

EDITORIAL

Perceived Differences, Exhibited 'Diversity' and Overlooked Individualities

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Perceived Differences and Exhibited 'Diversity'

In our editorial of Volume 2[§], we, the editors, were warning readers against the 'hijacking' of the concept of diversity which is often misused to merely highlight 'racial'/'ethnic'/'cultural' differences, instead of integrating individuals' many complex facets such as gender, language(s), religion, social class, etc. We are aware that the understanding of these dimensions of identity are fluid and fluctuating, for example, that identifying as an Asian doesn't mean the same for all Asians, that there are diverse representations and ways of claiming *Asianness*, as well as ways of being, feeling as and living as a female, a male, or a LGBTQ. In other words, the way people identify, appropriate and live a same social identity (e.g. religion) varies among individuals. Such categories are not definitive as one can change his/her identification(s) in the course of his/her life or even in relation with the context he/she is expressing himself/herself. For the editors of this journal, this sounds like repeating or rehashing something over and over again but today's news coupled with some academic contributions force us to remind our positioning to the reader: I am not a singular homogeneous category or a stereotyped identity rather I am contributing (consciously or not) to a group identification. In other words, at any moment I *am doing* race, culture, language, gender, etc. with other people in a certain context.

In a desire to sound more 'fashionable', researchers, journalists, practitioners, etc. who don't want to sound like they're stereotyping or essentialising - i.e. attributing characteristics of a group to an individual (Spencer 2006, p. 239) - are switching from the old concept of culture/cultural difference to the so-far less challenged and less criticised notion of *diversity*. 'Exhibiting' or claiming diversity has recently become increasingly politically correct, but does it really change anything beyond the use of the words? Let us illustrate what we mean with two news articles published in 2014.

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On 31 October 2014, the French online newspapers *Slate.fr* reported the case of a black student whose picture was posted on the webpage of the International Office of the University of Vienna to illustrate the internationalisation of the campus. The student was discussing with two Caucasian, blond-haired females (supposed to represent Austrian students?) and the picture was accompanied with the striking slogan: “We welcome students from abroad”. We cannot but see the connection with the Benetton campaigns where models from different racial backgrounds were striking a pose on huge advertising posters to promote the variety of colours of the brand’s cloths, but also obviously to ‘celebrate’ multiculturalism. The conveniently used representation of students from different racial backgrounds to illustrate some form or marketed brand of interculturality is an attempt to showcase what we mean by “United Colors of... Intercultural” (Gajardo, Dervin & Lavanchy, 2011), juxtaposing racially different looking individuals to portray intercultural interactions. This picture of the University of Vienna was aiming at attracting more ‘foreign’ students with the pre-conception that a foreigner necessarily looks different, or at least that if one looks different, he is a foreigner.

The black student on the photograph was an Austrian born citizen. When his friends let him know that his picture was used to promote diversity on campus, he wrote to the University (the content of the letter can be found online) to complain and to explain that he had nothing to do with internationalisation. Of course, the article commented on the association black/foreigner, on racism and discrimination etc. We can only agree with the fact that the University website was offensive, but we also have to wonder: How can someone’s picture be used by an institution of this international reputation to represent a category without his/her knowledge? The problem resides not only in choosing this black student to represent foreigners, but also in using the two blond girls as an example of ‘intercultural’ interactions; all of them were reduced to racial/cultural objects.

The article was followed by a link to a YouTube video entitled: *I, Too, Am Harvard*. The video was posted at the beginning of 2014 and was staging Harvard students from racially diverse backgrounds. The message of the campaign was revealed by a combination of the campaign’s name and the presence of (mainly) as-black-identifying students: Harvard students are not all white Americans but come from diverse origins. As one of the students mentioned, Harvard’s recruitment is interested in highly clever students: “To the doubters: Everyone here is incredibly brilliant, everybody here worked incredibly hard”.

However, some comments were echoing a commonly spread representation of this elite: “I don’t feel like a typical Harvard student”, i.e. I am not your typical Caucasian student. This opposition Caucasian/Black students finds its limits when a young female student with mixed origins mentions her ethnicities: “I am black Japanese, am Blasian... but I am black because no one is ever going to see me, look at me and say: Look at that Asian girl...”. In contrast, this other ‘mixed race’ student claims: “I’m half black and am half white, I’m the whole package,” deciding to opt for a more comprehensive identity when she needs to identify.

What is thus the difference with the Austrian black student? In the Harvard campaign, individuals identified **themselves** as black, Blasian, mixed Black-and-White, instead of being assigned an identity by outsiders. Even when they complain about stereotyping and hetero-identification (“no one is ever going to see me, look at me and say: Look at that Asian girl...”), they could voice their opinion, they were in charge and they could claim who they wanted to be. That’s why we should never forget the different facets of one’s identity/ies: they are Harvard students, because

their voice counts, because being a Harvardian means something to almost anybody in the world.

At the opposite side of the table, the Austrian students (black as well as white) were simply used for publicity: they were treated as cultural, or rather racial objects and it took a while before the black student could notice it and issue a complaint - nothing is mentioned about the two Caucasian girls in subsequent news reports.

Several articles of this volume are addressing the question of the representation of diversity in national contexts: How is diversity conceptualised? How and what do local institutions do with diversity? And also, a focus which is *near and dear* to the editors of this journal, how do individuals deal with diversity and how can the integration of diversities be improved?

Overlooked Individualities

The semantic shift from *culture* to *diversities* in education can also be observed in different domains of one's identification. The following excerpt from a continental European university website claiming to act in favour of gender diversity operates an obvious (gender) bias:

Gender Equality and Diversity Unit

The Gender Equality and Diversity Unit is a service point by the University of XX that takes care of equal opportunities for **all members** of the university. The focus of the unit lies on programs and measures to **support female academics** in their careers. Moreover, the team carries out programs in the field of gender monitoring (e.g. gender pay gap analysis), develops new strategies and explores new fields of action from a diversity perspective.

From "all members", the discourse switches to "female academics", leaving away other gender identifying categories i.e. males, LGBTQ, etc. The website displays a pro-feminist discourse which needs to be compared with the following excerpt from the University of Birmingham in the UK:

Gender equality:

Under the Equality Act 2010, we are all entitled to be treated fairly in the workplace regardless of our gender and not to be subjected to gender-related discrimination, including the right to equal pay for work of equal value. The Equality Act also establishes fair treatment and protection **from discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity and marriage and civil partnership.**

On the British website, there is no visible opposition between males and females and the final sentence can be understood as: *I don't mean any gender (male/female/LGBTQ) discrimination and I am fighting against all inequities.* In fact, the website includes a section entitled "My partner is having a baby" and "Can I share my partner's maternity leave?" explaining to male lecturers their right in case of the birth of a child.

Of course we are not saying that females are not discriminated against. Yet while gender equality appears in the first case as a fight for females' rights, which would potentially attract little male support (but this is a supposition and we are here essentialising genders), the University of Birmingham's website appears as more

consensual and anybody, regardless of his/her gender identification, could identify with the goals of the university. We believe that the second excerpt is not based on a *Us versus Them* opposition and is more respectful of diversities. Consequently, it may generate a broader support reaching beyond gender categories.

The excerpts above are only illustrating topics which remain central for the editors of *IJE4D* and which are at the core of this journal's goals. Using *diversities* in the plural, we welcome contributions where individual experiences are at the centre, moving beyond pre-conceived categories (e.g. see Byrd Clark, 2010) and integrating the complex dimensions of space and time, macro- and micro-contexts. We hope to receive more proposals that critically examine diversities in different contexts as well as integrating diversit-*IES* and/or fighting against any type of racial/ethnic/cultural, gender, social, religious, etc. biases in order to contribute to social changes which go beyond a mere word replacement.

About this volume

The third volume of this journal brings together a special issue and a varia section. The special issue is entitled *Diverse Teachers for Diverse Learners* and was edited by Clea Schmidt, Heini Paavola and Samúel Lefever. The issue comprises the first 6 research articles. The *Varia* section is made of two independent research articles.

The special issue was prepared by members of the network *Diverse Teachers for Diverse Learners* (2011-2014, <https://vefir.hi.is/dtdl/>) sponsored by Nordforsk, an organisation under the Nordic Council of Ministers that provides funding for research and cooperation. The work was conducted in Iceland, Norway, Finland, the UK and Canada and explored diverse students' experiences in schools, how students benefit from linguistically and culturally diverse teachers and how the teaching force generally benefits from diversification, how diverse teachers in the different countries effect and contribute to diverse teaching practices and school cultures, and how teacher education in the different countries should develop and take into account the diversification of teachers and students.

In the first article entitled *Diversity and Equity in an Educational Research Partnership: A Duoethnographic Inquiry*, **Clea Schmidt** and **Antoinette Gagné** compare and contrast their experiences in a 12-year collaborative partnership to explore issues of equity related to language education, immigrant learners and families, and diversifying the Canadian teaching force. Using a duoethnographic methodology the authors explore the evolution of their positions and how they have sought to make research findings relevant to a larger education audience.

The second article was written by **Jaakko Miettunen** and **Fred Dervin**. Motivated by the current 'treacherous' changes in Finnish education (introduction of a new core curriculum, problems of discipline, increasing number of dropouts and marginalized youth), the authors examine how different types of teachers are represented and constructed in a recent Finnish TV series. Diversity is not represented by canonical marks such as skin colour or language but by the way different teachers of different subject are depicted and stereotyped.

In the third article, **Joke Dewilde** and **Lars Anders Kulbrandstad** analyse the integration of teachers "with an immigrant background" into the national system. In Norway, one is considered a *person with an immigrant background* even if s/he is born in the country of foreign-born parents. In *Recruitment and Certification of Immigrant Teachers: Roles and Requirements*, the researchers discuss the motivations of the Norwegian government, how it intends to attract more teachers

from the minorities, but at the same time complicates their recruitment and integration to the national system by increasing requirements to access the profession.

The next article tackles the same question in two other Nordic countries: Iceland and Finland. For *Immigrant Teachers In Iceland And Finland: Successes And Contributions*, **Samúel Lefever**, **Heini Paavola**, **Robert Berman**, **Hafþís Guðjónsdóttir**, **Mirja-Tytti Talib**, and **Karen Rut Gísladóttir** interviewed six immigrant teachers working in Iceland and six other working in Finland to understand how they integrated the local teaching community and what difficulties they encountered. This cross-national research should give migrant teachers an insight on how to better succeed in a new national environment.

In his article entitled *Between Rhetoric & Reality: How Diversity Was Dismissed from Curriculum*, **Thor-André Skreftsrud** addresses the crucial question of the place given to diversity in the Norwegian new curriculum. Skreftsrud analyses the different drafts of the document and highlights how the understanding of diversity was conceptualised and shifted to “a superficial and fragmented treatment.”

The next article addresses questions of the representation of education in the media. **Giovanna Fassetta**, **Emilia Pietka-Nykaza**, and **Geri Smyth** consider teachers, teacher-pupil relationships and inter-staff relationships in a British TV series. In *Cultural Diversity in Popular Culture – two case studies from a UK school based television drama*, they analyse how student (multilingual, ethnic, multicultural) diversity is presented in the TV Drama *Waterloo Rd*.

For the final article of the special issue, **Kirsten Lauritsen** and **Hanna Ragnarsdóttir** address the pedagogical issues and prejudices faced by teachers whose first language is different from the medium of instruction of the country they are working in, i.e. other than Norwegian or Icelandic. In *Multilingual teachers in Iceland and Norway: Opportunities and challenges*, the two researchers analyse the narratives of practitioners to better understand power and conflicts in their working environment.

Although not part of the special issue, the next two articles show some continuity with the theme of diversities. **Anne Huhtala** deals with foreign language teachers of Swedish in Finland. In “*About me and my languages*”: *Prospective language teachers reflect on their plurilingualism*, she focuses on the narratives of language teachers who question their professional identity and the challenges they encounter regarding their own identities and their involvement in a Finnish context.

The last article of this issue, written by **Meilan Piao Ehlert** and **Danièle Moore** is entitled *Navigating and reconfiguring the “multi” in Languages and Identities – Six ChaoXianZu [ethnic Korean Chinese] Teenagers in Beijing*. The authors investigate how teenagers engage and invest in multiple representations of languages and identities in China.

With this new issue of IJE4D, we hope to delve more deeply into examining diversities in education. We also hope you enjoy reading the articles and, as always, we welcome your feedback.

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