

Democratizing Fashion Design Pedagogies: From Exclusion to Inclusion

Tanveer Ahmed

The Open University, United Kingdom

Tanveer.Ahmed@open.ac.uk

Abstract

Recent academic studies highlight how art and design higher education institutions can reproduce various forms of exclusion, whether through racial bias in the interview process; the low attainment and poor retention of Black and Minority Ethnic students; or through the relative absence of non-white educators. In today's rapidly globalising fashion design education environment, where cohorts of undergraduate fashion design students are becoming ever more diverse, how should such exclusions be addressed? This presentation assesses how more democratic forms of fashion design education might help address current exclusions.

Drawing on a case study of a tutor facilitated women of colour reading group at a higher education institution in the UK, the presentation highlights the importance of cultivating extra-curricula spaces of 'inclusion' in higher education contexts. Building on critical pedagogical traditions, the case shows how a reading group was utilised by art and design students to help expose how forms of Eurocentric privileging were embedded in a specific higher education context. Having exposed these biases, the reading group then used a decolonising approach to open up dialogues about alternatives ways of designing, both in fashion, and other art and design disciplines.

The case illuminates that, in contrast to dominant forms of fashion design education, which privilege education for inclusion in hegemonic ways, the development of 'extra-curricula' spaces of 'inclusion' can problematize and help develop alternatives to current – often exclusionary' - fashion design 'norms'. What this case points to, therefore, is that a more democratic, inclusive and progressive contemporary form of fashion design education is possible; but, only perhaps by creating alternative pedagogical spaces. These alternative spaces provide opportunities to address 'difficult' questions about hegemonic forms of fashion design and to consider new ways to develop (individual and collective) practices.

The presentation therefore calls for further research and pedagogical experimentation to address the question of how contemporary fashion design education can become more inclusive, to support the aims of social justice, equality and democracy in our time.

Keywords: Fashion design education; democratic fashion design; decolonising fashion design; critical pedagogy; social justice

ISBN: 978-989-54263-0-0