

# CRITICAL AND CREATIVE ENGAGEMENTS WITH DIVERSITY IN NORDIC EDUCATION

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LEXINGTON BOOKS

*Lanham • Boulder • New York • London*

Published by Lexington Books  
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706  
www.rowman.com

86-90 Paul Street, London EC2A 4NE

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Tavares, Vander, 1988- editor. | Skrefsrud, Thor-André, 1972- editor.  
Title: Critical and creative engagements with diversity in Nordic education / edited by Vander Tavares and Thor-André Skrefsrud.  
Description: Lanham, Maryland : Lexington Books, [2024] | Includes bibliographical references and index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2023040527 (print) | LCCN 2023040528 (ebook) | ISBN 9781666925852 (cloth : acid-free paper) | ISBN 9781666925869 (ebook)  
Subjects: LCSH: Teachers—Training of—Norway. | Student teachers—Training of—Norway. | Minorities—Education—Norway. | Linguistic minorities—Education—Norway. | Minority teachers—Recruiting—Norway. | Multiculturalism—Study and teaching (Higher)—Norway.  
Classification: LCC LB1725.N65 C75 2024 (print) | LCC LB1725.N65 (ebook) | DDC 370.71/109481—dc23/eng/20231024  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023040527>  
LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023040528>

∞<sup>TM</sup> The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

## 2

### **“We have Three Common Enemies”**

#### ***Student Teachers’ Perspectives on Existing Prejudice in Danish Multicultural Schools***

*Artëm Ingmar Benediktsson*

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THE COMPOSITION OF THE PUPIL body in Danish primary and lower secondary schools is becoming increasingly diverse (Statistics Denmark, 2021). Although this diversity creates unique opportunities for pupils and school personnel, the Danish school system still lacks success in finding holistic ways to improve culturally diverse pupils’ sense of belonging in the school environment and Danish society (Jantzen, 2020; Kristensen, 2022; Shirazi & Jaffe-Walter, 2021). Sense of belonging is seen as a central element in the Danish school culture that emphasizes the notion of “togetherness” [da. fællesskab] as a social construct in which schools are grounded (Jantzen, 2020; Mason, 2020). While the notion of togetherness is seen as a guiding light, prejudice and cultural stereotypes still exist in Danish society and schools (Kristensen, 2022; Larsen et al., 2013; Shirazi & Jaffe-Walter, 2021). These issues contribute to the creation of discriminatory learning environments, where pupils’ cultural and linguistic experiences are given lower status and legitimacy. Teacher education therefore plays a key role in raising awareness of discrimination in public schools and encouraging student teachers to discover ways to confront discriminatory narratives and practices, in order to create equitable learning environments where every pupil can feel valued. This chapter explores findings from fourteen qualitative interviews with Danish student teachers who, at the time of the study, had completed most of the courses included in their teaching education program and had

participated in on-site schoolteacher training in primary and lower secondary schools. The research questions are as follows: What are the student teachers' perspectives on existing prejudice in Danish multicultural schools? And how do they plan to counteract prejudice in the future?

### **Teacher Education in Denmark**

Ordinary teacher education in Denmark is regulated by the national regulations regarding teacher education, which establish the structural framework for the educational program, including teaching and assessment requirements, as well as general guidelines for the syllabi (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2015). To attain professional teacher status in Denmark, a student must complete a four-year program in one of the six university colleges. Teacher education is a 240 ECTS credit program that leads to the professional bachelor's degree, which is placed at level six according to the national qualification framework for Denmark (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2015). The Danish national qualification framework corresponds to the European qualification framework (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2022). The teacher education program consists of mandatory and elective modules. Although the contents of the modules can vary between the university colleges, they all comply with the national regulations regarding teacher education (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2015). Multicultural perspectives are included in the curricula as a part of the unit on teacher's fundamental expertise, which is obligatory for all students. The teacher's fundamental expertise is divided into four modules, one of which is a module on teaching bilingual pupils. According to the national regulations, the module on teaching bilingual pupils introduces student teachers to various teaching methods that have been developed for work in linguistically diverse classrooms, including second language teaching. Upon completion of the module, the students should be able to provide appropriate support to bilingual children and create an inclusive learning environment by including bilingual children's language repertoires in teaching. Additionally, multicultural perspectives are also included in the modules on teaching foreign languages, such as English or German, assuming that student teachers choose these as their teaching subjects.

### **Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination**

Previous studies have shown that history, culture, beliefs, and other social constructs shape peoples' identities and may influence the way people

think of various social groups (e.g., Duckitt, 2010; Gordijn et al., 2001). Furthermore, social constructs may create different forms of biases toward individuals or groups of people. The biases manifest in the demonstration of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. These concepts are comparable and are usually applied in similar contexts to describe an unjust treatment of people, mainly on the grounds of nationality, race, age, and so on, irrespective of their individual characteristics (Dovidio et al., 2010; Stangor, 2016). Defining stereotypes and prejudice is problematic because the definitions are constantly reevaluated and adjusted (Stangor, 2016). This chapter uses social psychological interpretations. Stereotypes are conceptualized as mental pictures of a social group and represent a set of qualities and features—both negative and positive—that are expected of an individual belonging to this group (Dovidio et al., 2010). Prejudice is defined as an attitude that, according to Dovidio et al. (2010), includes cognitive (beliefs, presumptions), affective (moods, feelings), and conative (behaviors, actions) components. Prejudice is largely based on common beliefs, misconceptions, and generalizations that are used to maintain societal hierarchies. Although prejudice and stereotypes can theoretically be both negative and positive, they are primarily negative attitudes and preconceptions, and people generate far more negative prejudice and stereotypes (Stangor, 2016). Furthermore, a study conducted by Czopp (2008) revealed that even “positive” stereotypes are not taken as compliments by people targeted by those stereotypes. Discrimination is conceptualized as biased behavior that may maltreat people and unfairly put them in disadvantaged positions (Dovidio et al., 2010). Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are interconnected and codependent phenomena. Stereotypes and prejudice are both the products of discrimination and the instruments that are used to uphold discrimination and justify the unfair treatment of people belonging to different social groups (Dovidio et al., 2010; Stangor, 2016).

### **Prejudice Reduction, Color-Blind Perspectives, and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

Multicultural education theory emerged as a movement to counteract biased teaching and assessment practices that placed students from cultural minority backgrounds in discriminatory positions (Banks, 2009). In order to present the distinctive features of multicultural education, Banks (2009) created a model that included five dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture (Banks, 2009). These dimensions are interrelated and are equally significant for building an inclusive learning environment (Banks, 2009). This

chapter focuses on exploring one single dimension of multicultural education: the prejudice reduction. Banks (2009) argues that the aims of prejudice reduction are to improve intergroup relations and to develop positive and democratic cultural attitudes via the utilization of appropriate teaching methods and materials.

With regard to the practical implementation of prejudice reduction, interventions, and explicit teaching about intergroup biases seem to be favorable methods (Grapin et al., 2019; Losinski et al., 2019; Vassilopoulos et al., 2020). Explicit teaching about intergroup biases can potentially motivate children to challenge discriminatory discourses within and outside the school, and hence have an impact on their peers (Losinski et al., 2019). A study conducted in Greece aimed to investigate the effects of interventions on school children's attitudes toward refugees (Vassilopoulos et al., 2020). It revealed that the children in the intervention group expressed greater cultural tolerance than those in the non-intervention control group (Vassilopoulos et al., 2020). The interventions included intergroup contacts, dialogues about refugee issues and labelling, critical examination of prejudice and its impact on refugees' status in society and reading and reflecting on real-life stories about child refugees (Vassilopoulos et al., 2020). The authors claim that this comprehensive approach has the potential to significantly decrease prejudice in Greek schools (Vassilopoulos et al., 2020). While the Greek study focuses on majority group students, Grapin et al. (2019) highlight the value of more inclusive approaches to prejudice reduction, which should involve all students in order to raise their awareness of the impact that discrimination might have on all members of society.

Intergroup contacts and interventions can potentially improve relationships and reduce prejudice, especially when these contacts are positive. However, Stangor (2016) points out that contacts are not always positive. Accordingly, interventions and intergroup activities should be systematically planned by school personnel who are aware of the existing intergroup dynamics. Careful planning will help to minimize the possibility of negative experiences, which may have a reverse effect on group members' attitudes (Stangor, 2016). Furthermore, poorly designed, low-quality interventions could lead to generalizations and the adoption of color-blind attitudes (Grapin et al., 2019; Stangor, 2016). A color-blind approach to tackling discrimination is characterized by actively ignoring diversity (e.g., culture, race, and gender) in order to promote societal equality (Dovidio et al., 2015; Rosales & Jonsson, 2019). Various researchers argue that a color-blind approach to prejudice reduction is not only unhelpful but can also even be harmful, as it creates an environment where discrimination still exists but is rendered invisible (Dovidio et al., 2015; Jones & Rutland, 2018; Rosales & Jonsson, 2019; Stangor, 2016). Color-blindness may seem like an easy solution that can, on a superficial

level, decrease intergroup tensions; however, on a deeper level, it would justify the unfair treatment of minority groups (Dovidio et al., 2015; Jones & Rutland, 2018). Despite the criticism of the color-blind approach, there is still a tendency to disregard ethnicity or race in school, rather than adopting a multicultural approach that acknowledges diversity and promotes critical discussions about interrelationships between groups (Jones & Rutland, 2018). Teaching materials may also push teachers to apply easy solutions if there is no mention of ethnicity or race (Jones & Rutland, 2018). Obondo et al. (2016) reported that schoolteachers in Sweden experience a deficiency in high-quality teaching materials designed with diversity in mind, making it more complicated for them to adjust their teaching practices to multicultural classrooms.

The preference for easy solutions, the depoliticization of culture and the failure to create truly inclusive and empowering learning environments are among the reasons for criticism of multicultural education theory (Ladson-Billings, 2014; May & Sleeter, 2010). Consequently, critical multiculturalism has emerged as a challenge to multicultural education. Critical multiculturalism encourages a systemic analysis of power relationships and challenges structural discrimination in modern societies (May & Sleeter, 2010; Vavrus, 2010). Culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) is a critical framework for teaching practices in multicultural classrooms. This was developed as a response to culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000). Becoming a culturally sustaining teacher is an active process that requires the implementation of teaching practices that empower and sustain classroom diversity (Paris, 2012). Key features of culturally sustaining pedagogy include the following: acceptance of the dynamic nature of culture, communities, and languages; acknowledgment of the active role of communities as central agents in learning environments; and recognition of the ecological value of, and building positive relationships with minoritized communities (Paris, 2021). Furthermore, culturally sustaining pedagogy counteracts existing prejudice and structural discrimination by bringing active discussions about systems of power and social injustice to educational institutions, by refusing discriminatory policies, and by encouraging all stakeholders to continue these discussions in the outside world (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2021).

The implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogy and the creation of an empowering learning environment where all children feel valued is a complicated task. Shirazi and Jaffe-Walter (2021) highlighted that, although Danish schoolteachers openly rejected right-wing nationalist ideas, their daily practices still echoed anti-immigrant discourses that are evident in the Danish political arena. Anti-immigrant discourses are manifested in, among other things, the unfavorable labelling of culturally diverse children and youths.



Kristensen (2022) researched the issues of labelling in Danish schools and revealed that so-called third-generation immigrant youths are being assigned labels of inferiority, despite being born and raised in Denmark and speaking local Danish dialects. The labels are often based on racial characteristics that are impossible to hide in order to avoid stereotypes (Kristensen, 2022). Kristensen's study touches upon the notion of the school-to-prison pipeline, by discussing negative narratives surrounding culturally diverse youths and low expectations concerning their futures. Young people, especially youths of color, are often unfairly portrayed as enemies of societies and as individuals who struggle with developing self-discipline; as such, they considered doomed to fail (Dunn et al., 2022; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). When juvenile detention and prison are even mentioned as practical solutions for handling behavioral issues, this creates a hostile and destructive school culture (Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). The school-to-prison pipeline narrative is also addressed in a study conducted by researchers from Michigan State University, United States (Dunn et al., 2022). The American researchers emphasize that culturally diverse youths are aware they are subject to negative portrayals and low expectations (Dunn et al., 2022). However, instead of silently accepting these labels, many young people choose to resist the discriminatory discourses by raising discussions about schools (in)directly pushing youths of color into a stereotype box (Dunn et al., 2022).

In order to build an inclusive learning environment and reduce prejudice, it is necessary to apply holistic approaches and provide support to culturally diverse families (Grapin et al., 2019; Jantzen, 2020; Losinski et al., 2019; Miklikowska et al., 2019). Additional support can contribute to their sense of belonging to the school environment and the local society. Grapin et al. (2019) recommend starting with a reevaluation of policies with cultural diversity in mind, in order to provide equal opportunities for all, regardless of background. Furthermore, parents' effects on children's attitudes should also be considered when designing prejudice reduction interventions in schools (Bergamaschi et al., 2022; Miklikowska et al., 2019). The active involvement of parents may pay off in the long-term and help create a supportive home environment (Bergamaschi et al., 2022; Miklikowska et al., 2019).

Although most of the literature focuses on reducing prejudice among children and youths, teachers' bias levels, according to Starck et al. (2020), reflect those of the larger population. It should not be assumed that teachers are inevitably equipped with positive racial attitudes and are ready to communicate them to their pupils (Rakhawy et al., 2021; Starck et al., 2020). Therefore, if schools expect teachers to carry out prejudice reduction interventions, teachers should be given real opportunities for professional development and participation in prejudice reduction programs that are designed for school personnel (Rakhawy et al., 2021). The reality is different; for instance,



a research study from Finland reveals relatively low awareness of multicultural issues among schoolteachers, despite years of experience of working in culturally diverse school environments (Acquah et al., 2016). The study also calls for better support and more professional development opportunities for teachers (Acquah et al., 2016). This extends to higher education institutions that must commit to the elimination of discriminatory discourses from teacher education and the empowering of future teachers to confront their own cultural attitudes and beliefs, as well as challenging existing structural discrimination and systems of power (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2019).

### The Study at Three University Colleges in Denmark

This chapter includes findings from a comparative qualitative study entitled *Multicultural Education: A Utopia or a Functional Framework for Successful Teaching Practices?* The study's primary goal is to explore student teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and to analyze how well prepared they feel about working with culturally diverse children in the future. Moreover, the study aims to provide insights into student teachers' perspectives on existing prejudice in public schools, based on their experiences from on-site teacher training and working as substitute teachers. The study was conducted by the author of this chapter.

Data collection took place during the spring semester of 2022 at three university colleges in Denmark that agreed to participate in this project. The participants were fourteen student teachers (nine females and five males), with an average age of 26 years. They were in the final year of their studies and were in the process of writing their final thesis. At the time of the study, the participants had completed the obligatory on-site schoolteacher training and most of the courses included in the teacher education program. In addition to the on-site training, most participants had part-time jobs as substitute teachers in Danish public schools. The researcher travelled to the university colleges, and conducted individual interviews with the students, in person. Prior to the interviews, the researcher had also held meetings with teacher educators and other personnel at the university colleges, who provided valuable contextual information that helped shape the interview guides.

The participants received and understood the information about the project and their participation. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions. All participants gave written consent to participate and agreed to be audio recorded. The privacy considerations followed European general data protection regulations. The project received a positive review and research clearance from the Norwegian Center for Research Data.

The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured using an interview guide that included themes and proposed questions. The interviews were conducted in Danish and transcribed verbatim. The quotations presented in this chapter have been translated by the researcher, who has aimed to keep the translations as close as possible to the original Danish transcriptions.

The interviews were analyzed using NVivo analytical software, which facilitates the arranging and reassembling of codes, categories, and quotations within the themes, and helps to visualize findings by mapping them into code networks. The findings presented in this chapter have been analyzed through the lens of multicultural education theory (Banks, 2009) and critical multiculturalism theory (May & Sleeter, 2010). Furthermore, the ideas of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012) have been used as a guiding light during the critical analysis of the interviews. A thematic analysis approach was applied, as described by Braun and Clarke (2013). The interviews were coded using a complete coding approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In the initial stage of the analysis, a codebook was created, which included researcher-derived codes based on the theoretical constructs in which the study is grounded. Researcher-derived coding was applied in order to reveal implicit meanings within the data and to summarize them in relevant and descriptive codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). During the coding process, data-derived codes were added to the codebook to include the themes that were not covered by the interview guide and that had emerged naturally during the interviews. In the final stage, the codes were evaluated, refined, and merged when needed. Thematically matching codes were assembled in categories, which later developed into themes. The findings are presented in the following sections, where the participants' voices are put in the spotlight. Pseudonyms are exclusively used to refer to the participants.

### **“We Have Three Common Enemies, and They Are Management, Parents and Pupils”**

During the interviews, the participants revealed that they had witnessed different stereotypes and prejudice in Danish public schools. The examples varied from prejudiced assumptions about culturally diverse pupils to structural discrimination. The participants pointed out that negative attitudes toward accents and “incorrect” usage of the Danish language often create and uphold prejudice about immigrants in Danish society. Derek explained that both school personnel and pupils have misconceptions about first-generation immigrant children.

I think the biggest prejudice I hear is that minority children with different ethnic backgrounds are stupid because their Danish sounds funny,

their language sounds funny. So, automatically, you don't sound so smart. (Derek)

Dorotea shared her experiences from the on-site teacher training where she was assigned to work in two different classes, one of which was a regular class, and the other was a special reception class for asylum-seekers. She explained that the contacts between the asylum-seeker children and the rest of the school were limited, which triggered tensions between the groups.

There were some comments about this asylum-seekers class here, that they make a lot of noise, so it was very negative and again the "us and them" thing. They are not mixed with other children, so maybe this is the reason for that. (Dorotea)

In the same interview, Dorotea tried to reflect on the reasons why the labels are being attached and concluded that school personnel usually prefer easy solutions and explanations based on stereotypical beliefs rather than trying to identify the core of the problem.

I have heard people say that this happens because she or he comes from a certain place. But I think it is because they don't have a deeper explanation for why the person had acted as she or he had done. And then I think it would be easy to jump to a quick conclusion, because we can all relate to this prejudice. (Dorotea)

When stereotypes and prejudice become accepted by most of the school personnel, it can be damaging to the whole school environment—instead of being a safe space for learning and development, it transforms into a battleground, where new members are pressurized into choosing sides. During her interview, Ditte described the school culture in the public school to which she was assigned in the first year of her studies.

It was my first on-site training, and I remember we sat in a team meeting where they said: "We have three common enemies in this team group, and that is why we get along so well, and they are management, parents, and pupils." So, that's what made that team so good, and it just painted a picture of a tremendously unhealthy culture. I was really, really unhappy during the time when I was at that school. . . . But then I also reasoned with myself that there must be some schools where it is different, where you don't feel so much contempt for those you work with. (Ditte)

Although Ditte's experience may be an extreme example of existing prejudice among school personnel, interviews with other students revealed that

teachers often indirectly justify existing stereotypes. Another participant, Dicte, said that she once had a conversation with a teacher about expectations for pupils' futures. The teacher praised an immigrant family for being well integrated into Danish society. Despite being generally positive toward this particular family, the teacher's arguments were characterized by stereotypical ideas about immigrants.

There was a pupil, a boy. And she [the teacher] just explained that his brothers were in higher education. And the family was very like . . . they were not criminal and . . . I think she called them "an integrated family." And then, right after that, she said that he had the potential to be a top criminal. And I think that was a very strange thing to say. (Dicte)

The school-to-prison pipeline narratives were also brought up for discussion by Ditte, who revealed that the teachers at a school where she was undergoing on-site training had shallow expectations concerning culturally diverse pupils.

They [the teachers] used ugly words to talk about the pupils. They were like: "You know, they just have to finish the ninth grade and then they will go to a juvenile detention center." So, that was how they referred to their students. Structural racism! (Ditte)

The stereotypes and prejudice leave imprints on the self-image of children from cultural minority backgrounds. As a result, the children develop self-prejudice and expect unfair treatment from school personnel. Dorotea described her experience of working with youths from minority groups who labelled themselves and used the labels to explain their bad behavior during extracurricular activities.

Actually, it really hurts to hear from them [the youths from cultural minority backgrounds]: "You don't want us to be here, we are just perkere [racist term, especially for people from the Middle East], we just cause trouble—I'm going out to do some crime now." You can really feel that they feel that we are prejudiced. I alone cannot help them and say: "It is not true", because that is just what I feel. I can hear that these pupils here are burdened with certain things. (Dorotea)

During the interviews, the participants not only shared their observations from the public schools but also suggested ways of resolving some of the issues. They reflected on the support they received from the teacher educators at the university colleges and the supervisory teachers during the on-site training. Their ideas and reflections are presented in the following section.

### **"I Am a Small Fish in the School. How Can a Small Teacher Change the School Structure?"**

While discussing the stereotypes and prejudice in Danish public schools, the participants deliberated about good practices that may help to counteract discriminatory discourses and build healthier learning environments. During the interviews, the participants were asked whether they received any support or practical advice to address discrimination issues in public schools. The majority stated that teacher education is primarily theoretical, and there was little discussion of practical implementation of the theories, especially when it comes to counteracting bullying or resolving intergroup conflicts. Daisy admitted in her interview that she is willing to share the responsibility for the lack of skills, and she should probably have been more active in asking for practical advice from the educators.

It is something that we did not have at the university college. And I agree that I am also responsible for my education. I should have asked more questions. But they [teacher educators] could also add the themes about prejudice and conflict management in the subject pedagogy and pupil-related skills. (Daisy)

The participants emphasized that they gained a deeper insight into the profession during the on-site training. They therefore wished to have extended training periods and a better connection between theory and practice. Despite the gaps in the teacher education program, the participants, with the help of teacher educators and supervisory teachers, were able to discover ways to reduce stereotypes in the schools. One approach was mentioned in several of the interviews: adopting the resource view of culturally and linguistically diverse children and rejecting negative attitudes toward accents and grammatical mistakes. Dorit said that she had initially learned about this approach at the university college. Later, her supervisory teacher highlighted the importance of developing tolerance toward pupils' languages and regarding them as resources.

I learned that mixing languages could be an excellent resource. If you cannot remember the word in Danish, well, then find it in the bag of the languages you have! And then we will see if we understand it. So, if you don't know the word for triangle [in Danish], but you know it in German, then use it, and we will probably find a solution. (Dorit)

On the other hand, some participants were leaning toward color-blind approaches to addressing discrimination. For example, Daniel repeatedly mentioned in his interview that he would rather adopt a color-blind

approach, as he feels it might positively impact the sense of belonging of pupils from culturally diverse backgrounds.

I see them as my pupils, not my minority group pupils [. . .] I don't believe in the idea of treating them differently, because I think that would further stigmatize them. (Daniel)

Dorit considered the issues of prejudice and stigmatization from a different angle. She explained that children are being judged and put in a prejudice box solely on the basis of their names, even before they step into school. In her interview, she underlined that she disagrees with this practice.

I also experience that . . . the pupils with foreign-like names become something . . . when we form classes A, B, and C, we make sure to distribute 'them' equally, so there is an equal number of Hasims and Mounas in each class, because they are an academic burden or a social burden. But how can I accept that? I don't know because I am a small fish in the school. How can a small teacher change the school structure? But I can allow myself to say that I disagree with that. And I see those children as a resource rather than a burden. But I don't quite know how to do it, how to change these stereotypes. (Dorit)

Several other participants shared Dorit's concerns that a single teacher's voice might not be enough to change discriminatory narratives in public schools. David believes that schools should promote open discussions about discrimination and prejudice, and challenge negative attitudes that exist in society.

If it is society that created those narratives, then I think that the school has a responsibility to break these narratives down. If you are an immigrant, you are not a bad guy, or you are not a criminal, as portrayed in the media. I actually think so. I think it is actually the school's responsibility [. . .] I feel that the class teacher is responsible for bringing up these topics in the classes. Active discussion, but maybe also... talk about the statistics in the media, you can break these statistics down and convey them to the pupils. Yes, there are some statistics, but it is also interesting to see how the statistics are being used and how they are used in political debate. (David)

Although the schools were mainly held to be responsible by the participants for resolving discrimination issues, they also acknowledged the role of parents and extended families. The participants have learned that teachers' duties extend beyond subject teaching. Good teachers, in their eyes, are



the ones who know their pupils' backgrounds, communicate with families, and provide relevant support to family members. Damian emphasized that families play an equally important role in the building of inclusive learning environments in schools. He suggested encouraging family meetings at week-ends, where families from diverse backgrounds could meet and get to know each other, which could help to break down the barriers and reduce prejudice.

You need to get help from the parents to facilitate something [meetings] where they can all be together, and they can play together. And then sitting and eating something together and having a chat about how things are going. This could break some barriers and taboos. So that is something I want to propose, but of course, I must have support from the home front to implement this. (Damian)

Dorotea developed the theme of the significance of building good relationships with pupils by underlining that teachers should allow themselves to be vulnerable in front of the class and to share their own experiences. She believes that teachers serve as examples for children who tend to replicate good or bad behaviors.

I have really learned that it is so important to be open and dare to be vulnerable myself. I dare to be authentic and ask them questions because it helps me to understand them. Because if I just close myself off and let my prejudices thrive, well then, they [the children] will too. (Dorotea)

Derek also believes that working to address one's own prejudice is a crucial part of a teacher's work. He stressed that teachers must be aware of everything they say in a classroom, including jokes or statements that might justify the unfair treatment of minority groups. Derek explained that he wants to be a role model for his pupils, someone they can trust and identify with. He wants to become the kind of teacher that he did not have when he was a child.

If the teacher is not open toward the minorities, and asks questions such as, "Isn't it a little strange that they don't eat pork?" or "How can they understand Russian? It looks weird." In other words, if you come up with those things, pupils see that—it is fun, and they join in because, if the teacher does it, then it must be OK. I think you have to be careful and come with open arms and be like, "You know, it is cool, a very interesting culture." So, the teachers are the biggest role models, I would say. (Derek)

Although all participants came up with some suggestions or described experiences of working on reducing prejudice in public schools, they admitted that

they lack the necessary practical tools to address these issues systematically. During the four years of teacher training, there had been some discussions about stereotypes and prejudice. However, according to the participants, these were limited to theoretical considerations, and rarely put in context. Although the on-site training and part-time jobs as substitute teachers in Danish public schools compensated for the lack of practical tools, the participants still thought it was insufficient to close the knowledge gaps.

### **The Student Teachers' Dilemma: Pursuit of the Perfect Ideas, or Acceptance of The Reality?**

During the interviews, it was apparent that the participants possessed various ideas about how they could contribute to building inclusive learning environments where all pupils would feel valued. However, it was also evident that some ideas were treated as pictures from an ideal and unreachable universe. This can be explained by the lack of focus on prejudice reduction in teacher education. Banks (2009) describes prejudice reduction as a holistic process that involves the implementation of appropriate teaching methods and materials, working to address one's own attitudes and promoting positive intergroup contacts. Research studies point out that the involvement of families is also greatly beneficial (Bergamaschi et al., 2022; Miklikowska et al., 2019). Indeed, all these aspects are visible in the findings, but they do not derive from the same interview. None of the participants had a clear and holistic approach in mind that was grounded in the theory and supported by experiences from the field. Some participants said that they are ready to accept the reality, at least for the first few months or years until they have become acquainted with their future workplaces, before they try to act and challenge the system.

The language-related issues were mentioned by several participants, who expressed their concerns that the accents and grammatical mistakes cause mistrust in pupils' learning abilities. The participants offered to adopt a resource view on pupils' home languages as a solution. When they were asked to elaborate on the resource view, the participants said that they had heard about the benefits of including pupils' languages in the educational process; however, they did not have a clear idea of the practical implementation of this. The importance of valuing and using pupils' languages corresponds to the notions of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), which preceded culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). Gay (2000) described various steps for adopting a culturally responsive approach to teaching. However, the analysis of the interviews did not indicate an awareness of a systematic approach to culturally responsive teaching among the participants.

With regard to culturally sustaining pedagogy and critical multicultural approaches to teaching, the participants' views diverged. Some participants prioritized the color-blind approach, which has been largely criticized for being a simple solution that justifies the unfair treatment of minority groups (Dovidio et al., 2015; Jones & Rutland, 2018). The participants who decided to disregard ethnicity and cultural backgrounds believed it would help in the building of an inclusive learning environment. However, an environment that is built upon color-blind perspectives can be harmful to youths, who might learn to ignore the prejudice rather than confront it (Dovidio et al., 2015; Jones & Rutland, 2018; Stangor, 2016). The other participants indicated preferences for a more holistic approach that somehow corresponds to the ideas of critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010; Vavrus, 2010) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). Instead of proposing easy solutions, this group of participants suggested bringing active discussions to the classrooms, including discussions about the current political debates and the role of the media in creating and reinforcing prejudice. Furthermore, they called on the public schools to abolish the discriminatory practice of dividing the pupils based on their ethnic backgrounds and not on their abilities. This also leads to the discussion about labelling, especially the school-to-prison pipeline narratives, which were repeatedly brought up by the participants. Schoolteachers not only demonstrated negative attitudes and prejudice, but they also pushed student teachers to adopt their views and join them in the alliance against the common "enemies," which include pupils who, according to the schoolteachers' words, would probably end up in juvenile detention centers anyway. This particular example indeed presents extreme views, and it is not likely that this is the norm in Danish public schools. However, another study by Shirazi and Jaffe-Walter (2021) also indicated that teachers' practices echoed anti-immigrant discourses. School management, policymakers, and school districts should therefore systematically address discrimination issues and provide better support and real opportunities for professional development.

With regard to intergroup contacts, the participants revealed that asylum-seekers and newly arrived immigrant children are usually placed in special reception classes. This is justified by the fact that those children have little to no knowledge of Danish and need special support to develop language skills. However, according to the participants, the isolation from the rest of the school creates tensions and contributes to the development of negative attitudes toward this group of pupils. Therefore, there is a need for interventions and positive intergroup contacts to foster tolerance and mutual respect between the groups. For instance, a Greek research team (Vassilopoulos et al., 2020) concluded that carefully planned intergroup activities helped to reduce prejudice toward refugees in the intervention group of Greek children. The Danish student teachers also mentioned that there should be interventions and in-school

activities to foster intergroup tolerance. However, they consider the school management to be responsible for taking the initiative. Previous research backs up the notion that, although every single teacher's voice is essential, the issues of bullying, racism, and discrimination should be addressed systematically and at the school level (Gräpin et al., 2019; Losinski et al., 2019).

The participants observed that discrimination had a negative impact on the self-image of youths from minority cultural backgrounds. Young people who felt marginalized developed self-prejudice, and, in some cases, accepted the labels given to them by society. This manifested in the provocative behavior toward the school personnel, as in the example shared by one of the participants who felt powerless in this situation. One suggestion for how to address this issue may be found in Dunn's (2022) study, which revealed that channeling youths' feelings into art forms may help them to make sense of the surrounding (often discriminatory) narratives and find creative ways to challenge them.

Family involvement in prejudice reduction was discussed in the interviews. The participants admitted that parents' attitudes and beliefs shape children's identities, and a good teacher should be aware of their pupils' family circumstances in order to see the whole picture. Furthermore, earlier research underlined that, in order to achieve positive long-term results in prejudice reduction intervention, the participation of parents is crucial (Bergamaschi et al., 2022; Miklikowska et al., 2019). Although the Danish participants were not formally trained to involve families in prejudice reduction interventions, they could suggest ways of bridging the cultural divide with the help of families. Their suggestions, however, were limited to home visits, food events, and conversations with parents.

Self-reflection is a significant aspect of both prejudice reduction and culturally sustaining pedagogy that was brought to light by several of the participants. Working to address one's own prejudice, attitudes, and beliefs has always been regarded as an essential step for implementing teaching methods with diversity in mind (Gay, 2000; Paris, 2021). Nevertheless, many teachers tend to look for an easy solution, and omit the self-reflection step when implementing culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogy in practice, which diminishes the purpose of these methods (Dixson, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Several Danish student teachers were aware of the significance of self-reflection and attached great importance to it as they considered themselves to be role models for their pupils. This perception gives them both a power that they are willing to distribute in a positive way and a great responsibility for their words and actions, both within and outside the schools.

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

This chapter contributes to the discussion about the relevance and practical value of multicultural education and critical multiculturalism for teacher

education programs. The analysis of the interviews revealed that, although the participants were aware of the existence of these theories, their knowledge of them was rudimentary. During the interviews, it was apparent that the participants felt self-conscious about their lack of practical knowledge of addressing discrimination issues. Several of them mentioned that they actually should have known better, but they were not given the opportunity to fully develop and practice the necessary skills. At two university colleges, the module on teaching bilingual pupils, which included themes related to multiculturalism, was taught in the final year. Consequently, the student teachers did not have any chance to practice the new skills and teaching methods in schools. The participants underlined that it could have been more beneficial for them to have this module earlier in their studies, and they wished that the supervisory teachers in schools showed more awareness and initiative when it came to multicultural issues. Furthermore, during the on-site training, the student teachers were hardly given access to culturally diverse children and their parents.

Looking back at their four-year journey, the participants concluded that the education they received was mainly theoretical and focused on acquiring general knowledge of the philosophy of education and general pedagogy. Although theoretical knowledge is essential, teacher education programs are expected to provide students with a functional framework for successful teaching practices that they can utilize in various settings. In her recent work, Ladson-Billings (2021) found that teacher educators exposed students to different theories and concepts, yet rarely utilized the teaching methods grounded in these concepts in their own practice. Instead of taking the students on a superficial journey around different theories, teacher educators should commit themselves to social justice, implement prejudice reduction interventions, and promote culturally sustaining pedagogy by actively applying these in their own classrooms. To become culturally sustaining teachers, students need to gain a deep understanding of the theoretical constructs, experience culturally sustaining teaching methods, and have an opportunity to utilize them during the on-site training. This will equip future teachers with the necessary skills to confront the three real enemies in their work in multicultural schools: stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

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