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## Research paper

# Diversity as the new normal and persistent constructions of the immigrant other – Discourses on multicultural education among teacher educators<sup>☆, ☆☆</sup>



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Six multicultural education discourses, ranging from conservative to critical, were found among Finnish teacher educators.
- The liberal discourses articulate diversity as valuable, and communication across differences, and self-reflection as central.
- The immigrant Other and the Finn are constructed as opposite subject positions in the conservative discourse.
- The critical discourses articulate examining inequalities and acting for equality as the central aims.
- To promote social justice all teacher educators and students need to engage in adapting a critical multicultural education.

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the role of social justice in multicultural education taught in teacher education. The study investigated discourses on multicultural education among Finnish teacher educators, and the subject positions constructed in them. Discourse theory analysis revealed six discourses on multicultural education, ranging from conservative to liberal and critical, with liberal discourses having the most articulations. Although Finnish teacher education has taken steps towards social justice, the results also highlight racialisation and the subject position of the immigrant Other as themes that need to be challenged to prevent the reproduction of inequalities in teacher education.

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This article studies discourses on multicultural education and the subject positions constructed in them by Finnish teacher educators. The central aims of multicultural education<sup>1</sup> are the promotion and actions of social justice and equity for all pupils (May & Sleeter, 2010; Nieto, 2018; Palaiologou & Dietz, 2012). Finnish

education is often described as equal for all (Itkonen, 2018), and the national curriculum supports education that focuses on social justice and includes everybody in the concept of diversity (Zilliacus et al., 2017).

Finnish education strongly supports both equal opportunity in legislation and equal access to school. However, in reality, equal treatment and equality of outcomes are not guaranteed for all, and pupils with immigrant backgrounds or those who are racialised are among the disadvantaged. In the 2018 PISA study (OECD, 2019), of all the OECD countries, Finland had the largest difference between the reading performance of pupils with immigrant backgrounds and a Finnish background. Pupils born abroad experience bullying three (girls) to five (boys) times more often in lower secondary school than their peers born in Finland (Halme et al., 2017). Racism based on skin colour in education was experienced by 67% of people with African descent (Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> We use multicultural education instead of intercultural education as it is the term used in Finland, but by using it we are referring to both.

Multicultural education was introduced into Finnish teacher education and schools in the 1990s to promote the integration of immigrant students. However, Finnish education is evidently still far from achieving its goals of social justice.

Research on multicultural education shows that some of its approaches, such as those concerning the integration of immigrants, paradoxically reproduces the immigrant subject as the culturally different, less capable Other (Gorski, 2009; Fylkesnes, 2018; Hummelstedt-Djedou et al., 2018). To examine multicultural education in Finnish teacher education, this study draws on the theoretical framework of the conservative, liberal and critical approaches of multicultural education originally described by McLaren (1995) and Jenks et al. (2001), and further developed by Gorski (2009) in his analysis of multicultural teacher education course syllabi. The conservative approaches of multiculturalism essentialise cultural differences and focus on assimilating the Other into school and society. Non-dominant groups are constructed as homogenous, upholding the hegemony of us and them (Gorski, 2009; Guilherme & Dietz, 2015). The liberal approaches stand for appreciating diversity, often from the perspective of the majority needing to understand and value those seen as Others. The emphasis is often on culture, and on understanding individual bias, but structural inequalities and discrimination remain unaddressed (Gorski & Dalton, 2019). Liberal approaches are popular, since they can be achieved more easily by, for example, adding content on different cultures, and do not demand dominant groups to give up their power and privileges (see e.g. Arphattananon, 2018).

Critical approaches, in turn, address and challenge hegemonic power relations. They focus not on the Other but on the structures that are othering, and the responsibility of educators to change these together with their students. Culture and identity are understood as dynamic and changing, and an intersectional perspective is taken of both identity and oppression. Taking into consideration both local and global issues beyond the national context has also been emphasised in critical multicultural education (May & Sleeter, 2010; Nieto, 2018; Palaiologou & Dietz, 2012; Vavrus, 2015).

Since teacher education is key to enhancing critical multicultural education in schools, the implementation of multicultural education in teacher education has been the object of research in several countries. A literature review of international research on teacher education and cultural diversity revealed that although their aim is social justice, teacher education researchers often reproduce a binary discourse of student teachers and the racialised Other, upholding the ideology of White supremacy (Fylkesnes, 2018). Studies from Sweden have shown that also in teacher education, teacher students with immigrant backgrounds are constructed as the Other in different ways (Bayati, 2014); as bringing diversity but also as lacking skills and experience (Rosén & Wedin, 2018). A study of Korean pre-service teachers' international learning experience found that as students were not taught the historical and societal aspects of racial inequality, or to engage in critical self-reflection on their own positionality, their learning remained on the level of a colour-blind and liberal multiculturalism (Kim & Choi, 2020).

Shortcomings in teacher educator competencies are also visible in Finland. In a study by Räsänen et al. (2018), Finnish teacher educators claimed that cultural diversity was not sufficiently covered in teacher education, even though a course with this theme is generally included. In a discourse analysis of Finnish teacher education programme policies by Hummelstedt-Djedou et al. (2018), the conservative discourses on multicultural education dominated, and immigrant pupils were constructed as a homogenous group that require certain skills from teachers. Moreover, it has been

found that teacher education programmes with an international or intercultural profile include othering and stereotyping (Hahl & Löfström, 2016) or focus on competence for intercultural encounters, but that they lack a perspective of power and structural obstacles (Layne & Dervin, 2016).

The research above shows that despite intentions of integration and equality, Finnish multicultural education often paradoxically contributes to the marginalisation of the immigrant subject by its mix of conservative and liberal approaches. In addition, the term immigrant itself is often used in a generalising and othering manner in education, although immigrants are actually a very heterogeneous group (Kurki, 2019; Hummelstedt-Djedou et al., 2018). The term multicultural is often used when referring to non-Western, non-white immigrant others (Hummelstedt-Djedou et al., 2018). In the Nordic countries, the immigrant is often constructed as an opposite to the ethnic majority, which makes "immigrantness" and otherness more a question of race than, for example, nationality (Vuolajärvi, 2014). It also makes it difficult for mixed race or "in-between" people to identify themselves in more multifaceted ways (Hübinette & Arbouz, 2019; Sandset, 2018). Finnishness is constructed as whiteness throughout educational practices and policies (Hummelstedt-Djedou et al., 2021; Juva & Holm, 2017; Lappalainen, 2009), racialising those considered non-white or non-Western, and preventing them from accessing the position of a Finn. The behaviour of pupils with immigrant backgrounds is explained by culture more often than the behaviour of white ethnic Finns, and the responsibility for integration and becoming fully Finnish is considered theirs alone (Juva & Holm, 2017). Pupils with immigrant backgrounds also encounter structural racism in education in the form of lower expectations manifested through guidance counsellors' and teachers' encouragement to choose vocational studies rather than higher education (Kurki, 2019; Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, 2020).

The above are examples of racialisation, the process by which race is made relevant (Lentin, 2008; Sandset, 2018). Race as a social and political category continues to affect the material and social realities of people globally (Lentin, 2008), although it has been replaced by concepts such as ethnicity or culture in the post-war era (Lentin, 2005). In Finland, race is rarely used as a concept, in order to avoid a connection to the construction of race as biological, and the subject of racism (Alemanji, 2016; Vuolajärvi, 2014). However, at times, ethnicity and culture are used with the logics of racism, and in the name of culture, groups of people are essentialised as different and, for example, less civilised than Finns, reproducing the privileged positions of whites and Westerners (Lentin, 2005; Vuolajärvi, 2014). In immigration discourses, the non-Western Other is often constructed as a threat, especially Muslim men as the "enemy within" (Alghasi, 2019), threatening our civilised and gender-equal values (Vuolajärvi, 2014). These arguments are used to construct Finnish society as civilised (Tuori, 2009) and are examples of racialisation as a cultural and discursive construction (Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017, p. 65). Different forms of racialisation thus create unequal circumstances in education, visible in Finland, as in the Western world at large.

The aim of this study was to analyse discourses on multicultural education among Finnish teacher educators, using critical multicultural education theory and discourse theory analysis. We describe the principles of discourse theory here, and our application of it in the Method section.

All forms of discourse analysis are interested in how meaning is negotiated and established through discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Discourse theory focuses on political struggles over meaning, and how hegemony – a social order that is taken for granted – is upheld through articulations in a certain discourse (Laclau &

Mouffe, 2001). Discourse theory is based on the principle of contingency, which means that no discourse or meaning is fully fixed and can always be articulated in another way (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp. 110–112). In the negotiation of meaning, some signs are given central positions, i.e. nodal points. Nodal points that become articulated with different meanings in different discourses are *floating signifiers* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 113). Some politically contested signs, such as “nation”, are so overloaded with meaning that they become empty, and are called *empty signifiers* (Torfing, 1999, p. 301). *Multicultural education* is both an empty and floating signifier, as many policies and actors assign different meanings to it in different discourses (Wright, 2012). Subjects are discursively articulated as subject positions in a certain discourse, and these positions set the limits for the agency of the subject (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 115). Every discourse and subject need an Other to constitute its limits, although this Other is simultaneously regarded as an obstacle or “enemy” for fully fixing the discourse or subject position (Torfing, 1999, p. 131).

When Hummelstedt-Djedou et al. (2018) analysed Finnish teacher education programme policies using discourse theory, they found that the conservative discourses, and to some extent also the liberal discourses, upheld the same hegemony of Finnishness, and articulated multicultural immigrants as Others. The critical discourses in turn contested this hegemony but articulated another hegemony, that of social justice, in which the constitutive outside, or the “enemy”, of the discourse was inequality.

Through discourse theory analysis, we strive to shed light on what hegemonic order and subject positions are articulated in the discourses on multicultural education among teacher educators. Our research questions are: 1. What kind of discourses on multicultural education emerge in the teacher educator interviews? 2. What subject positions are enabled for pupils, students, teachers, and teacher educators in the different discourses? Based on our findings, we discuss what still needs to be done so that multicultural education can enable actively moving towards social justice in education.

## 1. Method

The data for this study consisted of 14 teacher educator interviews in four<sup>2</sup> different teacher education programmes in different mid-size and big cities of Finland, with three to four interviews per programme. The teacher education programmes generally included a specific course on multicultural education, but the theme was also included in many other courses (see Hummelstedt-Djedou et al., 2018). The teacher educators represented different subjects, some having multicultural education as their focus, and for many it was a dimension related to their field of specialisation, such as worldview, foreign languages, or Finnish as a second language. Overall, this study examined teacher educators, of which a majority were engaged in the subject of multicultural education. The teacher educators taught at the university, but many were also involved in supervising student teaching practices in the field. Regarding academic positions, the participants included three university teachers, eight university lecturers (two were leaders of a teacher education programme), two adjunct professors, and one professor. Their teacher education experience ranged from 2 to 27 years and all except one were female.

Ethical principles for research (TENK, 2019) were considered by asking for permission from each faculty and written consent of the participants. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at anytime. Interview extracts

are presented anonymously and specific, recognisable information about the participating programmes is not included.

The interview guide was created based on critical multicultural education theory and contained 29 questions on the following themes: general view on multicultural education and diversity, multicultural education in one's own teaching, overall experience of and attitudes towards multicultural education in the faculty, reflections on the national curriculum, norms, discrimination and social justice, and challenges and opportunities for multicultural education in the future. The interviews were conducted at the respective universities and lasted between 42 and 117 min, on average 1 h. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Through a discourse theory analysis of the interviews, we wanted to understand how the teacher educators filled the empty signifier of *multicultural education* with meaning, the aim they constructed for it, and for whom they constructed it. We were also interested in what other nodal points emerged in the discourses on multicultural education during the interviews. In the first phase, we read through the interviews and coded the articulations according to the discursive themes that emerged from the data, using atlas.ti as the coding tool. The first phase of coding resulted in a large number of codes of sometimes closely related discursive themes. To structure the second phase of coding, we used the framework of conservative, liberal and critical multicultural education (Gorski, 2009; Jenks et al., 2001; McLaren, 1995) presented in the theory section, and coded articulations with regard to how they contributed to or contested the hegemonies in the different approaches of the framework. We merged the earlier codes of discursive themes into fewer main codes and ended up with eighteen nodal points around which six discourses emerged (see Table 1). One interview answer often contained articulations that contributed to different discourses, which we then coded using several codes. This also shows the contingency and fluidity of the discourses. We conducted a third reading of the articulations of each main discourse to more deeply analyse what each discourse included and excluded, as well as the subject positions constructed in each one. We wrote down descriptions of the discourses and selected representative examples from them for closer analysis.

## 2. Results

In the following, we present the six discourses that we found in the material, structured by the framework of conservative, liberal and critical multicultural education (Gorski, 2009; McLaren, 1995; Jenks et al., 2001), as shown in the table below.

The smallest discourse we found, with 42 articulations, we called *Integrating the Multicultural Other* and it contributed to conservative multicultural education. Three discourses with 179 articulations contributed to liberal multicultural education: *Diversity as Valuable and Inclusive*, *Respectful Communication Across Differences*, and *Developing Self-Reflection*. The articulations (48) of the third liberal discourse, *Developing Self-Reflection*, bordered on both liberal and critical discourses, but as they contributed more strongly to liberal multicultural education, we included them in that discourse. Two discourses with 123 articulations contributed to a critical multicultural education: *Examining Inequality* and *Actions for Equality*. Thus, the liberal discourses dominated, and the conservative discourses were a clear minority. Next, we present each discourse with representative examples.

### 2.1. Conservative discourse

The 42 articulations in the conservative discourse were made by 10 out of 14 teacher educators. Fifteen articulations were made by one teacher educator, and the rest were quite evenly spread among

<sup>2</sup> Referred to as University 1–4 (U1–4).

**Table 1**  
Discourses on multicultural education in the teacher educator interviews.

Discourse framework	Discourse	Nodal points	Subject positions
Conservative 42 articulations	Integrating the Multicultural Other 42 articulations	The immigrant Other Integration of the Other	the Other: the immigrant pupil, the Muslim man Finnish teacher students and teachers
Liberal 179 articulations	Diversity as Valuable and Inclusive 78 articulations  Respectful Communication Across Differences 43 articulations Developing Self-Reflection 48 articulations	Diversity The diverse individual  Communication Difference Understanding Self-reflection Own worldview and prejudices Changing attitudes	Finnish teacher students and teachers Diverse pupils (individuals) in school The multicultural, visibly different Other Individuals communicating The culturally different Other Finnish pupils and teacher students The self-reflective teacher student Teacher educator teaching students to reflect
Critical 123 articulations	Examining Inequality 70 articulations Actions for Equality 53 articulations	Inequality Critical examination Social justice Inclusion and participation Concrete actions for change Teacher responsibility	Teacher students and teacher educators examining inequality  Teacher students, teachers and teacher educators as agents of change

the other nine.

### 2.1.1. Integrating the Multicultural Other

Some teacher educators regarded the multicultural, and even to some extent the multilingual, as immigrants, a subject position constructed as the Other, the constitutive outside of Finns and the norm. One teacher educator (TE 14) described a student as follows:

We had only one student who was an immigrant, or her father was from elsewhere, she was completely Finnish-born and so on, but from her appearance you could clearly see that she was not an ethnic Finn.

The articulation presents that if a person's appearance differs from the Finnish norm – not white and/or other possible physical features – the difference is “clear” enough to make this person “not an ethnic Finn”. The articulation explicitly argues that differing appearance overrides country of birth, or the origin of a parent (Hübinette & Arbouz, 2019; Sandset, 2018). This is one of several examples of how Finnishness or immigrantness is constructed as being separated by race. One teacher educator (TE 6) claimed that everybody is diverse, and explained multiculturalism in teacher education as follows:

There are students of immigrant backgrounds, some, clearly so. But they are, clearly Finnish speaking. They have a different name, you can tell from their name and appearance that they are, but they have clearly grown up in Finland, so they are not like that.

The teacher educator constructs the subject positions as more nuanced than either immigrant or Finn by describing the students as having an immigrant background and Finnish language skills and having grown up in Finland. Name and appearance are highlighted as non-Finnish. The articulation constructs roots and heritage, and the corporal dimension of ethnicity as important factors for claiming Finnishness or being defined as Other. Both articulations are examples of the “racialisation of bodies and subjectivities” (Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017, p. 65). This way of speaking is part of a larger hegemonic discourse in the Nordic countries, in which race or ethnicity is the othering factor (Hübinette & Arbouz, 2019; Sandset, 2018). A non-white appearance and a non-Finnish name leave little space for these students to claim Finnishness (Juva & Holm, 2017) or even a multifaceted “in-between” identity (Hübinette & Arbouz, 2019; Sandset, 2018).

The view of the Other as essentially different to Finns is also reproduced in the way the teaching practice is talked about in

relation to multicultural education. Many educators, especially those in U4 who described their training school as “very multicultural”, put a great deal of faith in students learning real multiculturalism during their training, when they encounter Others – pupils with immigrant backgrounds. This emphasis on learning through encountering Others constructs the culturally different Other as someone the student teachers must learn how to teach (see also Hummelstedt-Djedou et al., 2018). Using a similar argument, a U3 teacher educator was worried about students not encountering enough multiculturalism in their training schools, and therefore took them to visit a preparation class for newly arrived pupils to learn practical skills in the subject. What students need to learn regarding multicultural education is thus articulated as being located in the Others. This kind of articulation risks both homogenising pupils with immigrant backgrounds as one group (Gorski, 2009) and omitting an intersectional perspective on all individuals. The focus on encountering Others also denies the teacher students self-reflection on their possible contribution to othering, and how they could act to promote social justice in the classroom (Gorski & Dalton, 2019).

**The Multicultural Other as a Problem or Threat.** A few teacher educators talked about the multicultural Other as a problem or a threat. An example of this was when a teacher educator, TE 6, was asked about the opportunities and challenges in multicultural education, and described the “piling up” of immigrants in certain schools as a challenge:

Then the challenges grow too big in some places and the teachers and resources may not be sufficient to handle these things. There are too many different things and challenges. Although multiculturalism doesn't of course automatically mean that there are problems, it still often brings with it all kinds of different things.

She says that there are “too many different things and challenges”, and not enough resources and teachers to handle the challenges. Although she says that multiculturalism does not automatically mean problems, she also says it “brings all kinds of different things”, relying on her prior articulation of “different things” and “challenges” to imply that these “different things” are problematic. She uses the term multiculturalism interchangeably with immigrants and implies that immigrant pupils are a homogenous group, characterised as bringing with them “all kinds of different things”. This articulation reproduces the understanding that the immigrant pupil is the one bringing challenges, and that

immigrants are “piling up”. This pinpoints that the challenges come from particular students and contradicts the view that emerges through a socio-political and intersectional lens, i.e., demographics as stemming from societal structures with social classes and marginalisation as key factors.

Some articulations of the immigrant Other infer a threat towards Finnish gender equality. These articulations are related to the general discourse that arose in Finland and Europe in 2015 when many refugees arrived at the same time and populist parties used the “concern” about Finnish women’s security as an argument for their anti-immigrant campaigns (see also Vuolajärvi, 2014). One teacher educator (TE 4) told us about a project she had been working on with her teacher students and adult immigrants. She said she had felt worried about the female students’ security in the company of immigrant men who came from cultures that were unaware of gender equality. Another teacher educator (TE 14) more specifically pointed out that Muslim immigrant men carry a static culture of misogyny:

The Islam religion [...] is a very misogynistic religion. Perhaps we still haven’t woken up to this, maybe there has been too much of this, I’m not a “persu” [member of the True Finns party] [...], but I think we should have this kind of healthy carefulness in the sense that we know that these young men who come here have been born in and grown up in an environment where they have absorbed their education like we have absorbed ours here, [...] And when we are not conscious, we maybe don’t watch out for this.

She essentialises the “Muslim culture” as misogynistic and as something static that the immigrants have absorbed and exemplifies how culture could be used as an explanation for the sexist behaviour of two teenaged boys in the training school. She positioned herself as a feminist earlier in the interview, while the subject position of the Muslim man is constructed as a threat to Finnish gender equality (Alghasi, 2019). Both these examples contain cultural racism (Lentin, 2008) or “racialisation as a cultural and discursive construction” (Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017, p. 65), and focus on the Other as a threat, leaving no room for Muslim men to have subject positions other than a misogynistic one. The previous example also shows denial of racism (Alemanji, 2016, p. 31): the teacher educator claims not to be a nationalist or racist, while simultaneously reproducing a racist understanding of certain people.

Several articulations in this discourse concern a wish to integrate the Other into Finnish society and school, by learning the language and the Finnish culture – including swimming and going to the forest – and adapting more gender-equal values. In answer to how a child’s background should be taken into account in teaching, one teacher educator (TE 9) described how teachers have to be prepared to talk with [immigrant] parents about values, and how the school could respond to their values and explain the school’s norms, rules and aims to them:

The parents can then think about whether this school is the best place for their child, because they decide in the end. After all, the Finnish school follows the norms and values of Finnish society, and we have this [curriculum] the teacher needs to follow.

On the one hand, the teacher educator shows a willingness to understand the parents, and on the other hand assumes that the values of the “immigrant family” differ crucially from those of Finnish schools and society. She continues that the parents can consider whether the school is suitable for their child, as if they have the option of not putting their children into a Finnish school while living in Finland. This assumes that the differences between

the subject positions of immigrants and Finns is static and that it is more the responsibility of the immigrant subjects – the parents and their children – to adapt and fit in. This kind of two-sided articulation is common in this study and presents both challenging areas and opportunities for further change.

The nodal points of this discourse are *the immigrant Other* and *the integration of the Other* into Finnish school and society. The subject position of the immigrant is constructed as opposite to that of the Finn. The “immigrant” is used both for somebody who has recently arrived in Finland and for those with some kind of migration background that makes them different to “original” Finns. The Other is articulated as culturally different, and culture as something static. Being a Finn is articulated as having roots in Finland, i.e., having a Finnish family background; looking like a Finn, i.e., being white; having a Finnish-sounding name, and having Finnish as a mother tongue. The way the two subject positions are constructed in this discourse leaves no space for the Other to take the position of a Finn (Hübnette & Arbouz, 2019; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). This shows the paradox of the constitutive outside that is needed for Finns to constitute themselves with modern, gender-equal values, while the Other is described as a threat and something to beware of (Torfing, 1999, p. 131; Tuori, 2009), and that they should integrate into the Finnish way of being. Several of the articulations in this discourse present the Other as the problem (Juva & Holm, 2017), someone who might not be willing to integrate and take on Finnish values. The immigrant subject is assumed to perform less well and cause more challenges for educators, from a perspective that over-emphasises culture (Gorski, 2016) and lacks an intersectional and structural perspective that would consider, for example, socio-economic background and discrimination. This discourse does not see all pupils as actors who equally contribute to the school community.

## 2.2. Liberal discourses

The liberal discourses were *Diversity as Valuable and Inclusive* (78 articulations), *Respectful Communication across Differences* (53 articulations), and *Developing self-reflection* (48 articulations). The 179 articulations were divided quite evenly among all 14 teacher educators, ranging from 6 to 23 per teacher educator, with many having around 11 to 12 articulations.

### 2.2.1. Diversity as Valuable and Inclusive

Several teacher educators emphasised seeing everybody as diverse individuals with different backgrounds and strengths. In the following example, the teacher educator (TE 8) constructs difference as a richness, but also emphasises the responsibility of the teacher to be sensitive to whether or not pupils want to bring up their backgrounds:

I’ve taught [pupils with] immigrant backgrounds myself, these classes that have pupils with very many kinds of backgrounds. Not everyone wants to highlight their own background. The teacher must know how to be flexible and discreet. But we have to teach already from a young age that we are all different, but also all the same. That if you differ from others in some way. It’s not usually a negative thing. It’s also a richness.

The question about pupils’ identities and background is asked in a general sense, but first the teacher answers that she has taught those “with immigrant backgrounds”. This confirms how diversity and having different identities and backgrounds is often connected to immigrants or the culturally different, and that Finns are supposed to be homogenous (Vuolajärvi, 2014). She does however directly change her description to “pupils from very different backgrounds”, which shows an awareness and direction away from

understanding diversity as only immigrants. Another teacher educator (TE 11) emphasised that everybody has a background, pupils with immigrant backgrounds have skills and experiences other than those related to their migration backgrounds, and the Finnish-speaking and those with Finnish backgrounds “know many more things than only Finnish and Finnishness”. The way these teacher educators talk about pupils with immigrant or Finnish backgrounds shows that Finnishness is a strong norm with which all pupils have to cope, either by not differing from it, or by being seen as something more than merely Finnish.

Some teacher educators explicitly resisted the division into Finns and immigrants. They argued for an understanding of the whole group of pupils as diverse, having an intersectional perspective and considering factors such as social class, religion, language, age, gender, ability, and pupils being different learners. For example, one teacher educator (TE 12) stated:

Intercultural or multicultural education is especially when everybody looks alike, for example, when we have this [training school] with mostly immigrants, then it becomes automatic when there is an obvious visible difference [...] But if we think that we are all just Finns, then especially pay attention to the fact that “hey, in spite of this, we are very different”.

The teacher educator claims that multicultural education is also needed when everybody looks the same, articulating that it is for everybody, as supported by, for example Nieto (2018). She exemplifies “if we think that we are all just Finns” and criticises interpreting visible homogeneity as everyone being the same, and claims diversity may also exist among seemingly homogenous groups. However, by saying “all just Finns” and referring to “when everybody looks alike” the articulation reproduces Finnishness as whiteness – and as something difficult to attain if not white (Hummelstedt et al., 2021; Juva & Holm, 2017). She also argues that multicultural education is automatic in a training school that has many immigrants and visible differences. This connects visible differences (non-whiteness) to immigrantness, which reproduces a view of diversity as consisting of visible ethnic differences and can be described as the “racialisation of bodies” (Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017, p.65).

Later, she argues that there should be more visible diversity in teacher education and that it has taken far too long to get teacher students with immigrant backgrounds, especially considering that the school is “full of” pupils with immigrant backgrounds. This articulates a visible representation of diversity as important, and includes students with immigrant backgrounds as future teachers, not only pupils. This teacher educator actively argues for rejecting the division into immigrants and Finns, an intersectional approach to identity, and more diverse representation in teacher education, but also unintentionally contributes to racialisation, which indicates the challenging nature of the topic of race.

Several teacher educators state that today multiculturalism or diversity should not only be something for specific occasions; it should be the norm in everyday teaching and materials. One teacher educator (TE 9) said that they looked at culture from different angles, arguing that the world is global and multicultural and that “we don’t have any monoculturalism in this world anymore”. She further argued that schools today have no racism because the pupils are used to diversity, and that “the racism problems are among us [adults]”. These examples construct a myth according to which visible ethnic differences automatically make teachers more aware of diversity and make racism or discrimination disappear. The pupils are constructed as being used to diversity in a colour-blind way, and discrimination problems are considered to disappear either if people do not pay attention to them or if they become used to the existence of differences. However, discrimination does not disappear, because of the mere existence of

difference.

The nodal point of this liberal discourse is *diversity* and *diverse individuals*. Diversity is constructed as something valuable that includes different aspects and concerns everybody (Gorski, 2009), but also as consisting of Others, which shows the floating character of the concept. Despite the articulations that today diversity is something natural, it is still constructed as being located more outside than within teacher education. The discourse’s emphasis on seeing the individual and humanity in everyone is indeed important, but together with the belief that existing (visible) diversity automatically ensures that diversity is considered, it may obscure the societal hierarchies and discrimination that still exists towards those who differ from the norm (Gorski & Dalton, 2019; Vavrus, 2015).

### 2.2.2. Respectful Communication Across Differences

Several teacher educators’ articulations revolved around learning to get along and to communicate with respect and understanding with those different from oneself. One teacher educator (TE 6) described the aim of multicultural education as making people tolerant world citizens who understand “people from different backgrounds and situations, so that we can act together and be reasonable and respect each other”. Although the articulations on communication across differences construct encounters with someone different as being reciprocal, the subject positions constructed are often the Finnish pupil, teacher student or teacher encountering multicultural Others. Some teacher educators reflected on how to really change the attitudes of students and make them more understanding and treat others ethically. One (TE 5) suggested that real encounters with those seen as Others would be a better way to touch the hearts of the students than using theory:

In my own subject, religion is an issue that arouses emotions. The only way to bring about change on the attitude level is that we go and get to know, for example, a local mosque, or approach certain people and chat with them [...] In my opinion, it’s through real encounters and interaction that the knowledge that we try to give students here can get some meaning and use.

The argument that the only way to change attitudes is to become familiar with, for example, the local mosque and the people there, includes the assumption that the attitude towards Islam is not necessarily initially positive, and that by encountering its representatives, this can change. The articulation contains a reproduction of the Muslim Other as someone who is not automatically accepted (Alghasi, 2019) and with whom a personal encounter is needed. It also constructs the students as being the ones belonging to the norm and who need to learn to accept others. This is an example of how, even when struggling to overcome prejudice and change attitudes towards groups in society known as the Others, there is a risk of reproducing the construction of the Other if it is not combined with critical self-reflection and examination of one’s own privilege and position in the encounter (Gorski & Dalton, 2019).

One teacher educator (TE 10) emphasised that teachers need to enable children to genuinely interact with each other and prevent cliques forming at school:

If there is a school with a lot of immigrant pupils that form their own groups and don’t mix with the Finnish, I mean Finnish speaking. Then it really is a difficult situation. But it has to happen naturally, they need to be guided to act together. Clique-forming is always dangerous.

The articulation contains the aim that all children genuinely connect with each other, and highlights the importance of teachers helping them do this. At the same time, it expresses that immigrants are more likely to avoid mixing with Finns than the other

way around. The articulation locates the possible problem of segregation as being among the immigrants through racialisation as a cultural construction (Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017, p. 65). This is similar to how Souto (2011) found that the reasons for immigrant pupils not mixing with Finnish pupils was not claimed to be the racism expressed by Finnish pupils, but cultural differences.

The nodal points of this second liberal discourse on multicultural education are *communication, difference and understanding*. Multicultural education is constructed as a matter of educating individuals to treat each other well. The structural dimension and the fact that everybody is not on equal grounds is not considered if one group represents the norm – the oppressor, and the other group represents the Other – the oppressed (Gorski, 2008). The norm of the white ethnically Finnish pupil and those with visible ethnic differences seen as Others is both questioned and reinforced. Overall, the way in which the subject positions of immigrant pupils and Finnish pupils or teachers are constructed shows that power structures are maintained rather than challenged. The articulations make the subject position of the immigrant or Muslim Other responsible for collaborating and integrating (Juva & Holm, 2017). The subject position of the Finnish pupil or teacher is constructed as someone becoming as tolerant and understanding as possible, but the privilege of their position is not considered.

### 2.2.3. Developing Self-Reflection

Many teacher educators highlighted that in addition to multicultural encounters, students need to become aware of how their own beliefs, values and prejudices affect their actions as teachers. One teacher educator (TE 12) said that students have practical knowledge of working with pupils with immigrant backgrounds from their teaching practice, but not necessarily theoretical knowledge of multicultural education:

It all starts from knowing one's own identity. And understanding at least the glasses through which you yourself look at the world. Only after this can you actually start thinking about others.

This focus on self-reflection differs from that in the *Integrating the Other* discourse, which saw teaching practice as the key learning opportunity in terms of multiculturalism, as its focus was on learning to work with multicultural Others. The focus in the quote above is on the teacher student, and this subject position is constructed as someone who is responsible for self-reflection. One teacher educator (TE 5) explained her reflection assignments on worldview issues:

Students have to think about their values and beliefs themselves and open up the often very subconscious thought processes related to values and attitudes [...] I've also received a lot of critique. Some students have said that this issue is too difficult and too private. Even if it's done anonymously in writing. But I justify it by saying that being a teacher is an ethical profession, we can't work with children if we're not aware of our own values.

This constructs the subject position of the teacher as needing to be reflective and aware and that they need to step out of their own comfort zone in order to become an ethical teacher. These articulations represent a liberal approach to reflection, one which focuses on one's own identity and values but does not consider socio-political conditions (Gorski & Dalton, 2019).

Some teacher educators questioned how a teacher with conservative values can support all pupils. One (TE 8) argued that students come to teacher education with conservative attitudes and monocultural values and think "We are Finns, we have the Finnish culture and the Others just have to adapt to that". She believed that multicultural education was essential for discussing and changing students' attitudes. Some mentioned limited time and large groups as obstacles to deeper reflective discussion. Another teacher educator (TE 2) explained that the leader of the

True Finns party's youth organisation had been her student, and she had felt it was necessary to "push him off track for a while", as he was influencing fellow students with his ideas of a monocultural Finland that needs protection. She felt that the aim of multicultural education includes an awakening on the emotional level. Here, the teacher educators raised issues related to the discomfort students might experience when their earlier beliefs are being questioned (Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017), but also implicitly highlighted the emotional work that teacher educators are engaged in when teaching multicultural education and dealing with students' emotions (Cutri & Whiting, 2015).

The nodal points of this discourse are students' *self-reflection, own worldviews and prejudices*, as well as *changing attitudes*. The gaze turns inwards, to the teacher students themselves. The discourse constructs multicultural education as a means to make teacher students reflect on themselves, their identities, beliefs and worldviews, in order to be able to understand and work with different pupils. The articulations constructed the subject position of the teacher educator as the one responsible for changing the attitudes of the teacher students to enable them to treat all pupils equally. The need to become more self-reflective and aware of their own beliefs was notably not associated with the teacher educators themselves. Overall, this discourse can be regarded as an important step for moving from a liberal towards a critical multicultural education. However, it still contributes to the liberal discourse on multicultural education, as it revolves around the teacher students' own beliefs and attitudes, and is not related to power structures in society or how students should act in order to bring about change (Gorski & Dalton, 2019; Liu, 2015).

## 2.3. Critical discourses

The critical discourses were *Examining Inequality* (70 articulations) and *Actions for Equality* (53 articulations). The 123 articulations were divided among all 14 teacher educators in such a way that thirteen had between four and twelve articulations, and one had 21.

### 2.3.1. Examining Inequality

Some teacher educators emphasised the importance of examining inequalities at different levels of education and society. One teacher educator (TE 2) articulated this in how she viewed multiculturalism:

I see it very much as a question of equality, and as becoming sensitive [...] when you go deeper and deeper, then many times you end up in these kinds of power structures and in the human mind somehow in these values [...] and in the structures of the school in which some group has a slightly better power position.

This can be defined as critical reflection (Liu, 2015) because, in addition to understanding one's own values and being sensitive to others, it emphasises becoming aware of unequal structures in school and in society.

The articulations in this discourse contribute to critical multicultural education in several other ways. Identity is constructed as something dynamic, and several teacher educators reported that they used an intersectional perspective to show that we are all 'many things at the same time' (TE 12). One teacher educator explained how she tries to expand multiculturalism or interculturality to cover more than just immigrants. She also criticised the way in which multiculturalism is often used in relation to problems, and multicultural schools as being where children with immigrant backgrounds and parents with low incomes and educational backgrounds go; international schools in turn have a



different, more positive image. Another criticised the deficit discourse on multilingual children and argued for seeing their potential instead. This shows an awareness among teacher educators of the inequalities reproduced in many discourses on multiculturalism. It also shows the extent to which *multiculturalism* is a floating signifier, open to new articulations in different discourses.

In addition to constructing diversity as having different aspects, this discourse also highlights different kinds of oppression (Gorski, 2016; May & Sleeter, 2010). One teacher educator (TE 5) talked about an *Education and Social Justice* course, which treated justice as something ethical and structural: “It includes perspectives on gender, language, religion, human rights, and also has a workshop on global education”. She also said that othering was a central theme in her teaching:

We rarely admit to othering or other someone on purpose. It can be harmless, and we don't understand that these processes, our structures, produce this othering. Then we try to look at where othering leads. [...] And these become huge questions of injustice.

Here the subject positions of both the students and teacher educators are constructed as complicit in upholding unequal structures, and thus responsible for learning to see injustices and to be agents who act upon them. The nodal points of this first critical discourse are *inequality* and *critical examination*. The teacher educators also said that they taught their students to be critical when using teaching materials and to examine the kind of norms that they reproduced. Some of the teacher educators reflected on how racism was not explicitly discussed much in teacher education. One (TE 13) realised that she should include racism more in her teaching in addition to ethnicity, which articulates a willingness to explicitly discuss racism and other oppression more with students. In sum, the articulations in this discourse construct multicultural education as a process with room for development (Nieto 2018).

### 2.3.2. Actions for equality

In addition to critical examination and reflection, some teacher educators highlighted the responsibility of teachers and teacher educators to render equal participation in school and society possible for everybody. One teacher educator (TE 4) emphasised concrete actions for equality, such as having people interact with each other. She said we also need to avoid discrimination among university researchers, as visiting researchers are often very alone:

When they come from somewhere like China or somewhere else far away and then have to even eat alone. This looks kind of bad. It's actually discrimination. Eliminating discrimination demands activeness. We don't easily go there. We are good at this kind of passive tolerance, but sometimes you just have to do something.

Some teacher educators also said that they believed that the national curriculum strongly supports equality, but that schools' teaching materials or practices are not always in line with the curriculum. Some also found it difficult to implement equality in teacher education. In these examples, the teacher educator is constructed as a subject position with the responsibility to realise equality policies, in contrast to the *Developing Self-Reflection* discourse, the focus of which was mostly on the teacher student. TE 4 also said that teachers should be role models in their actions, promoting equal participation and a good atmosphere at school:

If there is a discriminating atmosphere at school, and racist bubbles, then teachers should take a look; all personnel, all adults, can take a good look at themselves and think about why this is so.

Here, the blame for possible racism and discrimination is assigned to the teachers, which differs from the liberal discourse example, in which the immigrant pupils were constructed as being

at fault for not collaborating. Another teacher educator (TE 5) took this further and constructed the teacher as a societal agent:

They're not just teachers in the school, just for informational teaching; they are a societal agent. Even if it is no longer necessarily thought that the teacher should be something of a morally virtuous human, they still have an important official duty. [...] in an ethical sense they have to consider their work as having many dimensions, many influences. They can sometimes intervene concretely in really small things.

Many emphasised the same issue; how the teacher, through small concrete actions can greatly affect pupils' opportunities, also in matters related to, for example, gender. The subject positions of teachers and teacher educators are constructed as agents who make the change for social justice possible by providing equal opportunities and participation (Gorski, 2009; Nieto, 2018). The nodal points of this second critical discourse are *social justice* and *concrete actions for change, inclusion and participation* and *teachers' responsibility*. One teacher educator (TE 7) summarised this discourse well by explaining what is done on her course: “what social justice means, what equality means, and what it means in practice in the teacher's everyday activities. In working practices and evaluation and so on”. This articulates that multicultural education, as an approach for social justice, is present in all actions as a teacher (Nieto, 2018). The articulations in the two critical discourses attempt to disrupt the status quo of “us” and “the culturally different Others” which is also maintained in liberal discourses (Gorski & Dalton, 2019; Nieto, 2018). These discourses construct inequality on different levels of education as the constitutive outside, which needs to be eliminated (Torfing, 1999, p. 131) to achieve equality.

To summarise the results, the majority of the articulations contributed to a liberal discourse on multicultural education, similar to the findings of Gorski's (2009) study on multicultural teacher education syllabi, in which liberal approaches were also in the majority. Our results differ from Finnish teacher education programme policies (Hummelstedt-Djedou et al., 2018), as here, the conservative discourses were in the minority rather than the majority, as they are in the policies. This means that the discourses among the teacher educators are closer to the 2016 national curriculum than the policies, although not all the discourses lived up to the level of commitment to social justice in the national curriculum (Zilliacus et al., 2017). The teacher educators with multicultural education as their research and teaching focus articulated critical discourses to a greater extent. There was, however, no clear relation between position or years of experience and the kind of articulations made.

## 3. Discussion

This study indicates that the teaching of multicultural education in Finnish teacher education has taken steps towards social justice. In the liberal discourses, teacher educators articulated diversity as a richness and a willingness to promote understanding, and respectful communication and relations in multicultural settings (Gorski, 2009). Many regarded diversity as the new normal and attempted to take it into account in teaching and materials. Several teacher educators aimed to make students' attitudes towards diversity positive, and tried to find the best practices to “touch their hearts” and teach them self-reflection. The critical discourses emphasised the teachers' responsibility for examining surrounding structures, being sensitive towards pupils' needs and knowing what actions to take to make equality and participation possible for everybody (Gorski & Dalton, 2019; Nieto, 2018).

Nevertheless, the conservative *Integrating the Other* discourse, although it represented the minority of the articulations, highlighted challenging areas that need to be addressed to avoid reproducing inequalities in multicultural education. This discourse contained “racialisation of bodies and subjectivities” (Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017, p. 65), which construct the immigrant and the Finn as essentially different subject positions, with visible ethnic differences or race as the crucial dividing factor. Racialisation also occurs as a “cultural and discursive construction” (Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017, p. 65) when the immigrant is placed in the limited position of the Other, associated with a static different culture that affects adaptation to Finnish school or society, or in some cases with an explicit threat (Alghasi, 2019; Vuolajärvi, 2014). Focusing solely on the Other in this discourse meant that the role of the teacher educators or teachers and their contribution to social justice was ignored. The same subject positions of immigrants and Finns were partly maintained in the liberal *Diversity as Valuable and Inclusive* and *Respectful Communication Across Differences* discourses, although they emphasised a broader view of diversity. This makes it difficult for those considered immigrants to attain Finnishness and participate fully in the school community.

Some teacher educators considered racism difficult to talk about, and others explicitly stated it was not discussed enough on courses. Some considered the presence of non-whites or ethnic diversity in schools something that automatically makes racism a problem of the past. Racialisation, combined with the downplaying of the problem of racism that can also be seen in the liberal approaches, is a counterproductive approach that contributes to Western and White hegemony and does not support the aim for social justice in multicultural education (Gorski & Dalton, 2019; Nieto, 2018). Due to the Black Lives Matter movement against police violence towards black people, today, race and racism are discussed more than before in public debates in the Nordic countries (2021). This makes it even more urgent to discuss these issues in teacher education. To be able to challenge and deconstruct the limited subject position of the immigrant, teacher educators and students must be aware of racialisation and racism. This, together with an overall understanding of identity as something dynamic and contextually shifting, could enable more nuanced, hybrid identities and positions, and a Finnishness that is inclusive of all.

We consider it important to draw attention to the consequences of the different subject positions in the discourses for preparing teachers to work for social justice. As mentioned, the conservative discourses, and to some extent also the liberal discourses, neglected the role of the teacher students and teachers in achieving social justice. The liberal *Developing Self-Reflection* discourse in turn focused on the teacher student's own reflections on their worldview and prejudices. The critical discourses constructed teacher students, teachers, and teacher educators as societal agents responsible for examining inequalities and acting for equality in both everyday practices and changing structures (Gorski & Dalton, 2019; Nieto, 2018). We suggest that the conservative and liberal discourses may create a “false sense of preparedness” (Gorski & Dalton, 2019, p. 3) among future teachers for working for equality, either by making them feel prepared to encounter the Other or by making them feel positive about diversity and being self-reflective. However, without a socio-political perspective that takes surrounding power structures and one's own actions for social justice into account, as in the critical discourses, teachers cannot fully challenge the existing inequalities or promote social justice in the same way as it is advocated by policies such as the national curriculum (Zilliacus et al., 2017).

#### 4. Conclusions

We see the need for teacher education in which both teacher educators and teacher students see their own complicity in an unequal system (Gorski, 2008; Nieto, 2018) and develop a willingness to work for the best of all pupils actively and continuously at all equity levels. We agree with Gorski (2008) and Sleeter (2018) that for this, liberal approaches are not enough, since they do not fully acknowledge inequalities. We thus find that teacher education would benefit from using a critical multicultural education in its entirety. In the development work to achieve this it may be helpful to identify inequalities by, for example, looking at the subject positions created in the teaching, discussions, policies, and materials used in teacher education, as well as at the limits, opportunities and responsibilities that these subject positions are ascribed.

In the process of rendering multicultural education critical, we find Zembylas and Papamichael's (2017) suggestion noteworthy: that teacher educators use strategic empathy when balancing between the students' feelings of discomfort needed for transformation in social justice teaching, and too much discomfort, which in turn can provoke a lack of safety that prevents learning.

However, the discomfort among students when having their beliefs or values challenged that some teacher educators raised as an issue, together with the avoidance among teacher educators themselves to explicitly address questions of race and racism, show how emotional work is a structural characteristic of multicultural teacher education (Cutri & Whiting, 2015, p. 1023). Emotional work ought to be addressed in the professional development of teacher educators in order for them to be able to stay emotionally open with their students.

In addition to developing the practices of multicultural education used in teacher education, we agree with what some of the teacher educators raised: in order to construct diversity as something also located inside teacher education, and to avoid the construction of the Others as being located outside in schools, the structural obstacles that prevent more diverse groups of students and teacher educators being part of Finnish teacher education ought to be removed. For this, the leaders of the teacher education programmes must take responsibility. In addition, collaboration among all teacher educators, regardless of academic positions, would be fruitful for the development of multicultural education in teacher education, as our results indicate that articulations of a critical multicultural education were not related to the teacher educator's position or years of experience.

A dimension that is worth further research and discussion is the multicultural education used in the training schools and in supervisor education of the teachers supervising there, as well as how teacher students articulate their understanding of multicultural education when connecting teaching practice and teacher education courses. Some of the teacher educators said that the education of the supervising teachers in the training schools included no multicultural education. At the same time, teaching practice was considered an important arena for learning about multicultural issues in practice. We find that for students to learn more than how to encounter the Others; to be able to disrupt, instead of contributing to, discrimination; and to see the potential in every pupil, the personnel of training schools need to be included in critical discussions, and supervisor education needs to take these issues into consideration.

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