

Afroza Nanji

The Potential and Peril of a Pluralistic Disposition

Finding ways to live peacefully with human diversity represents one of the major challenges facing societies around the world. This roundtable experience explores conceiving pluralism as a disposition held by individuals in response to the challenges and opportunities associated with a changing, diverse and connected world. The Global Centre of Pluralism defines pluralism as an ethic of respect for human differences. Using this definition as a basis, a pluralistic disposition asks individuals to understand and reflect on their layered and dynamic *Identity*, actively seek to understand the diverse identities of others they *Encounter*, and *Engage* with different people for mutual benefit and the betterment of society.

Coming to know oneself is part of what it means to have a pluralistic disposition. Therefore, it is important to consider how one conceptualizes the *self*, which is changing as it encounters human differences. Change, at the heart of transformational learning, is required to realize the potential of pluralism. However, this potential is jeopardized when attempts are made to erase and minimize human differences or simply tolerate them.

The primary preoccupation of those studying pluralism at the individual level can be understood as a dilemma. How does one remain committed to one's particular identity, and at the same time open to those of diverse others? On one hand is the need for confidence and commitment that emanates from a clearly understood identity. On the other hand, is an identity that needs to become open, adaptable and willing to learn from others. Through an interactive experience, and drawing on narrative identity and transformational adult learning theory from the field of education, this roundtable focuses intentionally on the nature of *self* in encounters with human difference and the necessity to move beyond tolerance to active engagement. It is only then that the potential of pluralism can be understood, along with the lifelong journey required to realize it.