INTRINSIC

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CULTURE DIVERSITY AWARENESS

ite

International Teacher Education

This magazine is an International Teacher Education (ITE) collaboration project. The ITE is a unique programme that trains and prepares students to become internationally-minded teachers around the world. The ITE consists of three globally recognized teacher-education programmes:

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ACTIVATING
AUTONOMY
THROUGH REFLECTION

Cristina Cosentino

03

Life-Long Learning and Reflection Skills - The Theory

Current trends in education are pushing for learners to develop a skill set that is transferable and relevant across disciplines. There is a reconsideration of what it is that students need to know, and a shift towards interdisciplinary competencies, abilities and skills that encourage development of the student as a whole rather than focussing on subject-specific knowledge (Drake & Reid, 2020). Employers are looking for well-rounded individuals with a holistic education who can comprehend and solve complex problems that transcend disciplines. Society puts increasing value on learning outcomes associated with integrative approaches, including improved written and oral communication skills, teamwork skills, ethical decision making, critical thinking, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-world settings (Bear & Skorton, 2019). Traditionally, secondary school teachers are trained to teach domain-specific knowledge (Wang, Charoenmuang, Knobloch & Tormoehlen, 2020) and therefore struggle to design or even consider how to teach (and learn) with interdisciplinary links. At ITESS however, student teachers are trained by specialisation, alongside an equal proportion of learning within a multidisciplinary setting. One of the

ITE Framework goals, represented in the alignment tree shown, is for students to "continuously and systematically reflect on their knowledge, skills and attitude, as well as develop new knowledge as a result of being lifelong learners" (ITESS, 2023).

"Trainees today are constantly urged to reflect, though it is not always made explicit what reflection means or what they should be reflecting on" (Maynard & Furlong, 1995 cited in Rushton et al. (2012)). The better we as teachers can reflect on our own skills, the more likely we are to encourage this in those we teach. Reflection has developed into one of the most important skills to be practiced by student teachers, and it is an expectation that they can effectively reflect upon their personal and professional development. Reflection can be described as thinking, meditating or pondering over a learning process (Rushton et al., 2012). If we aim to make this a meaningful exercise, we teachers need to collect feedback and insights from our students and enquire further into why the process was meaningful to them: did it meet their needs, did it work for them, and how can we build upon this further?

What Is Needed for Effective Reflection

Lalor et al. (2015) have found that in order for student teachers to develop the professional competences expected of them as future teachers, it is necessary for them to experience deep levels of learning and reflection. This reflection not only applies to their own qualities and skills, but also their views on

assessment practices. If future educators intend to deliver meaningful assessments in their own classrooms, they should be actively involved in their own assessment processes, supported by reflective forms of assessment. By maximising the sustainability of learning, we make an investment therefore in their identity as life-long learners. Implementation of reflective processes into our curriculum design involves a responsibility to integrate these professional competencies into our courses. This should be intentional and explicit, so as to support our students in developing them. Shirley Clarke is unwavering in this regard: "The worst learning scenario is to be unaware of expectations or how your work will be judged and to have no guidelines about how to achieve the objective in the first place." (Clarke, 2008, p. 81). Here a dual process emerges in which student teachers are able to look back and examine their [professional] identity, while also improving their professional development through considerations of their future practice (Suphasri &

Chinokul, 2021). The challenge may then lie with us as lecturers and teachers in developing and investing in learning experiences whereby students experience the flexibility to identify their own learning needs, choose and pursue ways of meeting them, and reflectively assess their own learning success.

A Process of Inquiry into Students' Needs and Wishes

This has led a group of ITESS teachers to consider ways in which students and teachers might work together in a learning that focusses on the development of learning skills, while providing flexibility and encouraging autonomy in our student teachers. Earlier this year, we inquired into some of the wishes of ITESS students in years 2, 3 and 4 by means of a questionnaire (responses below). Here they were introduced to the possibility of designing their own module. One question asked for their insight into the skills and learning outcomes they would hope to develop throughout such a process.

Personal development and growth when it comes to your idea of yourself as teacher, exploring areas of teaching of choice	Practice or understand theories behind classroom practices	Be able to convey your personal needs and job expectations to a recruiter.	Designing lessons, demonstrating mastery of source material
	Independence and confidence		
Autonomy, intrinsic motivation, professional development	That you can make sure all students with different cultural backgrounds can get along in class.	Be able to appropriately respond to students' individual learning needs.	Being able to use the skills in real life and develop more from there too.
Familiarity with diverse cultural backgrounds	Exploring ways to use your voice effectively and healthily	Acquiring tools/skills to diversify your delivery in the classroom	Speaking in front of a crowd confidently

These responses demonstrate the ability of ITESS students to formulate specific, insightful learning outcomes for themselves. The results are a true demonstration of our students' passion and curiosity for learning, as well as a sound understanding of the cultural complexity of the workplaces that await them. As teachers, we should continue to consider the way in which programme learning outcomes are developed through our course materials and curriculum design. Smolarek et al. (2018) take a strong but interesting position with regards to this, suggesting that fostering this process of skill development in a student [teacher] is not easy. They challenge higher education professionals to "craft learning opportunities that introduce novices into the technical, social, and cultural features of a discipline or profession" (p. 34).

Designing a Solution

An educational method that we are all most certainly familiar with is that of inquiry-based learning; ITESS students are encouraged to develop and facilitate such learning within the practical setting of the TP classroom. Research finds that positive learning outcomes such as deep thinking, application of knowledge and logical reasoning are developed effectively through processes of inquiry, but that these processes should also be formalised and well-designed (Reynolds et al., 2017). We have therefore investigated and developed a module in which student teachers go through an inquiry cycle of deciding on an objective, creating learning outcomes and criteria for success and collecting feedback that

gives insight in to their success. The learning project is interest-driven and taps into the innate curiosity of the student. The expected outcome of such a module is for students to develop autonomy in their ability to direct their own learning, linked with the final stage of the ITESS learning continuum whereby students demonstrate their professional identity (see figure 1.).

The Solution in Practice

Elements of this design are being applied in Year 4 Educational Studies (ES4) in the form of a workshop design process. By formulating success criteria for their workshop, students are required to reflect on their success and that of others using their own questionnaires. We are enthusiastic about the notion of increasing student ownership as they design their own learning journey and make important decisions about how best to assess this. For those of us involved in designing this module, we have reflected upon the process and would like to share some examples of what we have experienced as good practice:

✓ time to have a professional dialogue about education and to see each other's vision

✓ important to ask the students' input and interesting to read what they would like

✓ willingness to provide greater opportunities for our students to develop their learning and growth

✓ good balance of creating something new and dreaming while also being practical and realistic

✓ this task felt more egalitarian and allowed a lot of different perspectives and ideas to emerge

✓ helped us become aware of what shortcomings in the course are actually

there and how we can address these, and what is already being done in this area in other courses Moving forward, we remain curious about ways in which student-teacher partnerships at Higher Education level can and will have an effect on the professional practices of future educators as they proceed into the work-field beyond ITESS. As teachers, we have considered ways to carry this innovation further into other areas of our educational practice. We continue to discuss the role of student choice in the courses we offer, and think about how to give our students access to what they may be missing from our curriculum. Pursuing student autonomy and an inquiry stance are a priority as we seek to educate and support life-long learning. We look forward to hearing about how both students and staff experience this learning module. The merits of such a course will be evaluated through the insights of those involved, hoping to continue to improve the great teaching and learning that already takes place within ITESS.

Let's keep the conversation open!

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EXPERIENCES

Bangkok, Thailand

What is a funny experience you had during your TP?

After my last TP in Bangkok, I can definitely say that the most fun moments I've had so far have been during breaks when the students are outside and can just be themselves. My TP had a great outdoor area.... With animals running and jumping around...like turtles, rabbits, and frogs.

Frankfurt, Germany

What is a wholesome experience you had during teaching practice?

On my last day at TP, the students themselves have organised a "Miss Nora" theme party where they have baked cakes at home, made a book for me about my time with them as well as what they have learned from me and some practical gifts and souvenirs and powerpoint presentations about their favourite moments during my time with them in the classroom.

Bremen, Germany

What is a wholesome experience you had during your teaching practise?

One of my student was having a hard time with the girl friend group, so I sat down and chatted with her to help solve the issue. On my last day, I got a little book from students where each student had written in a page. That student wrote how thankful she was that I spoke to her about her issues and that I didn't raise my voice and yell at her. She really appreciated having someone she can just talk to and someone she knows will listen.

Bremen, Germany

What is your favourite memory from teaching practise?

There was a student in my class that wasn't that good at speaking either English or German, he was from Turkey. Slowly we had learnt to communicate with each other the more I took over lessons. Near the end, he would make little country bubble characters for me depending on what country I choose and it was really cute.

A LENS FOR LEARNING

ENVIRONMENTS

LOOKING AT WHAT MATTERS

Natalie Shaw

In the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Elective at ITEPS, we explore learning environments through a conceptual lens. Rather than showing students examples of environments as suggestions (not) to emulate, we believe it is essential that students develop critical tools to evaluate any given learning environment against criteria of relevance. In doing so, we purposefully reject the idea of 'effectiveness' as a criterion. Instead, we opt for thinking about learning environments that respond to a range of human needs, using Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a guiding principle.

First step: Empathizing through imaginary journeys

Instead of starting theoretically, we ground our process in students' own recollections of spaces they enjoyed as children. As a first step, students prepare and then recount imaginary journeys to one another, focussing on creating a sense of the space they enjoyed for their listening peer. In doing so, students practice how to prepare, narrate, and guide such imaginary journeys – a valuable skills for ECE practitioners.

Second step: Let's code!

Harnessing research skills and working in a shared document, we then embark on coding the information obtained in the fantasy journeys, using the levels of Maslow's hierarchy as the key organising structure. Elements mentioned in the imaginary journeys that correspond to physical needs are noted in this category; elements that correspond to other levels of needs are noted in the appropriate section of the document.

Third step: Level teams

Reorganising students into teams looking at a specific level of needs in turn, we then look carefully at possible guidelines or principles that might emerge from our coded chunks. For example, if many students have mentioned having food or drink readily available in 'their' recollection of an environment they enjoyed, this may then we rewritten by the physical needs team as the following guideline for a learning environment: 'Children have free access to food and drink items to satisfy their thirst and hunger.'

Fourth step: Test and refine

Lastly, through engaging with literature about communication friendly-spaces, toy-free time in kindergartens, and children's geography, we refine our tool and add ideas that may not yet be included. We also consult texts and guidelines about inclusion to check for any blind spots and aspects we may have missed to finalise the tool.

Through this process, we arrive at a lens that allows students to evaluate how learning environments respond to children's needs, inviting critical thinking and reflection, rather than 'ready-made' solutions. The fact that this tool is grounded in students' own experiences is a clear bonus, we find.

Click Here to View the ECE's Lens for Learning Environment PDF

Aimee Flor Labrador Solar

BULLYING
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

ITS PROFOUND INFLUENCE
ON IDENTITY FORMATION

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1/3 of students experience bullying at some point during their school years (Smith et al., 2021). An astonishingly high number when considering that every third child has found themselves in the shoes of a victim. Did we not learn from told stories and written songs how bullying affects the victim in the long run? Did we not learn from all the cruel movies and TV shows featuring the results of bullying until the main character inevitably finds death at the end? When people hear verbal or physical abuse taking place at home, the typical reaction is to hold their breath and immediately take action to remove the child from its environment. However, despite bullying being seen as harmful, it is often neglected or recognized as "normal." Schools are intended to be secure environments where children can flourish and their identity can be nurtured. Considering that children spend a significant portion of their life in an educational institution, I would even go further and say schools are intended to be homes. This article will delve into the influence of bullying on children's identity, the challenges teachers face when designing a safe home for children, and the importance of prevention in fostering positive identities.

The Impact of Bullying on Identity Development

The influence of bullying on a child's well-being is widely known. However, in its various forms, bullying profoundly influences the development of the child's identity and shapes adults struggling with self confidence and motivation.

To the reader who never encountered bullying:

Imagine the following statements occurring on an almost daily basis, for years on end: "Do you ever want to have a nose job to get a smaller nose?" or "Rather take the picture from the front so your nose looks smaller," or even actions in early childhood like "Look, I drew your nose; it is as big as in real" or comments such as "Your nose looks different and weird." This child will likely live with insecurities regarding their nose for a lifetime, shaping their identity. Moreover, imagine teachers and adults representing role models and idols for young children expressing annoyance to the child. The annoyance in the form of "You always talk too loud!", "Stop fidgeting around; that is not what you are supposed to do," "Why do you not understand this simple topic? Everyone else does." This child will likely question their ability to learn and hide their true extrovert self for the majority of their lifetime due to the connection of being annoying.

Victims of bullying often experience a decline in self esteem, leading to diminished confidence in their abilities and reluctance to engage in social interactions (Carlyle & Steinman, 2007). Furthermore, repeated exposure to bullying can hinder a child's motivation to succeed academically, pursue their passions, hide their personalities and thoughts, and ultimately impact their overall identity formation. These immediate reactions of victims shape the identity in the long run; nonetheless, the impact of bullying during the formation of identity extends

beyond the immediate consequences. Copeland et al. (2013) describe research on bullying victims, which suggests that those are more likely to develop long term adverse effects on their mental health, including depression and anxiety. The scars left by bullying during primary school years can shape not only a person's self perception and influence their relationships and motivation throughout school but ultimately influence the student's overall well-being and future identity.

Bullying as a Complex Issue

"They will bully you for this outfit" - an attempt of many parents and friends to protect people they care about from mistreatment. Indubitably victimization finds certain groups more likely than others; nevertheless, bullying can affect everyone irrespective of their backgrounds, looks, or socioeconomic status. Bullying is a multifaceted issue that can manifest in various forms, and therefore, it is essential to state the diversity of bullying experiences beforehand. While physical aggression and openly verbal abuse are commonly associated with bullying and quickly recognized and briefly addressed, more subtle ways bring the same if not longer, lasting effects. Social exclusion, cyberbullying, and psychological manipulation are often neglected due to the challenge of adult influence (Modecki et al., 2014). As a result, the subjective nature of bullying and the complex way of recognition further complicate the issue, as what one person may perceive as harmless teasing, another may interpret as hurtful or demeaning.

The earlier shown examples of bullying show the subtle form that may not be perceived as bullying by many but rather a sharmless comments.

Where does it start, and where does it end?

The line between playful jokes and severe bullying can blur, making it crucial for teachers to use their interpersonal connections to intervene students' conflicts and be attentive to peer relationships' dynamics to assess the situation better. The impact of bullying is not solely dependent on the perpetrator's intent but rather on the perception and experience of the victim. Even seemingly minor incidents can accumulate over time, harming the child's sense of self and identity development. By acknowledging the various facets, we as educators can come to terms with the challenge and realize the importance of preventing and addressing bullying. In addition to the difficulty of identifying bullying due to its subjective nature, students may be hesitant to report bullying incidents due to fear of retaliation or the belief that nothing will change. To overcome these challenges, teachers must create a safe and trusting environment where students feel comfortable speaking up. The educator aims to strike a delicate balance when reacting to bullying by supporting victims, educating bullies about the consequences of their actions, and involving parents and the broader school community in resolving the issue to make students feel at home again. Teachers need to use their earlier mentioned interpersonal connection as not only a tool to identify bullying but
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also to later collaborate between teachers, parents, and students to implement comprehensive anti-bullying strategies that establish a safe environment where students can flourish and positively develop their identity (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). Reacting to bullying is a complex topic in which many teachers have failed in the past due to its various facets. The subjective view of where bullying starts and where it ends as well as the difficulty of students wanting and being able to collaborate with the school and the teacher makes one of the most challenging problems occluding in our school systems.

Bully Prevention: The Best, no, the Only Way to Succeed

Nonetheless when bullying is such a complex issue that educators struggle to recognize and react to, how can we walk in the right direction in lowering the number of victims? Similar to classroom management, bullying is easier to handle when prevented rather than reacted to. As teachers, we can shape students' thoughts and attitudes toward one another to promote a culture of respect and kindness. By introducing literature, metaphors, and carefully planned lessons that highlight the consequences of bullying in a way that children can comprehend, we can encourage students to develop empathy and understanding. We can nurture students to become upstanders rather than bystanders and prevent bullies from developing further (Espelage et al., 2020).

By embedding anti-bullying messages into the curriculum, fostering healthy peer relationships, and providing emotional support, we can create an environment that actively prevents bullying and support positive identity development to make the schools feel like home again.

Three Simple Activities To Support Bully Prevention (by the National Bullying Prevention, 2023)

1. The Paper Method
The teacher can take a paper and ask the students to say mean things to the paper. With each word the teacher is crumbling the paper more until only a ball of paper is left. "This is a person's heart," is what the teacher explains to the students. Now the students have to say sorry and the teacher flattens the paper again which is still visibly crumbled. "See, the heart looks better but will it ever look like before?". This metaphor is supposed to help children understand that "I am sorry" is not fixing the long lasting impact of mean comments.

2. Practice Empathy
Create common bullying situations and ask the children in groups to act out the situation while the rest of the class has to discuss how the person might be feeling. Familiar situations are supposed to open the students' eyes to the situations and comments they experience in their lessons.

3. Reflection Box
Give the students the opportunity to write down a situation in which they regret acting the way they did. They can write it down anonymously and put it in a box to not only think about it when they write it but also to later show that everyone sometimes says mean things but we can always try our best the next time.

Prevention can start with the little things.

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LEARNING

SPACES WHERE LIFE DWELLS

CREATING A SENSE OF HOME IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD

18

Natalie Shaw

'You know, Miss, <u>this</u> really was home. It was not the house I lived in. It was here.' Tom, 13

When I made my regular way from the underground station to my place of work in Berlin and back at the end of the day, I would often ponder the words above. They were told to me by a former student, spontaneously visiting from Australia and dropping by our school on a return visit to the city. A conversation with the excited parents and child about how it felt to be back in their 'old home' elicited the comment above.

Can our schools and learning spaces be home? Should they be home? Or should they, unapologetically, be 'other' spaces, contrasting the familial private from the more public educational space? Are we doing children a disservice when conflating both concepts? These are certainly very worthwhile questions to discuss, and formulating a response to these philosophical musings seems a task for another text or conversation.

For myself and the focus of this article, I tend to go back to what constitutes home for me: regardless of geographical or physical location, it is a feeling of knowing and being known. From my perspective, home is a place where it is possible to safely show the vulnerabilities that I edit out carefully in a more public space. A feeling of easiness comes with the idea of home, of routines that are responsive to my needs and values, of choices I can make, of priorities I can set. All these in turn allow me the security to then venture out and take new risks.

How might these ideas translate into the collaborative co-creation of learning spaces? I would like to stress the aspect of co-creation in this context, as projects such <u>as using the mosaic approach to design classroom spaces with young children</u> clearly emphasise the aspect of co-creation. <u>In this article</u>, the author puts forward her concept of a 'spatially democratic pedagogy', based on the collaborative work of children and adults. All too often, classrooms are fully set up prior to the arrival of parents and children, yet these learning environments leave little space for children's co-ownership: walls are already decorated, pinboards prepared, and individual coat hooks and cubby holes carefully adorned with printed labels. Surely, an inviting environment and having a space to 'land' on arrival are important. However, a placeholder cardboard card with the child's name can easily in time be replaced by a sign made by the child themselves, reflecting their personality, favourite colours, likes and dislikes. Such a card may not look 'picture perfect', yet underlines a key pedagogical point – that children's personality, voice, and agency matter in this given space.

Further, I would like to invite student-teachers and colleagues to reflect upon learning spaces through asking three key questions that have guided my own work.

<u>How do we make space for children's things?</u>
Anyone who has ever opened a cubby hole assigned to young children has surely marvelled at the valuable possessions that one can find within. These drawers or baskets become

treasure troves of the found, the repurposed, the created, and the obscure. Feathers, a shiny wrapper picked up on the street, a figurine pasted to a lolly stick and used in small world play, a stone collected during the last trip to the forest.

Seminal pedagogue and writer Janusz Korczak (in this text summarised by Thomas Hammarberg) made it a point to honour the belongings of children (p.8). Naturally, one may wonder about this in the context of abundantly affluent international schools, where children appear to be inundated with material possessions. However, it is especially the things that children feel they acquired themselves that become treasures of significance, imbued with meaning and a sense of identity. Throughout my work in schools, I have made it a point to make spaces for storage of personal items available to children (whilst occasionally encouraging them to check these for perishable items, which also make their way into them at times!).

How do we invite children to own the space with us?

Many classrooms burst at the seams with visual stimuli: number lines, letter charts, the latest products from art class, books and toys blend together in a colourful mêlée of sensory stimulation. Teachers weave around spaces tightly packed with tables, displays, toy storage, and other seemingly necessary items. The beginning of the year sees teachers rushing to prepare inviting, colourful spaces for children to walk into. However, this leaves very little opportunity for children to have

agency in co-creating a learning environment that responds to their ideas. Spatially democratic pedagogy provides impulses for co-designing learning spaces with children. In this approach, children's ideas are given ample room, yet there is equal space for the needs and feelings of the educator. Such an approach may pave the way for an environment where it is possible for the teacher or educator to say 'yes' to children's ideas. Crucially, this does not imply going along with each and every spontaneous idea, but engaging in the productive struggle of negotiating the diverse ideas, opinions and feelings that exist in any community. Heeding these insights, I always try to remain reflective about my personal desire for things to look pretty (after all, what will the parents say with regards to bare walls on the first day of school?) and my strong pedagogical and philosophical conviction that children's agency is vastly more significant than my personal worries about parental complaints. Rather than thinking of learning environments in terms of effectiveness (an illness that seems to increasingly plague the educational discourse), it helps me to think about classrooms as playgrounds of possibility. What these possibilities are, I am always excited about finding out together with the children – not prior to their arrival, and certainly not for them.

How do we make space for the complexity of life?

Staying with the concept of space and moving from physical to social and emotional space, many schools nowadays embrace checking in with children about their feelings via an emotion chart. Using these approaches wisely and appropriately is a topic of discussion with our students at the university and an aspect I found exceedingly important in my work with children. How is it possible to account for the full range of human experience and feelings, including emotions such as anger and sadness? 'The complexity of emotions and human life has a place in this learning community' has become a leading phrase for me in this endeavour. Oftentimes, children will generously offer to cheer someone up in response to a peer sharing feelings of sadness. Yet letting silence fall, holding space, asking a child further about the manifestations of their sadness and simply allowing sadness to dwell in the midst of our community without the need to return to a 'happier' state immediately can be immensely powerful. Importantly, it also constitutes a counterpoint to the pervasive 'happiness industry' that increasingly insists on humans being their so-called best selves (whatever this may be!) at any point. Like the physical classroom space, it is possible to resist the pre-printed, neat looking emotion charts in favour of a reflection of what is important to a particular group. What emotions do we want to include? What are good images to use? Is our emotion chart working for us? What might need to be added? What might need to be changed? Questions like this make for deep, musing conversations that I personally prefer to the ever-repeating discussion of the weather or the day of the week that so often happens particularly in ECE classrooms.

In conclusion, even writing this short article makes me excited about the work that I always feel highly privileged to carry out. I am enthusiastic to continue thinking about how to create a sense of home in classrooms together with children and my current students.

Books

"The Name Jar" - Yangsook Choi
This award-winning picture book follows a young Korean girl named Unhei who moves to America and struggles with her new identity. As she starts school, she contemplates changing her name to fit in, but ultimately embraces her heritage.

"The Turtle of Oman" - Naomi Shibab Nye
In this chapter book, Aref, a young boy from Oman, is preparing to move to America with his family. The book beautifully explores his feelings of anticipation, homesickness, and the importance of embracing change.

"Probably Ruby" - Lisa Bird-Wilson
Ruby was adopted by a white couple who understand little of her Indigenous heritage. Through her novel, we meet the people that are connected to her life and how they have impacted her identity. The novel is written from many perspectives, describing the reality of a transracially adoped Indigenous child.

Reasearch Papers

Exploring the Process of Global Citizen Learning and the Student Mind-Set - Lilley et al., 2014
A research paper explores experiences that foster a global mindset and perspective shift, leading to traits like reflexivity, relationality, and critical thinking.

The moral and the political in global citizenship: Appreciating differences in education - Veugelers, 2011
The research paper discusses the definition of global citizenship and educators' vision of global citizenship education focusing on the moral aspects.

Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature - Mallett, 2004
The researcher has undergone a literature review on research about the concept of home and is aiming to reflect and critique the research on home, thereby discussing what home is understood as in the field.

Podcasts

"Crafting a Citizen Story" - How to Citizen with Baratunde
A podcast highlighting the three narratives we have told ourselves about us: either we are subjects, consumers or citizens. How can we live the narrative of a citizen?

Meritocracy in the Classroom: An Educational Podcast for the Culturally Responsive Educator
This podcast channel provides educators with a toolbox of strategies who aim to close the achievement gap for Black and Brown students.

"Global Citizenship in Early Childhood Education" - The Preschool Podcast
Paula Jackson, Director of Global Citizenship at Barefoot Books, explains how positive early childhood experiences can establish a solid foundation for life when it comes to global citizenship and staying curious and open-minded.

IMAGINATIVE
ENVIRONMENTALISM
and
SOCIAL JUSTICE

HOW EDUCATORS CAN INSPIRE LIFELONG ENVIRONMENTALISM THROUGH A SOCIAL LENS

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Destiny Bunprakong

As time passes by, globalization and climate change become unavoidable and topics of paramount importance, especially in an international classroom. It is time to question in what ways future environmentalists will be educated to acquire the knowledge, tools, and a mindset to take care of the Earth.

Through Destiny's experience, interviews, and research, she analyses the strong link between environmentalism and education, and the role educators play in nurturing future citizens. Environmental issues have a severe impact on society and concern us all; learning and dealing with these goes beyond a small action or the reduction of a specific product. At the end of the day, everyone's real home is Earth.

In the summer of 2022 I was fortunate to spend time in Mexico City, where one July morning, we found ourselves headed towards the borough of Xochimilco. While the sky was still the deep blue of dawn, we carried a pair of canoes down to the canalside and, one-by-one, stepped into the swaying vessels. When we set off, the sky was the deep blue of dawn. Against the backdrop of overgrown greenery and waterside constructions, distant rumbles of an awakening city could be heard. The swooping call of water birds occasionally rings out between the swoosh of paddles against the murky water. Mist settles around us and the sun begins to rise, creating a hazy, mythical scene.

After wrangling the vined plants that skim the water, we arrived. Our destination is a floating plot of land known as a 'chinampa'. Constructed thousands of years ago by the Aztecs (Gayatri, 2022), the extremely fertile land is the site of a social-environmental project. It is a continuation of the historical tradition as these plots used to feed the entire city. The Earth provides seasonal vegetables, grown by locals who are paid fair wages. The project, known as 'Chinampas en Movimiento' is financially supported by sales of their harvests and tourists who take a journey similar to ours.

When I think back to that summer, our morning along the canals sticks out as a beacon of hope. The project was born out of care for the planet, but it was our interactions that have an impact beyond a neighbourhood in Mexico City. We took home an emotional reminder of how truly connected our ancestors were, and we are, to the Earth. In line with the principles of Imaginative Ecological Education (IEE), I believe our trip is a window into how educators can deeply engage their students in taking care of the planet.

Feeling: The peace and stillness of a sunrise inspires awe, and was contrasted vividly by the frustration of wrestling water vines with our paddles and rewarding soreness of my arms.

Activeness: This externally manifests in the action of paddling through the foggy canals. The internal connection arrived later, by feeling the damp earth nestling the seedlings in our hands. It was a glimpse into the future, of a bountiful harvest we would never get to see but were intangibly a part of.

A sense of place: Our entire experience was deeply grounded to the physical plot of land, but our relationship with the chinampa stretches beyond that. Local tradition and history provide a beautiful roadmap for present-day sustainability.

THE LAST STRAW

In one of my interviews for this post, I interviewed Paulina Cordova, a student at Universidad Anáhuac in Mexico City. She studies social responsibility and sustainable development and is one of the co-founders of Cycloop - a social enterprise developing logistics that will hopefully bring reusable containers to the food delivery apps of Latin America. She offers a wider perspective on the external social factors of environmental action.

She gives this anecdote: "Maybe you avoid using a straw. Maybe that straw doesn't make a difference to the world, but someone next you might be like 'Why aren't you using a straw?' and it's like 'wow' and you explain. Something has changed in that person, maybe. The individual to the global change for me, it's more like that. Mentality changes with actions. Sometimes those actions might not be so relevant, but they have an impact because you are transmitting it to other people."

It turns out, there's a lot more nuance than Cordova explained in our 15 minutes together. You've probably dealt with a damp, dissolving paper straw before - an outcome of the global movement against plastic straws that started on the Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu in 2018 (Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme, 2018). That frustrating beverage experience is the start of a story - imagining a world without single use plastic.

It's led to a rush in social conversation about saving the turtles and whether what we're doing for the environment is enough. Despite it being a step in the right direction with the involvement of national policies, National Geographic reports that plastic straws make up only 0.025% of the 8 million tonnes of plastic that end up in our oceans every year (National Geographic, 2019).

More importantly, the straw-ban is what the director of Stanford Center for Ocean Solutions Jim Leape calls a 'moral licence' - we get to feel like we've done something for the environment without having to make drastic lifestyle changes. Even then, the change is drastic to disabled people who rely on the flexible

and sanitary, disposable nature of plastic straws.

WHAT KIND OF CITIZEN?
When educators choose to take a critical look at the environmentalism they promote in the classroom, they can differentiate using Joel Westheimer's visions of global citizenship.

Avoiding a straw is an appeal to personally responsible citizens, whose actions are based on 'good character' and voluntarism. He divulges on how actions like these focus on private kindnesses that "fail to examine the deeper structural causes of social ills" (Westheimer, 2017

I hope to uncover more of Westheimer's critical, social justice citizenship.

Educators can support students by recognising that environmentalism has deep roots in emancipation and justice. Britannica references the Chipko movement in India, which linked forest protection with the rights of women, and the Assembly of the Poor in Thailand, a "coalition of movements fighting for the right to participate in environmental and development policies" (Britannica).

As Cordova so vividly stated, "environmental problems are social problems." She saw those living in poverty collecting plastic and glass to sell, and knew there was some relationship between our consumption, the welfare of others and the state of our planet. By creating learning opportunities based on local scenarios, students can cultivate a sense of place as they develop empathy for the nuanced social impacts of environmental issues.

Time in nature may be limited, but with imagination there is always a way to affectively engage young environmentalists. When we value our students as active participants and meaning makers, caring for our planet becomes something we can, as Dr.Judson says, weave into our hearts together.

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MUSINGS ABOUT HOME

OVER A PLATE OF PIZZA

CONVERSATIONAL NOTES AND THOUGHTS

BY MARGARETHA DE MOOIJ,
SAVITA SINGHAL, DEBRA WILLIAMS
GUALANDI, AND NATALIE SHAW

When the invitation to contribute to a special issue of the ITE magazine about home in all its permutations and meanings arrived in our inbox, a group of us responded, signalling our willingness to explore the concept through a shared piece of writing. All of us had written together with other people before, but we were curious and motivated to try something that was new, as the format was quite open.

Our starting point: we gathered for a pizza meal meeting during which conversation flowed freely but was purposefully guided by the overarching concept we had been asked to write about: home, and our perceptions thereof. Post-its were soon added to the table as our thoughts unfolded through mutual questioning and careful listening, leading to a dense web on potential starting points.

Below, we have gathered our responses in a piece comprised of individual ideas, yet connected by the main topic, to which each contribution is a personal response elicited by our conversation. The question 'Is not belonging a privilege', which framed part of our conversation, provides a focal point for each contribution. Margaretha de Mooij opens with a reflection on leaving, coming, and going; Savita Singhal reminisces about arriving in Meppel for the first time and encountering curious questions; Debra Williams Gualandi explores the loaded nature of the question 'Where are you from?', and Natalie Shaw closes the piece with a short reflection on the privilege of not belonging.

Margaretha de Mooij

When the questions was posed, about what 'home' is to me, it took me a long time to put this into words. For me, home is a feeling, a place, people, safety. When I was young, I always dreamed of living anywhere, but in The Netherlands. I grew up in the countryside close to Meppel, and I wanted to see more of the world. When I was 17, I went to London to work as an Au Pair for a Nigerian family. At that age, I thought the UK and The Netherlands wouldn't be that different from each other, other than the language. Looking back, I have to laugh about how naïve I was and my (I know now) small view of the world, but I felt I knew it all at that age. Living with a family that is from a completely different culture was new for me and took some time for me to adjust. But I didn't mind not having a feeling of belonging right away. Due to my past, I was used to this feeling of not really belonging. Because of my father's passing away when I was very young, and my sister's when I was 11, I always felt a disconnect with my classmates and friends because I could not really relate to their innocence and, luckily for them, they couldn't relate to how I felt. So, not having a feeling of belonging or, in the London case, a sense of home, was totally fine for me – it felt sort of normal. Growing up, my mother and the house I grew up in always felt like home to me and after my time in London, I was happy to come back again.

But being away from home had also made me more independent. I had learned to create another home, and I missed London and the life I had there.

So, I was back home where I had strong feeling of belonging, but at the same time, I had changed and grown as a person and didn't feel the same sense of belonging as before. I became restless and wanted to explore the world even more.

After some travelling and my studies, I ended up in a multi-cultural school in the western part of The Netherlands. Students were predominantly from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Most of the students were from warm and loving families. But there were also students that did not go home to a safe family environment. For some of them, school was their home, as the school was a safe space where they felt they could be themselves and forget about the troubles in the place where they lived. The interaction and relationships with my students made them my second home, besides the home I created with my husband.

After travelling the world and living in big cities, I never imagined myself living in the same area as where I grew up - the countryside near Meppel. But ironically, that is exactly where I ended up! Five years ago, my husband and I bought my old neighbour's converted farmhouse, 400 meters away from the house I was born and grew up in. Only when I moved into this house with my husband and son, did I feel this strong sense of belonging and really feeling at home. I have a view over the lands my father, grandfather and great grandfather worked on, and my son is the 5th generation growing up on these lands. The past and present are coming together, and I have never felt more at home as I do now. I imagine this to be my forever home, but you never know what the future might hold...

Savita Singhal

I have always been in favour of moving. I love it. Maybe because, I love to explore new places, new habits, new cultures and look at the world from various perspectives. I don't know! But this idea has always excited me. It was not limited to just moving to a new country, I was happy even if we were moving houses or cities. Change is important to me.

I moved to the Netherlands in 2018 with two new colleagues who, like me, had also left their country and were all set to make the Netherlands their new home. One of my colleagues was an African-American who chose to stay in a small village near Meppel to enjoy the quiet and serene nature. But with this decision came challenges. And this made me think: 'Is a sense of belonging in this new setup a privilege or not?'

For my other colleague and me, who lived in Meppel, it was an excitement as we were approached by curious eyes who wanted to know what English-speaking people were doing in a small city like Meppel, which is not a tourist destination. We were never intimidated by this directness. In fact, we enjoyed the attention.

Questions like 'Did you feel culture shock when you moved here?', which showed the ignorance of some people, did not upset me as it provided me with the opportunity to showcase my lifestyle, my habits and culture and provide them with first-hand information about my country. Thus, I feel that open-mindedness could be one of the factors which

contributed to the sense of belonging. However, I cannot ignore the fact that there are major cultural differences. And I need time to navigate them, and I am still working on it.

Another important factor which plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging is a social support network. Rome was not built in a day! I am fortunate that I work with wonderful colleagues who are always welcoming, but I can be a nuisance sometimes. I did build a network which can be called social, but I do miss being around people from my country. I miss celebrating Diwali and Holi, the gatherings, dressing up for special occasions. Is a feeling of home still missing even though I love to stay? Or am I a bird who is looking for birds of the same feather to flock together?

Debra Williams Gualandi

'Where are you from?' A seemingly simple question rooted in pleasant curiosity that often emerges early on in an exchange between people who don't know each other - be it at the bicycle repair shop, in the staff room or on a train ride. 'Where are you from?' A question that raises barriers at borders, acts as a thin veneer over crass stereotyping or purposefully emphasises another person's non-belonging.

For some, the answer to that question is clear and seamless. For some, it is complex and requires a longer and more personal response than the asker is expecting. For others, it is painful – a moment of emotional recollection, perhaps related to forced departures from places one can no longer return to.

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We give a lot of importance to that question. We have a natural need to categorize objects, events and people. It helps us use what we know about the world to understand what is new. Ah, you are from the country of Mexico – what do I know about Mexico and people from there that will help me communicate with you, understand you? Help me build bridges? Or help me put you in one of my knowledge boxes? If you and I are from the 'same place', we might think we can rely on a lot of shared knowledge that paves the way for humour, common ways of seeing the world and saves us both a lot of explaining.

The response to the WAYF question that I like the most is the non-response. I might say, 'I've lived in different places. Home for me is where my family and friends are.' This feels very true, most of the time. It could lead to further conversations, or it could stop there. I might ping the ball back into the arena of polite talk and ask, 'Is there a place that you call home?' or 'Did you grow up in one particular place?'.

Sometimes I am not in the mood for the non-response. Those are the days when I wish I too had a clear and seamless answer. I might be feeling that way because I am tired and a one-word response feels easy and quick. It might be because I sense in the person asking a

desire to tell me just how things are in the place I am from or a confirmation of what they thought (In my youth, I told a few tales and found my interlocutor saying something along the lines of 'Oh, yes, I knew you were Australian.' What on earth does an Australian look like, I asked myself. PS. I am not Australian.)

I might answer the question with the name of the place I was born, or the nationalities of the passports I hold, or the name of the country where I spent most of my growing up years, or the name of the country where I have lived the longest, or the name of the country where I am living now. Each of those answers feels both true and unfinished. All of the above requires some story-telling and imagination. In that sense, not belonging (entirely) is a privilege. You can tell your own story.

Natalie Shaw

Is not belonging a privilege? I would answer this question with a handy grammatical construction from my native language German: jein. This amalgamation of ja (yes) and nein (no) implies an ambivalence that I would like to explain and explore further.

To me, the answer is crucially connected to power. If not belonging is outside of one's influence and not intentional, the resulting experience of exclusion can be traumatic, deeply alienating, and existentially painful. To prevent others from feeling this way, I believe a reflective attitude within any community is vitally necessary. Too often, I experience that belonging is welcomed, yet only if it is on the terms of the community that is 'welcoming' the newcomer. 'You may join, but only on our terms' is the underlying pernicious message of this belonging-by-condition. The very fact that there is a group assumed to take a decision about this very matter reveals the power dynamics that are at play. Who are the 'accepters' to determine whether the 'newcomer' may be allowed to join?

On the other hand, not belonging can be a choice, connected to personal privilege. My background and upbringing have led me to the vantage point of having been able to experience different cultures through extended stays in various countries, both in Asia as well as in Europe.

Having witnessed the social, economic, and political circumstances in other places, I oftentimes feel disheartened by the culture of entitlement and complaint that I frequently experience in Western Europe, specifically in my 'home' country of Germany. However, I tend to forget that me having had these experiences is an expression of my privilege: of having had the financial means, the education, and the passport that frequently made me a 'welcome' foreigner. Not everyone has these means that will permit them to experience living in other places in the way I was able to. This makes me reflect on my own underlying entitlement that underpins the dismay whenever I witness people taking society's institutions, a relatively stable security situation, and accessible healthcare for granted.

In all places, I also clearly saw the outsiders less welcomed by a given community: indigenous people, migrant workers, domestic helpers from other Asian nations being eyed with distance bordering on disdain.

From my vantage point of privilege, I was able to feel at home whilst resorting to my foreigner status when it suited me. Having started my career abroad after obtaining my teaching degree in England, aspects of 'adult' life such as tax declarations and other 'domestic' tasks one usually learns as a young adult were easily navigated with help, since 'I don't really know how things work here'. It is convenient to be a foreigner in this moment, in but never fully of a place.

Now, living in the Netherlands with my family living in adjacent Germany, I still carry a welcome ambivalence, echoing my 'jein' response.

I happily reside in the Netherlands, yet I am not of this place entirely. Similarly in Germany, returning to my parental house that has been in our family for over 150 years, I feel a sense of belonging yet also of stagnancy. Meeting old acquaintances, I am quick to point out that yes, I am here currently, but I am no longer of this place fully. Interestingly, in either direction, I use the word home: I am going home to Germany; when returning to my houseboat in the Netherlands, I also announce that I am going home.

EXPERIENCES

Luxembourg

What is a funny experience you had during your teaching practice?

We had this boy in class collecting wood chips from the playground. One day, I found one next to him on the floor and told him. So, he picked it up, told me that it belongs to him and shoved it in his winter boots he was wearing.

Vancouver, Canada

What is a funny experience you had during teaching practise?

Having to teach hammer throwing to the students. The class teacher usually takes over PE lessons and for the track and field day the students had to know how to throw a hammer. I did not expect actually mallets to be in the equipment box. After talking to some colleagues and YouTube videos I taught the kid what I had understood to be hammer throw.

Berlin, Germany

What is your favourite memory from teaching practise?

I was sitting on a movable chair and the kids put blankets on top of me and I suddenly looked like a very funny ghost that was driving through the room on the chair. I just loved making up such a funny moment for them spontaneously.

Berlin, Germany

What is your favourite memory from teaching practise?

On my last day of TP a girl (5 yrs old) came up to me and said "Did you know it was illegal for you to leave our group?"

A DECADE
ABROAD

NAVIGATING CROSS CULTURAL IDENTITY

Hannah Rasmussen

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During a cool and breezy Danish summer evening, a family friend posed a thought-provoking question: 'Can you envision yourself returning to Denmark?' Their inquiry prompted me to realise that this summer of 2023 marks a decade of my family embarking on our international journey. This milestone highlights how my parents' decision to relocate to a foreign country has shaped the trajectory of my life by introducing me to new possibilities. What was initially expected to be a temporary chapter of 4-8 years of living abroad has lost its expiry date and turned into an unknown, perhaps indefinite, deadline. This introspection made me contemplate what it really meant to me to spend the past ten years living abroad.

I was born in Denmark as a cross-culture kid (CCK) which Pollock & van Reken (2009) define as someone who grew up with more than one culture present in their home, for example, children of a cross-cultural marriage like myself.

However, many children of different backgrounds fit into the definition as seen in the model below.
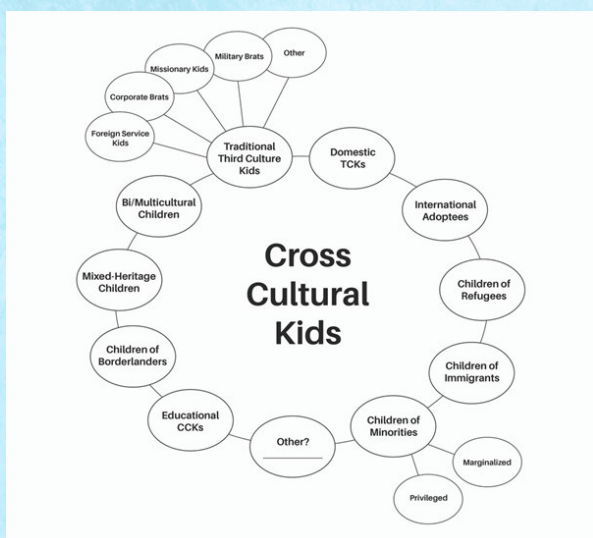

Figure 1: The Cross-Cultural Kid Model (van Reken, 2009, as cited in Bell-Villada et al., 2013).

With a Danish father and a German mother who wanted to nurture my bilingual skills, I encountered funny situations at an early age. Mixing the languages up left my friends and teachers confused when I attempted to translate jokes that weren't translatable. Additionally, it occasionally led to curious children remarking on my 'unique' speech, as my pronunciation was still a work in progress at the time. My tongue would curl up at the back of my mouth when attempting to pronounce words with the German 'sch' sound, leading to mispronunciations of words such as "Schlange", "Schuh", and "Schnee".

Living in Denmark meant that a significant part of my German family lived far away from us, with reunions typically reserved for holidays. Ironically, this geographical separation fostered exceptionally close bonds, and reminiscing about those visits make up some of my most cherished childhood memories. Yet, it has also contributed to my sense of Germany not quite feeling like a true home to me. At the age of twelve my parents then made the decision to relocate our family from Denmark to Belgium, which per definition made my siblings and myself third-culture kids (TCK's). The term "third culture kid" (TCK) defines a person "who spends a significant part of their developmental years outside the parents' culture." (Pollock, Van Reken, & Pollock, 2009, p. 12). Leaving one's

home is never an easy task, and the beginning of our international journey was accompanied by both highs and lows. Research suggests that 12-year-olds begin forming more profound and meaningful connections with their friends (Sharman et al., 2007), and I missed my friends back in Denmark greatly. Nevertheless, as time passed, I formed new friendships and underwent some subconscious realisations. When people ask about my cultural identity, I tend to find myself offering one of two responses. Either I declare that I feel more European than distinctly Danish or German, or I confess that I most strongly identify with my Danish or German heritage outside Denmark or Germany. This tug-of-war with identity is a common struggle for TCKs, as noted by Moore & Barker (2012, as cited in Tan et al., 2021), and my own experience mirrors this sentiment. Growing up in Denmark but having a part of my family living in Germany triggered self-identity questions from a young age, and spending most of my teenage years in Belgium only deepened the complexity of this self-discovery journey.

During a Danish class discussion on Danish identity (spoiler alert: there is no definite answer), I found myself questioning my own sense of belonging. I expressed my uncertainty about how Danish I truly felt at that moment. Surprisingly, my teacher became upset, insisting that I was unquestionably Danish due to being enrolled in the Danish language section at the European School and my upbringing in Denmark. It seemed, however, that she had momentarily overlooked my German heritage. Did this imply that I was somehow less German because I wasn't in the German section? Around the same time, I hit a vocabulary roadblock in my German language development. I struggled to articulate myself at the same level as my peers, leading them to perceive me more as a Dane who also happened to speak German. As you can imagine, this was quite perplexing for a 15-year-old trying to make sense of their cultural identity. Attending a European school meant that most of my peers shared a similar background, which led to my friend groups forming a comforting bubble of internationals with diverse backgrounds. Our commonality was being TCKs. As I evolved, I found that my childhood friends in Denmark were growing in one direction while I was growing in another (many people, despite their backgrounds, might relate to this). Suddenly, I felt estranged from the culture that technically belonged to me, as indicated by my passport and mother tongue. There were pop cultural references I could not grasp, and even seemingly miscellaneous aspects like clothing styles began to look different from those I had become accustomed to in Belgium. I would only catch up on Danish pop music during summer break when spending many hours in the car listening to Christopher or Lukas Graham on the Danish radio. Coloured clothes and the Fjällräven backpacks gained popularity in Denmark, while people still opted to wear mainly black and use Michael Kors handbags as school bags in Brussels.

On the other hand, for the first time, I encountered people who, like me, were children of cross-cultural

marriages and spoke multiple languages. In fact, my ability to speak Danish and German was not as exceptional as it had been in Denmark, as I befriended classmates who were proficient in up to five languages.

This experience brought me a new sense of acceptance, where I could be myself without the need for explanations. There was an unspoken understanding, almost a way of saying, "I see you, and you see me," without verbally expressing it. It also encouraged me to become open-minded, as there was no single dominant culture or language amongst us; thus, there was no 'us vs. them' mentality.

The end of the school year became dreaded as I experienced several close friends moving away. I had never had everyone I loved and cared for in one place, but suddenly, I had friends spread across the globe, some far away and some close by. I experienced a new type of friendship that didn't require daily updates. I would reunite with certain friends annually, yet our conversations seamlessly picked up where they left off a year earlier. I, to this day, have electronic and paper-based pen pal relationships that I have stayed in contact with for ten years, and I must say, it is a beautiful experience to know that my friends are thinking of me from afar.

At a certain point, I came to the realisation that I am perceived as someone with a distinct background speaking with a touch of uniqueness in my Danish and German, notably not necessarily in a negative way. During my time in Denmark, I began yearning to feel connected to my German culture again, but upon spending three months in Germany recently, I found myself missing the Danish efficiency, particularly during my daily train commute. Additionally, transitioning from the Danish culture of groundedness and addressing colleagues by first names, even in formal settings, to the German culture, took me by surprise although it is a concept I have known for many years.

Without a complete explanation, it feels as though I have an easier time blending and expressing both cultures when I am in international settings. In such diverse environments, there is no absolute right or wrong way to be, as the fusion of so many cultures at the table results in a multitude of communication styles.
Choosing a career path that would allow me to move and go various places seemed like a natural next step. With a foot in multiple worlds, I remained committed to pursuing an international path. During my gap years, I seized the opportunity to work as a substitute teacher in Denmark. The valuable work experience I gained during this time inspired me to become an educator.
I dreamed of working at international schools, aiming to be the kind of teacher in which students could see themselves. It was through a colleague who had also studied at ITEps that I stumbled upon the perfect opportunity. ITEps offered the ideal blend of teacher training and living in an international environment.

Throughout my time at ITEps, I have come to recognise one important factor we, as student teachers, acquire from our experience here that will be valuable in our future teaching

roles. This international experience, whether our backgrounds align or differ, offers us an understanding of students with an international background. We share a common journey of self-identity, the challenge of keeping up with our mother tongues while also acquiring new languages and figuring out what 'home' truly means to us. Acknowledging that this experience is not unique to me but is increasingly becoming the norm for many children from diverse backgrounds, I feel privileged to be in my current position. I hope to become an example to other children who may grapple with the challenge of self-identity and am grateful for the opportunity to potentially inspire them on their journey of self-discovery. I would have wished for a teacher like that during my school years.

Returning to the question posed by the family friend, I would like to imagine that my children will somehow have similar international experiences to my own, perhaps even by raising them in Denmark, as I was. A decade has come and gone, yet I still struggle to define my identity. As I have grown, my perception of self has shifted, leading to me realise that perhaps my identity is fluid and ever evolving, shaped by the phases of life I navigate.

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THERE IS NO DIVERSITY WITHOUT INCLUSION

HADIATOU BARRY

On September 4th in 2023, ITEPS and ITESS celebrated that they are now jointly studying together on the Meppel campus as an ITE community. Therefore, Hadiatou Barry came by as one of the keynote speakers. Her speech was very inspiring, and we thus wanted to feature it in this edition of the ITE magazine:

"I have always had the conviction that education is the key to success. Because as Nelson Mandela once put it, there is no greater weapon with which to change the world other than education. I absolutely agree with Mandela and applaud the efforts of educators worldwide. In fact, I believe that if anything you have the real power to change the world. You literally shape the future generations, and that is indeed a great responsibly, especially in polarizing times like these.

As a student I have first-hand witnessed the importance of support from my peers and most importantly teachers, in achieving academic and personal success.

At the age of 10 I moved to the Netherlands. As should be expected from everyone who wants to live in this country, I had to learn the language and culture. To that end I was sent to an international class. Finding my way in a country with different customs, norms and values was not easy but I tried, and I was to an extent successful, because there was this one old teacher and I remember her as if it were yesterday, juf Gritty, who had seen my curiosity and had decided that I had potential that needed to be nurtured.

She would lend me books to stimulate my reading and took time to discuss the readings with me. I in turn would use what I had learned to help my peers. It was a win-win situation. I was the last to join the international class, but thanks to juf Gritty I was the first to leave.

After six months I could speak the language and was ready for a normal Dutch primary school, or so I thought. You see, the international class was in a normal primary school. In the morning we would have Dutch lessons, and, in the afternoon, we would be in a normal class with Dutch children. These children were open-minded, they were used to sharing a classroom with children from all over the world. Diversity was normal and even enriching to them. The same could however, not be said for my new school. I was eager to go to that school, and I was looking forward to making new friends. Unfortunately, that did not happen. I found myself in an environment in which I was the only black person and one of very few people of color most of whom were double blood (mixed race). I did not receive the welcome I expected at this school. I was a talkative kid, who had strong opinions that I liked to share, but in that environment, it felt safer to keep it all in and to be quiet.

This was because my peers had made it clear that I did not belong with them. After all, they believed that Africans were inferior beings, in need of help and at the mercy of the whites. I came into that school with such light and enthusiasm but after a few months of standing up for myself, all that remained was a little girl in fear of being herself.

Even my teacher always sided with the other kids. He turned a blind eye and really showed me that I did not belong.

Looking back at the situation, even though I do not condone their behavior, I also do not hold a grudge against those students, after all we were all just kids. What I do think, however, is that with a better upbringing at home and proper guidance from their teacher, they would have done better by me and others who looked like me or where different to them. Their actions are the consequence of the stereotypes they heard and saw in their environments. Growing up how many shows did you watch with a person of color in the lead? Was the black person not always the silly or the evil guy in the movie? How many dolls of color did you have? I played with white barbies. And when watching movies, I always wanted to be the girl with the long straight blond hair. Because I was made to believe that that was more beautiful.

Continuing with my story, if there is anyone to blame, then it is the teacher who did not create a safe learning environment for all his students. As a teacher it was his responsibility to ensure that his classroom was a safe haven for all students. An environment in which they would be stimulated to learn and grow. To be open-minded, just and good people. His inability to be open-minded himself, to be there for all his students not only wounded but also scarred one of them for life. That little girl always believed that regardless of how smart she was, or hard she worked, and whether or not she identified

with this country, she would never belong.

This was my personal story, but unfortunately, I know of too many similar ones, some even worse. Of children who, because of their cultural background or social economic class, where classified by their teachers as being less smart or less capable. When I said that you hold the power to truly make a difference in the world, I meant that. Had that teacher stood up for me, I am certain the scar I was left with would not have been that big of a burden to bear. How that would change my life's experiences we will never know.

I would like to share another story with you that has shaped me. It was in my 5th year of high school; we had English from this lovely teacher who everyone including myself liked. That day I will never forget, we were discussing some literature readings, it had something to do with Shakespeare. We watched a fragment of a play related to the literature. And I remember that there was one Black actor in that fragment. After watching the fragment, we were asked a question by the teacher. One student attempted to reply. A kindhearted student who in that instance made a huge mistake. She commented using the N word.

It was quiet, for a second everyone seemed perplexed. Being the only Black person in that class, her words hurt me. But what hurt me most was the way in which she said it. It was distasteful and it felt like someone had stabbed me in the heart.

I had a flash back to my years in primary school, what if speaking up leads to my social isolation in that school? What is the right way to reply to this, after all she did not say it to me? While in my mind I was still debating on what to do, our teacher took it upon herself to speak up and correct her student and in doing so teach us all a lesson. She did it with such grace that in that instance, I did not feel alone. The way she explained how wrong that comment was, the weight it held and the consequences it has had on so many people in history, I could never have done it better. She was strict, yet fair. Allowed her student to understand what she did wrong and made sure that everyone in that classroom understood the importance of treating other human beings with the respect and dignity they deserve.

I often wondered whether that teacher was conscious of what her actions in that moment meant to me as a Black student. I can tell you that the gratitude I felt that day was immense. I felt safe and at home in her classroom. This was a safe space.

For me, these three stories are connected. It is not merely about the content of the subject you teach, but also the way in which you treat your students and how they treat one another in your classroom. Knowing when and how to speak up, what type of action to take in a given situation and being conscious of the type of teacher you want to be. What is the legacy you want to instill within your students? What do you want to be remembered for?

No matter how much time passes by, I will never forget these 3 teachers, I

might not remember the details of what they taught me, but I will never forget the way they made me feel. And how their action or inaction shaped me into becoming the person I am today. While I trust that most teachers have the best interest of their students at heart, I know that reality is not always as straight forward.

My work as a diversity officer has taught me that regardless of our intentions, we all have implicit biases. The education we enjoyed, the people we allowed into our lives, the neighborhood we lived in, the books we read and the media we consumed all have shaped us in a particular manner. They are jointly, the experiences and characteristics that make up our person.

I always say, the matter of diversity is not complicated. While I know that when I ask what diversity is, for most people specific characteristics come to mind, I can with certainty say that diversity transcends those characteristics, because as individuals we are all different and we all are in relative terms diverse. However, there is diverse in diversity. What matters is knowing what type of diversity you are looking for as an institution. Is it cultural diversity, sexual orientation or religious diversity? Measuring diversity can often be as simple as a headcount.

Inclusion on the other hand is more complex. It is about emotions, participation and belonging. It is something that is not tangible and thus not easily measured. Especially when you take into consideration that because it concerns feelings it can differ from person to person. Therefore, when our reality and our feelings are so different, how can we ensure inclusion within a classroom? How can we expect an individual from a small village, who had never left that place, has read certain books and consumed certain media, to be open to everyone, including those who have different opinions and who look differently? Well, that is the challenge, isn't it. The art is not to make everyone see or believe the same. It is about respect, it is about being yourself and coming to the realization that others equally have the right to be who they choose to be, no matter how you feel about that. It is about safety, the safety to think, it's about choice, the choice to be, and about freedom, the freedom to act within the confinements of the

laws of the school. The beauty of diversity is that it's very enriching.

While they may seem different, diversity and inclusion are connected. Dutch anthropologist Jitske Kramer describes it as breathing in and breathing out. You cannot do one without the other. Therefore, while it is important to have a diverse classroom, I would argue that it is more important to have an inclusive classroom. Attracting as many different people as possible – being diverse – does not automatically assure inclusion. All students should be able to equally participate, are heard, feel seen and have a sense of belonging. Being aware of and acknowledging your implicit biases as a teacher are key in creating an inclusive classroom. But that alone is not enough, management needs to be involved in the creation and promotion of inclusion practices. These practices should be sustainable and realistic. To ensure this, the voices of everyone involved should be heard. This to me, means that students' voices too, are heard and considered before a decision is taken or a policy is implemented.

To really experience a sense of belonging, students need be allowed to be themselves at all times. No one should have to change who they are to participate in education. The questions of what type of institution and teacher do you want to become? And what kind of legacy do you want to leave behind? Are questions you alone can answer.

What my personal experience has taught me is that who a teacher is, is more important than what they teach. 16 years later, I still remember the teacher who believed in my potential and consider the one who spoke out when I could not, to be a hero. She serves as an inspiration for me to stand up for those in need. I equally remember the one who dismissed me.

What I want you to remember from this talk is that there is no diversity without inclusion. And that real inclusion creates a sense of belonging. Which in turn stimulates people and in this case students to be the best they can be. Creating an inclusive environment is at times challenging, within a classroom it is the responsibility of the teacher.

Be the teacher you wished you had and change the world. More than ever before we need great teachers. Be that great teacher!

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