



## EDITORIAL

### **Participation, diversity, involvement and engagement in local and global contexts**

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.26203/drzs-1y92>

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**To cite this article:** Cross, B., Shanks, R. and Turunen, T., (2019) Editorial: Participation, diversity, involvement and engagement in local and global contexts. *Education in the North*, **26**(2) pp. 1-3.



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## Participation, diversity, involvement and engagement in local and global contexts

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*Ignorance is an evil weed, which dictators may cultivate among their dupes, but which no democracy can afford among its citizens. Beveridge, 1942*

In the run up to the 2015 election, Prof Stephen Ball took the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the British Welfare State to challenge educators to reassess what education is for. As the quote from Beveridge attests, he argues that it should be anchored in a different set of organising principles centred upon democracy. Warning that pedagogy and classroom decision-making are driven by the overbearing emphasis on performance (Ball 2013, p.4), he draws on the work of Fielding and Moss (2011) to argue that rethinking education for the 21st century, related to real social needs and economic problems, will only come about by unleashing the innovative potential of schools, teachers and communities; by building and exploiting a proper sense of “democratic fellowship”. In many respects his policy analysis makes relevant for a British context similar work undertaken by Apple and Beane (2011) in the United States.

This special issue marks another milestone, that of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Unicef, 1989). Despite this rights framework enshrining children and young people’s right to participation in decision-making that affects their lives, including education, there is no agreed way in how to practise this. Therefore, this right, and the democratic fellowship it could engender, is in danger of remaining only at the level of rhetoric, rather than being realised.

Furthermore, the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) recently launched project *The Future of Education and Skills 2030* calls for educational practices that support children and young people’s skills to become active, responsible and engaged citizens in their communities as well as globally. Education and educators play a key role in this task. Innovative practices and pedagogical approaches can provide students possibilities to learn transformative competencies - knowledge, skills, attitudes and values - they need to transform societies and build up sustainable future (OECD 2019).

To address these gaps, this special issue presents contributions that bring to light examples in which participation is encouraged and acted upon, when diversity brings forward positive and sometimes unexpected outcomes for all. These articles discuss the variety of educational practices that promote children's and young people's active involvement in their local communities and beyond.

The issue explores these questions in a range of contrasting settings. Are our participation practices diversifying to reflect the diversity of experience and expertise of those involved? Are the range of ways educators involve and engage learners fully cognisant of the implications of human rights? What are the challenges to this work? How are educators changing cultures and practices in current contexts?

The Special Issue's first paper 'School ethos and the association to upper secondary school students' school engagement: A multilevel study' explores the involvement of participants in their learning with a study of school ethos and student engagement (Ramberg). As the authors highlight, the engagement of students in their own schooling has an intrinsic democratic value and their study found that school ethos is linked to increased levels of students' engagement in school, namely participation in educational planning and decision-making and opportunities for influence.

From students' engagement in school we move to the inclusion of immigrant students in 'Working together for the inclusion of immigrant pupils: A case study of a rural community in Iceland'. Wozniczka and Guojonsdottir conducted analysis in a rural school and findings suggest that teachers are key agents in the inclusion of immigrant pupils and school personnel can have a positive impact on pupils' feelings of belonging, thus encouraging their participation.

The meanings of diversity in local and global contexts are explored in the next article 'Early educators' narratives about belonging and diversity in northern Finland early childhood education'. Juutinen and Kess engage in a peer interview methodology to explore how educators co-create understandings about belonging and diversity amongst educators, learners and their families.

Sullivan and Sjolander's article 'Mother tongue classes: A parental choice, but does choice equate with parental involvement and engagement in learning?' reports on ongoing research into parents' relationship with their children's learning of their mother tongue language in Sweden. They found that parental agency is necessary for parents to feel involved and engaged in this learning which requires active work on the part of the teacher.

From English mother tongue classes in Sweden we move to 'Children's literature as a vehicle for Indigenous Diversity Awareness and Inclusion in the Classroom' in Canada. Burke, Snow and Egan-Kiigemagi have investigated the use of critical classroom dialogues and children's literature to enable students to develop a greater understanding of both indigenous culture and the loss of indigenous identity.

In the Features section of the Special Issue we begin with further work on parent-practitioner relationships. In 'Effective parent-practitioner partnerships in children's secondary education' Gundarina, Hart, Oliveira and Paul highlight what they term community or 'three-way partnership' as a

dialogic and productive partnership involving parents, school staff and students in comparison to the more usual 'information-sharing partnerships'.

Democratic participation in decision-making in education settings is returned to in the next feature by Jones 'Students as "development-agents": how one school in Northern Norway brings students and teachers together to enact school improvement' which provides a detailed case study of what concerted action can do in a particular setting.

Diversity and multiculturalism is explored in 'Translation and Democracy in the post-prevent English Classroom' which reports on how the study of different literature texts can engage minority students by reflecting their own identities and ideals while also imparting national pride (Rohatgi).

The editors are pleased to report that due to the high number of expressions of interest in our Call for Papers there will be a second issue on the theme of 'Participation, diversity, involvement and engagement in local and global contexts' in the next volume of the journal.

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