

BOOK REVIEW / COMPTE-RENDU

TAVARES, V., & SKREFSRUD, T. A. *Critical and creative engagements with diversity in Nordic education*. (2024). 367 pp. \$170.95 (hardback). (ISBN 9781666925852).

The year 2025 saw significant rollbacks in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts across many sectors, including education. This was particularly visible in the United States where the government conflated race-based inclusivity efforts with the violation of civil rights, ordering an end to programs that support equity, diversity and inclusion efforts (U.S. Department of Education, 2025). Amid this ongoing backlash, it is more important than ever for schools to continue to be concerned with teaching to diversity. Tavares and Skrefsrud's book explores how pre-service and in-service teachers can be more equipped to teach diverse groups. While the book engages with diversity in Nordic settings (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland), the pedagogical insights and reflections are relevant to teachers, education administrators, policymakers, and educational researchers globally.

The volume contains 17 chapters and five sections. The first section, entitled *Student Teachers' Intercultural Competences*, is comprised of five chapters. These chapters investigate questions of interculturality in teacher education. Chen and Dervin discuss a study in which student teachers in Finland examined essays written by Chinese student teachers. Exposure to perspectives such as those found in the essays can better prepare student teachers for dealing with difficult questions related to diversity in the classroom. Tavares and Skrefsrud look at how museums can support intercultural learning. Guðjónsdóttir, Kristinsdóttir, Lefever, and Óskarsdóttir examine practices among teacher educators in Iceland for teaching students about working in increasingly multicultural classrooms. Benediktsson presents findings related to a study on Danish student teachers countering discrimination in their teaching practice. Among Finnish first year student teachers, Haara, Rissanen, and Kuusisto investigate questions of growth mindset, experiences of cultural diversity, and social justice beliefs.

In the second section, *Multilingual Learning in Diverse Classrooms*, the two featured chapters explore teachers' perspectives and practices relating to the use of languages other than the dominant one being spoken in educational settings. Alisaari, Bergroth, Harju-Autti, Heikkola, and Sissonen examine how Finnish teachers can come to value students' use of their whole linguistic repertoire. Also presenting results from a study in Finland, Yli-Jokipii, Rissanen, and Kuusisto discuss how mother tongue teaching can improve student success rates.

The third section, *Identifying Skills and Competencies for Future Teacher Religious Education*, contains two chapters which cover skills and approaches that can be taken to support and teach about religious diversity in Nordic contexts. Kimanen shows how teachers can more critically engage with religion in the classroom by developing an understanding of diverse religions, including through engaging in self-reflection on one's own worldviews. The other chapter by Skrefsrud and Tavares uses Paulo Freire's theory of liberationist pedagogy to bring students' personal lives into educational processes, emphasizing dialogue as a means to create transformational educational experiences.

Educators Supporting Cultural and Linguistic Diversity is the fourth section, containing four chapters. Here, Larsson connects movement education with Kumashiro's idea of teaching for uncertainty as a form of anti-oppressive education. Rusk and Ståhl explore the potential for gaming to develop technological competencies and a sense of belonging among students. They also address ways in which teachers can use gaming to teach students to be critical of social and cultural norms. Wolff, Peskova, and Draycott then connect multicultural education with questions of social justice, arguing that for real change to happen in classrooms, teacher educators need to become aware of undergraduate students' understandings of multicultural education. Reporting on a study with school principals in Iceland, Ragnarsdóttir then discusses how diversity education initiatives in preschools tend to be led by specific people who are interested in taking up those challenges, rather than institutionally led, although training for staff on working with diverse groups could improve such practices.

In the last section, *Students' and Parents' Encounters with Diversity*, the first three chapters take place in Norway, and the final one in the Swedish context. Rasmussen and Iversen explore Polish parents' experiences of engaging with schools in Norway when their children were having language-related difficulties. Basha and Skrefsrud draw on interviews and photo-elicitation to understand how Norwegian students experience

multicultural school events. Melnikova examines how migrant parents support their children's high school education and how students and teachers view this support. The last chapter features Winlund's exploration of how recently arrived immigrant students to Sweden can contribute to their understanding of the new culture in which they live; it is the only one in the book that touches on gender and sexuality.

It should be noted that the book provides insights into diversity mostly as it relates to language, culture, and ethnicity. It does not really address other areas of diversity education such as gender, sexuality, ability, and class. While a book need not be comprehensive, the title offers little insight into *which* diversity/ies will be studied.

Many chapters in the book highlight the need for greater structural and institutional supports, such as better-quality education to equip teachers to teach about and for diversity (Ragnarsdóttir; Yli-Jokipii et al.) The book offers some insight into what this support could look like, for example, by outlining specific approaches to diversity training (as seen in Chen and Dervin or in Tavares and Skrefsrud), this being a key strength of the book. An example of such an approach, emphasized by many authors as fundamental to teaching for and about diversity, is that students' linguistic and cultural differences should be seen as an important and effective resource or tool for helping them learn, not as a weakness.

A main critique, though, was the relative absence of author positionality statements. Discussion of positionality is a common feature in qualitative educational research (Lincoln et al., 2024) as well as in research relating to questions of identity and culture. Although there were some notable exceptions such as Rasmussen and Iversen, authors rarely discussed how they related to the aspect of the diversity being explored, such as whether they belonged to the linguistic or cultural minorities they were studying or their personal experiences teaching for or about diversity. Positionality statements may have offered some insight into the biases or assumptions that authors (and teachers) bring to these subjects and may have strengthened the book.

Overall, the book provides useful insights for teachers, education administrators, policymakers, and educational researchers into challenges and opportunities related to diversity and education. It also suggests important avenues for further research, especially developing criticality in multicultural teacher education, while connecting multicultural and diversity education to social justice issues. In addition, the book offers practical methods for researching diversity in education, and teaching practices that can contribute to creating more inclusive classrooms where

all can thrive. Given the anti-diversity sentiments growing worldwide, exploring questions of diversity in education is increasingly pressing.

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