

Short lecture New Year's reception FSW, 5 January 2021

By Aya Ezawa, Diversity Officer Leiden University

Thank you, Paul, for your invitation to join this New Year's reception of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences. It's great to hear of the many initiatives which contribute to community and diversity within the faculty and the faculty board's commitment to diversity and inclusion. I am glad to be able to join to briefly share my thoughts about diversity and inclusion at Leiden University.

One of my tasks as Diversity Officer is to translate our ambitions of creating a diverse and inclusive learning and working environment into action. It's one thing to have this shared ideal, and another, to actually make it happen. We have talked about Black Lives Matter, about an inclusive curriculum, about disability and the accessibility of online learning environments and about celebrating all stripes of the progress pride flag, among others. But if we agreed on it, why hasn't it all already happened? The challenge is that diversity and inclusion are not something you can impose. Inclusion needs to be embraced by the community at large to make it happen. And it is not something someone else will fix for us – we need to do this together.

Diversity is about the presence of diverse experiences and perspectives within our community. Inclusion is about *how* we engage with this diversity: how we see each other and interact with each other. And how we make sure the community is everyone's community, and a community where everyone can feel inspired and develop their potential.

What does it take to put ideas into action? As scholars, we are used to focusing on ideas and arguments. But making inclusion happen requires more than a well-supported argument because *knowing* is not the same thing as *doing*. To translate ideas into action requires engagement and acting on it as a community.

Let's take teaching as an example. What does it take for students to learn and how can we ensure a learning experience that includes all students? It's obvious that students don't learn simply by receiving a long email with a list of recommended literature. What inspires and allows students to be curious and grow is *how* we teach knowledge, and *how* we engage with each other in discussing this knowledge. Learning is a social and an emotional process, which shapes our motivation, our engagement, and our personal growth. And that depends on the kind of classroom community we build.

That's why the way we engage with each other and an inclusive learning environment is so important. Universities are fundamentally middle-class institutions, which focus on individual achievement. We think of students and scholars as individuals and focus on individual grades and performance. We think about our personal intentions, goals and achievements, and much less about how our actions intentionally or unintentionally affect others. But to perform well, we all need an environment that inspires and motivates. This is also the kind of environment that contributes to innovation. If we have learned anything during the corona period, it is how crucial our social life and feeling understood by one

another are for our own well-being, which in turn, is fundamental to being able to learn and do our work.

So, what can we do? Inclusion is first and foremost a matter of approach; avoid taking yourself and your own experience for granted, and exercise openness and empathy in approaching others. Recognize that you are not the best judge of what another person experiences or feels – there is much we can learn from each other. Inclusion is not just a matter of how we treat students and colleagues but should also inform our daily work.

When you develop a syllabus for a course, you can choose to think about who you yourself think are the most important authors; or, you can think about how the readings and authors relate to the diverse experiences of our students. Even better, consider making it a collaborative project.

Discuss with your colleagues the ambitions of your program or institute - how do we position our fields and expertise within a diverse, globalized and decolonized world?

When you hire – do you focus on individual performance and the subject of expertise; or, how a new colleague could actively contribute to a diverse and inclusive work environment? Creating an inclusive university is about much more than academics and means engaging students and staff at all levels.

A New Years's reception is a good place to start this conversation. How do you look back on 2020, and what do you want to achieve not only for yourself, but as a community in 2021? Change is about actively engaging with your community, and building a social fabric which can enable an inclusive learning and working environment for all.