

Editorial Preface

2020, a Bad Year for Diversities?

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From the side, a mountain range; from the end, a single peak; Far, near, high, low, no two parts alike.

Why can't I tell the true shape of Mount Lu?

Because I myself am in the mountain.

Su Dongpo (1084/1994: 108)

2020 is about to end as we are putting the last touches to this new issue of IJBIDE. This is the fifth year that the journal has been published.

This year of the COVID-19 crisis has revealed a lot about how some societies deal with – or neglect, to be more precise – what has interested us over the years: *diversities*. As such, representatives of under-privileged minorities appear to get infected more than others; older people fall more victims to a somewhat irrational virus that decision-makers pretend to treat rationally; some diversities get rejected, threatened, insulted. Western media and politicians have systematically focused on diversities of the Other (e.g. Uighurs in China), pretending to care, while still mistreating and ignoring their own. The crisis confirms what we already knew: diversities are treated unequally in our societies.

COVID-19 has also unveiled many inequalities in the context of education: some children have no (stable) access to online (quality) teaching; some are left behind in terms of learning. Many decision-makers – and some researchers too – will probably claim that the virus has created these severe situations for diversities. And while billions of dollars and euros are being ‘given’ to the corporate world, many are left to fend for themselves.

Another surprising phenomenon relates to the fact that many voices are unheard in the media. For example, the success and/or failure of countries in some African and

Asian countries is rarely discussed while a few carefully selected Western countries get praised (wrongly?) for their fight against the virus. ‘Goodies’ and ‘baddies’ are put forward and myths created about them. There is a need to us to remain vigilant against such phenomena. As Su Dongpo said beautifully in the opening quote, when looking at a mountain from multiple perspectives, one will always see it differently.

The country where we were located during the COVID-19 crisis can serve as a good example: Finland. *The New York Times* and *the Financial Times* have repeated lauded the small Nordic country in spring and autumn 2020 for its preparedness, care for its people and promotion of social justice. Reading these reports in the American press, we felt somewhat puzzled since the reality did not always correspond to this myth-making – but some will argue that compared to the U.S and other contexts, Finland was doing great; we refute such ridiculous comparisons, whereby 5 million Finns get contrasted to 330 million U.S. citizens!

Many scandals and signs of unpreparedness were actually reported. As such, up until December 2020 (nearly a year after the virus was first identified) debates were still ongoing about the need to use protective surgical masks in public places; it took a very long time before systematic testing was organized at airports; some people did not respect quarantining; it appeared difficult for some people to accept and ‘do’ distancing in stores; many old people seem to have died in care homes because of negligence; etc.

In relation to diversities, we found out that hundreds of Finnish children were increasingly marginalized during lockdown, away from school. Many migrants working in services such as cleaning public spaces were infected, and while decision-makers claimed that this was due to their ‘culture’ and the lack of Finnish skills, it became apparent that their infections with the virus were due mostly to their low socio-economic position in Finnish societies and the impossibility for them to ‘social distance’ since they needed to continue work during the crisis. Finally, food bank lines increased exponentially.

In April 2020, the NGO called Save the Children surveyed the view of Finnish children and youth on the impact of the pandemic on their everyday lives, studies, and well-being. The findings show that children of low-income families fared the worst: 43% of them felt that their mental well-being was bad or fairly bad; 47% and 57% respectively felt that their family’s income had decreased and worried about their family livelihood. A child quoted in the report claimed:

Youth mental health services in Finland should be considerably increased in general and not just during the pandemic. There are long queues everywhere and I, too, have been left without treatment due to this. That is one of the reasons why my mental state now during the coronavirus pandemic has declined.

Another one hinted directly at some form of injustice taking place in online teaching:

Ask teachers to have teaching take everyone into consideration. Not just the skilled ones.

These quotes question the ‘rosy’ picture of the Nordic country especially in terms of education and social justice – two aspects which it has used to brand itself as the world’s best education in the world.

Obviously, we do not claim that these problems created and/or unveiled by the Covid-19 crisis are specific to Finland. Most countries around the world will have experienced the same. But this reminds us that when it comes to diversities, we need to keep our eyes open and be critical. The way the avant-garde French artist Francis Picabia (1879-1953) put it is inspiring:

Our heads are round so our thoughts can change directions.

Social and economic injustice is everywhere to be found – that’s probably the best lesson from this terrible situation.

As always, this issue of IJBIDE helps us make our thoughts “change directions”. Three articles about the wicked problems of peace, bullying and inclusion are included.

In their original study “Plurilingualism and STEAM: Unfolding the Paper Crane of Peace at an Elementary School in Japan,” Daniel Roy Pearce, Mayo Oyama, Danièle Moore, and Kana Irisawa use peace learning as a way of linking up plurilingual education and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics). They problematise, describe and analyse data from a teacher-initiated plurilingual and intercultural project to demonstrate how teachers can help students develop a deeper awareness of language and openness to diversity, foster reflexivity, and encourage multidisciplinary engagement through plurilingual education, dialogue, and storying. We believe that this first paper is very meaningful for the world to come after the current crisis.

The second paper is an essay written by Jennifer Schneider about the Bully Curriculum, arguing that there is a need to adopt a critical inquiry and anti-bullying discourse. Using the context of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Online Programs, as well as traditional face to face classroom environments, the author advises her readers to move beyond ‘easy recipes’ in the fight against bullying.

Xin Su, Neil Harrison, and Robyn Moloney offer an interesting study in “Students of the Imaginary: Interpreting the Life Experiences of Ethnic Minority Students From Xinjiang Classes.” Considering the current negative discourses and misperceptions and misrepresentations of China this article contributes to understanding the situation of Xinjiang class students in the Middle Kingdom. Beyond the fruitless controversies created by some Western media and decision-makers, the authors apply the work of French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, to interpret the experiences of students at an ethnic minority boarding school program. The psychoanalytic lens allows the authors to show the complexities experienced by the students who seem to navigate between the desire of others and what they want for themselves.

Five years is both a long and short time period. Many things have happened since Fred Dervin and the late Regis Machart launched this journal. One thing is for sure: work on diversities in education is more important than ever and we do encourage readers to submit ground-breaking papers to the journal editorial board.

In Chinese Mandarin, the word *airport* translates as 机场 (Jīchǎng). The two characters that compose the word mean respectively: 机, *machine, aircraft* but also *opportunity*; 场, *field, large area*. Although the crisis has put an end to travel and reduced the number of potential encounters with diversities, we do hope that when airports reopen “large areas of opportunities” will allow us to reflect and act together against the evils that this crisis has revealed and reinforced.

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