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## 'Who Are Diverse?' Conceptualisations of Cultural Diversity in Schools behind Desks and at Chalkface

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the meanings and values attached to 'cultural diversity' as a descriptive and interpretative category in the field of education in Spain, including its application to define different groups in elementary and primary schools there. It reports from a comparative study that considers the discursive production of 'cultural diversity' in Spanish academia together with the discourse of teaching staff from three schools with specific programmes aimed at cultural diversity. Results attest to three different uses of 'cultural diversity': individualisation, difference and inequalities, as well as two different assessments: enrichment and problem. It also analyses how the discourse of teachers is more complex than those of the academy, because, among other reasons, they link diversity with situations produced by social inequality, by the fact that many students are migrants, and by a different ethnic condition. In general, the academic discourse tends to present a more institutionalised, idealised and blind vision of social inequality.

### KEYWORDS

Migration; Spain; cultural diversity; schools; student diversity; immigrants; minority groups

This work examines the meanings and values of the concept of cultural diversity in the field of education and its application in the definition of different groups in Spanish elementary and primary schools. The concept of diversity is strongly present in the discourses, practices and policies of governments, education institutions, businesses, academic institutions, non-profit organisations (UNESCO 2009; Jonsen *et al.* 2011) as well as in everyday life (Bell and Hartmann 2007). Indeed, we seem to be living in 'the age of diversity' (Vertovec 2012: 309), because we are now more concerned and aware of its presence and importance than ever before. The reasons behind this permeability are largely justified as a response to the complexity and heterogeneity of contemporary societies (Bell and Hartmann 2007) related to processes of globalisation (Darling-Hammond 2010), to the age of information (Castells 1998) and to recent migratory movements (Dietz 2007). Spain is a good example of the links between the increased prominence of cultural diversity discourse and recent migratory movements. Indeed, much of the scientific and academic production generated around this issue dates from the

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second half of the 1990s onwards (Aguado 2004; García *et al.* 2008), a period during which Spain has become a major destination for inbound migration. Two decades later, the social effects of the Spain's economic crisis in intensifying social inequality have reignited interest and concern around cultural diversity.

The field of education has not been untouched by the cultural diversity turn (Horsti 2014), as demonstrated by the great proliferation of academic studies, normative proposals and teaching formulas in school practice. In Spain, the decentralisation of state power following the Spanish transition to democracy has resulted 'in a situation where cultural diversity is mainly dealt with at the individual school level, usually following a compensatory approach, by which immigrant alumni are given special attention in learning the official language(s) and in bridging educational and cultural gaps' (Zapata-Barrero 2010: 7).

The growing popularity of this term has led some authors to refer to diversity as a buzzword or as a normative metanarrative (Isar 2006) when it comes to characterising societies and institutions. At the same time, the proliferation of its usage has been accompanied by multiple, imprecise and ambiguous meanings (Vertovec 2012). In fact, it is used as a euphemism or a renaming of other concepts such as inequality, race or multiculturalism (Ahmed 2007; Oliha and Collier 2010; Unzueta and Binning 2010; Hartmann 2015), which makes it even more complex to understand.

This paper analyses, within the case of Spain, the uses, meanings and valuations attached to 'cultural diversity' as a category of classification in the field of education, along with its application to identify different groups at schools. To this end, two types of discourses are jointly examined: discourses generated by academics and researchers; and those generated by teaching professionals involved in specific school programmes aimed at dealing with cultural diversity. This multidimensional approach enables us to examine the influence of the social positions adopted by several professionals in the field of education regarding cultural diversity. We will examine the distance between the academic work and educational professionals in their understandings of cultural diversity. The comparison between the academic discourses written behind the desk and practitioners at the 'chalkface' reveals two decisive interconnected processes in the shaping of social representations of cultural diversity: on the one hand, the institutionalised dimension, objectified by experts with the power to promote, define and legitimate the determination of social problems (academic discourses); and on the other, the dimension of reality subjectified by education agents (teachers' discourse) in their everyday life (Berger and Luckmann [1991] 1966). This comparative perspective, new in this field, is especially needed to understand the processes of academic institutionalisation and pedagogic processes that touch on interculturality, understood as the interaction between different cultural groups occupying positions of inequality and social discrimination (Dietz y Mateos-Cortés 2012).

## The Educational Study of Cultural Diversity as a Defining Category of Social Reality

Numerous empirical studies have examined how the concept of cultural diversity has been shaped and applied to signal individuals and groups defined as *different*, together with the social and political effects generated by the uses of this category in relations between designated collectives and the majority groups that enjoy a position of hegemony. These studies

point to ambiguity around the concept and in its application to a diverse range of fields and groups. Its meaning depends on institutional goals and priorities, taking on contradictory connotations (Oliha and Collier 2010; Marvasti and McKinney 2011; Vertovec 2012). Cultural diversity can be a descriptive and structuring level of social and educational reality or an ideological and political concept with regard to defining the most appropriate goals for organising and managing relations between social groups (Bell and Hartmann 2007).

In the US, there is a large body of work in education into the uses and functions of discourses of diversity when labelling and characterising the African American population (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Darling-Hammond 2007; Van Deventer Iverson 2007; Berrey 2011; Marvasti and McKinney 2011; Bhopal and Rhamie 2014; Hartmann 2015). In contrast to the pre-eminence of race as a category in the US context, the foreign immigrant population still receives insufficient attention in academic research on cultural diversity, with certain groups – such as Latin American descended population – suffering from limited visibility even though they have contributed significantly to the US cultural heterogeneity (Bell *et al.* 2010).

In the European context, few studies have looked into the uses and effects of cultural diversity as descriptive and analytical categories (Terrén 2001; Lawson *et al.* 2013; Carrasco 2015; Coronel and Hurtado 2015; Jiménez-Rodrigo and Guzmán-Ordaz 2016). Contrary to the situation observed in the US, European discourses about cultural diversity are closely linked to non-European migratory movements (Dietz 2007). Coincidentally, the *Gitano*<sup>1</sup> gypsy ethnic minority in Spain has also been associated with cultural diversity, which has brought about widely discussed consequences in terms of their stigmatisation, discrimination, and social and economic marginalisation in comparison to the wider population of Spain (San Román 1997; Laparra 2011). The debate focuses on how to incorporate the cultural difference of individuals and groups of foreign immigrant origin as well as those in the *Gitano* ethnic minority, within the school system.

One aspect that has received great attention in the analysis of discourses about cultural diversity pertains to its connection with the conceptualisation and interpretation of social inequality in classrooms. Its ethnocentric, assimilationist and segregating implications have been questioned in relation to those groups classed as *different* (Oliha and Collier 2010; Berrey 2011; Carrasco 2015; Gotsis and Kortezi 2015; Hartmann 2015), along with its reifying and essentialist effects with regard to how *cultural difference* is established (Orellana and Bowman 2003; Ahmed 2007). Furthermore, it has also been found that, despite the aspirational recognition and celebration of cultural differences, discourses about diversity often do not inquire into situations of lower status, disadvantage or marginalisation of groups, or consider processes of inequality (Van Deventer Iverson 2007). In response to these limitations and inconsistencies, a *critical theory of diversity* not only takes on board and assesses cultural differences, but also considers situations of inequality and injustice perpetrated against non-privileged groups (Herring and Henderson 2012; Márquez-Lepe and García-Cano 2014; Gotsis and Kortezi 2015).

Herring and Henderson (2012) identified in the US context different approaches and scopes regarding discourses about cultural diversity. On the one hand, a *colour-blind diversity* approach, which understands that ‘social world is based on the premise that it is sufficient to embrace cultural differences among various racial and ethnic groups without acknowledging disparities among these groups in power, status, wealth, and

access'. This perspective fails to highlight racial and ethnic discrimination that individual members of these groups face (Herring and Henderson 2012: 632). On the other, a *segregated diversity* approach is found when an organisation, despite having recognised the need for inclusion and set out certain measures to improve the representation of different groups, continues to maintain differences and separate the dominant groups from the dominated groups. 'Unlike a colour-blind diversity perspective, segregated diversity does acknowledge the need for inclusion. Indeed, proportional representation of various groups is important to this concept, but there is no requirement for equal representation and parity throughout all ranks of the organization' (Herring and Henderson 2012: 633). Lastly, a *critical diversity* approach incorporates into its analyses issues pertaining to discrimination, exclusion and stratification that envelope processes of construction of difference, questioning and challenging the notions of 'colour-blindness' and meritocracy (Herring and Henderson 2012: 632).

This plurality of approaches to cultural diversity must be explored in greater detail, because they are not neutral; they provoke social effects resulting from the definition of social reality generated by these particularly legitimated discourses, identifying which groups and individuals are *different*, what *they* are like, and the relationship between us and *them*. Ultimately, examining the study of how cultural diversity is defined nowadays can improve knowledge and allows us to reflect on the way in which relations between privileged and disadvantaged groups are structured.

## Methodology

This research makes use of a qualitative methodological strategy based on the combination of documentary analysis of articles published in academic journals, as well as in-depth interviews with teachers.

### *In-Depth Interviews with Teachers*

The interviews in this article are part of a larger ethnographic study that was carried out between 2011 and 2012 in three Infant and Primary<sup>2</sup> schools in different localities in Andalusia, southern Spain (referred to anonymously as School A, School B and School C, see Table 1). Andalusia has experienced a higher increase in immigrant students than any other region of Spain over the last 20 years. In this time, the number of foreign students increased 18-fold. Nonetheless, Andalusia, due to its population size, is ranked in the middle of the Spanish regions in terms of its percentage of foreign students; specifically, for the 2012/2013 school year, this group represented 5.2 per cent of all students. In relation with the *Gitano* collective, in Spain there are no official figures regarding this population, since this ethnic identity group is not reflected in any official population records. However, based on estimations by NGOs and other associations, the Government estimates the *Gitano* population of Spain is close to 750,000 people, approximately 1.5 per cent of the national population. The greatest concentrations are found in the regions of Andalusia, Valencia and Catalonia (*Fundación Secretariado Gitano* 2015<sup>3</sup>; *Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad* 2015<sup>4</sup>). Historically, the *Gitano* population was the most important ethnic minority in Spain, characterised by a position of disadvantage, marginalisation and discrimination in social and education contexts (Laparra 2011).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the schools taking part in the research (school year 2012–2013).

School	Location	Programme for dealing with diversity	Characteristics of the school and its pupils
School A	Province capital (between 500,000 and 1,000,000 inhabitants)	Temporary Language Adaptation Classroom for foreign pupils (ATAL). Remediation Programme aimed at pupils with special education needs associated with underprivileged social conditions	State-Run Infants and Primary School (from 3 to 12 years of age) Lay school 26% foreign and 40% Spanish <i>Gitano</i> gypsy pupils
School B	Province municipality (between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants)	Learning Communities Project aimed at inclusivity	Grant Maintained Infants and Primary School (from 3 to 12 years of age) Catholic school 68% Spanish <i>Gitano</i> gypsy and 25% foreign pupils
School C	Province municipality (between 5000 and 10,000 inhabitants)	Remediation Programme aimed at pupils with special education needs associated with underprivileged social conditions	State-Run Infants and Primary School (from 3 to 12 years of age) Lay school 95% ethnic background

Two researchers from the research team carried out fieldwork over the 2011/2012 academic year (researcher 1 spent 4 months at School A and 4 months at School B; and researcher 2 spent 6 months at School C). These schools were intentionally selected according to the type of programmes developed for ‘dealing with cultural diversity’ (see Table 1).

The three schools are all working – either at the request of the regional education authority or at the initiative of the teaching staff – on applying specific policies and measures aimed at dealing with diversity: *Temporary Language and knowledge reinforce classes for students of foreign origin* (ATAL); *Remediation Programme*, aimed at pupils with special education needs associated with underprivileged social conditions; *Learning Communities*, a programme that aims at families and neighbourhoods social organisations collaborating together within the school. Furthermore, these three schools display a high proportion of foreign students and from national ethnic minorities (*Gitano* students) (see Table 1).

Access to the schools followed ethical criteria (Murphy and Johannsen 1990), in all three cases permission was sought through an initial interview with the head teacher. We also guaranteed the anonymity of the schools and all participants. Once research was complete, sessions were held to present and discuss the findings at each of the schools. A total of 35 interviews were conducted, lasting between 1 and 2 hours each. At the three schools, all members of the Management Team were interviewed as well as teachers of different years and levels (see Table 2).

The intention was to compile discourses from different institutional positions represented by the staff at each school. The interview script was drafted over the first term of the research.

### **Analysis of Academic Literature**

For the analysis of academic discourse, we focused on conducting an exhaustive and systematic review of all the articles published in Spanish scientific journals between 2006 and 2012. Scientific articles can be considered one of the main sources reflecting the dominant academic discourse because they currently constitute the most valued product for the

**Table 2.** Characteristics of the teaching staff interviewed (position, gender, length of time at the school).

Schools	School role	Position and gender
School A	Management Team	A1: Head Teacher, Female A2: Director of Studies, Female A3: Secretary, Female
	Teaching staff	A4, A5, A6, A7, A9, A10: Primary Teacher, Female A8: Infants Teacher, Female A11: PE Teacher, Male A12: ATAL Teacher, Female
<i>Total</i>		12
School B	Management Team	B1: Former Head Teacher, Female B7: Director of Studies, Male B12: Head Teacher, Female
	Teaching staff	B2: Teacher of Religion, Female B3: Psychologist, Female B4, B5, B10: Primary Teacher, Male B6, B8, B9: Primary Teacher, Female B11: Teacher of Catholic Religion, Female B13: Support Teacher for Primary, Female
<i>Total</i>		13
School C	Management Team	C1: Head Teacher, Female C2: Director of Studies, Female C3: Secretary, Male
	Teaching staff	C4, C7, C10: Primary Teacher, Female C5: English Teacher, Female C6: Infants Teacher Female C8: Infants School Support, Female C9: Teacher of Catholic Religion, Female
<i>Total</i>		10

visualisation and exchange of academic debates. The inclusion criteria for articles was that they contain the term ‘cultural diversity’ in the title or keywords and that they applied to the context of education in Spain. A specific window of time was chosen (2006–2012) because it was sandwiched between two crucial milestones in the regulation of education and diversity management in Spanish schools: the Education Act (*Ley Orgánica de Educación Act 2/2006*) and its subsequent reform through the Quality Education Improvement Act (*Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa Act 8/2013*), which is set to be implemented at all levels of the Spanish education system in the 2016–2017 academic year. A search was conducted of Spain’s two largest and more significant bibliographic databases: Humanities and Social Sciences Index (ISOC), managed by the High Council for Scientific Research (CSIC), and DIALNET, managed by the Universidad de la Rioja. An additional criterion for inclusion was incorporated, dictating that the full text of the article had to be available for consultation. The final documentary corpus comprised 88 articles.

### Analysis Strategy

Given that the aim is to critically relate academic and teachers’ discourses, an analytical integration strategy was developed that would allow, using an analytical framework of common categories, for the comparison of such different discourses. This framework of categories was organised according to structural analysis guidelines, enabling the narratives of cultural diversity to be reconstructed based on two core analytical dimensions:

- Meanings and uses of cultural diversity (as defined and applied to different groups)
- Assessments of cultural diversity in the school context.

The academic texts reviewed and the interviews with the teaching staff were encoded in accordance with these categories using the qualitative analysis assistance program Atlas.ti v.7. To reduce subjective bias, the encoding work and the tasks of interpreting the material were carried out and checked by different researchers on the team. Three axial categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967) were identified that permitted us to classify the different conceptualisations of ‘cultural diversity’ within academia and schools: individualisation, difference and inequality (see Figure 1).

First, cultural diversity as individualisation implies an understanding of it as an inherent characteristic of society, naturalising the concept by understanding that ‘all the subjects’ are diverse without considering social categories. The next two types of discourse are based on a relational conception among groups. One is based on cultural differences and another on socioeconomic inequalities. Diversity understood as difference does not refer to the possible asymmetric relations among groups. Instead, it emphasises the dissimilarities among the groups identified as diverse and the one designated as majority. However, the notion of cultural diversity as inequality incorporates the relations among the groups regarding hierarchy and social exclusion that derive from the asymmetric socioeconomic positions that these groups occupy.

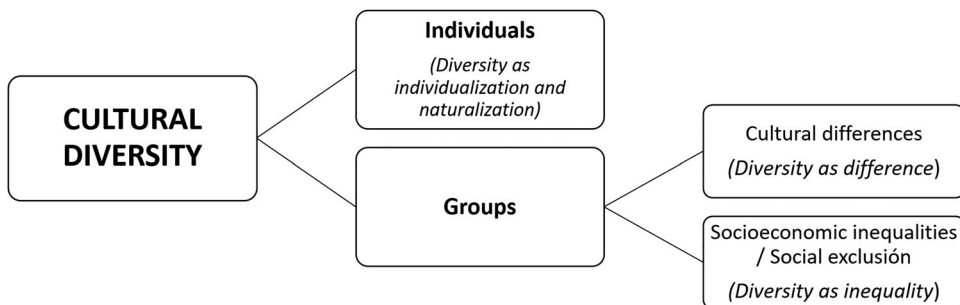
Regarding the assessments of cultural diversity in the school context, two categories spring up: ‘enrichment’, regarding the positive contributions to diversity in the classroom and in social life; and ‘conflict’ or ‘added problem’ to the work carried out by professors in the classroom.

## Findings

### *Uses and Meanings of Cultural Diversity: Individualisation, Difference and Inequality*

#### *Cultural Diversity as Individualisation and Naturalisation*

One use of cultural diversity understands the concept as an inherent quality of any individual living in society. This idea is above all characteristic of academic discourse, which largely operates from an abstract perspective, and very often does not specify which social



**Figure 1.** Analytic frame of uses of cultural diversity.



groups are diverse nor which criteria are used for defining them in social terms, as the following excerpt exemplifies:

In general, our society rejects heterogeneity, which is a native trait and an essential component of any human group. This renders difference invisible as a common characteristic. (Cabrera and Cabello 2011: 68)

From this perspective, the complexity of diversity and the multiplicity of factors that effect it are explicitly recognised, giving priority to individual factors (motivation, learning methods, performance, etc.).

Considering that each student is different and therefore education should attend individual differences ... Attention to diversity consists in applying a model of education that offers each student the pedagogical help he or she needs, adjusting the educational intervention to the individuality of each student. This aspiration is none other but adapting the teaching of different capacities, interests, and motivations to each and every student. (Araque and Barrio 2010: 11)

In the school settings, this consideration is also present, albeit it to a lesser extent. However, the unique nature of each individual is emphasised, recognising that each pupil has his or her own personal characteristics with a variety of different needs and demands during the teaching–learning process. The Head teachers of school A and school C express it in the following terms:

Researcher: What type of diverse pupils do you have in the school? –

Head Teacher: All our pupils are diverse. (School A, Head Teacher, Female, 07/09/12)

Researcher: What type of diversity do you find in your classrooms? –

Head Teacher: Well there are *Gitano* gypsies and non-*Gitano* gypsies, there are children with a strong intellectual level, children with gaps, in other words, each individual is diverse, each individual is diverse [...] (School C, Head Teacher, Female, 28/03/2012)

These discourses often express a very benevolent stance towards the diverse, well-meaning discourses that, both in the academic and school contexts, are grounded in a ‘positive’ conception, inevitable and mundane, but which at the same time ignores the processes whereby social differences and inequality are configured. In this sense, this way of understanding diversity is nearest to a colour-blind conception of diversity (Herring and Henderson 2012), where ethnicity and race are ignored:

Researcher: But how would you define diversity? –

Teacher: But me, coming from within, well I ... I barely notice diversity, probably because I’m working within ... (School A, Primary Teacher, Female, 18/04/12)

### **Cultural Diversity as Differences among Groups**

Another orientation, featured heavily in the academic discourse and the teachers interviewed, is linked to cultural differences and identification of groups – though we found differences between both fields of analysis. In academic literature, cultural differences are constructed on the circumstances that surround migrants. The majority of texts analysed did not contain specifications regarding national differences or other cultural

differences within the ‘migrant’ group beyond the national/foreign divide, as the following excerpt shows.

Within the framework of plurality that exists in our society, as we know, there are now new cultures in our social context, contributed by immigrant workers and their families [...] (Leyva 2011: 12)

The academic discourses reproduce ‘the myth of internal consistence of the cultures’, where national culture is understood in terms of a homogeneous community of beliefs and lifestyles, without mixture or external contamination (Duschatzky and Skliar 2001: 197). This process of creating or inventing essences reproduces cultural stereotypes built on general categories (for example ‘The Latin American school’) without considering other factors of social differentiation beyond the geographic adscription:

The Latin American school is characterized by a series of ceremonial and ritualized behaviours that have as their object the reappraisal of national identity. It is important to recognize that the school scenario where the process of learning takes place is very different in these countries, where there tends to be a tighter control on students and a public recognition of their merits (honour roll, awards at academic events, etc.). (García *et al.* 2012: 269)

Within the school context, the notion of cultural diversity is also constructed using the condition of foreignness in relation to the quantitative weighting presented by the presence of pupils of different nationalities in each school. But, unlike academic discourse, teacher discourse about cultural diversity is strongly associated with the *Gitano* group. The reasoning employed coincides with the dominant discourse of Spanish society, blaming *Gitanos* for *not wanting to mix* with non-*Gitanos* and keeping social relations fundamentally within their extended families and relatively isolated from the rest of society (Laparra 2011).

Researcher: What kind of people do you define as ‘diverse’ in your school? Teacher: and about the *Gitano* group ... . [...] They’re all related, they’re all related. So you never see a *Gitano* with Down Syndrome or anything like that. Have you ever seen a *Gitano* with Down Syndrome? But it’s blocked in the blood, it’s blocked... (School C, Primary Teacher, Female, 20/10/11)

The way of categorising the cultural Other is grounded in conceptual counterpositions regarding ‘us’ and ‘them’ creating homogeneous and hermeneutically sealed groups based on criteria of nationality and ethnic provenance:

Researcher: Do you to identify some people in your centre with cultural diversity? Teacher: the thing is that, except for the Romanians, the Pakistanis speak Pakistani within the family, and they don’t really mix with people, you know, from here, from Spain, they don’t really mix. That is their community and that’s it. (...) They have a different way about them, and they mix, they are more ... (School B, Primary School support teacher, Female, 30/05/12)

This essentialisation of cultural diversity, which is related with measures of special and differentiated education based in the distinction of groups with special needs due to their own individual characteristics, is very close to the *segregated diversity* approach of Herring and Henderson (2012).

### **Cultural Diversity as Inequality**

The third use of cultural diversity, identified in the academic and teacher discourse, euphemistically links it to inequality, albeit it with certain nuances in the different spheres. In the

academic discourse, the term cultural diversity is used to neutralise social inequalities through three discursive devices. First, through its non-inclusion, so that cultural differences operate independently from the dynamics of inequality and social exclusion. Second, a lack of intersectional dimension because of its tangential and homogeneous consideration of differences of gender, race, ethnic background, social class and citizenship as additives to cultural differences, without questioning the relationships of hierarchy and power between the national and foreign immigrant populations or *Gitano* population. And third, by overemphasising individual differences ('all pupils are different' is an expression repeated in many articles), so that structural inequalities are not mentioned or questioned.

Not all the students learn with the same ease, nor at the same rhythm; and they are not equally motivated. If these differences can be found among the students of the same classroom, they can be more easily found within the same school. (Navarro 2011, 30)

However, in a minority of articles, cultural diversity is not considered to impede the attainment of equality between the different groups, whereas, in the teaching scenario, given their contact with different processes of inequality, equality is imprinted with a signalling of distances and inclusion.

They enable the connection of the right to difference with the struggle against inequalities and educational exclusion and social justice; besides, they foster the development of democracy. (Martínez 2011: 167)

The search for more equity within education should take into account the unfavorable conditions that certain communities find in the process of having access to it or in the mechanisms that throughout the schooling process act in favor of maintaining the originally disadvantaged position. (Ortiz Díaz, 2009: 82)

On the other hand, in the teachers' discourse, cultural diversity is revealed explicitly as an identifier of social inequality, in contrast to the academic field where it is invisibilised or only partially acknowledged. Our research shows that part of the teachers' discourse describes the cultural diversity that exists in their schools by alluding explicitly to a framework of relations between different scenarios that reveals positions of power between groups, between established and outsiders (in the words of Elias 1997), and between school culture and family culture. The Head of Studies at school C, where there is a particularly significant presence of Spanish *Gitano*, expounds the link between the diversity present in her school and their context:

Researcher: How would you describe the diversity that exists in your school? Head of Studies: Well, [the school] is in quite a socially depressed area, with families on low, very low levels of income, and this has a strong impact on what is taught here. (School C, Head of Studies, Female, 17/04/12)

According to the teachers, such asymmetrical relations reveal conditions of social inequality, and so talking about cultural diversity means signalling the families' low levels of education, their lower schooling expectations towards their children, the poor housing conditions they are living in, illegal working conditions, sometimes linked to criminal activities, and in general, low levels of social prestige. Furthermore, these factors determine the students' poor academic performance and the atmosphere of conflict

that prevails in their schools. Hence the same informant explained the consequences of these circumstances on pupils' behaviour:

Because they have very different expectations from those held on average by the rest of the population. So, for them [*Gitano* families], the education and academic performance of their children is practically ... it isn't important at all, and so the children obviously do not perform well. (School C, Director of Studies, Female, 17/04/12)

Within these contexts of school practice, the concept of cultural diversity is also used by teachers to stress the influence of social and family context – often reduced to stereotypes – on the behaviours and school pathways of pupils identified as different. Some teachers associate cultural diversity with social compensation, and the school must respond to the sociocultural deficiencies of certain students and their families. This could be identified with the cultural diversity approach of Herring and Henderson (2012) in that it tries to supersede individualistic and colour-blind visions of cultural diversity in order to reduce socioeconomic inequalities, hence cultural diversity provides an explanatory factor for educational inequalities.

### **Assessments of Cultural Diversity: Enrichment or Problem?**

The two interpretations yielded by the academic and teacher discourses reflect confusion and ambivalence around normative issues; what is cultural diversity? How should we manage it within everyday practice in classrooms? This tension, albeit with different levels of relevance, is manifested through two evaluations of the term: on the one hand, cultural diversity is seen positively, celebrating it and interpreting it as enrichment, challenge and opportunity, very close to the ideals seen in academic discourse; on the other, its problematic nature is emphasised, showing it as an element of conflict, an assessment that appears more frequently in the teachers' discourse.

When cultural diversity is supported as a challenge and opportunity linked to the model of interculturality, aimed at questioning inequality and challenging cultural homogeneity in the interaction between groups, academic discourse shows it to be enriching, an element to be celebrated and fostered:

(...) Need to view diversity as a possibility for enrichment and social growth, as well as the importance of respect for difference. (García-Velasco 2009: 302)

The other is not a contaminating element; on the contrary, it is enriching and as such should be encouraged from all the social fields, among them the educational one. (Sánchez, 2011: 151)

Although this narration is fundamentally present in academic discourse, it also appears to a much lesser extent in the discourse of teaching professionals, specifically when it is associated with the naturalised definition of cultural diversity and its more individualised version. An argument that was strongly present in school A:

Researcher: How do you assess the existing diversity in your classroom?

Teacher: (...) diversity is richness, that's for starters. I believe that richness lies in diversity, and in knowing each other, and knowing the way in which others act, the way they speak, the way people relate with one another. (School A, Physical Education Teacher, Male, 28/06/12)

However, the research carried out by academics into school practice and the discourses of the teachers interviewed from the three schools both set out problems with the management of cultural diversity linked to social inequality and the vulnerable conditions affecting foreign immigrant and *Gitano* pupils. Hence, empirical studies show that:

The majority of schools display a problematic vision of diversity associated with gaps or deficiencies that must be overcome or compensated. Categories are defined (age, language, religion, gender, intelligence, nationality, etc.) a priori and students are assigned to them. (Aguado and Ballesteros 2012: 13)

Cultural diversity is construed as a problem when normativity is questioned through the presence of social groups that mark out differences and difficulties arise for their integration into everyday school dynamics. From the academic field, certain factors are highlighted such as language difficulties and the socioeconomic conditions of the foreign immigrant population:

Language factors and social conditions are the main factors of diversity identified (...) And it is precisely these elements of diversity that schools identify as the main obstacles they must overcome in order to guarantee the educational equality of these pupils. (Alcalde 2008: 212)

Another significant aspect regarding the problematic of cultural diversity in the schools manifested by academic discourse pertains to the 'external' diagnosis it offers of the work of school teachers and their 'shortcomings' – chiefly in terms of training and attitudes – when it comes to successfully dealing with cultural diversity in their classrooms.

The lack of expertise and information of these professionals greatly obstructs the effectiveness with which the attention to diversity is approached. (Colmenero 2007: 208)

A change in the self-perception of professors is essential; in their mentality, but above all in their attitude. Professors are the main protagonists in every process of inclusion and of attention to diversity. (Mas and Olmos 2012: 161)

Within school practice, teachers focus on the issue of cultural diversity in the cultural conflicts that arise when the school and family settings clash. Within this study, school B in particular yielded references to an absence of the social and civic values they work on at school within the family:

Researcher: How do you view the cultural diversity that exists in your school? Teacher: I see that as our greatest problem when it comes to looking at values, which values we should work on ... So we, for example, try as we might, we cannot defend the value of theft, or the value of an eye for an eye. So ... , and in all truthfulness, we see, we perceive, and we know that our children are in contact with that. (School B, Primary Year 6 Teacher, Male, 26/04/12)

Diversity is also based on the distance between school culture grounded in discipline and hard work, and the family culture ('differences of mentality') according to academic discourse.

The difficulties of these students when they arrive at school is not only founded in a linguistic difference but also in differences of culture and mentality, due to the fact that habits and ways of thinking of a Muslim boy are in sharp contrast with the educational ambiance of the school where he studies [...] To the above, we should add the lack of stimuli, the economic hardships and other factors that end up contributing to a higher percentage of school failure

and to an even deeper lack of adaptation of the individuals that belong to the Muslim community. (Ayora 2010: 41)

This is characterised by narrow school paths, low academic expectations, little interest in collaboration and participation, as well as their tendency to depend on financial assistance from public administrations or social organisations. According to the teachers, these distances that link cultural diversity with problems cause difficulties when it comes to teaching and in the climate created within the school.

Researcher: How do you assess that diversity in your classroom?

Secretary: I believe that they are different from the rest of society, because, for example, they [the *Gitano* gypsies] don't believe that an academic education is a priority or a basic tool for tomorrow. They think that as long as children can count a bit, sign their name and write out a couple of documents that's more than enough, even if they do it badly, (...) And these people, aged 16 or 17, they have had access to the current education system. They have had all the means available to the pupils here and they haven't made the most of it. (School C, Secretary, Male, 17/04/12)

In Figure 2, we offer a comparative synthesis of the main elements of the academic and teachers on cultural diversity.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the discourses generated by academics, *behind the desk*, and by teachers, *at the chalkface*, examined here point to an ambiguous consideration of cultural diversity. First, coinciding with the issues studied within the academic discourse generated in Spain (Terrén 2001; Carrasco 2015; Coronel and Gómez-Hurtado 2015) and Europe (Lawson, Boyask, and Waite 2013), the condition of being an immigrant/foreigner structures the meaning of cultural diversity as a category. A migration and appropriation has taken place on the part of Spanish academics, an appropriation of a discourse that is of Anglo-Saxon origin and links cultural diversity with migration. This result sets it apart from the construction of cultural diversity in other contexts, such as the US, where cultural diversity is often a euphemism for race and refers to how minority racial groups differ from the white population (Bell and Hatmann 2007; Unzueta and Binning 2010).

However, the discourse of teachers is more heterogeneous with regard to the collectives identified, broadening their identification of groups in terms of national origin but also ethnicity, such as the *Gitano* population. One explanation for this difference, as Martín and Pirbhai-Illich (2016) point out, is that academic discourses are based on theorisations to use cultural diversity in a homogeneous way, following a colonising logic. In contrast, when relational pedagogies are used, as in our schools with specific projects on cultural diversity, teachers are more able to use a different discourse. In both cases, this process of differentiation inscribes specific subjects within an otherness that names them and constructs them as bearers of certain marks that make them different (Bell and Hartmann 2007). This reification concerning their habits, customs and behaviour constitutes the first step to justify cultural essentialism, naturalisation of differences and, very often discriminatory and racist procedures (Picower 2009).

ANALYTIC DIMENSIONS	AXIAL CATEGORIES	ACADEMIC DISCOURSES	TEACHERS' DISCOURSES
<b>Meanings and uses of cultural diversity</b>	<i>Individualization and naturalisation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Similar approaches</li> <li>▪ Emphasis on the individual differences without paying attention to possible differences associated with different social groups</li> <li>▪ Main individual differences inherent to social life</li> </ul>	
	<i>Difference</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focused in the cultural differences linked to the immigrant origin of the foreign students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Besides the immigrant origin, attention paid to cultural differences linked to the Gitano gypsy community</li> <li>▪ Construction based on direct contact with this community</li> </ul>
	<i>Inequality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Minimal and tangential recognition of socio-economic inequalities</li> <li>▪ Homogeneous consideration of class, gender or race</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Explicit consideration of the inequality and exclusion as problems at school</li> </ul>
<b>Assessments of cultural diversity in the school context</b>	<i>Enrichment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Most common analysis in academic discourse</li> <li>▪ Positive and ideal vision of cultural diversity (challenge, opportunity...)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Minority and pragmatic vision</li> </ul>
	<i>Problem</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recognition of the factors that make integration difficult: language, socio-economic conditions, lack of training of teachers...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Most common analysis in the teacher's discourse</li> <li>▪ Daily difficulties and conflicts in the classrooms</li> <li>▪ Emphasis on the conflicts between families and teachers and the lack of support from the administration</li> </ul>

**Figure 2.** Main elements of the academic and teacher discourses on cultural diversity on education.

In Spanish academic and teaching discourse alike, the prevalent consideration of cultural diversity is often blind to inequality and produces segregating approaches. In other words, using the classification developed by Herring and Henderson (2012), their uses of diversity would be marked by the *colour-blind diversity approach* and the *segregated diversity approach*, used as an instrument in the classification of social groups labelled different in relation to the national (Spanish) or ethnic group (non-Gitano gypsy). However, teachers' presence and everyday contact with situations of inequality, discrimination and social exclusion affecting groups defined as culturally diverse lead their discourse to incorporate, often contradictorily, elements of the *critical diversity approach*. These contradictions are also supported by tensions between how the treatment of and relations with groups identified as diverse *should be* and how they *are*. In these cases, tensions mount between abstract ideals about diversity – diversity enriches us – and practical realities, as a euphemism for social inequality (Hartmann 2015).

Second, the variety of discourses regarding the assessment of cultural diversity – as a problem or as enrichment – is linked in our research with the close association observed between inequality and diversity in the teachers' discourse and, in contrast, the general

lack of references to this found in the academic discourse analysed. It is the belief of these and other authors that this reflects a worrying lack of consideration in such discourse regarding processes of inequality and an ignorance of class processes (Berrey 2011) in rhetoric about diversity, especially when drawing up plans or policies, in which inequality and power are concealed (Van Deventer Iverson 2007).

In the case of teaching staff, evaluation of the concept as enrichment or problem is related not so much with the subjects that represent cultural diversity, but rather, primarily, with a dual schema of normality and abnormality (school vs. migrant families and *Gitano*). Hence, as in other studies (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Infante and Matus 2009) when referring to cultural diversity in the teacher discourse, what becomes manifestly clear is the prevailing normativity in terms of race (white), class, gender, sexual orientation and age. This supports the conclusions reached by Nieto (2012: 678), indicating that, in an increasingly globalised world, the concept of diversity, consciously or unconsciously reflects ‘the status and value of different groups of people in society’.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

In the future, this study could be carried out in schools that are not developing specific projects to deal with diversity, in order to examine the diverse use and valuations of the concept in its different descriptive and normative dimensions. Similarly, conducting an in-depth comparative analysis of the pupils’ referential settings and factors of inequality could facilitate a more complex analysis of discourses about cultural diversity:

- By incorporating not only questions pertaining to diversity and identities but also linking these to social divisions and identities
- By recognising the specific combinations that produce systemic inequalities and their transformative potential.

This study is useful and novel because it compares different discourses that are constructed and generated at different levels that are relevant to political action in particular for the design of coexistence plans in the school or for training teachers. The interaction between these two discourses – generated within academia and by teachers – and their interlinking should allow for reflection on the need to deal with the differing appropriations made by different stakeholders in relation to the same concept, the multiple ways in which they are translated in different contexts, as well as the interests and dimensions they foster (Dietz 2007).

### **Notes**

1. We use the term ‘Gitano’ within the text, since this denomination is used by this ethnic minority to describe themselves and also as a means of designating this group in Spain.
2. Our research has focused on schools that teach Infants’ Education (ISCED 0) and Primary Education (ISCED 1) together within the same institution.
3. Available at: [https://www.Gitanos.org/la\\_comunidad\\_gitana/Gitanos\\_hoy.html.es](https://www.Gitanos.org/la_comunidad_gitana/Gitanos_hoy.html.es)
4. Available at: <http://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/familiasInfancia/inclusionSocial/poblacionGitana/home.htm>



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