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Diversity is the others: A critical investigation of ‘diversity’ in two recent Norwegian education policy documents

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The term ‘diversity’, as a descriptive feature of a population, is increasingly common in the field of education. While seemingly a neutral and inclusive term which might cover a range of possible axes of difference, it is often used without definition or problematisation. In this article I ask what conceptions of diversity can be discerned by looking at linguistic features in two central policy documents dealing with an ongoing curriculum revision - Norwegian Official Report (NOU) 2015:8 and White Paper no. 28 2015-2016. Using a critical discourse analytical approach, I have found that ‘diversity’ points, to a large degree, to ethnic, cultural and religious minority. Moreover, some groups are ascribed the function of creating diversity, while others experience it. These findings are discussed within a theoretical framework of equity, social justice, and democracy. In conclusion, I find that diversity, as it is used in these documents, serves to reproduce notions of ‘Norwegianness’ and ‘otherness’. The conversation on how to deal with difference is obscured, and the tension between equity and differentiation in education remains insufficiently addressed. To provide socially just education to all pupils, teachers and future teachers must be critically aware of how the policy level conceptualises difference.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; diversity; education; equity and social justice; policy;

Introduction

What do education policy-makers refer to when talking about ‘diversity’? While increasingly used in research, policy documents and public conversation, ‘diversity’ is often presented as an unsubstantiated assertion, lacking conceptual clarity (e.g. Fylkesnes 2018; Westrheim and Hagatun 2015). It has been claimed that it tends to refer to cultural ‘Others’ (e.g. Hahl and Löffström 2016), immigrants (Lahdenperä, 2000; Schoorman and Bogotch 2010), or people of colour (Hikido and Murray 2016), and a need has been stated for critical investigation of its use (Westrheim and Hagatun 2015). Although not ‘wrong’ or uninteresting as a factual assertion, ‘diversity’ in this article is

treated not as a fact or an increasing tendency, but as a linguistic realisation of certain conceptions of difference. There is a need to question how difference is conceptualised in education policy, because it defines the space for political action to promote equity and social justice (Young 2011). Research dealing with equity and social justice in education tends not to engage with education policy (Francis, Mills and Lupton 2017), and this article contributes to filling that gap.

In Norwegian policy documents, ‘diversity’ as descriptive of the population started showing up about ten years ago¹. In a European context of increasing nationalisation, and heated debate over immigration issues and integration policies, how ‘difference’ is conceptualised, and how that might affect teaching and pupils, is not a question limited to Norway. However, I believe the Norwegian context can provide an example of a conversation thrown into relief because conceptualising certain forms of difference as diversity is relatively new.

In this article I will examine critically the use of ‘diversity’ in two Norwegian education policy documents, pursuing the following question: *what conceptions of ‘diversity’ can be discerned in NOU 2015:8 and White Paper no. 28 2015-2016?*

The article proceeds as follows: in the following section I give an outline of previous work on difference and social justice. Then, I will account briefly for the Norwegian context, before turning to research methods. The analysis, which draws on critical discourse analysis, is then presented and discussed in light of theories on social justice and democracy.

Previous research

Although the nominal focal point is ‘diversity’, the concern here is how ‘diversity’ constitutes a linguistic realisation of certain conceptions of difference, and how that might matter to equity and social justice in education. The intent of this section is not to

give a full account of research on ‘diversity in education’, but to give the context for this study in relation to debates on difference and social justice.

While I agree with Iris M. Young (2011) that justice issues are often (insufficiently) framed as questions of material distribution (the ‘distributive paradigm’), I recognise that addressing social justice issues is difficult in terms of balancing distribution (of material goods, jobs etc.) and recognition (e.g. social, political or cultural) (Fraser 1997; Phillips 1997). Naming difference often implies a conception of normality, and one risks reproducing the ‘truths’ one is describing (Foucault 1981). Moreover, it speaks to the difficult balance between equity and differentiation, which neither education nor policy can escape (e.g. Beiner 2006; Eisenberg 2006; Frazer 2006 and Young 2006; and Francis, Mills and Lupton 2017). At the core are questions of how to organise society in the face of difference (e.g. Modood 2008; Phillips 2008; Squires 2008 and Thompson 2008). Looking at conceptions of diversity can shed light on how these questions are approached.

When addressing social justice issues, finding something to criticise might be relatively easy, whereas suggesting solutions is more demanding, and less common (Francis, Mills and Lupton 2017). Nevertheless, constructive suggestions have been made, stressing the importance of critical and reflexive skills for teachers (e.g. Hahl and Löfström 2016; Schoorman and Bogotch, 2010). Different approaches toward equity and justice in teaching and teacher education have been explored (e.g. Kaur 2008; Mills and Ballantyne 2016; Sleeter 2008), and suggestions put forward to ‘put equity front and center’ (Cochran-Smith et al. 2015, 68).

While some contributions have made critical investigations of education reforms (e.g. Popkewitz and Lindblad 2000, 2004) and Norwegian education policy documents (e.g. Arnesen 2011; Hilt 2015), less research focuses on conceptions of diversity in

policy discourse. This article aims to remedy that, answering calls to critically investigate diversity discourses in education institutional settings (e.g. Hahl and Löffström 2016; Westrheim and Hagatun 2015; Hikido and Murray 2016). By conceptualising diversity as a linguistic realisation of certain conceptions of difference, we may discuss how a diversity discourse at the political level might affect equity and justice in education.

Before proceeding, I will make a few points regarding immigration to Norway and education policy.

Representations of immigration in Norway, and some tensions in education policy

There are (March 2018) around 747000 registered immigrants in Norway (14% of the population), with Poland, Lithuania and Sweden as the biggest contributors (Statistics Norway 2017b). A little less than 217000 are registered refugees, with people from Somalia, Iraq and Syria as the largest groups (Statistics Norway 2017a).

As for most nations, the history of Norway is a history of migration. However, as Norway obtained its own constitution (1814) and gained independence (1905), nation building efforts included promoting a narrative of cultural and socioeconomic equality, leaving little room for ethnic or cultural variation (Hylland Eriksen 1993). Accounts of immigration history tend to start some time in the 1960s, with the arrival of labour migrants from South Asia (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008), as if a pre-immigration Norwegian society existed at some point before that.

This notion of an originally homogenous population has also strongly impacted minority groups. The indigenous Sami peoples (among others) were subjected to severe assimilation policies which did not officially end until the 1970s (Huss 2016). Today, Sami languages and cultures enjoy some judicial protection, including measures to ensure its survival in schools – although the degree of recognition enjoyed by Sami

people can still be discussed. However, a ‘minority-hierarchy’ regarding educational rights has been described (Morken 2009), where indigenous groups ‘outrank’ national minorities (minority groups with a judicially established ‘lasting bond’ to Norway) – and with immigrants at the bottom.

School has played an important part in the narrative of cultural homogeneity. Public schooling was gradually unified throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. ‘Unitary school’ (*enhetsskolen*), and later ‘comprehensive school’ (*felleskolen*) denoted a political goal of social equality promoted by common, public schools (Nilsen 2010, 479-481). The will to reduce inequality through political means was substantial in the post-war period, (Nilsen 2010), although education reforms faced tension between standardisation and differentiation. ‘Adapted education’, introduced in 1975, denotes a principle of equity through differentiation, within the unified system (Nilsen 2010, 482-489). It remains a central principle in Norwegian public education.

Over the past twenty years, the egalitarian ideology of the school has been challenged by neoliberal policies favouring marketisation and management by objectives (MBO) both on individual and institutional levels (Nilsen 2010). Critics have argued that these developments risk increasing achievement gaps along socio-economic lines. Tensions between promoting equality and accommodating to difference are present, if not necessarily overtly discussed, in recent policy documents.

Research methods

The research question bears repeating: *what conceptions of ‘diversity’ can be discerned in NOU 2015:8 and White Paper no. 28 2015-2016?* This article is part of a larger project where I investigate teacher discourses and practice, in two subsequent articles.

I apply elements from critical discourse analysis (CDA), paying attention to semantic as well as linguistic traits, and drawing on elements presented by Norman

Fairclough (2003). In the following sections, I present elements of CDA used here, before accounting for selection and procedure. Finally, I provide some pointers to the presentation of the analysis.

Critical discourse analytical (CDA) approach

The language we use shapes and is shaped by our understanding of reality. Our representations potentially shape the ways others understand reality. Some representations are ideological, potentially affecting relations of power. Political documents can be read as a struggle for the definition of truth, and thus, discursive power (Foucault 1981) is in play. I expect this to be linguistically traceable. Below, I elaborate on how that might be done.

Fairclough (2003) provides an extensive and coherent framework for CDA including identifying and discussing semantic and grammatical features of the text, in relation to its surroundings. I will not pursue all of the suggested efforts, but rather focus on three features. Firstly, I look at *lexical realisations of 'diversity'*. What vocabulary, or 'semantic chains' surround 'diversity'? By identifying relations of equivalence and opposition, we get an impression of the semantic field 'diversity' occupies.

Secondly, I try to identify *implicitness* – what is taken for granted. This search is contingent on the premise that '[w]hat is "said" in a text always rests upon "unsaid" assumptions [...]' (Fairclough 2003, 11). Assumption is unavoidable and useful in textual representation. However, sometimes underlying assumptions provide representations of reality which are not commonly accepted. Identifying implicitness will help identify the 'neutral' point of departure, which the 'diverse' stands in relation to.

Thirdly, I ask how *social actors* are represented. Actors are ascribed different roles, and different degrees of agency. Which voices are present, how are they

conveyed, and is the implied author's voice relativised? If a certain point of view is represented as authoritative, that constitutes a claim to universality on behalf of that point of view. Identifying the 'universal' is central to identify its opposite: the particular.

While representation of every possible conception of reality is not the aim of a policy document, questions of neutrality and universality concern power of definition. If a certain representation gains hegemonic status (and I would claim that policy documents tend to aim for that), the space for political action is defined by that representation, and no longer seems like a political question, but like a question of doing the only reasonable thing. It becomes depoliticised – a central mechanism of discursive power (Foucault 1981).

Selection

Two policy documents are analysed, the Norwegian Official Report (NOU) 2015:8 and White Paper no. 28 2015-2016². These two reports deal with an ongoing (September 2018) curriculum revision for 1st to 13th grade. They have been selected on account of being the most recent (at the time of analysing) extensive policy documents by the education authorities, indicating the most recent political will. An NOU is authored by a government-appointed committee or working group. It is a professional report with a political mandate. White Papers are often based on an NOU, and are presented to Parliament, though not voted on. They represent the government's official view. NOUs and White Papers thus represent different stages in the political process.

Procedure

A search on 'diversity' (*mangfold* in Norwegian) turned up the word itself, and inflections, compounds and adjectives derived from it. The criterion for inclusion was that 'diversity' referred to people and not, for instance, biological diversity. The whole

paragraph was noted, and chapter and subchapter were recorded. Headlines and references were not counted. This yielded 33 results.

The first step of the categorisation was by topic – the issues discussed. They were: a) society as increasingly diverse; b) diversity and school; c) diversity and subject renewal; d) diversity and democracy; e) linguistic diversity.

Next, extracts were labelled according to degree of differentiation of ‘diversity’, as either a) generalised; b) implicitly differentiated or c) explicitly differentiated. The categories were then organised in a table along the two axes – topic and differentiation – also noting the formal function of ‘diversity’ in relation to its clause, as either a) assertion; b) premise, c) cause or d) effect. This made it visibly clear that certain topics featured ‘diversity’ in certain characteristic ways. These characteristic ways, or clusters of ways in which diversity was used, can be captured in the following four headings:

1. ‘The others’ create diversity
2. Diversity and democracy
3. Expanding the register of the ‘Norwegian’?
4. Linguistic diversity – challenge or resource, and for whom?

There is no final, ‘correct’ way of categorising or interpreting the use of diversity in these texts. Nevertheless, I believe the breadth of ways ‘diversity’ was used in the reports, is adequately represented. The inclusion of several quotes in the analysis will allow readers to make up their minds as to whether my interpretations seem reasonable.

Analysis³

I proceed by presenting extracts from the reports, discussing interpretations of conceptions of ‘diversity’ in each extract through focusing on implicitness, lexical realisations of ‘diversity’ and social actors. The features will be marked in the extracts as follows:

- Triggers of assumption in *italics*
- Lexical chains underlined.
- Representation of actors in (parentheses). Implied actors marked with empty parentheses: ().

I will not analyse every single instance of the features listed above, because that would make for a messy read. Instead, I focus on the most salient features in each extract, that which adds something to the analysis as it moves along. That means that some features might be salient in more than one quote, yet still handled thoroughly in just one, for the sake of avoiding repetition.

'The others' create diversity

In opening chapters or in the introductions of later chapters, the authors typically painted a broad-stroked picture of societal development. Sometimes, diversity referred to the population in general. Other times, specific groups were implied. The following quote from NOU 2015:8, exemplifies the first:

[1] In sum, *the trends* offer a picture of a future society that will typically feature rapid changes (), development () of technology and knowledge, diversity (), complexity, major social challenges () and opportunities () for development () (NOU 2015:8, 21).

In terms of implicitness, diversity is mentioned as one of several developmental trends. Placing an item in a list makes it a factual assumption: 'There is increasing diversity'. The additive connection between diversity and challenges and opportunities, provides a normative, but somewhat ambiguous, evaluation of the purported trends, which is not discussed further. There is no direct reference to what causes the increase in diversity. As marked, the lexical chains tied to diversity establish additive connections between change, development, diversity, complexity, challenges and opportunities. The implied

assumption is that the Norwegian society was less diverse before, when there was less complexity, and changes were less rapid.

Another distinct feature of this snippet, is the nominalisation of verbs, which leads to an absence of grammatical subjects (Fairclough 2003, 142-143). The effect is that there are no actors behind the trends. This contrasts the next quote, from the introduction of White Paper no. 28, which explicitly provides origins of diversity:

[2] People who move contribute to more complex connections across national borders and cultures, and to a more diverse Norwegian society (Ministry of Education 2016, 6).

Lexically, diversity is chained to ‘connections across national borders’, and ‘cultures’. ‘Contribute’ indicates a causal relationship between movement of people and increasing diversity. The movement might refer both to people coming to Norway and people from Norway going abroad. In either case, it is impulses from outside Norway which lead to increased diversity.

The next quote is from a chapter of the NOU named ‘Renewal of the school subjects’, in a paragraph on ‘The multicultural society’:

[3] Ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is not only a global issue but also part of the day-to-day life for a large number of (pupils in Norwegian schools) (NOU 2015:8, 53).

Here, diversity refers explicitly to ethnic, cultural, and/or religious minority.

The quote begins with a relation of opposition – diversity is *not only* a global issue. This might imply an attempt to frame diversity as part of everyday life. Alternatively, by making explicit the opposition between diversity and ‘global issues’, one implies a neutral point of view – that diversity is not primarily a Norwegian phenomenon. The actors are pupils in Norwegian schools, and diversity is purportedly part of their everyday lives. However, diversity is part of everyday life *for* pupils. The

preposition, for, serves to create a logical separation between diversity and pupils, invoking a notion of diversity being something external, something Norwegian pupils *experience*. I find support in the observation that diversity is part of everyday life for ‘a large number’ – not all – of Norwegian pupils. Some pupils, it seems, are exempt from the kind of everyday life which involves diversity. This implies a vantage point of relative ethnic, religious and cultural homogeneity.

The next quote explicitly states the origin of increased diversity:

[4] Norway is part of the international migration picture, where the (immigrant proportion of the population) appears to be increasing. This contributes to a growth in ethnic, religious and cultural diversity in the (Norwegian society) (NOU 2015:8 21).

Here, diversity is chained to international migration, and immigrants. ‘The immigrant proportion of the population’ is the grammatical subject in the second sub-clause, but then attention is turned toward the effect of their increase on ‘Norwegian society’. It is certainly reasonable to argue that increased immigration has consequences for society. Nevertheless, I have two comments: firstly, the pairing of a relation of equivalence between diversity and immigration on the one hand, and the separation between diversity and ‘Norwegian society’ (there is society and then there is the thing that affects it) on the other, serves to create a conception of diversity as *created* by immigrants and *experienced* by Norwegians.

Secondly, even though minorities are the issue, the perspective lies with the majority. This extract is not unique in that regard.

Diversity and democracy

Both reports touch upon the relationship between diversity and democracy. There are interesting differences between the two. It is worth remembering that the NOU is a professional report, whereas the White Paper expresses the government’s official view:

[5] () *Being able to listen to (others), () endeavouring to adopt the perspective of (others) and () considering matters from several angles are important in a diverse society, as well as () being able to reflect on and reassess stances when () encountering new perspectives, and () accepting that there will be differences of opinion () (NOU 2015:8, 32).*

[6] *Knowledge about democracy as a form of government, and the support () of democratic values is very important in an internationalized society with increasing diversity, both nationally and globally (Ministry of Education 2016, 13).*

In the NOU quote, ‘diverse society’ is lexically chained to ‘others’, ‘the perspective of others’, ‘several angles’, ‘new perspectives’ and ‘differences of opinion’. Throughout the extract, there is no explicit actor, only implied subjects, as marked with empty parentheses. Italics mark normative saturation, and we see a clear focus on abilities generally seen as favourable, such as ‘adopt’, ‘consider’, ‘reflect’ and ‘reassess’, together with normative pointers such as ‘endeavour’, ‘important’, and ‘being able to’. ‘New perspectives’ might imply some pre-existing old ones. This might be read as alluding to the societal changes referred to elsewhere in the reports. However, given that the implied subject is generalised throughout the quote, I find another interpretation more justified: that it refers to how individual pupils deal with encountering perspectives they haven’t encountered before. In the White Paper, ‘diversity’ is chained to ‘internationalized’, ‘nationally’ and ‘globally’ in relations of equivalence. This implies a conceptualisation of diversity as originating outside of Norway. ‘Diversity’ is contrasted with ‘democracy’ and unspecified ‘democratic values’, implying tension.

In terms of content, the NOU accentuates a need to focus on attitudes towards differences which are potentially challenging or unfamiliar. This might imply an assumption that civic-mindedness is contingent on a certain level of homogeneity. On the other hand, it could imply accepting of difference as an inherent part of democratic society. Here, the White Paper leaves less doubt, with normative saturation in the

prescribed ‘knowledge of’ and ‘support for’ democracy. I will return to this in the discussion.

Expanding the register of the ‘Norwegian’?

The next few quotes deal with how the upcoming education reform should address diversity. The NOU states that:

[7] School has pupils who are indigenous people (the Sami) and pupils from national minorities, and [...] pupils from many ethnic groups from other countries. The diversity of pupils is increasing [...]. [M]ore attention *will have to* be paid to diversity and a *positive approach* to what different cultures can *contribute* to school and society. School has an *important* role in building identity and a sense of the collective community in the (population). But this does not mean *maintaining* a narrow register of cultural expressions as representing “the Norwegian” (NOU 2015:8, 53).

Let’s look at the lexical chains at the beginning of this quote: as marked, relations of equivalence are established between diversity, culture, indigenous people, national minorities and ethnic groups from other countries. Simultaneously, ‘identity’, and ‘collective community’ are explicitly contrasted to ‘a narrow register of [...] “the Norwegian”’, in a statement purportedly aiming to expand that register. This implies a normative evaluation that the current space for ‘the Norwegian’ is too narrow. Held up against the start of the quote, where diversity is clearly represented by the cultural others, this creates a paradoxical relation between the semantic content and the lexical realisation. Calling for a positive approach toward contributions *from* ‘different cultures’ *to* ‘society’, the NOU construes diversity and Norwegianness as separate from one another.

Let’s look at the White Paper:

[8] Norway today is a far more diverse society than it was 20 years ago, both ethnically, religiously and culturally. *The open and including attitude* of the Norwegian school toward each individual pupil and apprentice, with their different spiritual or religious

views, and cultural traditions, should be described [...] (Ministry of Education 2016, 21).

In contrast to the NOU, this quote mentions no expanding of register. ‘*The open and including attitude*’ is a definite reference, implying that there already is one, it just needs to be described in the curriculum. This indicates a shift from the NOU to the White Paper.

‘Linguistic diversity’ – challenge or resource, and for whom?

The following is from the White Paper, in a section on subject content:

[9] Language binds (the Norwegian society) together across traditional Norwegian linguistic diversity, and an ever-increasing element of multilinguistic diversity, and across social and cultural divides (Ministry of Education 2016, 50).

‘Diversity’ here refers to two different kinds of variations – within the Norwegian language (which has two official written forms), and between Norwegian and other languages. While intra-Norwegian linguistic diversity is described as traditional, multilinguistic diversity is represented as increasing. There is a relation of contrast between ‘language’ and ‘linguistic diversity’ – one binds together where the other divides. This quote belongs in a section on Norwegian as a first language subject, which might explain why ‘language’ implicitly means Norwegian. Norwegian is the only language represented as having this binding potential. This perspective seems unappreciative of proficiency in other languages – framing it not merely as irrelevant, but as divisive.

The next quote states that multilingualism might be a resource:

[10] Cultural diversity and multilingualism *enrich* (society) and create new *resources*. We also see that cultural complexity in society creates *tensions* that may lead to *conflicts* between (groups) (NOU 2015:8, 21).

‘Diversity’ is chained to ‘culture’, ‘multilingualism’, and ‘cultural complexity’, and there is normative saturation of both positive and negative *valeur* in ‘enrich’,

‘resources’, ‘tensions’ and ‘conflicts’, a tension which remains unresolved. In terms of actors, multilingualism is presented as a resource for society, not for the people being multilingual. Linguistic competence is an individual trait, yet the perspectives of the ones inhabiting it are absent.

The last quote contrasts the previous, being the one place in the analysed reports where diversity is discussed from the point of view of its ‘representatives’.

[11] (Sami pupils) experience a lingual and cultural diversity in their everyday lives which gives (them) multilingual and multicultural competence (Ministry of Education 2016, 50).

While multilingualism is generally presented as a resource or a challenge for society, in this one instance, it is presented as a resource for Sami pupils themselves. It is worth asking whether the ‘the diverse’ in a Sami setting is construed differently than other multilingual settings. Alternatively, this could be perceived as a way of covertly setting the Sami experience apart from a ‘proper Norwegian’ experience.

Discussion

There are three main points I wish to discuss. Firstly, the material exhibited a normalising (Young 2011) dichotomy with ‘cultural minorities’ creating diversity on one side, and ‘the Norwegian’ experiencing it on the other. Minority perspectives were largely absent, and pupils with minority background were hardly ever portrayed as subjects or agents (Phillips 2007, 8-9), but as functions of a ‘different culture’, represented in terms on their effect on ‘society’. While ‘diversity’ does not inherently imply a cultural, religious or ethnic aspect, it does have a history of being ascribed meanings along those lines (Michaels 2006). The association of diversity with ethnicity, culture or religion (e.g. Burner and Biseth 2016; Schoorman and Bogotch 2010) or non-whiteness (e.g. Fylkesnes 2018; Hikido and Murray 2016) has been described before, and implies a notion of a neutral point of departure, against which having ‘a different

(non-western) culture' becomes a source of othering. One aspect of this is the representation of the relation between diversity and democracy. In the White Paper extract, democracy was portrayed as challenged by something outside the Norwegian. It was friction between 'minority values' and 'majority values' which brought challenges to democracy, as if adherence to democratic values was something inherently Norwegian (Phillips 2007, 23) This shows an exoticising logic where challenges to democracy and social justice don't 'happen here' (Apple 2000, 31). Also tied to this is the overstatement of the homogeneity of what is considered the majority population (Phillips 2007). In a country where the imagined community (Anderson 1991) is traditionally based on a narrative of equality, the notion of a homogenous majority is perhaps especially pervasive. Diversity was not, however, unequivocally represented as mutually exclusive to Norwegianness. It was placed at the margins – not consistently and entirely excluded, but certainly not included in 'us'. Ever-present, but never discussed, was an aching tension between valuing of equality and appreciation of difference.

Secondly, both reports touched upon the relation between diversity and democracy. While deconstruction of 'democracy' in the reports is not the object of this article – had it been, I might have interpreted the extracts differently – there are some points to be made regarding implications of conceptualisations of democracy for social justice. The extracts differed in their framing of the relation between difference and democracy. The NOU addressed the inevitability of differences. By focusing on abilities such as listening, consideration, reflection, and reassessment in the face of difference – it seemed tilted toward a deliberative democratic ideal (e.g. Ercan and Dryzek 2015; Gutmann 1999). However, it remained unclear whether consensus would be the ultimate goal, or if attention to difference could in itself be seen as inherently democratic

(Giroux 1991), and central to social justice (e.g. Young 2011). The White Paper on the other hand, was far clearer in its oppositional representation of difference and democracy. Diversity clearly caused tension, framed as a lack of knowledge of and support for (unnamed) democratic values. Putting knowledge and support at the top of the list of democratic virtues (although I do not claim that to persist throughout the report) implies a notion of loyal subjects more than co-responsible citizens (Apple 2000, 45). If at all characteristic, the change from the professional report to the government's official stance, is interesting. It speaks to the degree to which policy facilitates the development of an education system in which pupils are encouraged and enabled to critically question policy (e.g. Gutmann 1993, 14) and power structures (e.g. Giroux 1991) and participate in democracy (Young 2011) in any meaningful way.

Thirdly, by framing difference as first and foremost a function of cultural minority, concerns about structural inequality in various forms risk being backgrounded (e.g. Hikido and Murray 2016; Hahl and Löfström 2016; Michaels 2006; Westheim and Hagatun 2015). This tendency is increasingly conspicuous when difference is framed as diversity, a word with immediate positive connotations. For instance, proficiency in languages other than Norwegian was thoroughly unappreciated, but nevertheless repeatedly labelled 'linguistic diversity'. We are left confused as to whether, at the end of the day, diversity is a 'challenge' or a 'resource', leaving the space for political action to promote equity insufficiently described. This is the hallmark of a depoliticised discourse (Fairclough 2003). While rhetorically solved, the difficulties of balancing equity and difference, remain. This evasiveness makes 'diversity' an unfit tool to conceptualise difference, and therefore to discuss equity and social justice in education.

Conclusion

I have pointed to a division in the material, between those creating and those experiencing diversity, placing the 'diverse' parts of the population at the margins. The implications are that notions of Norwegianness and otherness are reproduced along cultural lines.

While legitimately concerned to challenge centralism and monocultural dominance in Norwegian schools, this uncritical diversity discourse does not adequately address issues of social justice in education. Through a depoliticised discourse, the conversation on how to deal with difference, and the difficult balance between equity and differentiation in education, is obscured. Teachers and future teachers need to be critically aware of how the policy level conceptualises difference if they are to provide socially just education to all pupils.

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¹ Based on a search in twelve official education policy documents from 2007-2017.

² NOU 2015:8 was written in Norwegian but has an official English translation. The analysis was conducted with the Norwegian version. I provide the English translation of quotes. White Paper no. 28 2015-2016, has no official English translation. I provide, to the best of my ability, my translation of the extracts.

³ A few contextual points bear mentioning: preliminary searches in twelve central NOUs and White Papers on education from the past decade, showed that 1) diversity has become notably more common – going, for instance, from four mentions in 105 pages in 2007 to 21 mentions in 112 pages in 2015. 2) ‘Diversity’ referred explicitly to immigrants one third of the time. 3) The compound ‘diversity’ and ‘adapted education’ occurs nowhere in White Paper no. 16 2006-2007 (which deals specifically with adapted education).