Editorial: A case for diversity in educational research and educational practice

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Abstract
In this editorial we explore how diversity might matter for educational research and educational practice. We highlight that diversity constitutes a value in itself and can be valued for its consequences. We suggest that valuing diversity doesn't mean that any diversity is simply acceptable. Diversity, so we argue, requires a criterion, and we suggest that democracy may be a relevant criterion for diversity. We also argue that diversity needs a reference point so that rather than talking about diversity in the abstract, it is important to explore in what particular contexts and settings diversity may matter. Against this background we highlight the importance of methodological, conceptual, and theoretical diversity in educational research, also for the sake of the diversity of educational practice.

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, exclusion, transclusion, educational research, educational practice, pluralism, methodology, theory

Diversity, identity, and inclusion

The question of diversity has become one of the most prominent themes of our time, and it may well turn out to be one of its most defining themes. The issue at stake in discussions about diversity is that of representation and presence. It is about who is visible and who isn't visible, who has a say and who doesn't have a say, who plays a part and who doesn't play a part, who sits at the table and who is absent. It is, in short, about who is included and who is excluded. Jacques Rancière has coined the interesting phrase 'le partage du sensible' (see Rancière 2006) to describe the particular way in which, at a given point in time, in a society some are visible and some not, some speech makes sense and other speech is seen as 'noise,' some are included, and some are excluded. In English translation 'partage' is both about how such configurations of sense, sense-making and the sensible are *distributed* and how such distributions lead to particular *divisions* in society (see also Bingham & Biesta 2010).

The connection with questions of inclusion and exclusion indicates that the call for diversity is first and foremost a call for voice, influence, and power. Such calls, however, are not without problems. A main problem – which is well known from discussions about inclusion, in education and elsewhere – is that the success of such calls often relies on the willingness of those 'in power' to let 'others' in. While this may result in more diversity, it doesn't alter the power relationships between the parties, nor does it change the configurations into which 'others' are let in. Rather, therefore,

than seeing the call for diversity as just a call for inclusion into *existing* cultures, structures, and practices, real change is not just about bringing 'others' into existing 'set ups,' but about changing those 'set ups' themselves as well (see Biesta 2019 where this 'double move' is referred to as 'transclusion'). Viewed in this way, then, the call for diversity can be seen as a call for the *redistribution* of power.

What characterises contemporary discussions about and struggles for diversity is that they mainly – and perhaps almost exclusively – are articulated in terms of *identity*. Identity has, in other words, become the main and according to some even the sole marker of diversity. This seems, for example, the common thread in many diversity statements that organisations have been articulating in recent years. In this guise, the struggle for diversity, as a form of identity politics (see, e.g., Bernstein 2005), can thus be said to be first and foremost a struggle for *recognition* (see Honneth 1996). While recognition of identity is undoubtedly important, it may not be all that matters or should matter. At the very least the struggle for diversity should include a struggle for *redistribution* (on the latter see Fraser & Honneth 2003), particularly a struggle for the redistribution of resources and power or, in the language of Bourdieu, a struggle for the redistribution of *capitals*.

Diversity as value and the value of diversity
The philosophical discussion about diversity is, of course, complex and wide-ranging (see, for a helpful introduction, Festenstein 2005). Some would argue that diversity represents a value in itself. This would mean that diversity is always to be preferred over the absence of diversity, and perhaps also that more diversity is always to be preferred over less diversity. Such an approach makes sense if we connect diversity to matters of representation and presence, as one could argue that every individual has a right to exist, be heard and be recognised. The case for diversity, along these lines, goes against totalitarianisms that seek to deny individuals this right (see Arendt 1951).

This 'objective' approach to the question of the value of diversity is to be distinguished from *functionalist* arguments for diversity, where it is argued that diversity is to be valued because of its 'effects' or 'consequences.' One example of such a line of argument is the case for biodiversity, where the suggestion is that diversity is of crucial importance for the resilience and survival of ecosystems. A more diverse ecosystem, so the argument goes, has a better chance of responding to external threats than monocultures, as the latter can only respond in one particular way, so that their survival is literally a matter of 'all or nothing.'

Diversity needs a criterion
While there are good reasons for seeing diversity first and foremost in terms of identity, there are also a number of problems. One is that identity is, in a sense, *infinite*. If we think of identity in terms of what individuals identify *with* and perhaps also in terms of how others identify individuals from the 'outside,' so to speak, it is difficult

to see where the proliferation of such identifications may reach its limits, other than at the point where each individual would have made a claim for their particular identity, always slightly different from everyone else's.

If this problem is, in a sense, a practical problem, there is also a more principled issue with regard to diversity and identity. This has to do with the fact that identities are in themselves not necessarily good and desirable. This becomes a problem when some identities, often explicitly and pro-actively, come with the ambition to *exclude* other identities. Fascism, neo-Nazism and fundamentalism are, after all, identities, and they are actively taken up as desirable identities by some, yet they are problematic for precisely this reason. This seems to suggest, therefore, that diversity is in some way in need of a criterion.

One possible criterion for diversity is democracy, as one could argue that the values that are central to democracy – liberty and equality – seek to secure liberty for everyone and do so in equal measure. Democracy thus both secures the right to identity and puts limits on identities that seek to limit or undermine the possibility for some identities to exist or be recognised. This means, then, that the idea of *democratic* diversity is already more meaningful than diversity without limits, boundaries, or a criterion.

Diversity needs a reference point
One further consideration that is important in discussions about diversity has to do with the question how or with respect to what diversity matters or is supposed to matter. Meaningful discussions about diversity are, in other words, in need of what we might call a 'reference point.' It is here that we wish to connect discussions about diversity with educational research and, to the extent to which educational research seeks to be relevant for educational practice, also with educational practice. In line with what we have stated in earlier editorials (Aldridge et al. 2018; Biesta et al. 2019; Wainwright et al. 2020) we wish to highlight the importance of diversity in educational research, which includes diversity of design, methodology and method, diversity of research ambitions and approaches, diversity of conceptual and theoretical 'framings,' and diversity of the ways in which research seeks to engage with educational practices.

While some see the emergence of a research mono-culture in education as a desirable future – for example around the idea that all 'proper' research should be conducted as a randomised control trial in order to generate knowledge about 'what works' – such a future would, in our view, be detrimental for the vigour and rigour of educational research. To suggest, as we have done (Aldridge et al. 2018) that the nature of educational research should remain contested, means that we think that it is a sign of a healthy research field when it doesn't seek 'closure' but continues to raise fundamental methodological, conceptual, and also political questions about the

nature and purpose of the educational research effort. Such diversity *matters*, so we might say, which also means that educational research should remain mindful of and reflective about its position(s) (see Wainwright et al. 2020).

The same holds, in our view, for the relationship between educational research and educational practice, where we would also argue that any suggestion that there is only one 'ideal' way in which research and practice can and should relate, would be a problematic narrowing of the many ways in which educational research can be meaningful and helpful for educational practice (see also Biesta & Aldridge 2021). And in addition to ways in which research can be 'helpful' for educational practice, there is also a role in *causing* problems rather than just 'solving' them (see Biesta et al. 2019).

The suggestion that there is ultimately only one truly scientific way of conducting research and only one truly scientific way in which research should inform practice, can quickly turn into the suggestion that there is ultimately only one truly scientific way of 'doing' education itself. While we do not wish to cast doubt on the good intentions of those who pursue particular forms of research with the ambition to contribute to the improvement of educational practice, we do think that any attempt at suggesting that there is only one 'proper' way of 'doing' education not only undermines the scope for teachers' professional judgement, but also runs the risk of becoming totalitarian in its intentions and effects. While policy-makers may be tempted to pursue such a future, it is important, for the sake of education and the sake of educational research, that such tendencies remain contested.

For diversity that matters

If the vigour, rigour, and relevance of educational research depend on the diversity of the scholarly field, then it is important that the field itself continues to strive for diversity. While we do not wish to contest all the important reasons why diversity in itself matters, we wish to highlight that the discussion about diversity in educational research and educational practice *also* needs to keep an eye on research and practice itself so as to be able to engage with the ways in which diversity can matter for the quality of research and the quality of education itself. Academic journals such as the British Educational Research Journal have an important role to play in keeping this conversation at the forefront of the educational research community.

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