

Exploring the Process of Cultivating Tolerance: The Case of a Pakistani University

Authors : Uzma Rashid, Mommnah Asad

Abstract : As more and more people fall victim to the intolerance that has become a plague globally, academicians are faced with the herculean task of sowing the roots for more tolerant individuals. Being the multilayered task that it is, promoting an acceptance of diversity and pushing an agenda to push back hate requires efforts on multiple levels. Not only does the curriculum need to be in line with such goals, but teachers also need to be trained to cater to the sensitivities surrounding conversations of tolerance and diversity. In addition, institutional support needs to be there to provide conducive conditions for a diversity driven learning process to take place. In reality, teachers have to struggle with forwarding ideas about diversity and tolerance which do not sound particularly risky to be shared but given the current socio-political and religious milieu, can put the teacher in a difficult position and can make the task exponentially challenging. This paper is based on an auto-ethnographic account of teaching undergraduate and graduate courses at a private university in Pakistan. These courses were aimed at teaching tolerance to adult learners through classes focused on key notions pertaining to religion, culture, gender, and society. Authors' classroom experiences with the students in these courses indicate a marked heightening of religious sensitivities that can potentially threaten a teacher's life chances and become a hindrance in deep, meaningful conversations, thus lending a superficiality to the whole endeavor. The paper will discuss in detail the challenges that this teacher dealt with in the process, how those were addressed, and locate them in the larger picture of how tolerance can be materialized in current times in the universities in Pakistan and in similar contexts elsewhere.

Keywords : tolerance, diversity, gender, Pakistani Universities

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