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EDITED BY KATARZYNA GÓRAK-SOSNOWSKA & URSZULA MARKOWSKA-MANISTA

CONTENTS

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Intercultural education in a monocultural context: global and local dimensions of sensitive topics

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ABSTRACT: The article critically engages in teaching intercultural education in Poland—a country that is to a great extent homogenous in ethnic or religious terms. It starts with a brief overview of the complicated nature of intercultural education, followed by a case study of how intercultural education is studied and researched in Poland in a top academic journal dedicated to intercultural education. Quantitative content analysis shows that intercultural education is generally approached and unrelated to the local Polish context. The only exception is the borderland type of intercultural education. This leads to a conclusion that teaching intercultural education without a context—i.e. real-life experiences—proves to be a challenge in monocultural schools.

KEYWORDS: monocultural school, Poland, intercultural education, global education, sensitive topics

INTRODUCTION

Articles collected in this issue focus on sensitive topics in the context of global education. They critically engage with children and young people in school and out of school settings. Most of them are empirical studies that use qualitative and discursive methodologies. The countries covered include Germany, the Philippines, South Africa, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Central and Eastern Europe in general.

The first two articles cover the tertiary education setting. Marthinus Conradie presents department-specific pedagogies from a South African university that aim at decolonisation the relationship in academia. He analyses how teaching assistants man-

age their intersectional subjectiveness and engage whiteness using critical whiteness studies. Margaryta Rymarenko and Jekatyerina Dunajeva move over to a region with different experiences in diversity in education—namely to Eastern Europe. They explore how faculty members from East European universities approach diversity and how they interpret it, implement it, and manage it in their classrooms.

The following two articles take us to primary or secondary school. Heidi Maiberg and Alar Kilp discuss Estonian teachers' experiences discussing extremism in the classroom. According to their study, teachers discuss extremism mostly if their students initiate the topic. Moreover, they considered it was challenging to define extremism and interpret student reactions. Radek Vorlíček brings in the case of a Czech lower secondary school and examines the social and ethnic relations among six-graders of Czech and Roma ethnicity. The author analyses the role of ethnicity on intergroup relations and communication.

The final two articles in this section bring us to the more troubled and complex dimension of childhood studies. Karla Asuncion Morales analyses national and international legislation in the Philippines regarding protecting children engaged in armed conflicts. While these regulations aim to protect children, they provide only one framework that fails to understand "the multiplicity of childhoods and the complexities of war". To better care for Filipino children involved in armed conflict, she envisions an approach more oriented towards children's rights. Marta Skrzypczak critically engages with the issue of children's participation in decision-making in the German context. While children's involvement is embedded in national legislation, it is often not practically implemented at childcare facilities. She advocates for collaborative leadership and participatory structures, which are essential for children and adults

A book review accompanies the issue on the Academic careers of women in men in the CEE context prepared by Weronika Molińska.

The areas covered by the articles represent different patterns of experiencing and engaging with other cultures and sensitive topics. Some countries are multicultural by default (Philippines, South Africa), some embraced multiculturalism only recently (Estonia, Germany), while others—compared to, e.g. West European countries—remain monocultural in ethnic or religious terms (Central and Eastern Europe). In this introductory article focusing on the critical approach, we engage with the last context—namely, teaching intercultural education in a country that is to a great extent homogenous in ethnic or religious terms. We will start with a brief overview of the complicated nature of intercultural education followed by a case study of how intercultural education is studied and researched in Poland – one of the Central and East European countries, and at the same time one of the most homogenous countries in Europe (until the Russian invasion on Ukraine and the 2022 refugee crisis).

THE COMPLICATED NATURE OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

In the context of school and non-school practice, non-academic definitions become crucial in building the identity of intercultural education (Nikitorowicz 2009; Szkud-

larek 2003). These definitions are determined by political documents as well as the activities of non-governmental organisations and other actors (educators – practitioners). In the area of the theory and practice of initiatives that are already implemented, we can observe an absence of universal and straightforward terms that reflect the educational sense and ideas, and which could be used by teachers in their efforts to transfer knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in the process of teaching. Today, global education is understood in multiple ways by those who implement education and develop teaching resources as well as activities promoting this type of teaching and learning. In school and non-school practice, this type of education is implemented as multicultural education, intercultural education, international education, developmental education, humanitarian education, education for tolerance, anti-discrimination education, education about human rights, European education, global developmental education, etc. The problematic nature of the term, the unclear scope and the relationship with its constituent or related terms form a challenging climate in which we can undertake measured, systematised and comprehensive activities.

When considering the crucial actors of the education process: the teacher and the student, the challenge lies in comprehensive teaching and an adequate presentation of universal topics discussed within "global education" (whose important part is intercultural education). On the one hand, their richness and complexity ought to be accessible and understandable. On the other hand – they are presented as accurately as possible. Another dilemma appears in this context. Should global education be treated as a pedagogical innovation and implemented in general education as a separate subject called: "Global education in a knowledge-based society"? Or—as is the case now—should its content and topics be included (in line with the core curriculum) in subjects already taught at school: citizenship education, geography, history, ethics, culture studies or foreign languages? Although introducing a new subject would strengthen the importance of the content taught within global education, given the broad scope of topics and the overburdening of students with school subjects, it seems much easier to divide the content into subjects already implemented at school. The expectation that one teacher will have such a broad spectrum of knowledge (Räsänen 2010) and be up-to-date with all transformations taking place in the world with an interdisciplinary perspective seems too idealistic.

Among equally important elements are teachers' knowledge and attitudes (and other actors responsible for implementing global education in school and non-school practice) towards implementing or even readiness to undertake topics of this type of education in the teaching process. Emphasizing the "elimination of xenophobia and prejudice as causes of destructive group cohabitation" (Nikitorowicz 2003: 915), global education, as it were, demands a message based on the concept of cultural relativism and neutralisation of excessive stereotypes and simplifications giving rise to distortions. Referring to the voices and statements of those whose reality is described and explained by the teacher is conducive to avoiding stereotypes. "(…) [S]earching for information about problems affecting countries of the South, we cannot omit opinions, reports and appeals of civic society organisations from these countries" (Wojtalik 2011: 9). Practice shows how many difficulties it poses. It is so because the content

of global education and its assumptions can be (and often are) interpreted through the prism of one correct civilisational, cultural and world-view context (including religious). Moreover, its content is transmitted as knowledge "about Others", usually in a non-participative way, and so without the participation of individuals representing a particular country, culture or community. It would then be reasonable to carry out research diagnosing teachers' needs (and not only theirs) and how this type of education is often implemented in Polish schools as "dry-run" education.

On the ground of pedagogical exploration, analysing the contexts in which global perspectives have essential influence on individuals and communities, intercultural education formulates the challenges it faces and its aims, showing the paths it can follow. For instance—through a deconstruction of the understanding of the world (also of itself), through indicating the systems of entanglement of practice in ideologies, concepts and worldviews (while being also affected by them), global education attempts to construct points of reference with the maximum value of objectivism, while being in itself a pluralistic trend.

Intercultural learning should be seen in the context of the overall preparation of students to live in a pluralistic society. So it seems appropriate to emphasize creating attitudes of intercultural sensitivity and teaching the civic and practical skills necessary to prepare young people for their future lives.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE POLISH CONTEXT

The implementation of intercultural (and wider: global) education in Poland, strictly connected to the presence of Poland in the European Union, is an embodiment of ideological postulates of education for sustainable development whose aim is to transform the learning process and educate conscious "global citizens" with the competencies (e.g. global awareness) to actively participate in "global civic society". The basis for this message lies in The 2002 *Maastricht* Global Education Declaration, which is a peculiar global tool for the creation of European education policy remaining in the trend of globalisation. It argues that the education process "is not neutral in terms of world view, is not objective, unbiased or politically unengaged" (Jasikowska 2011: 97). As such, it is a challenge to education systems and bottom-up education activities in the globalised world of EU states. On the level of the Community, it is perceived as one of the available forces designed to lead to an evolution in understanding international developmental cooperation and to make the population aware of global interdependencies between countries of the Global North and Global South (Jasikowska 2011). On the local level, it is understood as a carrier of individual and social change (Babicki 2016).

When analysing the catalogue of obstacles and dilemmas in the implementation of intercultural education in Polish education practice, the very nature of this type of education comes to the forefront. Its nature is a source of several problems, barriers and controversies. The broad scope and complexity of issues addressed within global education is a particular challenge. It requires the cooperation of specialists

in different fields (both theoreticians and practicians), which seems complicated and may not always lead to reaching a consensus. This results from the methodological dissonance and distinct analysis fields between academics (and within the academic environment) and practitioners.

The Polish Ministry of Education and Science defines global education as all educational activities shaping the attitudes of openness and solidarity, arousing curiosity about the world and initiating activities for others through the popularisation of knowledge about global problems—with a particular focus on developing countries. Understood this way, global education encompasses initiatives in developmental, intercultural and multicultural education, education for sustainable development, and education for peace. On the other hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs uses the term global education quoting the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe[1], which explains the term as follows: "global education is education that opens people's eyes and minds to the realities of the globalised world and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and Human Rights for all" (The Maastricht Declaration 2002). Global education is a broader dimension of civic education, allowing people to understand the interdependencies between their own lives and the lives of other people around the world. Global education comprises the following elements: developmental education, education about human rights, education for permanent and sustainable development, peace education for conflict prevention and intercultural education.

When sensitising students to the problems affecting the contemporary world and its inhabitants, some educators use the term global education based on the definition developed by the Team for Global Education operating at Grupa Zagranica. The definition is officially accepted in educational practice in Poland by virtue of the agreement mentioned above on supporting the development of global education in our country. This education is based on such values as the dignity of a human being, justice and solidarity. Its important aspect lies in shaping attitudes and implementing active participation in social life through personal, conscious engagement (Grupa Zagranica 2011: 6–7). We must admit that despite the fact that the activities undertaken by Grupa Zagranica were a good move (activities aiming to introduce and apply a generally accepted definition of global education agreed upon in the intersectoral process initiated and coordinated by the group, as well as signing an agreement related to the term) when we look more closely at the process of developing the definition presently accepted; we will see a range of problems and challenges. They are connected, among other things, with the clarity and quality of the message, which calls the final result of this work into question.

Undertaking this type of activity and engaging such diverse environments to work on the definition deserves credit. However, the spectrum of institutions participating in it and the scarce representation of particular environments (particularly individuals from the Global South or the academic community—including the absence of

[1] This definition is a modification of the definition of global education from the *Maastricht Global Education Declaration. European strategy framework for improving and increasing global education in Europe to the year 2012*. Another definition is cited by (DEEEP) Development Education Exchange in Europe Project.

scholars from the field of megatrends, conservation and ecology, migration studies and teacher training studies) give rise to a dilemma whether the results have, and will have in activities undertaken in the future, sufficient substantive and practical value.

There is an important element influencing the possibility of implementing intercultural education in school and non-school practices, namely the strong dynamics of social, cultural, political and economic processes that define its subjects. This, in turn, requires facing outdated knowledge lack of access to "first-hand" information, which translates to poorer social sensitivity. The necessity to constantly update knowledge in different areas and fields (e.g. politics, business, human rights) adequate to social, political and cultural changes, and differences in understanding and functioning in time and places around the globe, can be an important blockage in this area.

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN RESEARCH PRACTICE

The bulk of global studies, particularly intercultural studies in Poland, is vast and well-established. It emerged from the studies of borderlands, ethnicity, and ethnography, which have been historically an important field of academic inquiry. We will analyse the scope of academic investigation related to intercultural education by reaching the only and most popular academic journal on this topic—*Edukacja międzykulturowa* (*Intercultural education*, ISSN 2299-4106). The journal is currently published twice a year and is indexed in CEJSH, ICI Journal Master List, and ERIH Plus. It has been awarded 100/200 points by the Ministry of Science and Education, which positions the journal as one of the most prestigious in Poland. The editorial board consists of the Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences employees, the University of Silesia in Katowice.

All issues (13 in total) are published in Open Access online. They have been downloaded, and the titles and abstracts coded using the MAXQDA programme for qualitative analysis. We have coded around 25% of the data individually and then developed a joint code system. We have analysed only research articles, so other text entries (introduction to the issue, reviews, conference proceedings, etc.) were not included in the final data set. The total sample consists of 191 articles with individual journals comprising from 10 to 20 articles. Most of the articles were written in Polish (161), while 30 were written in foreign languages, mostly in English.

The articles are divided into several thematic sections: articles, fieldwork reports, ethnic minorities, intercultural education abroad, a forum of young researchers, educational practice, and scientific centres. The sections with the most articles are articles (39), fieldwork reports (34), followed by educational practice (29), and forum of young scientists (28). The scope of the journal reflects well the diversity of approaches to intercultural education and balance between research and theory, as well as studies that focus on Poland and abroad. Most of the foreign authors and articles written in a language other than Polish focus on intercultural education abroad.

The decision about the article's topic is usually of the author, even if sometimes there is a leading topic for a thematic section (e.g. Roma education, language education). The most frequent topics are presented in the table below:

THEME	CODE
Concepts	multiculturalism – 30; identity – 20; borderlands – 16; religion – 15; otherness – 11; values – 9; theoretical approach – 9; global issues – 7; nation – 5; history / heritage – 5, collaboration – 5
Skills and methods	intercultural education – 40; language – 18; arts – 12; teaching methods and programmes – 11; pedagogy – 8; Intercultural competence – 8; regional education – 6; dialogue – 6
People in Poland / Poles – ethnicities	Polish diaspora abroad – 10; Silesia / Silesians – 10; migrants in Poland – 6; Kashubia / Kashubians – 5
People in Poland – places and demographic groups	school – 20; teacher – 14; pupils – 11; students – 10; children – 9; marriage / family – 9; youth – 8; space / city – 8
Regions abroad	Czechs / Czech Republic – 17; foreigners / foreign Western countries – 15; Ukraine – 9; Roma abroad – 8; EU – 6; Slovakia – 5

Table 1. Distribution of topics according to the frequency (min. 5)

Source: Own elaboration 2022

The topics provide an overview of how intercultural education is researched in Poland. Most of the articles refer to intercultural education (15), multiculturalism (12), religion (9), identity (6) and global problems and challenges (5). In fact, many of these studies link intercultural education to multiculturalism or put it in a context of global problems and challenges. The educational practice covers methods of delivering intercultural content. Thus intercultural education (8) and multiculturalism (7) are intersections with arts (9), didactic methods and study programmes (6), located in the school context (4), and directed at teachers (3) and pupils (3). Intercultural education in the world mainly focuses on language (8), and the two countries studied most are the Czech Republic and Ukraine. Reports from own studies cover values (5) and the institution of family (6), borderlands (9), Polish diaspora (5), students (5) and teachers (5).

Considering this paper's topic, the following four key concepts related to intercultural education will be analysed: intercultural education, multiculturalism, borderland / regional education, and intercultural competence. The first two ones—treated sometimes as synonymous—provide the context of how intercultural education is understood. The borderland and regional education are the types of intercultural education implemented in Poland, while intercultural competence is a crucial skill in the globalised world.

Intercultural education is approached mostly through a theoretical lens – it refers to contemporary world problems, global influences, tolerance as an aim and value, as well as approaches to intercultural education according to Polish and foreign scholars. Some of the articles analyse tools and spaces where intercultural education should occur—mostly school is the place, and arts is the means. Multicultural education and

multiculturalism are navigated in a very similar manner—as a phenomenon, something that one can be ready for, or pedagogical inquiry. Multicultural education is only seldom presented through educational practice. It seems that there is a strong need to discuss intercultural or multicultural education to become a part of the global discourse. Still, most articles refer to the very concept without applying it to the local context. Taking into account the monocultural character of Polish society, the latter would be hard and—in a way—artificial.

Intercultural education in the Polish context is region-oriented, with the most significant academic centres in the biggest cities (Warsaw, Cracow) or in cities next to the borderlands (Bleszyńska 2011: 78). Borderlands (Pl. 'pogranicze') is a complex term that describes the processes occurring at territories located far from centres, inhabited or culturally influenced by different groups of people. Nikitorowicz (2014: 180–181) identified several types of borderlands:

(i) territorial—as a space inhabited by two or more different cultural groups usually defined in ethnic, ethnographic, linguistic, religious or national terms, and located at the peripheries, next to the border area;

(ii) cultural content-related—a set of norms, values, rites, and traditions that make it easier for the inhabitants of borderlands to live together;

(iii) interactional—which is about a willingness to meet each other, learn each other and respect each other. The social bond that is established is built on similarities and differences;

(iv) personal, internal—is about the self-perception and identity of people inhabiting borderlands.

Unlike intercultural or multicultural education regional education is much more practice-oriented. It refers to concrete cases of people who inhabit borderland regions of Podlasie, Kashubia, and Silesia. The articles cover case studies related to heritage, language, mutual perceptions, transborder cooperation etc. Even if some of the articles refer to the role or regional education or dimensions of regional education, they are either reports from fieldwork or cover educational practice.

Intercultural competence is one of the core competencies of global citizenship (Deardorff 2006). This competence is not only about culture-specific knowledge, or openness and respect to other cultures, but also about cultural self-awareness. Fernando Reimers (2009) writes about a "global competency", defining it as knowledge and skills which people need to understand the contemporary flat world and to integrate many different fields, which will allow them to understand global events and create opportunities to solve them. Global competency also encompasses attitudes and a moral disposition, which enable peaceful, respectful and productive interactions with people from different geographical areas. Intercultural competence is only seldom a subject of articles published. It is mostly presented as an output of educational practice that can be achieved through arts, by children, or is an abstract must in the contemporary world. Only three articles were research reports, including two

about the Polish diaspora. It seems, therefore, as if intercultural competence was out of reach in the Polish school setting.

CONCLUSIONS

Global education is analysed and defined in various ways—both by practitioners (educators) and scholars. In the academic literature on the subject, it is categorised in the development of new paradigms of knowledge, in theories of sustainable development, activities of civic education, education for democracy, education for peace, or it is treated as a grassroots educational offer allowing (at least in its assumptions) its recipients to deal with globalisation and its challenges (to a greater or lesser degree). This dynamic, evolving education promoting a holistic perspective of the world does it through a process leading to equipping learners with knowledge, skills and competencies that are necessary to live (on the local and global level) in a world of mutual, complicated dependencies, in which the challenges and problems faced by contemporary man go beyond national and cultural borders (Popkiewicz 2012).

Education has always had to respond to the challenges faced by people in the world, staying in relationships with other people and nature, helping them find themselves in it and manage it (Nikitorowicz 2020). This was and is its main assumption. In the age of globalization, its task is to prepare individuals and societies to function in a world of global connections and dependencies, global challenges and threats. To face these global challenges, there has to be a school system able to provide students with relevant knowledge, skills and understanding of the surrounding world. The crucial element for such understanding is learning by experiencing how these global connections and flows actually work. This task is particularly hard to achieve in a monocultural Polish school with non-contextual teaching (Markowska-Manista 2021).

Based on the analysis of the themes of scientific articles in one of the key academic journals for researchers and educators teaching future teachers and pedagogues, we found clues that are crucial for understanding the context in which global—especially intercultural education is taught in Polish schools. We can notice the polysemous character of global education in the Polish context. The analysis showed that it is strongly embedded locally, regionally, and nationally in the context of national, ethnic, and cultural borderland transformations. Perhaps the borderland is our strength - the strength of global education in Poland. Further exploration should serve to analyse how activities for global education are implemented in the context of cultural borderlands, educational discourses and political borderlands where liberal and conservative worldviews clash.

* * *

An ongoing project, Sensiclass, has inspired the Special Issue: *Tackling Sensitive Topics in a Classroom*—Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education, Grant Agreement No. 2019-KA203-05. The project is led by the University of Tartu (Estonia) with partners from the Central European University (Hungary/Austria), University of Hra-

dec Králové (Czech Republic), and SGH Warsaw School of Economics (Poland)—four higher education institutions located in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

The project aims to prepare educational materials and strategies for teaching sensitive topics in the CEE context. The Special Issue, which came out after a call for papers, includes articles designed by the team members and authors from other institutions and countries. It only indicates that tackling and researching sensitive topics is a globally important issue.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska is an associate professor and head of the Middle East and Central Asia Unit, SGH Warsaw School of Economics. Her research focuses on Muslim communities in Poland and Europe. PI in *Let's Empower, Participate and Teach each other to Hype Empathy. Challenging discourse about Islam and Muslims in Poland* (EMPATHY) funded by the European Commission, 2022–2023).

Urszula Markowska-Manista, PhD – is field researcher in education in culturally diversified environments and indigenous childhood and youth studies concerning children's rights. Since 2016, she has been the director of and lecturer in the MA Childhood Studies and Children's Rights (MACR, Berlin, Potsdam) and is assistant professor at the University of Warsaw (Faculty of Education).

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Ignite some agency: how teaching assistants engage whiteness at a South African university

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ABSTRACT: Decolonial scholarship, although multifaceted, includes questioning how abstract theorisations could concretely reform department-specific pedagogies. This study builds on the proposition that decolonisation is served, at least partially, by department-specific pedagogies that oppose whiteness. It is grounded in a Department of English at a historically-white South African university. Using critical whiteness studies (CWS), I launch a discourse analysis of the experiential narratives expressed by Teaching Assistants during individual interviews. CWS equips me to examine how these contractually-employed educators manage their intersectional subjectivities as they facilitate small-group discussions among undergraduates in support of professors' official lectures. I focus on their reactions to the way students explore experiences of subordination.
KEYWORDS: discourse analysis, whiteness, racism, critical whiteness studies

INTRODUCTION

Tamara:

If students link their experiences with the text, it shows that they understand the text and find it meaningful. It's not just something they read for marks, it impacts their thinking about everyday life, to identify oppression and ignite some agency.

Neo:

People feel so stifled. So we need these conversations. Even I didn't know what other black students were facing. I needed to get my scales shaken off my eyes.

This study is animated by three concerns. First, decolonisation unmasks how coloniality suffuses higher education with violence, but institutionalised whiteness threatens its progress. Some scholars are responding by bridging abstract theorisations of decolonisation with pedagogic reform at the level of institutional policy, but also down to department-specific changes (Makombe 2021; Wale 2019; Makhubela 2018).

Second, from broad institutional to department-specific levels, antiracist praxis is part of decolonisation. Some departments already facilitate antiracist learning, including studies in postcolonial literature, but deepening such critical pedagogies remains paramount (Mueller 2017).

Third, decolonial scholars could mobilise insights from critical race theory (CRT) and critical whiteness studies (CWS) (Makhubela 2018; Adams, Salter, Kurtis, Naemi, & Estrada-Villalta 2018). Both value counter-storytelling. Should counter-narratives feature in the pedagogies of some departments/disciplines? Both problematise covert racism, systemic inequity and discourses of white ignorance. Should white ignorance be methodically addressed in disciplines dedicated to unmaking material injustices and racist institutional cultures?

This study participates in these debates, grounded in a Department of English in a historically-white South African university (HWU). Many CWS undertakings centre students' narratives, but this project foregrounds contractually-employed teaching assistants (henceforth simply Assistants), since they are required to explicitly broach theorisations of racism with undergraduates, which could counter silence, avoidance and ignorance. This renders their narratives potentially valuable to CWS.

Using CWS, I conduct a discourse analysis of the experiential narratives expressed by Assistants during individual interviews and examine how Assistants reflect on opportunities to resist or preserve forms of whiteness while teaching postcolonial literature to small groups of undergraduates. I hone my analyses on Assistants' discomfort with and reactions to some students' penchant for invoking personal experience.

Many CWS projects investigate students' lived experiences based on the antiracist affordances of specific courses (Mueller 2020, 2017; Kelly 2017). To my knowledge, no discourse analyses scrutinise narratives collected from contractually-employed teaching assistants in South African departments of English. This study does so. It surfaces how Assistants manage their intersectional subjectivities and discomforting experiences while facilitating small-group discussions among undergraduates in support of professors' official lectures on postcolonial literature. Soon, I will delineate the conditions of Assistants' work. First, I outline two theoretic touchstones for my analysis.

(IN)VULNERABILITY AND IGNORANCE

Broadly, this study uses CWS to chart how whiteness truncates encounters with knowledge about racism during tutorial sessions on postcolonial literature. Earlier studies have mapped discourses that equip everyday white actors to deny the systemic dimensions of racism by atomising it as individual prejudice and by exculpating whites as

passively enacting racism out of habit (Kelly 2017). Even universities that prize critical thinking and diversity can still develop novel forms of resistance against uncomfortable learning about racism. From this broad vantage, I distinguish two touchstones.

First, Wale (2019:1189) discursively analyses the narratives of South African students who self-identify as white and who study at an HWU—institutions with histories, symbols, traditions, cultures and curricula organised around whiteness and systemic racism. One of these narratives, called "out of my comfort zone", surfaces how some white students sincerely wrestle with the power-disruptive, ignorance-rupturing discomfort they encounter upon becoming, "vulnerable to learning about the experiences of black students" (Wale 2019:1200). I detail her argument later, but for now this observation suggests that if such "epistemic vulnerability" is traceable among students, then Assistants could evince similar modes of knowing that are, "open to uncomfortable learning" (Wale 2019:1200). Moreover, these Assistants could engage undergraduates in such learning.

To clarify, the above points are not exclusively pertinent to white racialisation. Participants in this study self-identify along multiple racial lines, but I read Wale's (2019:1200) "out of my comfort zone" as suggesting that if students can embody vulnerability, then Assistants could also show such vulnerability and grasp that many students, including white students, need to undergo learning about racism that is conducive to vulnerability. Wale (2019:1191) avers that this vulnerability can foster, "critical cultural openness", but what this openness implies for people who are differently situated in an intersectionally-hierarchical society, like South Africa, is an intricate question. Wale (2019:2014) advises that, "the same requirement for critical cultural openness may not be appropriate for black people". My interest lies in uncovering the kinds of discomfort that Assistants report, the discourses through which they affix meaning to uncomfortable teaching experiences, and what this might disclose about vulnerability in relation to antiracist pedagogy.

Second, Mueller's (2020) conceptualisation of white ignorance furnishes a proviso to Wale (2019) by elucidating how white students can profess insights into racism while controlling the consequences of knowing, both epistemologically and affectively, often by means of what is called strategic ignorance. Although small-group tutorials on postcolonial literature might indeed prompt the vulnerability that Wale (2019) observes, the depth of that epistemic and affective vulnerability remains uncertain. It might be counterweighted when white students (and white Assistants) strategically curate what they are willing to know about systemic racism. Relatedly, how Assistants who do not self-identify as white assign meaning to teaching experiences might yield insights into how they resist whiteness and ignorance. In short, my point is that Assistants' activities, and their reflections on these activities, proffer an opening for CWS that differs from, yet contributes to, research with students, full-time staff, intuitional policies and other domains of contestation.

The research aims addressed in this article can be summarised as follows. Assistants were interviewed about their experiences with teaching about racism via postcolonial literature. Assistants were asked to explicate how they manage their own authority in relation to students and their own potential discomfort during tutorial discussions, as

well as the principal causes of discomfort. Assistants were asked to explain how they manage the potential impact of the positionalities with which they identify, and the racialised and gendered identities which students are likely to assign to them. CWS anchored my discourse analysis of these interviews, initially without a more definitive objective than discerning the sources of discomfort Assistants report, alongside an interest in how Assistants resist and/or sustain forms of whiteness. A first-level analysis suggested the relevance of the above-mentioned CWS work. Next, the value of researching Assistants warrants some clarification.

INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

Most South African institutions of higher education face rising student numbers and a stagnating roster of fully-employed educators. Some universities have responded by training contractually-employed assistants to mitigate the danger that this student-lecturer ratio will precipitate passive learning. I designate them as Assistants to reduce the identifiability of the participants. This section concisely delineates their responsibilities.

All Assistants are enrolled for postgraduate studies, mainly Masters. They are charged with grading oral and written assessments on a roughly bi-weekly basis, and with actively involving groups of 15-25 students in face-to-face (prior to Covid-19) collaborative learning around the content covered during lectures. The department trains Assistants to utilise active-learning strategies, including flipped classrooms, student presentations, small-group discussions, essay-drafting exercises and difficult dialogues. The department's training manual stipulates that students should actively construct meaning with Assistants' aid by setting their own cultural and experiential milieus in critical conversation with the postcolonial texts and theory under study[1].

In principle, these strategies should enliven active, collaborative knowledge construction. A review of research into these strategies exceeds the scope of this article, but to contextualise the current study, it should be noted that Assistants are both required and trained to identify students' relative strengths and weakness, and to innovatively scaffold students' capacities for independent meaning-making.

Consequently, Assistants undergo the challenge of balancing their own studies with teaching responsibilities, including learning-sessions, assessment and administration. In the department under study, Assistants were required to facilitate four one-hour learning-sessions per week and one consultation hour (face-to-face before Covid-19 and online from the second semester of 2020 onwards). Weekly meetings with the lecturer responsible for each module were also mandatory. Finally, Assistants must prepare for each learning-session based on the knowledge they have accumulated about the students assigned to them. Amid these pressures, Assistants are positioned to instigate and direct conversations in far more personalised and targeted ways compared to the formal lectures, which professors deliver to approximately three hundred students. How such opportunities unfold invites sustained analysis,

[1] Citing the training manual would render the institution, department and participants identifiable, violating the terms for ethical clearance.

particularly since the content around which Assistants must stimulate learning explicitly broach the reproduction of systemic racism, directions for antiracism and the role literary texts play maintaining/unmaking injustice. How these factors bear upon the findings will be clarified during the analysis.

Evidently, Assistants are employed as an institutional reaction to evolving teaching conditions. How this response contributes to decolonisation and antiracism merits critical inquiry given its potential to rupture and/or reproduce inequitable and intersectionally-oppressive epistemic ecologies (Makombe 2021; Adams et al. 2018). Such micro-level research is humble compared to institutional policy reform, but grasping the dynamics of Assistants' work can illuminate how specific departments advance/retard decolonisation.

PARTICIPANT DETAILS

All Assistants working in 2019-2021 participated, with the exception of three who left the university after 2020 and declined to participate. This yielded fifteen participants, which compares favourably with similar studies (Wale 2019; Kelly 2017). At the start of 2021, most Assistants had amassed at least three years' experience, with two having served for six years, while four had acquired only two years' experience. Eight were completing their Masters, while the rest were undergoing Honours education. Three Assistants self-identified as coloured, seven as white, four as black and one as Asian. I acquired permission to conduct interviews from the Institutional Review Board, the Academic Head of Department, and all professors responsible for teaching undergraduates. From each professor, I requested the module guide, assessments, and the activities they expected Assistants to execute as co-teachers, especially in terms of how literary analysis is taught in relation to systemic racism.

During each of the approximately ninety-minute interviews, Assistants marked the texts in Table 1 as the most provocative opportunities for inciting discussions of racism. These are not the only texts classed as postcolonial in the department, and they are supplemented by numerous secondary readings. Students also raised racism during discussions of other authors including Shakespeare and Jane Austen by, for instance, interrogating their relevance to an African university.

Title	**Author**
The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian	Sherman Alexie
Ghost Strain N	Mohale Mashigo
Things Fall Apart	Chinua Achebe
The Bluest Eye	Toni Morrison
Possessing the Secret of Joy	Alice Walker
The Color Purple	Alice Walker
The Madonna of Excelsior	Zakes Mda
Houseboy	Ferdinand Oyono
Devil on the Cross	Ngugi wa Thiong'o
Coconut	Kopano Matlwa

Table 1: Texts used to discuss racism

The semi-structured questions that guided interviews are explicated below, along with a rationale for selecting Assistants.

SAMPLING RATIONALE

CWS often map student experiences, but contractually-employed Assistants remain underresearched. To my knowledge, no recent projects have investigated how Assistants in South Africa manage their own racialised subjectivities and their relative power vis-a-vis students, while facilitating instruction on racism and literature. Undertaking such research accords with a theorisation of racism as institutionalised and underscores telling differences between students and Assistants, including the latter's institutional positionality and education-level.

First, apropos to institutional positionality, CWS typically study students in relation to the institutional reproduction of racist systems/structures by interrogating the discursive repertoires, symbolic and affective economies that equip students to preserve or resist racism and intersectional marginalisation (Wale 2019; Kelly 2017; Adams et al. 2018; Mueller 2017). Assistants are positioned differently. Their relative authority enables them to (de)legitimise some students' modes of knowledge production. However, Assistants' position is liminal, since they cannot significantly alter the curriculum. Therefore, like researching students, analysing Assistants centres everyday interactions, but with actors who inhabit the institution differently.

Second, with regards to education, compared to most student-participants in CWS (Wale 2019; Kelly 2017; Adams et al. 2018; Mueller 2017), Assistants have explored critical theory to more advanced levels. This could shape their teaching practices and their capacity to appraise their own practices during interviews. All participants for this study have completed postgraduate courses on postcolonial literature, critical feminist theories, eco-criticism and critical race theory. What this background betokens is uncertain. It might arm Assistants to help students grasp the subtle yet systemic dimensions of racism and to appraise literary interventions in intersectional oppression. Moreover, this educational background might augment Assistants' capacity to reflect on their teaching techniques during interviews. It seems reasonable to harbour higher expectations of Assistants' critical acumen, compared to undergraduate students. Additionally, as a matter of departmental policy[2], Assistants are expected to stimulate learning environments that breach any routinised avoidance and discursive evasion of racism, principally by delving into postcolonial literary framings of racism. Consequently, tutorial interactions could approximate what Mueller (2017:226) terms "breaching conditions". Undergraduates with possessive investments in sidestepping critical conversations on racism are, in principle, drawn into difficult dialogues. Conversely, students who wish to problematise race-evasive logics are afforded opportunities to accomplish this.

However, Assistants might also encounter and collude in discursive manoeuvres that reproduce whiteness. Whiteness is notoriously tenacious. Mueller's (2020) caveat

[2] As mentioned earlier, citing departmental policy would violate the conditions under which approval for the study was granted.

remains: racism is sustained by practices through which white people manage what is known and felt. Similarly, Wale (2019) and Adams et al.'s (2018) exhortations to map the practices of those who resist systemic oppression remain equally cardinal, making CWS inquiry into Assistants both necessary and potentially fruitful.

INTERVIEWS PROCEDURES

After securing ethical clearance, all fifteen Assistants were interviewed individually via an online platform in compliance with Covid-19 safety protocols. Adopting a semi-structured questionnaire schedule, Assistants were asked to reflect on the pedagogic strategies through which they broach racism with students while unpacking postcolonial literature, the relevance of Assistants' self-identifications and the identities South African students are likely to assign to them. Assistants were also questioned about how they manage their own authority vis-à-vis students, particularly in terms of how they foster an inclusive and active learning environment. During the process, Assistants were routinely asked to discern potential areas of discomfort around teaching about racism, obstacles to students' critical engagement, frustrations, sources of excitement and success. Assistants were also permitted to digress into areas of interest that would not otherwise have emerged, reflecting an appreciation of Assistants as critical thinkers.

One limitation of my approach stems from explicitly topicalising racism instead of researching the spontaneous/natural arising of racial formations. To partially attenuate this risk, I draw from Kerr's (2020:111) reminder that discourse analysts approach interviews, "as interactions in which speakers are performing various activities" that are agential and ideologically-productive. I argue that although topicalising race and racism is fraught with risk, it can still advance critical agendas, notably the task of undermining ignorance. Asking Assistants to explain how they draw students into discussions of racism and to critically appraise how they (Assistants) assign meaning to students' reactions can spur self-reflection and bolster agency (Kelly 2017). It might also be generative for Assistants to contemplate the risk of becoming complicit in defending race-evasive ideologies during heated tutorial discussions and to elucidate how their own intersectional identifications might inflect their teaching practices.

Mindful of Kerr's (2020:112) admonition that, "no piece of data is self-evidently about any particular topic [and can] be grouped or analysed in a number of ways," I argue that interviewees attended to three broad domains: 1) discomfort around teaching about racism, 2) students' efforts to personalise learning, and 3) Assistants' constructions of the ideal outcomes of learning.

Before explicating my findings, the next sections narrow my conceptualisation of ignorance, invulnerability (Wale 2019) and "creative maladjustment" (Adams et al. 2018:337). The relevance of these concepts surfaced after a first-level exploration of the interviews instead of being selected a-priori.

EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE

Theorising race as socially constructed entails conceptualising epistemologies of racial ignorance as a, "culturally recursive accomplishment" anchored in, "a process of knowing designed to produce not knowing" about racism (Mueller 2017:220). Assistants' relationship with such epistemologies invites scrutiny.

CWS problematises ignorance about racism by exploring how institutionally-sanctioned knowledge ecologies ease the labour of ignorance. Various normative institutional discourses stymie the deepening and meaningful implementation of critical insights into systemic racism (Adams et al. 2018; Kelly 2017). Decolonial scholars treat this problem as the coloniality of institutionally-sanctioned knowledge (Makombe 2021; Makhubela 2018). Antiracist pedagogy responds by de-normalising such discourses, aiming to expose and disrupt the passive, habitual reproduction of racist discourses and to address the violence enacted on subordinated groups. One method for this de-normalisation is to centre subordinated epistemologies, so that counter-narratives from the marginalised can rupture ignorance (Adams et al. 2018).

Mueller (2017:219-220) cautions against overstressing the, "structurally induced habits", "unintentional routines", and "business as usual" discourses that equip white actors to claim unawareness or passive ignorance about racism. Overemphasizing systemically-induced patterns can eclipse white actors' possessive investment in evasive epistemologies, concealing the "creative agency" and innovative responses they can mount when the well-worn practices that perpetuate ignorance are challenged (Mueller 2017:221).

Indeed, Mueller (2017), Wale (2019) and Adams et al. (2018) adduce that contemporary social life teems with evidence of the severity and sophistication of racism. Concrete proposals for advancing justice are also widely available, with vocal calls for decolonisation contributing to and directing some of these calls (Makombe 2021; Makhubela 2018). Nurturing ignorance against this knowledge is an ongoing accomplishment. The socio-cognitive processes at stake are not, "private, asocial" modes of knowing; instead, "epistemologies of ignorance are social epistemologies, structured into the rhythms of institutions and everyday practices" (Mueller 2017:222).

Tellingly, this necessitates a theorisation of white subjectivities as structurally positioned, without framing them as passive dupes of the system. Rather, all people exercise a measure of self-direction and "motivated reasoning" to curate what knowledge is avowed, integrated and allowed to drive behaviour (Adams et al. 2018:347), as I hope to suggest during the analysis. Assistants must explicitly topicalise systemic racism in the context of postcolonial literature, which might complicate ignorance. But what can be learned from discursively analysing how they reflect on teaching experiences?

Following Mueller (2017), one complication for analysing Assistants' ruminations is to examine meanings that remain absent alongside those that emerge. As Assistants construct meaning around their teaching experiences, analyses must untangle both what is flagged and what is omitted (Mueller 2017). Since I rely on interviews, I cannot claim to have accessed tutorials directly. Correspondingly, I cannot offer a direct description of how tutorials unfold. The next sections bridge ignorance with invulnerability (Wale 2019) and creative maladjustment (Adams et al.'s 2018).

AFFECTS OF INVULNERABILITY

Wale (2019:11189-1191) probes the "politics of emotion in white students' experiential narratives" and foregrounds affects of invulnerability, "being emotionally closed to being affected by the experiences of oppressed groups", and being closed to the way one's own positionality affects others. She contends that the valorisation of affective invulnerability constitutes a core desideratum of the idealised white-self. Moreover, it has become, "aligned with the global historically intersecting project of racism/patriarchy/capitalism" (Wale 2019:1193). This propels her theorisation that if epistemologies of ignorance buttress exploitative relations, then the valorisation and performance of affective invulnerability buttresses ignorance by blunting empathetic reactions to knowledge about oppression.

As a remedy, she proposes, "critical cultural openness", a gradual process of "critically evaluating inherited cultural knowledge attached to whiteness" (Wale 2019:1191). A first-level reading of the interview data suggested the fruitfulness of expanding the analytic lens to conjoin epistemologies of ignorance with affects of (in)vulnerability.

CREATIVE MALADJUSTMENT

CWS challenges putatively race-neutral institutionalised practices that occlude racism and whiteness, including civility, impartiality and detachment (Kelly 2017). For Adams et al. (2018:337-339), decolonisation and antiracism require investment in knowledge ecologies that, "afford creative maladjustment [against] socialisation into a pathological system" in favour of instilling the "critical consciousness to resist repression of troublesome truths". For them, creative maladjustment is best rooted in subordinated knowledges. This proposition is shared in various streams of decolonial scholarship, but sustained labour is still required to ascertain what it spells for department-specific pedagogies (Makombe 2021; Makhubela 2018). My initial reading of interviews with Assistants flagged the potential relevance of this concept.

In particular, it is worth mentioning that Assistants who do not self-identify as white are often lauded as potential professors of the future. They are celebrated as contributing to the demographic transformation of the university in question. Indeed, this discourse represents a key facet of funding applications for employing Assistants. The institution avers that serving as Assistants while completing postgraduate studies will afford Assistants the teaching experience and academic qualifications needed to become full-time academics, either at this institution or at others. The feasibility and success of these claims exceed the scope of this study. However, it bears mentioning that if the institution prizes the decolonising potential of Assistants who self-identify as black, coloured and Asian, then questions can be asked about how seriously the pedagogic labour and epistemic contributions of these Assistants are taken. To what extent are these Assistants positioned as capable of ascertaining where creative maladjustment against engrained practices are necessary? To what extent are Assistants recognised as capable of formulating methods of creative maladjustment? Put differently, if "marginalised knowledge from the epistemic perspective of subordinated communities [can supply] a resource for critical consciousness", what role might As-

sistants and their encounters with students play? These questions demand multi-layered responses and in this study, I call attention to directions suggested by Assistants' reflections during interviews.

FINDINGS

Participants explored numerous avenues, but I hone this article on three sources of discomfort, followed by Assistants' reactions to students' penchant for citing personal experience. I start by citing two Assistants. Elucidating how their narratives intertwine epistemologies of ignorance and affective invulnerability demands some detail and furnishes a foundation for illustrating how other Assistants indirectly resist ignorance. To ease readability I follow Wale's (2019) simplified transcription conventions.

DISCOMFORT WITH EPISTEMIC MEDIATION

Two Assistants expressed discomfort with the epistemic and ontological position from which they mediate knowledge when engaging students in learning (i.e. speaking from white subject positions). Their discomfort clustered around moments that signalled students' unfamiliarity with Apartheid history and with histories beyond South Africa (in these Assistants' estimation).

Elaine:

> I was uncomfortable with the literature that was American-centric. The racial issues in the literature are very different from South Africa. Students don't know all the historical details, but also I don't want to come across like I'm telling these black students this is how racism is, you know. I felt maybe that they would be like, well what do you know about racism because you're not black? What do you know about experiencing racism?

Jacque:

> What right do I have to tell students about Apartheid or other history? I never went through that. All I know is the knowledge I've learned. I haven't really experienced any of the hardships. It sort of puts me in a push-pull situation, where I can correct the student about history. But do I have the right? What if the student approaches me and says you don't know the struggle. You don't know what we go through today.

Both Assistants frame themselves as vulnerable to questioning when sharing knowledge about histories of racism. Both self-identify as white and conjecture that students consider them white (female and male, respectively). Given this racialised and gendered positionality, they anticipate that students could repudiate that knowledge based on experiences of being racialised as black. Blackness is thus ascribed a certain knowledgeability.

It is worth mentioning that this openness to question one's suitability as a teacher might be necessary in contemporary South Africa, especially if racialised as white, and

where it leads is important. Initially, framing themselves as questionable appears to approximate the vulnerability Wale (2019) considers pivotal for critical cultural openness. This includes scepticism against the notion that totalising, objective knowledge (historical or otherwise) is attainable, since knowledge is readily co-opted by hierarchical positionality, including the identity-defensive concerns of whiteness and patriarchy. Consequently, the Assistants' reflections also approximate, "critical historical consciousness", the capacity to de-naturalise the memory practices implicated in normalising the coloniality of knowledge, being and power (Adams et al. 2018:337). Initially, these capacities seem evident from the Assistants' openness to anticipate the contingency of the knowledge they can share.

However, as they narrate students' lack of historical/contextual knowledge their reflections also suggest the simultaneous operation of affects of invulnerability and epistemologies of ignorance.

Elaine:

> I think lecturers are being too high brow, expecting too much. You have to take it down real basic. We are told to focus on how students are interpreting the text and that sort of forgets that students don't know how to read the text in the first place. They can't interpret because they don't understand and they don't know how to write academically.

Jacque:

> Students tend to bring in personal issues into their essays and they don't know how to separate like real life from academic writing. I've had essays where they say like they can relate to the poverty in the story because they have grown up in townships with a dirt road and no lights. It seems like an automatic response. When they see this imagery in the text it sort of triggers this response that oh I can relate to this now.

A distinct form of ignorance is projected onto students. Students lack granulated historical knowledge and lack mastery over institutionalised expectations surrounding academic writing, at least in terms of the norms these Assistants invoke. Earlier, the Assistants foregrounded their own vulnerability to students' knowledge. Instead of excavating that knowledge-base and its potential contribution to literary analyses (including its shortcomings), students' epistemologies are delegitimised. The implications, from a CWS perspective, are manifold. I belabour two of them here.

First, these narratives resonate with Sue's (2013:666) observation that race-talk violates the assumption that intellectual inquiry demands "objectivity [and] detachment". Seeing this issue persist from 2013 into the present, despite the hype around decolonisation, is problematic.

Second, and more pivotal in relation to Mueller (2017) and Wale (2019), these reflections hinder critical cultural openness and amplify epistemologies of ignorance and affects of invulnerability. To elaborate, the vulnerability occasioned by sharing information about racism with students who possess lived experiences of racism could prompt self-reflection and an openness to explore collaborative meaning-mak-

ing, even if this requires accepting that students could launch critical inquiry from a knowledge-base that Assistants do not share. Instead, students are configured as deficient and maladjusted to the university setting. Doing this preserves invulnerability, since configuring students as deficient enables both Assistants to circumvent self-interrogation by locating the problem in students, allowing the Assistants to safeguard their status as bearers of expert, institutionally-sanctioned knowledge.

In short, Assistants are discursively equipped to sustain invulnerability. To frame students as maladjusted, Assistants must normalise prevailing university standards, despite vocal exhortations for decolonisation. This represents an exercise of power by capacitating Assistants to negotiate what types of knowledge around racism is avowed/acknowledged and what is delegitimised/suppressed. Wale (2019) reports broadly comparable gestures in the sense-making practices expressed by students, but under radically different conditions. Finding this pattern among Assistants illuminates moments where decolonisation meets resistance within department-specific nuances.

The proposition that students lack academic enculturation was elaborated when these two Assistants approached a theme expressed by all Assistants: students' proclivity for leveraging personal experiences and observations as prisms for literary analyses. As I hope to demonstrate, other Assistants responded differently to this student proclivity, reading it as an opportunity, rather than an inherent obstacle to learning. First, I examine another source of Assistants' discomfort.

RESCUING WHITE MORALITY

One other white Assistant articulated discomfort with the task of guiding white students to treat racism as systemic. Responding to texts that interpolate racism with poverty, some white students atomised these problems. Instead of reading this pattern as diagnosing white resistance, this Assistant attempted to "repair moral breaches" by averring, "sincere, passive white ignorance" among students rather than grappling with the probability of active resistance incited by encountering uncomfortable knowledge around racism (Mueller 2017:230):

> Teresa:
>
> Compared to black students, more white students just don't recognise the link between poverty and racism. I think it's a perspective thing. I don't think white students were evading it. I think it's just something that they never thought could be linked. It wasn't on their radar.

Later, I intend to substantiate my argument that this constitutes an innovative, rather than habitual, manifestation of ignorance (Mueller 2017). To do so, I analyse Assistants' responses to students citing personal experience. However, it is relevant at this junction to contrast the above with an Assistant who self-identities as black:

> Refilwe:

> How does someone who lives in South Africa not understand this dynamic? These students push away the systemic part of racism, of what made these people poor, even though the texts clarify that. When you write from a point of privilege, you disconnect.

For this Assistant, and several others, this reflection inaugurated a contrasting source of discomfort accompanied by a different mode of vulnerability: Assistants' concern over the potential hypocrisy of pressuring students to treat racism as systemic, while exhorting students to think independently.

HYPOCRISY

> Neo:
>
> So, I might come across as hypocritical because I tell students to think for themselves and then make such strong suggestions when I guide them to analyse how a text handles systemic racism. It becomes a slippery slope. It's a heavy task. You have to draw a fine line between not being forceful in your ideas, because it can have a lasting impact on students for whom the scales are only peeling off slowly.
>
> Check:
>
> I do sometimes feel that I come across as forcing students to read all these texts and all these theories on racism when there are other theories out there that students might think are actually more factual.
>
> Elsa:
>
> What right do I have to tell this majority of black students and minority of white students what racism is? What flipped a switch for me is that I moderate debates. It's the difference between giving information and facilitating a conversation. But this requires telling them not to coddle me because I am a white girl. But then you run a risk. You guide students towards systemic racism, while claiming they have to think for themselves.

For these Assistants (and seven others), discomfort is primarily seated in the difficulty of balancing independent inquiry with the risk that students (especially white students) could choose to isolate racism from poverty and other inequities thematised in the texts. The Assistants acknowledge the critical task of resisting the, "collective delusions that normalise the status quo of racial violence" but question how this might be balanced with automatous learning and the truncating effects of white resistance, including active ignorance against linkages between racism and poverty (Adams et al. 2018:339). Crucially, the difficulty is impelled by questioning how to advance critical thinking, instead of rote compliance with normative academic standards.

This conflict between normative standards and independent inquiry also surfaced when all fifteen Assistants spontaneously broached students' predilection for rooting literary analyses in what Assistants termed *personal experience*.

INVALIDATING PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

When asked to expound their claim that students are unfamiliar with academic writing, the two Assistants examined earlier explained:

Elaine:

> In the essays we had to mark it was very often quite uncomfortable because students would get very personal. Then I felt like I had to say okay I understand this is very personal for you. Like one student devotes much of her essay to her experience with potty training and toilets at home. I had to be like okay that's not what we're asking from you. It also happened especially with Coconut because I think a lot of them connected to Coconut because it is a very South African text. So they would start talking and writing about their personal lives and how they experienced instances of being called a coconut because those are the things we talked about during tutorials when they were relevant.[3]

Jacque:

> Students would relate their personal lives to scenes from the texts. I have to tell them it's about academic writing. I mean it's all good to relate personal experiences to the text during tutorials. For example, we will go from sexual violence in the text to gender-based violence in the country.

From a CWS perspective, the following tensions permeate these extracts. Assistants are tasked with helping students produce individual arguments that rely on text-based evidence. But some Assistants are unbalanced when they encounter personal accounts of lived experiences marked by deprivation. These two (and the four Assistants they represent) react by invalidating allusions to personal experiences (I will return later to whether these experiences are indeed simply personal or collective). Invoking hegemonic, colonial academic standards, they disparage students for failing to comply with institutional cultures. Are alternative responses viable?

In CWS, antiracist pedagogy should prioritise active, personal meaning-making over rote-learning and, moreover, valorise counter-narratives and power-disruptive responses to prevailing institutional arrangements (Makhubela 2018). Consequently, CWS suggests a shift in how the citation of personal experiences could be framed. To clarify, this is not to deny the risk that students can digress entirely from text-based study, delving into lived realities to the detriment of theory-based argumentation. However, interpolating lived realities of injustice with textual/literary representations can, in principle, be approached as an opportunity rather than an intractable obstacle to independent learning, especially if the process is construed as a stage in students' education towards whatever goals a department valorises.

[3] For the sake of contextual clarity, it should be noted that students were required to explore interfaces between literature and material manifestations of injustice, including access to safe sanitation and sewerage (Robins 2014). From this standpoint, potty training in marginalised communities might indeed contribute to understanding resource deprivation in South Africa. Another Assistant, cited later, illuminates this possibility.

Stated differently, the knowledge that students generate by unpacking lived realities can support interrogations of the texts under study, and can create new knowledge by placing text, experience and theory in dynamic conversation. Admittedly, this project is demanding. Drawing undergraduates into this process requires scaffolding and time, especially considering the general under-preparedness of most South African students (Allais, Cooper, & Shalem 2019). However, my argument is that, at the very least, whether the citation of personal experience is constructed as an impediment or opportunity matters for students' investment in their own education and for just pedagogy. Within the parameters of undergraduate literary explorations, antiracism and decolonisation can be served by positioning students as capable of decolonising their own learning by, among other practices, narrating lived knowledge, especially if Assistants are able to facilitate rich encounters between text and experience. This proposition is supported by other Assistants who voiced this possibility. For instance, the extract that opened this article suggests that students can engage texts as critical resources, instead of, "just something they read for marks". Before elaborating, I suggest that apart from being a missed opportunity, the injunction against personal experience manifests epistemologies of ignorance and affects of invulnerability.

Attempts to incorporate personal experience into academic analyses are constructed as violating normative standards, instead of a potential resource for exploring subordination. This construction presumes the ideological neutrality of hegemonic standards, ignoring its colonial underpinnings. It sustains invulnerability by enabling four of the Assistants to evade the discomfort of implicating their own relative privilege with students' accounts of material realities of racialised deprivation. It also discursively equips Assistants to ignore the degree to which their own academic achievements (as postgraduate students) are premised on compliance with colonial academic standards:

Elaine:

> In my previous university, we really had it drilled into us in undergrad and honours. You don't speak about personal experiences. You have to remove yourself from your writing. There's no I think this and this is my opinion. So I think I'm coming very much from an experience of you don't do that.

Jacque:

> When I was going through university we were always told that you do not bring personal experiences into academic writing. Now, especially when we teach texts on racism, it just comes into their writing.

Finally, this construction also enables Assistants to forestall challenges to their authority, based on putatively neutral standards. Directly challenging the lived experiences of students who endure intersectional and material injustice could encounter accusations of racism and insensitivity. A safer route for evading discomfort is to retreat to topics over which Assistants can claim expertise, including the academic conventions they have mastered. But doing this demands ignorance of how these conventions are complicit in coloniality. Such identity-defensive manoeuvring showcas-

es how epistemologies of ignorance and affects of invulnerability intersect to stymie openings for critical inquiry. It signals the exigency of creative maladjustment against ostensibly-neutral institutional cultures.

However, not all Assistants responded this way. Before analysing alternative responses, another vital point about the construction of *personal experience* is necessary.

EXPERIENCE VS OBSERVATION

Elaine:

> They get personal in the tutorials where it's relevant, like talking about the toilets thing, but then they go put it into academic writing and I have to be like, well no this is more formal whereas tutorials are informal.

Jacque:

> For example, we will go from sexual violence in the text to gender-based violence in the country. Students go to how it is prevalent in the country and nothing is getting done about it.

The practices construed as *getting personal* are equally readable as observations of communal realities. Students are not simply narrating subjective experiences with entirely affective overtones, or selecting a soft/easy alternative over cognitive theorisation. Instead, students proffer observations of collective life under unequal conditions. To these Assistants, such discussions are permissible during the opening tutorial sessions, but not during writing, which might have generated confusion among students. Regardless, it seems that what could have been framed as *observations* are instead actively constructed as *getting personal*. Thus, denigrating these observations as intrinsically personal and irrelevant to academic study seems less like the passive enactment of an institutionally-sanctioned objective-subjective dichotomy. Rather, it seems like an innovative way of circumventing discomforting truths that rupture the twin objectives of whiteness: to continue enjoying the spoils of structural dispossession, while maintaining a personal and collective sense of moral integrity (Mueller 2020). As such, the proscription constitutes more than a habituated reaction. It also represents a creative accomplishment that insulates whiteness (Mueller 2017).

Finally, the reflections of a more experienced Assistant who often mentors novices, supplies some tentative confirmation since she explicitly mentioned that, "some white Assistants have asked me whether it's okay to avoid discussing racism". However, most Assistants responded differently.

EXPERIENCE AS AN OPPORTUNITY

Refilwe:

> If a literary text makes you connect with it to such an extent that your life connects to it, then the author is doing something right because clearly the author has encapsulated some part of your life. So let's talk about that. Let's unpack

that. Some of the black students didn't have the English to portray poverty as a form of systemic racism, but I could tell from their writing that they understood that because of Apartheid we now have the situations we have. But I still comment when students don't connect it to the story. But by contrast, many white students struggled to see how black and coloured South Africans today are disadvantaged. For example, they said people should be working harder. There's no reason for people to be poor and people just have to save money.

Alexie:

Personal experience comes up quite a lot, and students use it to validate their argument about the text, race and racism. So, they use their personal experience as a booster. Like, I know what I am speaking about. I have lived through this. And it comes with a level of confidence. I do think the fact that black students can so closely relate to issues of race and racism makes them confident. It's never a case of black students being mean. They are assertive. They know what they are talking about.

Ten Assistants interpreted students' attempts to co-ordinate literary analyses around lived experience as signalling, "reality attunement of racism perception" (Adams et al. 2018:343). Rather than lamenting students' writing as subjective, affective and irreconcilable with academic inquiry, these Assistants read students as understanding racism and as capable of grasping how some literary texts frame structural injustice in ways that unsettle whiteness-comforting logics, which reduce racism to mere prejudice and which fail to question liberal individualism's *work harder* ethics (Mueller 2017). Experiential knowledge is thus considered a potential resource for validating arguments. In Wale's (2019) terminology, such analyses can nurture critical cultural consciousness, or critical historical consciousness for Adams et al. (2018). Racialised differences between students' perceptions of racism also help Assistants to diagnose the emergence of white resistance.

Tellingly, none of these Assistants assumed that citing personal experience (or communal observations) automatically produced sound literary scholarship. Unrealistic optimism is absent. Problems with academic literacy, and even basic literacy, are acknowledged. Nor do these Assistants mandate engagement with personal experience/observations. The practice is constructed as an option that needs careful scaffolding, support and time as students ascend the levels of undergraduate study.

Among the most revealing of these constructions of personal experience as a pedagogic resource, is a reflection from an Assistant who indirectly challenges the earlier "potty training" narrative. Reflecting on tutorial sessions (face-to-face prior to Covid-19 and online during 2020-2021), she unfolds discussions of Robins (2014), which was assigned reading in relation to *Coconut*:

Daria:

Most black students were speaking from experience, since many do not have access to safe sanitation and sewerage. White students were quiet. So, I asked one of them what she thinks about protesters throwing excrement to protest against

> poor sanitation. She said it was disgusting. Black students tried to explain that such radical methods mean people have exhausted other methods. She was adamant. Then in her essay, she repeated her disgust. She took it as if she was attacked. It struck me how this student showed no empathy for protestors.

The Assistant offered this interaction to exemplify active resistance from white students, and to explain how she attempts to counter it. First, she recognises that detachment from material deprivation encumbers empathy and obstructs critical learning by impeding this student's ability to implicate her own privilege in the marginalisation of others. As such, this reflection resonates with the earlier one, "How does someone who lives in South Africa not understand?" Second, in response, the Assistant allows experiences of subordination to challenge resistance and, potentially, disrupt ignorance. The effectiveness of this technique exceeds the scope of this study, but it bears noticing how experiential knowledge is leveraged to unseat whiteness-insulating logics. Relatedly, this Assistants' reflection opposes the invocation of academic standards mentioned earlier. She avoids a dichotomous construction of personal experience as either a distraction from, or definitive indication of learning. Rather, she recognises the uncertain and pluralistic interplay of competing knowledges occasioned by students' interaction.

From a broad pedagogic perspective, this interplay can be valued for its potential to enliven active, yet difficult, collective knowledge construction. For CWS, the interchange can engender reality-attuned knowledges that unsettle strategic ignorance and obfuscatory logics around racism, at least potentially.

In short, most Assistants framed such interactions as opportunities for active learning, whether these transpired during face-to-face (pre-Covid) or online tutorials (2020-2021). The same logic shaped most Assistants' reactions to seeing personal experiences/observations emerge in students' writing. Methodologically my analysis is weakened by an ethical injunction against accessing students' essays directly, barring me from investigating their writing first-hand. Future research could rectify this.

CONCLUSION

Decolonial scholarship elevates, "the epistemic perspective of subordinated communities" as a resource for repudiating, "the White-washed roots of mainstream constructions of reality [in favour of] alternative constructions that better reflect and promote the aspirations of broader humanity" (Adams et al. 2017:339-341). Precisely what this entails for undergraduate studies is debatable. Curriculum reform stresses the urgency of exposing students to texts and theory by antiracist, anti-colonial scholars from the Global South (Makombe 2021). This exhortation is generally accepted, but its implementation calls for ongoing research at micro levels, as embedded in the macro.

To my knowledge, decolonial scholars have not yet grappled directly with how decoloniality is served or stymied at the level of Assistants confronting students' unexpected writing strategies. Similarly, CWS esteems experiential knowledge for its potential to expose the subtle collusion of whiteness and systemic injustice, but how

should this precept change undergraduate studies with antiracist aspirations? Does it necessarily demand that students be encouraged to explore combinations of academic analyses and experiential knowledge? As an entry-point for these questions, I have suggested that how Assistants construct and respond to this student-generated practice matters. Several context-specific caveats bear mentioning.

Assistants work under demanding conditions. There is no doubt that many South African students enter university without having mastered basic literacy, owing to historically-grounded problems (Allais et al. 2019). This might evoke some empathy for the assertion that academics, "are being too high brow". Moreover, Assistants have no agency in selecting the texts or learning objectives they teach; consequently, they may not feel at liberty to respond flexibly to writing strategies that appear unconventional from normative/hegemonic standpoints. Additionally, although all Assistants have explored critical theory, this does not mean that Assistants have been exposed to theorists who call for students to link experiences to systemic arrangements. While critical theories prize counter-storytelling, not all make unambiguous calls for student-essays that bridge literature and quotidian realities. Taken together, these observations might suggest that critiquing some Assistants for expressing discomfort with what they term *personal experience* is mistaken. Expecting Assistants to ascertain the coloniality implicit in delegitimising this practice might be expecting too much.

However, other contextual variables include Assistants' training manual, which flags the expectation that students should read texts in relation to cultural, communal and personal values. Finally, Assistants occupy an institutional space rife with public lectures and paper presentations on decolonisation, including antiracism and counter-narratives. These factors suggest that the twin moves to frame students as deficient when they work with *personal experience*, and the subsequent move to rationalise this framing by invoking normative academic standards, represents an active, obdurate enactment of racialised ignorance, capable of encountering alternative, antiracist interpretations without allowing these to destabilise normative conventions (Mueller 2017).

If decolonisation aims to trouble collective delusions that succour ignorance and control how subordinated knowledges are legitimised, then the above-mentioned manoeuvres of ignorance also warrant problemitisation. Simply asking Assistants to accept personal experience or to commit to antiracism is inadequate. Instead, an alertness to innovative logics that occlude whiteness is necessary. In this, I concur with Mueller's (2017:235) proposition that apart from aiming to "generate awareness" about whiteness, critical responses must also make "ignorance more difficult" by intensifying the labour required to sustain ignorance, with the goal of ultimately stabilising self-reflexivity.

More specifically, the key proposition I hope to articulate here is not to read the findings as suggesting that Assistants must necessarily be trained to encourage students to anchor textual analyses in personal/collective experiences/observations. Decolonial theory does not mandate the elevation of student experience, but it does exhort vigilant deliberation on which epistemologies are (de)legitimised (Makhubela 2018). Therefore, my argument is that how Assistants react to unexpected and poten-

tially non-normative student-practices is paramount for expanding Assistants' capacity for recognising how students grapple with racialised realities and for supporting students' learning effectively.

Far from selecting a soft option, students have indeed struck upon one avenue (among many) for learning. This avenue is incomplete; it could benefit from increasingly deeper theorisation about, for instance, intersections between the personal and systemic. Nevertheless, this avenue can help students to untangle the complexities of marginalisation and to deliberate how literary texts can augment opposition to oppression, even when those texts engage foreign/unfamiliar contexts. Most Assistants recognised this, framing students as struggling with basic literacy, but nonetheless busy with earnest ventures to bridge textual and personally-relevant analyses. The frequency with which most Assistants constructed students as active-yet-struggling, bolsters the interpretation that other Assistants are leveraging ignorance actively and creatively, rather than habitually.

CWS scholars often respond to racism-supporting practices among students or teachers by recommending sensitisation through training. Training is also a regular fixture in South African institutional discourses. This might prompt the suggestion that Assistants should be instructed to search for the subtle operation of whiteness in their own pedagogies. Although welcome, the findings illustrate that some Assistants already evince this capability, at least partially. While always incomplete, open to growth and susceptible to degradation, the aptitude is traceable. What Assistants construct as *personal experience* is generally recognised as an opening for a kind of education that can contribute to decolonisation by endorsing and incrementally enhancing engagement with literature as a lens for appraising how coloniality affects quotidian existence. This observation also points in another direction.

As mentioned earlier, non-white Assistants are often celebrated as future professors. If higher education is indeed committed to this endeavour, instead of using it for public relations, then institutions should take such Assistants seriously, especially their agency and the directions for creative maladjustment suggested by their pedagogic experiences. This includes their sense that *personal experience* contributes to decolonisation, even if this practice violates some academic norms. From Wale's (2019) perspective, it is also interesting to note that these Assistants articulate a risk of hypocrisy when calling on students to think independently, while nudging them towards situating the personal in the systemic. Whatever else this apprehension might betoken, it indicates these Assistants' openness to vulnerability, including epistemic and affective vulnerabilities, which enable them to question their own authority and pedagogic methods in ways that engender openness to innovation including students' grappling with experiential knowledge (Wale 2019). How Assistants frame and cope with these pressures, how the institution can attenuate the pressure, and what new pressures arise beyond Covid-19 all invite future scrutiny.

Other questions opened up by this study include whether students and Assistants racialised as white have an obligation to engage not only the epistemologies generated by the texts under study, but also by students and Assistants racialised along other axes. If so, how should white students and Assistants meaningfully respond or impli-

cate themselves in these experiences? Finally, there is of course a major risk in white people consuming black experiences as a facile/superficial gesture of exculpation for racism.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Marthinus Stander Conradie holds a PhD in critical discourse analysis and inferential pragmatics from the University of the Free State (South Africa), where he is currently employed at the Department of English. His research interests are grounded in discourse analysis and critical race theory, which he has applied to examine everyday political argumentation, the construction of race and racism as well as whiteness. His publications include analyses of South African students' online discussions of personal experiences of racial discrimination and micro-aggressions on university campuses, citizens' online deliberations via asynchronous news forums, as well as media depictions of Africa in print advertising.

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Social and ethnic group membership among students in a Czech lower secondary school

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ABSTRACT: This article examines social and ethnic group membership among sixth-grade students at a Czech lower secondary school whose student population is predominantly heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity. The main focus is on group membership in the sixth grade, which is considered as the worst class at school and which is attended by several Roma boys and girls. Special attention is paid to the boundary constructions in the groups of children from an anthropological perspective and interactionism. The article is based on qualitative, and ethnographic fieldwork. The central method of the fieldwork was observation. This method was partially supplemented by materials from the school evaluations and interviews with teachers and other respondents during the field research. Research findings derive from fieldwork conducted at the school that is perceived as problematic by local residents. The school is located near a socially excluded locality in the Czech Republic where a large number of the buildings are in deplorable condition, with many apartments unoccupied. Many city residents consider the locality to be a "Roma ghetto". The article contributes to understanding the grouping and social and interethnic communication among twelve-year-old students. The article sheds light on the benefits of being in a group and how students and groups communicate with each other.
KEYWORDS: Identity, interethnic relations, Czech Roma student, educational inequalities, social exclusion

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I examine social and ethnic group membership among students at a Czech lower secondary school near what has been termed an "excluded locality." In this area many children live in non-residential or otherwise unstable conditions, and the educational failure rate of students is significantly high (PAQ Research 2020: 21).

A significant number of Roma students attend this ISCED 2011 level 2 lower secondary school. Many non-Roma students eventually leave this school and opt for other schools with a lower or no proportion of Roma students. The school is perceived as problematic by many local residents, with many city residents considering the locality to be a "Roma ghetto" and have indicated negative opinions, i.e. that the excluded locality "should be surrounded by barbed wire."

This article is based on qualitative and ethnographic research based on the method of observation, a "hallmark of both anthropological and sociological studies" (Kawulich 2005). *Students were observed during lessons as well as outside the classroom during free periods.* The observation was partially supplemented by interviews with teachers and other field research respondents.

The primary theoretical framework of the article includes the concepts of educational inequalities, interethnic relations, identity, and social exclusion. Inequalities in education are defined here in terms of educational opportunities, education participation, quality teaching, selection, and peer relations (Thompson 2019, Bhopal et al. 2014, Lambert and Griffiths 2018, Bukowski et al. 2020). Special attention is devoted to social and educational inequalities which affect the group dynamics and atmosphere in the classroom (Bhopal et al. 2014, Lambert and Griffiths 2018). From the point of view of interethnic relations and communication (Eriksen 2010; Brubaker 2006; Jenkins 2014, 1997), social and interethnic relations among groups of children which co-create various aspects of sociality in the educational settings are presented here.

Identity has been described as a multi-layered concept (see Eriksen and Schober 2016*;* Eriksen 2010) In this research ethnic identity will be explored, with ethnicity in this context perceived as consisting of a distinction between "us" and "them." Ethnicity is relational, situational and is created by social contact; it is a social construct and a social concept (Eriksen 2010). It is understood more as a process and an aspect of a relationship, rather than a characteristic of an individual or a group (Barth 1969). According to Lawler (2014: 9) "identity works as an object (or a set of related objects) in the social world: it works to delineate both persons and types of person, and to differentiate between them." It is important to keep in mind that "our identity locates us in the social world, thoroughly affecting everything we do, feel, say, and think in our lives" (Newman 2018: 115). In the text below, I focus especially on sameness and difference, as these two concepts offer complementary perspectives on identity. "The first of these allows for individuals to imagine themselves as a group, while the second procures social distance between those who perceive themselves as unlike. Even together, however, these concepts are inadequate to capture the power relation in which identities are enmeshed. For sameness and difference are not objective states, but phenomenological processes that emerge from social interaction" (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 369).

Social exclusion is another important research term in this context. Exclusion takes many forms (see IBE-UNESCO 2021), although here it is perceived as a mechanism for determining who belongs or does not belong to a group, i.e. what identity is denied to the student and what identity is assigned to the learner (Mareš & Sirovátka 2008). In the Czech context, the term social exclusion has been closely related to the concept of

excluded locality. This territorialization has been defined as "space (a house, street or neighborhood) with a high concentration of people in whom we can identify the signs linked to social exclusion. The surrounding populations denote these places symbolically as negative" (GAC 2015: 16). Analyses of putatively socially excluded localities in the Czech Republic (GAC 2015: 19) have pointed out that social excluded localities are seen almost exclusively as Roma localities, even those in which Roma do not constitute a statistical majority. The boundaries of these places can also symbolic (e.g. the locality is perceived as "a bad area," "dangerous place," "ghetto"). In these localities, the majority of the adults have only a basic level of education and on average around 80% of the population is unemployed.

The article builds on ethnographic studies from school settings. The study of the school collective has a long tradition in the Czech Republic, not only thanks to the influence of the Prague Group of School Ethnography (1995, 2001, 2004, 2005), but also due to the first Czech work on the sociology of education by Jaroslav Šíma (1938).[1] Among other things, this sociologist was concerned with how children's groups form, develop and disappear in school life (see 1938: 86). Šíma described how most school groups are formed according to the rule of conformity and contrast (1938: 88-89): "Children are grouped together who have the same position in the class, children of the same interests, the same intellectual level, excellent or bad students, children from good families or children left mostly on the streets (...). Less frequent, but nevertheless obvious, are groups in which contrasts are brought together, usually by connecting the weaker to the stronger. Thus groups of children are formed, one of whom is prosperous and the other or others join him, either to help them or to let some of his brilliance fall on them, or finally they approach him because of the desire that such a one should be their friend."[2]

In this article I will try to show how some of these ideas of Jaroslav Šíma are still valid after more than eighty years. I will focus on the sixth grade in one ISCED 2011 level 2 lower secondary school, in which the above considerations can be delineated.

[1] Jaroslav Šíma's book has its strengths and weaknesses (see Nešpor 2011: 974-975). It is interesting to observe that already in 1938 significant reflection was taking place on the relationship between poverty and school success: "we know how great the correlation is between poverty, family and poor school performance. However, children are mostly unaware of it. Poor children are not bound by the knowledge that their fathers are laborers; they are bound by the fact that they are not very good at school. They are alone in the street all the afternoon, and they can play together, and their mischief now and then commands the respect of their classmates, while other individuals achieve this by excellent grades" (Šíma 1938: 89).

[2] According to Šíma (1938: 90), groups of girls were more determined by school relations, while boys' groups were more determined by out-of-school relations. Furthermore, girls formed more groups than boys, and their groups were stronger and more stable. The fact that girls formed smaller groups – often pairs – played a role, while boys tended to form more multi-person groups. Šíma described how small groups were generally more closed, while larger groups were looser and more changeable. In addition, groups formed on the basis of contrast tended to be less permanent than groups formed according to the rule of conformity. It would be interesting to carry out research to determine how children's groups have evolved in comparison with Jaroslav Šíma's findings from 1938.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative ethnographic research study was based on the method of observation and was partially supplemented by nine interviews with teachers and other respondents during the field research. The respondents included representatives of municipalities, employees of non-profit organizations, employees of pedagogical-psychological centers as well as residents of the research locality.

Materials from the school evaluations were also used and analysed in the research. The school evaluation was based on a questionnaire survey. The main authors of the school evaluation were Jan Sýkora and Jakub Drbohlav. I kept in close touch with both of them on the evaluation. Data collection for the school evaluation took place in the computer centre (see subsection A note on methodology: How the students filled in the questionnaires). The results of the school evaluation were available to teachers and the principal.[3]

The research was carried out in the autumn of 2018 in three school classes within a primary school and lower secondary school – one first grade, one third grade (see author 2022), and one sixth grade class.[4] These classes were selected after having a discussion with the principal and teachers. In this article, I describe only selected aspects of the school life of students from the sixth grade.[5] A total of 15 students were observed in the sixth grade – 9 girls and 6 boys.

My research follows all ethical principles, the guidelines, and the code of the Czech Association for Social Anthropology (CASA 2020). My membership in the CASA commits me to adhere to the CASA Code of Ethics, which consists of principles of research work along with publishing research findings, relations with subjects as well as responsibility to the public and students. I placed special emphasis on the protection of the participants' privacy, safety, and confidentiality. I did not use any data recording devices and I attempted to respect the environment and cultural values of the participants.

I put the emphasis on responsibility, anonymity, openness, awareness, fairness, sincerity, credibility of information obtained, protection of confidential communication, compliance with obligations and non-misuse of findings). In order to protect the identities of the students and teachers involved in my research, their names have been changed and coded. I straightforwardly described the subject of my research to the participants. I have chosen not to indicate the name of the school nor the locality in which I carried out the research.

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[3] I would like to thank Jan Sýkora and Jakub Drbohlav for the valuable materials from their school evaluations. Excerpts are included here with the permission of both authors. These materials helped me to better orientate myself at the school and among the school actors I worked with. I would also like to thank the principal and teachers for their kind helpfulness and willingness to assist me during my fieldwork.

[4] I had intended to continue the research in 2020, but due to circumstances associated with COVID-19 the research has been postponed. The work is set to continue in 2022.

[5] To some extent, this sixth grade class is also an example of how the third grade class may develop in the future (see author 2022).

THE CONTEXT OF THE SITUATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN TERMS OF ONE SCHOOL IN THE VICINITY OF AN EXCLUDED LOCALITY

The research took place in the Czech Republic in the town of Kruštíkov, which has less than 12,000 inhabitants.[6] One locality in the vicinity can be described as socially excluded. A large number of the buildings are in deplorable condition, with many apartments unoccupied. Many city residents consider the locality to be a "Roma ghetto" and believe that the excluded locality "should be surrounded by barbed wire." While not only Roma live in this excluded locality, according to estimates Roma make up one-third to one-half of the total population. One school is in operation near this district and the excluded locality.[7]

The teaching staff at the school consists of a total of 30 educators, with an enrollment of about 350 students. The average number of students per class is 22.6 in lower secondary school. Out of a total of 160 students, 42 finished with honours (with top marks), 108 passed and 10 failed.

The school is perceived by many local residents as problematic. A number of parents express opinions such as that "there are so many problems at the school that a social worker could move there" (Parent 1. Personal communication. Interview by author, lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 25. 10. 2018).

The school management is aware of some problems and for this reason the school cooperates closely with experts in the prevention of risky behavior. These experts are from an NGO. They have been collaborating with schools for a long time. These experts focus on the use of experience-based methods in the pedagogical environment. Through the implementation of programs for class groups, these experts assist teachers in attempting to integrate socially excluded students and students with a higher risk of social exclusion into the school community. They help to build a positive classroom climate and set up equal relationships among all students. These experts are also involved in the training of the teaching staff and in the validation of evaluation tools.

The evaluation methods described below attempts to reveal how the school is perceived by the students themselves and how students evaluate the different characteristics of school life (see Figure 1).

[6] The name of the locality is fictitious.

[7] In the Czech Republic children aged 6–15 attend basic schools that have two levels. The first level, comparable to primary schools, comprises five grades; the second level comprises four grades and is comparable to lower secondary schools (see The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports 2011).

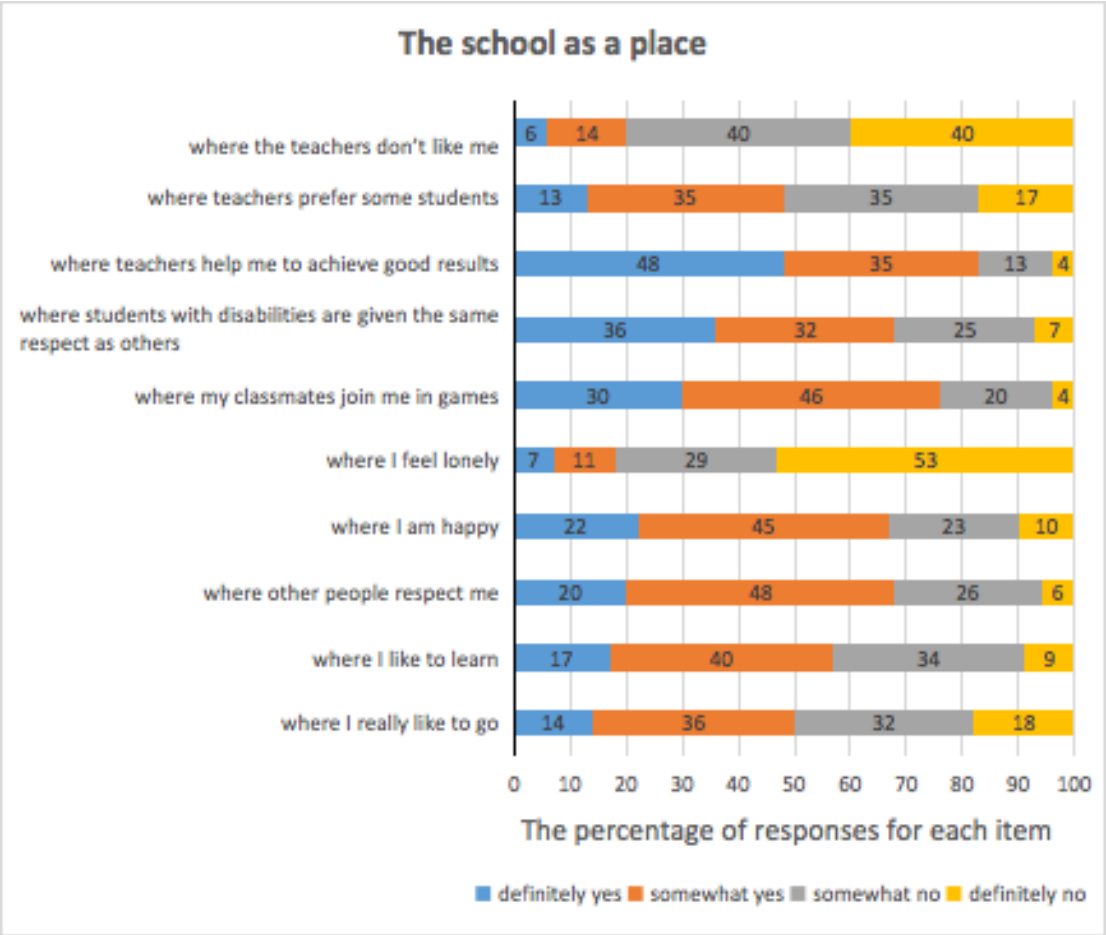


Figure 1: How do students evaluate the different characteristics of school life?[8]
* Source: The figure was made by the author and it is based on the school evaluations

The evaluation tool indicated that 67% of students are happy at school, 57% consider school to be a place where they enjoy learning, and 83% believe that the teachers help them to achieve good results. In contrast, 18% of students feel lonely at school, 33% are not happy at school, and 20% believe that the teachers do not like them.

In comparison to Figure 1, it is possible to look at the evaluation results from the sixth grade where I conducted the research (see Figure 2). The results of the questionnaire show that 62% of sixth-grade students are happy at school, 78% consider school to be a place where they like to learn, and 89% believe that teachers help them to do well. In contrast, 17% of students feel lonely at school, 38% are not happy at school and 33% believe that teachers do not like them (see Figure 2 below).[9]

[8] The percentage of "definitely yes" "somewhat yes" "somewhat no" and "definitely no" responses for each item is plotted in stripes.

[9] The results from the sixth grade may be somewhat skewed and the data should therefore be taken with a grain of salt (see subsection A note on methodology: How the students filled in the questionnaires).

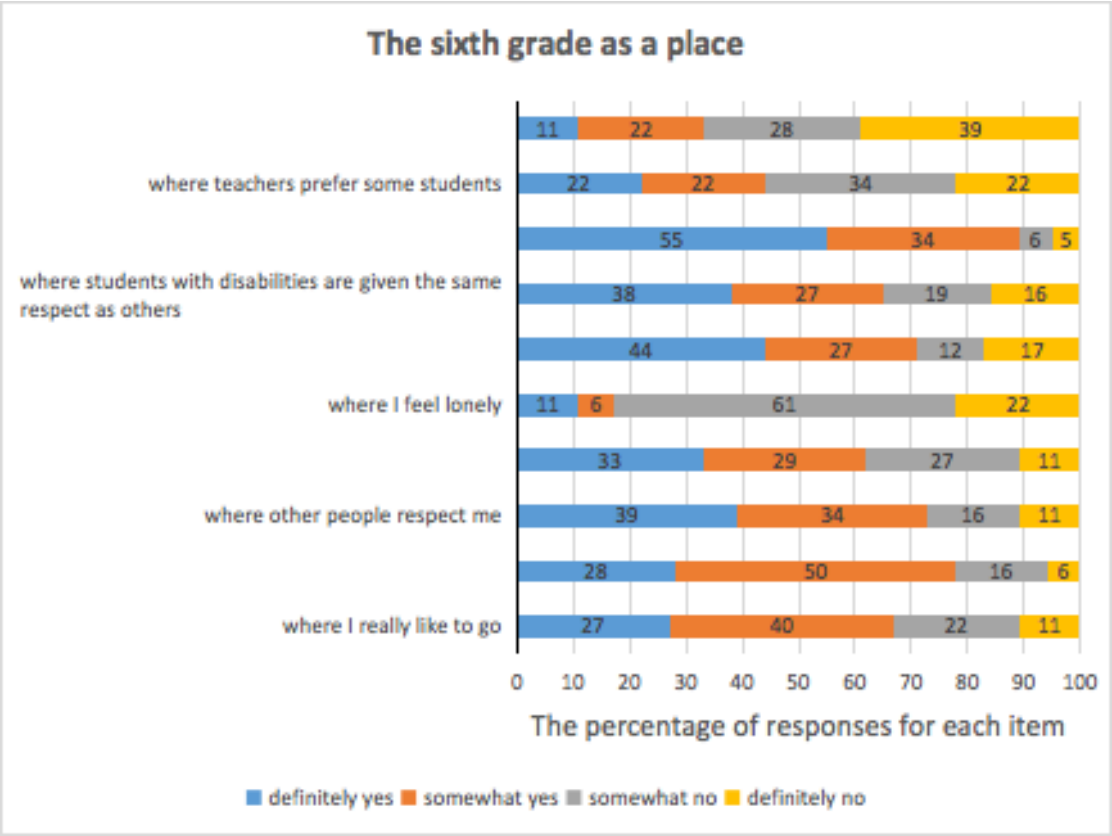


Figure 2: How do six-grade students evaluate characteristic of school life?

* Source: The figure was made by the author and it is based on the school evaluations

THE CONTEXT OF THE SITUATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN TERMS OF ROMA EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Among the 350 students who attend the school, there is a significant number of Roma students. In the Czech Republic, the number of schools with a growing concentration and a dominant share of Roma students is gradually increasing in schools that operate in the vicinity of excluded localities. In 2018 approximately 830 socially excluded localities with a total of more than 127,000 people were designated in the Czech Republic (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic 2019: 25). Compared to 2006, the total number of localities has nearly tripled, with the number of inhabitants living increasing by nearly one half. In 2006, between 60,000 and 80,000 people were living in 300 excluded localities (GAC 2015).

The number of schools with a growing concentration of Roma students is gradually increasing due to the fact that non-Roma students leave these schools and opt for other schools with a lower or no proportion of Roma boys and girls (Gac 2010: 23; People in Need 2009: 80). In the Czech Republic, in situations in which five Roma students are in one class, on average more than half of the parents will consider moving their child into another class (*Čada* & Hůle 2019: 115). Roma are among the groups that are negatively viewed by parents, with their presence seen as problematic by about a quarter of the interviewed parents (*Čada* & Hůle 2019: 113).

There have been conflicts between Roma and Non-Roma children at the school, which are perceived by children in several classes as conflicts between "whites and gypsies" (from interviews with several students in different classes). During these conflicts and quarrels, non-Roma children most often refer to Roma as "dirt" and scold them to "go to work." The Roma children, in turn, call the non-Roma children "racists, white pigs" and threaten to send their families after them. Some non-Roma children have claimed that they were attacked by Roma because they had a "white face." Currently, tensions between Roma and non-Roma students can be observed in several classrooms:

> I would call our class almost racist, of course, the Roma would not be lynched, but they would not receive praise. This behavior was compounded by a conflict between one girl in the lower year because she didn't want to give a cigarette to a Roma girl, so ten Roma girls waited for her after school and beat her up (Student 1. Key informant. Personal communication. Interview by author, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 12. 12. 2018).

Not only social and ethnic problems can be found among the children at the school. The big problem is in the area of education itself, as a large number of the Roma children at the school have educational problems and achieve poor grades.

In the Czech Republic 38% of Roma students from excluded localities do not complete their primary and lower secondary school studies (GAC 2010). After the ninth grade, only 14 % of students continue to upper secondary education with a *Maturita* examination. Roma students are much more likely than majority students to choose upper secondary education with a VET certificate. Many young Roma students do not even finish their schooling (GAC 2010; *Amnesty International 2015; Amnesty International* and European Roma 2012).

Among other things, this is due to the fact that the Czech education system is facing significant inequalities in the field of education (see the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports 2019). Significant inequalities exist with regard to the quality of Czech schools, both in the form of regional inequalities and inequalities within regions (The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports 2019). The education system is facing problems due to the aging generation of teachers, the lack of systemic support for enhancing the quality of teachers and principals in schools as well as limited research in the field of education (EDUin 2019, The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports 2016). In the Czech Republic, the strong influence of socio-economic status on educational opportunities and educational mobility can be noted (PAQ Research 2020). The family background and the geographical area in which the child lives fundamentally influence the child's development and life trajectory (PAQ Research 2020).

One response to the educational inequalities has been inclusive reform, which has been gradually coming into effect since the 2016/2017 school year through Czech legislation. This reform was intended to reduce educational inequalities, but the efforts cannot be seen in terms of black and white. Thanks to the initiatives, numerous support measures for students have been introduced and the number of teaching assistants has been increased; whereas a total of 10,400 assistants worked in schools in

the 2015/2016 school year, their number has now doubled.[10] Yet on the other hand, in hindsight this systemic change has not been well prepared, explained or fully accepted by the public and teachers. Up to 61.3% of primary and lower secondary school teachers struggled with implementing inclusive education (Pivarč 2020: 77). Inclusion efforts have produced a number of problems since the beginning of their implementation, e.g. the amount of paperwork has skyrocketed (Pivarč 2020: 136). As a result, schools differ in their approaches to and views of inclusion and segregation. There are big differences among schools in terms of how school principals talk about inclusion, how they perceive it, and how they assess the climate in their particular school (Moree 2019: 25). Specifically, schools in excluded localities have different relationships to inclusion than do schools at a greater distance from excluded localities (Moree 2019: 6).

SIXTH GRADE: "THE WORST CLASS AT SCHOOL"

> Inspections force us to make all children be successful, but if some don't want to work at all, how can they achieve success? (Teacher 5. Personal communication. Interview by author, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 11. 12. 2018)

The sixth grade in the school under observation is attended by 15 children – 9 girls and 6 boys. Among them are 6 Roma children – 4 girls and 2 boys. 18 children had attended the class, but three girls have moved on to secondary school. At the moment it is "the worst class at the school" (Teacher 1, teacher 2, teacher 3, teacher 4. Personal communication. Interview by author, lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 26. 10. 2018).

The students in the class are aware of this and ironically refer to themselves as a "decent class." In December, after four months of teaching, the teacher changed the seating plan for the fifteenth time because of the bad behavior of some students: "I would need four assistants (...). It just all came together in my classroom" (Teacher 1, a 31-year-old teacher of the sixth grade. Personal communication. Interview by author, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 11. 12. 2018). Students do not bring the required materials to school. Half the class does not bring the assigned book to reading lessons. For geometry, the students do not bring a pencil or ruler. One of the Roma girls was repeating the grade. Currently, two students (Emanuela and Valeria) are at risk of repeating sixth grade.

"Together, the students make a wild class, but individually each learner is friendly (...). Some are hard-working, others are not. Some are disappointed with our school system. They would like to learn something new, but they are afraid to fail" (Teacher 2, 47-year-old teacher of history and art education. Personal communication. Interview by author, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 22. 11. 2018). Several children show low self-confidence or deep self-doubt. They struggle with issues of

[10] In Czech schools, a teaching assistant provides support to the lead teacher in the education of students with special educational needs (The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports 2016b).

inferiority, for which some educators have assigned co-responsibility to their class teacher, who also taught these students from first to fourth grade. She "had favorites and didn't like the rest" (Teacher 1, teacher 2, teacher 4. Personal communication. Interview by author, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 11. 12. 2018).

GROUPING AT SIXTH GRADE AND CLASSROOM CONTEXTS

In this section of the text, I would like to point out how sixth grade students are divided into groups. In this regard, I recognize that "the relationships of group members consist of a set of interrelated and hierarchically organized positions and roles. These positions and roles reflect how the individual student is accepted and valued by the group" (Hutyrová 2019: 142).

Based on my long-term observation and interviews, I believe that the collective divides itself into four groups:

Group 1 - non-Roma girls

Group 2 - non-Roma boys

Group 3 - Roma girls

Group 4 - Roma boys and one non-Roma student

The distinction between "us" and "them" is contextually determined. Within the classroom, there is a strong separation of students into several sub-groups whose members are holding together against others within the class. These groups are sometimes antagonistic. At other times, they cooperate with each other – for example, groups collaborate in physical education when they define themselves against the neighboring class and try to win over them in ball games (football, floorball, basketball).

What is important, however, is that each group has its own structure and identity as well as different interests.[11] "Identification and interests are not easily distinguished. How I identify myself has a bearing on how I define my interests. How I define my interests may encourage me to identify myself in particular ways. How other people identify me has a bearing on how they define my interests, and, indeed, their own interests. (...) How I identify others may have a bearing on which interests I pursue" (Jenkins 2014: 8).

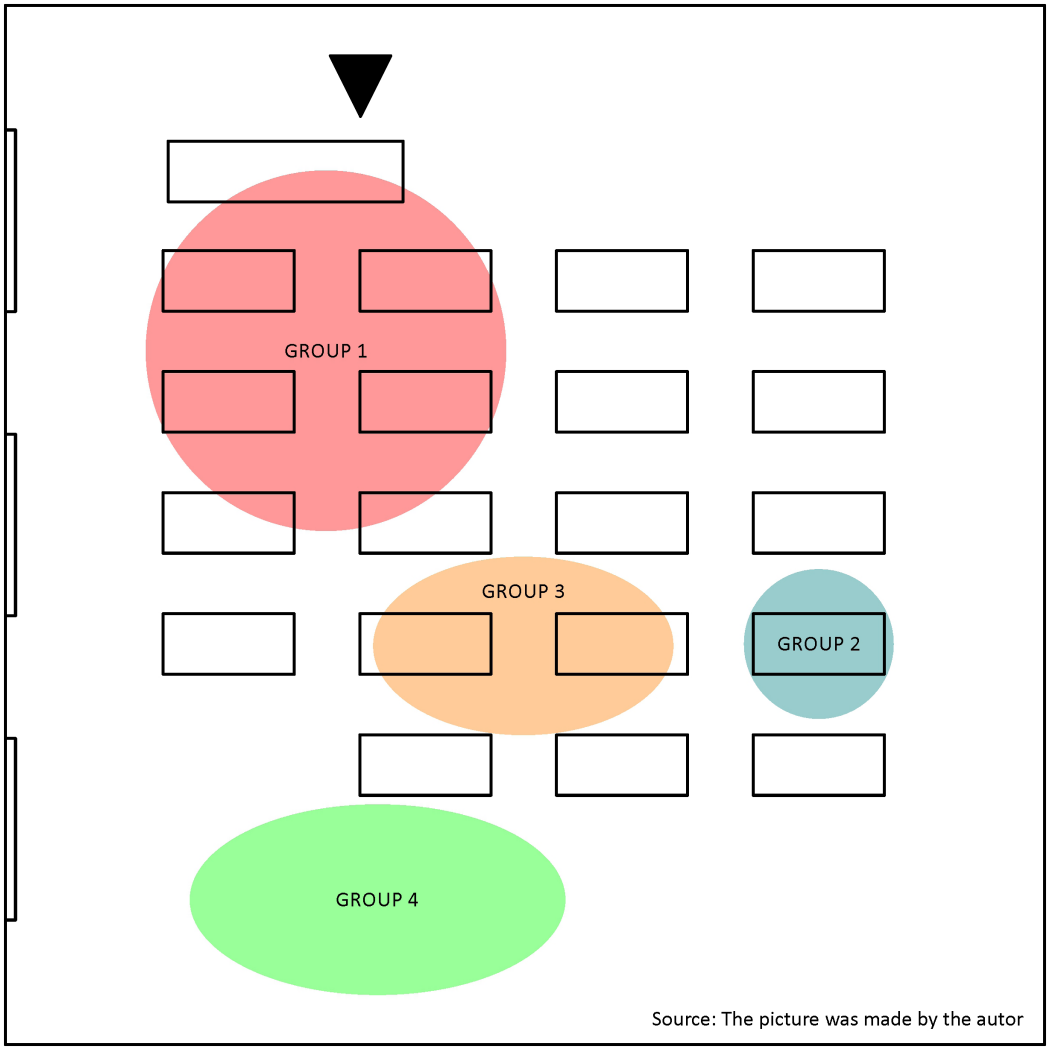
Each group reflects socio-economic differences, differences in school achievement, differing goals and ideas about life and education, differences in family background, differences in school attendance as well as career aspirations. During my research, I observed these differences on a daily basis:

> In the Czech language lesson, students write a test that includes the previous months' material. The test should take the whole lesson. However, after five minutes, Emanuel has finished and is getting bored. At first, he tried to look at the others, but gave up soon and started to crumple up the test paper into a ball.

[11] Other basic group phenomena such as group norms, cohesiveness and group culture are closely related to group structure (Lovaš 2019: 240).

After a while, he was joined by Bedřich, who imitated him. They both rolled up the test paper and they both laughed about it. The teacher noticed this and asked them if they were finished. She understood everything. The boys fell silent, uncrumpling their paper and lay down on the desk. Shortly afterward, two Roma girls finished their test. They lay down on the desk as well. They were quiet in order not to disturb anyone. The teacher said to one of them, "Val, don't give up and continue writing the test. I need you to figure it out, so come on." Valerie, however, made no more signs of writing. The remaining Roma children wrote the test for an hour (observation records from the *field diary, the* lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, *19. 11. 2018*).

Each student identifies more or less with one of the four groups and adopts a group identity. Each group spends time during free periods in a different way and in a different place. The classroom is divided into four spaces according to group affiliation – see the Picture 1 below.



Picture 1: The classroom space

During breaks, the Roma girls meet at two desks in the middle row. Group 4 always heads to the back of the classroom, where they most often play music loudly from their mobile phones.[12] They tend to stay near the windows, and sometimes they tease the other group of boys. They meet at the fourth desk in the right row, and when conflict arises they follow the dictum: "let cooler heads prevail." This means that when they are being teased, they leave the classroom environment, and go for a walk in the hallway in front of the classroom. They are trying to avoid group 4 and avoid conflicts. The boundaries among the sixth grade groups are firmly fixed, with each group living to an extent in its own social bubble.

THE FIRST GROUP

The non-Roma girls spend all their breaks together. In terms of school success, they are among the most successful and hardest working. At break time they often prepare for the next lesson if there is a chance that the teacher will examine them. Together with the non-Roma boys in the other group, they are interested not only in the marks they will achieve in their report cards, but also in what they can do to improve. Based on my research, I assume that they are more active in terms of "help-seeking" (see Calarco 2011). For example, when the history teacher announced to the children "whoever is interested in their marks as they stand now can come and see them" (Teacher 2, observation records from the *field diary*, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 20. 11. 2018), only students from the first and second groups came. This speaks to some extent about the attitude and relationship to education that these students have. At the same time, however, it is telling that many children are already burned out by sixth grade. They already know by then how they are doing and that their chances of significant improvement are minimal.

THE SECOND GROUP

The non-Roma girls are closest to the three non-Roma boys who make up the Group 2 in the class. These boys have good marks on their report cards and always spend their breaks together. At break time they usually have one goal, and that is to avoid the students from the fourth group who generally seek to hurt them. Emanuel from the fourth group seeks them out and often attacks them physically and verbally.

Naturally, there are sometimes minor conflicts between boys. In all the school classes, there is occasional teasing or friendly banter. However, there is no teasing between the third and fourth groups and there is usually no laughter among them. It is more like bullying, which is quite different from playful banter. As Kolář and NIDV (2016: 20) point out, "if I tease my friend, I expect it to be fun not only for me but also for him. But if I see that he doesn't take it as fun, that he is hurt, then I feel sorry and apologize to him. It's different from bullying. The aggressor wants to hurt the other person. He's happy about it. He won't apologize. He repeats his behavior and usually

[12] With all the music during the break, the classroom seems like a disco. The issue of mobile phone usage at schools is a currently a widely-discussed topic in the Czech education system.

escalates the violence."

For example, during practical lessons, I had the opportunity to observe the boys as they migrated to the workroom. The teacher was discussing wood sawing methods. The students had the task of making a throwing cube. During this lesson, I observed name-calling, physical aggression, threats, and even specific situations in which boys from the fourth group attacked boys from the second group.

> Emanuel picked up a file full of sawdust. He watched the third group students. He waited until they weren't looking in his direction. Then he quickly took off and rubbed the file hard on the sleeve of one of his classmates. After a few minutes, he was imitated by Bedřich. He walked past the students from the third group. In his hand, there was a file full of sawdust. He turned to his classmate and blew all the sawdust from the file into his face (observation records from the *field diary, the lower secondary* school in the town of Kruštíkov, *22. 11. 2018*).

THE THIRD GROUP

Group 3 consists of Roma girls who are distinguished from the others by their different interests and their Roma ethnolect of the Czech language.[13] During my observation, they often talk about fashion, beauty, and clothes. On break, they do their make-up, eyelashes, and lips. They admire the teacher who dresses nice and is beautiful. One such teacher was supervising the girls, who came up to her to ask her opinion on fashion and to tell her she is "really hot and beautiful" (Member of the third group, observation records from the *field diary*, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 4. 12. 2018). One girl is obese and has the worst position in the group of Roma girls. This is due to the fact that this group has strict criteria for what pretty girls look like. They have ideas about who looks pretty and this girl fulfils these ideals the least among them.[14] The Roma girls are close to the fourth group and also get along relatively well with the non-Roma girls.

THE FOURTH GROUP

The fourth group is composed of the Roma boys Emanuel and Zdeněk and the non-Roma boy Bedřich. Their association is perceived by their classmates as a "black and white friendship," i.e. a situation where a non-Roma student is friends with a Roma student. "If you are friends with Roma and something goes wrong, according to your classmates, your failure is justified because you hang out with Roma and end up like them. This is the evaluation you get from your classmates. You will start to be excluded from the group if you are friends with Roma students a lot and if you start to adopt their behavior" (Student 2. Key informant. Personal communication. Interview by au-

[13] For more information on the Roma ethnolect in the Czech language and u*sing Romani in language socialization in a Czech Roma family*, see Bořkovcová (2007) and Kubaník (2016).

[14] In the context of this example, it should be emphasized that the attitudes of our classmates are key to us. "We more or less unconsciously see ourselves as others see us" (Mead 2017: 43-44). This is closely related to our self-awareness (Koukolík 2013, Kohnstamm 2007, Roessler a Eilan 2003).

thor, the lower seconday school in the town of Kruštíkov, 22. 11. 2018).

Emanuel, Zdeněk and Bedřich are "the worst kids in the worst class" (Teacher 1, 31-year-old teacher of sixth grade. Personal communication. Interview by author, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 20. 11. 2018). Emanuel is doing very badly. He is described as a "troublemaker." According to the teachers, he is aggressive, rude, and vulgar, often disturbing and provoking the teachers. He often makes various loud noises during class. He has a poor behavioral mark and has received many comments and warnings from teachers. He physically and verbally attacks his classmates and does not prepare for lessons. "He doesn't want to write anything down and gives up a lot of things in advance" (Teacher 1, 31-year-old teacher of sixth grade. Personal communication. Interview by author, the basic school in the town of Kruštíkov, 20. 11. 2018). He often lies on his desk during class. An effort has been made to assign him a teaching assistant.

Bedřich "is a troublemaker and is close to other troublemakers" (Teacher 4, 50-year-old teacher of physical education. Personal communication. Interview by author, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 22. 11. 2018). "He doesn't have good marks, that's why he's friends with Roma" (Teacher 2, 47-year-old teacher of history and art education. Personal communication. Interview by author, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 20. 11. 2018). He does not listen to the teacher and he behaves rudely. It is his second year at the school. He has ADHD and an individual education plan. Zdeněk mostly listens to the teacher, i.e. he is not rude like Emanuel and Bedřich. He does not use vulgar words like his friends from the fourth group. Unlike those two, he has at least a partial interest in his studies, although according to his teacher: "he is not very good at learning." (Teacher 1, 31-year-old teacher of sixth grade. Personal communication. Interview by author, the lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, 20. 11. 2018).

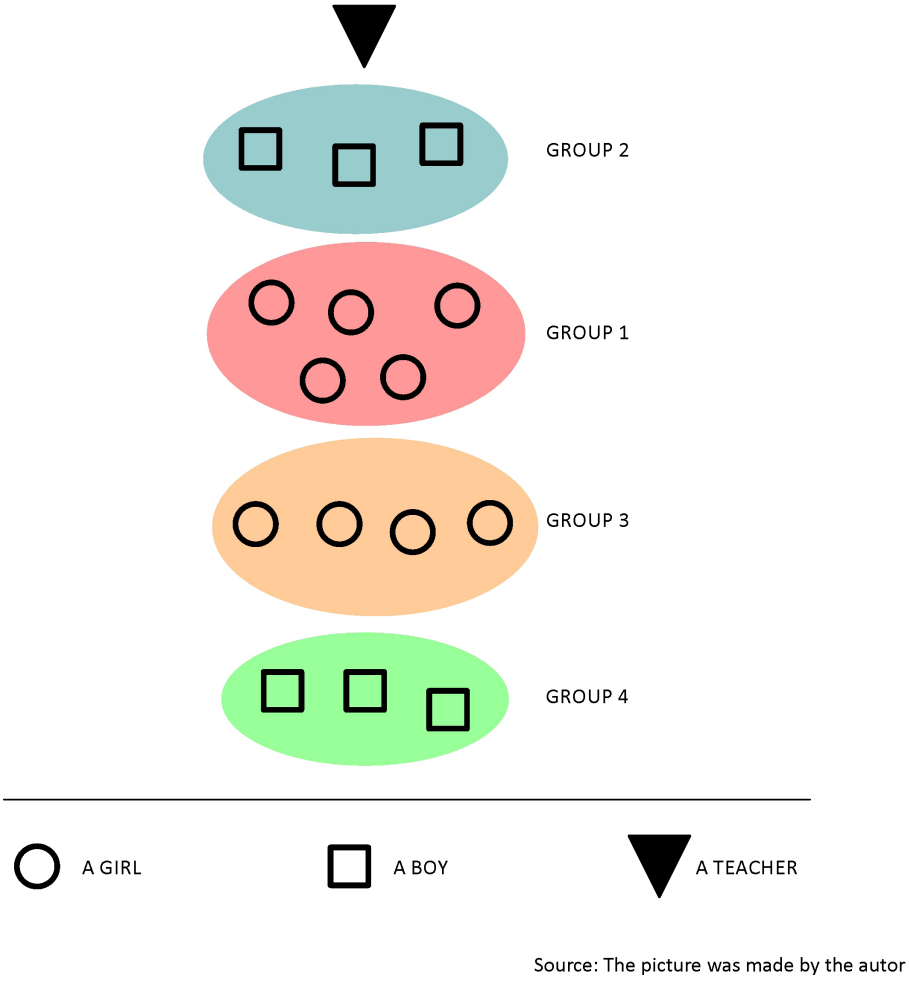
Group 2 hates this group, as do the group of non-Roma girls, who refer to the boys from the fourth group as "pigs," especially when they do something disgusting (e.g. when Emanuel and Bedřich pretended to have sex in front of the girls). Neither Emanuel nor Bedřich like it when girls call them pigs, which is a reason they sometimes threaten them: "Shut up or I'll beat you up." In my observations, this behavior remained only threats and intimidation, i.e. the girls were not physically harmed.

Nevertheless, bullying in the sixth grade, various threats and intimidation greatly undermines positive communication in the classroom and reinforces the social and symbolic boundaries between groups, especially the boundaries around the fourth group. Dagmar Šafránková (2019: 295) points out that other group members who, although not directly involved in the bullying but were spectators and witnesses of the bullying, experience disillusionment about the functioning of the social group and society. They lose their faith in justice and their sense of safety and protection in this society. They realize that moral norms are violated with impunity. The educational and socializing function of the school is disrupted. This leads to students withdrawing into themselves and their own groups. The group they belong to offers them a relative sense of safety, protection, and support.

COMMUNICATION AMONG STUDENTS

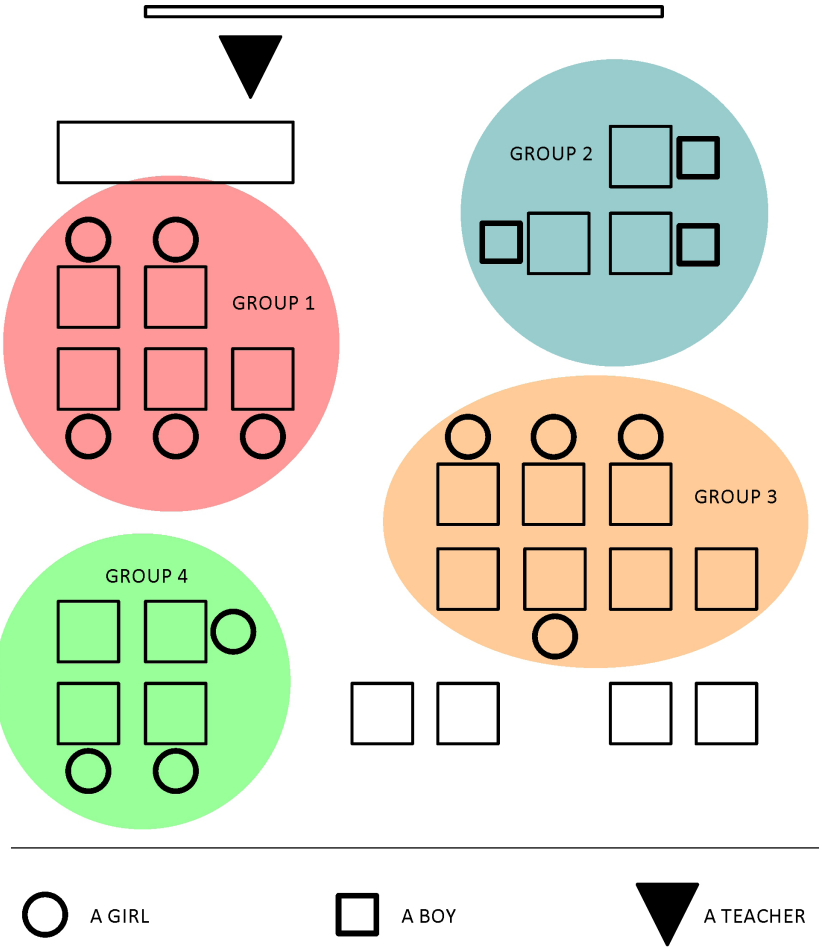
During my research I was interested in the social distance between students. I made field notes with regard to who was willing to interact and communicate with whom, for example as depicted in this record of the observation of this art lesson:

> Students attend art lessons in a special classroom equipped with folding benches and tables suitable for drawing and painting. They walk to this special classroom with the teacher. First, the students have to line up in their classroom behind the teacher who takes them to the classroom (see Picture 2).



Picture 2: Leaving the classroom and lining up behind the teacher

In the special classroom there is no seating order and students sit in their desks according to their sympathies and antipathies towards their classmates—see Picture 3.



Source: The picture was made by the autor

Picture 3: Special classroom

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher invites the students to gather in front of her desk to explain what they will be doing today. The students then approach their own tables and stand before them again according to their sympathies and antipathies.

Teacher: What are we going to do today? Today we are going to do group work. We are going to study Egyptian writing and draw Egyptian gods according to the model.

Teacher: First, we'll divide into teams. How are we going to do this? Tell me how many of you there are today.

Students: 15.

Teacher: Okay, we'll choose five captains.

The teacher writes the letter C on five small pieces of paper and mixes them together with blank pieces of paper in a box and rattles them around. She an-

nounces to the children, "In the box, there are blank pieces of paper and five bits of paper each with the letter C on them. The students who select these pieces of paper will be the captains. The rest will then divide up into teams. One group will have a maximum of three members."

One boy from Group 3, one Roma girl, and three non-Roma girls become captains. They draw a small paper with the letter C.

Teacher: captains, please go to the back of the room. The rest of you come to me. I will assign numbers (the teacher gives out numbers from one to ten to the children).

The captains drew numbers to choose the members of their teams. The students were divided as follows:

Blue team: 2 non-Roma girls and 1 non-Roma boy

Green team: 2 non-Roma girls and 1 non-Roma boy

Pink team: 3 Roma girls

Purple team: 1 non-Roma girl, 1 Roma girl and 1 non-Roma boy

Yellow team: 1 non-Roma boy and 2 Roma boys

The problem arose with the students from Group 4. Emanuel and Zdeněk from Group 4 formed a team with a non-Roma boy from Group 3. Only this non-Roma boy worked on the given task. Emanuel and Zdeněk sat with him but did not participate in the task.

Further, complications arose with Bedřich right at the time the teams were chosen.

The team captain – a non-Roma girl – hesitated as to which number to choose. In the end, she chose number six, Bedřich's number.

Bedřich: Are you kidding me?

Teacher: Bedřich!

Bedřich: I don't want to go there. I won't work with her. She's always bugging me.

Bedřich moves slowly towards her, but after two minutes he goes to the teacher and asks her to put him in a group with his friends. The teacher denies his request.

Teacher: The teams were chosen randomly.

Bedřich: I'm not being on that team.

Teacher: You can work alone if you don't like it.

Bedřich doesn't answer. He is the only one at the front of the classroom, with the rest of the class at the back of the classroom (away from the teacher's desk).

Teacher: Are you going to work alone or will you join your team? In life we don't just work with the people we want to, with people we like.

After a while, the teacher turns to Bedřich: How can I help you? How would you like to complete this activity today? What would help you to be able to work with them?

Bedřich: Nothing would help me.

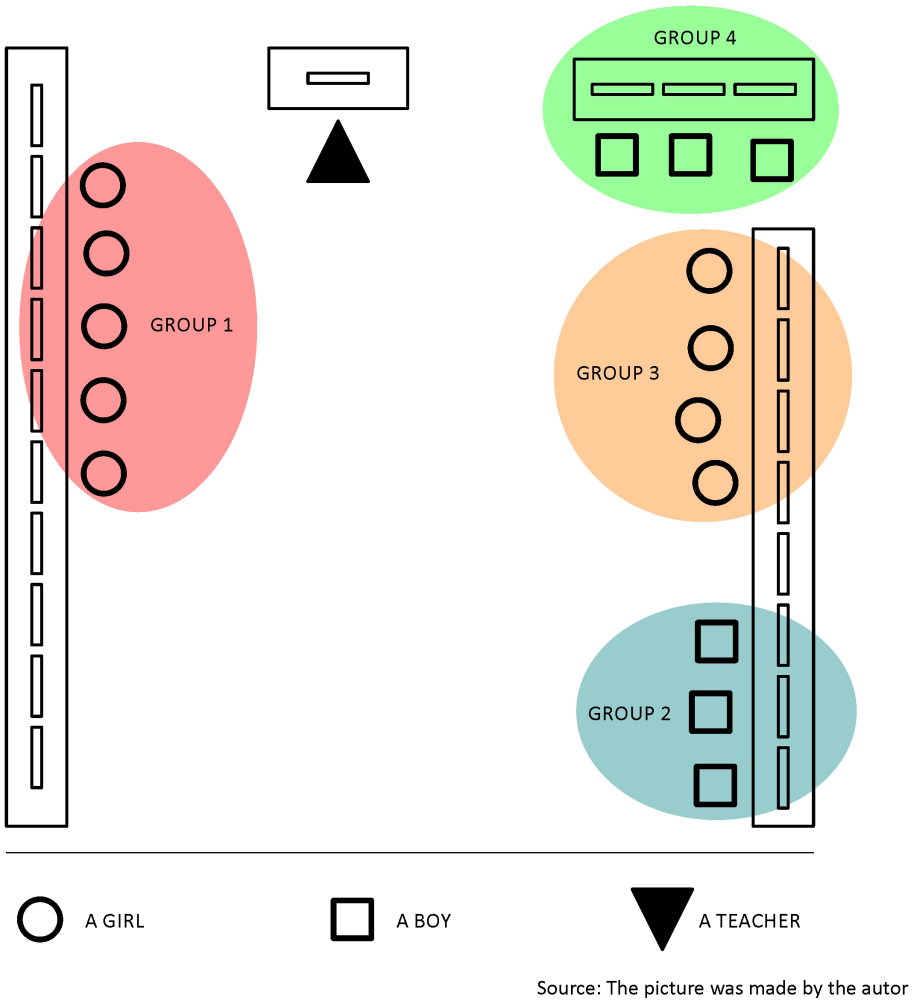
In the end, Bedřich decides to work alone.

The teacher gives him an assignment, but he doesn't work on it at all (observation records from the *field diary, the* i school in the town of Kruštíkov, *3. 12. 2018*).

This and other similar episodes demonstrates the stratification of relationships according who is friends with whom and who is willing to cooperate and communicate with whom. The blue team, the green team and the pink team worked very well and completed the exercise with excellent results. The purple team worked relatively well together and completed the exercise. The non-Roma boy from the yellow team worked alone completing his team's task. The other students did not participate in the activity and spent the whole lesson talking to each other. Similarly, Bedřich did not work at all. He sat alone in his desk the whole time. The Roma boys tried twice to approach Bedřich, but the teacher always returned them to their seats.

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY: HOW THE STUDENTS FILLED IN THE QUESTIONNAIRES

The students came to the computer center to fill in the survey and sat according to their group membership (see picture 4). Bedřich from Group 4 was angry and the teacher moved him next to the non-Roma girls as a punishment. The boy refused to sit next to them and at first remained standing for several minutes. At the end of the lesson the teacher scolded Bedřich for his behavior. After the bell rang for break and after the teacher had left for the office, Emanuel stepped up to Bedřich and advised him, "Tell your mother what happened, she will beat her."



Picture 4: Filling in the surveys in the computer center

This class was interesting for me not only from an empirical point of view, but also from a methodological point of view. I had the unique opportunity to observe how students interacted with each other in this space and how they completed a questionnaire survey related to the school evaluation that mapped their relationship with their classmates, teacher and school (the results of this survey are available in the figure below).

Teacher: Read the questionnaire carefully. Everyone fills it out for themselves and according to themselves, because everyone has a different view of it. Now be quiet, work and don't disturb others.

Teacher: The questionnaire is several pages long, so click on the continue button at the bottom on your computer when you have completed the page.

One of the students completed the questionnaire after only a few minutes. The teacher walked up to him and asked, "What? Did you get it?"

Student: Yes, I have.

The classmate sitting next to him: He clicked it by chance.

Teacher: Is that true?

Student: Yeah.

Teacher is shaking her head and saying: Then go sit on that chair over there. She points to the empty desks next to the non-Roma girls (observation records from the *field diary, the* lower secondary school in the town of Kruštíkov, *22. 11. 2018*).

There is a lot of information in the questionnaire and over time some of the students got tired of completing it. There were statements from students like "I don't want to read it" and a few students started answering the questions quickly without reading them properly. Students who finished early were able to chat with each other and wait for other classmates to finish the questionnaire. So as soon as one of the students from the third group finished, the other two boys sped up their completion. They wanted to finish too in order to talk about football, basketball and computer games.

Other problems also emerged. Some children did not understand some of the questions at all and had to call the teacher to explain them. The questionnaire also asked the students to choose their gender. Some boys, as a joke, chose *female* instead of *male*. I also consider it a major complication that the students did not have a quiet place to fill it in. Many of their fellow students were disturbing them, which interfered with their ability to understand the questions properly. The students also did not have the opportunity to think carefully about the answer to each question.

In addition, students lacked privacy in the computer lab. Students often looked towards neighbors, watching them filling in their answers. As a result, many children did not answer the more sensitive questions. Some were afraid to fill in these answers, not wanting their classmates to know their opinion, which could have led to further conflict. Another huge disadvantage became apparent while filling in the questionnaires. Only the teacher was there for the questionnaire completion, not the questionnaire author.

DISCUSSION

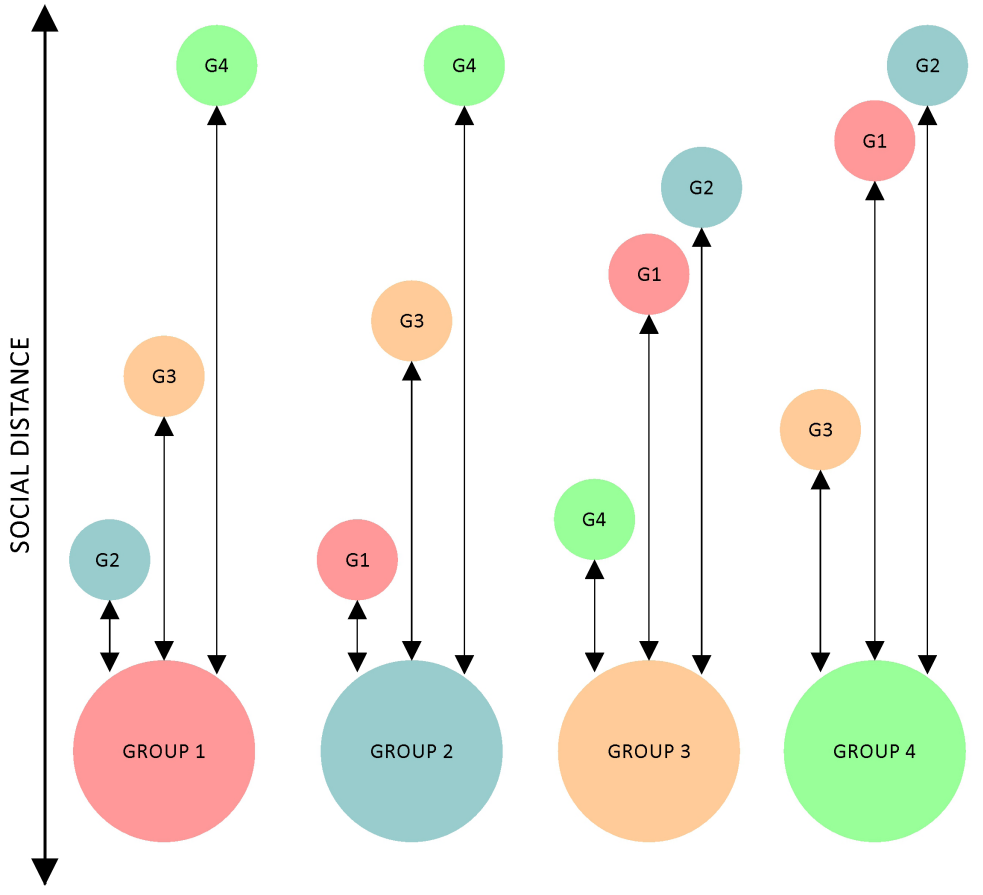
Jenkins (2014: 12) asks provocative questions that are somewhat relevant to my research and children's groups at school. "Groups may be imagined, but this does not mean that they are imaginary. They are experientially real in everyday life. In this respect, the empirical questions we should ask are: Why do people believe in groups? Why do they believe that they themselves belong to them? And why do they believe that others belong to them?"

Although more complete answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this text, I will attempt to address them in the context of the sixth grade and the Czech school. Students believe in and identify with groups because it gives them a sense of belonging, safety, support, and acceptance. Group membership fulfills their social needs and also helps them to navigate the social space of the classroom and school. In the sixth grade, there is a significant separation of the collective into "us" and "them."

Every student wants to belong to some group, as remaining alone would be make the student vulnerable.

Each group has its own structure and identity in the sixth grade. Each reflects socio-economic differences, differences in school achievement, goals, ideas about life and education, differences in family background, differences in schooling, school attendance, and career aspirations. These factors make group affiliations so strong that the school is unable to break or blur group lines in the sixth grade and create a united collective that pulls everyone together.

I am aware that a number of theoretical and methodological problems arise when observing children's collectives, for example, in developing criteria by which to distinguish "close relationships" from "less close relationships" (Výrost 2019: 181). Nevertheless, through careful analysis of the information I have gathered, I have created a diagram/picture that illustrates the social distance between the four groups—see below.[15]



Source: The picture was made by the autor

Picture 5: Social distance among sixth grade groups

[15] When I analyzed the collected data, I created a similar picture for each student.

For the sixth grade, the criterion described by sociologist Eliška Novotná (2010: 72-73) applies: "Those social groups that are similar, that are in the same situation, are not threatened. Such groups know their mutual expectations and do not surprise each other. They have similar value systems, share attitudes, norms, and beliefs and this leads to mutual sympathy and symmetrical relationships. Social groups feel safe not only with groups with whom they share needs but also with those groups whose needs are complementary to their own."

From this point of view, in the sixth grade, asymmetrical relationships can be observed and identified between the first and fourth groups (non-Roma girls vs. Roma boys and one non-Roma student), and the second and fourth groups (non-Roma boys vs. Roma boys and one non-Roma student). The remaining relationships are relatively symmetrical depending on the context and the development of the sixth grade.

During my research, I found out that almost half of the six grade students evaluate the school negatively. In terms of social relationships and school outcomes, it is important to observe how students feel at school. The results in the chart can be related to information from the Czech School Inspection (CSI 2019: 7), according to which up to 19% of Czech students agreed that they feel lonely at school. Furthermore, what has been confirmed by the international PISA survey is significant, namely that lonely students and outsiders tend to achieve worse school results (see CSI 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

The main contribution of this article is a description of the peer relations and group dynamics in the context of Roma education and inclusive education in the Czech Republic. Special attention is devoted to the grouping and social and interethnic communication among twelve-year-old students in a Czech school located near an excluded locality that is perceived as problematic by local residents. The article is based on ethnographic research in sixth grade, which is perceived as the worst class at school and which is attended by several Roma boys and girls. The article provides empirical data that can contribute to the discussion on what constitutes classroom interaction and how we can understand it (Delamont 2018, Watson and Moray House Institute of Education 2019, Manke 1997).

The research findings demonstrate how social and ethnic boundaries in the groups of children are constructed and negotiated in educational settings. There is an explanation of the benefits of being in the group and how students and groups communicate with each other. The findings indicate that the boundaries among the sixth grade groups are firmly fixed, with each group living to an extent in its own social bubble. In terms of methodology, the article also provides an interesting example of how students completed a survey that mapped their relationship with their classmates, teacher, and school.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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The rights of Filipino children in armed conflict: reflections on international and national legal frameworks

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ABSTRACT: There is a great amount of international attention directed towards the recruitment and involvement of children in armed conflict. In response to this, Philippine legislators have passed laws to assist and protect these children. However, most of these are not reflective of the reality of children and may even further disadvantage them. This paper explores international and national policies directed towards children in armed conflict through the perspective of children's rights. It aims to paint a more realistic and rights-oriented approach towards the understanding of children in armed conflict. The importance of this not only rests on the growing amount of international attention directed towards this issue, but more importantly, because doing so promotes efforts in fulfilling the fundamental rights of children.
KEYWORDS: children's rights, law, Philippines, policies, child, soldier, war

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of public concern regarding the engagement of children in armed conflict. This has further escalated to global debates and tensions, wherein the reality of the child soldier is strongly perceived as a problem to be solved with utmost urgency. General feelings of alarm and apprehension maintained by stakeholders and the public are fueled by a prevalent humanitarian discourse that highlights the vulnerability and innocence of children. However, more contemporary scientific and anthropological discourses have deviated from this ideal and have instead underscored the agency and individual capacities of children. Such theoretical contradictions have led to challenges in creating and implementing international policies regarding the involvement of children in armed conflict. More-

over, state efforts to address these challenges have been problematic, especially due to difficulties not just in translating theoretical understandings, but more importantly, applying international standards to local contexts.

This is evident in the Philippines, wherein local insurgencies have been ongoing for the past decades. Despite peace agreements between the government and insurgent groups, conflicts continue to disrupt the peace and stability of affected regions. As a response, appropriate laws have been passed by Philippine legislators to assist and protect communities inhabiting conflict-affected areas. Moreover, several of these laws are aimed towards the protection of children, whether or not they directly engage in insurgencies and identify as child soldiers. This paper explores such policies through a children's rights-oriented perspective. It argues that government laws and policies directed towards child soldiers, which are largely reflective of international legal norms, may not reflect the reality of child soldiers, and may even restrict their claims to fundamental rights. It is divided into four parts. First, the conventional concepts of the child, war, and the child soldier are examined. This section demonstrates that the inflexibility and ubiquity of these concepts result in policies and beliefs that are detrimental to children. Afterwards, legal frameworks, both international and national, are outlined and assessed. Third, the current reality of Philippine child soldiers and corresponding legislation are presented. Lastly, some recommendations are given. It is the aim of this paper to paint a more realistic and rights-oriented approach towards the understanding of child soldiers. The importance of this not only stems from the growing amount of international attention directed towards child soldiers, but more importantly, because doing so promotes efforts in fulfilling their fundamental rights.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the acquisition of secondary data sources through extensive desk research was utilized. Although this method provides a more extensive understanding of social phenomena, its highly non-participatory quality is also a limitation.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE "CHILD SOLIDER"

Varying understandings of the child soldier have been put forward by studies on children and war. For example, portrayals of children in the context of war have alternated between highlighting their trauma or resilience (Wessells 1998: 641). Studies have also been limited to specific periods and aspects of war, such as its after-effects; however, not a lot of light is shed on the unique experiences of individual child soldiers (Druba 2002: 271). Studies on the prosecution of war crimes rarely consider the atrocities committed by child soldiers, and instead focus on war lords and their recruitment of under-aged soldiers (Bosch 2012: 357). More recently, as a result of empirical scientific efforts, research perspectives on child soldiers have slowly progressed from viewing them as innocent victims to acknowledging their more active roles (Wessells 1998: 636). Progressive scientific discourse on child solders has therefore recognized the insufficiency and inaccuracy of maintaining conventional conceptions of the child, war, and the child soldier.

The Child

The process of constructing the concepts of the child and childhood is heavily influenced by culture and society. Hence, the idea of what a child and childhood should be are understood differently according to varying contexts. However, innocence and vulnerability are two traits that are generally perceived to be characteristic of children. Maintained by the majority, this blanket description is the foundation for universal expectations towards children. There is therefore an ensuing anxiety when children fail to conform to this ideal, even more so when they exhibit attributes seen to be "adult like". For example, there are moral and legal dilemmas faced by adults when children engage in work, commit crime, or migrate independently. These activities entail adult capabilities, and when manifested by children, the concept of the ideal child is threatened.

Such perceptions are reflected in legal systems, wherein most laws directed towards children follow protectionist themes. To preserve the ideal childhood, policies are created to safeguard the innocence of children, as well as protect their vulnerabilities. As will be illustrated in the succeeding sections of this paper, these practices tend to result in undesirable outcomes.

Children and War

The devastating consequences of war cannot and should not be understated. Military conflict results in holistic detrimental effects on affected individuals, some of which may only manifest in later years. Effects of war are not limited to the individual, but immensely devastate educational, health, political, and social systems as well (Denov 2008: 814-815). Hence, there is no doubt that international, intranational, and national efforts to end and prevent conflicts must be at the forefront of political agendas.

Due to the terrible circumstances it brings, war is exclusively associated with adults. That is, the perceived innocence and vulnerability of children disqualifies them from war. This exclusivity is further heightened in modern times, as there have been claims suggesting that contemporary war, when compared to past wars, is exceptionally cruel and chaotic (Rosen 2005: 11). However, when one consults historical research, this is not necessarily the case. In fact, ethnographic and historical studies have shown that young people have historically been taking part in war. For example, Cheyenne boys participated in war parties around the age fifteen and adolescents of the Maasai and Samburu tribe were given the status of warriors (Rosen 2007: 297). Moreover, there is scant evidence that the chaos and unpredictability of war has increased, as it has been argued that wars have always been characterized by disorder and terror (Rosen 2005: 11). It is therefore apparent that the image of the child soldier as an exploited and innocent victim of war is a new concept, and one that is ultimately based not on historical and empirical data, but on "anecdote and emotion" (Hart 2006: 217; Rosen 2005: 157).

The Child Soldier

It is understandable that the image of the child soldier evokes unease amongst most individuals. The individual concepts of the child and war are ideologically exclusive, as it is difficult to juxtapose innocence and terror. Modern society concludes that war must be ended because of its evils and that children must be protected because of their vulnerability (Rosen 2005: 1). The child soldier then, is perceived as a contradiction of terms. This is reflected in general humanitarian and political discourse surrounding children in conflict. It is important to note that due to the interrelatedness of these two fields, the separation between them has been increasingly ambiguous. Rosen (2007: 304) states that "the language of humanitarianism and human rights has become the language of political discourse." Fueled by this humanitarian discourse, studies on child soldiers have painted them with a broad brush and have mainly portrayed them as victims with no agency. Choices and behaviors of children engaging directly in war are seen to be results of their victimization; that is, brainwashing, drugs, kidnapping, and abuse leave them with no choice but to fight (Rosen 2005: 134). The following themes have been present in much of the literature on child soldiery: children are not able to comprehend their actions in war; children have idealist and vulnerable minds and are therefore easier targets for manipulation and propaganda, children are robbed of their childhood as a result of participating in war, and the corruptive effects of war lead to emotional, mental, behavioural, and cognitive disorders later life (De Silva, Hobbs, & Hanks 2001: 126, 131). Children are victims chiefly because they do not have the rational judgment to know, understand, and decide on issues that concern them (Rosen 2005: 134). In the rare cases that recognize their volition, children's comprehension of war is limited to their personal and social relations, and excludes awareness of state level political processes (De Berry 2001: 94).

A primary outcome of this is a highly singular understanding of the realities of child soldiers. Such approaches fail to consider the multiplicity of childhoods, the complexities of war, and the individual capacities of children. Although it is arguable that the decision to become a soldier may not be the most beneficial to a child's well-being, it is also important to acknowledge that it is an absolute necessity for some children (Rosen 2005: 2). For example, being a soldier may oftentimes times grant children opportunities to protect their families and provide for them economically (Dickson-Gomez 2003: 333). Children orphaned by the war may join the military for reasons of survival (Wessells 1998: 639). In addition, because of major loss and destruction caused by the war, soldiering may be their only means of protection and security (Rosen 2007: 298; Wessells 1998: 639). Furthermore, involvement in war is also seen as a source of empowerment. This is especially true for girl soldiers, since their active roles in war are downplayed in popular discourse and literature (Denov 2008: 813 - 814). Despite their engagement with fighting forces in several countries for the past two decades, girls' experiences, as well as the diverse roles they had during and after the war, have only been recently acknowledged (Denov 2008: 813). Moreover, it is helpful to recognize that girls may have had significant involvement in historical conflicts, but it is likely that these engagements have not been documented. Girl soldiers have distinct moti-

vations for joining wars, particularly to be able to secure protection from domestic or state violence or to evade unwanted marriages (Denov 2008: 816). Women, in recalling their experiences as child soldiers, interpret their experiences as not only endeavors of emancipation from colonial rule, but also from male structures and confining gender roles (Rosen 2005: 17; Denov 2008: 816). It is clear that the narrative of victimization is flawed, as it fails to account for the diverse and highly nuanced nature of child soldiering around the world. Moreover, one can observe that the discourse on child soldiers is one that is largely adult and male centered. However, it is profoundly complex. Many children are not forced to be soldiers or abducted by armed groups; instead, they fight with a resolution that the choice of becoming a soldier was completely theirs. Involvement in war is an opportunity to make their way in the world and assert their independence and agency, resulting in a state of empowerment and liberation (Rosen 2005: 17). It follows then, that policies adhering to humanitarian themes, although most probably conducted with intentions to aid and assist children, do not accurately reflect the realities of children engaged in armed conflict (Rosen 2007: 299). Driven by rather protectionist and adultist premises, the helplessness of children is exaggerated, resulting in a greater distinction between the capabilities of adults and children (Rosen 2007: 299). In light of this, it has been suggested that the framing of issues regarding child soldiers, including claims of an increase in child military recruitment over recent years, have been used by activists, humanitarians, and politicians for aims that do not actually advance the rights of children involved in armed conflict (Hart 2006: 218). Furthermore, arguments have been made that particularly in the field of international politics, childhood and the interests of children have only been used as proxies for various political interests (Rosen 2005: 2). The image of a helpless child forced to fight has become both a powerful symbol of armed groups with illegitimate motives for conflict and a tool to evoke the sympathies and support of the public for any efforts aimed towards intervening and ending these wars (Harris 2015: n.p.).

These views are not meant to downplay the terrible consequences of war. The circumstances brought about by conflict are unquestionably cruel, to say the least. It is true that children are caused to commit atrocities against their will by leaders who have no resolute political will or even a sense of morality (Hart 2006: 218). In order to prepare them for war, children are subjected to rigorous and inhumane training and sometimes left to die after showing signs of exhaustion (Denov 2008: 818). Anecdotes of family separation, assault, rape, and all forms of abuse are true and can indeed result in unimaginable and irreversible personal and societal consequences. However, it is necessary to understand that not all experiences of child soldiers are identical, and assuming so is erroneous and harmful. Such assumptions ignore the scale and history of the military engagement of children, the personal value and importance children ascribe to becoming a soldier, and their agency and capacities.

A dilemma is faced when attempting to reconcile the two approaches. Excessive emphasis on the victimization of child soldiers and the resulting negative consequences shifts the focus away from greater social and political problems; on the other hand, underscoring the resilience of children may silence efforts aimed towards addressing authentic needs (Wessells 1998: 641). Hence, a new approach, one that deconstructs

the ubiquitous and conventional perceptions on childhood, war, and child soldiers is necessary. Hinged on the acknowledgement of children's rationalities and active roles in dynamically shaping the world around them, a universal definition of childhood should be replaced with one that "focuses concretely on the conflicts and settings in which children are more likely to experience extreme brutality and trauma" (Rosen 2005: 133; Rosen 2007: 300). The resulting understanding is therefore more reflective of child soldiers' realities, which not only consolidates current knowledge and scholarship, but may also provide a foundation to inform policies and legal frameworks (Denov 2008: 832; Rosen 2007: 304). When viewed through a historical, anthropological, and ethnographic lens, a child soldier is not perceived as a dilemma to be resolved, but an individual child with agency and capacities.

THE CHILD SOLDIER IN THE CONTEXT OF LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

International Legal Frameworks

There are international frameworks that aim to safeguard children in conflict-affected areas around the world: the four Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Convention 182 of the International Labour Organization, the Cape Town Principles and Best Practices, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (Druba 2002: 272). These involve different stakeholders and monitoring bodies, and contain various nuances. Umbrella laws on international armed conflict have been put forth by the Geneva Conventions of 1949, seventeen of which have to do with children; however, it does not prohibit any level of participation (Druba 2002: 272, 274). In 1977, the Geneva Conventions were augmented by Additional Protocols I and II, both of which address internal conflicts; Additional Protocol I refers to conflicts associated with defending against colonial threats, while Additional Protocol II involves intranational conflicts, such as conflicts between the state and rebel groups (Druba 2002: 272, 274). The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989 and ratified by all UN states except for the United States, contains an article especially concerning children joining armed forces (De Berry 2001: 93). In general, Additional Protocols I and II and the Convention on the Rights of the Child endorse the prohibition of children's participation in armed conflict; the age limit for recruitment is set at fifteen years old, with priorities of recruitment granted to children who are older (Druba 2002: 274). More recent treaties, however, have raised the minimum age of state recruitment from fifteen to eighteen years of age; such is the case with the ILO Convention 182 and the 2000 Optional Protocol to the CRC (Druba 2002: 275).

Apart from establishing the minimum age for recruitment, most international treaties also determine permitted circumstances and methods for recruitment (i.e. giving priority to older children). Moreover, definitions of child soldiers are generally absent, except for the Cape Town Principles that provide the following definition:

Any person under eighteen years of age who is part of any kind of regular or ir-

> regular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and for forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms. (UNICEF 1997)

This definition prohibits any degree of involvement with any kind of armed forces. This is similar to a definition held by "Straight-18", a standard held by numerous global campaigns against the recruitment and involvement of children in armed forces. According to this standard, a child soldier is "any person under eighteen years of age who is recruited or used by an army or armed group" (Rosen 2005: 3).

The "Compliance Gap"

Degrees of military participation (i.e. direct or indirect participation) permitted by international treaties differ according to circumstance. Although there is unanimity in maintaining that children, by all possible means, should be restricted from joining the armed forces, there is an apparent disparity between international and intranational military involvement. Additional Protocol I (International Committee of the Red Cross 2010: 56) states that "all feasible measures" must be taken to prevent children from directly participating in hostilities, but does not prohibit the indirect participation of children; on the other hand, Additional Protocol II prohibits both direct and indirect involvement (Druba 2002: 274). It is interesting to note there are no outright prohibitions against children's indirect participation in international conflicts; however, the indirect and direct participation of children in intranational conflicts are prohibited. Rosen (2005: 141) recognizes this as a compliance gap, wherein states and international bodies hold a double standard by "promoting a stringent legal rule for child protection when it comes to suppressing rebel movements but adopting a far more relaxed standard in regulating the recruitment and use of children in state armed forces." Moreover, this compliance gap exposes the motivations of states to prevent rebel groups from recruiting child soldiers, effectively diminishing any challenges to their established sovereignty (Bosch 2012: 335). This may explain why the significance of children's involvement in national liberation movements has been downplayed in the past, but "now that postcolonial states face their own insurgencies", the participation of children has escalated into a global issue (Rosen 2007: 304). This may strengthen claims that states seek to advance political interests under the guise of promoting the rights of children to protection.

The Dilemma of Political Participation

One of the most interesting dilemmas that result from the prevailing concept of the child soldier is its contradiction with the reality of the child's political participation. It has been established that apart from direct and indirect involvement in nonstate armed forces, there are no absolute prohibitions against the participation of children in the armed forces of the state. The Optional Protocol on the involvement of children

in armed conflict sets the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into governmental forces at sixteen years of age (Druba 2002: 274). This entails that children sixteen years of age are allowed to protect their state as a form of civic duty, despite not being afforded with equivalent duties in the political landscape, particularly enfranchisement (Grover 2008: 59). The involvement of children, who are yet to actively participate in civil responsibilities and duties, in defending the State is parallel to enlisting foreigners in the state's armed forces (Grover 2008: 58 - 59). It is further argued that voluntary recruitment is not the acknowledgement of a child's capacities, but one that is fueled primarily by the interests of the state (Grover 2008: 60).

Dissonance Within Judicial Law

It is important to recognize that technically, when children below the age of fifteen engages in war, they hold a non-combatant status in a sense that their involvement in conflict is not legally permitted. A non-combatant status does not protect an individual from criminal liability and prosecution in the case of a war crime. However, international policies, with the objective to protect children, shield child soldiers from criminal liability (Rosen 2005: 136). As stipulated by Additional Protocols I and II, "if… children who have not attained the age of fifteen years take a direct part in hostilities and fall into the power of an adverse Party, they shall continue to benefit from the special protection accorded by this Article…" (International Committee of the Red Cross 2010: 56). In addition, child soldiers have never been prosecuted by the International Criminal Court, despite the fact that they have committed numerous human rights abuses and other cruelties (Grover 2008: 55). Victims of war have also expressed feelings of injustice for the unwillingness of international bodies to put child soldiers on trial for their crimes (Rosen 2007: 302). The irony of these protectionary measures is made evident when recognizing that some children are held fully responsible for other crimes (Rosen 2005: 136). The prosecution of a crime committed by a child entails the recognition of the capacity of a child to judge, rationalize, and make moral decisions. This is fundamental to penal law. It is illogical then, to penalize children for a crime committed outside the context of war and to acquit them for war crimes, since both require the same moral and rational abilities. Of course, it is also important to consider the circumstances surrounding the criminal act (i.e. if the child was forced to participate in military activities), but it has already been established that not all children participate in war against their will. Hence, surrounding circumstances should only, at most, mitigate the penal consequences.

The hesitation to impute criminal responsibility on children's war crimes stems from the idea of a child as a powerless victim. Their lack of legal agency acquits them from any consequence (Rosen 2007: 301). Instead of a punitive approach, a rehabilitative one is followed instead. The Paris Principles (UNICEF 2007: 9), developed from the Cape Town Principles, state that "children accused of crimes under international law, allegedly committed while they were associated with armed forces or armed groups should be considered primarily as victims of offences against international law; not only as perpetrators." It has been claimed that this leniency has resulted in

outcomes that are unfavorable to children. Children, especially those under the age of sixteen, are consequently even more valued as soldiers, due to their assumably pliable minds and exemption from punitive legal consequences (Bosch 2012: 361; Grover 2008: 54-55). This not only fails to accomplish the objectives of the state to protect itself, but more importantly, it counteracts any efforts aimed towards the protection of children in armed conflict.

The lack of realistic descriptions of childhood and actual experiences of child soldiers in favor of a single international standard has led to outcomes that offset endeavors in favor of children's rights. The generic understanding of child soldiery held by most is one in which "the worst stands for all" (Hart 2006: 218). International human rights frameworks exclude majority of the world's children by upholding an ideal of childhood that cannot be attained. It is therefore "essential to recognize that the vision of childhood manifest in the CRC may only have limited relevance for children who lack the social, economic, and political wherewithal to actualize this vision" (Hart 2006: 223).

NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Philippine legal frameworks on children and their involvement in armed conflict are largely reflective of international law. In addition, the ideal of a Filipino child, one that is significantly influenced by cultural norms, is also a major theme in legislation regarding children. In recent years, as a response to an increase in the recruitment of children by insurgent groups, legislators have passed laws against children's military involvement, as well as the rehabilitation and protection of children in conflict. Although it has no direct provisions for child soldiers, the Child and Youth Welfare Code, passed in 1974, is arguably the groundwork for the understanding and implementation of the rights of children in the Philippines. In essence, it presents the rights and responsibilities of the child, establishes the authority, rights, and duties of parents, and outlines policies regarding education, adoption, and the church. Despite its recognition of the rights of the child, this code is severely flawed when viewed from a child's rights perspective. First, it makes a distinction between "the gifted child", "the emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted child", and "physically or mentally handicapped child" (The Child and Youth Welfare Code 1974). Moreover, the language is imbued with paternalistic and adultist themes, with statements such as "the molding of the character of the child", "to prepare the child for the responsibilities of adulthood", and "enhance his opportunities for a useful and happy life" (The Child and Youth Welfare Code 1974). It is therefore unsettling when one considers how this code sets the theme and approach of subsequent laws.

A piece of legislation passed particularly for children in conflict is the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Act. The aim of this act is to "provide special protection to children in situations of armed conflict from all forms of abuse" (Republic Act No. 11188 2018:1). It echoes the provisions of international frameworks regarding the treatment, protection, and rehabilitation of children involved in conflict; moreover, distinctions are made between children afflicted by armed conflict,

children in situations of armed conflict, and children involved in armed conflict. It first provides the definition of a child:

> A child refers to: a person below eighteen years of age; or a person eighteen years of age or older but is unable to fully take care of one's self; or protect one's self from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation or discrimination; and unable to act with discernment because of physical or mental disability or condition. (Republic Act No. 11188 2018: 5)

It subsequently defines children involved in armed conflict as "children who are either forcibly, compulsory recruited, or who voluntarily joined a government force or any armed group in any capacity. They may participate directly in armed hostilities… or indirectly…" (Republic Act No. 11188 2018: 5). The definition of a child soldier mirrors that of the Cape Town Principles. The difference lies in the principal definition of a child and the permitted degree of involvement. In essence, a child is equated to one who is unable to act with discernment and protect one's self from any form of harm. Whether or not this is due to a physical or mental disability, this definition is highly discriminatory and completely ignores the capabilities of children. Moreover, this even goes against the possibility of children volunteering for military service, since they are perceived to have limited rationalities. When viewed in light of the Child and Youth Welfare Code and its paternalistic tendencies, such approaches are placed in their context. However, this does not discount the potential harm that this kind of ideas may produce. In addition, both direct and indirect involvement are prohibited. The irony of this is that a law mandating military training under the Reserve Officers' Training Corps for children aged sixteen to eighteen has been passed in Congress (Cepeda 2019: n.p.). If children are viewed to be irrational when deciding to involve themselves in armed conflict, it does not follow that their rationalities are acknowledged in the context of mandatory military training. Moreover, reflective of the aforementioned Paris Principles, this Act primarily views children as victims and therefore exempts them from criminal culpability. Children have "the right to be treated as victims… with the framework of restorative justice, social rehabilitation, and promotion of their protection" and shall "enjoy all the rights of a child recognized in this Act and other applicable laws" (Republic Act No. 11188 2018: 10, 20). This entails the unlikelihood of prosecuting a child for crimes committed in the context of war. Rights to participation are also upheld with the provision of "the right to be consulted and to participate in all matters affecting them… should be sought in all stages of assessment, planning, implementation… development and design of policies, programs, and services… (R.A. 11188 2018: 12). Although the opportunity to participate in such matters is a welcome change in policies relating to children, this practice should then also be applicable to other forms of civic and political participation and should also be made available children who are not involved in conflict. Limiting this to children in situations of war is definitely a progressive step towards political equality, but one that excludes all other children. An interesting feature of R.A. 11188 is the concept of "zones of peace". The right of children to be treated as zones of peace is also decreed by Republic Act 7610 (Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination

Act). A zone of peace is a "site with sacred, religious, historic, educational, cultural, geographical or environmental importance, which is protected and preserved by its own community" (R.A. 11188 2018: 9). This law holds the promotion of children as zones of peace as the motivation to resolve armed conflicts (R.A. 7610 1991). Although this was most likely enacted with intentions to promote the protection of children, the concept of a child as a zone of peace is almost akin to depersonalization. Moreover, the usage of a child as a primary incentive to end conflicts idealizes the child, highlights their vulnerability and helplessness, and reinforces efforts to protect the conventional ideal of the innocent and incapable child.

THE CURRENT REALITY OF CHILD SOLDIERS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Recent developments involving child soldiers have focused on the southern regions of the Philippines wherein, despite peace talks and treaties between the government and insurgent groups, there are continuing armed conflicts. Issues escalated in the city of Marawi, a city wherein parts of Sharia law are integrated in legal codes, due to an insurgency led by groups allegedly inspired by or affiliated with ISIS (Matsuzawa 2017: n.p.). The conflict lasted for five months, and was declared over in October 2017 (Fonbduena 2017: n.p.). Despite this, there have been claims that insurgent groups continue to recruit soldiers, including children; this is usually done through manipulation and deception (Al Jazeera Philippines 2018: 00:33; 01:57). Through an interview of a former male child soldier who was able to escape from the insurgent groups, it was revealed that members of armed groups pose as soldiers of the Philippine Army and offer children financial incentive for military training, this incentive was increased if the child agreed to hold a firearm and participate directly in fighting (Tan 2017: n.p.). According to a study published by the Philippine Human Rights Center in 2005, majority of child soldiers are combatants, while the rest of the children take on auxiliary, support, and political organizing roles (Barrete 2017: n.p.). This data reflects the variety of roles played by children involved in conflict. Stories of manipulation and deception are appalling, and it is only right to endeavor to end them. However, it is also important to recognize that most children are not coerced to join the insurgent groups, but do so freely due to promises of financial rewards, education, a good marriage, and the fulfillment of family wishes (Barete & Lischin 2017: n.p.; Remitito 2017: n.p.). Motivations of revenge and the desire to protect their communities have also fueled involvement, which are also accompanied with an exposure to "ideological and political programming" of the insurgent group (Barete & Lischin 2017: n.p.). Due to their age, children are also valued by insurgent groups because they are seen as "investments" for future conflicts; in addition, since children comprise a large portion of the Philippine population, they are seen as a significant source of manpower (Barete & Lischin 2017: n.p.). In 2017, public concerns surrounding child soldiers grew as an outcome of videos and photos of children training with insurgent groups. In these photos and videos, children are holding guns and undergoing combat exercises. In the same year, the release of 1,869 child soldiers after an action plan negotiated between armed groups and the United Nations was held as a victory for humanitarian groups

(Al Jazeera 2017: n.p.; UNICEF, 2019: n.p.).

It is interesting to note that despite the number of reports on child soldiers and their claims of victory over child soldiering, only very few included the opinions and experiences of actual child soldiers. Moreover, despite statistics that show the involvement of girls in armed conflict, none of the publications involved girls. The Philippines has a dearth of research when it comes to children, even more so for children involved in conflict. This is true for most studies regarding child soldiers, since access is limited and the physical environment itself is unsafe. It is more likely then, for laws and policies to be based on sentiment rather than empirical knowledge. This is already seen in the laws regarding child soldiers, as most, if not all, were created without the consultation nor the participation of children. Participation is promoted in Philippine law, but this is not the reality experienced by child soldiers. Indeed, the translation of law into practice is a tedious effort.

The general picture of a child soldier in the Philippines is one associated with public pity and sentiment. This is understandable, especially when considering the laws designed for children and the cultural expectations surrounding childhood. Furthermore, from the examples given, it is evident that the narrative of victimization still permeates public opinion and governs state policies. The understanding of child soldiers in the Philippines follows the ideal held by the international community, one that is largely adult and male centered. The child soldier is male, engages in armed conflict against his own will, and is therefore in need of help and rescue.

A CALL TO DECONSTRUCT CONCEPTS

Despite claims to promote their rights, international and national actors often fail to acknowledge the realities of child soldiers. Instead, objectives to preserve the ideal of childhood, one that is characterized by vulnerability and innocence, are given paramount importance. Due to the prevalence of these protectionist dispositions, it has been argued that international and state actors seek to advance other political interests in the guise of fulfilling the rights of children. Although this is a rather contentious claim, one cannot help but concede to it, especially after considering the examples given above. Blanket policies based on the inflexible idea of the child, war, and the resulting image of the child soldier are present in both international and national legal frameworks. Moreover, discourse on child soldiers, which is largely reflected in public opinion and humanitarian efforts, is one that is adult and male centered. This ignores the multiplicity of childhoods, especially the experience of childhood in nonwestern countries, where the recruitment of children into armed forces is most apparent. As a result, policies directed towards the protection of the child, rather than eradicating the harms and abuses faced by children in armed conflicts, result in more harm.

In the Philippines, several state and nonstate efforts have been enacted in order to end the recruitment of children into armed forces. However, these have mostly been done without the participation of children, nor any consideration of their authentic realities. It is saddening and frustrating to consider how efforts geared towards the promotion of the well-being of children do not include the thoughts and opinions of

the subjects of these efforts. Instead, children are dictated upon and left out of the processes that ultimately concern them.

It is therefore imperative for a conceptual shift to occur. Maintaining conventional understandings and attitudes of the child soldier is no longer practical nor beneficial. Hence, a deconstruction of the concept of a child solider must be endeavored. This entails the acknowledgement of the following: children have individual capacities that range from rational to behavioral abilities, childhood is varied, nuanced, and experienced differently by all children around the world, and warfare is complex and multi-faceted. It follows then, that a change in the legal framework is also necessary. Blanket policies must be replaced with policies that recognize the capacities of the child, as well as the complexity of the circumstances surrounding each soldier. To condemn all recruitment may limit a child's access to other rights, and must therefore be approached with much thought. Ultimately, it is not a surface change that is necessitated, but one that challenges the conventions and practices that have been believed to be true in recent years. This is not a simple process, nor do the results manifest immediately; however, it is a definite step towards the realization of children's capacities and the promotion of their fundamental rights.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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The problem of children's right to participation in early childhood education and care

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ABSTRACT: Participation, a highly debated topic, is understood as a right to self-determination and a right to be involved in the decision-making in matters that concern one's life. Also, in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Germany, children's participation plays an important role, embedded in the legislation. However, research shows that children still do not participate in decisions in their daily life in childcare facilities. This problem has been linked to the negative attitudes of early childhood educators, their fear of losing control, sharing power with children, or even lack of knowledge. The recent qualitative case study, examining educators' participation perspectives by applying semi-structured interviews and a focus group, demonstrated that educators understand what participation means differently and view it as a concept rather than a right. However, they perceive it as having enormous importance and are keen to embrace it. Their attitudes depend significantly on their experiences and the behavioural scripts they internalized. Another factor influencing children's participation is the organizational culture of a childcare facility. It is correlated with the quality of care in childcare settings. To this end, studying and ensuring positive work relationships proves to be necessary. Applying collaborative leadership and democratic, participatory structures is essential to children and adults alike. A genuinely respectful environment designed to promote self-determination, deep reflection, ongoing training, and support are key in realizing children's right to participation in ECEC.
KEYWORDS: children's right to participation, perspectives of early childhood educators, organizational culture, childhood studies

BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Participation of children has been codified as their right in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UN 1989), inspired by the philosophy of Janusz Korczak and Maria Montessori (Milne 2008:46). It recognizes that children are social actors, can mould and voice their viewpoints and make decisions concerning their own life (James & James 2020), despite being historically omitted and even marginalized (Montessori 2020; Zeiher 1996). This children's right also applies to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services (Kangas 2016). The ECEC "includes all arrangements providing care and education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours, or programme content. The early childhood period is commonly defined as birth to age 8" (OECD 2001:14). In the context of Berlin, Germany, the ECEC service is called a kindergarten[1], or KiTa. The topic of participation has been widely debated, and yet still, children's right to exercise participation in ECEC is seen as poor (Maywald 2014). Early childhood educators have previously been shown to understand and interpret the notion of participation in varying ways (Kangas 2016; Mentha, Church & Page 2015).

Meanwhile, Hansen, Knauer and Friedrich (2006) believe that the role of educators as participation's gatekeeps and role models is highly significant. Their study demonstrates that participation is blocked by negative attitudes and feelings of fear, insecurity, and distrust, but also by insufficient structure and poor methods of adults working with children. One must ask, how do those feelings and views emerge? Is it really how educators feel and view participation? How is it understood, and why is it so problematic to apply a participative style of pedagogy? This paper attempts to answer these questions and presents findings from the recent qualitative case study, which examined early childhood educators' perspectives on the right to participation by inquiring into their biographies and personal and professional experiences. The study also explores understanding, attitudes, practices, methods of participation, and the organizational culture of kindergartens.

CHILDREN IN SOCIETY

Historically, the way adults perceived children was an evolving, complex process inspired by thinkers and philosophers. To name just a few, Thomas Hobbs believed that the best parenting method is through demanding a complete submission to adult power in a strict, obedient environment, a result of a belief that children are sinful and wicked (James, Jenks, & Prout 1998). John Locke introduced the notion of *tabula rasa,* believing that the transfer of knowledge is the most important element that will achieve a better society (James et al. 1998). Jean Jacque Rousseau convinced many that

[1] Kindergarten is the name of a German ECEC setting, technically caring for children from three to six years of age. Children from birth to age three are cared for in krippe. However, very often krippe and kindergarten are joined together and shortly referred to as KiTa (Kindertageseinrichtung) (Berliner Vorschrifteninformationssystem 2020).

children in their angelic-like nature need protection from the cruelty and deprivation of the adults' world (Woodhead & Montgomery 2002). And Jan Piaget, "the giant in the field of developmental psychology", initiated the view of children as developing through set stages, becoming a set of skills, understanding, and wisdom (Santrock 2006:226) gradually. The theories of developmental psychology, showing children through the lens of a biologically determined journey from utter incompetence to complete, adult-like competence, have primarily dominated and shaped the image of the child society in the present day (Wyness 2018). Esser, Baader, Betzand, & Hungerland (2016) provoke a question in this focus on the development and socialization of children, how do adults pay attention to the voices of children?

Are they, as Montessori (2020:10) states, "forgotten citizens", waiting for adulthood to claim their rights? Or maybe outsiders, a product of a generational order (Zeiher 1996:11)? Liebel (2008:35) writes, "according to the notions of childhood that predominate in the world today; children are primarily regarded as the potential for the future or as future citizens", subject to and dependent on adults' power (Zeiher 1996; Liebel 2008:42).

The new sociology of childhood offers a different view of the child, in which children are "actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live" (James & Prout 1997:5). Children have an agency (James and James 2012), the power to co-construct their life, "to influence, organize, coordinate, and control events taking place in their social world" (Alanen 2009:170), and to speak on their own behalf (Wyness 2018:72). Going further, children should not be seen as dependent on adults but as social actors with a role to play in the process of interdependency, a role in which adults and children are equally and mutually dependent on each other (Alanen 2009). According to Wyness (2018:76), participation (in educational institutions) can be one of the means to recognize children's agency.

PARTICIPATION

Participation, a highly debated concept, tends to be understood in various ways, according to Lansdown (2010:11). It is commonly interpreted as a word "to describe the forms of social engagement" (Lansdown 2010:11). Thomas (2007:199) makes two further distinctions in the concept of participation. He views it as actions or as outcomes of such. But he also points to a difference between participation as a decision of one as an individual, the self-determination, and as a democratic decision-making process within a group of more people. Self-determination can be seen as the basis of participation (Schneider 2019:79). And in this paper, self-determination and decision-making capacity are seen as coming together, as holistic participation. Hart (1992:5) reminds one of the enormous impact and importance of sharing decisions on the whole community. He states, "It is how a democracy is built, and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship" (Hart 1992:5). Moving further, in order to examine participation in relation to children and also early childhood education, it is of huge importance to

become an overview of significant thinkers in this field. The philosophy of Korczak and Montessori are the most influential with regards to this concept (Milne 2008:46)

JANUSZ KORCZAK AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

Henryk Goldszmit, known under the published author's name of Janusz Korczak, was a person whose interests were mostly in the fields of medicine, social work, journalism, and literature. He treated sick people of all ages, managed an orphanage, educated children, and wrote articles and books dedicated to them (Markowska-Manista 2020).

In his published work, Korczak (1929:5) acknowledges children's economic and physical dependency on adults, leading to uneven power relations. It is giving children a lesson that younger or weaker people can be dismissed and ignored. It is a lesson of strength and power, which can become problematic for the future of society (Korczak 1929:6). Korczak dislikes the focus and methods of upbringing and socialization of children, the control, harsh discipline, also applied in the name of protection. Children will not only be important to society when they are adults, but they are important to it at any time of their lives. They are a part of adults' realities and deserve appreciation, respect, empathy and, kindness. They deserve equality (Korczak 1929). These values are key elements in Korczak's philosophy. They should be applied in everyday life, but also in educational settings and institutions. Korczak believed that learning is a mutual process for both children and adults, with everyone involved having an opportunity to gain a valuable lesson (Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Olędzka 2020:143).

This philosophy has impacted the pedagogy in countries all over the world, as the style and techniques are extraordinary, intriguing, and stirring. (Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Olędzka 2020:141). He implemented a court of peers, children's parliament, and council of self-government, through which children were intrinsically involved in managing and running their environment, living space and reality in a fully democratic way. Undertaken tasks and duties, to fulfil the needs of all, were appointed on a voluntary basis and without adult interference (Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Olędzka 2020). The self-development and training of one's self-confidence were important elements of everyday reality, with children betting against each other in relation to gaining new competencies. There was a special area designed for downtime or quiet-time in aid of self-regulation. "Remembrance cards", a tool used by the parliament of children, marked the meaningful experiences (positive and negative) in children's lives. In the orphanage space created for children by Korczak, older children assisted younger or those new to the establishment to ensure proper support was provided. Keeping everyone up-to-date with current matters was another important domain contributing to the participatory and democratic environment. The tools set in place to provide information and the ability to complain were a letterbox, a newsletter edited by children and adults alike, and an information board (Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Olędzka 2020:151).

In relation to professionals working with children, Korczak recommended applying deep self-reflection. He believed that knowing oneself well would assist in becoming a better, more empathic educator (Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Olędzka 2020).

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MARIA MONTESSORI

Doctor, feminist, accomplished academic, and an advocate for children is in a nutshell who Maria Montessori was (Montessori 2020). As a result of her vivid interest in children and their causes, she became one of the world's most influential and famous pedagogues and children's rights supporters (Montessori 1976). Montessori (2020) also viewed children as the margin of society, subjected to the total control of adults, like slaves subjected to dictators, having to obey and attend educational institutions. And yet disrespected, dismissed, and ignored children will develop into miserable adults (Montessori 2020:21). Regarding children as future resources is not preparing them at all for life in society (Montessori 2020:26). They should rather be seen as equal with all other people (Montessori 2020:10). Montessori recommends creating a ministry of children, to be consulted by other ministries, and protection of civil rights of children. Another idea is nominating thoroughly prepared adults to represent children and their rights in legislation. Moreover, education should not be a matter decided only by adults but by including children, the ministry, and their representatives in decision-making processes (Montessori 2020:29).

CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

Although the notions introduced by Korczak and Montessori were surely innovative and controversial during the time of their lives, children's participation is now a right included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, UN 1989), ratified by nearly all countries around the world (Lansdown 2010)[2]. This particular right is codified as Article 12 of the CRC (UN1989), in which it is stated that all children have the capability to form viewpoints and opinions at any stage of their lives that can be expressed in a variety of ways (Lansdown 2010:12). But is it enough for children to be able to voice their views? According to Lansdown (2010:12), "in order to contribute their views, children need access to appropriate information and to safe 'spaces' where they are afforded the time, encouragement and support to enable them to develop and articulate their views". Lansdown also believes (2010:12) that children's voices should have the real power to impact life in any areas affecting them and influence decision-making processes.

Art. 12 of CRC (UN 1989) attempts to regulate participation by limiting the capacity of decision-making for younger, less mature children, which has been subjected to wide criticism (Lansdown 2010:13; Cordero Arce 2015:291–292). Participation can be understood as consisting of four steps: acquiring information, developing a view and vocalizing it, reception of the opinion by others and contemplation and lastly, decision-making (Alderson and Montgomery 1996, as cited in Lansdown 2010:13). The child who is not mature enough (in adults' viewpoint) might be excluded from the decision-making process, while the adult continues to retain the power over the child (Lansdown 2010:13). The dependency is also criticized by Cordero Arce (2015: 291–292), who questions the genuine nature of such participation. For this reason, he

[2] The CRC (UN 1989) was only not ratified by United States of America (OHCHR 2020).

proposes moving from participation to the notion of children's citizenship.

Nevertheless, Lansdown (2010:13) believes that articles 5 and 13 of the CRC complement the right of children to participate. Art. Article 5 stipulates that responsible adults have the responsibility to inform and support children in exercising their rights. Article 13 gives children the right to know and express their viewpoints (United Nations 1989). Adults are motivated towards sharing or even renouncing the obligation to make decisions with regard to children (Lansdown 2010:3). Lundy (2007) agrees and states that art. 12 of CRC must not be interpreted separately but complementing and being complemented by other rights.

MODELS OF PARTICIPATION

Despite increasing recognition that children are rights holders, their participation is often not satisfactory (Hart 1992). With the model "The Ladder of Participation", Hart (1992:8) initiated a discussion and further academic attempts to reflect on and reevaluate participation.

The model introduces steps in the form of a ladder that visualize the complex problem of participation (Hart 1992). It begins with non-participation (*manipulation, decoration,* and *tokenism*) and is considered the most common form associated with children's civic engagement in society (Cordero Arce 2015:292). In short, *manipulation* occurs when the drive behind actions is not clear or when children are asked to voice their comments but not given feedback (Hart 1992:9). *Decoration* happens when children are involved in action without being given information or able to take part in the planning and execution of the activity (Hart 1992:9). *Tokenism* is defined as "instances in which children are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions" (Hart 1992:9). Participation means being involved in an activity that includes children in the planning process, purpose and outcomes, decisions and provides a space for individual contribution (Hart 1992:9). And yet, the critics of this model say, "there is a danger of abstracting children's participation as an end in itself and thus losing sight of the way in which children and adults are interconnected, and the ways in which adult structures and institutions constrain children" (Morrow 2008:122).

Shier (2001:110) proposes a model with applying critical questions to aid reflection about the level of participation aimed at organizations and professionals working with children. The way to participation and equality in relation to decision-making is through listening to children, supporting them, and including. Whereas Lansdown (2010:20) introduces three categories of consultation, collaboration, and child-led participation and states that "the extent of children's actual engagement can be assessed by considering the level of their involvement alongside the point at which they become involved."

All the three described models share a common characteristic, a hierarchical structure of assessing participation. Lundy (2007:932) offers a different, non-hierarchical approach, seen as helpful in applying other models and in portraying participation as

a right and not as a theoretical abstraction (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2015). She (Lundy 2007:932) proposes linking Art. 12 of CRC (UN 1989) to others, such as Art. 2 (right to non-discrimination), Art. 3 (best interest), Art. 5 (the right to guidance from adults), Art. 13 (right to information), and Art. 19 (right to be protected from abuse). There are four interlinked and complementing sections proposed by Lundy (2007:933): *space (*safe, unbiased environment), *voice* (diverse formats thereof), *audience* (a listening ear with authority), and *influence* (feedback on the outcomes). Lundy (2007) recommends adults working with children engage in training aiming at the coaching of the model's appropriate function.

Interestingly, Hultgren and Johansson (2019) disagree with hierarchical models described on the basis of their reliance on children's age and capability to participate and hence omitting the youngest. Participation should rather be based on mutual respect, communication, and observation, rather than being scrutinized because of the power (in)equality. Adults working with the youngest children should closely observe them, experiment with various resources and options, and deeply reflect, let themselves be led by children's clear preferences and decisions (Hultgren and Johansson 2019).

WHY PARTICIPATION?

Being able to participate is important for children for many reasons. Children can benefit from feeling included (Hultgren and Johansson 2019), more confident and autonomous (Kangas 2016; Sinclar 2004). Participation supports the improvement of children's skills. It encourages them to be more self-reliant, it endorses active communal membership. Moreover, children practice and master communicating, solving problems, and conflict resolution. They have an opportunity to use their creativity and to develop a sense of responsibility for others (Stroß 2007:157–158).

Kangas (2016:8) believes that participation is a powerful tool in empowering others and a vital part of educational processes. Grothe (2019:49) points to the kindergarten, an establishment educating and caring for children in their earliest years of life, as the place where children develop their knowledge about life in a larger community outside of the family unit. Children soak in this social construction and the distribution of power in society. Experiencing kindergarten means learning about what democracy is therefore the role of participation is significant in discovering own place in the community (Grothe 2019; Maywald 2019). But being involved in co-creating their reality is also beneficial for adults, argues Stroß (2007:157). Early childhood educators could be relieved in their tasks by children taking on responsibilities and developing a sense of community's needs (Stroß 2007:157). In such a scenario, children's voices and position could become more vital, leading to phasing out structures of hierarchy within the educational institutions (Liebel 2017:172).

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS AND PARTICIPATION

Hansen, Knauer, and Friedrich (2006) believe that children's opportunities to participate depend on adults' readiness and willingness to include such strategies and tools

in their work. Participation can only take place if pedagogues create the space, respectful atmosphere, room and provide support for such to take place (Rieker, Mörgen, & Schnitzer 2016; Grothe 2019; Schneider 2019a). Early childhood educators' tasks are to guide children and support them, conduct observations, record progress and evaluate it in the team of other professionals. Other responsibilities include having a deep empathy and understanding of each child's need and constructing a safe, stimuli rich and nourishing setting. To participate, children need to become partners and co-constructors of the community's environment (Grothe 2019:51). For this to take place children need to be trusted to constructively learn from mistakes. In turn, the participatory culture will ensure that high quality of early years services is provided (Schneider 2019a:116).

But what do early childhood educators need for participation to be implemented? Westrich (2019:92) believes they need confidence and bravery to face long-established hierarchies. They need the ability to continuously self-reflect, communicate well with others, and guard children's right to participation (Westrich 2019:92). Schneider (2019b:79) finds determination and assertiveness equally important. Another important virtue is the ability to empathize to large extents in order to correctly read signals shown by the youngest, non-verbal children (Maywald 2019:40). Such sensitivity goes back to the attachment theory of Mary Ainsworth, developed in the "Strange Situation" experiment (Santrock 2006:357).

CULTURE'S INFLUENCE

This theory aided in comprehending the influence of parenting on developing children (Santrock 2006:358). Fishe's (2004) research shows that safe and loving parenting benefits children cognitively, emotionally, and socially already in pre-school. Simultaneously, the bond between children and their parents is not universal and depends on the culture of the family's environment (Santrock 2006: 358–359). Therefore participation is a cultural construct (Rogoff 2003). It has been found that culture affects the behaviour and brain, and this phenomenon is the centre of "cultural neuroscience" (Han 2017:24). What is culture, then? Macionis and Plummer (2008:128) see it as "designs for living: the values, beliefs, behaviour, practices and material objects that constitute people's way of life. Culture is a toolbox of solutions to everyday problems. It is a bridge to the past as well as a guide to the future". It is also language, the cultural success, the notion of reality (Blaschke 2006:49). Culture can be arranged into the material, social, and subjective (Han 2017:9). Material refers to commodities, social to accepted behaviours, and "subjective culture refers to shared ideas, values, beliefs and behavioural scripts in the human mind" (Han 2017:9). Culture might be passed on, but it is dynamic rather than static. Accepted norms can transform when applied in another social setting (Han 2017:9)—internalizing behavioural scripts and particulars of culture itself can take place through imitating others (like in the case of babies), through receiving and implementing instructions of others, and finally, through collaboration with peers (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner 1993).

All these above-described processes mean that social norms, relations, even the

way people react are shaped by their life encounters and background (Rogoff 2003), but even experiences gathered by their parents and grandparents (Rogoff 2003:279). Through passed on cultural capital, children develop a sense of how they fit in society (Rogoff 2003:307). They also discover the extent of their own (in)dependency by experiencing control over them. Some communities endorse strict adult control and the cult of authority, whereas others view such as stance as disadvantageous (Rogoff 2003:229). Paradoxically, the perceived progress of humanity in the form of industrialization became the point of its degradation, at least in terms of children's participation. From this time, a point on children was disconnected from adults and adult-like events because of their young age and enrolled in educational institutions (Rogoff 2003:20). Lansdown (2010:16) pinpoints the irony of this phenomenon, the progressive, human-rights-oriented societies were not as progressive after all, as they deprived children of their right to participate.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND HIDDEN CURRICULUM

ECEC services are not only institutions of public service but also businesses hiring employees, which in turn are a part thereof (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence 2007). Businesses and organizations are perceived as developing their own norms and values, which act as directives in the workplace (Allaire & Firsirotu 1984). Allaire and Firsirotu (1984:213) believe that each organization has a "sociocultural system composed of the interworkings of formal structures, strategies, policies and management processes and of all ancillary components of an organization's reality and functioning". Each also has a "cultural system" of shared norms, values, and even symbols (e.g. Logo) (Allaire & Firsirotu1984:213). The employees or other involved parties influence the organization by their individual experiences and fulfilled roles (Allaire, Firsirotu 1984:215).

According to Rogoff (2003:258), "by participating in the everyday formats and routines of cultural institutions and traditions, children engage in their underlying cultural assumptions". Children in schools and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings grasp not only the knowledge that is intended to be passed on to them by professionals, but they also learn the ins and outs of hierarchy and structure of a given service. Through interaction with others, children internalize norms and values, defined as a hidden curriculum (Giroux 1981:72), a significant element of organizational culture (Allaire and Firsirotu 1984). The importance of such within ECEC cannot be undermined, as the youngest children first experiences serve as a fundament for their later life (Jančec & Vodopivec 2017:35). Jančec and Vodopivec (2017:35) believe that children go through rapid development in their first years of life, where their character and viewpoints mould and fasten, where behavioural scripts become internalized. The biggest impact on these processes will have the most present adults, influencing children's view of the world and values they see as dearest. For this reason, ECEC professionals are seen as highly important and influential in the transfer of cultural capital. This refers to the perception of participation, its importance, and execution (Jančec & Vodopivec 2017). Early childhood educators influence and co-construct not only the hidden curriculum but influential in terms of children's play space, daily

activities and routines, structure, and communication, which in turn is determined by a setting's organizational culture (Jančec & Vodopivec 2017). The culture of an ECEC setting has then a significant impact on the quality of care and education provided (Kangas, Venninen, & Ojala 2016).

PARTICIPATION AND ITS PART IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN ECEC IN GERMANY

Participation of children in Germany is regulated by legislation. Germany ratified the CRC (UN 1989) in 1992 (OHCHR 2020). Having rights applies to all German citizens from birth on (§ 1 Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch 2020). Children should be given space for autonomy and independent thinking, alongside with an opportunities for discussions (§ 1626, 2, BGB, Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz 2020). According to the Children and Adolescents Law (Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz) SBG VIII (§ 8 Subsection 1), children shall participate in the decisions relating to children and youth welfare services. ECEC services are under the obligation to respect children's rights, to ensure that the 'best interest' of children is met, to protect and finally, provide participation opportunities in decision-making processes within the structures of the institution (§ 8b, § 45 (2) 3, SGB VIII, Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, 2020). The latter remains to be difficult to implement (Tietze, Viernickel, Dittrich, Grenner, Hanisch, & Marx 2016:21).

Historically, a kindergarten was an institution to care for the youngest children when the parents worked, with the nuclear family model as a prevailing one. There was a very clear power relationship between adults and children. The first were making decisions; the latter were expected to obey (Allen 2017). Also, nowadays, kindergarten places are in high demand, and children are not only in full-time care but also from a very young age (Maywald 2014). The number speaks for themselves; 95% of four- and five-year-olds and 55% of two-year-olds are taken care of in ECEC German services (Prengel 2016). However, Maywald (2014) points that the quality, hierarchy, and structures remain the same as decades ago. Children's voices are not respected and integrated into their kindergarten realities (Grothe 2019:50). Children's ideas are not incorporated into practice (Sommer-Himmel, & Titze 2018). Prengel (2016) believes more research is needed about children's participation in kindergartens.

"Die Kinderstube der Demokratie", extensive action-based research, demonstrated that implementing participation depends largely on early childhood educators and their interest in it, as well as their attitude, mindset, and perspective (Hansen, Knauer, & Friedrich 2006). It was demonstrated before that early year's professionals possess a varied understanding of the concept of participation (Kangas 2016; Mentha, Church, & Page 2015). Kangas (2016:34) shares her own encounter of working with educators who distrust children's capabilities and doubt their agency. She writes: "to me; it seems, that there is still ignorance about children's rights and some educators seems to think, that it is in their power to decide whether or not children may participate in the everyday decision about their lives" (Kangas 2016:34). Hansen, Knauer, and Friedrich (2006) discovered that a negative mindset towards participation might

be caused by feelings such as distrust, scepticism, disbelief and doubt. But where are those feelings coming from? There is a lack of research on the cultural impact of ECEC settings and its employees. Gaining a better understanding of ECEC services by examining their educators' attitudes, beliefs, personal experiences, and biographies could prepare a better fundament for professional training. Gaining insight into educators' perspectives and organizational culture might help answer why participation is not correctly implemented and practised in ECEC settings in Germany.

METHODS

The study was conducted within the qualitative methodology and is a case study focused on early childhood educators employed in a FRÖBEL organization. FRÖBEL is a provider of ECEC settings in ten of Germany's administrative areas. There are currently 197 facilities with estimated 4200 employees taking care of 18,000 children. The organization's kindergartens are also based in Australia and Poland (FRÖBEL 2020a). FRÖBEL is involved in and participates in many projects, actively cooperating with many partners in order to provide high-quality Early Years Education and Care. Many of the settings apply a bilingual concept by hiring native speakers and the languages used are English, Spanish, Italian, Polish and Dutch (FRÖBEL 2019). The organization is involved and supports research in ECEC, provides its own employees with an extensive further training programme, and even prepares for work soon-to-be educators in own academy (FRÖBEL 2019). The Mission Statement (FRÖBEL 2020b) pinpoints the company's contribution in providing services based on democracy, sustainable development, and participation. Some children's rights are encapsulated in the statement, such as the right to identity, education, protection from abuse, and participation. The tasks of managers of ECEC services include promotion of transparency, diversity, and non-discrimination as well as positive team building. They are also guardians of FRÖBEL's organizational culture (FRÖBEL 2020b).

Early childhood educator is in this study understood as an employee of FRÖBEL organization, whose responsibilities are those of any state-acknowledged educators and include observation of children's development and documentation of such, working with parents, and counting into setting's adult-child ratio. The participants were sampled by using snowball and purposive sampling techniques.

The study applied two methods of data collection. The first method was the in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven early childhood educators with varying degrees of work experience and working with children of different ages. The Interviews were conducted in person or online, leaving the choice to participants in the light of the COVID-19 Pandemic. At the time of data collection, there was flexibility regarding social distancing and government restrictions. The second method was a focus group that took place in an online setting, in which six early childhood educators took part and further explored topics partially examined or highlighted during the interviews. Thematic analysis was used in order to analyze collected data (Braun & Clarke 2006).

With regards to the collection and transcription of data, the aim was to adhere to human research ethics procedures (The University of Newcastle Australia 2017). Prob-

ing into participants' biographies posed a risk of evoking hurtful memories, which obligated sensitivity and ensured that participants were not becoming upset (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden 2000). It also required protecting myself from possible negative or traumatic personal stories (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson, & Wilkes 2011; Fahie 2014).

FINDINGS

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

All participants recalled memories from different times in their lives. They portrayed the varying cultural backgrounds they grew up in, spread in many locations and on three continents. The participants fondly remember the celebrations and feelings of belonging to a community. The memories of own kindergarten attendance are dim for the most. One participant, however, describes pleasant memories thereof, while the other recalls authoritarian, strict, and off-putting educators and a set unchallengeable structure of the day (Skrzypczak 2021:32).

"As citizens, as a member of the society, you have to go through this socialization process, which starts with your family", stated one participant, recognizing the cultural learning process that influences children (Skrzypczak 2021:32). Some participants grew up in big families, some in small. Some believe in having "had a really easy and privileged childhood", carefree and loving. In contrast, the others are left with hurtful or even traumatic memories (Skrzypczak 2021:31). Many participants grew up experiencing authoritarian parenting style, characterized by discipline and (corporal) punishment, although a couple of participants experienced a space for discussion, joint decision-making, and parental support. Rules set by parents were to provide structure and are to this day perceived as a "moral compass" (Skrzypczak 2021:32). The above-mentioned parenting style and a viewpoint were perceived by some as necessary and ended up being replicated, for as one participant states, "it's a natural way for adults to make decisions above the head of the children because they already naturally know what's best for the child" (Skrzypczak 2021:33). However, other participants repel such attitudes and confront them on a regular basis, recognizing the internalized behavioural scripts. Some vocalized the fighting of internal battle of values passed on by parents and more attachment-based methods of upbringing children. One participant connected the authoritarian parenting style with low self-esteem, while the other found it strange to suddenly be respected at the point of becoming an adult. Adultism is said to be something "ingrained in our brains because we heard it from our parents, from other teachers. We heard it directed at ourselves, and a two-year-old, a one-year-old who is throwing a tantrum, is trying to tell us something" (Skrzypczak 2021:33). This ever reappearing confrontation, a process thereof, became a motivation for one participant to dedicate her career to working with children and in ensuring children in her care enjoy a trauma-free childhood. De facto, all participants demonstrated a high degree of engagement and passion when working with children. Respect, empathy, and information were identified as values that educators strive for (Skrzypczak 2021:33-34).

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

In order to fulfil their tasks well, educators need some character traits and qualities. One participant calls them "fundamental qualities", and such categories shall include "empathy, tolerance, patience, understanding, creativity, self-discipline, consistency, ability to bond with children, passion for the job, being a good listener, an active listener and being open-minded". Moreover, an educator should be able to self-reflect and to be genuine or authentic (Skrzypczak 2021:34).

Educators have many professional duties, such as protection or support. One of the mentioned important tasks is creating a space for children to share their thoughts and opinions but also making sure that their opinion is vocalized appropriately, if not verbally. Recognizing this responsibility means viewing educators as gatekeepers to participation (Skrzypczak 2021:34-35). However, just as educators need to fulfil many tasks, they also face many struggles. The main challenge that participants recognized was a lack of time, which can significantly diminish participation. Often, decisions are being made on the spot as there is not enough time for discussion and inclusion of all parties involved. Working with parents, a need to adhere to a particular structure of the day, and supervising children are other mentioned issues. Dealing with staff shortage is thought to be an enormous problem, posing a great obstacle in implementing participation. It can only take place if there are enough adults in the kindergarten. When educators are missing from their workplace, "the efficiency of care is prioritized" (Skrzypczak 2021:35-36). Time issues and not enough support due to missing colleagues cause rising stress levels. Generally, participants feel under pressure most of the time, with participation being one of the affecting elements, due to the amount of work required from educators to implement it. The process of self-reflection and remaining empathic at all times towards children requires a lot of work. It is not easy to focus on the opinions and needs of children and give them time for independent problem-solving rather than follow their own instincts and quickly find a solution for children (Skrzypczak 2021:36).

Problems with the team and insufficient management support are also recognized as a challenge. Educators often feel there is no space for their own contribution in decision-making processes and that their voices are not listened to. Consequently, participation remains to be seen as a struggle, challenging to organize, time and energy-consuming when there are so few time resources already (Skrzypczak 2021:35).

CHILDREN IN SOCIETY AND THEIR PARTICIPATION

"The child always has to fit in, adapt to the parents, to the adult's life," said one participant (Skrzypczak 2021:40). The other adds that children are not allowed to have a say, an opinion. Children are compared to disabled people, with both groups being marginalized in society. Children are not consulted about the choice of their educational institution, nor its design and functionality. Children are misunderstood. But their rights are also less important than economic growth (Skrzypczak 2021:38).

It was demonstrated that participation is understood in a variety of ways. One participant states that the concept serves as a "buzz word", a marketing trick to benefit

FRÖBEL (Skrzypczak 2021:37). Most of the time, participation is perceived as self-determination, an ability or space to make decisions about own needs or taking part in the offered activity. A few educators believe that participation is also about taking part in the decision-making process, contributing to the community of both adults and children, a concept that sounds well theoretically, but is difficult to implement. Nevertheless, adults role is to support children and act as gatekeepers to their participation. It is also within their professional duties to provide children with information and more self-determination opportunities (Skrzypczak 2021:38-39).

Participants agreed that children should be involved in structural decision-making processes to some extent. Children's capacity to apprehend consequences of such were questioned, concerns arose as to the organization of such process and fear of chaos was expressed. The worry that educators' work becomes even harder when implementing participation is the main reason educators feel reluctant. At the same time, participants showed a great deal of respect towards children by being receptive to their learning, passion, and yearning, but also by their own deep self-reflection. Children are taken seriously, even if unable to communicate verbally, and there is a lot of focus on the individuality and character of each child. Participants also recognized the role of the environment in a child's development and participation and the need for an open, welcoming, well-organized space (Skrzypczak 2021:39).

Although some participants expressed hesitation and reluctance towards participation, they all recognized the many benefits such practice entails. It gives educators the possibility to make their daily work easier. Children have an opportunity to become pro-active in their social environment, curious, resilient, and self-confident. Participation aids in better emotional self-regulation, social skills, understanding of human rights values. It promotes the development of seeing oneself as part of the community (Skrzypczak 2021:40).

Some participatory methods are already used by the participants. Children are granted a lot of freedom to make individual choices relating to food, napping, or outings. Morning circle is a means to give children information about available activities or the structure of the day. Projects led by educators are often based on children's interests and ideas. Some participants expressed a wish to introduce a children's parliament, facing challenges; however, due to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which further impedes children's ability to participate (Skrzypczak 2021:40–41).

WORKPLACE

Participants perceive their workplaces as hugely influencing children's scope of participation. The buildings can either promote this children's right or hinder it significantly due to poor design and closed spaces. The space, educators, and setting's manager are thought to be interrelated. FRÖBEL's framework, an "open space" incorporated in all of its kindergartens, allows for free movement and for making individual choices. However, it can prevent educators from giving children the needed support at the right moment. The study's participants view FRÖBEL as greatly respecting children's

rights. Protection, development, education are at the core of the organization, as well as participation, which is often thematized (Skrzypczak 2021:41).

The management of kindergarten plays an important role in implementing those important values at FRÖBEL, which often occurs by putting forward various projects or goals. "Sometimes you get given, sometimes you get given the rules, and you don't know if they've come from the Leitung (en. management) or from FROEBEL somewhere above or, and you're like, this is a terrible rule. This rule sounds like it's come from someone who's never worked with children before," stated one participant (Skrzypczak 2021:42). Little or no monitoring is also viewed as problematic, along with scant support for educators in implementing concepts and ideas. There are a "lot of demands on the educators and not really the structures in place" (Skrzypczak 2021:42). Moreover, participants see themselves as excluded from decision-making processes, and they feel disrespected. One participant said: "It's like sometimes we're taking care of the children to get all the rights to participation and listen to their desires when our Leitung is not actually doing that with us" (Skrzypczak 2021:42).

Going further, participants view the management of kindergartens as unable to deal with team problems. Quitting work is a common result of unresolved conflict between employees, to which managers turn a blind eye. A common strategy is swapping colleagues in the teams rather than dealing with the problem itself. Educators in this study wish for themselves more support from their management. "If the team is not working, of course, nothing is working" (Skrzypczak 2021:42). Finding common ground for a number of people with different experiences, backgrounds, and values is a difficult process. Communication is not always flawless with different interpretations of issues and colleagues who are not open to new ideas. A good, open-minded working atmosphere is significant in order to learn and develop further goals. Such teams and their ability to reflect and construct meaning together in relation to participation are viewed as more successful in their implementation (Skrzypczak 2021:43).

DISCUSSION

Each participant of the study had a unique background and different life experiences (Skrzypczak 2021:45). Rogoff (2003:274) believes that people reproduce behaviour and views by "generalizing experience from one situation to another". In the light of this statement, it can be argued that many educators replicated the opinion of adults' superiority towards children. Many educators experienced an authoritarian parenting style, and some even find it appropriate (Skrzypczak 2021:45). However, some educators confront such upbringing methods, are conflicted by them, but also are motivated to support children in growing up in a different, more respectful way (Skrzypczak 2021:46). This process of internal revision and shift proves that cultural impact does not determine one's values endlessly (Han 2017; Rogoff 2003).

The study demonstrates that there is a different understanding of participation among the participants, which has already been claimed by Mörgen, Rieker and Schnitzer (2016:8). It is perceived rather as a power to make own choices, to self-determination. However, it is just a part of the bigger picture and not the wholesome in-

terpretation of participation, as already defined in this paper. It is not viewed as a right of each child but rather as a theoretical notion (Skrzypczak 2021:44). Lundy (2007) highlights the importance of continually engaging in the process of participation. She believes that ongoing training should be provided to all who work with children to excel in understanding art. 12 of CRC. The support could be provided by trained participation experts (ger. Multiplikator*in), whose tasks would also include monitoring and evaluating participative methods and strategies in the kindergarten. Moreover, it is proposed to establish the role of the Ombudsman for Children's Rights for each ECEC provider. Every organization taking children's rights seriously is also recommended to establish a Children's Parliament or Children's Advisory Board, to give children opportunity and space to contribute on the structural level (Skrzypczak 2021:47–48).

Some educators recognize their role as gatekeepers to children's participation and the need to be authentic (Skrzypczak 2021:47). Authenticity, empathy, and deep understanding of each child were, as postulated by Korczak, qualities needed to work with a participatory pedagogy (Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Olędzka 2020).

Nevertheless, one strives to involve children in decision-making on a communal level is opposed by others' perspectives to give children opportunities to express views to make them feel respected. Educators view participation as in need of control and thorough organization. They fear children (especially the youngest) are not capable of being involved to this extent and want to protect them from harmful consequences ([author] 2021:44). But they also feel losing own control over their children (Rieker et al. 2016). Therefore, children are still not trusted to make decisions about their own lives; they are refused to be seen as social actors with an agency. They are perceived as a society's capital of the future, but not of today (Liebel 2008).

Despite their reservations, early childhood educators believe participation to be of huge significance, benefiting children in many ways. Through it, children have the opportunity to become more resilient, confident, curious about the world. They can master their communication, social and emotional skills. Educators are interested in children's participation and they reflect on its process. This attitude is thought to be partially inspired by FRÖBEL's organizational culture, as this establishment incorporated art. 12 of the CRC in the organization's mission statement and frameworks for each of its ECEC centres (Skrzypczak 2021:44-45).

Although children are provided with information, listened to, and given a space to make their own choices, there are no tools used to ensure children can engage in structural decision-making ([author] 2021:45). These findings prove to not fulfil the legal obligations of ECEC services (Westrich 2019:91). Westrich (2019:91) proposes children's parliament or a fixed time for consultation with the management as means to improve children's participation. There are many more methods conceived by Korczak that can be revitalized and used in educational institutions for children (Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Olędzka 2020). According to Rogoff (2003), children of all ages have the capacity to participate in and contribute to their communities just by simple means of taking care of a specific task. Moreover, utilizing more tools might support educators' daily work and reduce pressure and stress levels. Practising participation can also be a method of learning and improving one's understanding (Skrzyp-

czak 2021:47). Lundy (2007) cautions against the accidental application of tokenism or decoration. Children must be listened to, but also respected and taken seriously. She proposes documenting the meetings with children and giving them feedback on the extent of their own contribution.

Going further, the findings demonstrate that there is an urgent need to examine the organizational culture in ECEC services. Ineffective communication, problems between colleagues, feeling unappreciated and disrespected are, to name a few, issues that block the application of participatory pedagogy. Work relationships and the kindergarten's atmosphere will impact the development of children's values and views (Jančec & Vodopivec, 2017). Participation must apply to all people involved in an ECEC setting; it needs to be part of the service's culture in order to work (Schneider 2019:115). Kindergartens should aim for a democratic, respectful, and secure environment for adults and children alike (Schneider 2019), a duty of managers (Pohlman 2019:127). Providers of ECEC services are obliged to not only ensure proper frameworks in place but also monitor their application (Pohlmann 2019:125–126). Moreover, it is recommended for kindergartens' space to be thoroughly examined on an ongoing basis to ensure the design and layout promote participation in the setting (Skrzypczak 2021:48).

The study's limitation is missing perspectives of kindergartens management, as well as the generalizability due to the small number of participating early childhood educators. It could be useful to repeat the study with German-speaking educators to gather more data, as this study was conducted only in English.

To sum up, it is clear that the perspectives of early childhood educators about participation and its implementation depend on many different factors (Skrzypczak 2021:51). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007:86) think that "early childhood institutions carry great symbolic importance. There are statements about how we, as adults, understand childhood and its relationship to the state, the economy, civil society and the private domain". Therefore, investing in the organizational culture, training of educators and proper implementation of democratic, participative strategies is necessary for ensuring a better society. The participatory culture of now will shape citizens' future democracies (Maywald 2014; Sinclair 2004; Lundy 2007). It is also a duty of ECEC services to ensure children's right to participation is respected and practised, for as Korczak says, "children are not the people of tomorrow, but are people of today. They have a right to be taken seriously, and to be treated with tenderness and respect. They should be allowed to grow into whoever they were meant to be – the unknown person inside each of them is our hope for the future" (Korczak, as cited in COE 2009:7).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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In between the need and the uncertainty: Estonian teachers' ambiguities, experiences and reflections in tackling extremism in the classroom

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ABSTRACT: Schools are one of the primary settings for fostering skills to support students in understanding the causes, motivations and outcomes of extremism (Vallinkoski *et al.* 2021). This article presents the results of a pilot study focusing on Estonian educators' experiences with discussing and tackling extremism in the classroom. The questionnaire of the study is created based on a similar study conducted in Finland by Vallinkoski, Koirikivi and Malkki (2021), with the permission of the main author and adaptions for the Estonian context. Less than half of the teachers mentioned instances where they had met students supporting or following an extremist ideology. Most of the latter were not fully certain about how to classify the cases they had in mind. The examples that were mentioned most often were right-wing extremism, conspiracy theories, Islamism, coronavirus, Nazism and Communism. Estonian teachers are enthusiastic about the positive role of education in the prevention of extremism. However, they struggle with the 'ambiguity' of extremism, partly due to the Estonian system of education that does not include a nation-wide program for prevention of extremism or counter-radicalisation in education. Correspondingly, teachers feel quite uncertain about what their exact *duty*, *role* and *mandate* is as far as extremism is concerned.

KEYWORDS: extremism, teaching, teachers' beliefs, sensitive issues, self-censorship, radicalisation, preventing radicalisation, countering radicalisation, Estonia

INTRODUCTION

Tackling extremism in the classroom involves ambiguities, uncertainties, and challenges related to what is expected of teachers and education and how teachers need to act. The 'ambiguities' of extremism can be approached from two perspectives—ambiguities that result from the way how extremism is defined and ambiguities related to the way how extremism is tackled in the classroom.

Ambiguity regarding definitions

For starters, extremism is not a value neutral term (Arthur 2015: 314), which means that its definition and implementation has ideological implications. This is probably the main reason why the term lacks a commonly accepted definition. No clear (universally accepted or objective) definitions exist for extremism (Arthur 2015: 313), terrorism and radicalisation (Onursal & Kirckpatrick 2021), or countering violent extremism (Gielen 2019: 1152).

Generally, there are three approaches in defining extremism:

1) Extremism as *violence*. The focus is on the use of political violence. Groups and movements relying on political violence typically also have an ideological profile, but no major ideology (e.g. anarchism, nationalism, liberalism) is neither extremist nor immune to it. The focus is not on the type of ideological content but on the explicit legitimisation of the use of violence by an ideology in a given political context.

Gary Ackerman and Michael Burnham define 'violent adversarial ideology' as follows: "[A]n ideology that enunciates specific grievances, delimits enemies, and legitimates violence against those enemies" (Ackerman & Burnham 2021: 1169). If the core indicator of extremism is violence, then a person who has adopted an extreme position without being involved in "violent behaviour in support of the position adopted" (Arthur 2015: 313) is not an extremist. But others, who have been involved in violent extremism without having an in-depth understanding of the radical ideology (Malkki 2020: 16), are classified as extremists.

2) Extremism as a 'structure of *thinking*' (Davies 2021: 103) and 'the denial of other realities' (Davies 2008: 612). The question is not about the use of violence or the content of the views. Extremism relies on the belief that "there is one right answer, truth or path, and that there are no alternatives" (Davies 2009: 192). Its drivers are *absolutism* (single truths, simple dualisms, black and white certainties) and "the search for *perfection*, *utopia* or *purity*" (Davies 2009: 190).

In this view, the teacher recognises extremist thinking in students by the 'low tolerance of ambiguity' (Vergani *et al.* 2020: 94) and controversies (or of conflicting ideas) (Bonnell *et al.* 2010: 82; Andersson 2016), "the inability or unwillingness to see different sides of an argument, to be able to hold different values at the same time" (Davies 2021: 103).

> Counter-radicalisation pedagogy aims "to teach people to be at comfort with ambiguity" (Davies 2009: 190), be "more at ease with ambiguity and conflicting ideas" (Bonnell *et al.* 2020: 82), and be flexible in thinking (Davies 2008: 620). The teacher does not instil a 'correct' ideology in students but aims to "increase the complexity of thinking in students" (Davies 2021: 103). Teaching should involve and enhance 'integrative complexity' and value pluralism (Davies 2018: 13; Davies 2021: 103). Controversial issues pedagogy is a corresponding approach in preventing and tackling extremism in the classroom (Jerome & Elwick 2020).

> 3) Extremism as the opposite of (mainstream) *social values*. Here, the focus is on the content of the views and on their relationship with the "core beliefs of the majority of society" (Arthur 2015: 314). Extremism can be an opposition to democracy (Davies & Limbada 2019: 4; Onursal & Kirckpatrick 2021: 1105) and human rights (Davies 2008: 621). According to this perspective, the aim of counter-radicalisation activities is to 'defeat' extremist ideology (Onursal & Kirckpatrick 2021: 1108).

In practice, the attitude regarding "an opponent of democracy" may also depend on whether the actor involved scores negatively on two other indicators (use of violence, structure of thinking). Thus, when opponents of democracy do not resort to political violence (and/or do not impose their view on others), some scholars have argued that they should not be banned from democratic participation (Mudde 2016: 133). Thus, a renowned scholar of extremism and populism, Cas Mudde (2016: 130), states:

> I argue that extremists, like all (political) minorities, should be allowed to voice their opinions unconditionally, even if their views are not shared by the majority, and therefore not expressed in the state policies.

Besides ambiguities of definition, there are also ambiguities regarding the *duty* of teachers to *engage* with extremism-related themes and situations in the classroom. In cases where the states have adopted national counter-radicalisation programmes (e.g. UK, Finland), the teachers have different kinds of *duties, roles* and *mandates* to tackle extremism in the classroom than they have in a country like Estonia where such a national action plan is missing. Estonian teachers have different 'security-related' *duties* (what they ought to do), *roles* (what teachers in the country are expected to do) and *mandates* (if they tackle extremism in class they know that all major parties involved know that it is legitimate for teachers to do so).

In UK and Finland teachers are expected to monitor students for possible signs of radicalisation (Niemi *et al.* 2018: 3) and to "identify students 'at risk' of radicalisation" (Jerome & Elwick 2020: 222). Due to the lack of a national counter-radicalisation program, Estonian teachers do not necessarily know the working definitions of the related terms (radicalisation, violent extremism), they do not have systematic guidance materials, and they do not have a mandate to tackle such types of extremism in the classroom. Controversies more familiar to Estonian teachers are over the politicisation of 'memory' in Estonian-Russian relations (Laruelle 2021), and over right-wing extremism more recently. In both issues, however, concepts other than radicalisation

and counter-radicalisation have been in use.

Thus, tackling extremism in the classroom is hindered when the relevant institutions (the state, the ministry of education, educational institutions) have not provided guidelines or guidance on how teachers should practically tackle themes and situations related to extremism (Wansink *et al.* 2021).

In Finland there is a National Action Plan for Preventing Extremism and Violent Radicalisation (Niemi *et al.* 2018: 2). A similar national action plan is missing in Estonia. Two materials discuss the role of schools and teachers in preventing and tackling radicalisation, extremism, and provide recommendations (Maasing & Salvet 2018; Nahkur & Maasing 2020), but these are not a part of teacher education, and without a national program these auxiliary materials fail to yield teachers a proper *duty, role* and *mandate* for tackling extremism in the classroom.

Despite such differences, teachers in both Estonia and UK are expected to educate "young people to understand terrorism and to understand contemporary political debates about it, and the ubiquitous media coverage of it" (Jerome & Elwick 2020: 222). Teachers in both countries need appropriate knowledge related to cases that represent *local* manifestations of extremism (UNESCO 2016: 16), because local examples of extremism are the prime sources of radicalisation.

In both contexts (i.e. in countries where there is no national policy, and in countries where there is), teachers are expected to attend to emotions in the classroom, to admit that there are uncertainties that need to be tackled as uncertainties and to allow extreme views to be expressed in the classroom (Davies 2008:621; Misco 2011: 14). In both contexts, extremism "comes to the classroom" due to course subject matter, due to controversies that are socially and politically relevant, and due to extremism-related behaviour and self-expression of the students.

In both contexts, preventing and tackling extremism is one of the school's responsibilities, a topic neither explicitly researched in Estonia (Kilp & Maiberg, *forthcoming*) nor mandated by nation-wide educational programs.

Examples of violent extremism in Estonia have been few and marginal in comparison to Western European countries but have lately been increasing. Considering Islamism, Estonia has three significant cases. Firstly, Abdurrahman Azan (Ivan Sazanakov) left Estonia to fight in Syria in 2013 and joined Islamic extremists. Secondly, two men who supported and organised finances for Sazanakov—Ramil Khalilov and Roman Manko—were later imprisoned for supporting terrorism (ERR 2017). Lastly, in 2020, residence permit of a citizen of Ukraine who had lived most of his life in Estonia was terminated. He had studied Arabic in Saudi Arabia and he is considered to be a threat to public order and security due to alleged radicalisation (Pavlova 2022).

There are also cases of right-wing extremism. The Conservative People's Party of Estonia—in parliament since 2015, a member of government coalition between 2019 and 2021—has had individual members who have been affiliated with or connected to Neo-Nazi groups (mostly outside of Estonia). Regarding students, in 2019, a 13-year old boy from a rural town in Estonia was the leader of the Nazi organisation Feuerkrieg Division. Relevant for this study is that the boy had no problems with classroom behaviour or with studies at school (Salu 2020). Additionally, there is a growing num-

ber of cases where students are groomed or find their way to radical right-wing organisations (Salu 2021).

In Estonia, terrorism and violent extremism is not as serious of a security threat as it is in the UK, France or Germany. However, the theme is also clearly more security related and more relevant in Estonia in 2021 than it was a decade ago.

Ambiguity in classroom practice and experience

The "what should be done?" kind of knowledge regarding extremism is complex and difficult to implement in practice (Jerome & Elwick 2020). Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock argue that the educational treatment of radicalisation and extremism should also address their structural root causes, promote education for social change and avoid "stigmatisation of radicalism and radicalisation in society", because the unwanted outcome will otherwise be that some students will become fearful of speaking out and being labelled as radical (Sukarieh & Tannock 2016: 34).

Teachers who enhance 'education against extremism' should promote "conflict, media and political education, free speech, and advocacy" and *avoid* pedagogy that enhances "instruction, single truths, passivity, silencing and political ignorance" (Rosvall & Öhrn 2014: 339).

There are some general rules. However, a teacher needs to also focus on the individual, contextual, situational (Andersson 2016: 9), which requires teachers to reflect and decide on what to do on the spot, when the student suddenly changes his or her behaviour or self-expression or whether the student engages in an ignorant play with ideas, symbols and slogans or is fully committed to extremist ideology or violent movements.

Furthermore, the excessive 'self-censorship' of educators while discussing extremism-related topics is a potential hindrance. Self-censorship is inherently neither bad nor good (Chamlee-Wright 2019; Mercer 2021). Civility and productive dialogue will inevitably involve some degree of self-censorship (Chamlee-Wright 2019: 542). Self-censorship is negative and problematic when, due to a social fear (of losing friends, of losing status, of becoming a target for ill will), teachers refrain from saying or doing something they believe would be needed or useful (Mercer 2021: 74-75).

To engage efficiently with controversial themes related to extremism, teachers need to master the practical (cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural) skills of management of classroom discussions (Hess 2004; UNESCO 2016: 20-21, 36). 'Self-censorship' is a problem in teaching extremism-related issues when teachers avoid engagement with this subject matter due to: a fear of sanctions from the school director or pupils' parents; the fear that the teaching of sensitive topics may negatively affect the perceptions of their professional quality and status as a teacher; the fear that the teaching of sensitive topics may reveal pupils' prejudices and extremism (Savenije & Goldberg 2019: 40); the teacher's excessive inclination not to offend others (Savenije & Goldberg 2019: 42).

DATA, PARTICIPANTS, AND METHODOLOGY

This pilot study used an online questionnaire in three weeks between the second half of August and the beginning of September 2021. The questionnaire was made using LimeSurvey and consisted of multiple-choice questions, arrays to evaluate the likelihood of certain acting patterns, and open-ended questions. In addition, participants were encouraged to explain their choices by leaving comments.

The study population consisted of teachers of history, civics, Estonian as a first language and Estonian literature, and religious education.

Teachers of the named subjects were selected as the target group because the likelihood of discussing extremism in the subjects like history (Kello 2016; Raudsepp & Zadora 2019), religious studies (Niemi *et al.* 2018) and civics (Andersson 2016; Hess 2005) is higher than in other subjects taught at schools of general education. Correspondingly, teachers of natural sciences were not included in the sample.

The online questionnaire included 39 questions in five sections: the demographics (9 questions); dealing with extremism in a classroom (6 questions); how topics related to extremism find their way into the classroom (5 questions); personal views (what type of extremist ideology are they personally concerned about; their subjective assessment on the role of schools in prevention of extremism and on the causes and sources of extremism) and reacting to triggers (if they were to meet a student with an extremist worldview, whom would they contact) (11 questions); and self-reflection (7 questions). In a final question we asked respondents to write the name and e-mail address of a teacher who could potentially have dealt with extremism and related topics in their teaching practice.

This study uses data from all questions, except seven questions dealing with personal views on the sources and causes of extremism, and reaction to triggers. The latter were not included because they dealt with normative attitudes and hypothetical situations and not with the practical experiences of the teachers. In sum, teachers responded to and reflected over extremism-related instances in their professional teaching experience, and presented and explained examples in the comments added to their answers.

Participants

The pilot study was opened by 55 (F=48; M=7) educators among whom 14 filled it completely, and 41 left some parts undone. The high proportion of unfinished questionnaires was expected as the design of the inquiry did not require the respondents to provide an answer to all of the questions. The respondents could skip questions under certain circumstances (e.g. those who had not met a student with an extremist worldview could skip follow-up questions presented to those who had answered affirmatively).

The participants' age was between 24 and 66 (average age 48.3; median age 49.5). Among them, nine were teaching Estonian language and literature, 11 history and civics (usually taught by the same individual), and eight participants taught several subjects simultaneously (history, civil society, and religious education).

In the Estonian education system, the teaching load of the educator varies a lot due to the size of the school. For instance, in smaller rural schools, one teacher may be responsible for several subjects, while in bigger urban schools, the teacher can focus on one or two subjects. It is common that the same teacher teaches both history and civics classes because the teacher training of civics is a subset of history teacher training curricula in Estonian universities. Religious studies is an optional subject taught in around 14% of schools (Viilma 2018). As the teaching load of religious studies is very small, it is often an additional responsibility of teachers from other disciplines such as history, art history, or literature.

The teaching experience of the sample varied from 1 to 40 years (average 27.1 years). Among 28 teachers who answered to the questions of the demographics section, eight taught only at an upper secondary school (classes 10-12), the others taught at several levels simultaneously—20 at a secondary school (classes 7-9), 18 at a lower secondary school (classes 4-6) and two at a primary school (classes 1-3). Seventeen of the teachers were from counties (in total 11 counties were represented) and eleven teachers from five cities (six from Tallinn, two from Tartu, and one from Narva, Pärnu and Haapsalu, respectively).

The possible participants were invited to participate in the study through email lists of their subject unions and associations (the Estonian History and Civics Teachers' Association and Association of Estonian Language Teachers). As teachers of religious education do not have a union or association, they were contacted through an email list created and used by the teachers. All the list managers confirmed the call for participation prior to sending the invitation out. Additional invites were sent out to chosen schools in Tallinn, Ida and Lääne Viru county, and Lääne county. The contacts were found from the web pages of the schools.

Participation in the survey was anonymous, the IP-address trackers were turned off. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to submit contact information of teachers who are suitable for the study and could be interested in participating. Altogether, three email addresses were submitted for further contact.

Due to technical malfunctions, three versions of questionnaires were created with principles and questions remaining the same. As a result, 38 educators filled the first questionnaire, 0 the second one, and 17 the third one.

Method

The study follows the interpretivist approach and employs a qualitative thematic analysis.

Following Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006; 2019; 2021), we used a 'reflective thematic analysis' to identify patterns of meaning based on questions related to people's experiences, views and perceptions. We followed the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006: 87): we familiarised ourselves with the answers given; we identified answers with relevant meaning; we looked for potential themes; we defined and named the themes; we looked for patterns of themes; we produced the report.

Although we also counted the "Yes" and "No" answers given by the respondents

quantitatively, our focus was primarily on the comments added to the answers for four reasons:

(1) The "Yes" and "No" answers did not describe the teachers' experience and the reflective meaning teachers attribute to their experience. Comments added involve information on examples, experiences and meanings framed by the self-reflection of the teachers. In order to identify examples of extremism-related themes, behaviours and views they had witnessed in the classroom, they first reflected on definitions and defining characteristics of extremism and related themes. Thereafter they named examples and cases. As our findings demonstrate, teachers were often uncertain about how to define extremism and extremist ideology as well as whether the example that comes to their mind should be classified as extremism, extremism-related themes, a type of extremism one should be worried about, whether the use of extremism-related symbols is related or un-related to extremist views and/or commitment to an extremist movement.

(2) At some instances we identified the intended meaning not from "Yes" and "No" answers, but from the comment added. For example, to a question "Have you been worried about extremist views of some students?" one respondent answered "Yes" with a comment "There has been no reason." The comment added indicates that the answer "Yes" could also be interpreted as "No".

(3) The groups of both those who answered "Yes" or "No" involved respondents who were unsure whether the example and experience they had in mind should be classified with the term asked in the question, or were uncertain about how exactly to define the related term.

(4) As several teachers were struggling with terms and meanings, their internal reflections were not easily quantifiable.

In sum, we counted the numbers of "Yes" and "No" answers given, but our prime focus was on *what* kind of *experience* and *examples* teachers subjectively classified with the term *extremism* and how (is it violent extremism, an ideological view, use of extremism-related symbols with or without an extremist belief or behaviour), how teachers interpreted what goes on (both cognitively and emotionally) in students involved in their examples and what goes on in teachers themselves (self-censorship, teachers' sensitivity to issues perceived and experienced as sensitive and controversial).

The shortcomings of the chosen methodological approach

The questionnaire method yielded a significant amount of information from many teachers on multiple topics. The data attained allowed to map patterns of teachers' experiences, views and reflections and was sufficient for a pilot study.

During the analysis of answers and comments of the respondents, we recognised that the use of interviews would have yielded more of the type of information we were looking for (reflections, examples, experiences). In the research that follows this pilot

study, we will also use interviews.

The number of respondents filling the questionnaire to the end was sufficient for pilot study but could have been higher. The relatively low number of participants was likely due to three reasons. First, the number of participants fully completing an online questionnaire tends to be relatively low, irrespective of the research topic.

Second, the timing of data collection was from the middle of August until the first week of September. In the Estonian general education system, the school year begins on the 1st of September. Although most of the teachers were back from their summer holiday by receiving the invitation of participation, most teachers use this time to prepare for the upcoming school year. Therefore, the low number of participants (and people finishing the questionnaire 100%) could be due to the timing - it fell under the very busy preparation period as well as the first week of school during the third wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

The third possible reason is the relatively low knowledge of Estonian teachers about the content and vocabulary related to extremism and extreme movements. As extremism, especially the contemporary trends, is not widely discussed in the Estonian school system, most teachers do not have training in such topics. Therefore, insecurity, lack of knowledge, and uncertainties related to the topics mentioned above might lead to situations where educators either did not start filling the questionnaire, or did not finish doing it. Again, in the follow-up research this threshold is also likely passed better with interviews than with a questionnaire.

RESULTS

The results are organised and presented according to eight aspects (some related to questions asked, others related to the disciplinary domain of teachers or to specific patterns that repeated either in the comments or the answers of the respondents).

1. As 'ambiguities' are related to the definition of extremism (discussed in Introduction), Estonian teachers expressed uncertainties about the definition of extremism and whether the examples they have experienced in their teaching practice can be classified as extremism.

To the question "Have you met a student who supports an extremist ideology during the time you have been practicing teaching?", five teachers out of 25 answered that it depends on the definition of extremism or were unsure whether what they had seen and witnessed can be classified as extremism. One teacher, who answered "No", added a comment:

> Define extremism. Views cannot be extremist. Ideology can be considered extremist only, when means for its realisation are radical.

Six teachers opted for the answer "I am not sure" and added comments where they expressed uncertainty whether "homophobic self-expression" can be considered an ideology, whether students who praise Hitler's person or activists who are against fur farming fall into the category of extremists, when they are not willing to impose their views on others by force.

A teacher, who wrote "No" to the question which asked whether she has met extremism in the classroom, added a comment that some of her students have praised Nazism, but they had done it for reasons other than adherence to an extremist ideology or movement:

> Teenagers love to express extremist views simply with the intention of being in opposition.

Another teacher had met a student whose behaviour was problematic but who did not verbally support any specific form of extremism. She commented:

> In a couple of lessons one child in grade 7 answered to questions with a phrase "Allahu akbar" and refused to listen to discussions over homosexual love. They have not directly said or written anywhere that they support some extremist ideology.

> 2. When asked to think on controversial issues that are related to extremism, some teachers identified extremism with themes such as terrorism, climate, war, group affiliations (Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims) or movements (BLM, Fridays for Future) without specifying how the theme, group or movement is related to extremism (is it a perpetrator or victim). The identification of extremism through themes and actors perceived to be controversial was expected. When examples provided were local, they were more likely to be about extreme nationalism and far right than about terrorism and use of violence.

Teachers were asked to name examples of extremism which are socially controversial in Estonia or politically relevant and have been discussed in the classroom. Among the examples given, the answer 'terrorism' referred to a broad theme but its meaning was quite unambiguous, because the term refers to violent and radical behaviour. Another teacher mentioned the theme of 'climate and environment', also without providing any examples.

Others mentioned specific examples such as Black Lives Matter, Fridays for Future Estonia or "refugee was a Muslim", but did not explicate whether these examples were (related to) *targets* or *perpetrators* of extremism or both. For example, "refugee was a Muslim" could possibly relate to both Islamism or radical anti-immigration views. The same pattern repeated when 'Jehovah's Witnesses' were named as an example of religion-related extremism. When the religious group is mentioned without further explanation, it is unclear whether it is meant that Jehovah's Witnesses are an extremist organisation - as they have been classified by the Russian Federation (Fautré 2020)—or that they have been *targeted* by extremist policies of state.

It is important to notice not that they named actors or themes without explanation but that they recognised extremism by identifying themes which are controversial, and then named the actors and themes which in their view were related to extremism.

To a general and the open-ended question "Have you met a student who supports some extremist ideology? If yes, then please describe", ten teachers out of 25 answered "Yes" and six of them wrote an explanation or comment. They highlighted that students rarely have extremist attitudes and worldviews, and when it happens, it is most

likely not a manifestation of full and deep commitment to an extremist ideology.

In addition, when given no options, most examples mentioned by the teachers were about right-wing extremism and racism. They did not at all mention examples that would fall under categories such as 'conspiracy theories', 'environmentalism', 'terrorism' and 'wars' (which were mentioned by some when explicit themes were asked about later).

Two teachers mentioned Nazism and racism, while Anti-Semitism, extreme conservatism, extreme nationalism, homophobia and misogyny were mentioned once. One teacher distinguished between single occurrences and more regularly observed patterns as follows:

> I have met some, but not often. From time to time, I have some noisy students who start to express thoughts that are radically homophobic or racist. Such situations do not occur often, but every now and then still. In addition, when in social studies class I let students express their opinion in writing, they express extremist views from time to time.

Another teacher listed several single cases without identifying the regularity of their occurrence:

> There has been one student with antisemitic views, one supporter of an extreme conservative youth organisation, and some students whose statements of opinion have been racist or misogynistic.

One teacher focused on '*interest* in Nazism' and wrote that "[t]here have been students interested in Nazism every year". Another focused on '*support* to Nazi ideology" and recalled that "Once I had a student who expressed support to the ideology of NSDAP in an essay".

> 3. Extreme right ideology (including right-wing extremism, White Supremacy, Nazism, Neo-Nazism) and conspiracy theories are the ideologies and views teachers have witnessed students to support or to be interested in most.

To the explicit question, "Have you met a student who supports 'right-wing' ideology (skinhead movement, Nazism)? If yes, then please describe", 11 out of 25 answered "Yes" and seven of the latter added a comment or explanation. When we asked about 'right-wing' ideology and the wording of the question included 'Nazism', the number of positive responses increased by one, but the overall pattern of teachers' assessments observed above repeated—the examples witnessed occurred rarely and, by the teachers' assessment, the involvement of students with 'right-wing' extremism tends to be superficial.

Teachers mentioned Nazism six times and one of them specified "Neo-Nazism rather than Nazism". Another teacher observed that students have played and made jokes with their interest in White Supremacy and Nazism:

> White Supremacy, Nazism—but in the form of a joke, short statement or gesture, neither seriously nor from conviction.

A typical observation is that while there have been students interested in a given

ideology, their interest has been superficial:

> Sometimes, but not often, there have been students who have been interested in National Socialism. Mostly it has not been about a fully developed Nazi-ideology, they cannot be called real skinheads. Rather, they have been boys-teenagers who have simply been interested in the theme. They have often been interested in the theme merely superficially, without any deep involvement, and thus have considered themselves to be Nazis.

A significant proportion of "Yes" answers (9) were given to a question related to 'conspiracy theories.' 'Conspiracy theories' is an extremism-related theme that teachers tend to be subjectively most worried about, yet in their comments they tended to repeat options presented in the question and did not add many examples of their own.

Three teachers mentioned conspiracy theories related to vaccination (including anti-vaxxers) and the (denial of) coronavirus. Only one teacher mentioned a conspiracy theory not related to the coronavirus:

> I have met some students who have thought that the society of the world is being led by a hidden group of people.

The teachers also mentioned other worldviews and ideologies (Islamism, extreme nationalism, religious extremism, extreme leftism, extreme environmentalism) that they had witnessed being supported by students, but these ideologies were mentioned by not more than two teachers each. Among the latter, only extreme nationalism was explicitly related to social (inter-ethnic) relations in Estonia.

> 4. Although about half of the history teachers had met a student who supports an extremist worldview and the other half had not, there was still a discipline-specific pattern in which themes were identified as related to extremism. Communism, Nazism and Fascism, as well as wars in the Middle East and in Muslim-Majority countries, were the most often mentioned themes in history classes, while climate and conspiracy theories were the extremism-related themes less specific to any subject matter.

To the question "During the period of your teaching practice, have you met a student who supports an extremist ideology?", five teachers of history answered "No", while six answered "Yes". The pattern of answers was different when the question asked was about extremism-related themes that need to be discussed because of the course subject matter.

Not surprisingly, religious fundamentalism is discussed most often in the class of religious studies, and Communism, Nazism and Fascism in classes of history.

The discussion of more contemporary phenomena—wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, climate protests, refugees and immigration, minority rights and gender equality, fur farming, Covid-19—are less likely to only be discussed in classes of a specific subject matter.

> 5. When teachers noticed students using ambiguous symbols, memes and pictures that are related to extremism, they mostly observed phenomena related

to Nazism (e.g., drawings of swastika) and symbols of Communism/the USSR. In their assessment, students did not fully grasp the meaning of the symbols. When teachers noticed such phenomena, they were not particularly worried, and did not consider such instances as being beyond their ability to handle or as indicators of the students' commitment to an extremist ideology.

To the question whether they have seen symbols, memes, pictures etc. that are related to extremism being used by the students, symbols of Nazis were mentioned by nine teachers, and symbols of the USSR and Communism by four teachers.

Irrespective of whether the symbols were about Nazism, Communism, Satanism, White Supremacy or the picture of Che Guevara, the teachers generally did not express concern. They seemed confident that they can master such situations in class, and interpreted the cases where, for example, students wore shirts with symbols of Satanism or with the picture of Che Guevara, as instances where students either wanted to provoke someone (a teacher or other students) or did not really understand what the given symbol meant.

6. When asked about what kind of extremism teachers are most worried about, the respondents most often named 'conspiracy theories' and Islamism. When the question was limited to contemporary Estonia or "in the context of your school", teachers most often mentioned right-wing extremism and extreme nationalism.

When asked about extremist ideologies that make teachers worried in general, nine teachers named beliefs in conspiracy theories. They mentioned the denial of Covid-19, resistance to vaccination or to wearing protective masks, but in an individual case also the Flat-Earth theory. Among the reasons why conspiracy theories make teachers worried were: "other people will suffer", and "it can have a direct negative impact on the health and welfare of individuals and their relatives."

Six teachers, who were worried about Islamism, expressed worries over the terrorism and human casualties that accompany Islamism. One teacher, however, added a comment:

Oftentimes, everything related to Islam is considered Islamism.

Other extremisms were mentioned less frequently. One comment explained a worry related specifically to extreme leftism:

[This] ideology is imposed too strongly over people, it belittles and despises those who disagree.

Another teacher listed worries specific to climate extremism:

It involves too many double standards, hypocrisy, fanaticism and scaring of people.

Additionally, one teacher wanted to explicitly express the position of "not being worried":

Because I am not worried. Such movements have always existed. I trust that democracy and the state are sufficiently strong in Estonia, none of these can do any

major harm to our society.

When asked about an ideology that makes one worried in the context of Estonia or schools, five teachers mentioned right-wing or extreme nationalism without adding explanations.

Three teachers, however, expressed concerns that they have had over instances where a student in class either was in a vulnerable situation or expressed extremist views. Regarding the latter, one teacher wrote:

> I think that this young person has been in a search of understanding and such opinions will not remain with him for long.

Another teacher wrote:

> When I see a student who has become isolated and withdrawn due to their world-view, then I consult with some specialist in the school.

A third teacher wrote that they had been worried about Russian-speaking students who wore the Ribbon of St George—a symbol of Russian nationalism (Kolstø 2016)—in a class with predominantly Estonian-minded students.

> 7. The twelve teachers that responded to the open-ended question "what is the role of education in the prevention of extremism" approached the issue from four perspectives: knowledge from historic experience; a need for an approach that is based on facts, knowledge and science; competence to form an informed opinion; the ability to distinguish what should be considered extremism and what should not.

Teachers who expressed their views were generally enthusiastic about the positive role of education in the prevention of extremism. Their assessments differed in the details and fell into four perspectives.

First, education contributes to extremism prevention by teaching the *lessons of history*. One teacher wrote:

> You recognise the tree by its fruit. Education reminds us what the end of extremism was. When somebody says that Hitler was a great statesman, I always respond that he failed. Due to his actions, the German state was destroyed, the influence of Germany and German language diminished. Not to mention the sufferings that he caused to other peoples.

Another teacher pointed to a lesson to be learned from Communists:

> Communists also tried to raise a new type of human being. One learns in school about the consequences of their deeds…

A third teacher generalised and wrote:

> We can show from all of history what the outcomes of extremism can be.

Second, education fulfils its positive mission when teaching is based on *facts, knowledge* and *science*. One teacher wrote:

> Regarding anti-vaccinationism, the school should take a position that is unam-

biguous and based on science. I am worried because there are also teachers at school who refuse vaccination due to their own ideological views.

Third, particularly regarding extremism-related issues, some teachers highlight the positive role of an informed debate, which enhances understanding and allows students to take stand on controversial issues. In their comments, teachers wrote:

… students understand when they have discussed things through;

… it is better to discuss these themes than to search information from the internet on your own;

Students are quite insecure in their views. They often imitate opinions out of ignorance. Schools are safe spaces where all terms and their referents can be explained and understood. Many have later admitted that they now think more deeply about these issues or are more confident in participating in the related discussions.

Fourth, three teachers particularly highlighted the need to deal with the definition of extremism. One teacher wrote:

Education can prevent extremism only when the student recognises and knows what it is that can be considered extremism.

Another teacher questioned the negative frames that tend to accompany the term:

In theory, extremism is a phenomenon that could be needed or even useful. The whole issue is biased and loaded with premises.

A third teacher wrote:

It is of highest importance to teach children critical and analytical thinking. Yet, the teacher needs to create an atmosphere (in class and at school) which allows children to freely choose what to believe in; we can debate, but we cannot say to anyone that their worldview is wrong and that they are not allowed to believe in it; education needs to give such a perspective which allows children to distinguish humane and positive ideologies from extremist and violent ones.

8. Regarding the way they handle extremism-related content and situations in the classroom, teachers did not express any major challenges or hindrances. They did express some caution in applying a classification of extremism in specific situations of their teaching experience but were not particularly or excessively 'self-censored' when their teaching practice involves extremism-related themes.

The questionnaire included a set of questions where we wanted to know whether teachers have questions related to extremism that they feel they need to discuss with students but have refrained from such discussions, or vice versa, whether there have been extremism-related questions the students want to discuss but the teachers refrain from (feel self-censored). To our surprise, teachers did not express any significant 'internally perceived hindrances' in what they want, feel obliged to do or have to

do as teachers regarding extremism-related content.

When some teachers mentioned instances and themes that could be classified under the category of self-censorship, these instances seemed to be rare occasions. They did not represent a general habitual disposition framing the way they deal with extremist-related content in class.

Nevertheless, some teachers mentioned that they have met students who want to avoid themes like 'same-sex love' or abortion. One teacher tried to avoid the discussion of sexual relations and pregnancy, "because all they need to know is written in a textbook. I have nothing to add". Another teacher wrote that she tries to avoid themes which could be offending or particularly sensitive to some students in the class. Two teachers mentioned that they have experienced some pressure from parents, and two other teachers said that they try to avoid private issues but students keep bringing them up.

DISCUSSION

Firstly, the results show that not all Estonian teachers who participated in the study have faced or discussed extremism in a classroom.

Secondly, the participating educators do see the importance of education in preventing and tackling (violent) extremism. Several of them struggle with defining the terms (e.g., 'extremism', 'terrorism') and with the interpretation of student behaviour, which is a positive feature, because (as discussed in Introduction) extremism involves ambiguities and the competence to decide and act without seeking fixed rules.

Thirdly, the teachers who had tackled extremism in the classroom tended to hope that 'what happens in the classroom, is solved in the classroom'. However, if teachers are alone in such situations and need to make decisions on their own, they would benefit from guidance materials that provide alternative modes of action on the context-based themes and situations, as well as the knowledge about the choices of teachers in Estonia. The latter would empower *teachers* not only to make appropriate decisions, but would also make them more confident in tackling extremism in the classroom.

As extremism is a dynamic phenomenon—new movements and groups keep emerging—enhanced political and media literacy (Jerome & Elwick 2019) is needed for both teachers and students.

Finally, the primary 'local' topics related to extremism in Estonia are coronavirus and right-wing extremism. The popularity of right-wing extremism has been growing over the last few years due to grievances and uncertainties related to economic instability and perceived need to strengthen a group identity through feelings of superiority (Niemi et al. 2018: 5). More recently, the increasingly perceived challenge of extremism related to the denial of the Covid-19 virus or resistance to vaccination. Novel overlap between the two (Falkenbach & Greer 2021) existed in lower intensity during August and the beginning of September 2021, when respondents filled the questionnaire of this study, and reached to a much higher level of intensity two months later when the daily number of deaths due to coronavirus was often higher than the number

was for whole month (2) of August. There is a threat that the local right-wing populists do politicise topics related to coronavirus, including the need for vaccination. When this happens, teachers face a new topic that they need to discuss with their students in these uncertain times.

CONCLUSIONS

This pilot study examined 55 Estonian educators' (of whom 25 provided answers to most questions) experiences in discussing topics related to extremism with students and colleagues, as well as an overview of topics that students have raised.

Less than half of the teachers mentioned instances where they had met students supporting or following an extremist ideology. Most of the latter were not fully certain about how to classify the cases they had in mind. They struggled with 'ambiguity' that is partly due to the phenomenon and partly due to the Estonian system of education that does not include a nation-wide program for prevention of extremism or counter-radicalisation in education. Correspondingly, teachers feel quite uncertain about what their exact *duty*, *role* and *mandate is* as far as extremism is concerned.

Regarding the way in which teachers handle extremism-related content and situations in the classroom, they did not express any major challenges or hindrances. They do express some caution in applying a classification of extremism in specific situations of their teaching experience, but they are not particularly or excessively 'self-censored' in their teaching practice.

As the likelihood of teachers facing extremism-related topics in classrooms is increasing, we believe that there is a need to create guidance materials that take into account the Estonian context, to support teachers in preventing and tackling extremism. Additionally, when the Estonian state will adopt a national counter-extremism programme, teachers will have a better comprehension and perception in regard to what their exact *duty*, *role* and *mandate* is in tackling extremism in the classroom.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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Faculty approaches to diversity in Eastern European education: implications for teaching sensitive topics

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ABSTRACT: This article analyses the concept of diversity in education in the context of Eastern Europe and how its meaning might differ from that used in Western-focused literature. The study explores how faculty interpret diversity based on their experience of teaching contexts as being homogenous, situational, or internationalized, for which interviews have been conducted with university educators in Eastern Europe. In a phenomenographic analysis, three different approaches to how faculty engage with diversity in the classroom were identified: (1) exposing students to diversity as an external phenomenon through teaching; (2) focusing on the diversities among students in each classroom and learning how to navigate them; (3) using the diversities present in the classroom to facilitate inclusive teaching and learning. We argue that the meanings and intentions associated with understanding diversity are constitutive of how faculty see their role in facilitating student learning in a diverse classroom, especially of their strategies to address sensitive and controversial topics. Finally, we discuss the implications for teaching practice and academic development, in addition to the relevance of diversity in Eastern European classrooms.
KEYWORDS: Eastern Europe, higher education, diversity, sensitive topics, conceptions of learning

INTRODUCTION

Several researchers proposed the argument that certain commonly-used concepts, such as multiculturalism, diversity, democracy and alike, often reflect the experience of Western Europe and thus are narrowly defined. Indeed, political narratives and

concepts are often transferred or borrowed from the West to Eastern Europe for the sake of imitation (Homes & Krastev 2019). Instead, these concepts should be seen as historically embedded phenomena with meanings that reflect historical, cultural and social contexts, thus strongly linking these concepts with past collective experience (e.g. Berkes 2010; Koesel & Dunajeva 2017). Not only the meaning of these concepts differs but also surveys consistently demonstrate strong regional differences between attitudes towards issues related to multiculturalism, social values and diversity (Pew Research Center 2018).

For instance, within the field of education, Erzsebet Csereklye, a Hungarian expert on social and cultural diversity in education, suggests that Eastern European societies experienced different constructs of social diversity, in which teachers' perception of diversity within classrooms are rooted (Csereklye 2014). More specifically, during socialism, a regime that lasted nearly 50 years, interpretations of social diversity were determined by a class-based approach, while critical discussion of diversity in education was entirely missing (Balint, Gubi, & Mihaly 1980; discussed in Csereklye 2014). Today, this approach dominates pedagogical approaches, and diversity is still defined as connected to economic status rather than other characteristics (Csereklye 2014). Discussion about diversity and multiculturalism in education has not reached post-Socialist countries until the 1990s (Csereklye 2014), making these concepts relatively novel for education.

In this study, we look at classroom diversity, first as it is conceptualized in Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) and then as it is defined in the field of higher education. We wish to note that by discussing the experience of CEE universities, we do not mean to simplify reality and disregard differences, sometimes very pronounced, among the institutions in the region. Instead, our goal is to demonstrate how certain shared experiences and attitudes, as well as institutional factors, may explain the way university faculty conceptualize and mobilize diversity in their classrooms. We argue that the approach to the diversity of faculty in higher education depends on the societal, cultural, legal and political context in which their institutions operate and the social milieu where faculty socialize as educators.

Since "diversity is in itself a multi-dimensional concept, dependent on the cultural context and level of awareness of difference" (Claeys-Kulik et al. 2019: 23), consequently, in this study, we define diversity as a contextual concept that depends on one's experience. For example, increased migration in one country or a significant number of international students in national higher education institutions (HEIs) may have increased awareness of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. In contrast, diversity may be narrowly seen in other places in terms of gender or disability (Claeys-Kulik et al. 2019). In our study, we develop this argument further and highlight how diversity is defined and operationalized through faculty experiences of their classroom context, shaping their personal teaching theories and, more specifically, their attitudes and strategies to address sensitive and controversial topics.

METHODOLOGY

The authors of this study participated in KA203-C646E630 "SensiClass" Erasmus+ Project, which was a collaborative endeavour between four universities located in Hungary, Estonia, Poland, and the Czech Republic, aimed at developing pedagogical strategies to promote social change towards inclusive societies. In the framework of this project, the authors inquired from faculty in Eastern Europe about the challenges inherent to culturally diverse higher education classrooms. Interviewed faculty did not necessarily participate in the project. Hence, this research was motivated by the ongoing inquiry about teachers' experiences with diversity and sensitive topics in Eastern Europe under 'SensiClass' project.

The study builds on a survey (N=12), and semi-structured interviews (N=9) conducted with faculty members from project partner universities. The anonymized survey was conducted in April and May of 2020 and aimed at collecting faculty insights about the challenges and dilemmas they face or anticipate facing when teaching in diverse classrooms. Then, based on the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted online between May 2020 and August 2021. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to and during the interview. The interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes in length. We made no voice recording of conversations and instead took detailed verbatim notes that were complemented with interview scripts drafted directly after the interviews. In fact, research demonstrates that 'data quality between audio-recorded transcripts and interview scripts written directly after the interview were comparable in the detail captured,' and ideas may even be better organized in the script rather than transcript (Rutakumwa et al. 2020: 565).

Each interview followed a set of leading questions shaped by researchers to probe further the initial data obtained from the survey, yet participants had opportunities to reflect on what they felt was important and were encouraged to share experiences they themselves deemed relevant to the discussion of diversity in their teaching context. In addition, during the interview, we inquired about the wider teaching context in which university educators work; in specific, teachers were asked to reflect on the social and cultural composition of their society, national political trends, public and media discourses and the implications of these factors on their teaching environment. Interviews were conducted in English. All interviewees were from the Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines. They differed in terms of academic rank and level of teaching experience as well as in terms of institutional contexts in which they engaged with diversity in teaching. Table 1 describes the number and basic details about interviewed faculty.

Title and discipline	Country of Teaching	Institutional Context	Interview code
Religious Studies	Poland	National public university	Interview No. 1
Philosophy	Czech Republic	National public university	Interview No. 2
History	Ukraine, Hungary	National public universities, international private university	Interview No. 3
Medieval Studies	Hungary	International private university	Interview No. 4
Cultural Heritage Studies	Hungary	National public university, international private university	Interview No. 5
Education	Poland, Germany	International study programs at home and abroad	Interview No. 6
Medieval Studies	Hungary	International private university	Interview No. 7
Religious Studies	Estonia	National public university	Interview No. 8
Religious Studies	Estonia, UK	National university abroad, high school at home	Interview No. 9

Table 1. Description of Participants
Source: Own elaboration

To interpret the interview data, we employed phenomenographic analysis to explore how faculty conceptualize diversity based on their understanding of the teaching context and personal teaching histories and how these conceptualizations shape their teaching practice. In line with phenomenographic research tradition, we distinguished between the conceptions of a phenomenon and the approaches to the phenomenon and explored empirically the logical link between them (Prosser & Trigwell 1999; Åkerlind 2007; Marton & Pong 2005). In the context of our study, diversity represented a phenomenon under analysis. In our investigation and the interview coding process accordingly, we distinguished what faculty think diversity means in their classroom from how they approach handling diversity through teaching. Such distinction helped us to arrive at inductive categories for different conceptualizations of diversity and teaching approaches associated with them and to detail faculty self-conceptions of teaching in diverse environments of the CEE region. The coding process relied on comparison as an intellectual tool for identifying relevant categories establishing the boundaries of the categories, summarizing the content of each category, and inferring the relationship between them. The comparison also allowed to increase the validity of the findings as it provided 'a solid basis for generalizing the concepts and the relations between them to the same phenomena external to the sample' (Dorner, Misic, & Rymarenko 2020: 5; Boeije 2002). To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data analysis, both researchers completed the coding independently, and the codes were compared in the process to reach an agreement on the meaning and connection of categories.

Inductive categories that we developed via coding of the interview data reveal different levels of awareness about diversity among faculty, where a more inclusive and complex perception of various aspects of this phenomenon points to a more comprehensive understanding of it (see Åkerlind 2004; 2007). In line with previous research, the categories we assigned to the conceptions of teaching in diverse environments reveal variations in faculty focus on teaching towards content versus teaching towards understanding, and variations in focusing on teacher's role and strategies to focusing on students' and their development (see Åkerlind 2004; Ashwin 2006; González 2011). We also see these categories as relational responses to specific teaching situations, yet differently from Åkerlind (2004) and others, we do not imply the relationship of hierarchy among them. Rather we see them as developmental patterns that faculty may pursue in certain teaching contexts.

RESULTS

During our research, we found that diversity was a pertinent concept for all educators, and it is integral in all classrooms and societies across CEE countries. Students' groups may be heterogeneous in many aspects, such as socio-economic background, political views, physical and mental abilities, family backgrounds and others. Some faculty were keenly aware of this, pointing out that it is "challenging to know that everyone is different in some way, and it is difficult to see and explore diversity, as it is sometimes hard to know what diversity looks like" (Interview No. 2). In other instances, vari-

ous forms of diversity were not readily recognized as such and consequently surfaced during class discussion, at times leading to emotional, controversial or even hostile interactions in class.

While we observed hesitation and discomfort from teachers on how to address issues of diversity in class, we also noted an expansive body of literature, demonstrating that diversity in classrooms is an asset. Hence, teachers should be trained to properly deal with and foster diversity (e.g. Andrushchenko & Nesterenko 2015). Some faculty were also aware that student differences—whether in terms of their cultural characteristics, ethnicity or worldviews—are a positive asset nevertheless many struggled with how to handle conflicts arising from various forms of diversity. We took this conundrum as the foundation of our academic curiosity, striving to first assess how diversity is conceptualized by educators themselves and in what way they use these conceptions in their teaching practice.

As a result of phenomenographic analysis, we identified a coding scheme (Table 2) that reflects faculty perceptions about the nature of their teaching context, their conceptions of diversity within this context, and their approaches and strategies to handle diversity in the classroom. The categories presented in the table are the analytical summary of the coding results. The scheme shows that teaching environment, conceptions of diversity, and corresponding teaching strategies are closely interlinked, and we unpack the relationship between these categories in the sections below.

TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

We found that faculty perceive the diversity of their teaching environments primarily through personal histories and experiences of teaching and through their assumptions about the larger social, political, and demographic contexts in which they teach. Based on their perceptions, we identified three types of teaching contexts: 1) homogenous; 2) situational; 3) internationalized (see Table 3). It should be noted that these categories do not merely suggest levels of exposure to diversity in the CEE region, rather they point to the quality of exposures to this phenomenon and how it is experienced by CEE faculty.

Homogeneous teaching environment: Faculty with personal employment histories of working exclusively in CEE counties and teaching at (usually one) national university tend to conceptualize their teaching environments as superficially diverse or homogenous. They recognize lines of differences among students like diverse ideas about the subject matter, variations in social status, different national backgrounds. Yet, those are deemed less significant than diversity related to culture, nationality, religion or ethnicity. Those are perceived as absent from the teaching context. International students do not add to classroom diversity as they come from neighbouring countries and, according to interviewees, do not differ substantially from the students at home. Local representatives from ethnic or religious minorities rarely appear among the student body. Interestingly, the perceived homogeneity was referred to by some faculty as a source of biases, prejudice and even xenophobia due to students' lack of awareness about other social groups that might or might not be present in the society.

They also see perceived homogeneity as contributing to a lack of awareness and skills among teachers and students to meaningfully engage with diverse groups or reflect on them as part of the course content and learning activities.

Situational teaching environment: Faculty who worked within and outside the CEE region and taught in both national and international universities or within different universities in one country conceptualize their teaching contexts as situational that has diversity in various degrees and always subject to a different set of factors. They pick on differences and variations in their student body that are related to institutional distinctions, educational cultures, learning styles, or professional backgrounds, in addition to larger national or cultural characteristics. Sometimes, these can go down to variations in discussion format preferences or students' readiness to engage with certain content types (e.g. based on ethical or religious values). Faculty working in situational contexts recognize that certain aspects of diversity might matter more than others even within the same classroom. Accordingly, they see such teaching contexts as constantly changing and thus requiring a great deal of learning and adjustment from their side as teachers.

Internationalized teaching environment: CEE faculty teaching at international universities or study programs across or within their countries perceive their teaching context as internationalized, where both students and teachers are members of the global academic community. They recognize and accept all forms of diversity as given among their students and streamline differences as contributing to the process of mutual learning. They are also mindful of their own as well as their students' expectations of belonging to an international teaching and learning environment. Some faculty also pointed to the dilemmas associated with students perceiving the global community as 'Western', which also impacts how they as teachers should address and deal with such perceptions. As was evident from the interviews, teaching in such context often exposes faculty to the dilemmas of ethics and justice of knowledge production, sensitivity towards issues of decolonized knowledge, and mindfulness about creating equal opportunities for students to contribute to the academic debate.

FACULTY CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DIVERSITY

Faculty conceptualization of diversity, summarized in Table 4, is directly linked to their perceptions of the teaching context. In other words, these conceptualizations demonstrate various degrees and breadth of awareness about diversity depending on the context through which faculty were exposed to it. In general, we found that faculty were willing and able to see diversity in its visible and hidden forms with varying degrees of nuance and complexity. Those in international teaching environments begin with the assumption that everyone is diverse in one way or another, whereas other teachers thought some student cohorts are diverse while others are not. We also found that teaching experience in varying contexts contributes to broad conceptualizations of diversity by faculty.

1. How do faculty members perceive their teaching environment?	**2. How do faculty members perceive diversity?**	**3. How do faculty members approach teaching in diverse environments?**
1.1. Homogeneous • Differences within institutional or national contexts are seen as arbitrary. • Prejudice against the ‘other'. • Lack of skills to navigate diversity.	2.1. Diversity is seen as largely lacking or invisible.	3.1. Expose students to diversity as an external phenomenon through teaching. • Teachers introduce students to different viewpoints and interpretations. • Teachers use case studies exposing students to diversity dilemmas to put their prior assumptions or mental models in question, expose moral reasoning behind controversial judgements. • Sensitive and controversial topics are a matter of concern and are often discussed individually with students rather than in all class discussions.
1.2. Situational • Teaching context varies across countries, educational systems and institutional cultures. • Teacher-student relationships differ across contexts. • Learning styles differ even within similar contexts.	2.2. Diversity is specific to concrete classroom context.	3.2. Focusing on the diversities among students in a given classroom and learning how to navigate them. • Teachers are mindful of the classroom context when selecting content, activities, and assignments. • Teachers seek to adapt their classroom strategies to work effectively in different contexts. • Sensitive and controversial topics are approached with caution but have their place in classroom discussions.
1.3. Internationalized • Teachers and students are part of a global learning community. • Being mindful about the ethical dilemmas associated with internationalization.	2.3. Diversity is a given feature of any classroom	3.3. Using the diversities present in the classroom to facilitate inclusive teaching and learning. • Engaging students in critical reflection about their own assumptions and identities. • Supporting learning through difference. • Establishing an environment for safe communication. • Supporting learning through lived experiences. • Sensitive topics are invited in the classroom backed by teacher's experience in handling controversial discussions.

Table 2. Coding Scheme
Source: Own elaboration

	Differences within institutional or national contexts are seen as arbitrary		**Lack of skills to navigate diversity**
Homogeneous	"diversity means Erasmus students, or a few foreigners. A lot of diversity comes from [neighboring countries]. These students adapt very well. Diversity that is not so much diverse." (Interviewee 1). "There are differences in terms of [students] political and religious views. The latter is rather ideas about religion, like Islam. Another difference is social context: special needs, village—city tension. Not really multiculturalism." (interviewee 2).	"due to lack of diversity in real life, they [students] are less aware,... plus we have xenophobic sentiment. So this is a tricky paradox. We don't have others but we don't like them. " (Interviewee 1). "many people talk about ending racism of Roma, but in reality they are mean and racist...maybe useful to meet someone from these sensitive groups" (Interviewee 2).	"[Students have] lower level of cultural empathy" (Interviewee 1). "The one big problem in our faculty is that everything is theoretical. There is not much space for practical knowledge, like this.[...] It would sensitize people to these topics." (Interviewee 2)
	Institutional differences	**Educational culture differences**	**Learning style differences**
Situational	"If you teach in a place like [international university], you are confronted with [diversity] challenges, you have to work out a strategy. But if you teach in the [national] higher education system, where you have some elements but not to this extent, then your reactions can be very problematic. It is a matter of being exposed to such situations. "(Interviewee 5).	"The hierarchy does not exist in [country A], but in [country B] very much so. We have more activities in [country A] after we finish classes. There are safe spaces after the finals and they [students] invite us. These are like nonformal meetings. The atmosphere we can talk informally... We are part of their activities. [...] In [country B] it's impossible. It's banned to drink with students. I think these must be historical and social reasons. The diversity is bigger in [country A] than in[country B]." (Interviewee 6)	In [national university 1] is very traditional. Students are used to receive lectors. It is hard to have the talk. In [national university 2] it is easier. We actually had some conversations." (Interviewee 3) "You have to put everything in your context anyways. So methods can be used, from the Western European context, but you have to add your own content. What I see is because Eastern Europe is not as "sexy" as Western Europe. Western Europeans often don't understand Eastern European societies, so they simply don't grasp the context" (Interviewee 9)
	Belonging to a global learning community	**Being mindful about the ethical dilemmas associated with internationalization**	
Internationalized	"When you have a very diverse class with bright students—they are part of the global youth—but they come from very diverse backgrounds".	"In Europe the way we create knowledge is very ethnocentric. When I have students from Cameroon, Ethiopia... they try to find articles and science in their own language! They translate and show us how many new theories and knowledge they also produce. It is our problem in Europe. We forget about indigenous methodologies, and we do not have enough connections... I mean ethical research and didactics. [Hence] I decided to focus on ethical symmetry: I found a solution to give equal opportunity to students to share their own voices." (Interviewee 6) "It is very hard to help students who have expectations to write like "Western people" and manage their expectations while there is an opposite trend in the world, recognizing "different Englishes." (Interviewee 4)	

Table 3. Faculty Perceptions of Teaching Environment
Source: Own elaboration

Faculty members who think of their teaching environments as homogeneous conceptualize diversity as lacking or as an exceptional phenomenon. They conceive diversity as a collection of concrete characteristics (ethnical, religious, cultural, etc.) that are identifiable within the student body. Diversity thus can be present in the classroom only when there are students with those identifiable characteristics; otherwise, it is seen as a phenomenon to which students should be introduced by the teacher. The focus, therefore, is made on improving students' awareness about diversity by increasing their knowledge of various cultures, religions, thinking perspectives, etc., through course content and learning activities.

Faculty teaching in situational contexts also sees diversity as a combination of identifiers such as ethnicity, social status or culture as well as less visible characteristics such as professional backgrounds or institutional learning cultures. Their understanding of diversity is also broader and more nuanced, and they attribute it to all students in various degrees and combinations. Interestingly, one of the interviewees suggested that diversity refers primarily to employing various teaching methods depending on the composition and the learning needs of the audience. Diversity is, therefore, a contextual feature of each classroom with both advantages and constraints. Adjustments on the side of the teacher should reinforce the former and overcome the latter to create successful learning experiences.

Finally, faculty working exclusively in an international context see diversity as an unavoidable feature of any classroom. Their conceptualization of diversity includes all the above-mentioned characteristics and contextual features, such as nationality, religion, gender and others. Yet, they are also mindful of students' individual learning abilities, authentic experiences, expectations, and feelings. Diversity for them is, therefore, not a collection of identifiers or contextual variations but an underlying normative foundation of the teaching and learning community. The focus is then on working through this foundation to tailor to all students' individual learning and developmental patterns.

TEACHING APPROACHES AND SENSITIVE TOPICS IN THE CLASSROOM

During our inquiries, teachers shared stories of students with emotional outbursts, anger or outrage when discussing certain topics during class. Nearly all felt unprepared to address neither the affected students nor the entire class properly. We noticed that in almost all instances, issues associated with diversity have brought up professional challenges for teachers, unsure how to respond or deal with arising situations. One of the interviewed teachers from Poland, for example, complained that a student claimed that African was uncivilized while there was an African student in the classroom. A teacher from Estonia shared that in the context of learning about the Holocaust, a student expressed antisemitic views. Two teachers faced a situation when at least one student in class vocally opposed gay rights. In all cases, teachers shared their inability to adequately respond and treat the situation in class.

Diversity as (non)identifiable characteristic	"Diversity… usually you refer to different ethnicities, nationalities and religions. But you can go into broader definition: social, economic diversification within population. I think diversity also means radically different political orientation. But maybe it is useful to stick with the first definition" (Interviewee 1) "…not only a visible diversity, invisible diversity is very important: social background etc. It is difficult to see and explore diversity because there is much homogeneity, hard to know how diversity would look like" (Interviewee 2)
Diversity as contextual feature	"Diversity means for me students who are involved in [certain]courses and programs, they are coming from different backgrounds: different countries, religions, genders, cultures, different educational background, which also involves behavior and expectations in classrooms. Many other things are defining their identity(Interviewee 5) "I use this word in this way: you have diversity in opinions; you have diversity in meanings – how people are interpreting different phenomena; diversity comes from different contexts - " (Interviewee 8)
Diversity as normative and normal	"Multiple diversity is normal!" (Interviewee 6) "For me diversity is pretty diverse. I come from different kinds of settings. I think the essence of diversity is that it's multifarious. [...] Socio-economic status, educational background is also very important and often overlooked, age, ability – all those are important. I am exposed to a lot of linguistic diversity. In that position it's the usual difference between students, how they express themselves and how they feel, how it makes them succeed " (Interviewee 7)

Table 4. Faculty Conceptions of Diversity
Source: Own elaboration

Considering faculty perceptions about their teaching context and their understanding of diversity, we identified three different approaches to teaching: (1) exposing students to diversity as an external phenomenon through teaching; (2) focusing on the diversities among students in each classroom and learning how to navigate them; (3) using the diversities present in the classroom to facilitate inclusive teaching and learning. Each approach contains distinct sets of strategies as to how diversity is handled and how sensitive and controversial topics are addressed that are summarized in Table 5.

Exposing students to diversity as an external phenomenon through teaching. We found that faculty members who see their teaching environment as homogenous nevertheless perceive diversity to be an asset in the learning process. Some of them highlighted the importance of engaging students via multiple perspectives in mastering their subject matter; others consider diversity helpful in addressing and overcoming social biases and prejudice embedded in CEE society, still others believed discussing diversity to be essential for acquiring non-academic skills such as intercultural communication. However, as these faculty see diversity to be external to their classroom, they take it as their primary role and task as teachers to expose students to this phenomenon. In this regard, faculty see themselves as holders of essential knowledge and understanding about the diverse 'others' that they need to teach to their students.

Students, on the other hand, are perceived as those whose knowledge and prior mental models related to diversity need to be challenged and transformed through teaching. Accordingly, the classroom strategies of faculty members reflect this self-conception of teaching. It is up to the teacher to bring students' attention to different viewpoints and perspectives, introduce the case studies to work on diversity dilemmas and invite students' moral reasoning with regard to diversity in addition to an evidence-based judgment. The goal of these activities and explanations is usually to inject into students' understandings and frameworks of diversity that teachers deem appropriate and just.

At the same time, these faculty are cautious about provoking controversial debates and prefer to avoid discussions on sensitive topics in the classroom. If such discussions emerge, they are handled on an individual basis and often outside of the classroom. Among the reasons reported by faculty to justify such an approach are fears to provoke conflict in the classroom or step into the discussion they won't be able to handle effectively, as well as lack of skills to facilitate controversial discussions with the learning value to the students.

Focusing on the diversities among students in each classroom and learning how to navigate them. Faculty exposed to various teaching contexts tend to prioritize a more audience-focused and reflective approach to teaching. They use their knowledge of the national, institutional or educational contexts to learn about their students as well as are open to question their prior assumptions about students as they teach.

Conceptions of Teaching	**Examples of teaching strategies**		
Expose students to diversity as an external phenomenon through teaching.	***Teachers introduce students to different viewpoints and interpretations***	***Teachers use case studies exposing to diversity dilemmas to practice relevant skills, expose moral reasoning behind controversial judgements judgement***	***Sensitive and controversial topics are discussed individually***
"Teaching multiculturalism by dry run – teaching how to swim without water, … And we have an essentialist knowledge about cultures. " (Interviewee 1)	"Maybe it's not the perfect thing. I try to point: different interpretations and different understandings…. I show different ways and reasons." (Interviewee 1.) "I tell them it is normal and common to be afraid of foreigners, but it is different to be xenophobic. Afraid and hate are different." (Interviewee 2)	"the most important is good and bad examples, from other schools, from abroad. So that way we can see in practice how it works…. Students collect case studies about sensitive topic. During one seminar we discuss these, and we try to systematically analyze" (Interviewee 2) " They discuss in groups. This is a way for me to explain to the students, regardless of what it is about – abortion, LGBT, etc. - when you can accept rational argument, when linked to moral argument, then judgments become difficult." (Interviewee 1)	"it's easy when you have a discussion with one student only. … I don't engage in huge explanations. I am afraid if I engage farther, I would provoke stronger comments… I want to avoid that, I don't want to provoke and don't want confrontation. " (Interviewee 1)
Focusing on the diversities among students in a given classroom and learning how to navigate them in a particular context.	***Teachers are mindful of the context when selecting content, activities and assessment.***	***Same strategies are adapted to different contexts.***	***Sensitive and controversial topics are approached with caution but have their place in classroom discussions to an extent***
"when you get in a situation when you expect something in terms of knowledge or skills in a classroom, then you have to offer a balanced opinion on that, it has to be commented. But never in a way that would blame the student. Not like "you should have learnt it ages ago" or "how could you have got here without knowing this?" [It is] I who can be mistaken in my evaluation and expectations [of the students]." (Interviewee 5).	"One brilliant paper I had in mind to give them for discussion was about sexual toys. It was a cultural economics paper that demonstrated well how the idea of body and sex change. I was thinking if I should do it in the Catholic University and I decided not to". (Interviewee 3). "the first thought is the variety of methods I use in teaching. My toolbox, method-wise, is what I mean. Giving students different assignments, so if one student is not good with memorizing, they might be better at doing other tasks." (Interviewee 9) "Another big challenge is the reaction of students to certain things. Like evaluation: if I tell a student that their seminar work is pretty good, this means for some that they will be happy for a few days, the prof said it's pretty good. But somebody else will take it as failure, "pretty good' may mean rubbish. The background from where you are coming from and expectations are very different." (Interview 5)	"At one point, we asked all the students about their own research project from that point of view. One student said he feels there is no relevance at all. … So we asked the student to elaborate on his opinion. We then engaged in a conversation. Soon it was clear that for example some elements were relevant for the research and then gender was a factor. Multistep, indirect discussion of the issue – this was the strategy. I think this strategy would work at [University] as well. The diversity is not so expressed there, but at the same time it does not mean you don't have strong preconceptions and attitudes toward people, or conclusions based on assumptions, very problematic assumptions. I have a few cases of political attitudes… and then it became a sensitive issue. This strategy would be equally fruitful." (Interviewee 5)	"It takes us back to the balance: how to create an atmosphere in which students can freely express themselves and there is a line, and when students cross it, they are confronted. You may feel that a fellow student does not argue rightly, but it should not be connected with race, religion etc. That's the line." (Interviewee 5) I think we all have quite specific topics [that is sensible]. I know a lot from papers, but I don't know how to handle ethical issues. I think what we do is often talk among colleagues our experience. We share our stories" (Interviewee 3).

Using the diversities present in the classroom to facilitate inclusive teaching and learning.	***Engaging students in critical reflection about their own assumptions and identities.***	***Establishing am environment for safe and shared communication.***	***Sensitive topics are invited in the classroom backed by teacher's experience in handling such discussions***
"I don't like to stand there to as a single authority figure. I like having students engage in dialogue. They come because they are fundamentally interested in the topic. It is a more interactive classroom." (Interviewee 4)	" I have to bring it in a delicate way. I am not challenging their views but want them to think critically. I do it through discussions. I say I read their essays and I see they take some things for granted. I ask them questions about the origin of Christianity…I ask them about the relationship between colonial power tactics and religion. I ask questions and make them think. " (Interviewee 4) "I think the awareness helps a lot. I can see that there is a difficulty when no such awareness exists… that working in a university we are teaching about how to communicate and be a researcher… when there is a better awareness, Self-reflection I think are also very good." (Interviewee 7)	"At the beginning we always establish rules and norms for our own classes and how we communicate. We also discuss how we communicate via email too. At the beginning we lay down all this foundation. Students know the strategies we use to communicate and the majority can decide." (Interviewee 6)	" I just let the discomfort be, I didn't call out anyone. I did signal that I liked the provocativeness of the topic and explained why it was interesting. I call out polemical ideas, but I had to learn how to do it…For example, I never thought about the implications about colonialism. And now because of these students – I am so grateful – I can recognize how settle and complex this issue is. Now I can pick out the problems better." (Interviewee 4)
	Supporting learning through difference	***Learning from lived experiences***	
	"I am really happy to say that I have fantastic students. They are from different countries and they are connected with different social, cultural and political situations. … With such a huge, diverse group they do not fight and disagree, but they try to find a solution to understand… they are 20 students and have a fantastic opportunity to understand differences." (Interviewee 6)	"the traditional way of teaching is very problematic in extremely diverse classrooms. Therefore, often the way to do it is to use case studies. It is also good for students because they can bring in their own cases." (Interviewee 5) "when we have the seminar, they have their own experiences and thoughts. They like to share their experiences. they agree or disagree with theories. I also learn a lot." (Interviewee 6)	

Table 5. Self-Conceptions of Teaching and Teaching Strategies in Diverse Classroom
Source: Own elaboration

While being attentive to the audience, faculty members still decide on how diversity will be employed in teaching. For example, they are making decisions on which content materials, activities and assignments are the most appropriate for their class. In this regard, they would try not to select content materials that can be deemed too controversial, or they would choose case studies they think are more relevant to the background of their students. Likewise, they tend to adapt their teaching methods and strategies to work effectively in different contexts and with different groups of learners. Rather than teaching students about diversity, these faculty invite students to engage with it in the class through activities such as group discussions, debates, structured case analysis, role plays, and authentic research tasks. The goal of these activities would be for students to reconcile differences by engaging with the perspectives of their peers.

Controversial topics and sensitive discussions have their place in the classroom, yet only when teachers are confident that they fit the study context and that students would be able to handle such discussions smoothly. Otherwise, sensitive or controversial topics are taken with hesitation, and the need to have specific skills for handling such debates is cited as a necessary pre-condition.

Using diversity in the classroom to facilitate inclusive learning and critical self-reflection. Faculty teaching in international universities and programs capitalize on diverse compositions of students as a mutual learning opportunity and of their classroom as a shared learning space for students and teachers alike. Students are invited to understand rather than confront differences by engaging with the authentic experiences and backgrounds of their peers. In this regard, special attention is given to establishing shared terms of engagement and communication in the classroom, as well as ethical considerations about shared knowledge production. Teaching strategies identified under this approach challenge students to critically reflect on their own assumptions and identities and use their own lived experiences or contextual knowledge to challenge the existing academic scholarship and to contribute to it. Sensitive or controversial topics are consciously invited in the classroom as a helpful learning tool to approach diverse, complex and emotional aspects of social phenomena under study. Yet, faculty are mindful of developing facilitation skills for such discussions by constantly reflecting on their own and their colleagues' classroom experiences.

Overall, the three identified approaches to teaching might be seen as distinct stages of development that faculty go through as their exposure to diversity and its various aspects increases or if they confront multiple challenges related to diversity. Our findings are then relevant for universities that are experiencing increasing internationalization of their student bodies, whether as a result of intensified exchange programs or opening up their universities to international students.

DISCUSSION

Korhonen and Weil (2015) have argued regarding the internationalization in higher education that it has a significant impact on teachers' self-conceptions and that it

pushes them to re-evaluate their practice and their roles in the classroom depending on how they confront new realities and challenges. Our findings suggest that diversity context impacts teachers' self-conceptions and practices in a similar way, pushing them to adapt and tailor their practices to their specific teaching environment. Furthermore, our analysis points out that faculty conceptualizations and beliefs about diversity are predominantly shaped by their professional and personal teaching experiences rather than the CEE societies' wider national, social, or political characteristics. Namely, personal exposures to diversity via classroom compositions, subject matter, or institutional cultures are more important than social, political, or country-specific characteristics in shaping faculty perceptions and strategies in relation to diversity.

We found it helpful to distinguish between the 'what' and the 'how' aspects of the diversity phenomenon, which allowed us to clarify the relationship between conceptions of diversity and responsive teaching approaches. We found that faculty strategies to handle diversity are strongly linked to their understanding of diversity itself. In this regard, diversity is understood as either an external or internal phenomenon and the nature of diversity is differently situated. Faculty might conceptualize it merely as presence or absence of certain characteristics in the student body (e.g. national, cultural, socio-economic), as a feature of concrete classroom context that shifts depending on the topic or content discussed, or as an inherent condition of any teaching environment in today's internationalized and interconnected higher education context. This implies different degrees of awareness about diversity and its defining aspects among faculty along the scale of complexity, from the collection of identifiable and stable characteristics to the complex web of shifting identities, relationships, and context. This finding is consistent with the notion of degrees of complexity or 'breadth of awareness' about the phenomenon based on individual exposures to different aspects of it (Åkerlind 2007: 26). In addition, we found that faculty awareness about diversity was also subject to personal or community reflections about teaching context and strategies. Namely, those who tend to reflect critically about their teaching experiences regardless of the context formed more nuanced conceptualizations of diversity, as opposed to those who were less prone to reflective practice. This adds further evidence to the argument that different kinds of reflective practice (self-reflection, semi-formal faculty conversations) contribute positively to faculty development (Roche & Marsh 2002; Dorner & Belic 2021).

Varying understandings of diversity inform faculty conceptions of teaching in diverse environments or what Fox (1983) defined as 'personal theories of teaching'. The three approaches to teaching identified in our analysis each specify a distinct role of a teacher and his/her learning expectations for the students. It should be noted that these approaches are not mutually exclusive but rather represent certain developmental patterns for faculty in different contexts. The level of exposure to more diverse environments and diversity-related challenges may encourage faculty to be more reflective and to take more student-focused approaches, as opposed to those teaching in a homogeneous context. Similarly, faculty willingness and confidence to engage in sensitive and controversial discussions increase with their exposure to more diverse contexts as they are expected to employ those skills more often. We also find

consistency with the argument that personal theories of teaching essentially shape faculty attitudes to students and their learning (Fox 1983; Kreber 2010). In our case, self-conceptions of teaching in diverse environments strongly impacted how faculty employed teaching strategies across contexts and perceived student learning, especially in relation to teaching sensitive and controversial topics.

Finally, it is also important to recognize that teaching about diversity or simply handling issues related to diversity within classrooms must be embedded in the political realities of the region. Clark Kerr's observation from 1990 remains true today: there is tension between the "internationalization of learning" on the one hand and "intensification of the interests of independent nation states in the conscious use of these institutions for their own selected purposes" (Kerr 1990: 5). Soon after regime change, scholars posed the question of what the future of Eastern European higher education is, whether traditions rooted in communism will prevail or liberal, Western ideas will dominate, partly due to internationalization of higher education (e.g. Berg & Vlăsceanu 1991). We see a similar tension today, especially with the recent political changes in many Eastern European countries. Some political leaders, most notoriously in Poland and Hungary, have explicitly turned away from liberal values, which is mirrored in their education system, promoting a certain type of educational content, a "proper" national history and appropriate values (e.g. Kürti 2020). Some observers noted that in these countries, "school curricula … have been trending more toward patriotism and religion, with less emphasis on diversity" (Scherle & Heinrich 2017). As we demonstrated in this article, these tensions manifest today, too. Consequently, teachers' roles in handling sensitive topics and controversies in class have become even more imperative for creating a democratic and safe learning environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Our study was motivated by the shared experience of teachers from the CEE region, who expressed their need for help to handle various situations in classrooms that resulted from differing views, controversial statements and growing intolerance they noticed in their classrooms. We embarked on the study with the initial goal of demonstrating that diversity is a relevant and integral feature of the CEE classrooms, yet the way it is conceptualized, mobilized and treated in classrooms may differ. Through our analysis, we established various categories to group faculty's experiences with teaching, perception of diversity and approach to teaching. We highlighted the importance of a teaching environment that explains how diversity is defined and consequently navigated inside classrooms. Our research also suggests that regardless of the level of experience and teaching context, mastering facilitation skills is an essential pre-condition for being able to handle controversial topics effectively.

We acknowledge the small scale of our analysis, which makes it difficult to imply straightforward generalization of findings. Yet, we anticipate that our initial inquiry will encourage further research into the CEE context and faculty experiences related to it. The relationship between teachers' perception of context and their teaching approaches has an important implication for faculty support and academic develop-

ment initiatives in CEE context. At present, faculty professionalization in addressing diversity seems to be linked to their personal exposure to the phenomenon in different teaching contexts. To support faculty in developing towards more comprehensive approaches and strategies for engaging with diversity, opportunities should be made available for them to reflect professionally about their teaching context and challenges associated with it, to gain additional awareness about aspects and features of diversity, and to earn and practice skills necessary to engage it effectively in teaching.

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ABSTRACT: This is a book review of the *Academic careers of women and men*, edited by Renata Siemieńska. The authors of the chapters presented in the book show selected problems of gender inequality and discrimination in Polish higher education compared to other countries. They analyze excitingly, among others: the low share of women in technical and engineering sciences in European countries, mechanisms marginalizing women in the surgical profession, a small percentage of women in the staff of art universities, as well as the course of doctoral studies and access to research grants awarded to women and men by Polish institutions. The discussed aspects also present a historical perspective and investigate the causes of the existing state of affairs. The research results on the situation of women in the academic world cited in the book prove that regularities persist for years, such as slower development of scientific careers among women or their low presence in higher positions in the academic hierarchy.
KEYWORDS: academic careers, gender inequalities, gender differences, higher education, gender studies

The reviewed book raises the subject of differences between women and men in terms of the possibilities of scientific development. It presents research carried out by an international group of social scientists. This item is part of the phenomenological discourse that appeared in Europe in the second half of the 20th century

and developed in Poland very clearly over the last two decades. The main conclusions, supported by the research results described in this book, still show the discriminatory picture of women in the academic world and its potential theoretical reasons. However, the authors draw attention to the growing role of women in the Polish scientific world compared to women's academic careers in other countries.

The scientific editor of the book *Academic careers of women* (2019) is prof. Renata Siemieńska. Both the editor herself and the other authors are scientifically related to equal treatment of women and men or the situation of women in science and the labour market.

The book *Academic careers of women and men* is divided into four main parts: contemporary research issues, historical outline, description of doctoral studies, and presentation of the specificity of applying and awarding grants or funding research. The first part presents the small presence of women in the scientific world in Poland and the world in recent years. It draws attention to the imbalance between women and men in terms of scientific careers and emphasises the low share of women in technical and engineering sciences in European countries. The second part presents how the image of the different careers of women and men in science in Poland has changed over the years. Moreover, the presented mechanisms may impact the marginalization of women in the profession of a surgeon, recognized as a male profession, with a small number of women working at art academies. The third part describes the course of doctoral studies in preparation for research work, describing the level of postgraduate studies, the study picture and the overall assessment of the comparison of women to men. The last part, the fourth, presents the inequality of access to research grants awarded to women and men by Polish institutions, as well as a description of mechanisms that may mediate in this respect. All four parts contain fifteen texts, preceded by an introduction and concluded with conclusions from the described research. The entire book also ends with a summary containing the study's findings, pointing to the persistence of barriers and differences in the scientific careers of women and men, emphasizing that women experience these barriers more often than men.

Moreover, an interesting thread concludes with a description of the specifics of these differences and difficulties. The proposed structure of the book seems to be very clear. Beginning with the presentation of general data and historical comparison of it gives the reader a broad picture of the situation of women and men at universities, constituting a kind of introduction to contemporary research issues, based on the appearance of scientific careers, the image of doctoral studies and the realities and conditions of financing scientific research from national measures.

The thematic breadth of the book can certainly satisfy any reader. Both people associated with the scientific world will find here a number of interesting theses that can constitute the basis for their further research, but also people utterly unfamiliar with the system of the academic world or the characteristics of scientific work may become interested in the image of gender differences or professional inequality in todays and previous times. Each chapter is described in detail, explaining the variety of research methods and results and is enriched with clear, numerous tables and graphs that illustrate the results described. Each text is topped with a structured summary containing

the most important thoughts and theses from each chapter relating to the overall research results described in the first paragraph.

Four texts attracted my attention, each representing a different part of the book among all the texts. At the same time, the first text in the volume is *Determinants of the academic careers of women and men in the world—an outline of the issues and research review*. It provides an accurate account of the gender characteristics and differences between men and women in the scientific world. This is a kind of excellent introduction for the reader, introducing him to the results so far, describing in detail the situation of women and men in the conditions of higher education and Poland in the European arena.

The second of them, which is part of the topic of women in the academic world in Poland, is the chapter entitled *Armored ceiling: why are there so few women in the faculty of art universities in Poland?* presenting not only the preferences of men and women to work as an academic lecturer in their field of study but also the potential reasons that may affect the assessment of this profession by women as unattractive. Moreover, the research results not only show statistical data on gender differences in terms of scientific and professional choices, but most of all reveal the dilemma faced by the art world, even when it is limited within the framework and rules of education centres. Interestingly, the authors point out that it is a hermetic group in which contacts and acquaintances take the lead, despite the postulation that diversity is an integral part of creative processes and spaces. However, this arouses considerable curiosity about the priorities of the artist and the academic group, which may encourage readers (working in science) to explore this area in their subsequent research.

Then, an equally important text, this time in the field of the discourse on doctoral studies (part III of the volume), describes: *The role of the family in the career of young scientists—from the decision to study to the career path after obtaining a doctoral degree*. As the authors themselves indicate, when choosing scientific development and the decision to continue a scientific career, not only the family of origin may be important, but also (or most of all) one's own family. This aspect was particularly interesting for the authors. The fundamental question running through this test is whether the situation of women and men differs in terms of reconciling scientific ambition with having a family. Indeed, the result of qualitative research showing young scientists as resourceful, dynamic people, open to new experiences and potential trips has a positive overtone here. Moreover, these interviews show the fact that men are increasingly involved in caring for their offspring, not wanting to treat children as an obstacle to their or their spouse's career development, supporting their partners' aspirations at the same time. Unfortunately, the positive attitude of young scientists alone is not enough. The authors point out that significant changes are necessary here on the part of the system and even the state to increase the potential possibilities of scientists and develop their scientific potential in the field of building scientific excellence, representing Poland in the international scientific arena, thanks to the increase in the number of publications, patents and grants international. Providing financial support, as well as caring for the offspring of the young generation of scientists, seems to be necessary here to be able to develop them in this direction. Reading this fragment, one

can get the impression that a group of young scientists is lonely in this regard. This is, of course, the so-called group studied in this case; however, this problem certainly affects the academic staff and many other people outside the university. Nevertheless, drawing attention to the importance of this support among the academic culture may even lead to the launch of a discourse that could contribute to the introduction of significant changes that would be an element of building our competitiveness in the international scientific arena.

The last part of the book is the part that introduces the realities of grants—information on applicants and evaluators. As part of the presentation of research funding from national funds and the conditions of this in Poland in the first decade of the 21st century, in my opinion, the chapter *Gender of scientists and their access to research grants in Poland at the beginning of the 2000s*, which is a fragment of from a report for the European Commission originally published in English. It provides a clear description of the statistics that give a picture of the gender gap in funding for research work and projects. It draws attention to the fact that among the applicant beneficiaries, women constitute a significant minority, which may be related to many professional and social factors. In addition, this report shows the opportunities that people had in the first decade of the 21st century and analyzes not only the successiveness of women's applications but also the place of women and men on the committees awarding grants. Interestingly, the author also recalls campaigns encouraging women to work in science and study at technical faculties. At the same time, it emphasizes that the normalization and social acceptance of women in masculinized professions should take place from an early age in the group of preschool children, who are the basis of the new generation and the future of the nation.

The main research conclusions presented in this book draw the reader's attention to the issue of discrimination against women not only in access to grants and research projects but also the uneven image of their doctoral studies and the low participation of women in engineering, technical, plastic and surgical sciences. The statistical data quoted in the book, also included in the historical perspective, point out that the negative perception of women in the academic world has not changed so far.

It is worth noting that women receive lower salaries for their work less research funding, which is also more difficult for them to get. Moreover, they receive far fewer new job offers while being harassed for their "vague management style", which hypothetically reduces the number of women in technical, engineering, and decision-making positions. All these factors are argued by gender differences, the role of women in society, who, as a mother, has more significant difficulties publishing an appropriate number of scientific texts and reconciling maternal duties with professional or scientific responsibilities. The presented arguments may arouse the opposition of the contemporary reader. I doubt whether the binary division of scientists (only women and men in scientific careers) is not significantly limiting. Moreover, it seems that nowadays, it can even be harmful to associate a woman in the patriarchal style with the role of mother. After all, not every female scientist (and women in general) may want or be able to become a mother. At the same time, men may also want to take over the role of the primary caregiver of

a home or family. This aspect is omitted when describing, for example, the differences in financing work or research on women and men. I believe that it would be worth considering other factors that may influence the still full of sexism picture of differences between women and men in terms of professional and scientific development opportunities in Poland and the world. Renata Siemieńska refers to this at the end of the book, calling for the spread of changes and striving for equality in educational and professional centres, as well as in gender roles.

Overall, this book provides an extensive description of the situation of women in higher education and the differences in the picture of academic careers between women and men, and the arguments for these inequalities. It is described in an accessible language and illustrated with many tables and charts, which also facilitate the text's assimilation. Hence, it can be concluded that this item is suitable for various groups of readers. Indeed, it will be an interesting publication not only for people interested in the image of higher education and scientific work, with social institutions, economy, human identity, etc.

In conclusion, I believe that this book should form the basis of the literature of all students. The editor of the volume calls for changes to be made in the scope described in the book. However, they want to conduct a discourse that would cause any change in this respect; it should be based on increasing the awareness of a given issue in the groups most interested, i.e., primarily in the academic community at every level.

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