Educational Briefing 2020

**Equality, Difference, Ambiguity –
Competences for and approaches to diversity-sensitive
educational processes**

Content

Introduction

The aim of democratic citizenship education is to strengthen those competences which enable young people to actively participate in a democratic and pluralistic society. Of particular importance are those competences enabling young people to deal with diversity in an appreciative and constructive manner. To ensure that educational processes are diversity-sensitive, pedagogues and peers themselves have to develop such competences. This requires not only theoretical knowledge of diversity and a constant self-reflection, but also acquiring diversity-sensitive methods and an appreciative approach towards diversity.

This publication is dealing with the topic of diversity competences from three different perspectives: Prof. Dr. Karim Fereidooni describes in his article why and how the development of diversity-sensitive competences and attitudes should be part of qualification programmes for pedagogues and peers. He also explains how a constructive attitude to equality and difference could be achieved. In a second article, Prof. Dr. Claudia Lenz describes why tolerance of ambiguity is relevant for citizenship education and the democratic functioning of diverse societies. Tolerance of ambiguity refers to the competence of dealing with ambiguousness and uncertainty in a productive manner. Finally, Maja Bogojević describes how social media can be used to promote diversity-sensitive competences and an anti-discriminatory attitude.

Diversity-Sensitive Approaches and Competences in Pedagogical Work [1]

Karim Fereidooni

Why?

The first Article of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights states that human dignity is inviolable. The respectful consideration of diversity contributes to bringing this ideal a little closer.

The dignity of each human being is inviolable, and this is why all children, young people and educators have the right to have their specific everyday reality taken into account in all pedagogical institutions, to the extent that such needs are compatible with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

This does not include discriminatory or toxic attitudes, and these must be critically addressed. Pedagogical institutions should not tolerate all opinions – they ought rather to resolutely oppose discriminatory views and actions and strategically work to combat them.

Educators and peers cannot remain neutral when antisemitic, heteronormative, classist, racist and sexist statements are expressed by colleagues or students. Elie Wiesel expressed this fundamental principle as follows:

"We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

This requires the formation and development of an educational professionalism that centres an ongoing engagement with the following questions:

- "How can I facilitate, for myself and my colleagues as well as for my clients, humane working and living conditions, in the consciousness of mutual respect?"
- "What is required for this?"

Hooks (2001, p. 54) defines 'love' in the following way: "the action we take on behalf of our own or another's spiritual growth … Love [is] a combination of trust, commitment, care, respect, knowledge, and responsibility".

This idea of Platonic love is premised on actions, and not only on feelings.
This idea of love does not constrain or isolate the participants, but rather evolves an idea of how the future of a constructive and inspiring relationship can be shaped. The relationship in which love takes place empowers participants to reflect on structures of inequality, in order to work out communal solutions and strategies that encourage people to accept themselves, value themselves, and grant all participants the freedom to enact positive change.

What?

Diversity sensitivity denotes the capacity to perceive the various human-produced structures of inequality (e.g. antisemitism, racism, sexism, heteronormativity, classism, bodyism, adultism, ageism, etc.) at work in our society and pedagogical institutions and that negatively affect the lived reality and participation chances of children and youth as well as educators; as well as signifying a commitment to having the diversity of all people be regarded as a valuable resource and potential for the specific institution as well as for the whole of society.

Note by Karim Fereidooni on the concept of "ethnicity":

The Cambridge Dictionary defines "ethnicity" as follows: a "group of people who have the same national, racial, or cultural origins, or the state of belonging to such a group". For Arndt (2011, p. 632) the word "ethnicity", introduced into academic discourse in the 1960s by Wilhelm Emil Mühlmann, comprises "nothing other than a new way of dressing up […] racist conceptual contents", since "the central principle—that people can be differentiated according to biologistic (supposedly genetically determined) criteria (such as skin colour) and that these can in turn be interpreted in mental, religious, cultural, etc., terms—simply [conveys racism] via a different terminological route" (ibid., p. 632). For Leiprecht (2001, p. 28), ethnicity functions as a linguistic foxhole for "race".

How?

"The first thing you do is to forget that I'm black. /
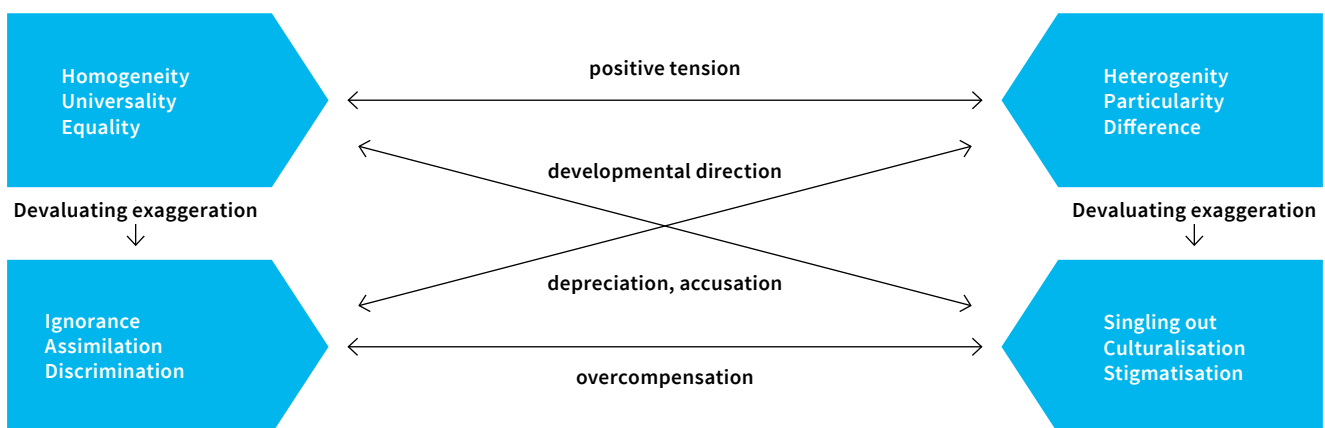Second, you must never forget that I'm black."
(Parker 1989).

In the interest of preventing discrimination, when should people's specific everyday realities be focussed on so as to take their individual life circumstances into account, and when should this individual focus be dispensed with in order to prevent discrimination?

In other words: In which contexts should educators perceive specific or unusual circumstances and respond in a diversity-sensitive manner, and in which contexts should children's and youth's particular circumstances play no role?

To reformulate again: In what situation, as an educator or peer, am I stigmatising specific children or youths by emphasising their respective individual differences, and in what situation am I stigmatising them if I leave their respective individual differences out of consideration? In the following, an attempt will be made to answer these questions: The first step to creating a diversity-conscious pedagogical institution that provides adequate and efficacious anti-discrimination measures is the analysis of the conditions under which norms and differences are constructed. The normal and the divergent do not exist as such, but rather are reproduced in social interactions. The concept of doing difference (cf. West and Fenstermaker 1995) clarifies this.

The following model represents the field of tension between the recognition of difference and the disregard of categories of difference:

The dialectic of difference in the square of values and development (Edelmann 2008, p. 223).

Homogeneity Universality Equality	positive tension	Heterogenity Particularity Difference
Devaluating exaggeration ↓	developmental direction	Devaluating exaggeration ↓
	depreciation, accusation	
Ignorance Assimilation Discrimination	overcompensation	Singling out Culturalisation Stigmatisation

The dialectic of equality and difference is constituted by the field of tension between explicit disregard for differences (upper left in the diagram on p. 6) and explicit singularisation according to differences (upper right in the diagram). While the ideal type of homogeneity solely emphasises the commonalities between all people and disregards existing differences (upper left on p. 6), the ideal type of heterogeneity only apprehends the differences between people, without taking commonalities into account. The requirement that a positive tension be established between the two ideal types makes clear that a meaningful balance and consideration of equality and difference is necessary for all people to be treated justly.

Besides recognising people's specific differences and taking the concomitant positive measures—which can be seen as a way of compensating for disadvantage suffered—as a social actor the state may not lose sight of the justified demands for the equality of all citizens. While the overemphasis of citizens' equality (bottom left on p. 6) regardless of their specific needs and experiences of discrimination can itself lead to (renewed and / or cumulative on p. 6) discrimination, overemphasising differences (bottom right on p. 6) without consideration for the equality that pertains between all citizens of a community can lead to culturalisation.

The vertical connecting lines thus clarify, on the one hand, that even positive values can result in devaluation due to one-sided exaggeration, in that the overemphasis of commonalities could, for example, lead to differences being denied or no longer perceived. On the other hand the overemphasis on differences could lead to effacing the individuality of the person for the sake of their attributed and/or actual culture, tantamount to a kind of determinism. The lower horizontal connecting line indicates the danger of going from one devaluation (ignorance) to another (culturalisation) if the dialectic between equality and difference does not happen in a reflexive way. The diagonal connecting lines clarify that a diversity-conscious approach to differences can only arise if the direction of development proceeds from the devaluating exaggerations towards the diagonally opposite positive values.

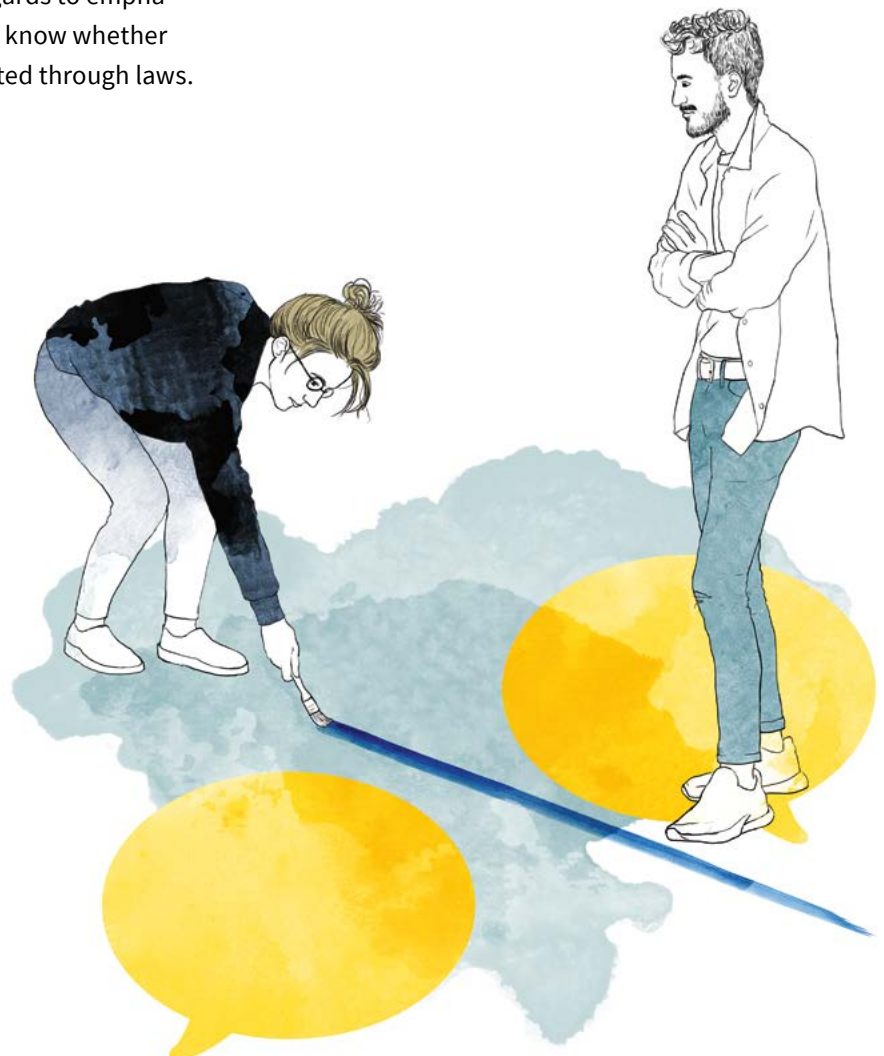The following is an attempt to answer the above questions.

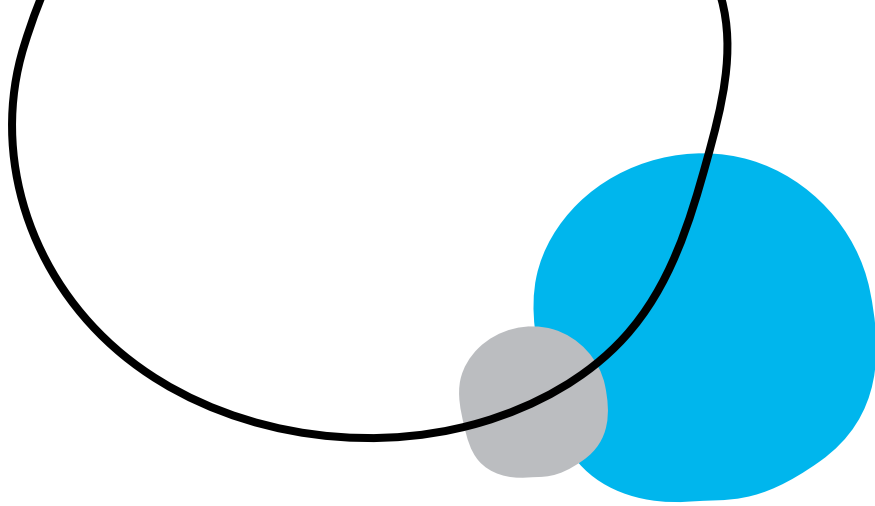**Differences should be perceived and emphasised if:**

- a person's disadvantage (e.g., physical impairment or discrimination) can thereby be compensated.
- the person desires it (principle of voluntariness).
- the perception of differences is appreciative (and not embarrassing).
- spaces of empowerment can thereby be created.
- this is connected to a critical analysis of power. The emphasis on difference should not disregard aspects of the critique of power. This requires the analysis of the following question: Who holds how much power in our society? In regards to emphasising differences it is essential to know whether they are innate, acquired, or created through laws.

Differences should not be explicitly emphasised if:

- emphasising the difference disadvantages the person concerned,
- the difference is brought up against their will,
- discrimination is thereby (re)produced and
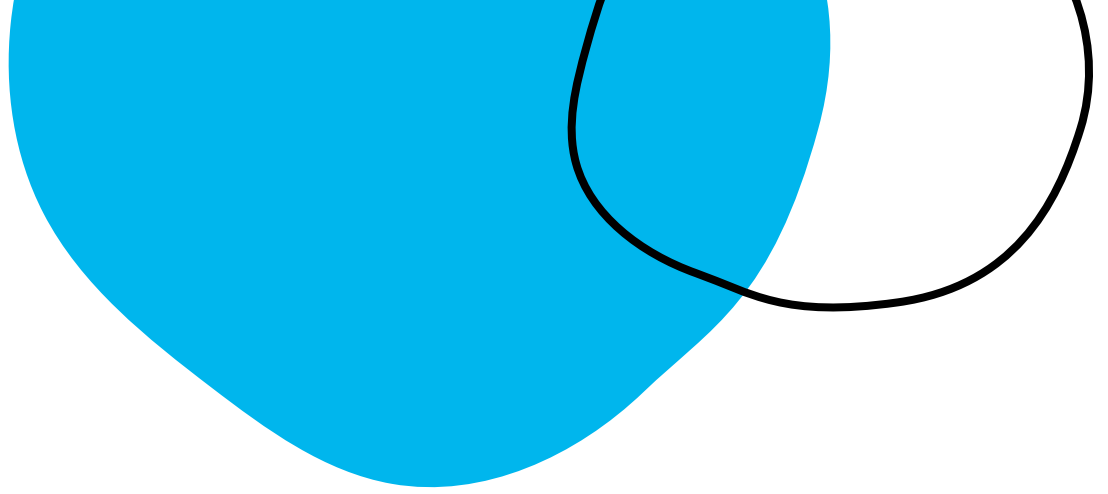- the person is reduced to their difference.

Both the relevance of bringing up differences and the context in which it occurs are decisive for a constructive approach to difference and equality. When reflecting on the (dis)regard for differences, the following question should be considered: Is emphasising differences relevant to the specific context or not?

When reflecting on diversity, there has to be a discussion of normality, because "norms have a regulatory effect; people are correspondingly classified according to these norms, positioned, and placed in a hierarchy" (Rabenstein et al. 2017, p. 10). "… [Many] suffer from fears of denormalisation, i.e., the fear of belonging among those who are 'not normal'. … Ideas of normality are created by establishing the 'other' or 'others'. … Ideas about normality … are created in social discourses and practices in connection with specific relationships of power" (Ibid.). In connection with this, Emcke notes: "We only notice norms as such when we do not correspond to them, when we do not fit into them, whether we wish to or not. A white-skinned person deems the category of skin colour irrelevant, since in the life of a white person in the West, skin colour is irrelevant. A heterosexual person considers sexual orientation irrelevant, since personal sexual orientation can be irrelevant in a heterosexual person's life. Gender categories will appear self-evident to a person who identifies with the body they were born with, since this body never gets called into question. Those who correspond to norms can afford to be sceptical of the idea that they exist." (2016, p. 21ff., emphasis in original)

- **Diversity sensitivity should be a completely normal professional skill among prospective educators and peers. Educators should learn from as early as possible how to engage with diversity in a productive way within their respective institution.**

- **Educators and peers should be offered diversity-sensitivity training in order to bring home to them the importance and the necessity of addressing diversity issues.**

- **Pedagogical concepts relating to diversity sensitivity need to be developed. Educators (including those who are still in training) require concrete examples of the application of these concepts in order to develop their own ideas and to further develop existing ideas and/or customise them for specific institutional contexts.**

- **Interdisciplinary teams should be set up in every educational institution in order to take into account the gamut of aspects of diversity.**

- **Diversity sensitivity is not only a topic for individual pedagogical training or professional development, but rather an aspect of institutions' organisational development. Individual measures need to be accompanied by institutional processes.**

- The problem of data collection: Which data ought to, may, must be collected? Without a concrete approach to data collection, it is unlikely that diversity strategies will be implemented effectively.

- "Shifting the focus across three central dimensions of the way diversity is discussed … : … firstly, changing the emphasis from the expectation that individuals implement changes, to the modification of processes and practices; secondly, from focussing on divergent factors, to questioning the social construction of normality; and thirdly from a focus on differences as given, to reflecting on attributions of difference" (Rabenstein and Schuchart 2017, p. 5).

- "The central focus should not be on 'assistance'—in the sense of compensating for desiderata defined in terms of a norm in order to assimilate individuals to the latter—but rather on increasing participation" (Rabenstein et al. 2017, p. 9).

- "What needs do which people have; what do they need in order to participate or to be able to decide for themselves how to participate?" (Rabenstein et al. 2017, p. 9).

- "There is a need to discuss … how the enabling of 'empowerment' can be included in concepts of individual assistance, and what weight an empowerment-based approach in the [training and professional development of educators] … could have" (Rabenstein et al. 2017, p. 9).

- Formulating goals is important for their work process.

- It also makes sense to create an expert advisory board to support them and their institution.

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About the author

Professor Dr. Karim Fereidooni holds the Junior Professorship for Didactics of Social Scientific Education at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum. His work is focused on racism-critical pedagogy in educational institutions, civic education in the context of post-migrant society, diversity studies and diversity-sensitive research on schools. Previously he taught German, Politics / Economy and Social Science at the St. Ursula Gymnasium Dorsten.

Tolerance of ambiguity: A Central Concept for Democratic Citizenship Education in Diverse Societies

Claudia Lenz

The concept of tolerance of ambiguity describes the capacity to constructively handle ambiguity and insecurity. In this article, I want to show why this quality is crucial for the democratic functioning of pluralistic, diverse societies – and especially so in times of crisis and societal transformation. I also wish to draw attention to how, in the context of citizenship education, an individualising perspective on the development of tolerance of ambiguity falls short. I will then conclude by looking at institutionally and systemically applied approaches to fostering tolerance of ambiguity.

First, though, a word on the current relevance of tolerance of ambiguity in the context of COVID-19: The pandemic presents multifaceted challenges to societies the world over, and has triggered various interrelated crises. Acute overloading of health-care systems and massive restrictions to public life have in turn resulted in economic losses, threatening the personal economic survival of significant numbers of people.

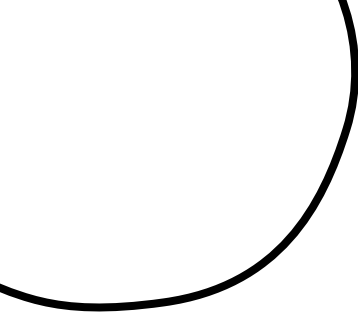2020 has thus placed people under multiple, severe existential burdens:
- Fears about the potentially fatal consequences of the pandemic;
- massive restrictions in the lives of individuals, with social, psychological and economic consequences;
- a temporary suspension of the ordinary rules of democratic decision making.

In addition to these, there is the fact that all of these impositions have to be endured on the basis of limited scientific knowledge about the new virus. The counter-measures have thus largely drawn on existing assumptions and approaches to pandemic control – which vary quite widely from country to country (see Sweden as a European exception). This situation constituted and continues to constitute another, fundamental imposition:

- The uncertainty and incalculability of the state of emergency.

COVID-19 has also had massive impacts on the education system in the form of months-long school closures. Many educational policy-makers are particularly concerned about the "lost" learning outcomes due to school lockdowns. Yet the consequences of the pandemic also point to the necessity of strengthening democratic competence and tolerance of ambiguity as a central element of such competence.

The flourishing of COVID-19-related disinformation, to which young people are exposed in a variety of ways, is one example of why tolerance of ambiguity now seems so necessary.

What is tolerance of ambiguity?

In the face of the existential burdens mentioned above, the attractiveness of information offering conclusive explanations and promising healing cures is unsurprising. The COVID-19 crisis is a marvellous opportunity for those who provide definitive answers (even if these are outright lies), who promise the "big picture" and the "deeper connections" (even when their versions of these contradict basic common sense), and who present clear "guilty parties" and stereotypes of the enemy. Such interpretations do offer the appearance, or at least the illusion, of orientation, predictability and control.

This is where tolerance of ambiguity comes into play. For the alternative to conspiracy theories that "explain it all" is not to uncritically accept and obey the "official" measures and narratives, but rather the ability to engage with the latter in a critical and reflexive way. However, this ability is in turn premised on the capacity to endure and constructively shape uncertainty and ambiguity. And this is precisely the basic definition of tolerance of ambiguity.

The concept of tolerance of ambiguity was developed in 1949 by the psychoanalyst Elsa Frenkel-Brunswik, in research made in connection with the concept of the authoritarian personality. Stangl (2020) describes intolerance of ambiguity as the inability to "endure situations that are contradictory or that have multiple meanings"; this leads to the preponderance of "a rigid, inflexible, compulsive attitude. Nuances and complex situations are rejected because they are irritating; this defensive tendency is closely related to a negative disposition towards difference, and to the rejection of the culturally foreign."

Crucial here is the tendency to resist aspects of reality that do not fit into rigid ordering systems and unequivocal identifications. Such resistance often goes along with a hostile disposition towards people/groups who are seen as "carriers" of these aspects as qualities. Many authors point out that this resistance also originates in a sense of being overwhelmed in the face of the complexity and dynamism of rapidly changing modern societies.

Modernity is informed by the Enlightenment conviction that the individual is capable of responsible self-orientation within social and societal realities, and possesses the faculties needed to make independent decisions in such a context. This is a promise of freedom – but also a challenge. Zygmunt Bauman (2005) points out the fact that the basic modern situation is inevitably accompanied by ambivalence, since the meanings and orientational patterns of the past only offer limited answers to the contradictions and ambiguity of the present and future. Kiehl and Schnerch (2018) note:

"If we now accept that social modernity inevitably produces contradictions, ambiguity, and multiple meanings, we can also understand why the feeling of dissonance becomes a constant presence."

From such a perspective it is understandable how ideological interpretations that propose unilateral identities and affiliations and promise final answers can obtain a certain attractiveness. And this also clarifies the central role of democracy education in enabling people to constructively translate ambiguity into an openness to creative change. This is expressed in the description of tolerance of ambiguity given in the "Competences for Democratic Culture" reference framework (Council of Europe 2018: 45):

"[T]he term "tolerance" should be understood here in its positive sense of accepting and embracing ambiguity (rather than in its negative sense of enduring or putting up with ambiguity)."

Aspects of tolerance of ambiguity

In the literature, tolerance of ambiguity is also called uncertainty tolerance, the tolerance of multiple meanings, or the tolerance for ambivalence. In these terms, different aspects come to the fore:

Uncertainty and ambiguity as limits of knowledge

As human beings, we always make our decisions, whether individual or collective, on the basis of limited information and knowledge. New information may be added, and different perspectives may require a revision of judgements that have been made. Sometimes the available knowledge allows for several, perhaps contradictory conclusions, but action is still required. An awareness of this limitation and provisionality means an openness to going further, to correcting and revising. This is an important dimension of tolerance of ambiguity.

Unpredictability

One consequence of the preceding point is that human action can only be planned to a limited extent and its consequences are never fully predictable. This is true on the level of individual life decisions, and even more so once collective, social and political action comes into play. In complex societies and in view of rapid technological, social and ecological change, expectations and planning for the future are becoming increasingly uncertain. In order not to become incapable of action in the face of this unpredictability, tolerance of ambiguity is required.

Tolerance of ambiguity as a prerequisite for democracy

Ambiguity as an experience of identity

No human being can finally be reduced to a series of static properties. Every person goes through developments that bring with them different identifications, roles and affiliations – which can sometimes be mutually contradictory. The rejection of this "inner diversity" and the emotional ambivalence sometimes associated with it leads to polarizing and Manichean orientations, where the world is divided up into friends and enemies. Tolerance of ambiguity means being able to recognize and abide something of the "other" in that which is one's "own" as well.

Unpredictability, insecurity, and incompleteness are thus fundamental aspects of human existence per se, but they are more strongly evident in democratic, pluralistic societies – and can even be called hallmarks of democracy.

The fact that human beings exist "in the plural", as the philosopher Hannah Arendt (1956) put it, is a fundamental prerequisite of politics, and consequently of democracy. In their diversity, human beings have different perspectives on reality, divergent attitudes, and conflicting interests. This brings with it the need for processes of opinion formation and decision-making. A living democracy is based not only on the pluralism of opinions, but also on the fact that there is room for different ways of life. Conversely, authoritarian political rule is characterized by forcing political unity and cultural conformity.

Being able to interact constructively in a democracy therefore means being able to interact in a context of diversity, and to recognize as equals those who are perceived as different. When otherness is perceived as disconcerting and threatening, however, defensive reactions arise and in the worst case generate hostile stereotypes.

Plurality, in the sense of a diversity of interests and opinions, as well as diversity, in the sense of a variety of cultural orientations, identifications and ways of life, requires the ability to live with and constructively shape ambiguity and incompleteness.

Tolerance of ambiguity can accordingly be considered as **core among the competences needed for democracy** and diversity. The following dimensions, among others, should be considered in this respect:

- Recognition of and openness towards the diverging **perspectives, interests** and **arguments** of others,
- **Willingness to compromise** as a way of coming to decisions and agreements,
- Readiness to change one's **own point of view**
- Accepting and recognising **that which is different as being of equal value**,
- Finding value in **not understanding** as a starting point for **new insight**,
- Readiness to **change existing patterns of interpretation** and attitudes.

How can tolerance of ambiguity be developed through citizenship education?

The Enlightenment answer to the complexity of human reality, but also to its openness to construction, is education with the goal of maturity, which in Wolfgang Klafkis's definition (1999) already includes a three-fold orientation, and thus an orientation towards complexity: autonomy, participation and solidarity.

In relation to the above-mentioned aspects of tolerance of ambiguity, maturity consists, on the one hand, in the capacity for independent thought, for taking personal responsibility, and thus also for assuming responsibility for one's own limitation; and on the other hand, however, in a sense of responsibility extending beyond one's own individuality to encompass others and a shared world. Maturity is thus always both an inward as well as an intersubjective factor, and encompasses the conscious and reflexive engagement with the tensions, contradictions, and dilemmas that come with it.

How can school and extracurricular education encourage the development of tolerance of ambiguity in its diverse facets? Clearly this encouragement cannot be limited to a couple of techniques to be applied in social studies class, but must rather extend to a comprehensive educational orientation towards the learning process and its institutional framework, in which the following points are of central importance:

1. Experiencing equality in diversity

Since tolerance of ambiguity is so strongly tied to identity formation and fundamental, internalized mechanisms of the recognition and devaluation of otherness, the learning process must be connected with experiences of diversity as a "normal state" and the equality of that which is different. Such experiences help with learning to navigate the tensions and contradictions and to open up spaces for action within them.

2. Experience democratic processes

In the same sense, dealing with the challenges and opportunities that democratic opinion-forming and decision-making present, tolerating conflicts of interest, and the ability to make compromises all have to be learned through experiences of real democratic participation. For this, both the classroom practice of various forms – such as argumentation, dialogue and political debate – as well as practical participation in decision-making – whether in the classroom, at the school level, or in connection with local democracy – are advised. Both school and extra-curricular education can offer not only spaces of experience, but also spaces for processing and reflecting on those experiences that are challenging and unsettling for the individual.

3. The construction of knowledge and the search for truth as intersubjective endeavours

In times where an unlimited number of "alternative truths" are leaving the echo chamber of the internet and finding their way into the public sphere, the practice of critical thinking as a component of tolerance of ambiguity obtains central significance. Critical thinking must be able to apply criteria for claims to truth and plausibility, and at the same time be capable of critically reflecting on the limitations of these criteria. The current wave of the Black Lives Matter movement, for instance, arising in response to the murder of George Floyd by a policeman in Minneapolis, has also drawn attention to forms of everyday and systemic racism in Europe, and demonstrated blind spots of the societal majority. Here an important role is played by awareness of the positionality of knowledge.

4. Empathy / Perspective of the other

To expand on the previous point, tolerance of ambiguity demands the capacity to project oneself into the standpoints, perspectives, and experiences of others. Where the lack of tolerance of ambiguity leads to defensiveness and setting rigid boundaries in order to maintain definitiveness and inflexible patterns of interpretation, the practice of tolerance of ambiguity requires a capacity for taking on other perspectives (cognitive) and for "feeling into" (affective), without however slipping into "over-identification" and losing distance from one's own experience. A good example here is the teaching of history: attempting to project oneself into the experiences of people from the past can call into question what is taken for granted and considered normal; yet at the same time, one has to remain aware that the past is always approached from the perspective of the present and through contemporary patterns of interpretation.

5. Dilemma training

A highly effective approach to fostering tolerance of ambiguity can be found in working with moral dilemmas. Everyone has had the experience of facing decisions where all alternatives for action will compromise held principles and/or result in undesirable consequences. School and extracurricular education can make real experiences or fictional situations into the object of reflection and dialogue, both as regards alternatives for action and how to deal with the associated challenges and demands.

6. Dialogue – "Putting yourself on the line"
The intersubjective dimension of the learning process is totally decisive for the development of tolerance of ambiguity. The experience of the concrete other as an equal (see point 1) enables entry into a dialogue where the boundaries of what is "familiar" and "strange" can be explored, shifted, and risked. In intersubjective communication where mutual recognition and trust are safeguarded, that which is supposedly foreign or rejected can thus first be tolerated, and in a further step, perhaps even integrated into the self. This could could take the form of being convinced by an argument proffered by someone holding a putatively adversary position, or recognising oneself in the experience of someone with whom it was assumed there was no common ground. Such processes are risky, since they bring clear boundaries into motion, render judgements invalid, and require new reorientations.

In the face of this risk, such learning processes must take place in a climate of recognition and supportive em-powerment. The teaching staff must constantly be weighing up whether and to what extent he or she ought to invite learners to "put themselves at risk" in this way, and thus potentially abandon personally necessary defence mechanisms.

Tolerance of ambiguity and / as privilege?

Tolerance of ambiguity as a "demand" on the self-steering, self-regulating individual can recall the narrow neo-liberal focus on the subject as solely responsible for itself while remaining blind to or eliding the surrounding conditions.

No doubt, economic security and a social and educational background favourable to personal advancement are better preconditions for facing insecurity with openness and tolerance, than a position of poverty and social deprivation is. Cynically expressed, the description of tolerance of ambiguity can look like a trait of Bordieuian distinction – a luxury for the educated middle class.

The challenge of this perspective can yield an important insight, however: into the systemic and institutional framing and preconditions that promote or hinder the development of tolerance of ambiguity.

Still, looking at tolerance of ambiguity solely in terms of privilege misrecognises the fact that status and privilege can reduce the ability to perceive and integrate per-spectives other than one's own, and thus restrict open-ness to change. The question therefore remains how school and extracurricular education, as well as their insti-tutional and systemic parameters, can contribute to the development of tolerance of ambiguity for learners of all social backgrounds.

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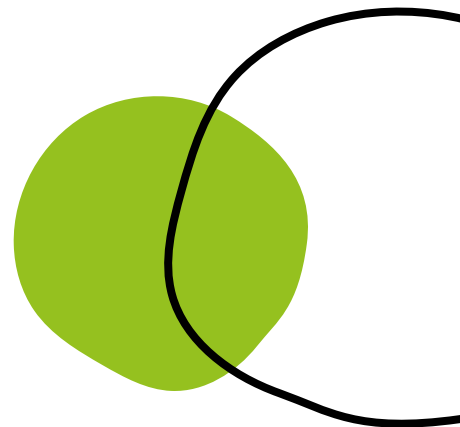
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Anti-discrimination Activism and Education on Social Media – Between Solidarity and Performativity

Maja Bogojević

How can social media be used for civic education and anti-discrimination activism? How can allyship and solidarity look like in this context?
Social media has a lot to offer. Opportunities for empowerment, networking, and building an audience are just the tip of the iceberg. Content-rich memes and hashtags like #metoo can be politically effective on platforms like Twitter, Instagram and Tik Tok. Perspectives that have been structurally deprived of a hearing are finding themselves empowered on and through the internet.

Like anything else, social media platforms do not exist in a social vacuum, but are part of a world that is shaped and influenced by sexism, racism, and numerous other forms of discrimination. The internet in particular offers spaces of expression to people subject to social marginalisation, as well as enabling those unaffected by such processes to learn from this experiential knowledge and integrate it into their own political practice.

As with all political and pedagogical activity, recognising that we all bring different identities and experiences to the table is central. Moreover, it should be remembered that differentials in social power do not vanish into thin air online, but if anything become more strongly marked. For example, people with (so-called) migrant background and/or BIPOC may well create their own autonomous projects, but structural opportunities for funding are often lacking.

As regards intersectionality, it is important to recall that on social media too, solidarity should be extended to everyone. Accessibility, for example, can be facilitated by providing alternative texts or making use of accessible language.

How can learning about social inequalities and the perspectives of marginalised groups take place on social media? Why is it important that this happens?
If we are to achieve forms of coexistence that are rooted in solidarity, cooperation, and inclusion, this will require processes of sensitisation for all members of society. All people need to be informed about social inequalities, whether they are affected by them or not. After all, what good is it if marginalised people empower themselves, only to then be subjected to yet more discrimination? Processes of empowerment and of sensitisation have to go hand in hand.

Since so many of the offline opportunities for civic education have been shelved due to COVID-19, digital alternatives can serve as educational opportunities. Both #metoo and the Black Lives Matter movement have demonstrated the enormous potential of digital activism in the realms of civic education and visibility.

Political channels and explanatory videos are at the forefront of the potential here. Instagram accounts and formats also provide the opportunity to mediate political content in an accessible and straightforward manner. This can also encourage people to further engage with the issues in the context of their offline social intercourse.

Social media's archiving functions facilitate access to the experiential knowledge gathered there. Moreover, the kinds of knowledge social media can store are often precisely those that structural constraints prevent people from accessing. For example, because the history of so-called guest workers is not (or hardly) considered relevant in school curricula, people have to acquire it for themselves. This kind of history is made invisible even though, for some people, it might be central to the formation of their identity, or to the trajectory of their own family. Queer issues, too, which do not correspond to heteronormative domestic imaginaries, are far easier to find in online forums or on social media than in school books or children's television.

The following are a few instructions for an anti-discriminatory approach to using social media.

Disclaimer: People's experiences of discrimination should not primarily serve learning experiences to help unaffected people better understand discrimination. Remember to always centre the needs of those who are affected by discrimination.

1. Empowerment

● **Before there can be any discussion of approaches to discrimination for those unaffected by it, the sufferers of discrimination must first go through processes of empowerment. This is a matter of those who have been discriminated against organising themselves and living out their own resistance, via their own autonomous capacities and possibilities.**

2. Reflecting on who you "follow" and what kinds of content you yourself consume (or do not consume)

● **Leaving your own self-satisfied bubble is un-pleasant. Living in a racist, sexist world is even more so. It can often be helpful to consume content that fosters your own self-reflection through providing insights into socially marginalised perspectives.**

● **This should be carried over into all fields. Diversity of perspective is not just important when discrimination is at issue. Queer or racialised people, for example, are not obligated to only talk about queerness or racism if they want to be seen and heard.**

3. Powersharing

According to Jagusch and Chechata (2020), power sharing refers to "the imperative to become aware of one's own individual and structural positionalities and privileges, which are often invisible but nevertheless constantly play a role, and to reflect on the ensuing responsibilities". This means, in many cases, sharing resources and giving up positions of power. In the digital realm this could involve the following aspects:
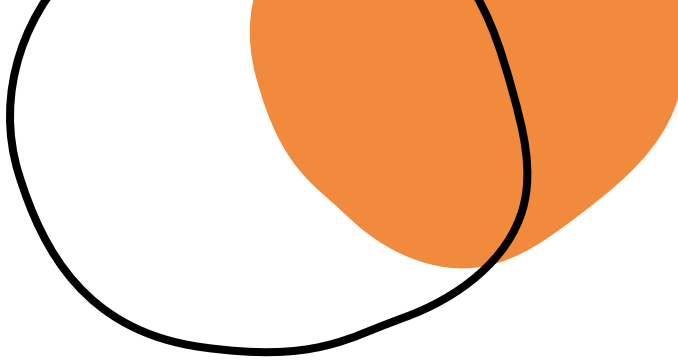
- **Creating a larger audience for marginalised voices**
  Marginalised people do not need anyone to speak for or about them. Hence it is important that people holding positions of power due to their racialised, gendered, or class-based privileges create space for others. Practically, this could mean sharing posts, shout-outs, or Twitter/Instagram "takeovers".

- **Representation or "diversity mascot"?**
  In work with marginalised groups it very often happens that people are deployed as "diversity mascots" in order to signify a putative diversity. So instead of performatively mentioning the experiences of the queer community on Christopher Street Day, ask yourself: how can I genuinely work to facilitate queer people's access and give them a platform, every day, and not just on the most obvious occasions?

4. Point to existing knowledge!

Especially on the internet, most people don't take copyright or citation etiquette seriously. Unfortunately, this often leads to people's work being made invisible.
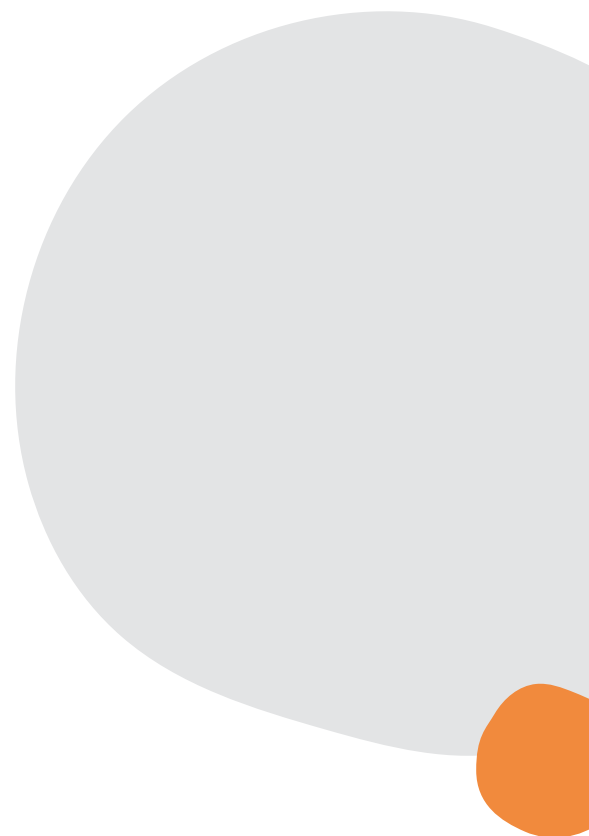
Work Citied

Jagusch, Birgit und Chehata, Yasmine (2020): Empowerment und Powersharing: Ankerpunkte – Positionierungen – Arenen

About the author

Maja Bogojević is a social scientist and political trainer. Maja is studying human rights in the MA program at the University of Vienna. As a political trainer, Maja gives lectures on the topics of allyship, intersectionality, class discrimination and the power-critical use of social media. In this context she has contributed to numerous educational projects, such as AufKlo, Say My Name, softie and #digitalreal. In 2020, Maja has been media education fellow of the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe and SPIEGEL Ed.

Glossary

The texts of the glossary have been mainly translated and taken from Informations- und Dokumentationszentrum für Antirassismusarbeit e.V. (IDA).
www.idaev.de/recherchetools/glossar/

Ableism
This term refers to the structural discrimination of people with an (assigned) disability, as well as people who are handicapped.

Ageism
This term describes the structural discrimination of people based on their assigned old age as well as the stigmatisation of old age and being elderly. For example, through socio-cultural predominant associations with illness as well as physical and mental decline.

Diversity
The diversity approach departs from a multi-dimensional perspective: Individuals are characterised by numerous differences and the belonging to a larger number of different groups in a high-ordered social context and society. Based on the multiple affiliations to various diversity dimensions, such as gender identity, ethnic and cultural background, skin colour, religion, worldview, sexual orientation, disability, age, social status, occupation etc., there exists simultaneously differences and commonalities between individuals, depending on the context. The diversity approach picks up on intersectionality in so far as it particularly makes aware the connection of belonging and assignment of social status and the position of these in societal dominance structures.[1]

Empowerment
The term has been characterised by the U.S. civil rights and self-help movements and stands for the self-empowering or self-enablement of peoples. This means a process in which disadvantaged people develop their own strengths and use their skills, in order to participate in political and societal decision-making processes and do so to improve their living circumstances and opportunities to develop – independent of the benevolence and the majority class.

Heteronormativity
Heteronormativity refers to the "presumed to be natural exclusive binary division of genders (man and woman)" and mutual heterosexual desire, which are both seen as societal norms and, accordingly, binary stereotypes for men and women.

Intersectionality
This term refers to the analysis of interdependence (mutual conditionality) and the combined effects of various categories of difference with dimensions and social inequality and exclusion. In order to create a thorough understanding of discrimination, their individual forms (such as racism, sexism or hetero-sexism) may not be considered as independent of one another.

Classism

The term classism refers to the discrimination of people based on their (assigned) economic, social and educational-political status/background. This can occur on an interactional, institutional, and/or socio-cultural level.

People of Color (POC)

People of Colour serves as an analytical and political term, which is used for all people and communities which are racialised as "other" and were and continue to be oppressed. Meanwhile the term BPoC (Black and People of Colour) is used more frequently to expressly include black people. Somewhat less frequently the term is extended to BIPoC (Black and Indigenous People of Colour) which includes indigenous people.

Queer

Queer is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or are not cisgender.

Sexism

Under sexism is understood to be every form of discrimination of people based on their (assigned) gender as well as its appearance in underlying ideologies.

White/Whiteness

"White" does not necessarily mean the shade of colour of a person's skin but the position and social attribution as white in a racially-structured society.

1   www.ewdv-diversity.de/diversity/intersektionalitaet/, last access 21.11.2019.

Understanding Europe Network

As part of the educational network *Understanding Europe*, young peers between the ages of 16 to 28 hold seminars in public schools. Currently, the network offers the EU Crash Course and different media literacy workshops. The main target group are students from the age of 14 onwards. The participation-oriented peer approach creates a space at schools for young people to talk about politics in Europe, the media, participation and their own life-worlds without being graded.

The peers see themselves as moderators and discussion partners at an equal level. Our qualification programme enables them to reflect on their role as multipliers as well as on their societal positions and to deepen their knowledge of Europe. Moreover, they learn how to successfully apply diversity-oriented methods of citizenship education. The annual multi-day training events are organised and carried out by peers specifically qualified by the Schwarzkopf Foundation during the European Summer School. As part of our fellowship programme, we furthermore support young people in developing new and innovative educational formats.

In cooperation with Understanding Europe Germany and the European Youth Parliament, *Understanding Europe* currently delivers courses in 12 European countries. Peer coordinators are responsible for the project implementation on the ground. *Understanding Europe* is a project by the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe, funded by the Mercator Foundation.

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