

**Including Difference:
Communitarian Approach to Art Education
in the Least Restrictive Environment**
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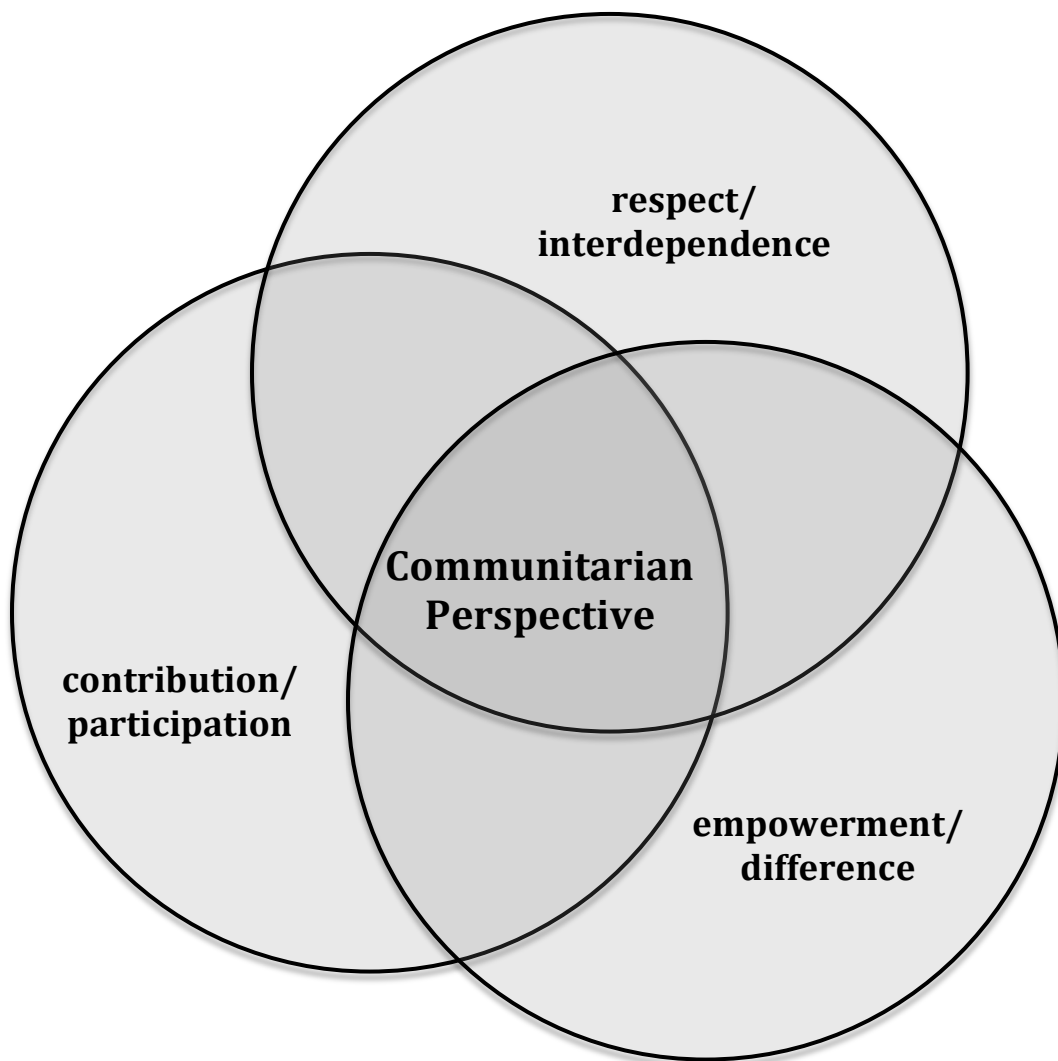


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Including Difference: Communitarian Approaches

NAEA • March 9, 2013 from 10:00-10:50 a.m.

Location: Meeting Room 201B/Center/2nd Floor

When you see someone who cannot see, walk, hear, speak, or understand as you do, what do you feel and think? We are informed how to respond *by representations* of people in films, songs, artworks, literature, advertising, and other forms of social practices and products. A *medical model* of disability with its offshoot of rehabilitation emphasizes lack, deficit, deficiency, degenerate bodies, and inferiority. Impairment conceptually locates the disability within the individual and is adopted in the medical model of cure and care. It is not simply a matter of acceptable and unacceptable representations, but analysis of disability representations should involve the study of historical contexts of its construction and the consequences of the popular cultural narratives. We discuss practical, research-based strategies for communitarian inclusion in the art class. Communitarianism emerges from the concept of empowerment by difference, derived from educational values of equality, liberty, and efficiency.

A communitarian perspective, applied to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), recognizes the responsibility of all class community members to find strengths and build capacities in each other within their shared environment. Within the communitarian philosophy, the educational values of equality, liberty, and efficiency emerge from the concept of empowerment by difference. Consequently, equality is not an absolute but is relative to one's needs. Similarly, communitarian productivity (i.e., efficiency) is assessed in terms of opportunity to contribute, with the understanding that, in an interdependent community, everyone has contributions to make. Communitarian liberty empowers one to actively participate in the educative process through choice-making in a safe and enabling environment. In this presentation, we share a communitarian approach to inclusion in the art class. We discuss practical, foundational, research-based strategies for the inclusion of all learners, especially those who experience moderate to severe disabilities, in a fully participatory way.

Including Difference: A Communitarian Approach in Art Education to the "Least Restrictive Environment" Law is an approach to inclusion that respects and finds value in all humanity. Inclusion in a learning community is the responsibility of all members to find strengths and build capacities in each other within their shared environment. Equality is not an absolute, and access is relative to an individual's needs. A communitarian perspective utilizes the intent of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) federal regulations for empowerment of all. We discuss strategies for the inclusion of individuals who experience moderate to severe disabilities into the art class community in a fully participatory way.

At the heart of the communitarian values of equality, liberty, and efficiency is the concept *empowerment by difference*. Within an inclusive community that strives for liberating equity that is not defined as sameness, sustained interaction with each other is promoted through communicative art expression in which each learns to identify strengths and capacities in others. Each person, despite disabilities, has untapped potentials and emergent strengths. The different capacities, once identified, can be skillfully encouraged so that individual strengths contribute to the group's goals. Communitarian liberty is to make choices regarding work and learning, to take responsibility for those choices, and to be empowered to actively participate in the educative process in a safe and enabling environment. Communitarian productivity (i.e., efficiency) is

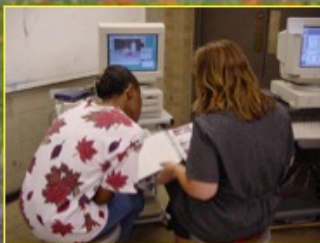
measured in terms of opportunity to contribute, with the understanding that, in an interdependent community, *everyone* has contributions to make. This inclusive, communitarian perspective corresponds with the purposes and intent of the IDEA Federal Regulations, which include empowerment, and guided the formation of the HEARTS program presented in the second half of this book. This chapter offers resources and strategies to empower through difference.

Within a community that strives for liberating equality that is not defined as sameness, sustained interaction with each other is promoted through communicative art expression in which each learns to identify strengths in the others. Each person, despite disabilities, has strengths. The

different strengths, once identified, can be skillfully encouraged so that individual strengths contribute to the group's goals. Communitarian liberty allows stakeholders to make choices regarding their work and their learning, to take responsibility for those choices, and empowers them to actively participate in the educative process in a safe and enabling environment. Communitarian productivity is measured in terms of opportunity to contribute, with the understanding that, in an interdependent community, *everyone* has contributions to make.

It is our hope that this text provides art educators, pre-service art educators, and others working alongside individuals experiencing alter-abilities with both a philosophical approach and practical, foundational, research-based strategies for teaching in an inclusive class as envisioned by IDEA.

Assistive & Adaptive Technologies Facilitate Inclusion



- ❖ Focus on abilities rather than disabilities.
- ❖ Facilitate active participation and collaboration.
- ❖ Customize instruction (according to IEP under IDEA).
- ❖ Provide computers for self-advocacy and self-representation since for many computers provide a means to express and to experiment, and serves as an equalizer.