

Translation k02e02 Heinemann

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Hello, my name is Alisha Heinemann, I'm a professor of educational trajectories and diversity at the Institute of Technology and Education at the University of Bremen in Department 12 Educational Sciences, and today I would like to speak about the "Grey side of 'doing diversity'."

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This episode, like all the other episodes, is quite short, but I have nevertheless formulated three learning objectives, all three of which I hope we will at least begin to achieve. And that is, first, to gain a general overview of the idea of 'doing diversity'. In the second step, we want to take a critical look at diversity concepts and practices of 'doing diversity', and thirdly, we want to derive a discrimination-sensitive approach to these diversity concepts.

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When we talk about 'doing diversity', then it refers to talking about and dealing with difference in institutional contexts. And these are institutional contexts, such as the university or other educational institutions, but also, for example, companies or public administration. In all these contexts, we think about how to deal with difference within these contexts. And there are two approaches. One is the socio-economic perspective. Here, the normative reference tends to be the maximization of corporate success, for example, the highest possible return on investment, appealing to as many people as possible, making maximum use of, let's say, human capital. And the second perspective, which is particularly relevant for this lecture, is the anti-discriminatory perspective. Here the normative reference is that in a society where difference leads to inequality and injustice, we want to create more justice by 'doing diversity'.

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There are various programs and concepts which, at their core, pursue the goal of reducing discrimination and exclusion that is based on difference and inequality. All these concepts are usually laid down in the form of various diversity guidelines and public declarations of intent. And depending on how progressive the various institutions, organizations, companies, etc. are, in some cases they are also institutionalized, that is firmly anchored, for example, by having an anti-discrimination office, as is the case at the University of Bremen.

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These concepts of diversity seem to have, first and foremost, positive aspects. For one thing, it is possible to generate something like an increased sensitivity to difference through this focus on constructed or existing differences in our society. This focus enables that categories of disadvantage become differentiated, nameable and thereby also discussable. In particular written reference points are very positive, we have just spoken about guidelines, which sometimes are published, guiding principles, which are published, or having something like these institutionalized points of contact for people who are affected by exclusion and disadvantage and who can then refer to the fact that there is something like this. And finally, the fact that a company or an institution is clearly committed to a diversity policy, to an anti-discriminatory diversity policy, means that the scope for discriminatory statements and actions is somewhat smaller.

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To ensure that 'doing diversity' concepts do not have the opposite effect of what they actually want or are supposed to achieve, it is important to deal with what I call here the "grey side of 'doing diversity'". There is, unfortunately, a great deal of it, but I would like to pick out four points in the following. These are 'reproducing', 'distracting', 'masking' and 'silencing'. There are others, but as I said, I will go into these four in more detail now.

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'Reproducing' - let's start with construction in deconstruction. What exactly does that mean? It means that by talking about difference and about different categories, such as the category of woman or the category 'of color' or queerness, we are also producing and reproducing these differences again and again. At the same time, we find ourselves in a dilemma, because not naming the categories and not naming this identity position leads to the fact that we cannot even see or say that a group is disadvantaged or deprived in a certain way. And we can only counteract this if we ask ourselves, on the one hand, who benefits from 'diversity' out of which position and in which way, and who is perhaps fixed to identity positions by the 'diversity'-reference that simply do not really fit for him, her, the person. And at the same time, we must keep the intersectional perspective in mind, seeing that the individual social positionings and categories that might fit for people, that there are always several at once, so we are not just woman for example, but we can also be a woman of color, we can be queer, we can be not queer, we can be cis, can be trans. And all these categories play a role in intersectionality, which partly gets neglected in the context of diversity strategies, because then it's suddenly about one category exclusively and about one position to which you are then fixed. And only if we go through these reflection loops again and again and pay attention to breaking up these categories, only then can 'diversity' be something other than, as Paul Mecheril says, the sophisticated continuation of power relations with means that at first glance "seem somehow respectable".

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'Distracting', that would be the second aspect of the 'grey side of diversity', is when diversity is talked about, quite enthusiastically, quite cheerfully, and many colorful pictures are published, of colorful teams for example, and there is no more talk about the specific violence that lies in experiences of racism, of sexism, heterosexism, Ableism and classism.

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The third area of risk is what I call 'masking', the so-called disguise effect. And this happens when diversity concepts are above all used to show the outside world how innovative and sensitive to differences the institution is. We see this a lot, for example, when we are at the CSD, at Pride, and then the Pride floats from various companies drive past us and everything is very colorful and happy. And the goal above all is to enhance their own image, while at the same time not much is happening at the real implementation level, so for example if the declarations of intent, the guidelines that we briefly mentioned earlier, are actually not legally binding at all, or when the anti-discrimination offices and points of contact that have been set up are only counseling centers for those affected, but have no possibility of sanctions at all.

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The fourth area, which I call 'silencing' or the so-called gag effect, arises above all when

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these diversity-related concepts are developed and represented by people who are not personally affected by structural discrimination. This leads to the fact that the voices of those who are actually affected in the company, in the educational institution, in the administration, wherever, are made inaudible and this results in so-called "silencing". In other words, there is an ostensible eye-to-eye level at which people talk to each other, but those who can get their voices included in the paper, in relation to the question of who determines the content of the guidelines, are often voices of those who are not affected by discrimination.

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Let us summarize briefly. 'Reproducing' leads to the fact that orders of difference are confirmed again and again, thus quietly strengthening existing relations of inequalities. 'Distracting' is about distracting from the actual topic and thus also from the violence inherent in hierarchizing orders of difference. In 'masking', a shiny cover is laid over existing and problematic institutional structures, and in 'silencing', those affected by discrimination are silenced.

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So how can we prevent that the four risks that are inherent in diversity concepts, that are inherent in 'doing diversity', that we don't fall into these traps? So, for example, if we don't want to say 'diversity' when it comes to explicitly naming racist or sexist violence, then be brave and keep asking: What's actually happening here in this case that just came up, in my company for example, or in my institution? And who is benefiting from it? Always be alert and intervene, also audibly, if you have the feeling that diversity is being celebrated, but power relations within the institution are not even mentioned. Or if there is something like the rainbow flag on the entrance door as a commercial trademark, but any self-criticism within the company, within the institution, is not desired. Intervene when discriminatory statements are downplayed, and so on.

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In order to prevent diversity strategies from becoming mere declarations of intent, keep thinking about how you can make it possible that what is stated in the paper or what the anti-discrimination office was set up for, that this is actually something that is binding, that is sustainable and that can be implemented structurally at all levels of the institution.

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In order to make diversity strategies not about but in collaboration with the people they are about, critically evaluate with your group that is writing this guideline: Are representatives from all marginalized groups involved in the development of the paper? And what about the decision-making prerogative with regard to joint decisions and agreements, also regardless of the status group? And here it is very important that you pay attention to one aspect, namely that those affected by marginalization, by discrimination, are always very quickly accused of being aggressive or inappropriately emotional and at the same time they are denied being competent or even neutral. This move, this attribution of 'you are emotional and therefore not neutral' is another way of silencing those affected, with the result that their legitimate concerns are not heard and cannot be brought forward.

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Finally, I would like to give you some assignments and that includes to please take a look at the diversity concepts that exist at your university or your company, your organization. Or if they don't exist, try to find out why they don't exist and maybe look for a neighboring institution or a neighboring university. Then take notes: What are the goals of these concepts? And how do you experience the real-life implementation of the concepts? And if you yourself are not directly affected by the disadvantages the concept refers to, ask your colleagues and/or fellow students if they would like to share their experiences with you regarding the institution's sensitivity to difference. Finally, think about what you would do if you had the opportunity to create and implement a diversity concept as an educational professional or in other leadership roles. What would you pay attention to?

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Finally, here you can see the literature used.

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And I thank you for your attention.