



## ***DigIT: Developing Digital Skills and Tools for Better Inclusion of Refugees and Immigrants***

*Project Reference:* 2021-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000032041

Toolkit to higher education (HE) training for educators

### **CHAPTER-4**

#### **Optimising the wealth of Diversity in Higher Education**

**Utilising refugees and immigrants multi-cultural experiences to enhance the prescribed curriculum and develop skills and multiple perspectives with the class.**



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

#### **Disclaimer**

This project has been funded with the support of the European Commission. The content of this website represents the views of the authors only and is their sole responsibility. The Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

DIGIT © 2023 by Vistula University is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

## Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i> .....	3
<b><i>Chapter 4-</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b><i>Optimising the wealth of Diversity in Higher Education</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<i>Introduction:</i> .....	4
<i>Overcoming challenges of Incorporating Diversity in the Pedagogical Context</i> .....	5
Strategies for incorporating diversity as a meaningful pedagogical resource.....	5
Examples of successful initiatives that have leveraged the skills and knowledge of refugees/immigrants in higher education .....	8
<b><i>External Sources</i></b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b><i>References:</i></b> .....	<b>11</b>

## **Introduction**

Access to higher education (HE) is a fundamental right that should be granted to all individuals regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. However, refugees and immigrants often face numerous barriers that prevent them from fulfilling their desire and motivation to access HE. These barriers can be cultural, social, economic, and legal in nature, and they require a concerted effort from all stakeholders to overcome.

HE professionals play a crucial role in facilitating access to HE for refugees and immigrants, as they are in a unique position to provide tailored support and guidance. However, HE professionals need to be aware of the specific challenges faced by refugees and immigrants and equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to address these challenges.

This digital toolkit is designed to address this need by providing HE professionals, student association members, social workers, teachers/career advisors from schools and colleges, and workers from refugee support organizations with a comprehensive guide on how to facilitate access to HE for refugees and immigrants. The toolkit's objectives are to raise the level of competence and socio-economic awareness among HE professionals, enhance refugees/immigrants' professional and personal growth, and encourage refugees/immigrants to pursue their education and contribute to community development.

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the toolkit, the recommendations provided are based on the latest legal and policy developments affecting access to HE, as well as the best practices identified by experts in the field. This digital toolkit was created to serve as a valuable resource for HE professionals and other stakeholders involved in facilitating access to HE for refugees and immigrants. By equipping HE professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to address the barriers faced by refugees and immigrants, we can promote social inclusion, diversity, and community development.

*Chapter 4-*  
*Optimising the wealth of Diversity in Higher Education*

**Utilising refugees and immigrants multi-cultural experiences to enhance the prescribed curriculum and develop skills and multiple perspectives with the class.**

**Introduction:**

This module aims to help higher education professionals utilize the differences in lived experience and ideas of participants as well as their own cultural and transcultural experiences, to enrich the higher education workplace. Within the space of the higher education classroom, we envision a new opportunity of development of the educator, and the students, including those with refugee backgrounds.

The module seeks to go beyond merely acknowledging differences as some kind of tokenism to diversity, but attempts to use it as a pedagogical resource which can lead to better cognitive and affective outcomes for all participants. This would include the educator, who may have to reflect on his or her own assumptions constantly and review the parameters of what previously may have been a successful course. Neither is it only educators to whom this section is aimed at. Students, including those from refugee backgrounds, should understand the value of different beliefs and practices, and see the classroom as an effective space to base different discourses.

**Objectives :**

1. To increase diversity of perspectives in class, especially perspectives based on lived experiences.
2. To draw upon real-life case studies and factors that would be distant from the European Higher education context to question, challenge, modify and evolve European perspectives.
3. To encourage critical situational analysis, where the positions in an academic or practitioner's domain are viewed as a result of a cultural-historical-social process.
4. To help increase ethno-relativity amongst all participants (Based on Bennett's 6 stage model of ethnocentrism-ethnorelativism)
5. To provide an impetus of self and group reflection.

**Resources needed:**

The resources that can act as a basis for this process of development are based on perspectives, ideas and lived experiences of people who have lived in cultures different to the prevalent culture of the classroom. Some refugees would have faced substantial adversity in the context of forced displacement and resettlement. This leads to such students having experienced multiple world views and an understanding of different lived realities.

**Overcoming challenges of Incorporating Diversity in the Pedagogical Context**

Diversity, for diversity's sake can be celebrated, yet the pedagogical potential of diversity in the classroom ought to be recognised. Without a key understanding of the theoretical basis where students' diversity acts as a resource of learning, diversity in the classroom may reduce to mere tokenism. This tokenism acknowledges difference and articulates its importance but does not utilise it effectively to improve learning and understanding. Recognising diversity should not be a standalone, apart from the course. Therefore, pedagogical imperatives and learning outcomes with a theoretical basis, and ideally empirical evidence, ought to be the driving force towards developing activities. Pedagogical objectives that aim for cognitive and emotional development ought to be the starting point for planning activities, rather than carrying activities out for their own sake.

***Strategies for incorporating diversity as a meaningful pedagogical resource***

1. Moving Beyond tokenism: Diversity should not be separated and abstracted, but ought to be understood within the context that we are living in. Combining diverse cultural experiences within classrooms undoubtedly transforms practices to be more responsive to changing education contexts. As per Giroux (1991), diversity helps us resist closure on knowledge, recognising it is contingent, dynamic, and with different meanings. Therefore, incorporating diversity should not be incorporating a standalone activity, but to create spaces in the 'standard' curriculum, where the curriculum can be appraised critically.

The illustration below hopes to provide an indication :

Context : A higher education classroom focused on teacher training in a European Union country
--

Class profile : 70% native students, 15% European students, 15% non-European internationals from the Global South students including refugees
Task : Evaluating Computer-based Cooperative Learning based on prescribed texts from a cost-benefit perspective
Added value of Diversity : The task can be carried out across different contexts (which may not necessarily be different across countries or the same within countries) where different monetary resources are available and different cultural factors are at play.
<p>Desired outcome : Not merely is the value of Computer-Supported Collaborative learning estimated from a detached decontextualised teaching perspective but also where socio-cultural and linguistic diversities pose challenges to collaboration, or require added teacher interventions. Also given the relative abundance of teaching resources in Europe, the perspective of a refugee who may have migrated from a region with limited resources, would also add an economic and possibly an economic-socio-cultural interaction-based perspective. Potentially, in addition, it may also lead to questioning the necessity of Computers for supporting collaborative learning.</p> <p>Some inputs may seem removed-from-the-Norwegian/German-classroom but are likely to be relevant and are certainly real, in modifying the planning of a typical CSCL intervention, and would enhance any lesson planning task around CSCL .</p>

Such an approach, considers and constructs different challenging contexts, which may differ in the scope and intensity of challenge, as well as the discussion for solutions, some of which would be contingent and dynamic. It would allow us to question the status quo approach that can be encountered in different teacher training guides and books.

**2. The challenge of positivist knowledge :** The critical pedagogy tradition questions the claim of the neutrality of knowledge and a unitary hegemonic conception of reality (Friere, 1961). By analysing the processes and factors that shape knowledge, we understand contexts in which knowledge was reified. The objective of border pedagogy is to create theories and alternate conceptions, which transcend posited knowledge, including by analysing the criteria that value

some knowledge as credible and those that do not. Giroux (1991) argues that border pedagogy is the idea that differences are a means to developing a more democratic discourse within the classroom and university spaces. Neither is this limited only to the humanities and arts. Even within statistics utilised for social sciences examples of seemingly ubiquitous conventions are found, which on investigation reveal arbitrariness.

Within the social sciences and humanities, the choice of concepts, decisions regarding operationalizing such concepts has been varied as has been the choice of methodologies, and therefore should be approached with healthy skepticism.

For example, the notion of 'nation' which in European contexts has been synonymous with culture, and until recently, implying a singular, monolithic culture that is practised by the people of the nation. Such a concept would be very misleading and inaccurate to describe other 'nations' which consist of multiple identity groups with a variety of histories, languages, belief systems and lifestyles which all have a historical and emotional connection to the land. By acknowledging, questioning, respecting and analysing why these differences exist, we hope to redraw the boundaries between the norm, and what is seen as different to a more open, democratic and de-centred classroom.

**3. Challenges of Constructivist Learning** Utilizing diversity and difference as a pedagogical practice necessitates a constructivist approach to learning. Yet, in a constructivist classroom, a flawed understanding of constructivism can mislead educators into believing students are able to structure their own learning effectively. This may sometimes be the case, however, expressions of diverse cultural experiences and its interaction with constructivist classroom practices can lead to an extraordinary melange of practices and perspectives. And it is important to connect concepts so that they do not remain as standalones, but their relation and interaction with one another is understood. Therefore, direct instruction still plays a key role towards structuring, drawing out and enabling an environment for diverse knowledge sources.

Another common misconception amongst educators has been documented across several studies that all ideas, viewpoints and perspectives put forward in a constructivist classroom are equally legitimate and complete. The challenge here is that the classroom moves towards a kind of relativism of knowledge, which is not suited for rigorous assessment and not adhering to critical pedagogy which equally critiques non-dominant perspectives too. As per the basis of

critical pedagogy diverse perspectives ought to be subjected to the same investigation of assumptions and conditions which underlie a posited statement of knowledge (Windschitl, 2002).

***Examples of successful initiatives that have leveraged the skills and knowledge of refugees/immigrants in higher education***

The first case study below on Identity texts, utilizes the first strategy of incorporating diversity as a pedagogical resource to build a narrative and reflective space. It also employs the second strategy where by using diversity texts to some extent as it hopes to add new perspectives to the status quo.

**Case study : Identity Text as a space for sociocultural exchange among mid-career medical professionals from different countries.**

Zaidi et al. (2016) used identity texts as a means of fostering sociocultural exchange and interaction amongst mid-career medical professions at the US-based Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research. The identity text asks participants to create a representation on how their overall identity has evolved over time, taking into account broader socio-cultural and historical processes. This identity text could be represented in any form, written, visual art, tactile etc. based on the choice of the student. The benefit of this approach was it created a reflective space as well as a narrative space. The former helped in mapping tensions contributors may have faced in institutional environments, as well as power structures and the contributor's struggle within the setting. The latter helped towards creating a powerful story to share stories and highlighted the social nature of identity formation.

Zareen Zaidi, Daniëlle Verstegen, Rahat Naqvi, Tim Dornan & Page Morahan (2016) Identity text: an educational intervention to foster cultural interaction, Medical Education Online, 21:1, 33135, DOI: 10.3402/meo.v21.33135

The limitation of this case study is that it does not explore the casual and contingent nature of alternative perspectives - perhaps that was not necessary in the context.

In the next case study, however, diversity, from across the world has been used very specifically as a pedagogical resource to highlight intercultural understanding, or the lack of it, and how with singular perspectives we can create and reify 'the other'. This case study also highlights, in an effective way, how knowledge is contingent, and not necessarily uni-



dimensional. It also provides a reflective space where the participant can consider how they would react.

### **Case study : Teaching Intercultural communication with ‘An Idiot Abroad’**

Intercultural communication involves identifying and reflecting on ethnocentrism and developing intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986). Ethnocentrism is the notion that one's own perception of culture is central to their reality (Bennett, 1986). An Idiot Abroad was a TV show which involved an individual called Karl Pilkington who preferred staying in his home country and was reluctant to travel and yet was persuaded to. The TV show focuses on the intercultural experiences that Karl finds himself in as a part of a curated itinerary, which are often hilarious, sometimes cringeworthy and possibly reflective. Since this activity was a part of the communication studies department's courses, there are multiple other parts to this activity, including a theoretical introduction.

However, crucially, the debriefing part, post watching the videos, is something which would have wider applicability. This part included questions on the cultural values observed in the video, Karl's navigation of such settings, his (lack of) success as well as any strategies he may have employed and how these linked to notions of intercultural competence and ethnocentrism. Finally, there were also reflective questions which put the viewer in Karl's position or hypothetical scenarios which made them consider how they might react or would like to react.

Communication Teacher, 28(1), 9–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2013.839044>

### *External Sources*

- The UN Refugee Agency - Higher Education Programs for Refugees:  
<https://www.unhcr.org/education/higher-education.html>
- The European Commission's Erasmus+ Program for Refugees:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities-for-refugees\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities-for-refugees_en)
- The Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford: <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/>
- The Journal of Refugee Studies: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs>
- The Migration Policy Institute: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/>
- The International Association of Universities - Refugees, Displaced Persons, and Higher Education: <https://www.iau-aiu.net/Refugees-Displaced-Persons-and-Higher-Education>
- The World University Service of Canada - Student Refugee Program:  
<https://www.wusc.ca/our-work/student-refugees/>
- The Refugee Education Initiative: <https://refugeeducationinitiative.org/>
- The Higher Education Support Program by the Open Society Foundations:  
<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/what-we-do/themes/higher-education-support-program>
- The International Refugee Assistance Project: <https://refugeerights.org/>
- European website on Integration: [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/report-health-refugees-and-migrants-who-european-region\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/report-health-refugees-and-migrants-who-european-region_en)

### *References:*

- Bennett, M. J. (2004). Becoming interculturally competent. In *Toward multiculturalism : A reader in Multicultural education*.  
[www.idrinstitute.org/allegati/IDRI\\_t\\_Pubblicazioni/1/FILE\\_Documento.pdf](http://www.idrinstitute.org/allegati/IDRI_t_Pubblicazioni/1/FILE_Documento.pdf)
- British Council. (2016). Refugee access to higher education: Policies and practice in Europe.  
Retrieved from  
[https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/refugee\\_access\\_to\\_higher\\_education\\_report.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/refugee_access_to_higher_education_report.pdf)
- European Commission. (2016). Education for refugees and asylum seekers in Europe: A study of 15 Member States. Retrieved from <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0b0cdd2c-cd4e-11e5-a4b1-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- Friere, P. (1968). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin.
- Giroux, H. A. (1991). Border Pedagogy and the Politics of Postmodernism. *Social Text*, 28, 51–67. <https://doi.org/10.2307/466376>
- Windschitl, M. (2002). Framing Constructivism in Practice as the Negotiation of Dilemmas: An Analysis of the Conceptual, Pedagogical, Cultural, and Political Challenges Facing Teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(2), 131–175.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3516031>
- Hockings, (2011, p. 521).