

Engelse vertaling (obv Deepl – nagelezen)

[Team Diversity & Inclusion (Edith P.)] (0:00 - 0:59)

Welcome to UAntwerp's podcast series on diversity and inclusion in education. Today's guest is Marion Wasserbauer, who is a visiting lecturer within the social sciences. Marion is going to talk about how to achieve a diversity-sensitive approach in education.

Marion, welcome. You teach the course Popular Culture and Diversity. This is an elective course taught in English to about thirty to sixty students. It is part of the Masters in Communication Studies, Film Studies and Gender and Diversity. You also teach a series of classes on gender, feminism, intersectionality and LGBTQI studies as part of the bachelor course on general literary theory. Please tell us, how are the contents of your courses intertwined with diversity and inclusion?

[Prof Marion Wasserbauer] (1:00 - 3:21)

This is indeed the central theme of both of my courses, as their titles reflect. Popular Culture and Diversity focuses on diversity issues in popular media culture and popular culture in general. In this course, I also teach students about intersectionality. What does it mean and how we can look at current media culture from this perspective? In my half of the literary theory course, consisting of a series of six classes, I familiarise students with gender, feminism, intersectionality and transgender studies. All of these topics have been boiled down to an introduction of perspectives and literature.

What it's all about? These are two courses with a lot of content. In Popular Culture and Diversity we talk about such things as transgender representation in the media. How have these groups been represented in the media throughout history? How are transgender and nonbinary people represented in the media today? As you may have inferred, we discuss a lot of sensitive issues, such as gender diversity. If you look at the current media discourse, it's a very sensitive issue. It attracts a lot of attention and it also generates a lot of emotions. But we also discuss class, racism, ethnicity and age. A whole range of diversity issues that I try to familiarise students with in theory, but also in practical, everyday contexts.

[Team Diversity & Inclusion (Edith P.)] (3:21 - 3:26)

How do you introduce these sensitive topics to students?

[Prof. Marion Wasserbauer] (3:27 - 8:49)

As I said before, it is important to me that we consider both theory and practice in culture and in literature, but also in everyday life. I give students a theoretical framework, such as intersectionality, but I also try to teach them how to apply that framework when watching a movie or reading a book, or when sitting at the table with your uncle who might say something problematic.

So, how do you apply all of that? I don't present myself as the sole authority in this area. One of my ways of making students aware of these issues is by adopting a vulnerable position as a lecturer. I speak from my own perspective. I give them a lot of information about my personal life, about my own gender identity, about my sexuality, about my origins, about my social background. This way, I try to convey to them what intersectionality means on a personal level and how it relates to higher

structures present in society, which influence all of us. I find it works really well to take myself as the point of departure. It invites students to do the same. I also ask them to reflect on themselves. Where do you stand in life when it comes to all of this? This is how I teach students about positionality. That really means reflecting on one's position in society and how this impacts the way one looks at certain subjects. That is very important because as a researcher, you are never neutral: you always start from your own frame of reference. Sometimes, this is very new information for students, because they've learnt that as researchers they have to be neutral. But it is also important to be very aware of your own frames of reference. These are shaped by your upbringing, your education, your personal experiences and your position in society. It is therefore important to be aware of these factors. That is one way in which I try to make sensitive topics concrete for students. I also try to use myself as an example, since I am the person I know best and can say most about. But I welcome all perspectives, because I only have a limited view of the world from my own positionality.

That is why I try to invite guest speakers every year, with the aim of bringing new perspectives into the classroom. One of my favourite guests is comedian [Soe Nsuki](#). She gives my students an introduction to the history of hip-hop and also talks about her own positionality, growing up as a black girl in a fairly white neighbourhood on the outskirts of Antwerp, with hip-hop and dancing – in particular breakdancing – being key in shaping her outlook on her own position and on life in general. She describes some basic hip-hop principles during her class, which are very instructive and motivational. I notice that students are really excited about this because Soe is not just funny, but also super smart. The way she talks about popular culture and identity being intertwined is something I wouldn't be able to get across. This shows that a good way of delivering a topic to students doesn't necessarily require an academic guest speaker. The guest speaker can also be a comedian, for example.

I am aware that some topics can be difficult for students, such as racism and the history of transgender representation. This involves discussing a lot of hurtful things that happened in the past and are still happening in the present. That is why, in my class on transgender representation for example, I start with a content note. This is a sort of warning to make the students aware we're about to discuss a topic that is sensitive and subject to a lot of different opinions, and which at times has been handled very badly throughout history – and still is. So that content note explains that transphobic, homophobic and racist things will come up. Not because I'm going to say such things, but because we're looking at the history of the topic as a whole. And if a topic affects you personally, feel free to say something or step outside. A lot of lecturers in social sciences like to talk about the Black Pete debate. One way to prevent the discussion from getting heated is to prepare your students by warning them that it concerns a sensitive topic. If students know in advance that something will be sensitive, they often find it easier to talk about it.

[Team Diversity & Inclusion (Edith P.)] (8:49 - 8:57)

What do you do when you realise that students are victims of racism and discrimination themselves? Have you experienced that before?

[Prof. Marion Wasserbauer] (8:58 - 11:55)

As I am very open to students, they will occasionally come up to me during the break or after class. Sometimes they'll even raise their hand and share their experiences with being discriminated against, for example due to their neurodiversity. They may explain that the university, for example, is not an easy context for someone who has autism. And if I notice that students are in need of support or a conversation about this, the most important thing is to just address that, to listen for a moment.

It's not like I have a map of the entire support network in my head, but if I do know where they can find support at or outside the university, I'll always point them in the right direction. As we talk about so many topics related to diversity, I know these can trigger students. Things can get personal. I also try to refer my students to organisations where they can get more information and more support. One of these is the [Lumi](#) helpline, which is intended for anyone who is LGBTQI+ and has questions about this or is looking for a sympathetic ear and more information. I also try to mention each year that the university offers psychological counselling for those struggling with their studies or dealing with other issues. I post links on the student portal or on Blackboard to organisations that students can turn to. Over the years, I have found that it is really important to take on this role in addition to lecturing. Because that's what you want as a lecturer: not only for the students to simply take notes and listen to you, but also to reflect on their own lived experiences. It is very nice when they manage, but it can also be difficult sometimes to advise students to get help.

There's one more thing I want to say about racism. I am very conscious of the fact that, as a white lecturer, I am usually in front of a group of students where the vast majority is also white. When I start talking about ethnicity and race, I think it is very important to mention that my frame of reference is limited. I did not have certain experiences, so we can have a theoretical discussion on them, but I think it is much more important to invite someone who can talk about these important issues based on their own experiences.

[Team Diversity & Inclusion (Edith P.)] (11:56 - 12:38)

Thank you. If I understand correctly, you are trying to do more than just transfer knowledge in your classes. You also try to create a relationship with your students and to establish a kind of safe environment where they can be themselves, where they can feel at home. That is also in line with research that shows that psychological safety and well-being, or *social belonging*, are important conditions to learning. Are there any other ways in which you try to create these conditions?

[Prof Marion Wasserbauer] (12:39 - 14:30)

Yes, I actively try to build a relationship with the students. I am really committed to them. That's important for me, connecting with the students. My idea is not for the students to simply collect a bit of knowledge, take it home and possibly forget it again. My idea is that we come together to build something. For me, the essence of education is that both of us want to make something better. We want to take our knowledge out into the world, so let's work together. That's the common goal. Consequently, it is also important to know how the other person is doing. During the COVID period, I noticed that the students were not attending class as much, so I regularly asked them how they were doing. How do you feel about the classes and in general? How do you feel about the content? But also: how do you feel about what's going on in the world right now? And one method that worked well for me in class was [Mentimeter](#). It allows students to anonymously say what's really on their minds, and what may be bothering them. Questions I've asked this way include: what do you need from this course and what else do you need support for? I find that this is a safe way to ask questions to students and to create a connection. You can also use Mentimeter for larger student groups. And again, that really results in better relationships. The feedback I get from students shows me that they find it very important to be heard, to be considered human beings.

[Team Diversity & Inclusion (Edith P.)] (14:32 - 14:41)

So, if I understand correctly, you are also trying to build some kind of equal relationship with your students.

[Prof. Marion Wasserbauer] (14:43 - 16:40)

Yes, definitely. And I think that also applies to discussions about knowledge. I consider students as sources of a knowledge. I don't act like an all-knowing lecturer, but I try to build an equal relationship where we exchange knowledge with each other. So I consider knowledge as a dialogue and not a one-way street. Students often know a lot already and have special interests, and I like to actively bring this knowledge into the classroom by giving them space to share their opinions or insights with the group. I really like it. I teach about popular culture, and I also find it important to learn from pop culture. For instance, Soe Nsuki's history lesson on hip-hop introduced me to the principle of '*each one teach one*'. It doesn't matter how long you've been breakdancing. Everyone can do one special move that they're very good at. And you can always learn from each other and that's very important. It's not because you're more experienced or because you are more educated that you can't learn something from someone who's new. I think that's a very important principle to apply in class. Sometimes it happens that a student who has come to that realisation will raise their hand to say something like: 'Yes, but from a Marxist-feminist perspective...', followed by an entire explanation that sometimes puts me at a loss for words, because that student clearly knows more than I do. I think that's fantastic, very stimulating. And what I do is thank that student and ask if anyone has anything to add, or I say: 'I've really learned something.' So I really consider the relation with the students as a dialogue and not as a one-way street.

[Team Diversity & Inclusion (Edith P.)] (16:40 - 17:06)

So there is a lot of dialogue between you and the students. Do you sometimes also create exchange moments between the students themselves, where they can share perspectives with each other? I'm particularly curious to know how that happens and whether tensions occur sometimes. And how do you deal with those?

[Prof Marion Wasserbauer] (17:07 - 19:24)

Both my courses are taught by way of lectures, which I don't like all that much. So I try to encourage classroom discussions and one-to-one dialogues. I think real moments of dialogue are easier to fit into tutorials.

Have there been any tensions? I have to say really tricky topics come up in class sometimes. And I really enjoy hearing different opinions when someone makes a very bold statement. There are always students who are very engaged and raise their hands a lot. And some students have very strong views. I think it's important to listen, to consider and to ask the audience to respond. I try to not always respond myself, but to encourage multiple perspectives in class. To be honest, not every student is overjoyed with having a compulsory introduction to gender, studies, feminism, intersectionality and so on. I also want to provide space to discuss that.

Does that result in tensions? Occasionally it does. From time to time, I see students rolling their eyes. So if students are listening to this podcast now: yes, we see that. But that's also fine. I plan to use something new in the coming academic year, the [Ouch! and Oops! method](#). Which actually is a method used in conversations or in contexts where you know sensitive topics will come up, but you don't

necessarily want to get into a deep psychological discussion. So if you find that someone has made a hurtful comment, you can respond out loud by saying 'Ouch!', as in: this was intense. And then the person who made the comment can just say 'Oops!'. This method allows you to acknowledge something's going wrong, but without immediately giving rise to a vulnerable discussion, which I don't necessarily have the in-depth knowledge for either. So I read about such things and I try to apply them in class.

[Team Diversity & Inclusion (Edith P.)] (19:25 - 19:40)

Inclusion also means decreasing the potential barriers that students are facing on their way to success. Are there any barriers students are confronted with in your course that you consciously try to address?

[Prof Marion Wasserbauer] (19:41 - 21:00)

Yes, the course Popular Culture and Diversity is taught in English, which makes it accessible to a lot of students. But for some students it is difficult to write a paper and to pass an exam in English. My way of dealing with that is that I give students the choice to write the paper and to pass the exam in English or in Dutch. So they can choose, because in my course language isn't more important than subject matter. That is one of the ways in which the course can be made a bit more accessible. Another way I deal with this is to tell the students: 'You are an independent adult person, so you can decide yourself how you want to distribute your study time. And if you prefer to submit the paper in the second exam period because this fits better with your complex exam schedule, then you are free to do that.' The only thing I require from students is that they communicate about it in a timely and clear manner. I need clear agreements with clear deadlines. But these are ways in which I try to give students more flexibility, as well as greater agency and responsibility.

[Team Diversity & Inclusion (Edith P.)] (21:02 - 21:12)

Okay, we are at the end of our conversation. Is there any other important message you would like to send to lecturers about diversity and inclusion in education?

[Prof Marion Wasserbauer] (21:13 - 22:55)

What is very important to me is your own positionality, your own view, your own position. To acknowledge it and to just be aware of it, whether you are teaching in the exact sciences, in the social sciences or in the humanities.

Everyone has their own 'backpack' and positionality in this world. I think it's important to teach students to reflect on themselves. Another important point is that we teach a lot of theory, or I do at least. But daily life goes on. So it is very important for me to always make the link between theory and practice by mentioning examples. These can be from popular culture or literature, but also from everyday life. For example, have you ever talked to students living away from home about feminism? One way I do that is by asking my literature students to write a personal reflection on a book that changed their view on gender, feminism or sexuality. Sometimes students will then come up to me and say they have never thought about this before. Then I think: 'Great, this is your chance!' But sometimes it needs some persuasion and a very sensitive, person-centred approach to keep everyone on board.

[Team Diversity & Inclusion (Edith P.)] (22:56 - 23:04)

That seems like a very nice message to end with. Thank you very much for the pleasant, interesting and informative conversation, Marion.

[Prof. Marion Wasserbauer]

The pleasure's been all mine.