

**Inclusion and Intersectionality in Visual Arts Education.**  
**Edited by Kate Hatton**

**Positionality, Pedagogy and Paradigms**

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There has been a long and well researched history of the visual arts being divisive, reinforcing social categorisations defined by taste and consumption and equating hierarchies of arts practices to differing levels of education and social class. In response, this book considers the inequalities of intersectionality and how visual arts education, in particular within higher education, can be more inclusive. But can visual arts education really 'include all'? This book has some thought-provoking suggestions around re-framing and re-considering pedagogy within visual arts education towards "a truly inclusive education system (that) incorporates inclusive teaching and learning practices that allow students to understand and challenge how traditions of practice and knowledge are constructed" (p138).

Taking a sociological approach, in defining visual arts education as a social practice, this collection of essays draws on inequalities of class, race, gender and disability and their intersection for students of higher education. This edited collection makes a contribution to both the practice of arts education and research within sociology of the arts and culture. Despite the message that 'an inclusive education is for all' the concept of inclusion is critiqued throughout as contested and political. The ten case studies are written by practitioners in the field: artists, gallery educators, art and design lecturers and informal arts educators. This book is the second in a series that addresses social justice and visual arts education as the setting for wider debates on inclusion. This timely publication responds to a context of increasing exclusion within visual arts education and the removal of art from core teaching in schools, resulting in students arriving at university underprepared, unskilled and, most significantly, underrepresented.

Discourses of race, class, gender, access and disability, explored in this book are shown to intersect with our notions of artistic merit, 'ability' and 'skill', which frequently obscures the social filtering of students within HE. Intersectionality is used to question and examine the layering of identities and experiences both prior to and during university. 'Intersectional thinking' around diversity initiatives is argued for throughout the book, as each of the authors use intersectionality as a tool to unpick overlapping social categories, in order to explain everyday experiences of social inequality and the organisation of power within the institution. Widening participation initiatives are taken to task in several of the chapters, through critiquing their misrecognition of intersectionality and the unquestioning acceptance of particular pedagogies within the visual arts which serve to reproduce inequality. Disadvantaged learners, it is argued, tend to accumulate disadvantage, miss out on or fail to convert their cultural capital within higher education.

Three key themes cut across the various chapters: positionality, pedagogy and paradigms, which are key pathways for the book's main argument for the re-thinking and re-categorisation of intersectionality for improving visual arts education within higher education.

### **Positionality**

The authors speak from positions of personal experience, either as practitioners, facilitators or those who have experienced marginalisation through intersectionality. Many of the authors have worked in teaching and/or assessing visual arts curriculums and use their experiences to highlight the failure of many higher education institutions in engaging black and ethnic minority students in a 'white centric' world. In chapter 2, fine art lecturer, Ope Lori engages in a self-reflexive study designed to address how 'whiteness' is held up and maintained. She argues that her role as an artist is to create 'oppositional gazes' to play with power relations and unfix positions. Practising artist, Lorraine Douglas, describes her dual role as insider researcher / teacher researcher as part of an educational action research project. Her chapter (4) raises the issue of risk and risk-taking in relation to students from different class backgrounds for whom art and design courses may be considered a 'risky' option (Reay 2003).

A key strength of this book is the author's centrality to the projects being researched; Michael McMillan (chapter 3), as a researcher on the University of the Arts London's RAS (Retain, Achieve and Success) programme, drawing on his experience as Artist and Gallery Educator at 198 contemporary arts programme and Autograph ABP in Shoreditch; Chris Koning and Ilga Leimanis (chapter 6) reflecting on their outreach and informal visual arts education work; and Jasmine Holland-Gilbert (chapter 7) commentary on her learning as co-ordinator for the Open Book project – a initiative offering free education for marginalised individuals. There is clear value in bringing these practitioners and lecturers together to explore their own positionality as a reflective tool, which enables speaking about their own identities and roles within the institution, as a way to reassure students experiencing feelings of difference or not fitting in.

### **Pedagogy**

Widening participation relates not only to increasing diversity within student admissions, but also to developing pedagogical strategies which support these students to achieve within higher education. This has clear implications for pedagogy within visual arts education, which is taken up in several chapters in this book. Student characteristics of identity impact upon their pedagogical experience, and despite the expected ideological premise of promoting learning and creative expression for all, the different case studies within this book demonstrate that this is often not the case. The marketization of education and employability agendas frequently undermine pedagogy for equality. Marco Benoit Carbone, in chapter 10, draws our attention to attainment gaps for ethnic

minority students. Engaging with 'invisible pedagogies' (Bernstein 2003) his contribution challenges the divide between practice-orientated (vocational) and theoretical (academic) learning modules on visual arts programmes. Pedagogical difference is emphasised in chapter 5 by Melanie Davies who reflects on the experiences of dyslexic students, whom she argues are a majority in art and design courses. Drawing on critical disability studies, Davies highlights the discursive construction of dyslexia: disability as social construction in relation to pedagogised identities (Atkinson 2007). Furthermore building on the potential for art education as inclusive practice, chapter 6, investigates a workshop titled: *thinking through drawing*, which engages with drawing as a communication method in addition to writing.

## Paradigms

Of interest for those undertaking their own research into visual arts education are the differing theoretical toolkits selected by the authors. Collectively they highlight the symbolic practices of intersectionality as a way of challenging the often taken-for-granted practices within higher education. This collection of essays extends feminist theory, critical race theory and critical disability studies as a way of signposting the social experiences of students often misrecognised by staff, students and contexts of learning. As well as drawing on the work of social theorists such as Paolo Friere and Michel Foucault, there is a strong take up of Pierre Bourdieu's analytical tools of field, capitals, dispositions and habitus. The book argues that although Bourdieu does not deal directly with intersectionality, his key concepts provide the basis for understanding the symbolic means by which people feel excluded – the accumulation of disadvantage. For example, in chapter 9, the role of the library is critiqued through the collection management practices within university libraries that create structural barriers through bibliographic classifications in which intersectional students cannot place themselves.

In chapter 8 Samantha Broadhead examines the route of postgraduate education critiquing the positioning of arts & design courses as a 'soft' options and precarious career. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of dispositions, she argues that higher education does not offer direct class-based transformation. New experiences in higher education do not over-write previous identities, however instead, they contribute to a gradual sense of becoming (Gale and Parker 2014). While dispositions offer a potential site for change, habitus is more long standing, with those lacking affinity with the institutional habitus feeling out of place. Jasmine Holland-Gilbert (chapter 7) introduces the concept of 'precariat insurgency', which represents the powerful potential of 'non-traditional' students of higher education whose presence acts to transform the institutional habitus. This perspective emphasises the change within the institution rather than the agent, where a presence and refusal to shy away from their marginalized identity transforms the institutional habitus.

## **Inclusion and intersectionality in visual arts education**

This collection of essays presents reflexive and reactive accounts of widening participation programmes, initiatives or research within visual arts education contexts. Together they offer a critical perspective on inclusion within higher education through the lens of intersectionality. But this is not devoid of suggested changes and ideas for improvement focused around the re-categorisation and re-thinking of student's intersectional experiences. Arts educators, researchers, lecturers and curriculum makers will find valuable the opportunities offered by an intersectional approach to inclusion within visual arts education captured in this book. These ideas for improving inclusion within the pedagogies and practices of arts education lead the reader to re-consider the practice of art education within an intersectional framework. Guiding visual arts education away from 'how to' instructions, towards enabling our students to develop a mindset through which to conceptualise a different society.

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### References

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