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Teaching Innovations for Inclusive Education

Comenius Carrousel Workshop Reflections

Lopes Cardozo, Mieke ; Dumitrescu, Roxana; Zuntova, Gabriela

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Teaching Innovations for Inclusive Education: Comenius Carrousel Workshop Reflections

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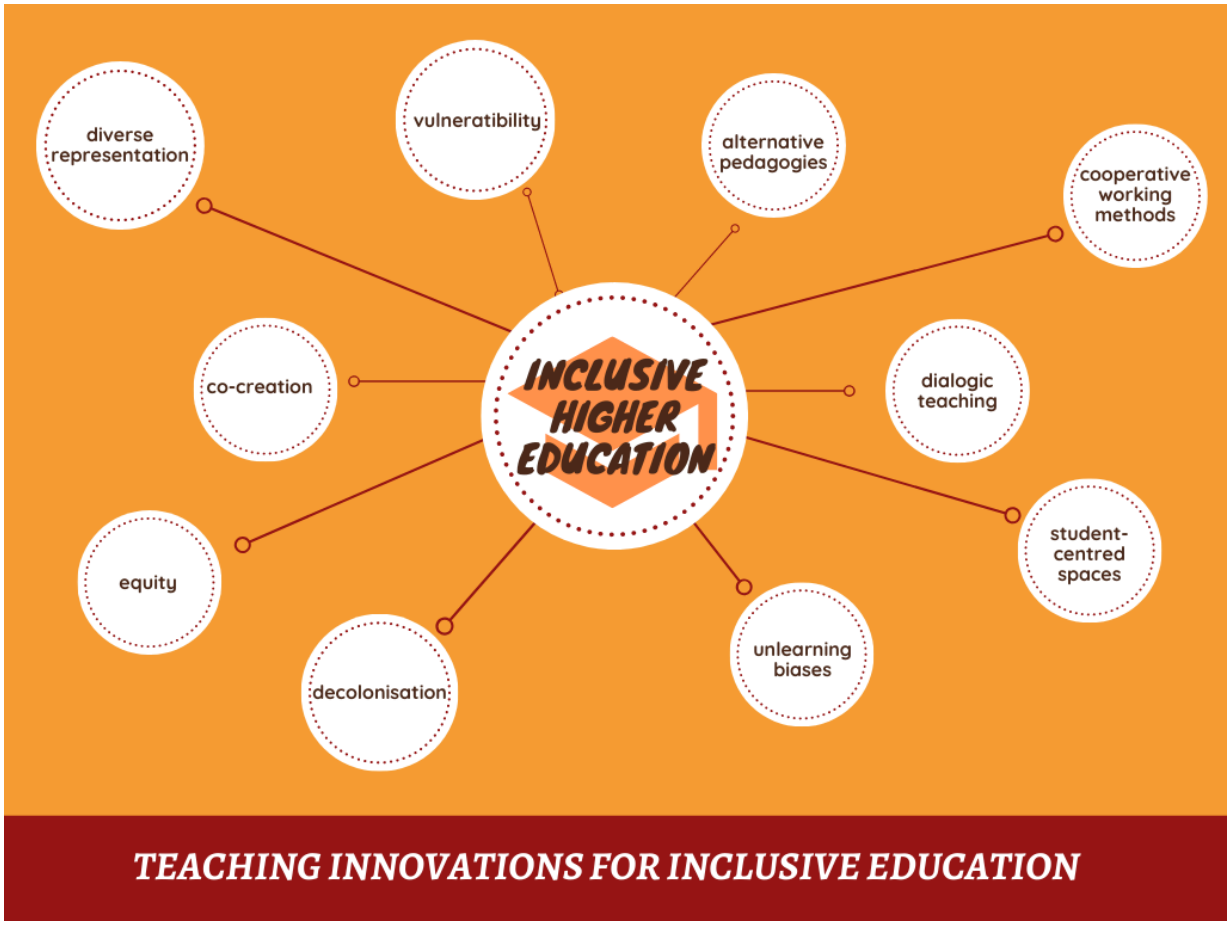


By: dr. Mieke T.A. Lopes Cardozo (UvA), Roxana Dumitrescu and Gabriela Zuntova (students in International Development Studies, UvA

What motivates you to work on inclusive higher education? – this was one of the questions that started and guided the active dialogue within the Comenius Carousel workshop on *Teaching Innovations for Inclusive Education*. The workshop was facilitated by members of the **Inclusion Tracé of the Comenius Network of Education Innovators in the Netherlands**. It brought together a group of 40 participants ranging from lecturers, students, education policy developers and scholars to discuss and reflect on the potential challenges of Inclusive Higher Education.

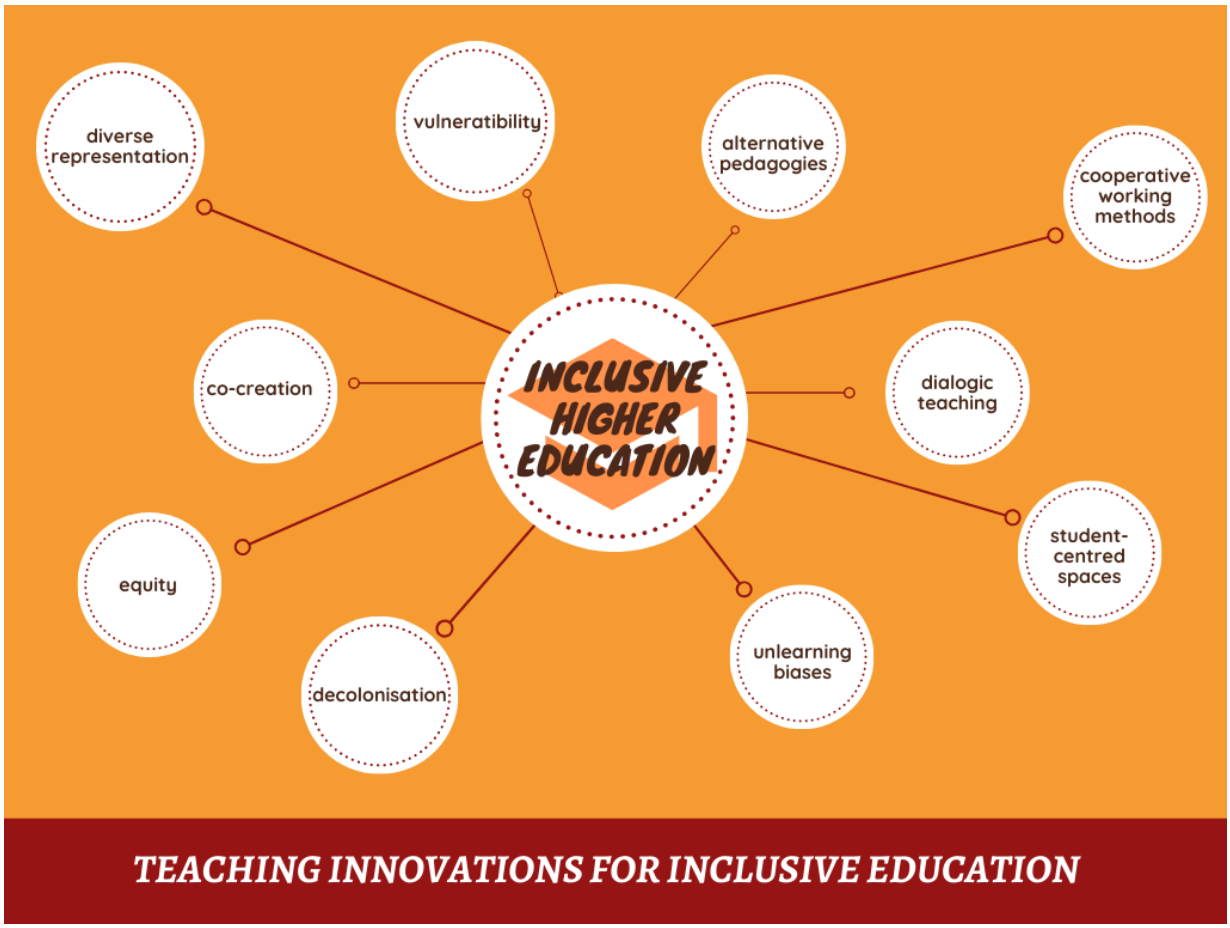
This Comenius Carousel was part of the first fully virtual conference organised by **The Centre for Sustainable Development Studies (CSDS)** at the University of Amsterdam in January 2021. The aim was to bring together a diverse audience from academia, practice and policy fields to engage with the latest Critical Perspectives on Governance by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and focused on **SDG4 on inclusive and equitable quality education for all**. The conference presented an opportunity for inclusive debates with participants from around the globe, and provided space to introspect and explore the complexities of multilevel politics and governance of education systems and learning spaces.

Recognizing the need for more inclusivity within Higher Education, the session shared insights from three concrete examples of innovations to foster more inclusive education in The Netherlands, including: ***Give every student a voice!*** (**Chiel van der Veen**, Anne de la Croix and Agnes Willemen – Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam); ***Inclusive pedagogies: a professional skills course*** (Inti Soeterik, Fadie Hanna and Tugba Öztemir – University of Amsterdam); and ***Critical Development and Diversity Explorations*** (**Mieke Lopes Cardozo** and the CDDE student collective, University of Amsterdam). In line with the aim and theme of the conference, the Comenius projects emphasised the educators' responsibility to create and give space to all perspectives and to provide students with tools that will amplify their voices and sense of agency. They also highlighted the potential benefits of using cooperative working methods, dialogic teaching, and combining social justice with contemplative pedagogies.

In order to allow participants to reflect on the usefulness of some of these methods into their own work or study contexts, the facilitators organised an online variation of a "beehive" activity. This exercise was designed to create a buzz of conversations and then have bees (rapporteurs) collect a myriad of ideas in a collective beehive mural. In this manner, participants were encouraged to actively reflect, share and engage in a discussion on their own work or study environment in terms of facilitating inclusive education. In small groups, we reflected on the following questions: ***What strategies do you implement within classroom settings***

to foster a more inclusive higher education space? And how do you engage with colleagues and/or students that are not familiar with or express resistance to inclusive higher education (policies or approaches)?

Working with these questions allowed participants to collectively display and propose various suggestions for teaching towards inclusive education on an online mural. Some suggestions that emerged from these conversations (see visual) included: representation of diverse perspectives in diverse educational resources, visual or creative activities, role plays to encourage the practice of perspective-taking, encouraging empathy and creating co-created learning spaces that foster student agency, and many others. Workshop participants concluded there is no one straightforward way to achieve inclusive higher education, but rather that it requires an amalgamation of methods and approaches to teaching and learning that most often diverge from traditional education, and is uniquely designed – preferably in co-creation with students – to serve the needs of each specific learning setting.



Based on these insights, **Dr. Anne de Graaf** (Chief Diversity Officer – University of Amsterdam) and **Dr. Julie Allan** (Professor of Equity and Inclusion – University of Birmingham) presented concluding reflections on institutions' tendencies to emphasize equality over equity, which often reinforce ableist biases and other forms of exclusion. To overcome these, educators are encouraged to

acknowledge their vulnerability and be reminded that learning *from* students is of equal importance as teaching them. Arguably, placing students as experts on diversity and inclusion may lead to more effective expectation management and support ongoing efforts to explore ways to meaningfully decolonize the curriculum.

Inclusive education concerns itself with designing unique educational approaches to serve students' individual and collective needs in a plethora of contexts. It constitutes facing complexity, encouraging dialogue but also providing a safe and brave environment to do so. In the words of Julie Allan, "inclusive teachers live with uncertainty, avoid judgement and question their own assumptions". The reflection questions discussed during the workshop may be helpful in developing our abilities as educators and (life long) students to live up to this premise: ***what motivates you to work on inclusive education, with whom do you need to connect and co-learn, and what do you want to learn/develop yourself in order to be able to support a more inclusive higher education community?***

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