

Inclusion, Diversity, and Education

“Inclusion and diversity.” We often hear this expression in university settings and beyond. However, what does it really mean? From a broad point of view these concepts refer to the variety of unique individuals that make up a group of people and the environment that allows them to interact together as equally valued contributors. An inclusive and diverse setting consists of (and welcomes) different identities in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation, age, national origins, abilities, or disabilities, just to mention a few examples. Furthermore, all individuals have the opportunity to contribute to an environment like this (regardless of their differences); in doing so, they enrich it.

When we combine diversity, inclusion, and education the results at stake are even higher. What students learn in university courses goes well beyond the classroom walls; it impacts our future also in terms of societal progress. In other words, if students do not hear women’s names in their courses, how can we reach gender equality? If black writers are the exception rather than the norm in the classroom, how can we overcome racism? If sexual orientation is not discussed, how can we reach equal rights for all humans?

Inclusion and diversity in the curriculum, from general education to doctoral studies, should be of primary importance. As Adrian Asham suggests: “When schools cater for diverse learners, they develop structures and approaches that benefit all learners” (43). In other words, this has a positive impact on society as a whole. Furthermore, as Nancy Chick and Holly Hassel remark: “[the] highest goal is that these connections will instil in students a sense of responsibility beyond themselves and to the wider communities, and that this sense of responsibility or connectedness will lead to social action, activism, and engaged citizenship” (211).

Feminist pedagogy has been educating students on diversity and in-

clusion since the 1980s. In her 1987 publication, Carolyn M. Shrewsbury notes that feminist pedagogy “begins with a vision of what education might be but frequently is not” (6), thus suggesting that it attempts to bring changes to the status quo. Feminist pedagogy is a “continuing reflexive project” (6), engaged with the materials studied, movements for social changes, issues of sexism, classism, sexual orientation, racism, ableism, and others, while aiming to reach gender equality, foster diversity, and practicing inclusion in the classroom and beyond. As Shrewsbury adds, the environment thus created is “a place to utilize and develop all of our talents and abilities” (6) where all voices matter and where the diversity of these voices enriches the learning outcome. In other words, feminist pedagogy has been one of the first steps in the educational curriculum to create a more inclusive and diverse university setting and – in turn – a less unequal society.¹

In the past, feminist pedagogy and principles of diversity and inclusion have often been applied to courses in women, gender, and sexuality. Today, however, they should be applied to all disciplines; addressing them is paramount to improve, for example, the gender gap and raising awareness against homophobia, lesbophobia, and transphobia. In this context, it is necessary to remark that women in the United States have been granted entry to public universities late in comparison with other western countries, such as Italy and France. As a consequence, issues of gender and pedagogy were also addressed at the same time. For example, the University of Virginia accepted undergraduate women only from 1970 onward.² The Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972, which states that discriminating on the basis of sex in U.S. education programs is illegal, helped to change the

1. As suggested recently in the Vanderbilt University’s guide to feminist pedagogy: “it is an overarching philosophy—a theory of teaching and learning that integrates feminist values with related theories and research on teaching and learning”.

2. “By 1970, when the first officially co-ed class enrolled and 450 women arrived on Grounds to take their seats in UVa classrooms, over 30,000 women had already made their mark on UVa, pursuing –and earning –their diploma, certificate, or degree (bachelor’s, master’s, medical, law, and doctoral). Their presence is recorded in the archives. The existence of women on Grounds is a fact hiding in plain sight. To borrow McIntire alumna Margot Lee Shetterly’s (Com 1991) formulation, they are UVa’s hidden figures – some hidden once for their gender, others hidden twice for their gender and their race”. See <https://womenscenter.virginia.edu/history-women-uva> for a list of resources on women at UVa.

system nationwide. However, white male-dominated and male-centered education is still a concern of the twenty-first century on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond.

The fifth issue of *Beyond* focuses on diversity, inclusion, and education. This includes the ‘voyages’ that scholars and teachers accomplish while using feminist pedagogy, active citizenship, and global citizen education in their classroom and research. In her article, Roberta Trapè aims to explore the (hitherto neglected) role of foreign language pedagogy in educating learners for global citizenship. This is particularly true of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion. Alice Pomodoro analyzes how in the last few years, feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements have been trying to raise awareness of inclusive language as one of the mediums that can be used to compensate the negative consequences linked to sexist language. Caroline Lippers’s contribution concerns personal cultural preference: why we behave the way we do when we are confronted with another culture and how to strengthen our cultural agility. Susan Lee Pasquarelli uses her experience as the leader of a faculty-led program in Sicily to uncover insights beneficial to international faculty while designing and implementing culturally responsive, field-based learning experiences. Stefano Baldassarri’s review of Johnny Bertolio’s textbook *Controcanone* suggests that materials to change the status quo have been created and educators now have the chance to participate in active and inclusive changes. Federico Damonte’s article focuses on his course *Diversity in Italy* and in particular on the classes where he discusses with students how migrants are represented in the media in Italy. Finally, the interview with Lucia Schiatti gives readers the opportunity to see how diversity and inclusion can be applied to STEM subjects too.

As Paulo Freire already suggested in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) educators have the power to change the status quo or to continue to perpetrate injustices. With this issue of *Beyond* we would like to contribute to create:

“a classroom environment of mutual respect where both teacher and all students take active, responsible, and shared roles in the learning

process. This dynamic is achieved through classroom relationships that don't hide or gloss over the differences in experience and perspective within a community of learners. Within this community, students care about others' learning and well-being as well as their own, and they feel free to use their sites of authority – where they already stand and what they already know – to help contribute to the knowledge of the course (Chick and Hassel, 197-198)".

Join us in the quest for inclusion, diversity, and gender equality in education.

Francesca Calamita & Nina Peci, guest editors of *Beyond*

References

- Ashman, A. (2014). *Education for inclusion and diversity*. Pearson Australia.
- Chick, Nancy and Holly Hassel. "Don't Hate Me Because I'm Virtual': Feminist Pedagogy in the Online Classroom." *Feminist Teacher* 19.3 (2009): 195-215.
- Freire, Paulo (1971). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Engl. trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos, New York, Herder & Herder.
- Shrewsbury, Carolyn M. "What Is Feminist Pedagogy?" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 3/4 (1987): 6–14.
- Vanderbilt University's guide to feminist pedagogy, <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/femped/>