39 Raising awareness and understanding of superdiversity in the classroom

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How to use this policy

Schools in most jurisdictions are required to adhere to a range of policies that promote inclusion and preclude discrimination. These policies usually focus on areas such as disability, cognitive skills, gender/sexuality, culture/race, religious affiliation, and protections for vulnerable populations. These legislative requirements are important for protecting children and families in school contexts. However, the next in step in building inclusive schools is to build an understanding of the importance of superdiversity in the classroom.

Superdiversity is a relatively new idea that describes the changes in patterns of diversity that have recently taken place in many contemporary societies. These changes mean that many schools now have a level of diversity in the student body never seen before. Superdiversity, requires considering the vast array of individual differences that make up each student and how aspects of their diversity interact with each other. It also focuses on how patterns of diversity may evolve from demographic changes in the families that the school serves, government policies, and school policies. This field is in its infancy, and there is not yet a firm empirical basis for tools and practices that comprehensively encompass superdiversity in a school setting. However, this policy aims to set out the core practices that schools can implement to begin to meet the challenges and opportunities that exist in superdiverse classrooms.

[To adapt and use this policy delete or modify the text as indicated]

[INSERT name of school] Raising awareness and understanding of superdiversity in the classroom

Rationale

In his seminal work, Vertovec (2007) highlighted new patterns of migration in London in the early twenty-first century that had not been seen before. These complex patterns of migration resulted in a *diversification of diversity* that could no longer be easily categorized according to stable categories of race, ethnicity, or religion. For example, people from the same national/ethnic

background may practice different religions, speak different languages, and enjoy different legal statuses in their host nations (Vertovec, 2007). He described these new patterns as *superdiverse*. This is not a situation that is unique to London; similar trends can be seen in many countries, including Australia, where the reasons for family migration are varied, with large movements of skilled migrants, family reunifications, and those fleeing conflict or oppression (Ng & Metz, 2015). This migration has a direction relationship to the diversity seen in Australian schools. The shared experience of these migrations, considered together with religion, language, and other cultural practices, can form the basis of individual and group identity beyond simplistic notions of national background or ethnicity (Vertovec, 2007). However, a slightly different pattern of these factors may alter those identities, which is why gaining an understanding of superdiversity in a school context is essential.

Superdiversity has been considered in areas such as linguistics (e.g., Blommaert & Rampton, 2016) and public health (e.g., Phillimore et al., 2019) but has only been recently considered in educational settings (e.g., Bardwell, 2016; Blackledge et al., 2013). In a school context, superdiversity entails raising awareness of a multitude of complex and layered diversities rather than focusing on just one prominent aspect of individual diversity, such as ethnic background. For example, knowing that a student has arrived from Syria may provide some insights into their needs and strengths in a school setting. However, understanding their previous experiences as a refugee, their exposure to languages and literacy practices, their position within the family, their underlying cognitive ability, religious affiliation, recreational preferences, and so on will lead to a more accurate understanding of the individual and their strengths and needs.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness of the superdiversity in **[INSERT name of school]** community. In practical terms, this means acknowledging and considering, where possible, that each child has a range of personal characteristics that need to be considered in all aspects of school life. These aspects include commonly considered diversity aspects such as ability, culture/race, gender/sexuality, and religion. However, given different contexts, diversity may also include personality, interests, socioeconomic status, individual needs, and a wide range of other variables. This is not an easy task; however **[INSERT name of school]** is committed to considering the scope of diversity existing in the school and how some of these aspects of diversity interact at an individual and group level.

Scope

Given that the construct of superdiversity is still developing in educational settings, this is an aspirational policy for the teachers, staff, and school leaders

of **[INSERT name of school]**. It should be viewed as the next step in supporting the diverse needs of students. Given this, the legislative and policy obligations related to diversity must be adhered to before considering the additional complexities of superdiversity.

[INSERT specific roles and responsibilities of individuals or teams]

Policy statement

[INSERT name of school] will endeavour to understand the complex diversity of the school community. We will strive to understand the school community as individuals but also as members of many diverse groups. We will seek to understand how these interactions of group membership impact on the academic and social experience of our students.

All staff at **[INSERT name of school]** commit to looking beyond specific individual aspects of each child to consider how other characteristics may be relevant (e.g., to consider gender and culture in addition to a diagnosed psychological condition) (Richie, 2016).

All staff at **[INSERT name of school]** are encouraged to consider the family structure, living arrangements, and socioeconomic status of students in the school's catchment area, as these may provide valuable insights into needs and opportunities in the classroom (Vertovec, 2007).

Staff at **[INSERT name of school]** will consider how their social circumstances and cultural background may impact on their teaching practices and their perceptions of students (Acquah, Tandon, & Lempinen, 2016).

Staff at **[INSERT name of school]** should continue to reflect on, and seek to develop, their beliefs about how culturally diverse and multilingual students learn and how other aspects of diversity may impact on this (Zheng, 2009).

Staff at **[INSERT name of school]** will actively work towards ways of teaching that position multilingual practice as the norm (rather than monolingual) and will avoid using terms which place students' knowledge in a deficit manner. The term "emergent bilingual" will be used in preference to terms such as "EAL/ESL student" (Fielding, 2015; Garcia, 2009).

[INSERT name of school] will consider the complex diversity of the school community in developing curriculum for all students. The teaching and learning tools used at the school will consider the experiences and preferences of our students.

[INSERT name of school] will consider the complex diversity of the school community in developing the extracurricular activities for all students. The mix of activities, sports, and social events at the school will consider the experiences and preferences of our students.

Teachers and staff at **[INSERT name of school]** know or actively seek an understanding of the diversity of the school community. This includes understanding the "historical, structural, and political contexts that lead to prejudice and discrimination in education" (Forghani-Arani, Cerna, & Bannon, 2019, p. 14).

[INSERT name of school] will actively embrace diversity and will specifically focus on discouraging unhelpful social concepts such as “normal” and “other”.

[INSERT name of school] will engage with organisations and support groups that meet the needs of diverse populations in the local area. Through this process the school community will develop a nuanced understating of the challenges and opportunities that exist in the community.

[INSERT name of school] will seek to embrace a range of cultural and religious days and periods of significance, not just those from dominant groups (Niemi, Kuusisto, & Kallioniemi, 2014).

School leadership at **[INSERT name of school]** will promote and support teachers in developing positive attitudes towards inclusion (Sharma & Sokal, 2016).

When the opportunity presents itself, the school leadership of **[INSERT name of school]** will consider the design and fit-out of school spaces to meet specific learning needs with a broader awareness of how learning spaces impact on a students’ connection with the school (Barrett, Zhang, Moffat & Kobbacy, 2013; McAllister & Maguire, 2012).

Rating of evidence base

Figure 39.1. Superdiversity in the classroom Rating of Evidence.

Author Note. Given this is an aspirational policy in an area that is still developing, there is adequate evidence to suggest this is a topic of relevance. There is good evidence from related fields that this is a valid area for consideration. However, there is little evidence to support any specific tools or techniques at this point. This aspirational policy has the potential to improve the school experience for all students. At this point the focus is on building awareness and increasing understanding so it should be easy to implement. Accounting for superdiversity in school settings has the potential to greatly improve each child’s learning and sense of belonging. Through understanding a range of diversities and their potential to interact with each other, school staff can provide an inclusive experience.

Authorship

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Related policy and documents

[INSERT RELEVANT POLICY AND DOCUMENTS]

For example:

Inclusion policy
Wellbeing policy
Safety policy
Counselling policy
Anti-bullying and discrimination policy

Date of ratification

This policy was ratified on the [INSERT DATE].

Date of review

This policy will be reviewed by [INSERT DATE].

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