

DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION:

LESSONS FROM THE 'MAKING JOURNEYS. BUILDING BLOCKS FOR DIVERSITY' USO
PROJECT



MA students visiting the exhibition in the Bestuursgebouw, 19th March 2019 (© Noortje van Amsterdam)

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The Plan

“Students from a wide variety of backgrounds (in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality etc.) feel welcome at Utrecht University. The diverse community of students and lecturers will enrich the academic debate and prepare students for their future role in a multi-faceted society. Lecturers have the skills required to teach and inspire a diverse population of students. Having a diverse staff population will offer students a wide variety of role models.”

(Strategic Plan 2016-2020, p.15)

In the Strategic Plan 2016-2020, the Utrecht University proclaims to strive towards a “diverse community” of students and staff. The aim of this diversity policy is two-fold: the UU aims to offer a fair and equal opportunity to every suitable candidate, and simultaneously, to improve the quality of education and research. Through a diversity-oriented academic culture, the university further hopes to prepare students for a future career across the diverse sectors of society.

“The Utrecht University aims to bridge differences and create equal opportunities for ideas. In this manner, the university promotes a culture of diversity in which all staff and students can feel at home. In a diverse community of students and teachers, more diverse and new perspectives, and a broader range of experiences, can be brought together in the classroom. This contributes to the quality of education, an inspiring and challenging learning environment and enriches academic debate.”

(Universiteit Utrecht Annual Report 2018, p.34 - translated from Dutch)

A diverse university community, however, does not automatically lead to the anticipated positive effects. The issue is after all not only about numerical pluralism, but primarily about the way in which the diversity in education takes shape. In policy notes, strategic plans and research reports ‘diversity’ often remains a rather abstract concept. What does diversity mean in the practice of education and how can it become a strength or resource, rather than a challenge? To initiate dialogue with all of those involved, it seemed useful to us, to make the notion of ‘diversity’ concrete, visible, tangible. The “Making Journeys: Building Blocks for Diversity” project developed from this central idea, building on the following four points of departure:



From numbers to stories

The concept of 'diversity' is primarily used in relation to the composition of the university community: in a narrower sense this plays out as "internationalisation" (Strategic Plan 2016-2020, p.17), in a broader sense as a "variety of backgrounds (in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality, etc.)" (p.6). The concern for diversity in education is then translated into policy measures that are aimed to promote the inflow of members from groups that are currently underrepresented.

But how does a plural, diverse community impact the dynamics of a lecture hall or classroom? How does an "inspiring and challenging" learning environment come about, what does a 'culture of diversity' mean in practice? What are possible questions, discussions and challenges in this context? In short: what does diversity mean in the context of UU education, what kinds of building blocks are needed to give shape to diversity and how can diversity contribute to the quality of education?

Dialogue

In a diverse university community, it is inevitable that students take different paths to reach the classroom, and step inside with different baggage. Whether from Roermond or from the Turkish countryside, from a boarding school in England or from the university of Lesotho: everybody comes from somewhere. This of course, has an impact on the educational process. In order to gain insight into how this form of diversity is shaped in the classroom, we wanted to find ways to make the paths - the stories, the baggage and the perspectives that one brings with them - subject to discussion, or discuss-able to begin with. Through these stories - the 'journeys' - we hoped to initiate dialogue about the dynamics of a diverse community involved in the educational process. We invited students who had participated in UU education through the Inclusion programme in the past few years, their fellow students and teachers. Inclusive diversity always concerns the entire university community, not only minority groups; it was therefore important to us to involve students and teachers coming from diverse backgrounds and participating in different roles within the educational process in our project.

Third Space

Diversity in education should broaden the horizon of students and teachers and enrich the academic debate. To put these hopes into practice, it is necessary to create space in education for different perspectives and experiences of all those involved. This can be experienced as problematic; is it not much easier to build on a shared, homogenous foundation in education?

Within the UU, a range of initiatives are actively concerned with raising awareness of the challenges and the potential advantages of diversely composed groups, as well as developing skills to mobilise plurality in (educational) practice with a positive impact. TAAU for example, regularly offer teachers workshops about (cultural) diversity in education. Two other projects dealing with similar issues were recently supported with USO funding: ICUU (Intercultural Competences for the UU), aimed at



the development of intercultural competences of teaching and supporting staff, and the Toolbox Diversiteit in Onderwijs ('Toolbox Diversity in Education, supported by USO funds through the Faculty of the Social Sciences).

"The structure of teaching and learning in Dutch academic contexts today leaves little room for exploring refugee students' personal stories and their experiences related to (the lack of) diversity in the classroom setting. Yet these stories seem crucial for how these students, their teachers, and their fellow students understand each other and interact. Our aims in using ABR as an innovative educational toolkit are to create spaces beyond the classroom setting where the experiences of this diverse group of students can be explored; and to raise awareness in the UU for constructive approaches to diversity within the educational context."

(Project proposal Making Journeys, first half of 2017)

These initiatives concentrate on interactions in and around the classroom. To us it seemed that a broader approach was necessary. In the classroom there is usually too little room to engage in dialogue about the paths that brought students to the given class, or the baggage that they bring with them. A busy class schedule offers little slack time, and there is rarely a suitable form that these types of conversations could take. To get to know the stories and experiences of students, a *third space* (cf. Bhabha 1994) therefore needs to be created; a space outside the classroom in which - free from the formal structures and usual in-class role division - there is adequate time and attention to listen to each other, let histories and stories surface or allow for silences take over.

Arts-based approach

The academic and rational context of the classroom offers limited opportunities to learn the stories that are instrumental to understanding the interactions within the classroom. Therefore to further research the dynamics of inclusive diversity in the classroom it is not only a *third space* that is needed; methods to make the individual trajectories of students and the baggage they carry with them to the classroom are equally necessary. For this reason, we chose to adopt an *arts-based* approach: by inviting participants to give shape to their experiences and perspectives, that which they make visible simultaneously becomes an opportunity to enter into dialogue.

"Arts-based research (ABR) more generally aims at creating empathic understanding by using techniques from the arts. For example film, poetry, plastic arts, photography, and narrative writing can be used to access and communicate emotional and sensorial knowledge going beyond the rational knowledge that is usually foregrounded in academic



contexts (Finlay 2008; Leavy 2009; Kjørup 2011). Our project aims to use ABR as a methodology to build inclusive diversity in the UU academic community. Inspired by such projects as Bouchra Khalili's 'The Mapping Journey' (MoMA 2016), Bristow et al.'s (2015) 'Hotel Yeoville' project, and Tom Holert's 'Learning Laboratories' (BAK 2016), the ambition is to co-create knowledge pertaining to the refugee student's (educational) background, the forms of diversity they embody, and current efforts to re-enter education in the Netherlands; and to allow them to 'show themselves' without threatening their status as students at the University."

(Project proposal Making Journeys, first half of 2017)

Our plan was that an exhibition would allow these physical objects to be visited, viewed and discussed by the wider university community and could therefore form a concrete platform for dialogue about diversity. Accompanying workshops would give insight into an arts-based approach as an instrument in uncovering and fostering an inclusive diversity in the classroom.

The Project

The USO application was approved in March 2017. Seeing as only a portion of the requested budget had been approved, the original plan was rethought, adjusted and implemented in a downscaled form. The project was launched in the summer of 2017 and would continue in four stages.

Exploration and Preparation

The project began with an invitation to Inclusion students, their fellow students and teachers. Soon however - with the exception of a single student - Inclusion students remained the only group involved. We return to this issue in the final section.

In the second half of 2017, a series of workshops was organised with the participating students. A different mode of expression was central each time. An evaluation session was held together with the students at the end of this first semester.

In the first half of 2018, we held individual conversations with the participants, and further developed a number of ideas from the previous semester, including a series of two short films in which one of the participating students filmed portraits of two other students. Once again a group meeting was organised (30th April 2018) to discuss our progress and next steps.

In the second half of 2018, we focused our work on the design and production of the exhibition. We intentionally chose a modular form for the spatial design of the exhibition, to enable us to combine its parts flexibly and adapt it to the diverse public spaces of UU buildings. The loose parts constituting the exhibition were designed in such a way that it was relatively simple for us to



assemble, disassemble and store it. The design and production of the exhibition modules was done by Henk de Haan, architect and designer, who also designed the project logo.

In the exhibition, a selection of over 100 objects and three films was presented under six different themes relating to diversity in educational practice. We distilled these themes from and throughout the workshops and individual conversations we had had with the students, and reviewed and reworked them together with the participating students during the 'klankbord' session (15th October 2018).

In anticipation of the opening of the first exhibition, one of the participating students, Elif Ozer, wrote a blog post for the website of the Erasmus Student Network ESN¹, which we are happy to include here:

18th of March! Keep in mind!

What type of image comes to your mind when somebody tells you about "diversity"? When I think about diversity, I unconsciously visualize a garden with different types of flowers, a big very colorful and joyful painting or millions of colorful balloons flying on limitless sky. Let's think about reverse situation. A garden with only pink roses, a painting made by only one color, wouldn't that be boring? On September 2017, I was invited by a project which is entitled as "Making Journeys, building blocks for diversity" in Utrecht University. Since I am a bit Albanian, a bit Bosnian, half Turkish, currently living in the Netherlands and fan of diversity, My DNA already accepted that invitation! When I entered the meeting hall, I saw the big colorful painting that is mentioned above. Tens of people from all around the world were together to show the unity despite uniqueness. I was literally flattered with many butterflies in my stomach, feel me? Workshops, interviews and other creative efforts were planned with teachers, refugee students and fellow students with the aim of understanding how UU community experiences diversity. All those collaborations that have been facilitated through the Making Journeys project will come to light with the "Journey into Diversity" exhibition including photos, drawings, videos, objects, and paintings made or taken by participants. Moreover, the context was "Art" and it was the most attractive part for me. Art is a common language for all human beings around the world. Even if you are not able to speak either Dutch or English, these paintings are going to explain clearer than verbal communication. Power of art is fascinating! Unfortunately, I was not able to participate all workshops because of work but I did not disregard my chance and painted something about my inner meaning of diversity. Teachers kept posted me about the flow of schedule. Now I look forward to see the exhibitions. Are you at Uithof and do you have a minute on 18th of March? Would you want to do something meaningful? Please give a chance to this exhibition! Future is bright when we are together on art! The exhibition will be on view:

- In the foyer of the Administration Building (Bestuursgebouw) from March 18 (opening ceremony will take place 15:00-17:30) until March 29.

¹ <https://esnrecht-blog.com/2019/03/14/exhibition-at-utrecht-university-journey-into-diversity/>



- In the entrance hall of the Victor J. Koningsbergergebouw from June 17 – June 28.

For more information:

<https://www.uu.nl/en/education/inclusion/exhibition-journeys-into-diversity>

Elif Ozer

Exhibition “Journeys into Diversity”

The exhibition - curated by Mary Bouquet in cooperation with Alexandra Barancova and designed by Henk de Haan - was on display twice at the Uithof: 18th-29th March in the foyer of the Administration Building (Bestuursgebouw) and 17th-28th June in the Koningsberger Building (Koningsbergergebouw). Sites where announcements about the exhibition were made included the UU Intranet, the Inclusion website,² the UU diversity webpage³ and the TAUU website.⁴

The exhibition illustrated the wide variety of experiences in and around UU education through photographs, texts, drawings, paintings, quotes (from conversations) and objects that were made or brought by refugee students, their fellow students and teachers. The title of the exhibition expresses one of the ways in which diversity is shaped; by the paths walked and roads traveled, including all transitions, inclusion and exclusion.⁵

“Diversity is a hot item in education. But what does diversity entail in practice? How is it experienced by Utrecht University students in the context of their education? This exhibition is part of the project Making Journeys. Building blocks for Diversity (2017-2019) funded by the Utrecht Stimuleringsfonds Onderwijs. The project created a space where refugee students, their fellow students and teachers could broach topics of learning and understanding in relation to their journeys into the classroom – for which there is no time or place in the classroom itself. In a series of workshops and interviews, we explored, through arts-based research, what these journeys can mean in the context of Utrecht University education. This exhibition presents a complex picture of diversity through photographs, writings, drawings, paintings, filmed portraits, and quotes. The personal journeys evoked here go beyond national or ethnic identifications. And there is room for everyone to reflect and add their experiences and perspectives.”

(Noortje van Amsterdam, Administration Building, 25th of March 2019)

² <https://www.uu.nl/en/education/inclusion/exhibition-journeys-into-diversity>

³ <https://www.uu.nl/organisatie/diversiteit-en-inclusie-bij-de-universiteit-utrecht/>

⁴ <https://tauu.uu.nl/2019/02/exhibition-journeys-into-diversity-and-workshops/>

⁵ <https://makingjourneys.com/>



By presenting individual experiences and perspectives through objects, they were given a presence in the public space of the University, whereby they could be explored, considered and discussed. At the same time, the visitor remained involved. Diversity always influences the university community as a whole. The visitor saw their own figure in the reflection of the mirrors and could not therefore be separated from the emergent multiplicity. This way, a complex image of diversity was created, showing more than a heterogeneity of backgrounds (religious or ethnic identity, socio-economic background, race, age, gender or educational baggage).

“What we created was something like a river and islands with breaks between them. You could say that this materializes the journey we all undertook when collaborating together. Not only did we assemble this very rich material; we also did some analysis of the conversations that took place. From these, we distilled six themes. Rather than impose those themes on you this afternoon, we prefer to invite you to walk through and look for yourselves.”

(Mary Bouquet, Administration Building, 25th of March 2019)

The exhibition in the Administration Building was planned to be opened by prof. Mrs. Annetje Ottow on the 18th of March. Due to a shooting incident in Kaneleneiland, it needed to be postponed by a week, to the 25th of March. In the Koningsberger Building, the exhibition was opened by dr. Sabine Uijl, Director of Education at University College Utrecht on the 17th of June. During this opening, the Information Science students who had built a website and app (see below) were present to speak about their contribution.

The official openings offered a good opportunity to bring attention to the exhibition among the university community. Students who had participated in our project introduced the objects they had contributed and engaged in dialogues about their experiences from in and out of the Utrecht University. The exhibition attracted primarily policy staff in the Administration Building and students and teachers in the Koningsberger Building. To reach more students and teachers, it was suggested that we present the exhibition for a third time, at the the Educatorium. Certainly a prime location, which however, we unfortunately could not extend our exhibition to within the limited project period and limited (project) resources.

Workshops

The exhibition was accompanied by a series of four workshops entitled “Arts-based Approaches to Diversity”. The objective of these workshops was two-fold. On the one hand, participants were guided through the exhibition. We explained how the broad range of exhibited items had come together and invited the participants to reflect on and react to the concrete and complex image of



diversity illustrated. On the other hand, the workshops were also geared towards familiarising the participants themselves with using an arts-based methodology as a means of gaining a better understanding of diverse educational environments. The participants got to know (some of) the diversity of backgrounds among the group through a bottom-up approach, as well as the potential of this approach in exploring the dynamics of diversity.

Workshop “Arts-based approaches to diversity” (Onderwijsparade, 7th of March 2019)

In this workshop, we use arts-based activities (photography and poetry) to explore how diversity is experienced and how it can be re-imagined. We use our USO project 'Making Journeys; building blocks for diversity' in which we collected stories of refugee students at UU as a starting point for discussing ways to maximize the potential of diversity in our daily practices as UU educators.

The first workshop (led by Noortje van Amsterdam and Elena Valbusa) took place during the annual Onderwijsparade (translated literally as ‘Educational Parade’) on the 7th of March 2019. The relatively small workshop room in the Utrecht University Hall (Academiegebouw) was packed (ca. 25 participants), testifying to the relevance of the theme to those present. In a tight 50 minute time-frame, the participants were first invited to share their own associations with the term ‘diversity’ through a photograph they were asked to select themselves. We then explained our project and dove into discussion about the value of diversity in education, its potential and obstacles, and the opportunities that an *arts-based* approach can offer to make different voices and experiences audible and visible.

Workshop description (18th of June 2019)

Diversity is a hot item in education. What does diversity entail in practice? How is it experienced by Utrecht University students in the context of their education?

Creating an exhibition was part of the project ‘Making Journeys. Building Blocks for Diversity’ (2017-2019), funded by the Utrecht Stimuleringsfonds Onderwijs. The project created a space where refugee students, their fellow students and teachers could present topics of learning and

understanding in relation to their journeys into the classroom – for which there is no time or place in the classroom itself. The exhibition ‘Journeys into diversity’ presents a complex picture of diversity through photographs, writings, drawings, paintings, filmed portraits, and quotes.



The personal journeys evoked go beyond national or ethnic identifications. And left room for additions and reflections. During this session, students and teachers will talk about the making of the exhibition and in particular about their personal contributions to it. A visit to the exhibition will also be part of the session.

The second and third workshops (led by Noortje van Amsterdam and Elena Valbusa) both took place in the Koningsberger Building on the 18th of June. Registered participants were asked to bring a photograph that in some way captured their ideas about diversity to the workshop with them. They got to know each other in small groups through discussing these photographs. A number of the central themes that had come up were then further elaborated in a group discussion that followed. Next, the participants walked through the exhibition individually. Sharing stories behind some of the exhibition items encouraged participants to begin discussing their own backgrounds, experiences in education and ways in which they could relate to certain items. After a short break, the participants returned to the workshop space and reflected on the exhibition together, thinking specifically about the points of departure that it can offer to think about the different ways in which diversity plays a role in education and how teachers can respond to it.

The workshops concluded with an exercise in which each group wrote a poem collectively to attempt to summarise their experiences.

“I think this workshop has made us understand not only diversity in the sense of a group of people but also from the point of view of an individual. It’s about connecting people, listening, hearing, understanding and openness. Without openness and a will to understand, listening can be an empty excuse. To really listen to all the different voices demands a great effort of flexibility; it is a challenge to find and exert that energy as a teacher. We are so used to telling and having answers. Listening is not what we are really used to. Is it uncomfortable? Listening can be uncomfortable if you as a teacher are not heard as well; communication is bi-directional.”

(Workshop participant reflection, 18th June 2019)

Diversity is not about the others
 Diversity is about all of us
 It is inspiring and complex
 And down-to-earth and hands-on as well
 But luckily we all live in the same world and
 Make it simple by sharing and adding

Opening up is scary and unfamiliar
 But is always enriching
 Uncomfortable but not unsafe
 Together we pave our way
 Yes we do!

Om jou te begrijpen (*To understand you*)
 Stap ik opzij (*I step aside*)
 Ik vraag je wie je bent (*I ask who you are*)
 En zoek de verbinding (*And search for a connection*)
 Door die verbinding (*Through the connection*)
 Ontstaan er weer andere dingen (*Other things develop*)
 Je weet niet wat er komt (*You don't know what is to come*)
 Maar er is altijd de reis (*But there is always the journey*)
 Onderweg naar iets (*On the way to something*)
 Een reis van verwondering en (*A journey of marvel and*)
 Nieuwsgierigheid (*Curiosity*)
 Life is a journey
 Of never ending discovery

One last workshop was organised on the 21st of June as a morning session to the yearly Inclusion conference. In this workshop, the students who had participated in the project discussed how they had experienced the process together and how they saw themselves through the lens of the exhibition. The website (see below) was presented and possibilities for adding new content were discussed. Students speculated about ways in which the exhibition could be kept alive through the website and what other relevant experiences they have had participating in education were still missing.

Alongside the workshops, we organised a number of supplementary guided tours through the exhibition.

On the 19th of March, Noortje van Amsterdam guided a group of students from the Master programme Organisaties, Verandering en Management (Organisation, Change and Management) through the exhibition. Directly after their exhibition visit, the students were asked to write down three impressions, insights or reflections they had from it. Here are a few of these:

Duizeligheid van alle perspectieven (*Dizziness from all the perspectives*)

De vluchteling wordt als object neergezet door de media. Maar nu lees ik over hun gevoelens en het wordt weer een persoon. (*The refugee is framed as an object by the media. Now that I read about their feelings, they become a person again.*)

De tentoonstelling maakt diversiteit persoonlijk en maakt dat iemand

zich ertoe kan verhouden. *(The exhibition makes diversity personal and relatable.)*

Meer begrip. Ik oordeel meer dan ik dacht dat ik deed. *(More understanding. I judge more than I thought I did.)*

Mobiliteit: ik kom uit Limburg. Hoe vaak moet ik het niet horen dat ik een accent heb? Ik kan me voorstellen hoe je je voelt. *(Mobility: I come from Limburg. How often do I have to hear that I have an accent? I can imagine how you feel.)*

Iedereen maakt een reis. Maar je bent divers. Ik ben ook gelijk aan die persoon die de reis maakt. Dit is een overeenkomst. Tegelijk is het belangrijk om de verschillen niet te ontkennen. *(Everybody makes a journey. But you are diverse. I am also similar to the person making a journey. This is a meeting. At the same time, it is important not to deny the differences.)*

“Zij” zijn eigenlijk precies hetzelfde als wij en maken ons druk om dezelfde dingen *(“They” are actually exactly the same as us and we are concerned about the same things)*

Ipv diversiteitsscan, doe een gezamenlijkheidsscan *(Instead of a diversity scan, do a commonality scan)*

Diversiteit mag nooit een doel op zichzelf worden *(Diversity can never become a goal in itself)*

In a conversation about diversity in education that followed, the students brought in their own experiences. This made it clear that the objects in the exhibition can make a good starting ground for fruitful discussions about diversity in UU education.

Repeatedly, the exhibition proved to be a fruitful starting point for dialogue about diversity. Within the framework of this project, this could of course only be actively pursued by us on a limited number of occasions. Mary Bouquet and Elena Valbusa guided members of the UU Diversity Taskforce through the exhibition in the Administration Building on the 20th of March. On the 24th and 27th of June, Mary Bouquet gave individual exhibition tours to colleagues and students in the Koningsberger Building.

And Further

Originally we had planned to create a digital platform that would - among other things - create space for digital storytelling. Given that the approved budget was limited, this part of our plan had unfortunately had to be abandoned. During her visit to the exhibition in the Administration Building however, we met dr. Ioanna Lykourentzou from the Information and Computer Science department.



Under her supervision, a group of first year Honours students set up a ‘digital interactive application’ in the form of a website and smartphone app. As a result, the exhibition collection is now digitally documented and accessible: <https://makingjourneys.com/>. Additionally, the website serves as a possibility to supplement the collection with new material. There is - of course - also room for reactions, thoughts and contributions from visitors to continue the dialogue. As a means of following up on this USO project, our project team member Alexandra Barancova will be managing the digital collection in 2019/2020 and further develop the dimension of dialogue on the platform.

Lessons for the the Utrecht Educational Model

“All education at Utrecht University is embedded in a vision based on a stimulating study environment and teaching that does justice to the various ambitions and talents of our students. This vision forms the basis for the way in which education is organized at Utrecht University: the Utrecht Educational Model.”

(<https://www.uu.nl/en/education/education-at-uu/the-educational-model>)

The Utrecht University dedicates a significant amount of attention to the quality of education. In the Utrecht Educational Model, the emphasis is put on individual, small-scale and flexible education (“personal and activating”) with a lot of freedom and space for students’ own initiatives (“flexibility and freedom of choice”). Its education is characterised as modern and innovative, and said to encourage students to cooperate - for instance in interdisciplinary projects. A particular profile of the Utrecht student seems to be shaped through this educational model: skillful in communication (cooperation, contribution to small-scale education), digitally mobile (on digital platforms, in webinars, online group work), full-time (part-time studies are rarely an option), and self-confident and outspoken (expressive of ambitions and preferences).

Drawing on the contact and conversations that we had with the students involved in our project, a ‘diverse’ educational practice seems, to us, to pose some challenges for the Utrecht educational model. We introduce these here briefly.

Full-time study programmes

Around 25 participants were involved in our project. Barely anybody, however, attended our sessions regularly; we rarely knew whom we could expect to join any given workshop. Some inquiring revealed that students often had concrete reasons for their absence: moving from one AZC to another, an appointment with the IND or municipality, work-related obligations, children that

needed to be picked up from school... And then there were also some less clear, personal reasons phrased as “I was quite busy”, “my mind was always busy” or “I have a long list of reasons”.

This seems to suggest that a full-time commitment is not realisable for every student. Currently, UU study programmes are for a large part aimed at full-time students, who (preferably) complete their education without any incurred delays, within the prescribed time-frame. Students with a study delay are ‘diverging’, they evidently must have problems and are often referred to study advisors and student psychologists. The pattern of sometimes (being able to) attend, and other times not, that recurred throughout our project prompts the question of whether the strive for diversity would benefit from making study programmes more flexible, so that studying part-time would no longer be viewed as exceptional or ‘diverging’. Making the pace of studying more flexible (supported, for example, through paying per study credit instead of the current full-time programme-based university fee) could foster diversity by not labelling the students who - for whatever reason - cannot commit to studying full-time as ‘other’ in advance.

Digitally Savvy

One of the key ambitions for the (near) future stated in the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 is the expansion and intensification of the university’s digital learning tools, with a view to offer students “an inspiring, challenging learning environment” (Strategic Plan 2016-2020, p.17). It is assumed that students feel positively challenged through digital learning and communication, that they indeed find it inspiring.

In our project, various students expressed how insecure they felt in a digital learning environment. An environment which did not seem to confront their fellow students with the same mysteries they found themselves struggling with. This was one of the six themes in the exhibition:

Digitalization and communication

Blackboard, Solismail, Osiris, MyTimetable, Google Scholar... Utrecht University students are assumed to be digitally savvy and aware of the implicit rules of digital communication – e.g. how much time to take to respond to an email; what salutation to use to contact a teacher. Digital means of communication can be a great resource, but can also inhibit students’ participation and incite anxiety about missing out and uncertainty about who to ask for help.

Some students also reported finding communication through a platform like Blackboard complicated: what exactly is it for and how is a student expected to use it? Can a (legitimate) reason for absence or silence be communicated through such a platform?

It became clear to us that digitalisation can function as an addition to blended learning, but that we need to be wary of viewing it as an independent way to automatically solve all issues in a ‘diverse’ educational environment.

Skillful in Communication

Next to digital skills, communication, cooperation and problem solving skills also make up the profile of Utrecht’s 21st century student (Strategic Plan 2016-2020, p.16).

Communication with the participating students turned out to be an unexpected challenge throughout our project. Being a UU project, we also set up a Blackboard community for internal information exchange and cooperation. Even though, without exception, all the participating students owned a smartphone (in many ways often a direct lifeline for them) and had a SolisID (along with which also access to Blackboard), we did not manage to channel communication through Blackboard successfully. We speculated that this may be due to the group’s unfamiliarity with Blackboard and decided to move to Facebook. The private Facebook group that we set up was, however, not much more successful. It was only with individual emails and through (individual) Whatsapp messages that we were effectively able to reach the participants.

The lesson that we take from this is of course not to recommend every teacher to communicate with all the students in their courses individually. Rather, that teachers should take into account that not all students automatically feel included (“inclusive diversity”) with general, collective messages that reach them through Blackboard, or other platforms.

Self-confident and Outspoken

The principle of the “obligation of mutual effort” in the Utrecht Educational Model has formed an educational culture in which a student entering the university is expected to be assertive and outspoken, is eager to speak and to be heard. In short, an active student who participates and contributes. Our project revealed that there are a number of obstacles that can get in the way of active participation. We presented three of these as themes in the exhibition: “Safety, fear, and responsibility”, “Confidence and pride”, and “Gratitude”.

Safety, fear, and responsibility

A safe environment is a prerequisite for learning. Yet, not all students feel safe in a UU classroom. Some fear the responses of others to their sexual orientation, their religious identity, their migration status, or their political views. Political refugees in particular may fear being reported to the regime in their home country by students who are affiliated with these governments. A strong sense of responsibility spurs some to voice their opinions, regardless of the dangers involved.

One of the students told us that the first thing they do when they start a new course is check the attendance list; who else is taking this class? Is there perhaps anything (or anyone) to be concerned about? The fear of (political) persecution is deep-rooted for a number of refugees for understandable reasons. Other fears too, however, can be a reason not to openly speak up for one's stand points: fear of being laughed at, fear of not belonging. The classroom is not a safe, value-free space for every student.

Confidence and pride

Many students feel less than confident participating in UU education. Previous educational experiences can lead students to feel that they are behind before they even start. Both Dutch and refugee students fear appearing stupid in front of others in the classroom and need time to find their place amidst educational customs at UU. As a result of this lack of confidence some students opt out of taking exams because failing could hurt their pride.

The eyes that stare you down in a classroom can make you insecure. Or even just the feeling that eyes might be staring you down - for example because you immediately notice that you look 'different' than others at a meeting as you enter. Insecurity can result in a student assessing themselves negatively, even before any examination has taken place. Not everybody sits in a classroom with the secure feeling of being entitled to be sitting there, of having earned being there.

Gratitude

Students differ in how they understand their place in academic education. They may take it for granted ("it's the logical next step"), see it as an entitlement ("I've paid for it"), or a confirmation of (intellectual) competence ("I've earned it"). Many refugee students express immense gratitude ("it's a valuable opportunity"). In combination with cultural mores, gratitude shapes interactions between students and teachers, at times stirring up feelings of burdening others or taking up too much space.

The way in which a student views their place in the classroom can differ too. While some students view it as a logical next step, for example after a VWO-exam (the Dutch high school diploma, which is after all *preparatory* for academic education), this is not the case for every student. Some perhaps ask themselves who or what they should be thankful to for being in this position - similar feelings of

gratitude can result in students feeling less entitled to speaking out freely, point to problematic elements of education or to claim their space.

In short, there can be a range of reasons why not every student feels at ‘home’ in Utrecht’s classroom by default. Simultaneously however, many students told us how important their participation in UU education was to them; as a means of learning about Dutch society, to begin building a future or an opportunity to escape the daily life of the AZC and feel like more than only ‘refugee’. This project offers insights for the UU community to think further about the complex role that diversity plays in education and in society, and to question these issues critically. In the next chapter we expand on a few of these.

Lessons and Insights

By adopting an arts-based methodology, we aimed to create space for members of the (diverse) university community who do not always find it easy to speak out, or who are not always listened to. With this, we also attempted to grasp a historical moment, namely the refugee crisis of 2015 and the socio-political discussions and movements that this has led to. A number of aspects of the way in which diversity is thought and spoken about in the UU context became clear to use during the project.

“Not about me?”

Diversity is often understood as a consequence of the presence of students and teachers with multiple nationalities, cultures or ethnicities in a classroom. The term therefore appears implicitly linked with minorities; to the ‘majority’ in the university community, this can suggest that diversity is not about them.

The project began with an invitation to Inclusion students, their fellow students and teachers. With the exception of a single student, the group members quickly narrowed down to only Inclusion students. It seemed that the other students had the feeling that the topic of ‘diversity’ concerned the Inclusion students, but not them. Students emailed us with excuses such as “I do not have so much to say about this”, “my story is not special”, but also “I don’t have time”. The notion that diversity is about groups that are underrepresented within the UU also surfaced during the workshops accompanying the exhibition; a sense of distinction between a ‘diverse’ and ‘non-diverse’ group was expressed in many conversations.

Diversity however, is not only about the Other, diversity is a relationship that we build together, as a community. This means that instead of dividing and categorising, we should, in our opinion, embrace our differences - and that holds for the educational context too. Nobody can remain unconcerned, uninvolved. We, for instance, also contributed items to the exhibition ourselves. The mirrors used in the exhibition functioned as a means to make the visitors’ reflections a constituent part of the exhibition, whereby they became implicated in its diversity. This way, visitors were invited to consider the topic of ‘diversity’ from their own, unique perspectives. Inclusive diversity always means that everybody is a part of it and is involved in shaping it together.



Language

In our project it soon became apparent that language easily lets us down. With the terms available to us we repeatedly draw boundaries that in- and therefore also exclude. It was a constant struggle to find words that would not deny the participating students' identities, but would at the same time not be restricted to unidimensional labels that categorise certain students as simply 'other' or 'different'. The question of which terms we use is of course not only about how 'the other' speak, but it also concerns ourselves. Which term, which label do students find fitting to describe themselves?

'we'	'the other'
Dutch student	non-Dutch student
local student	international student
regular student	student with a migration background
usual student	different student
average student	atypical student
white student	refugee student
UU student	Inclusion student, UAF student

Identification

In one of the preparatory workshops, we discussed whether or not students would like to be introduced as a 'refugee' in a class or seminar. The answers that we gathered in response were even more diverse than the number of those present.

The reasons for wanting to be introduced as a 'refugee student' in the classroom varied. It can be a way to make it clear that you stand behind something, even though the price you have had to pay for it was (and often still is) high. It can be a way to express solidarity with other refugees and asylum seekers. And for a number of students, a refugee vs. asylum seeker status was viewed as a determining factor as to who they are in a given moment and how complex the life that they are leading (or have to be leading) currently is. In addition, being introduced as a refugee can elucidate the circumstances driving your personal personal (study-related) goals and ambitions. In contrast, the argument that identity is not so unidimensional was also voiced in the same session; that in the first place, you may prefer to be a 'student' in the classroom. In the context of the UU however, other identity markers (like age or skin colour) can also stand out.

The answer to the question of who you are and how you wish to identify yourself can indeed partly be determined by your direct surroundings. Students' preference to not immediately be introduced

as a 'refugee' was often related to the perception of their surroundings, the manner in which they would (possibly) be viewed by others. A reluctance was expressed to being placed in a certain box, to be ascribed an identity that would determine the perception of others. There was a certain fear of prejudice and uninformed opinions of the generally still very 'young' (in the eyes of the refugee students) fellow students in the classroom. A number of Inclusion students pointed out this age gap between them and other students. Another student expressed their fear that being perceived as a 'refugee' might get in the way of fair assessment; that even a mediocre performance would be praised for being "very good for a refugee student" on the basis of a certain set of expectations.

This reluctance was particularly underlined by the need to be treated as an individual, rather than as a member of a group or viewed as a representative of a category.

As long as diversity is primarily seen as a theme for and about minorities, the tendency to attribute identity will continue to exist. The conversations that we held with the participating Inclusion students made clear to us just how little room there is to discuss and constructively frame the individual backgrounds, personal baggage and perspectives of students present in and around the classroom setting.

Listening

One thing that became evident across the range of meetings and workshops was just how important it was for participating students to have the opportunity to tell their own, individual story, in their own words and/or form and to be listened to.

Listening and understanding

A 'diverse' classroom is often defined based on ascribed identity. Teachers, fellow students or support staff label a student based on their ethnic background, gender, country of origin, religion, etcetera. This process is inevitably subject to stereotypes. Students try to oppose stereotypical notions about who they are. Some feel a constant pressure to outperform the expectations of others. Some feel that 'you should be yourself'. Most prefer to identify themselves and ask others to listen before making judgements.

Listening means making space for the other by taking a step aside. Not a step behind to put yourself out of reach, nor a step ahead to occupy all the space. Inclusive diversity implies that space is made for everybody, space to listen to diverse insights, diverse experiences, diverse perspectives.

To bring the participating students up to speed with our progress and anticipated next steps, we organised a group meeting after the initial half year of our project. Although we had thought we had made it clear that this project was a cooperation to us, one of the students accused us of talking too much and listening too little in direct response to our presentation. The student repeated this once

more in a later conversation, quoting, from the Bible, “be quick to listen, slow to speak” (Jacobus 1:19). This reproach of “talking too much” showed us how easy it is to step ahead from our privileged position within the institutional context and make others feel that their voices are being ignored, even though this may initially be with the best intentions in mind. Diversity concerns us all, including ourselves.

Conclusion

Diversity is an abstract concept, which we have attempted to concretise through visualising and materialising it. This not only through objects and exhibition items themselves, but also through a physical presence - in-between the entrance hall, study spots, coffee machines, the reception and staff room. With this approach, we aimed to give space and form to diversity in the UU context, in order to initiate dialogues and learn to see diversity as an opportunity rather than an extra burden to the already overloaded teachers' lives. "Transform the many existing differences among students into a value in education; when differences are named and used, diverging from the norm is no longer a problem of the minority, but becomes a resource that everybody can benefit from," Berteke Waaldijk, Leoniek Wijngaards, Jan ten Thije and Jan Hogendijk wrote on the issue of inclusive diversity in the aftermath of the 2016 Education Conference (Waaldijk e.a. 2016) .

Through an arts-based approach, we aimed to give visibility and presence to members of the diverse university community who do not always get the word easily or are not always listened to. This showed that education is but a part of the complex realities of the students who participated in our project. Conversations about experiences with UU education often quickly drifted off into other directions. This made us realise that it would be impossible for the students who took part in our project to avoid bringing the complexities of their existence with them into their lecture halls and classrooms.

Simultaneously, engaging the broader university community in dialogue about inclusive diversity proved to be a challenge. Diversity is often still viewed as "an issue of the other, of the 'diverse' student". Students withdrew from the project with reasoning such as having nothing to contribute. Finding space for dialogue turned out to be - quite literally - an arduous task. It was not possible to set up the exhibition in a large number of the university's buildings. We were could only reach a limited number of colleagues with the workshops.

We were able to show, however, a way in which the abstract concept of diversity can be made visible, tangible and therefore also negotiable through an exhibition based on an arts-based research process. The dialogue we held with students, workshop participants, exhibition participants and with each other yielded a range of insights, some of which we have elaborated on in this report. We invite everybody to continue the dialogue in and around the classroom.

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