

THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN TEACHER EDUCATION FOR DIVERSITY

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Abstract. This paper explores the main challenges in teacher education for diversity: the dominant regimes of truth in society that reinforce existing stereotypes/prejudices, the gap between pre-service and in-service teacher education and professional development, the fragmentation of teacher education system, the competences of teacher educators and lack of research and research-based practice when it comes to education for diversity. The paper discusses the impacts of these challenges on teacher professional role as well as the support needed to overcome some of them. The changes need to be made in two domains: the teacher education curriculum that should reflect the idea of teachers as autonomous professionals who initiate and create their own practice, and the education system that needs to support and encourage the autonomy and initiative of teachers and in which teachers could be visible as active participants/leaders in the process of change.

Key words: education for diversity, challenges, teachers/teacher educators, leadership.

Regardless of the number of different terms used for education *in* and *for* diverse societies (such as intercultural/multicultural education, inclusive education, education for social justice, transformative education, anti-bias education, education for diversity, etc.), they are all based on the same assumptions: the respect for diversity, equity, solidarity, cooperation and participation. What is also common to all of them is the idea of the potential role of education in the process of creating and changing social reality. Some authors see education as a *subversive practice* (Postman & Weingartner, 1969) that should contain a potential for social change rather than simply be a mechanism of reproduction of social oppression. Education should be a mechanism of social critique and transformation, and more than pure transmission of knowledge

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and accommodation to the characteristics of the contemporary society (since it is not the only possible society). Everyone involved in the process of education – formal or informal – has to make a conscious and responsible choice: either to use their own capacities for the creation of change, or to *sabotage* that change (Stamopoulos, 2003). In that sense, education for diversity is transformative education that includes the concept of social justice, as well as multiple perspectives of various social groups. This is a conscious, continuous and focused effort to overcome and deconstruct the dominant stereotypes and prejudices and to recognise and prevent discriminatory practices so that “students from different racial, ethnic, and social class groups experience educational quality” (Banks, 1993: 3). In this regard, what needs to be done in order to transform the existing education system and create the *culture of diversity* is to implement practices that (a) challenge inequality and promote access to an equal education, (b) raise the achievement of all students and provide them with an equitable and high-quality education and (c) give them the opportunity to become critical and productive members of a democratic society (Nieto, 2010).

Teacher educators are facing multiple challenges in trying to prepare student teachers for teaching in a complex and diverse world. On the one hand, their role is to prepare teachers for different challenges that they will face in their professional work, while they should also predict future challenges for which to prepare student teachers. The challenges facing teacher education for diversity are numerous, but can be reduced to a few basic ones that mainly arise from different understandings of the concept of diversity and the way the education system is structured. In this paper, those challenges will be presented as questions that might encourage reflection and debate.

What do we really mean by education for diversity?

There is a significant confusion in the terminology used for education aiming at respect for diversity, inclusiveness and equity, as it has already been mentioned in the introductory part of this paper. Different concepts are sometimes used as synonyms, sometimes as the levels of education for the respect of diversity, and sometimes as necessary components without which it is not possible to talk about transformative education aiming at respect of diversity, recognition and change of discriminatory practices, inclusiveness and equal opportunities. Education for diversity is very often reduced to learning about the existing differences, the approach that some authors call *window dressing* (Nieto, 2000) or the *heroes and holidays approach* (Gorski, 2010). This is a very narrow conception of education for diversity, since it only focuses on surface aspects of various cultures (dress, food, customs, etc.) used to present the culture to the others. Within this approach teachers are encouraged to learn about other cultures in order to be able to work better with students from different backgrounds and to understand their points of view, so that

they can develop an atmosphere of appreciation of diversity in their schools/classrooms. Although such knowledge about other cultures is an important step towards interculturalism, it is still far from the idea that all cultural differences like these are mostly just the surface and not necessarily opposite to the attitudes and values of the dominant culture reflected in all the aspects of school life (monoculturalism). Education for diversity is much more than learning about the heroes and holidays of some culture. Some authors are of the opinion that an intercultural approach promoting respect for diversity, knowledge about other cultures and understanding the contribution of various social groups to the community, without a social justice approach (namely, without the critical assessment and deconstruction of dominant stereotypes and prejudices, without the recognition of mechanisms creating and sustaining the inequalities in a society, and without changing the discriminatory practices) is inadequate (Banks, 2010; Gorski, 2010, 2013; Nieto, 2000). Education for diversity is transformative education and as such is closely related to the concepts of equity, access and social justice (Nieto, 2000). It is not enough to learn about others without reassessing one's own group and the power relations in the society reflected in the education system and in the conception of adequate teaching. The aim of education for diversity is not to understand what is wrong with others who do not fit into the existing system (the deficit theory), but rather to understand the ways in which to transform the system so that differences become acceptable and all children have equal chances. Paul Gorski (2013) introduced the concept of *equity literacy*, the ability to ensure every student an opportunity to achieve full potentials: the ability to recognise both subtle and not-so-subtle biases and inequity, the ability to respond to biases and inequities in the immediate term, the ability to redress biases and inequities in a longer term and the ability to create and sustain a bias-free and equitable learning environment for all students.

Another problem with narrow conceptions of education for diversity arises when its elements are introduced as a separate teaching subject, instead of being interwoven through the whole curriculum (a cross-curricular approach). Education for diversity is not only a matter of knowledge and understanding, but a matter of "living" as well (attitudes, values and actions). Therefore, student teachers should accept the "philosophy" of intercultural education, or values that promote respect of diversity, equity and social justice, and should be able to actively apply these values in their professional practice and lives. This is not an easy task to achieve, due to the next challenge that has to do with dominant "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1977) in a society to which teachers and their educators belong.

Is education for diversity a subversive practice?

Education is not an isolated system, but well-embedded in a system of social relations, reflecting the distribution of power existing in a society. Oppression present in a society can be manifested in various explicit or implicit ways in educational practice and is largely supported by the attitudes of persons managing the educational process (Vranješević, 2012). The ideas that there are groups deserving some privileged status (internalised domination), or that there are groups which, due to their inferiority and incompetence deserve to be marginalised – internalised oppression (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 1997), that marginalised groups are to blame themselves for their marginalised status – blaming the victim mechanism (Ryan, 1976) are very much present both in the society and in education. Those ideas influence the ways teachers approach the concept and practice of diversity. Oppressive practice is evident in the very process of teaching because learning is an active construction of knowledge through social interaction (rather than the passive adoption of knowledge). Knowledge is not culture free because it is always created and promoted for a specific, defined purpose. Often these purposes are promoted through the language, culture and values of those in power (Bishop, 2010: 128). Education for diversity is very difficult due to the fact that teachers as well as their educators are the part of the *regime of truth* prevailing in a society and they frequently share the dominant prejudices and convictions with other members of that society. They tend to neglect the different starting positions children have simply by belonging to different social groups; they tend to disregard the fact that there are marginalised groups whose members cannot achieve equal outcomes compared to the members of privileged groups, however strong their strive was. Teachers also tend to misinterpret the concept of equity, and perceive equity as equality in treatment rather than equity in terms of equal chances/opportunities that members of particular groups have at the beginning. Inclusiveness does not mean to treat all children the same way, since children are not the same (they are not a homogenous group) and they need an individualised approach. It means that each child should have equal access to quality education and a chance to develop fully his or her potentials (equality in outcomes, not in the ways we achieve these outcomes). Some critical voices about the specialist education for inclusion/education for diversity are reported in the European Training Foundation (ETF) Serbia country report.

Teachers don't know how to work with children who are not mainstream because at the faculty they are taught that children are homogenous category... They fail to differentiate between the concepts of being equal and being the same... It's not unusual that teachers are afraid of diversity (Macura-Milovanović, Gera i Kovačević, 2010: 50).

Being part of dominant regimes of truth, teachers fail to understand and recognise the oppressive mechanisms within the school/education context. They

both deny that oppression exists, that students are not treated in the same way and their personal responsibility in resolving problems of oppressive practice in education. Some studies on pre-service teacher attitudes towards the causes of learning underachievement amongst children from marginalised groups showed that they do not consider themselves responsible for that underachievement. The majority of pre-service teachers attributed Roma students' learning underachievement to their parents' disinterest in schooling, Roma students' lack of motivation, and their non-acceptance by peers (Macura-Milovanović & Peček, 2012). When asked about the competences needed for education for diversity/inclusive education, teachers in Serbia "did not formulate any statement suggesting that they recognise that a teacher's own assumptions influence his/her teaching or that knowledge is value-laden" (Macura-Milovanović, Gera i Kovačević, 2010: 37). They denied personal responsibility and socio-psychological barriers such as discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes in the context of both society and the school in the process of creating a culture of diversity.

One conclusion of the ETF study is that in many countries participating in the research, including Serbia, teachers are not motivated to foster social cohesion and inclusiveness in school and to create a learning context in which the same issues should be addressed from different and diverse perspectives (Pantić, Closs & Ivosevic, 2011: 64). Stereotypes and prejudices about others that teachers have (as members of a certain society in which these prejudices became unquestionable and unchallengeable), their misunderstanding of mechanisms that support and perpetuate social inequalities, fear of diversity, as well as negligence of their own role in the process of building a just education, are the challenges closely related with the next one facing teacher education for diversity: competences of teacher educators.

Who educates teachers for diversity?

It is not possible to talk about education for diversity without a critical review of competences and motivation of teacher educators. The way teachers would be prepared for social and cultural diversity and how significant they should consider their work will very much depend on their educators. Though teacher educators are responsible for preparing student teachers and teachers, very little is known about their own education and preparation, especially with respect to diversity. One of the issues raised by the ETF study refers to the competences of teacher educators for developing teachers for the context of social and cultural diversity. According to the findings, some teacher educators have been criticised on a number of levels: (a) commitment to inclusive education/education for diversity, (b) general competence in relation to education for diversity and (c) the kind of engagement with teacher students and teachers when it comes to practice in inclusive schools (Pantić, Closs & Ivosevic, 2011). In Serbia, teacher educators are trained at faculties that are

diverse in terms of representation of courses that could enable them to work adequately with students from different backgrounds and to prepare them to work in diverse classrooms. Most of them are trained to be “subject experts”, with little or no experience in teaching methodology, educational psychology and pedagogy, inclusive education, supporting students from marginalised groups, etc.

Since teacher educators form the part of the society, they frequently share the same stereotypes and prejudices with the majority and thus could have “blind spots” when their attitude towards diversity is in question. Teacher educators with stereotypes and prejudice towards some social groups, or blind to inequalities and discrimination, can hardly teach students about the significance of education for diversity for their future professional work. If teacher educators are incompetent to teach about diversity, they will not be able to prepare their students for work in a diverse environment.

There is an additional problem related to the competences of teacher educators when it comes to education for diversity: a majority of teacher educators have no experience of work in schools or in a classroom, so it is difficult for them to prepare their students adequately for such work. Also, the very structure of teacher education (and teachers in general) does not reflect the diversity existing in the society; teacher educators are mainly the members of dominant groups and have difficulty seeing problems in diverse environments from that position. Since there is a need to address inclusive education throughout *all* teacher education courses, not just at a particular one, one recommendation from the ETF Serbia report was to provide additional education to all teacher educators in order to adopt positive attitudes towards diversity and develop competencies for inclusive education (Macura-Milovanović, Gera i Kovačević, 2010: 60). This proves to be very difficult for two reasons: one refers to financial costs, since education of teacher educators demands professional advancements and substantial changes in their initial education, the changes in teacher training curriculum, as well as the development of new teaching materials, textbooks, etc. Such a comprehensive approach requires funding that goes beyond the priorities established by educational authorities. The second reason lies in the fact that education for diversity demands professional advancement of teacher educators, and re-examination of their accustomed ways of thinking and behaviour, which can provoke a lot of resistance.

Continuity vs. discontinuity in teacher education – How to overcome the gap?

The fragmentation in teacher education implies that there is a gap between learning and applying something – the lack of continuity between pre-service and in-service teacher education and professional development. Two main challenges concerning this gap are: (a) how to better articulate the links between initial and in-service teacher education in order to provide a holistic

approach to career development, and (b) how to best utilise the induction period, because the transition between initial teacher education and the beginning of teaching is key to retaining new teachers in the profession (Burns & Shadoian-Gersing, 2010). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) online consultation showed that 47% of student teachers, 51% of teacher educators and 66% of teachers who responded estimated that the current teacher education produces teachers who are not at all or only somewhat well-prepared to effectively handle diversity issues (Burns & Shadoian-Gersing, 2010: 34). According to the ETF report (Pantić, Closs & Ivosevic, 2011) teacher education systems in many countries are fragmented, thus making systemic change more challenging. Teacher education and professional development are not seen as the continuum of a lifelong process, involving different stages, which need to be coherently linked. The fragmentation of the teacher education system appears in different areas:

(1) *Fragmentation of teacher education for different levels.* In Serbia and other countries that participated in the ETF survey, primary school teachers are educated at special faculties for teachers (Teacher Training Faculties or Pedagogical faculties), while subject teachers, who teach higher grades of primary school and secondary school, are educated at respective faculties linked with their subjects (Literature, Science, Arts faculties etc.). Pre-school teachers, working with children from 3 to 7 years of age, are also educated at Teacher faculties (the department for pre-school teachers), or at Teacher colleges. The analysis of the curricula of teacher education institutions in Serbia showed that the majority do not include the subjects dealing with education for diversity. The majority of Teacher Training Faculties (for primary school teachers) have courses for working with children with developmental difficulties, but these are predominantly based on the medical model of inclusion and deficit theory. Some faculties have introduced more courses on diversity and inclusive education (such as Inclusion in education, Team work in inclusive education, Individualisation and support of students in the educational process –at the Pedagogical Faculty in Jagodina), but this is still insufficient for a comprehensive approach to education for diversity. This situation is even more discouraging at the faculties that educate subject teachers. Those faculties are mostly content-oriented, focusing on acquiring subject knowledge (language, history, natural sciences, etc.) and do not offer opportunities for students teachers to learn how to work with students (not to mention how to work with diversity in their classrooms). Additionally, there is no cooperation between faculties that educate pre-school teachers, primary school teachers and subject teachers in order to prepare them better for their future jobs.

(2) *The gap between pre-service and in-service teacher education.* According to some regional and international research, there is little connection between pre-service teacher education and in-service practice, in spite of a growing demand for making strong links between in-service and pre-service trainings, professional development and teaching practice (Cochran-Smith &

Zeichner, 2005; Pantić, Closs & Ivosevic, 2011). The lack of links between initial education of teachers and their professional development creates big problems for novice teachers who are expected to effectively apply knowledge and skills they have acquired during initial education. The main problem is that during their education, teacher students do not have enough chances to practice at schools and get acquainted with school life. Mentors at schools who could be a liaison between the school and the faculty are rare, so that novice teachers tend to quickly integrate into the existing culture and adapt themselves to the norms of the school (Pantić, Closs & Ivosevic, 2011).

(3) *Fragmented education of school specialist staff.* Professional services in schools: psychologists, pedagogues (in some schools), special educators are important allies to teachers in their professional work. These professionals are educated at respective faculties and departments and hence it is debatable whether they are properly prepared for work with diversity and which kind of help they could offer to teachers.

(4) *Fragmented and insufficient/non-existent education of the whole school.* In order to adopt the basic principles of education for diversity, and to create a culture of togetherness, mutuality and cooperation at school, comprehensive education of all the school employees (not only teachers) is necessary. That is particularly important for novice teachers who enter school for the first time and are supposed to learn the basic principles of school life. The school atmosphere which they enter should be characterised by cooperation, exchange of ideas, freedom of experimentation and research, peer learning and support and participation in all aspects of school life, which is usually not the case. The ETF report clearly showed that there is no holistic approach to teacher preparation and development (Pantić, Closs & Ivosevic, 2011). Fragmentation at all levels of education system affects teacher professional development and is closely connected with the next challenge which refers to teacher professional identity.

*Is intercultural teacher education “terra incognita”
in terms of research and evaluation?
How do teachers see themselves?*

There is a tendency to assume that higher education institutions are generators of knowledge, while practitioners are merely consumers, which assumes that any transfer of knowledge is unidirectional. Yet the knowledge emerging from the classroom about what works and what does not work – and the resulting needs for guidance and development – should be an important tool to guide practice and policy (Burns & Shadoian-Gersing, 2010). The importance of research in the area of education for diversity is twofold: education for diversity aspires to change both the convictions, attitudes and values of the participants in the education process (re-culturation), and the education system so as to support the sustainability of the above mentioned changes (re-structuration). The research of dominant attitudes in practice, or in the area of

implication and the effects of new practices, is an effective way to encourage and support the changes. In order to be able to introduce necessary changes, educators should participate in the research of the effects of the changes if they are supposed to critically review the current practice.

Another problem related to research in education is that teachers are not willing to conduct research and thus critically advance their practice. During pre-service and in-service education, teachers are not trained to do research and are not aware what research in education really means (Vujisić-Živković, 2007). This area of research is for the majority of teachers *terra incognita*: on the one side, they are not familiar with the methodology of research, and on the other, the very area of research has been mystified to a degree that teachers perceive it as a domain of science and scientists, not of practitioners and practice. Such a gap between theory and practice blurs the basic meaning of research in education and encourages convictions among teachers that they are not competent enough to do research. Also, the gap between theory and practice prevents teachers from seeing the importance of research for the improvement of the quality of their practice, because they think the research is beyond the domain of “real life”. Therefore, it is important to support evidence-based learning at school, and to help teachers understand the significance of research for the advancement of their own practice, which should be in the best interest of children with whom they work. During the consultation process run by the OECD, 78% of teachers and 69% of teacher educators reported no formal evaluation of the strategies they used to address diversity in the classroom, which makes the change of practice and implementation of new ones very difficult (Burns & Shadoian-Gersing, 2010: 34). That is why it is very important to train the teachers for research and make them able to critically review their practice; based on research data they could solve many problems they are coping with daily. The integration of theoretical and practical knowledge is the best way to enable them to “practice theory and theorise the practice” (Pantić, Closs & Ivosevic, 2011: 89). Education for diversity assumes teachers who are reflective practitioners, who have the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt the existing curriculum to the cultural, developmental and individual needs of children, who permanently critically review, change and improve their own practice. In intercultural education it is expected that teachers respect and implements the values of intercultural education and are able to create their own practice and initiate changes where they are needed; the teacher is expected to be a *leader*. To be a leader means to induce a change in: (a) one’s own process of learning, (b) students’ process of learning, (c) the process of colleagues’ learning, (d) the learning process of an educational institution/system, and (e) the corpus of knowledge (locally, as well as regionally and globally). Teachers are active in the process of knowledge construction; the knowledge is not transmitted (the transmission model of learning) but created in the process of exchange (the transformative model of learning) in which teachers actively participate (Frost & Durrant,

2003). Teacher leadership assumes active participation of teachers in knowledge acquisition, where knowledge is created by teachers rather than merely received.

Concluding remarks

In spite of all the differences between challenges in teacher education for diversity, what they have in common is that they all arise from the way the educational system is organised and the way it works. The narrow concept of intercultural education, the lack of education for diversity during teacher pre-service training, the fragmentation of teacher education, the gap between pre-service and in-service training, the lack of research-based practice, the concept of teacher as an implementer instead of a creator of his/her own practice, are the issues connected with the way the education system is structured. In this system, teachers are not visible enough and their role is not seen as a leading role in the process of educational change. The implementation of the idea of teacher leadership can mobilise teachers' capacity for leading change. It can release their energy and commitment to improving the effectiveness of their practice and practice in their schools. Teacher leadership can improve the system quality by enhancing professionalism and the process of building professional knowledge created by teachers, thus strongly grounded in practice (Frost, 2010). Considering that teacher leadership assumes a basic change in the way the process of learning/education is perceived, the change of teacher's role, and the change of education policy (which can facilitate or stall the development of professional autonomy and teacher's initiative), the implementation of the idea assumes various kinds of support of teachers. *First*, teacher education curriculum should reflect the idea of the teacher as an autonomous professional who initiates and creates his or her own (intercultural) practice and develops within a professional culture, which encourages innovation and distributed leadership. The curriculum should contain programmes and methodology to support reflection, planning and sharing of experience. *Second*, during initial education teachers should be encouraged to start a dialogue with other educational stakeholders about important issues related to education (one of them is diversity), which overcome the contents of their subjects. *Third*, it is important to empower professional associations of teachers to offer a chance for teachers to exchange ideas and experience, to learn from others and through a constructive dialogue to improve and advance their practice. *Fourth*, it is necessary to strengthen the relations between colleges/university and schools, to form the teams of teachers in schools who could be a significant support to future teachers in their professional development. And *last* (but not the least), teacher educators must constantly advocate for educational decentralisation, i.e. for the development of an education system that supports and encourages the autonomy and initiative of teachers, in which the teachers are visible as active participants in the initiation and creation of necessary changes.

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ОСНОВНИ ИЗАЗОВИ У ОБРАЗОВАЊУ НАСТАВНИКА
ЗА УВАЖАВАЊЕ РАЗЛИЧИТОСТИ

Анстракт

Рад се бави основним изазовима у образовању наставника који се тичу уважавања различитости (и то): доминантним режимима истине који постоје у друштву и поткрепљују постојеће стереотипе/предрасуде, јазом између иницијалног образовања наставника и њиховог професионалног развоја и усавршавања, фрагментацијом система образовања наставника, компетенцијама оних који образују наставнике и недостатком истраживања и праксе засноване на истраживањима у области образовања за уважавање различитости. У раду су приказане импликације које разматрани изазови имају за професионалну улогу наставника и указано је на могуће правце превазилажења неких од наведених изазова. Промена које морају да се догоде односе се на два нивоа. Први ниво се тиче курикулума за образовање наставника који мора да одражава идеју о наставницима као аутономним професионалцима који иницирају и креирају сопствену праксу, а други ниво се односи на образовни систем који мора да подржи и подстакне аутономију и иницијативу наставника и у којем ће наставници бити видљиви као активни учесници/лидери у процесу промене.

Кључне речи: образовање за уважавање различитости, изазови, наставници/наставници будућих наставника, лидерство.

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ОСНОВНЫЕ ВЫЗОВЫ В ОБРАЗОВАНИИ УЧИТЕЛЕЙ
В ПЛАНЕ УВАЖЕНИЯ РАЗЛИЧИЙ

Резюме

В работе рассматриваются основные вызовы в образовании учителей в плане уважения различий: доминантные режимы истины в обществе, которые поощряют уже существующие стереотипы/предвззудки, разрыв между инициальным образованием учителей и их профессиональным развитием и усовершенствованием, фрагментация системы образования учителей, компетенции тех, кто занимается образованием учителей, и дефицит исследований и практики, базирующейся на исследованиях в области образования в плане уважения различий. В работе обосновываются импликациии этих вызовов на профессиональную роль учителя и указывается на возможные направления преодоления некоторых из упомянутых вызовов. Изменения должны произойти на двух уровнях: программы образования учителей, которые должны отражать идею учителя как автономного профессионала, иницирующего и осмысляющего свою практическую работу и идею образовательной системы, которая призвана поддерживать и поощрять автономию и инициативу учителей и в которой учителям будет принадлежать роль активных участников/лидеров в процессах изменений.

Ключевые слова: обучение уважению различий, вызовы, учителя/ учителя будущих учителей, лидерство.