

Episode transcription:

Richaa Hoysala [00:00:09]

Hello and welcome to CICE: The Podcast, a student led podcast out of Teachers College, Columbia University. As students of Comparative and International Education, we started this podcast to connect academic research in the field to the current events they inform and explain.

My name is Richaa Hoysala and I'm a masters student in the International Educational Development Program,

Nadia Ford [00:00:25]

And I'm Nadia Ford. I'm a master's student in the International and Comparative Education Program at Teachers College and we will be your hosts for this episode.

Richaa Hoyslaa [00:00:42]

Over the past few years we've seen polarizing politics around the world and we've grown accustomed and desensitized to the increasing number of stories regarding polarization, prejudice and hate. Although this phenomenon of exclusion and discrimination is not new, the prevalence of it today and in recent history is of concern especially in the policies and practices that impact schools and classrooms.

Nadia Ford [00:01:28]

In today's episode, we will learn more about where this is coming from and what we can do as educators and educational researchers to support our students and teachers. Our guest today is Vikramaditya Joshi, a second year doctoral student in the philosophy and education program at Teachers College, Columbia university. He currently serves as the director of research and partnerships at Reimagined Resilience, an innovative professional development program designed for educators and educational staff to nurture resilience as an integral capacity in their practices and for their students. Hi Vic, welcome to the show.

Richaa Hoyslaa [00:02:09]

Hi Vic. Our first question for you is how do you make sense of these events that we see happening around the world?

Vikramaditya Joshi [00:02:17]

We're doing something which is what's heavily required, which is dialoguing, speaking with each other. Uh, the few first words I've heard, you know, is being accustomed to these things, being desensitized to these things and a few concepts that will help ground our

discussion. I think today are firstly biased, which is often thought about as, oh, we have programs that we simply make people aware of their biases, right? And make people simply know about their biases. The question is where do they come from? Why do these biases occur? And a big part of why those biases occur is because we don't speak with each other enough. One, one idea we often talk about that's in the literature, but is not really spoken about in this way, is that bias and curiosity can't coexist. If you are gonna exhibit biased behavior, you're not gonna be asking questions. You're not gonna be interested in learning more. You're gonna be interested in conclusions. And when biases have conclusions which are prejudicial or can harm someone else, then we really get concerned about what conclusion someone is reaching, which is not necessarily of their own volition, right? Not their own will. They're just taking in a conclusion from somewhere. And I think fear is a very powerful motivator to move people, right? And I think bias and fear are two very complimentary concepts because with fear of the unknown or the other, that works very well with this idea of a lack of curiosity.

Richaa Hoysala [00:03:51]

This notion on bias, lack of curiosity, and the fear of the unknown is reminding me of what is happening at home. In India, we've been seeing rising Hindu nationalism with anti-Muslim and anti-Dalit sentiments. Most recently in my home state of Karnataka, the high court upheld a ban on hijabs in the classroom. And as a result, young Muslim women are being systematically excluded from their right to education. How do you make sense of these events in terms of the ideas that you've mentioned?

Vikramaditya Joshi [00:04:24]

This story in particular, it's deeply upsetting to me. I grew up in India. I've spent all of my childhood there. This ban on a visible form of honoring one's faith highlights. What we just talked about when there's no curiosity. And what's really, really deeply disappointing is that the arguments behind such a decision, they are prejudicial. There's a really powerful video of a Muslim girl, trying to walk into her school. And there are a bunch of men just standing there trying to intimidate her out of her education. And you wonder, fear is a powerful motivator, right? You, you see that happening because what do they show? They show a narrative of fear. And that's why I think we have to bring this idea of narratives in because a bias is trying to seed a story into someone is to tell 'em that this is a story of a person, a story of a people, and you need to buy into it wholeheartedly. Cause once you do, then all your biased and prejudicial can, it makes sense actually. But if you accept the premises of those stories, the more you know about someone, research has shown this again and again, the less likely you are to immediately make assumptions about someone because you know more about them. You've lived with them, you've seen them grow up. And so this

lack of familiarity, this lack of curiosity opens up this vulnerable space where someone can tell a story for you. They take away your agency.

Nadia Ford [00:06:01]

Vic, thank you very much for what you just shared. And there are, were a few things that stuck out to me, notably narratives and storytelling. And I would like to share a little bit about my own, I guess, narrative and the ways that I have seen bias play out in my own life. I grew up on the border of Mexico in Del Rio, Texas, uh, which is a town that was in the news a little bit last year, the image that was circulating of a border patrol agent on horseback. Um, whenever there were many individuals who were seeking asylum in the Rio Grande. And as a child, I would explore my neighborhood, selling little trinkets to save money for a pet and sometimes my friends and I would enter half built homes to see, oh, wow, is this, you know, one day going to be a mansion? And if I lived here, here's the room that I would want. And here's the room that you could have. And this is what the playroom would be. And flash forward, teen 10, 15 years later, summer of 2021, my partner and I were dressed up pretty cute, you know, we were about to go on a little date. It was sunset. We were having a good time and we were walking on the street right behind my own. And at points we were stopping to, you know, say, oh, I love the frame of that chimney or, oh, what a beautiful garage door <laugh> and things like that. And in the time that it took us to walk from the, you know, beginning of the street to the end and back three different individuals had called the cops on us. So we get back to the end of the street and a cop car pulls up and my partner tells me, you know, oh, that's for us. And I tell him, no, no, no, it's not like I grew up here. I'm not new in town. This is my community. These are individuals who, as you had mentioned earlier, Vic have seen me grow up. There's no way. And sure enough, we keep walking up to the end of the street. And at this point I can see, you know, my own backyard in view, and to, um, police officers come up to us and inform us, we have received some calls of a disturbance. Where are you all from? What are you all doing here? Um, and it's just, I couldn't just really sit with the fact that this is a community that, you know, has seen me grow up. That was paying me \$5 for a little beaded bracelet I made so that I could save money for a pet. And here we are so many years later and they are afraid of me. And I would just love to hear in, you know, your own experience and in the work and the research that you've done, what you make of this.

Vikramaditya Joshi [00:08:41]

Thank you for sharing that story Nadia. It's, it's both, it moves me and at the same time, it's, it's a story that really kind of motivates our work it, and the first, there, there are few things I'd wanna say about the story and then how it connects to the work that we're doing. That moment of recognition that your partner has, it's for us, it shows that the story is already

out there. The story is so typical. It's so, honestly it's so boring and your partner's phrase says it all that's for us, because there's nothing more to tell because the story are so uninteresting, right? Because they just have to tell one story and it connects with this idea of dominating the narrative. You can't have doubt, you can't have change. Bias is also premised on stability. That this needs to be stable so then we can apply it with regularity. So that's one of the first parts when I hear this story. The second part, which I think is so, which I think is so important for listeners to hear, is bias, and the way bias operates is to fractionalize, like fragment us, where that fragmentation is accompanied by a sense of competition. So it's not just, oh, we're separated. We can't share in the same good. We can't share in the same joy. We can't share the same, the same wants, the same needs that human beings have. No, because we're separated. It's us against you. But the third part, which I think is the other positive aspect of sharing stories like this, is that sharing the story connected to say our personal histories makes these personal histories linked to larger questions or patterns.

Nadia Ford [00:10:27]

Vic, I'm taking away a lot about the relationship between biases and narrative. I especially liked what you mentioned about sharing stories to break or challenge the dominant narrative, shifting gears, a little to bias in an educational setting. Have there been programs in the past that have focused on bias in classrooms or schools? What can we learn from them?

Vikramaditya Joshi [00:10:50]

Absolutely. So when we were researching anti-Muslim bias initiatives that were occurring in different parts of the world, we found a very extensively studied one called the prevent program in the United Kingdom. And they were trying to help educators and teachers talk about Islam as a faith and the practices that associated with Islam, you know, different forms of prayer and gathering. What that unfortunately turned out to be was the surveillance of Muslim students in the classroom, which served to exclude them and marginalize them further. And second, it actually made the differences between Muslim students and students of any other fit seem more exaggerated than less, which only serves to exclude alienate and isolate.

Richaa Hoysala [00:11:38]

Based on what you've learned from past programs, where does your program Reimagine Resilience come from?

Vikramaditya Joshi [00:11:46]

Reimagine resilience is led by Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess. She's a professor at Teachers College, Columbia university, and she has an idea. So this is the idea that the program is based on and it's called educational displacement. So there are a few ways to describe educational displacement, but the way I like to describe it is educational displacement occurs when a student feels invisible in the classroom. And there are three forms of invisibility I can talk about. There's invisibility of voice, where their voice is just not heard. They just don't feel like they can share their story. The second is an invisibility of representation. I don't see a single story in the curriculum where I can see that's me or that's, that's a part of my story. And the third invisibility one can call invisibility of say curiosity. We often say there's a culture of silence, not a culture of question posing because every student should be able to ask a question. And so that's, that's kind of what grounds Reimagine Resilience.

Nadia Ford [00:12:54]

Can you tell us more about the program? How is this program different from those in the past?

Vikramaditya Joshi [00:13:00]

The program itself is a professional development opportunity for educators to nurture resilience as a capacity in their practice. Now, when coming to your question about what Reimagine Resilience is doing and how it's responding to what's been happening, what the focus has been on as I briefly mentioned was bias awareness. Let's engage in your positionality and where you teach from, where you move from, where you learn from, and then let's leave after we help you become aware of that. You now figure out this difficult question of identity all on your own. So for us, that felt like a good first step, a very important first step. I want to very openly recognize the importance of that work. See, we just felt that it was incomplete. What we think is important is, bias awareness is an important part, but also is like the expression of what you've become aware of. So if I'm aware of all these things now, what are ways in which I can express myself to have this storytelling, to have this recognition of your voice to happen in the classroom?

Richaa Hoysala [00:13:53]

You mentioned the program focused on the skill of resilience. How is resilience defined and how are you reimagining it?

Vikramaditya Joshi [00:14:03]

I love this question. And, um, there are two parts to the answer. The first part is the resilience part, right? And for us, we're very interested in a lot of the work that we've seen

has shown that resilience is valued across any kind of political affiliations as a capacity in students, in educators and even in context beyond that. So, we were really interested in how, what is resilience being defined as, for people to value it so much. And when we went into the literature, we saw the resilience is described as a form of endurance, and we thought that there are actually a few concerns we have about this metaphor. One it's an individual that is often talked about in the literature. Resilience as an individual capacity. It's only for you to cultivate. The second part with resilience is that it's always in response to a specific problem. And that's something which we were also concerned about because it raises the question of, let's wait for a crisis or for a really difficult or tragic event to tap into our resilience which we found quite strange. And all the narratives that we saw in the literature, where they were drawing stories of resilience is often a story of someone on their own, who had to do it y themselves. Not with the support of a community. I find that this is something that makes a story much more appealing to an audience. That person does it on their own. When you see these biographies of people, right? It's often they did it by themselves, they bucked the trend, they succeeded on their own. When you read the biography you realize, this person's achievement is actually a completely collective achievement, that all achievements are collective achievements. So, to offer what Reimagine Resilience is doing, we look at a community based approach of resilience, which is why educators that come to the program, it's not just for you to come to the program on your own, learn something then leave. You will learn about the other teachers in the program. There are many activities which will draw on inferences and reflections all over the country. That's the first change in resilience. The second change in resilience is not just in moments of crisis. Resilience is a capacity we think, can really agree to look at responding to say how you deal with social media for example. There is a form of resilience when it comes to being in the classroom and recognizing that resilience doesn't have to look at, doesn't have to be simply overcoming a stressor. Resilience could be something where you think about, I read this story, how am I responding to it? How are we responding to it? And how can we be resilient against certain habits of mind or tendencies we have? And the last way is to obviously spotlighting stories. Because when we learn about stories about resilience then we can actually think about how to better understand people.

Nadia Ford [00:16:48]

We have been talking a lot about narratives and the importance of sharing stories. What kinds of stories do you share in your program? Where do these stories come from?

Vikramaditya Joshi [00:16:59]

Like I said, at the heart of reimagine resilience is Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess story and I must begin with that. Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess was a survivor of the Bosnian genocide in the

1990s. So a Bosniak is a Bosnian Muslim. She was growing up in Bosnia at the time where the Serb forces were ethnically cleansing Muslims. She just recently wrote a memoir about this story. It's called *The Cat I Never Named: A Story of Love, War and Survival*. And there's this moment I want to share, which really highlights the power of the story. So there's a scene, Amra and her father are standing at their doorstep, at the door, and these Serbian boys come in, who are you know, part of the military. They see that there is this abandoned Serb house who are Amra's neighbors. Amra looks at them as robbing the house, looting the house, taking away all their things. And the young Amra says, you know, they deserve to be robbed. I hate them. And her father is right next to her and looks down at her and says, Amra, we shouldn't say that. They are just like us, yearning for things, yearning for food, for housing, for shelter. And they have forgotten their humanity. No matter what you do in life, things like this will pass. And we should always remember our humanity. And this is her father telling a daughter about people who are persecuting them. And it's such a powerful moment of resilience. Amra's father could have fed into those narratives, that could have closed Amra's thinking. But he said no. You need to remember your humanity, even if your oppressor is doing that to you. And it was a really powerful moment which we use in the program in *Reimagined Resilience*, because Amra's story is a story about how through the survival of her genocide, education plays a key role in that process. Amra keeps going to school during this siege of her hometown. She immigrates to America and begins studying here. So that's what forms a kind of backbone of the program and we look at different aspects of this story. And to the other part of the question is where do we get our stories from? To be very honest, we get stories from all of you. We ask teachers to share their stories. We seek stories from students who share their experiences.

Richaa Hoysala [00:19:15]

That is incredible. I recently read Professor Amra's book and I found it exceptionally inspiring. I'm sure her stories and stories from students and teachers in the program will have a profound impact in disrupting the dominant narratives and providing multiple perspectives. To conclude, as we read about policies and practices like the hijab ban in India or the Don't Say Gay bill here in America, how can we practice resilience? What advice do you have for educators, students and parents?

Vikramaditya Joshi [00:19:49]

Yeah, this is a really important question. And the reason why storytelling is extremely important, we argue, and which is why we center it in our work, is telling a story takes time. And on a more personal note, I think it's just very important for us to form kind of lateral ties in our communities. You know, the examples you've shared accompanied by, for example, the banning of certain books, right, that is occurring. In some ways, no surprise at all,

because if we've talked about how it's important to control the narrative, it is not surprising that folks want to limit what narratives can be part of a student's learning experience. If you have people in your community, who I may be talking about, who may be affected by it, it's important that you recognize this. If there are folks in your community who are reading the same stories as you that they may be having feelings about it. And one thing which we often do, and this is something which in all research across the political spectrum is we think, oh, I just resolved this on my living room conversation. But the question is, is that do we want to expand our circle of empathy? Right, do we want to expand our circle of empathy beyond just the people we live with? As we will see it all boils down to what individual people are doing too.

Nadia Ford [00:21:10]

Wow, Vic, well, just thank you so much for the time that you've taken to share, Reimagine Resilience with us and the listeners here. And we deeply appreciate how much knowledge we have gained from you and the incredible, incredible work that you are doing. Thank you very much for taking this time.

Richaa Hoysala [00:21:27]

Thank you so much.

Vikramaditya Joshi [00:21:29]

Yeah, thank you both. It's been a pleasure.

Nadia Ford [00:21:41]

CICE: The Podcast is part of Current Issues in Comparative Education, an open access journal in the field of comparative education. CICE is the oldest open student lead journal in the field. CICE: The Podcast wishes to thank doctoral and master students who have contributed to this episode. Credits can be found on our website. For additional information on Reimagine Resilience, please see the links in the bio.