

Diversity in Art Education

Reflective paper

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Write a 2000-3000-word paper on how you perceive diversity, keeping in view the theories and insights discussed in class and who you might be, as a diversity and social justice minded educator, and what sort of art or design classroom you want to create based on the content of this course.

*Diversity*, a word that is being used all the time and everywhere especially in recent times. Before we talk about it, firstly it is important to understand the meaning of diversity. According to one of the definitions of Diversity:

*The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.*<sup>1</sup>

It pretty much included everything and shows that diversity is about acceptance, tolerance, empathy and so on and so forth. According to another definition:

*The diversity definition refers to the existence of variations of different characteristics in a group of people. These characteristics could be everything that makes us unique, such as our cognitive skills and personality traits, along with the things that shape our identity (e.g. race, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, cultural background).*<sup>2</sup>

Here, they are also specifically mentioning personality traits and cognitive skills and that diversity is not restricted to physiological aspects but it is a mindset that enable us to understand the differences and then accept it and not just accept it but be tolerant towards the differences as well.

So, talking about the differences it is important to understand that differences are present everywhere around us whether we talk about human differences, differences in the mindsets, in families, in schools, offices; each and everything is different from one another.

Then why do we even need diversity, isn't it a 'matter of fact' to be tolerant towards each other's differences? It means it is not just about the differences, tolerance or acceptance. The need of diversity

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gladstone.uoregon.edu/~asuomca/diversityinit/definition.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://resources.workable.com/hr-terms/diversity-definition>

arises when one person thinks he/ she is superior to the other person for any reason; whether because of the position, color, religion, culture and so on and so forth.

So, the question is what makes one superior than the other, who set this precedent that *abc* is superior than *xyz* or *xyz* is inferior than *abc*. Because no one born with such mindsets.

These differences generate in ones mindset because of the culture and society because there are times when people are forced to see the differences amongst each other. Let's take an example of any TV show, where they casually divert the audience towards someone's body or color or race and often times you don't even notice unless they make you notice that.

On the other hand, even before a child interacts with the society, he/ she gets an exposure and develop the mindset from/ with his/ her family and a lot of times a child experience such discrimination from his own home rather than from the society first. They make you see what you have and what you don't have as per the needs of the 'society', till then no one will feel the inferiority as well as superiority complex.

As Maxine Greene said:

*At once, I keep pondering the meanings of inclusion and wondering how it can occur without the kind of normalization that wipes out differences, forcing them to be repressed, to become matters of shame rather than pride.*<sup>3</sup>

Here she is talking about inclusion and inclusion cannot be separated from the idea of diversity. In fact it is not wrong if we say that diversity is something that is present around us and is in born but inclusion is something that we practice or do. Now, that we have the differences and complexes due to which we need to practice inclusion then what is the best way to deal with the differences and practice conclusion?

Steven Vertovec gave the idea of 'Super-diversity', in which he says:

*First, to briefly recap the idea: 'super-diversity' was intended to address the changing nature of global migration that, over the past thirty years or so, has brought with it a transformative 'diversification of diversity'. This has not just occurred in terms of movements of people reflecting more ethnicities,*

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<sup>3</sup> [https://maxinegreene.org/uploads/library/diversity\\_inclusion.pdf](https://maxinegreene.org/uploads/library/diversity_inclusion.pdf)

*languages and countries of origin, but also with respect to: a multiplication of significant variables that affect where, how and with whom people live. In the last decade, the proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of a range of new and changing migration variables shows that it is not enough to see 'diversity' only in terms of ethnicity, as is regularly the case both in social science and the wider public sphere. In order to understand and more fully address the complex nature of contemporary, migration-driven diversity, additional variables need to be better recognized by social scientists, policy-makers, practitioners and the public. These include: differential legal statuses and their concomitant conditions, divergent labour market experiences, discrete configurations of gender and age, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents. The dynamic interaction of these variables is what is meant by 'super-diversity'. (Vertovec, 2007)<sup>4</sup>*

Over here he is stressing upon the transformative diversification of diversity and how it needs to be addressed on the bigger level.

On the other hand if we talk about Pakistan, which is very diverse in terms of cultural and religious practices, but unfortunately there is a huge socioeconomic class difference which doesn't make it very diverse and inclusive. And this difference we largely see in the education system as well, where private schools have taken over public school and a certain class are privilege to attend 'quality education' only. This socio economic class difference pass on to generation to generation and is not healthy for diversification and inclusion practices.

However, art schools in Pakistan are comparatively more diverse towards accepting people coming from different backgrounds, ethnicities, religions and as well as different socio economic class. Although, the situation in art school is also not perfect too. Because a person like me who has lives and brought up in Karachi, been to art school knows the other politics of diversification and acceptance. Art schools themselves are also divided in class as per the vicinity of the institute. But needless to say it is somewhat better than the others.

Like, as an educator, I have taught in both private and public schools when I look at this matter pf diversity and inclusion, I feel teachers/ educators carry bigger responsibility because after parents they

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<sup>4</sup> [http://compasanthology.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Vertovec\\_COMPASMigrationAnthology.pdf](http://compasanthology.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Vertovec_COMPASMigrationAnthology.pdf)

are one of the most authentic and reliable figure in a child's life and a single sentence or gesture of a teacher can make or break his/ her personality. Therefore, an educator first needs to practice the traits which he/ she wants his/ her students to carry because then it is a cycle of 'learning' and 'preaching'.

To spread the message and practices of diversity I believe, an educator needs to have empathy and good listening skills. An empathetic person will eventually pass on the empathy to his/ her students and listening will help him/ her built the patience which help a teacher resolve bigger issue and confusions developing in students mind.

Karen L Goldman wrote about Maxine Greene and her work as an educator:

*In 1973, with the publication of Teacher as Stranger: Educational Philosophy for the Modern Age, Greene encouraged teachers to lead their students on free-form explorations in the classrooms. Thirty years later, in the publication, Releasing the Imagination, Greene (1995a or 1995b?) summarizes her message: To help kids shape their identity, we've got to awaken them to their own questions and encourage them to shape their identity, we've got to awaken them to their own questions and encourage them to create their own projects. They don't really learn unless they ask (p. 22)<sup>5</sup>*

Above statement of Dr. Greene showing the importance of questioning. The process of listening and asking can make the diversity inclusive in a classroom as well. Because the process of communication isn't going on between just two people but with the entire class, 20 to 25 minds; where they will be able to understand and embrace the differences. And understanding the differences is the first step towards inclusivity.

*Understanding differences involves recognizing and appreciating the intercultural dynamics, social identities, and the wide range of cultural options that diversity provides for everyone. An important part of understanding diversity is that it includes similarities as well as differences. Understanding that we have similar interests or beliefs can encourage cooperation and cohesion. A commitment to understanding and appreciating differences recognizes that disparities in social and economic opportunity among groups often reflect the continuing impact of racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and bigotry.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://cedar.wvu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1113&context=jec>

<sup>6</sup> What is diversity? Presentation 1

This shows the importance of understanding because if an educator is able to create awareness and understanding and importance of diversity and inclusion even to a small group of students then it will pass on to another group of people and so on and so forth. This continuous cycle will help generate inclusivity on a social and cultural level

A good educator needs to create certain rules and practices in the classroom that help build the idea of diversity in students' subconscious mind. The first and foremost the environment of the class needs to be safe, where students feel the freedom of speech and expression, they are able to feel comfortable, they feel that they are important, their views are important, where students are able to generate conversations and an exchange of healthy dialogue can take place.

On the other hand curriculum should be designed in a way that in cooperate empathy, compassion, listening, tolerance, altruism and acceptance. By in-cooperating them in a curriculum, these attributes will be engraved in their subconscious mind. Also the course content should also facilitate minorities, by in-cooperating that majority will be able to understanding the true understanding of inclusivity where they will see the practicality of what is being taught.

Another very important aspect is the space, the infrastructure and accessibility of the class/ institute/ building should also facilitate everyone. I often notice here in Pakistan there is no or less accessibility for people with disabilities and/ or with special needs. That's why I stated above that it (matter of diversity and inclusivity) should be taken on a bigger (state) level because as an educator I can in-cooperate different things but what about when these students will go out of their class rooms and don't find inclusivity, empathy, tolerance and acceptance?

*"What the best and wisest parent wants for his child, that must we want for all the children of the community. Anything less is unlovely, and left unchecked, destroys our democracy."*<sup>7</sup>

This quote by John Dewey sums up everything quite well. What and how a person likes to be treated to also treat others the same way, that should be the rule and way of living. This way we will be able to give respect to others.

In the end, I feel even if we try to do with the best of our understanding and knowledge to spread the awareness of diversity and inclusivity, we ourselves subconsciously or consciously do contribute to the biases, exclusivity and discrimination. We outside of the classrooms, away from our students, do make

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<sup>7</sup> What is diversity? Presentation 1

exclusive groups, we do body or color shame our friends and family, without realizing that regardless of being friends with someone it can impact someone's mental health and wellbeing. This is where a question arises in my mind, a conflict develops with my own self that how much I understand diversity?

And also we need to look at the flipside of it as well. As per the counter argument by Dr. Jordan Peterson about diversity that diversity in itself is a racist concept and I do agree to it because like I stated earlier that unless we are not being made to notice such differences we won't be able to notice that because nobody is born with such mentality.