Editorial

Power and majority discourses in education - critical perspectives

Ane Bergersen

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences
Email: ane.bergersen@hvl.no

Anne Grethe Sønsthagen

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences
Email: anne.grethe.sonsthagen@hvl.no

Editorial

In education, the *Nordic model* is a comprehensive school system where equity, equal opportunities, and inclusion are consistently cited as the goal of schooling and orientation (Blossing & Söderström, 2014; Telhaug et al., 2006). The Nordic model is widely considered a good example that provides equal learning opportunities for all students. In the Nordic countries, the idea of "education for all" has been particularly strong as a basis for the Nordic welfare model. Norwegian early childhood education and care (ECEC) and schools have the mandate to equalize social differences, emphasize cultural diversity, and include all actors (Meld. St. 19 (2015-2016); Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2017; OECD, 2019; UHR, 2018). Similar educational policies can be found in other Nordic countries (Conolly et al., 2025). Frønes et al. (2020) underline the importance of considering the context of education when investigating equity, equality, and diversity. This special issue investigates power and majority discourses in education empirically and theoretically from early childhood to higher education.

A comprehensive knowledge of intercultural understanding is fundamental for student teachers and teachers in the field of practice (Meld. St. 7 (2020-2021)). Nevertheless, Norwegian and international

research suggests that the majority's symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) seems to dominate institutions such as ECEC (Bergsland, 2018; Solberg, 2018; Sønsthagen, 2021; Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2017). Furthermore, research shows a need for a more majority-critical perspective in Norwegian educational institutions (Bergsland, 2018; Lødding, 2015). Research also shows how international student mobility can promote global awareness, intercultural competence, and critical understanding of one's position as a professional practitioner (Bergersen et al., 2022; Bergersen & Muleya, 2019).

This special issue highlights critical perspectives on power and majority discourses in education from local, global, and comparative perspectives. Such new insight might contribute to a critical debate about education's role in society, nationally and globally. Through critical majority discourses, power, and decolonial perspectives, articles in this special issue are interdisciplinary, with critical educational reflections from early childhood to the university level. Most contributors are based in Nordic countries, with empirical data from early childhood education and schools in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Although coloniality is a global phenomenon, the Nordic region has a historical 'innocent' narrative emphasized in these countries, as discussed in this special issue. Coloniality is deeply rooted in educational discourses, and as Duvisac (2022) shows, coloniality is a prerequisite to modernity discourses and practice.

Quijano and Ennis (2000) describe coloniality as a system of power that produces and reproduces racial and gender hierarchies at the global and local levels, which, together with capital, knowledge, and culture, maintain a regime of Western domination and exploitation. Decoloniality seeks to make the colonial matrix of power visible and advance distinct perspectives and positionalities that decenter Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought (Massao & Bergersen, 2024). Such perspectives require decolonial attitudes, which involve relational ways of seeing the world, including the relationship between privilege and oppression (Bergersen & Massao, 2022; Maldonado–Torres, 2016). Decolonial logic can be linked to Freire's (2000) theory of the pedagogy of the oppressed, which emphasizes thinking with the learners and not for them, through true dialogue. Three articles discuss education and higher education using decolonizing lenses in this special issue.

In the conceptual article *Beyond Exceptionalism: Decolonizing the Nordic Educational Mindset*, Conolly et al. use research from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden to identify a specific Nordic coloniality. Nordic coloniality, the authors argue, is characterized by notions of exceptionalism and societal equality leading to an imagined cultural and racial 'sameness'. The authors use decolonial theory to highlight how Nordic exceptionalism within education leads to a singular historical narrative that assimilates minoritized groups, favoring a Western epistemology. Further, they emphasize that the Nordic education system must reassess the approaches and discussions of quality and the narrative of sameness.

In the empirical-based article *Student Mobility in Norwegian Higher Education: What can we learn from voices from Zambia and Tanzania?* Bergersen and Massao discuss how cooperation partners in Zambia and Tanzania, through equal knowledge exchange and positions, can contribute to strengthening the quality of student mobility from Norway. In this article, the voices are from the receivers of Norwegian students and their reflections regarding student mobility from Norway. The research question is, "How can student mobility contribute to increasing a more equal knowledge exchange?" Through decolonial methodology, the authors have conducted nine qualitative interviews with six coordinators in Zambia and Tanzania, emphasising context and positions. The theoretical framework is critical pedagogy and decolonization, analysing power, positions, and pluriversity in international cooperation and student mobility. This article aims to contribute to democratising knowledge from Eurocentric singularity and hegemony to the pluriversity of global knowledge and human experiences.

Lyså and Faye discuss how students in higher education in Norway understand and interpret empathy in virtual reality (VR) immersion in their article *Exploring Opportunities and Pitfalls of Nurturing Empathy through Virtual Reality in Higher Education in Norway*. The authors engage with empathy using anthropological and sociological conceptualizations and add theoretical decolonial perspectives of empathy, emphasizing the need to contextualize and situate empathy in a broader geopolitical context. Through the research question, *How can we understand empathy and its opportunities and pitfalls through VR immersion in higher education?,* they explore whether learning about people in vulnerable situations through VR immersion might lead to outcomes other than those expected by the producers of such content. They argue that for empathy to be transformative, one needs to consider the significance of the positionality and contextuality of those involved.

Society, including the educational field, is influenced and shaped by power (Thomson, 2017). The dominant group defines the understanding of the social world and reproduces the social order (Bourdieu, 1991). This power reproduction can be understood as symbolic power that neither the dominant group, *the majority,* nor the subordinate groups, *the minority,* reflect upon or try to resist. The concepts of majority and minority are not static categories but are developed in specific social settings such as the educational field (Bundgaard & Gulløv, 2008). The majority defines the symbolic order, leading to their norms, values, and perspectives being recognized and accepted as valid. Power reproduction also influences the educational field, even though it is portrayed as following universal rules and assuring social justice. By, for instance, emphasizing the majority language, logic, norms, and approaches, the educational field risks reproducing majority discourses and inequalities rather than reducing them (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Sønsthagen, 2021), as illustrated by several articles in this special issue. Through true dialogue and problem-posing methods based on the learners' daily situations (Freire, 2000), educational comparisons can give fruitful insight into things we take for granted and our blind spots. All educators are responsible for all learners,

minorities and majorities, and in a Nordic context, to avoid inequality and reproduction of power and colonial structures. Freire (2000) argues that dialogue and listening to diverse voices, such as minority parents, staff members, and children in ECEC, schools, and higher education, are key to disrupting majority discourses. Two articles in this special issue focus particularly on majority discourses.

Filikci discusses in the article *Can bilingual students be dyslexic? Problem presentation on dyslexia and bilingual learners in Danish Policy of Educational* how knowledge about dyslexia and bilingual students is constructed and problematized in educational policies. A discursive approach is used to analyse policy documents through discourses that construct the logic of truth, subjects, and positions, which might include silence. The article discusses the research questions related to the potential implications of this representation for educational practices, including challenges in detecting and supporting bilingual students with dyslexia and how policies may contribute to the underdiagnosis and exclusion of this student group. Through an analysis of the Danish policy dominating discourses, bilingual students' position is peripheral when dyslexia are discussed. When monolingual students are the norm, bilingual students risk increased inequality in accessing supporting learning tools and recognizing their needs.

In the article *Multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism*, Lundquist et al. investigate how multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism unfolds as a dynamic phenomenon among educators in Danish and Swedish preschools and primary schools. The article discusses the following research questions: 1. How do educators in Denmark and Sweden reflect on, negotiate, and develop multicultural and multilingual educator professionalism? 2. What critiques and renewals of pedagogical conditions and practices do the educators' reflections point to? The article builds on data from three action research projects that all investigated the development of multicultural and multilingual professionalism among educators. The article discusses and argues that educator professionalism has the potential to raise critical reflections about normative, ideological foundations for practice, hierarchies and distributions of power that these lead to, challenging majority discourses on culture and language and renewing pathways for future school development.

Two articles discuss ECEC in particular, one based on a literature review regarding Nordic immigrant parents, and the other analysing staff members' narratives in Norwegian ECEC.

Migdad et al. have explored the state of research on immigrant parents' experiences in early childhood education stages by conducting a literature review through a qualitative meta-synthesis of 22 Nordic studies. Their article, *Immigrant parents' experiences and perspectives on the early childhood education stages in Nordic contexts: A qualitative review and meta-synthesis,* has the following research question: What does research report on how immigrant parents in the Nordic countries perceive and engage with

early childhood education? The authors draw on sociocultural perspectives on communication, emphasizing the construction of shared meanings through social interaction. Moreover, the theoretical perspectives investigate how Nordic ECEC practices interact with the agency and capital of immigrant parents. The authors emphasize the need for a more flexible approach to parental engagement, supporting institutional transformation.

In the article *Racialized narratives on multicultural parental cooperation in early childhood education and care – Normality understood as whiteness,* Sønsthagen and Massao explore the following research question: What racializing narratives emerge when ECEC staff discuss multicultural parental cooperation? The authors have conducted a narrative analysis of the staff's discussion of parental cooperation with parents with refugee backgrounds. Theoretically, the study draws on symbolic power and violence theories, critical race theory, and white privilege. The authors discuss what racializing narratives can lead to and what obstacles might exist in the ECEC's role as a bridging institution.

The seven articles in this special issue underscore critical perspectives on power and majority discourses in education in various ways. They address topics such as injustice, diversity, white privilege, global awareness, and decolonial responsibility. Several articles emphasize educators' need to be critical and reflective of their positions, power dynamics, and privileges. This special issue aims to illuminate some of the blind spot areas in educational research in alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Good health and well-being), 4 (Quality education), and 10 (Reduced inequalities) (United Nations, n.d.), and contribute to a critical debate about education's role in society.

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