

# What are the implications of super-diversity

Sociology



## **Introduction**

As a result of unprecedented migration, forced or through choice, there have been calls for a dramatic rethink with regards some of the most basic concepts used in the social sciences (Blommaert, 2012). Vertovec (2007) introduced a new concept which was meant to address the changes taking place as a result of global migration and he called this 'super-diversity'. 'Super-diversity' describes an increased number of people, which may be quite small and scattered in various places, who have multiple origins and are also transnationally connected, (Vertovec, 2007, p. 3). Parekh (2005) writes that because of 'super-diversity' Britain could in the future be seen as a community of communities. In London alone, more than 300 first languages are spoken in schools, (Spencer 2011). Spencer writes that one reason 'super-diversity' is so important now is because the old approaches to multiculturalism and its structures, are now redundant. Cattle (2012, p. 2) also argues that the government policies of multiculturalism which have been used to 'mediate' changes in the past, are now no longer appropriate or relevant. For the purpose of this discussion then 'super-diversity' will be discussed in more detail with the implications it has for Britain. Migrant children as a socially diverse group will then be the principle focus of this writing with the aim of outlining the nature of the difficulties and challenges they experience in Britain, and how schools in particular, facilitate or hinder their inclusion in contemporary society.

The United Nations estimated that, in 2005, 191 million people lived outside their country of birth and at the beginning of the 21st Century about one in four/five residents in Australia (24%), New Zealand (19%), Switzerland

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(24%), Canada (18%), Germany (13%), US (13%) and Sweden (12%), were born in foreign countries, (Vertovec 2014). Christian Aid however, predicted that a further 1 billion people will be forced from their homes between 2012 and 2050 through war, conflict, extreme human rights abuses, climate change and natural disasters (Cantle 2012). This global migration poses many challenges since it affects citizenship in the country to which people have moved to, as well as having consequences for the meaning of citizenship. Whilst people are crossing borders in order to live a new life, find work or refuge, questions are raised about the rights of such immigrants, as well as their citizenship. Miller (2000) for example, argues that rights, duties and community, is central to modern political thinking. Bloemraad et al. (2011) writes that citizenship is about people's rights and their legal status. Citizenship is also about sovereignty, national identity as well as state control.. However, these relationships are challenged by the huge levels and the diverse nature of international migration. Bloemraad et al. (2011) believes that there is a need for a better understanding of the inter-relationships between the dimensions of citizenship and immigration. Vertovec (2014) argues that it was not enough just to see diversity in terms of ethnicity alone and that other variables need also to be considered, for example people's different legal status, their experiences of the divergent labour market, gender and age. Glick Schiller et al (2006, p. 613), believed that there was much to be gained from using a multidimensional perspective on diversity ' both in terms of moving beyond the ethnic group as either the unit of analysis or sole object of study'. Several authors argue that a super-diversity perspective can have a liberating potential in that it allows for new and open discussions about diversity, (Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah, 2010).

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Problems arise when there is exposure to difference and although many people adjust and become accustomed to it, there are also those who are fearful. People can, under pressure, retreat into their own identity and in turn support separatist ideologies, (Institute of Community Cohesion 2012). Cattle (2012) argued that globalisation has led to broken communities with people looking inward as well as people clinging to more traditional identities. In religious terms the United Kingdom could now be described as a Christian society that is also secular as well as religiously plural (Weller 2008). The uncertainties and fears that abound because of these changes can and are being exploited politically by groups on the right and far right. This can be seen in Britain with the rise of the English Defence League and the popularity of UKIP. However, it should not be assumed that it is only whites who have problems with difference. Spencer (2011) cites Peterborough in Britain as an example, where a long standing Asian community of Pakistani origin, mainly Muslim, have experienced community tensions with the new migrants who are also Muslim, but come from different countries. In rural areas too, where people from Central and Eastern Europe have come to work in agriculture and food processing, no one anticipated that integration issues would arise. ' Super-diversity' as a concept recognizes that migrant newcomers can be white and still face some of the same challenges as any other migrant of colour. They can still face the same barriers to integration that other migrants face.

Moving on to the impact all this has for migrant children, especially in Britain, we must first look at education. Schools are seen as a microcosm of society, representing and often magnifying social relations that exist in the

wider community, (Reynolds, 2008). Schools have a duty to work toward community cohesion as well as creating positive relations between people from different backgrounds, (Working Paper 47, 2008). The Working Paper also states that under article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, all children have the right to an education. In Britain education is meant to offer all children equal opportunity, nondiscrimination and the provision of high quality education (Working Paper 47, 2008). Inclusive education means that all learners must be given equal opportunities, especially those who have been excluded from educational opportunities e. g. children living in poverty, ethnic and linguistic minorities, migrant children and children with special needs or disabilities. The Working paper 47 (2008), citing Blanco and Takemoto, argue that an inclusive school is meant to offer a opportunity for each pupil to both keep and develop their own cultural identity and it must also offer a welcoming community. Schooling is also important for migrant children because schools have a duty to work toward community cohesion too, (Working Paper 47, 2008). Through super-diversity it is argued that there is more to a migrant's identity than just ethnicity, race or language. Policy makers need to recognise ' multiple identities' to improve inclusion and cohesion. More positive relations can be forged despite different backgrounds since they may have shared identities at some level, (Reynolds, 2008). A focus on the commonalities rather than the things that divide migrants seems to be the way forward. Also recognising pupils as ' migrants' and offering additional support on this basis, to foster inclusion as well as having wider implications for community cohesion.

According to UNICEF (2014) migrant children are affected at multiple levels by migration. Some migrant children are left behind by one or both of the migrating parents, or they are born in a different country to their parents but then migrate with them. Some children unfortunately, migrate alone. Women and children migrating and crossing various borders in large numbers are at very high risk, especially those without any documentation. They are more at risk of being trafficked and exploited, as well as becoming victims of violence and abuse in all its forms, (UNICEF 2014). Child trafficking affects children throughout the world, in both industrialized and developing countries. Trafficked children are subjected to dangerous situations such as prostitution, forced marriages and illegal adoption. They are at risk of violence, sexual abuse and health problem such as HIV and pregnancy. They can also be used as unpaid labour, modern day slaves or cheap labour, (UNICEF 2014). Whilst in transit many of these migrants become victims of discrimination, poverty and social marginalization and those without documentation have difficulty accessing education, social services and health care.

Many children however, successfully migrate to Britain, documentation intact, and so schools are facing greater challenges, some more than others, since some regions of Britain have more immigrants to accommodate in their schools than others. Research is ongoing and much of this has been carried out in schools looking at what works, what is successful as well as what has failed. Reynolds (2008) for example, reported on two schools, Charrington and Bridgehurst, which were compared in terms of highlighting what could be done by schools and the teachers in it, to encourage inclusion for migrant

children. Charrington school, for example, had more friendship groups present in the school and even when there was a real complexity of identities, hostility between migrant students and their peers was minimal, (Reynolds 2008). The teachers' attitudes helped since they were conscious of the benefits the migrant children could bring to the classroom and how a welcoming environment encouraged children to celebrate their ethnic, cultural, religious and migrant identity. Racial prejudice was low level in the community and the teachers and pupils reflected this in the school. However in Bridgehurst School, where inclusion was not managed as well, migrant children were viewed negatively and the teachers and pupils brought with them the prejudices which were rife in their local community. At Charrington's school 'super-diversity' helped inclusion and there appeared plenty of opportunities for the students from migrant families to 'identity match' with other pupils as well as teachers. The nature of the wider community, as well as the nature of the school population itself, were important factors in shaping the inclusion experience for migrant children. Reynolds, (2008) cites Verma et al. (1994) who stresses the importance of matching teacher's ethnicity to the ethnicity of the pupil population in order to make sure teachers' offer and deliver a truly inclusive education. Reynolds (2008) also cites the work of Warikoo (2004) who found that 'identity matching' does not always have to be based on ethnicity alone but can also include a shared history of migration, a shared interest or experience, which in turn helps form relationships between pupils and teachers. Warikoo's (2004) concept of 'identity matching' supports the idea that individuals will form relationships more easily if they are able to share some form of identity which can act as a bond. Charrington's location was in a rather a diverse

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community where historically there had been a lot of in-migration. Racist and anti-immigration feelings however were low. Bridgehurst school had more problems with inclusion because the local community were very anti-immigration and had high levels of racism. The teachers and non-migrant pupils at Bridgehurst had less opportunity to 'identity match' and there were large divisions between the main ethnic groups in the school.

Language is a particular problem in schools with migrant children and research has shown that where there are EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners, some of the pupils felt isolated especially if they were the only speakers of a particular language. Some of these pupils experienced bullying and anxiety as well as isolation. They also found pupils abandoning their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds in order to fit in and assimilate with their peer group, (Department for Schools and Children, 2007). The New Arrivals Excellence Programme Guidance, was introduced as a resource to support international migrants. It argued that migrants students have needs beyond just learning the English language, and educational establishments needed to recognise this. Reynolds, (2008) argues that there are those students who speak English but still need other kinds of support in order to feel included in the school, although acknowledged that the new programme did go some way to address this. Wardman (2004, p. 15) however, writes that EAL lacks a position within the curriculum in schools and there is a 'consequential lack of centralised support or strategy'. Reynolds (2008) also found that in many schools EAL teachers were overburdened. Some recent research carried out at the University of York, suggests that Initial Teacher Education should train new



teachers on EAL issues and Continuing Professional Development and Training should also be carried out for existing teachers as well as teaching assistants. This is to make sure that all teaching staff who are responsible for EAL also understand Second Language Acquisition processes, (Wardman, 2004, p. 15). The research also argued that new approaches to teaching migrant children should take into account the benefits of trans-linguaging and code-switching for all children in the classroom. Ignoring bilingual children's ability to use their first language could also be viewed as being discriminatory, (Helot and O'Laoire, 2011). The research of Wardman suggested that there should be a co-ordinated effort to link schools in order to share best practice as well as materials, and so avoid time wasting. It would also support teachers who felt isolated with the kinds of problems and challenges these children pose. Cooper (2004, p. 5) believes that there are many dangers ahead especially from 'democratic legislative structures'. Cooper argues that there is a risk of cultural minorities being 'outvoted' on resource issues, as well as policies which are crucial to them' Benhibib (2002, p. viii) also suggests that there has been hasty policy recommendations which run the risk of side lining group differences and Benhibib argues that this is because of the failure to fully challenge what is meant by cultural identity. Inclusive educators may also need to ask questions about the 'hidden curricula' where values, rituals and routines of the wider society are acculturated within students' and find alternative curricula that meet the needs of diverse learners, (Goodley, 2011).

In conclusion, it can be seen that migration has created many challenges for the general public, schools, policy makers and governments. Some studies have

found in favour of 'super-diversity' suggesting that it can produce higher levels of worker productivity and economic benefits. Super-diversity can also be seen to boost local demand for services and goods, (Spoonley, 2014). Others believe that the term could be even more inclusive recognizing disability, sexual orientation and gender in the migrant communities, (Spencer 2012). However, super-diversity is sometimes compromised because of fears, anxieties and hostilities which migration creates especially at local level. In the UK, for example, in rural areas where people from Central and Eastern Europe came to work in agriculture and food processing no one expected integration issues would arise. Super-diversity has helped us recognize that newcomers can be white and still can face the same challenges as any other migrants of colour. They can still face barriers to integration that other migrants face. The scale and growth of cultural diversity have implications for social cohesion, economic performance, and social mobility. It seems crucial therefore that governments support intercultural dialogue, fund resources that go into promoting language training and create anti-discrimination laws. Governments should also facilitate any disadvantage that may make social mobility difficult, (Spoonley, 2014). Since children are the future, schools and educational establishments need to be fully resourced in order to give migrant children support for the difficulties they face, aside from just language support. This should go some way to creating better opportunities and the possibility for full inclusion into contemporary society.

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