Whiteness in teacher education research discourses: A review of the use and meaning making of the term *cultural diversity*

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Teacher education researchers do not explicitly define the term *cultural diversity*.
- Teacher education researchers use the term *cultural diversity* in relation other undefined terms.
- Teacher education researchers use *cultural diversity* extensively in binary oppositions.
- Teacher education researchers are actors who produce a discursive ideology of White supremacy.
- Discourses of teacher education research may effect racial justice.

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ABSTRACT

The term "cultural diversity" is extensively used in recent teacher education research, but its meaning appears to vary and therefore needs to be made visible. This article reviews the use and meaning making of the term cultural diversity. The analysis reveals three main patterns across the 67 studies reviewed: Cultural diversity is (1) undefined, (2) related to a set of other undefined terms and (3) used in binary oppositional discourses that produce a racialized Other. Drawing on critical Whiteness studies and critical discourse analysis, I argue that despite attempting to promote social justice, researchers are actors who produce a discursive ideology of White supremacy.

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1. Introduction

This article reviews the use and meaning making of the term *cultural diversity* across 67 international research studies on teacher education published in the period 2004–2014. The term cultural diversity is extensively used in recent educational research, especially in research focusing on multicultural education. There already exists an extensive amount of research on multicultural teacher education, particularly in the USA (e.g. Castro, 2010; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008), but work in this area outside the USA is only just beginning to gain traction. Even though established researchers in this research area describe cultural diversity by referring to various other terms (e.g. Artiles, Palmer, & Trent, 2004; Banks, 2012, 2014; May & Sleeter, 2010), the meaning of cultural diversity appears to vary. Reviews of teacher education studies reveal that the lack of conceptual clarity is persistent across teacher education research (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Grant, Elsbree, & Fondric, 2004; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). In their critique of teacher education research, Cochran-Smith et al. (2015) claim that this lack of conceptual clarity is a well-known issue. In a review of intercultural competency in teacher education, Smolcic and Katunich (2017) argue that such lack of conceptual clarity reflects a lack of culturally relevant theoretical and conceptual knowledge. Despite some researchers taking an interest in the analyses of discourses and particularly how terms manifest themselves in teacher education institutions (e.g. Matus & Infante, 2011), multicultural teacher education researchers generally do not focus on the constructed—and potentially contested—meaning of central terms such as cultural diversity.

If the establishment of meaning "takes place through language" (Leonardo, 2002, p. 4), conceptualisations of terms in discourses, constituted by knowledge-producing institutions, work through educational curricula and practice (Afdal & Nerland, 2014, p. 284), and teachers' dispositions are fundamentally about meaning making related to feelings that affect pedagogical behaviour (e.g. Eberly, Rand, & O'Connor, 2007; Garmon, 2004; Robinson & Clardy, 2011). The varied use and meaning making of cultural diversity in research on teacher education then needs to be made visible because its conceptualisation affects the dispositions of researchers, teacher educators and student teachers in ways that in turn effect social justice (Mills & Ballantyne, 2010). Therefore, I argue that to investigate the use and meaning making of cultural diversity in educational research is important because, despite research on cultural diversity in teacher education appears to promote social justice, it in fact subtly produces discourses that centre Whiteness as normal through ways that the term cultural diversity almost always denotes an inferior and racialized Other. As long as Whiteness is an engrained and unexamined area in the discourses produced for teacher education, the extensive focus on cultural diversity has implications for teacher education when it comes to promoting social justice.

The aim of this article is twofold. Firstly, it aims to clarify how Whiteness works through the use and meaning making of the term *cultural diversity* by making visible what meaning is given to this term in the reviewed articles. Secondly, it aims to discuss possible implications for researchers in the field of teacher education as well as teacher educators. The two questions guiding this review are:

1. How is cultural diversity used and made meaning of in teacher education research?
2. What are the possible implications of the use and meaning of cultural diversity for researchers in the field of teacher education as well as teacher educators in relation to social justice?

The article's main theoretical framework draws on critical Whiteness studies (CWS), wherein Whiteness is understood as an ideology of White supremacy that works through discourses. Methodologically, the article is inspired by the data-gathering strategies of systematic reviews (e.g. Gough, Thomas, & Oliver, 2012a, 2012b) and an analytical approach based on critical discourse analytical theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). These theoretical and methodological approaches are important because they allow the researcher to focus not only on the object of the discourse (Foucault, 1989; Goldberg, 2006) (i.e. the use and meaning making of cultural diversity) but also on the patterns of discursive positionality within a targeted area of research. In this manner, the article aims to map—and thus make visible—the discursive object constructed in the use and meaning making of cultural diversity. Simultaneously, it aims to deconstruct and uncover the subtly promoted positionality of the researchers within a delimited research area and within a delimited timeframe.

In the next section, I outline the article's theoretical perspectives. I then describe the rationale and criteria for the selection of the studies, provide a general overview of the selected studies and explain the strategy for analysis. Following, I address the article's first guiding question by presenting this review's analysis. Next, I discuss this review's analysis against the second guiding question and in light of the concept of Whiteness. Last, some concluding remarks are made.

2. Theoretical perspectives: Whiteness as a discursive ideology of White supremacy

Both critical researchers of Whiteness and critical discourse analysts aim to challenge the existing social *status quo*, for example, by questioning the power/knowledge (cf. Foucault, 1980) produced within institutions, with a wider goal of bringing about greater social justice (Taylor, 2009). However, whilst critical discourse analysts generally focus on detecting and deconstructing the workings of any dominant group's hegemonic discursive meaning making, critical researchers of Whiteness are mainly concerned with detecting and deconstructing the workings of Whiteness in different societal contexts. In this article, I review written texts and focus on detecting and deconstructing the workings of Whiteness through the discursive use and meaning making of the term *cultural diversity* in teacher education research studies.

Theoretical perspectives in both CWS and critical discourse analysis recognise the inextricable relationship between the Foucauldian concepts of *power* and *knowledge*. In the concept *power/knowledge*, power is always a function of knowledge and knowledge is always an exercise of power. According to Foucault (1980), power/knowledge "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). As an embedded part of discourses, power/