field trip to a partner University around an hour away in northern Portugal, where we had the opportunity to attend research presentations by experienced scholars. These presentations were enlightening from an academic point of view as they gave an opportunity to get informed about experiential learning on the related thematic focus of the ISS. Based on cutting-edge empirical studies, these presentations contained detailed descriptions of the literature, research gap, and methodological details, including participant recruitment, data collection, interpretation, analysis techniques, and findings. As a doctoral student, these presentations provided a complicated but enriching image of the challenges and rewards a research project may involve, giving me pointers on working on my own research study intricately.

On the final day, the participant students were placed in particular groups based on their research topic. In this group, each participant student participated in a micro-presentation lasting for around ten minutes of their research study. Here, they could focus on their research design, which they had the opportunity to refine during the entire week. They received feedback on various aspects of their study from the other group members and the assigned tutor for the presentation, who acted as the Chair. Finally, the ISS also took care of all the students' entertainment in the intense study routine by taking them sightseeing and organising a social dinner towards the end of the week.

Numeric or physical inclusion

In this section, I argue how ISS facilitates a numeric or physical inclusion of doctoral students. Here, I focus on the ISS's role in not only providing interactional lectures, plenary sessions, and workshops but also scope for brief research presentations and thoughtful discussions by doctoral students. It can be noted that the interactional lectures and thought-provoking discussions allowed the students to have a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, which can be defined as the capability to put ideas into practice by integrating innovative and creative techniques. These academic interactions can be partly attributed to the experienced tutors who informed us about how we could plan and manage our projects by emphasising the pragmatic objectives in order to utilise the slightest opportunity while strictly adhering to the research's ethical procedures. For example, I remember one tutor asking us: "Are you familiar with SMART goals?". She suggested the necessity of following SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals to promote good research practice. These competencies are especially important for university researchers to excel in their professional and personal lives (Havadi-Nagy & Illovan, 2013). I argue that these competencies were particularly helpful in the wake of COVID-19 for ECRs like me who faced a significant delay in their research study.

It would possibly be reasonable to assume here that through the interactional activities, the ISS provided a safe and brave platform in a non-judgemental atmosphere for the students to share their thoughts with peers without fear and inhibitions. The ISS ensured the students' active engagement when the students expressed their views and reflections individually after completing each of the tasks and activities set for them. This approach paved the way for necessary skill development like cooperation, speaking, listening, presentation, career advancement, networking, personal development, and the possibility of future collaboration on projects and publications with foreign colleagues. By looking at the main areas around research design, reflexivity, and ethics covered by this residential summer school, the ISS experience was academically enriching for me. One example of collaborative engagement was when we, as a group, created a folder for all the team members to share relevant links, a chosen bibliography, photographs, and any other relevant document that related to our particular project areas.

Furthermore, the friendly interactive format within the ISS allowed me to express my thoughts freely and improve my networking and communication skills. The presentation in front of peers meant for me to get valuable tips on multiple areas of the research study from an international perspective. Engagement in academic discussions and debates with internationally located doctoral researchers at the ISS helped to refine my ideas and boost my confidence. This further helped to refine my research methodology. This line of argument is also backed by literature. "Students learn advanced theoretical and practical knowledge in order to develop practical and transferable strategies and solutions which adapt to their home country reality" (Havadi-Nagy & Illovan, 2013, p. 130).

The study of Wisker et al. (2010, p. 613) focuses on how remote supervision of doctoral students amidst the pandemic influenced their possibilities to make "learning leaps" that were necessary for the completion of their doctoral studies. While there are viable ways of using the ISSs to stimulate a range of information promoting inclusive education, it will be possibly ambitious to call the ISSs "learning

leaps” in the words of Wisker et al. (2010, p. 613). I think that in today’s academic scenario, the ISSs have the potential to serve as a catalyst with a burst of information from an international perspective. I recall sharing with the tutors: “I cannot say how helpful this ISS has been to me. It has made several niche areas clear for me”. As a doctoral student, I am often tempted to read and draw upon literature from the most relevant and specifically related national or continental context to which the topic relates instead of looking at the wider world at large. Hence, getting the opportunity to interact with a broader international audience who provided critical and constructive feedback in a cooperative face-to-face format was possibly otherwise not that easily available to me studying in one of my country’s remote universities.

Social inclusion

I discuss the social level of inclusion offered by the ISSs. Here I focus on the role of the ISS in providing the doctoral students with networking and socialising opportunities not only within the members of the allotted groups but also beyond it during the mid-morning and afternoon breaks, lunchtimes, evening social interchanges, and final day farewell dinner. The advantage of networking is well-documented in advancing academic career development through social assistance and career progression (Heffernan, 2021). In this context, it is possible to draw on the work of Cheng (2004) to explain students’ sense of community. This is because, generally speaking, the ISSs also try to give a campus community environment to its participant students in a fixed time period both inside and outside the lecture rooms. According to Cheng (2004), among other things, a sense of community can be provided by creating an open atmosphere where the student’s individuality and free expression are permitted and respected, offering an active learning and social atmosphere in the residential programme. I think that the arguments used by Cheng to discuss the students’ sense of campus community are equally applicable in the context of the ISS. Drawing from my experience of attending an ISS, I argue that the ISS tried to provide a community feel to the participant students. I would like to mention two particular instances that were significant in my experience of the ISS in terms of social inclusion both outside and inside the lecture rooms.

Firstly, outside the lecture rooms, the coffee breaks, mid-morning refreshment breaks, and lunch times allowed the students to gather together. The students sat on any table that was empty or where they wished and started socialising at once. It also happened at times when the student-tutor demarcation became blurred, and everyone sat together and enjoyed their drinks and food. I remember once looking for a table when a tutor said: “Hey, why don’t you join us?” Instances like these led to more intense student-tutor interactions. Furthermore, the organised tours and residential experiences gave more informal and casual opportunities for socialisation. When we travelled by bus, there was no fixed seat allocated to the students. This meant that the students could mix more widely by travelling to the place

by one bus and returning by another. The walking together back and forth to the ISS venue also gave opportunities for casual chitchats, adding a wonderful dimension to the scope of students' socialisation. These interactions served two purposes. First, academically speaking, these interactions provided me a common ground to get the information and understanding of how my fellow researchers had adapted to the drastic changes in the pandemic with respect to the various aspects of online research. This was specifically important for me as a "Pandemic Times" researcher following the pandemic restrictions (Bagchi, unpublished doctoral thesis) and conducting partially digital research in a "hands-off" mode (Lupton, 2021) on the sensitive topic around race that involved minors in primary schools. The break-up times, organised tours, and casual walks were instances that facilitated social inclusion, helping to experience a feeling of company as the socialisation continued outside the lecture rooms, transcending beyond smaller group circles that were allotted to each person inside the lecture rooms (Cheng, 2004).

Secondly, I mention an instance of social inclusion within the lecture room. At the beginning of one day during the ISS, one student asked whether our group could start the day with a fun game that was played in their community. It required all the members of the group to go around in circles and make the sound of their favourite animal with their mouths. For students working at their doctoral level at the epitome of the academic hierarchy, this fun game may be considered by some as immature and suitable for minors like nursery children or primary schoolers. However, to our surprise, we all thoroughly enjoyed playing it and burst into childish laughter. This fun game possibly gave us a refreshing break from the tightly designed, intense work schedule for us as students. More importantly, this game went a long way to break the ice and familiarise us with each other, facilitating socialisation. Additionally, it also gave a feeling of social connection as equal members of a group to all the students coming from different countries to be a part of the game. This was particularly essential in the aftermath of Covid-19 when individuals became reduced to numbers: numbers of people living and numbers of people dead. Similarly, this fun activity possibly allowed the students to feel that they were more than "a number" in the register (Boyer, 1990). No wonder these interactions gave us an opportunity to twine with the ISS participants; many of us made friends and acquaintances in a short time. These instances show the important role played by the ISS in fostering and enriching the social life of doctoral students.

Psychological inclusion

Finally, I discuss the role of the ISS in providing inclusion at the psychological level for doctoral students. This may be aligned with one of the chief capacities of the European Union's recommendations on the key competencies for lifelong learning (European Union, 2006), which refers to a condition to ensure an opportunity to communicate in various foreign languages, facilitating an intercultural understanding and following cultural diversity (Havadi-Nagy & Illovan, 2013). Apart from the academics-oriented activities, the internationally-located summer schools provide a deeper understanding and cognitive perceptions of the geographical, historical, social, and economic contexts

of the region, thereby playing an important part in dismantling preconceived perceptions. For instance, the ISS that I attended gave the doctoral students an opportunity to come in close contact with a knowledge of the food, culture, language, practices, and ways of life in Portugal. Sightseeing and guided tours facilitated knowing the culture and geography of the place more closely, which provided the opportunity to gain rich personal experience. After a hard and fulfilling day, we had ample free time made available to us within the programme. At these times, we could venture out independently, whether alone or in groups as suitable to our personal interests in our leisure time for visiting the different beautiful locales (for example, sea, city sightseeing) or absorbing the local vibes of the place by watching a movie, visiting a pub, or interacting with the local people. On one occasion, some of us planned a trip together downtown, also called the city centre. A fellow student said: “Let’s take thirty minutes or so to freshen up and meet in the lobby.” The sightseeing facilitated the development of our social skills and civic competencies. Social competence means personal, interpersonal, and intercultural competence, which is beneficial to understanding the customs and manners in diverse contexts, while civic competence refers to a person’s mindfulness of the crucial links of today’s world like citizenship, equity, justice, law, democracy, and diversity (Havadi-Nagy & Illovan, 2013). As a performing artist, the sightseeing and trips to tourist places during the week-long residential programme offered by the ISS were particularly valuable to me as they were rich learning experiences themselves. This is because they provided a philosophical retreat through the tourist trips that brought me closer to the art, culture, and heritage of a totally different place. This kind of psychological inclusion gave me a good opportunity to gain deep knowledge about the city in northern Portugal where the ISS was conducted and its surroundings, which would have otherwise possibly remained at a superficial layer of knowledge in my life. This is due to the fact that I do not think I might have considered visiting these specific places even though I might have visited other parts of Portugal in the future.

Conclusion

The present article discussed an autoethnographic study of ISSs through my personal experiences and reflections as a doctoral student by drawing from literature. While ISS was a good learning experience, I hope that this article may help to make a scholarly contribution and present credible scientific findings. Future research on ISSs may include more data sources like interviews and surveys to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic under study. Additionally, collaboration of more autoethnographers may offer diverse perspectives leading to richer and more nuanced insights. Finally, longitudinal autoethnographic studies conducted on ISSs may be useful to capture changes in the nature of ISSs over time. I think that the ISSs can become an important player in the modern academic scene for doctoral students with a combination of learning, social, recreational, and entertainment objectives (Cooper et al., 2000; Dallari et al., 2011). Based on the inclusion model of Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018), I have tried to show that the potential of the ISSs cannot be ignored

as an alternative framework for practising inclusive education among doctoral students. Being short, intensive, compact, and focused, and often organised in heritage or tourist towns or cities, the ISSs are multipurpose and match education objectives with social and leisure ones. Moreover, the didactic and scientific approach of the ISSs, with an international makeup and interdisciplinary nature, provides a framework for an enlightening interchange of ideas, acquisition of knowledge, development of central skills, team-building work, and innovative academic thinking (Havadi-Nagy & Illovan, 2013). The ISS was a remarkable experience and proved to be a real advantage for me as a doctoral student with fixed financial budgets while working within specified regional and national boundaries. For future implications and a more critically enriching inclusive atmosphere, I propose race-sensitive, culturally responsive discussions to be considered for incorporation within the scope of the ISSs. This line of argument emphasises the necessity for ISSs to become platforms that espouse education along the lines of social justice and equity. By becoming a cradle of empathy for the doctoral students in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19, the ISS that I attended showed an initiation of significant possibilities and potential for its members to ignite friendships, ongoing connection (albeit virtually), and exchange of educational ideas for those working on similar research projects.

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