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Intersectional framework in analysing diversity – towards a more critical diversity and multiculturalism in education*

Model intersekcjonalny/przekrojowy w analizie różnorodności – w kierunku bardziej krytycznej różnorodności i wielokulturowości w edukacji

Streszczenie. W artykule przedstawiono krytyczne podejście do koncepcji różnorodności i wielokulturowości jako sposobów pracy na rzecz równości społecznej. Tekst ma charakter porównawczy i przeglądowy, odwołuje się do różnych prac badawczych, które wykorzystują przekrojowe/intersekcjonalne modele pojęcia różnorodności i wielokulturowości oraz podkreślają znaczenie analizy relacji władzy w społeczeństwie. Zaprezentowane w artykule rozważania pozwalają dojść do wniosku, że jednym z najważniejszych celów edukacji jest praca na rzecz bardziej sprawiedliwego społeczeństwa, pedagogika krytyczna – zarówno na gruncie teorii, jak i praktyki, jest niezbędna do osiągnięcia tego celu, a modele intersekcjonalne/przekrojowe postrzegać można jako podstawową soczewkę dla badań edukacyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: przekrojowość/intersekcjonalność; rola nauczycieli; równość społeczna; pedagogika krytyczna

Summary. The paper discusses critiques of the concepts of diversity and multiculturalism as ways to work towards social equity. The paper is a comparative review paper, discussing different research papers which apply an intersectional framework on the notion of diversity and multiculturalism and emphasise the importance of analysing power relations in society. The position of the paper is that one of the most important purposes of education is to work towards a more just society, and it suggests that critical pedagogy is an essential theoretical and practical approach to fulfil this aim. Different research articles are discussed and the intersectional framework is suggested as an essential lens for educational research.

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Introduction

In this paper, different intersectional critiques on the notion of multiculturalism and diversity are compared, drawn on the work of Ahmed, Iverson, Cooper Stoll and Jones. First, intersectionality is conceptualized as a theoretical tool to understand social inequality, and how it can be applied in educational practice and research. The focus of this analysis is Cooper Stoll's research on teachers' perspectives on racism and diversity, which then is compared to the works of the previously mentioned authors. Different critiques on diversity and multiculturalism are summarized, and then further ideas on a more critical multiculturalism through the lens of intersectionality from Chan, Cor and Band are discussed.

What is Intersectionality?

The vantage point for intersectionality is that social inequality and social division is caused by power differences between different groups in society (Collins and Bilge 2016). Many philosophies and theories have addressed oppression and discrimination based on different social statuses – such as feminism which addresses the oppression of women as a group, or Marxism which talks about exploitation based on class differences, just to mention a few. The intersectional lens provides a way to interpret and analyse the world as a complex system of power relations. Intersectionality can be viewed as an analytical tool to explore the factors that are basis for the systemic organization of power relations, and to explore how these relations intertwine and mutually construct oppression. With intersectionality, the different power systems are viewed as intersecting ones, and it makes it possible to address multiplied discrimination against people who are part of more oppressed groups. The intersectional point of view is historically rooted in Black feminist movements: the multiple systems of oppression, racism and sexism, were already addressed by activists in the 19th century (Collins and Bilge 2016).

1. Systems of power

Different systems of power can be defined, which have served as basis of historical and continuous oppression of different groups. Class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and ability are the main categories that serve as factors in oppression and all have the discriminatory systems that produce inequalities and determine the relative positions of groups and individuals of these categories: sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism (Collins and Bilge 2016). The group in power historically, if we take all categories into account are (at least) middle-class, white, heterosexual, able men. For all practices, that attempt to work towards social justice, intersectionality is an essential tool to identify the complexity of different systems of power and investigate how the discriminatory systems interlock.

2. Intersectionality in the globalized world

The global social inequality has been growing and has significantly grown with the expansion of the neoliberal ideology (Collins and Bilge 2016). In order to address the causes of social inequality and to revise social practices, intersectionality is an essential tool that can describe the social reality, and induce action of different groups, political actors, institutions. The power differences are made to become invisible within the neoliberal realm: in neoliberalism there is only individual responsibility and a fair, open "market" in all areas of life – everyone has the same opportunities and the same rules apply to everyone. Hence, the neoliberal idea is that both success and failure are the individuals' responsibilities, and the social inequalities are fairly produced, therefore justified. This approach has influenced government practices, institutions' policies, personal relationships – all fields of life. The ultimate goal in the neoliberal world is to be competitive, and within globalization, it is to be globally competitive. This has caused countries moving away from the idea of the welfare state and giving more space to privatization, which is further increasing the social inequalities, especially economic inequalities. Social inequalities which, on the contrary to the neoliberal explanation, are caused and determined by systems of power, which have been caused by the oppression of discriminated groups, and which do not allow a real fair play and similar opportunities to everyone (Collins and Bilge 2016). The intersectional framework can bring attention to discrimination and the systemic virtue of oppression, which can bring up new aspects of equity and how to work towards social justice, which is among the most important purposes of education.

In the previous paragraph the different systems of power were introduced. Another important aspect is, that the organization of power happens in all dimensions of life. Collins and Bilge name four domains of power: the interpersonal domain, the disciplinary domain, the cultural domain and the structural domain of power. All four are equally important, and hegemony is maintained through all these domains, as well as oppression happens in all these domains. The interpersonal domain refers to personal interactions, especially between people from dominant and non-dominant groups; the disciplinary domain refers to different disciplines which might favour members of the dominant groups (sports or professions); the cultural domain refers to how social inequality is represented in the culture (e.g. how poverty or failure is blamed on individuals in our culture); and the structural domain, which describes how the hegemonic structure is constructed and where the power lies and how it is maintained (e.g. the power of private companies over governmental decisions) (Collins and Bilge 2016). In education all domains are of great importance in research, as education reflects the societal structure, therefore it needs the explicit aim to change the power structure for a more equal society.

3. "Critical" as the quality label of intersectionality

The intersectional framework brings upon critical analysis of power relations. Collins and Bilge (2016) introduce the concept of critical inquiry and critical praxis and challenge the division between them. Critical inquiry has been to describe the presence of the intersectional framework in academia; the critical approach towards existing knowledge and practices especially with regards to social inequalities. Critical praxis refers to ways how people in everyday life apply the intersectional framework to attempt to mitigate social inequalities. The two is not so easily separable; critical inquiry is always needed for critical praxis, as there is a prior knowledge of inequalities before it comes to new, critical practices. Both are essential in reaching a more just world.

This paper will focus on intersectional educational research therefore it is important to mention the relationship between critical education and intersectionality. Since education has the possibility to maintain the hegemonic status quo (and quite often it is the goal of it), it is essential to be critical in education if we aim for social justice, so that education can liberate society. Critical education and intersectionality have intertwined relations – the intersectional framework is essential for critical education. Paulo Freire,

one of the main figures in critical education, in his book, *the Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, addresses the intersecting systems of power and uses the term "oppression" to describe what the power differences cause and how they operate (Collins and Bilge 2016). Using the word "oppression" to define power dynamics in the social structure makes it visible, that social inequality is not a coincidence in society, but is maintained and reproduced by hegemonic practices of dominant groups and therefore it can be changed.

Diversity as the solution to social equity?

Social inequality is addressed in theories and practices widely. Among the main concepts addressing and attempting to solve social inequality are diversity and multiculturalism. These ideas are addressed and challenged by many intersectional scholars, and in this section, some of their definitions and critique on diversity are discussed. The intersectional framework can provide researchers with a lens that makes inequalities and oppression visible in a system, and it is a very useful lens to analyse examples which has attempted to work for social justice and claim to have reached it in some ways.

In this section, first, Laurie Cooper Stoll's chapter in the book *Intersectionality and Educational Research* (2015), named *Teachers' Perspectives on Race and Racial Inequality* is summarized. This chapter explores privilege and its effects on attitudes towards social inequality, while applying intersectional considerations in the methodology as well: she works with semi-structured interviews and observation and explores the context of her research in depth. Moreover, Cooper Stoll chose a social context where multiculturalism and diversity is celebrated, and she investigates and challenges the form of assumed social equity in these ideas. I will compare her ideas and critique on diversity with that of Susan V. Iverson's chapter titled *Interlocking Oppressions* (2015), and Tamara Bertrand Jones' chapter titled *Me-Search Is Research* in the same book; and Sara Ahmed's in her article *Embodying Diversity: Problems and Paradoxes for Black Feminists* (2015). All these texts are exploring attempts towards social equity in supposedly more equal contexts: the main text investigated teachers' in a progressive area, and the last three all reflect on academic context. All chapters apply an intersectional lens in pointing out how discriminative systems persist and at the same time are made invisible in diverse spaces.

1. Summary of Cooper Stoll's research on Teachers' Perspectives

The study is a qualitative study, examining teachers' perspectives on race and racial inequality in a town in the US which is considered to be racially and culturally progressive; a place where diversity and multiculturalism is celebrated. The researcher investigates whether different social locations of teachers influences how open they are to acknowledging systemic oppression. She contextualizes the US as a place where racism is considered to be a problem only on an individual level, where the education system is believed to be designed for equality, where teachers and staff are neutral to race (colour-blind classrooms), and where education is viewed as the ultimate solution for racism and the mitigation of ignorance. She criticises this approach and applies knowledge from research that shows that racism is systemic, that there is a big difference between different schools when it comes to equity, that teachers and staff are often racist, because they are part of a racist system; that dominant groups often have interest in maintaining the hegemonic status quo; and that education often just offers ways to mask inequalities but does not necessarily challenge ignorance and hierarchical views. The town has a significant White, Black and Hispanic population, and there have been many actions taken to achieve racial diversity in schools. The town has different multicultural events, they celebrate holidays of different ethnicities and cultures; promote diversity on posters around the town; include literature in school from and on people of colour. The aim of the research was to see how teachers' think about race and racial inequality, and how their social location influences their perception on social inequality, especially institutional racism and privileges of the dominant groups. She investigates whether teachers acknowledge institutional racism or think about racism as an individual problem; and whether they consciously take racial inequality into account when it comes to their teaching practices, and their interactions beyond the classroom (Cooper Stoll 2015).

Methodology

Cooper Stoll interviewed, observed and interviewed again 18 teachers in the chosen town, from three elementary schools. The sample was voluntary-based – therefore the proportion of the teachers from different schools were not equal, now were the proportion of their social positions. The majority of the teachers were white female, and most of them were general education teachers. Other categories among teachers included Asian, Black, biracial and Middle Eastern, when it comes to ethnicity, there were some male

teachers included as well, and one of them openly homosexual (Cooper Stoll 2015).

In the first round of the interviews she asked teachers about their careers, their teaching philosophy and pedagogy, and their perceptions of their own social locations. After, she spent 8 months observing the teachers' work, which included formal observation within the classroom, analysis of classroom rules and curricular materials, physical aspects of the schools. After the observation period, she conducted another round of interviews with the same teachers, where she inquired about their attitudes towards educational policy in general and specifically towards gender- and race-based policies. She had the opportunity to ask them about events occurring during the observation period and their opinion about the data she gathered then (Cooper Stoll 2015).

Findings – The Paradox of Diversity

Based on her interviews, the concept of colour-blind classroom is followed by the interviewed teachers, which means they claim not to see colour and gender, just human beings. This attitude fails to acknowledge oppression and material disadvantages, which follows the neoliberal idea of that equal opportunities and rules create equality. She explains, that she found that anything negative that is related to race, for example acknowledging institutional racial discrimination is off-limits. The teachers view diversity and multiculturalism as something happy that should be celebrated, and with this, they deny the systemic oppression of other ethnicities than White (Cooper Stoll 2015).

This town, and therefore its teachers take great pride in their multicultural school system and practices. However, this multiculturalism seems to be still operating with "othering" – calling for example non-White, non-Christian holidays "obscure"; and celebrations that have to be approved by authorities, for example the principal or the parents – meaning that the standards what is acceptable and not are still set by dominant groups. She also finds that the teachers' multiculturalism does not include any systematic critique of the White privilege or social inequality. Furthermore, there is no explicit multicultural curricular program in the schools, therefore it depends on teachers' how and to what extent they address diversity and multiculturalism. She also found, that racial injustice occurs in the classrooms as historically contingent – which again fails to acknowledge systematic oppression and exploitation (Cooper Stoll 2015).

Cooper Stoll (2015) investigates how the teachers think about the African-Centered Curriculum (ACC), which is a magnet program offered only in one of the schools, where the majority of students are Black. The program was introduced as a way to increase the self-esteem and confidence of racial minority children with emphasising a "culturally relevant" curricula, with the hope that this could decrease the disparities in test results between Black and White students. She finds that none of the teachers know much about this curriculum, but all have quite strong opinions against it. Their attitudes imply quite a lot about their attitudes towards anti-racism. They failed to reflect on the dominant curriculum being Euro-centric, they treated it as the standard, and were sceptical of why there should be another curriculum. They failed to acknowledge the systemic virtue of racism, and even the term reverse racism occurred. One teacher brings in the argument, that if Black students can have their own curriculum, then why cannot all different groups have their own, e.g. the Polish? This further implies that diversity is viewed without any relation to power or oppression. Some of the teachers claimed that schools and policies should be careful not to overemphasise Black communities and experiences, because that would fail to be relevant to the White. Cooper Stoll (2015) grabs the core of the entitlement and privileges of the dominant group in her findings, namely they view social inequalities as a zero-sum game; and they do not agree with dominant groups having to sacrifice their privileges for a more just world. She finds that the multiculturalism and diversity mean that everyone has to adjust to the "norm" which is defined by dominant groups and individuals.

Based on her study, her conclusion is that teachers' disadvantaged social location (e.g. being female or Black) does not influence their attitudes towards social inequality as much as other factors in their job. She finds that three types of privileges work against their systemic view on oppression: their own privilege as being teachers which is to some extent a power position; their failure to question and challenge the privileges of White students and parents; and the privileges which are associated with being part of this town, which takes pride in the reputation of doing well when it comes to tackling social inequality. Her conclusion is that it is not enough the have a diverse teaching community, emphasis has to be put on pedagogical philosophies and attitudes. She concludes that more explicitly anti-racist teachers are needed for a more just education (Cooper Stoll 2015).

2. The importance of this study in intersectional research

The researcher's theoretical concept about intersectionality sees social inequality as a result of oppression and through the whole study she applies an intersectional lens. Her problematization bears multiple intersectional qualities: she acknowledges the systemic virtue of inequalities, when she sets off to investigate attitudes of teachers on racism, while taking into account and comparing the social locations and the privileges the participants have. She applies a critical analysis to the practices this community and the teachers have on multiculturalism and diversity. In her results, she draws attention to different social dynamics that influence teachers' attitudes towards racism, and she comes to the conclusion that more teachers are needed who would question the hegemonic status quo in their educational philosophy and pedagogy. The application of the intersectional lens at all steps of this study provides an important example for further studies which investigate social inequalities. The methodology could be applied with some revision to the European context as well, e.g. with regards to Roma students, immigrant students and so forth.

3. Diversity as a brand

In this section critiques of diversity are summarized and compared, and some of the alternatives the writers offer, are discussed. Sara Ahmed refers to diversity as a brand (Ahmed 2009), and different ways how diversity becomes a brand and loses the point of tackling social inequalities are discussed here.

Both Ahmed and Jones use their academic experiences as Black female scholars in academia. They both formulate a critique towards the idea, that social inequality is tackled already by the presence of members of oppressed groups (Ahmed 2009; Jones 2015). Their criticism is similar to the one Cooper Stoll (2015) discusses as well, that the standards of "norm" are still set by the dominant group, and the "others" have to assimilate, rather than changing the environment and the context. This shows how the power of the dominant group persist – the bare presence and involvement of people from oppressed groups can hardly reform the environment into a more equal one.

Iverson (2015) problematizes that diversity as a collective word renders all differences the same, and does not acknowledge systemic oppressions, and their interlocking virtue. This is similar to the finding in Coop-

er Stoll's research (2015), when the argument of the Polish curriculum is brought in by one of her participants. This notion makes oppression invisible and implies that differences between groups belong to the same category, and power relations are once again disregarded.

Diversity as a concept of a happy place occurs in Ahmed's (2009), Iverson's (2015) and Cooper Stoll's (2015) analysis as well. This seems to be one of the strongest elements in challenging the problems of diversity: all researchers point out how diversity should mean that all different people can be happy and friendly together, and this notion makes it impossible to bring up anything negative related to oppression and inequalities. Cooper Stoll (2015) brings up an example of motivational posters about friendships, that do not see colour. Differences are to be celebrated, they should not be associated with anger or discontent. This approach is quite beneficial to those of the dominant groups; if diversity means everyone is happy, they do not have to fear that their privileges would be addressed or taken away.

Iverson (2015) and Ahmed (2009) point out the notion of that differences are inevitable and while people from disadvantaged groups should try to assimilate to the norm, they should also preserve their differences, because that is what preserves diversity, which is, as previously mentioned, a desired and happy concept. However, if differences are viewed as systems of power and systems of oppression, this approach means that discrimination is to be concealed, in order to keep diversity. Iverson (2015) points out that diversity sees differences as static and does not allow systems of power and individual identities to transform, which would be essential to reach social equality.

They all point out that diversity gives institutions, communities, practices a reputation, an indicator, that they are doing well, and this is how diversity becomes a brand (Ahmed 2009; Cooper Stoll 2015; Iverson 2015; Jones 2015). The researchers' experiences, and their findings show that the adaptation of diversity as a quality does not actually challenge the hegemonic status quo and does not change the experiences of members of marginalized groups enough. The criticism they bring up rather shows, how diversity is benefitting the dominant groups, and via making systems of power and discriminative systems invisible, makes the struggle of members of marginalized groups more difficult, as it cannot be acknowledged.

Iverson (2015) proposes an alternative to the diverse spaces; she claims that what we need are not tolerant and friendly spaces, but free spaces, where people come together for the purpose of understanding stories and to make patterns visible in the stories. Ahmed (2009) suggests that we

should give space to anger as well, since social injustice can invoke anger, which can be an essential drive to change and can "open up the world". She rejects the idea of masking inequality as something happy, and she claims that we should grasp our anger to bring upon real change.

4. An intersectional analysis on oppression and privilege

An article titled *Privilege and Oppression in Counselor Education: An Intersectionality Framework* by Chan, Cor and Band (2018) discusses the possibilities of an intersectional lens in multicultural education. Similarly to previous authors mentioned in this paper, they criticize that many counselling curricula requires multiculturalism, yet remains oblivious to systems of power, oppression and social justice. They frame multicultural education as a "collaborative and transformative process that challenges students' perception" on self and on others (Chan et al. 2018). For this, self-reflection on intersecting systems of oppression and privileges in one's social position in different contexts is needed. Fier and Ramsay suggests that for multicultural services education and training on ethics is needed (Chan et al., 2018). In addition, Davis suggests that analysing one's identity through the lens of oppression and privileges can raise empathy (Chan et al., 2018). They suggest that intersectionality can be an effective tool in further developing multicultural policies and curricula and can be used in education as a way to encourage critical thinking of students.

Methodological considerations in intersectional research

Intersectionality is a complex way of analysing the world and it poses a lot of challenges when it comes to research methodology. To conduct a truly intersectional research, we need to transform all parts of the research and make adjustments, in order to make systems of power visible, in order to make sure that we investigate the power relations. Theory, methodology and analysis all have to work together in intersectional research which challenges the status quo and does not further maintain it. Cooper Stoll's work is a great example: she incorporated intersectionality in her theory, in her research questions, she made intersectional considerations when it came to her research sample. Her paper keeps the focus on systems of power the whole time as a way to investigate and assess if education is really anti-racist.

Conclusion

The research discussed in this paper problematize existing concepts and practices of diversity and multiculturalism as ways to achieve equality. Further questions and aspects of equality can be raised based on these research results, which can serve as new research questions for further research; as well as questions for discussions on equality in educational institutions. Furthermore, the theoretical framework of this paper, intersectionality can shed light on privileges and underlying attitudes towards social justice that might maintain the hegemonic status quo rather than dismantle it, in a progressive, diverse environment. Moreover, the discussion on power, equality and diversity is of great importance in adult education, since people from different social positions participate in educational spaces and processes. However, as seen in the discussed research, diverse community does not necessarily mean *equal* community, and without open discussion and analysis it is possible that power dynamics persist within a diverse community. Intersectionality is a tool to analyse power relations, and a tool to bring about changes that dismantle systemic power dynamics. Education is indeed one of the main spaces where power can be challenged and, in a society built on inequalities, it should also be one of the main purposes.

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