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Activating Diversity and Inclusion:

A Blueprint for Museum Educators as Allies
and Change Makers

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Activating Diversity and Inclusion: A Blueprint for Museum Educators as Allies and Change Makers

by Wendy Ng, Syrus Marcus Ware, & Alyssa Greenberg

In this article, the authors Wendy Ng, Syrus Marcus Ware, and Alyssa Greenberg provide a blueprint for a rigorous approach to how museum educators can activate diversity and inclusion to create social change. The authors critically analyze the problematic power dynamics that maintain white supremacy in museum work, and introduce guiding principles of allyship and practical reflection strategies for enacting equitable relationships with visitors and staff across lines of social difference. This guide is designed to help you develop a critical practice that is conscious and constant, and engage in anti-oppressive museum work internally and externally.

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Taylor & Francis's *Journal of Museum Education* web page.

1. **"As practitioners, we take this responsibility seriously – museums should not just be institutions of social value, but institutions of social justice. For us, this responsibility entails creating museum education experiences that are meaningful and relevant to all visitors, not only those who benefit from white supremacy and other forms of privilege." (p. 142-143)**
 - Where is your museum located on the spectrum between being an institution of social value and an institution of social justice?
 - Where is your professional practice as a museum educator located on this spectrum?
 - How aligned are your museum's position and your own position?
 - How can you work towards bridging the two positions?
2. **"Working with ever-changing language, we have chosen to focus on the concept of allyship, which we define as a way of working together, across multiple identities, to create work environments, programming, and exhibition content that embraces all humanity, specifically racialized and marginalized peoples, from a social justice lens." (p. 143-144)**
 - Framed by the guiding principles for allyship, what can allyship look like in museums?
 - What can allyship look like in your professional practice as a museum educator?

(continued)

- What is not helpful when attempting to ally yourself with racialized or marginalized colleagues?
 - What are the consequences of a lack of allyship in museums?
3. **“Empathy is at the heart of allyship – a museum’s ability to understand and share the feelings of its communities helps to develop a deeper, more profound purpose to the work of museums.” (p. 144)**
- What practices does/might your museum employ to cultivate empathy internally and externally?
 - What practices do/might you employ as a museum worker to cultivate empathy internally and externally?
4. **The authors outline critical self-reflection and group reflection activities stating, “This is messy work. We are training ourselves to be not passive observers, but active participants in transforming harm and creating inclusive institutions – with compassion, understanding, and solidarity.” (p. 148)**
- By transforming harm in museums, what kind of spaces are allies creating?
 - How does power play into the effectiveness of an ally?
 - What barriers inhibit museum professionals from engaging in the sometimes messy work of critical self-reflection and group reflection?
 - How can we diminish the effects of or remove these barriers?
5. **“...we approach diversity (and the rhetoric around it) as a contested site rather than an automatic social good. Diversity is not an outcome. For example, we believe that anti-oppressive museum work is more systemic than merely hiring a demographically diverse staff. Hiring a diverse staff can still result in tokenizing power dynamics, such as expecting a staff member to speak or act on behalf of their marginalized identity or maintaining white privileged staff members as the leaders and decision-makers. Rather, diversity is a means to an end.” (p. 149)**
- How does your museum approach diversity and inclusion work?
 - In what ways can diversity and inclusion initiatives undermine social justice goals?
 - In what ways have your museum’s internal or external practices maintained white supremacy?
 - In what ways has your own work or experience as a museum professional maintained white supremacy?