

Navigating Contact Zones in 21st Century Schools: Creative Identity Development in Two Complex Transcultural Spaces

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Abstract: This article describes the experiences and the creative identity development of A., an 11-year-old bicultural and bilingual boy who attended school in two different cultural contact zones (CCZs), in South Africa and Germany. The study is anchored in a single case qualitative research paradigm and follows an ethnographic approach by using qualitative interviews, observation and field notes. Findings show A.'s identity development within the two CCZs. The article discusses how A. develops creatively to manage himself in the different CCZs by focusing on expanding or minimizing selected identity parts to create "safe zones". It concludes that to grow within the two school environments, identity needs to be developed creatively and flexibly in correspondence with the schools' approaches to diversity.

Keywords: identity development, creativity, cultural contact zones, school system, Germany, South Africa.

1. Introduction

Internationally schools are increasingly characterised by a diverse, culturally complex student population (Civittillo, Schachner, Juang, van der Vijver, Handrick & Noack 2017; Wahab, Nathan, Hasnida, Ghazali, Rabi & Dawi 2018). Educational concepts across countries, also in Germany and South Africa, aim at implementing inclusive concepts to cater for this diversity (Schneider 2018; Sleeter 2018). However, students with bi- or transcultural identities often challenge the attempt of educational policies and practices in European countries to homogenize and assimilate diverse individuals to provide social justice and equity (Dewilde & Skrefsrud 2016).

According to Pratt (1981), global societies are "contact zones" in which cultural exchange takes place dynamically through communication. These cultural contact zones (CCZs) are complex with highly hybrid, heterogenous and interwoven cultures, also described by Welsch (2017) as transcultural. These CCZs are experienced as challenging and unsafe (Dewilde & Skrefsrud 2016), since all information within their space is heterogeneously comprehended and interpreted. This might lead to dilemmas in educational contexts, where cultural values, identities and processes are complex and constantly (re-)negotiated (Singh & Doherty 2012). A high ambiguity tolerance, defined as an individual difference that predicts short- and long-term reactions to a spectrum of situational characteristics relevant to a wide variety of life contexts and outcomes, is needed to cater for the multiplicity of heterogeneous concepts and interpretations in CCZs (Furnham & Marks 2013). "Safe moments" are required in CCZs to cope with cultural complexity and the urge for homogeneity and similarity (Dewilde & Skrefsrud 2016: 1041).

This article presents findings based on a longitudinal qualitative study of a single case in two selected school CCZs in South Africa and Germany. It argues that creative identity development can support managing the self in highly and less complex CCZs. The aim is to provide in-depth insights into the complexity of management of the self and its meaning-

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making within these CCZs and to understand the relevant cultural specificity, as well as the complexity of individual identity development processes needed to cope within these schools.

The research's significance is anchored in its in-depth exploration of a single, bilingual and bicultural identity of a specific individual. It provides new insights for the reader into how exactly bicultural and bilingual identities are influenced by their sociocultural contexts and the interlinkages of the intersectionalities of identity. This research provides valuable insights into the interplay of complex CCZs and the individual, which can serve as an example to understand and optimize individual development within these contexts.

1.1 Educational contexts

An increasingly diverse and culturally complex student body leads to new challenges in schools (Sleeter 2001, 2018). Educational systems in South Africa and Germany aim at implementing inclusive concepts to cater for this diversity (Meier & Hartell 2009; Werning, Löser & Urban 2008). Many of the mainstream educational contexts in Europe have been dominated historically by monocultural and monolingual practices in terms of pedagogy, curriculum policy and design, syllabus, teaching methods, and reforms related to the interplay of these concepts. Baker (2011) has pointed out that cultural and linguistic plurality within educational contexts are still marginalized in the mainstream school culture, while students with transcultural identities often challenge school systems (Dewilde & Skrefsrud 2016).

To operate an equitable and socially just school system, cultural and linguistic plurality need to be integrated into educational routines (Freire, 1970). According to Dewilde and Skrefsrud (2016), the cultural multiplicity in Norwegian CCZs in schools challenges homogenic concepts and leads to tensions and insecurities and a challenged sense of belonging (Mattei & Aguilar 2016). To deal with these challenges in CCZs, individuals need to have a strong sense of coherence, which contributes to a complex understanding of the self and situation, with the ability to manage that complexity and find a sense of meaningfulness (Mayer 2011).

Previous studies have shown that bicultural students feel more empowered than monocultural students in schools in China. They challenge their classmates to explore and celebrate their differences through arts (Schulte, Webster, Anttila & Hase man 2018). Studies emphasize how schools mainly follow a “sink or swim” philosophy and hardly offer support for bicultural students (Clarke & O'Donoghue 2017). These students are challenged by peers to choose one ethnic or cultural identity (Longerbeam 2016). Critical consciousness within schools can support a reflexive approach to diversity, equity and social justice (Palmer, Cervantes-Soon, Dorner & Heimann 2019), leading to the development of peaceful and sustainable transcultural spaces.

1.2 Cultural contact zones (CCZs)

The notion of CZZs was introduced by Pratt (1991), who developed her theory in opposition to viewing culture, identity and language as stable, monolithic, coherent concepts. Pratt (1991: 37) writes that CCZs usually contrast with ideas of these areas being monolingual, self-defined, discrete entities based on homogeneity and a shared language across all community members. CCZs are diverse in terms of culture, language, religion and other intersectionality markers (Naples 2008). Vertovec (2007) calls CCZs a place of super-diversity, while Welsch (2017) refers to transculturality. In CCZs, cultural exchange takes place based on global migration flows (Dewilde & Skrefsrud 2016). Coming from a language perspective, Canagarajah (2013) describes CCZs as *translanguaging*, constituting a space where language is created heterogeneously.

Fine (et al. 2008) and Torre (et al. 2008) emphasize that research on CCZs supports understanding of interaction between individuals and groups of different power. Torre sees CCZs as intellectually charged spaces in which individuals are able to experience, analyze

and work through power inequalities, similarities and differences. Tensions and experiences of discomfort can be addressed (Pratt 2007) while providing space to work on issues such as voice, agency, power and desire (Askins & Pain 2011).

CCZs provide space for pedagogical thinking and practice, as well as exchange of ideas on context, place, identity and lived experience (Soja 2010). Dewilde and Skrefsrud (2016: 1033) write that schools should deal with topics of inclusion, exclusion and marginalisation, thereby promoting inclusive and hybrid CCZs, rather than fostering a “pedagogy of place- and spacelessness” that promotes monocultural approaches to diversity, such as cultural and linguistic homogenisation and assimilation.

1.3 Creativity and identity development through identity narrations

Previous research has shown that identity discourses are multifold, interdisciplinary and transcultural (Bamberg, de Fina & Schiffrin 2011; Mayer 2008), have increased in complexity, and are strongly relevant in a globalized world formed of hybridity and multiplicity (Frost and Regher 2013, Jeldtoft & Nielsen 2014).

Identity is created through thoughts, perceptions, social- and intra-psychological processes and ascriptions of self and others through communication processes and interactions (Mayer & Flotman 2017). In CCZs, identity constructions and narrations are (re-)created, responding to the question “who am I?” (Mayer 2015) based on sociocultural and contextual embeddedness (Coté and Levine 2014). Individuals may use different identity concepts derived from manifold memberships in different groups (Stets & Burke 2000).

Sandhu and Higgins (2016) emphasize that identity development can only be comprehended within their contextual relatedness. In post-colonial contexts, identity development is strongly built on intersectionalities such as class, ethnicity, language and gender and can be countered with concepts of hybridity (Bhabha 2015). O’Sullivan-Lago, de Abreu and Burgess (2008) write that, to establish continuity in CCZs, individuals use an “I as a human being” strategy to guarantee continuity in identity positioning in a world full of fragments and tensions. It is common in CCZs to construct identity through a socially shared repertoire of cultural knowledge, values and practices that go along clearly marked power asymmetries (Mahalingam 2008).

1.4 Creativity in identity development processes in CCZs

In CCZs, individuals need contributive identity processes to develop a positive, constructive, multiple and flexible yet stable identity across the lifespan (Mayer 2015; Mayer & Maree 2018). Creativity can support identity development in CCZs, where original ideas, wisdom and intelligence are needed to develop the self in context.

Creativity is developed through interplay of individual and environment (Csikszentmihalyi 2014). Characteristics of creative individuals have been discussed in manifold ways (Beghetto & Kaufman 2007, 2013; Gralewski & Karwowski 2018; Runco & Albert 2010; Sternberg 2005). Creativity supports the ability to define and resolve novel solutions of high quality (Sternberg & Lubart 1995). Creativity is a mental activity that includes behavioural processes, systemic interactions of the individual and embeddedness in a sociocultural background (Csikszentmihalyi 2014).

Saad et al. (2012) point out that culturally rich environments, bicultural contexts and bicultural identity development foster cognitive processes and particularly creativity. Creative individuals need to be original, effective and knowing in their approaches (Runco & Jaeger 2012) to resolve fundamental and diverse human challenges (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe 2014) through their ability to change perspectives (Glăveanu 2015; Runco 2015). They need to have ambiguity tolerance, sensible risk taking, and willingness to manage challenges, as well as intrinsic, task-focused motivation (Sternberg & Lubart 1995). All of these attributes of

creative individuals might contribute well to identity development in CCZs, fostering transcultural understanding and functioning (Mayer 2011).

2. Research methodology

This article presents findings from a longitudinal, qualitative, single case study (Yin 2009). It uses an ethnographic approach to present, reflect upon, interpret and discuss the experiences of a single individual within two CCZs over a period of five years. The case study is based on the social-constructivist research paradigm (Berger & Luckmann 1966), which assumes that culture is a learned social dimension in which meaning is created and negotiated.

Through the description and analysis of findings, this ethnographic approach aims at understanding narrated experiences in the defined CCZs through the contextual and cultural perspectives described (Berry 2007; Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2010).

2.1 Data collection, analysis and presentation

Data were collected through interviews with A. along with observations and field notes over a five-year period. The narratives collected draw on significant, remembered moments in life (Denzin 1989), opening possibilities of extracting narrations on creative identity development (Wood 2009). The resulting data were analysed through the five-step model of data analysis developed by Terre Blanche and colleagues (2006): (1) familiarisation and immersion (reading through the collected data), (2) defining basic themes, (3) coding of sub-categories, (4) elaboration (exploring content in depth) and interpretation, and finally (5) re-evaluating the findings. Throughout the process, intersubjective validation processes were used (Yin 2009). These processes included reflections and discussions about experiences to validate the researchers' perceptions and interpretations. The data and findings were discussed over a period of several months, with the expectation of yielding rich, complex and detailed descriptions (Chan et al. 2015, Creswell 2015).

The case study provides readers with references to creative identity development and emic, in-depth, culturally embedded perspectives (Chang 2007, Denshire & Lee 2013) within CCZs (Pratt 1991). It leads to discussion of findings in the context of the literature review, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

2.2 The setting

This case study describes A.'s experiences in two schools.

South Africa finds itself in the post-Apartheid era since 1994. Organizations, including schools, have become key players in the transformation from a society built on racial segregation, discrimination and oppression (Cloete, Bunting & Maassen 2015) towards a democratic, multicultural society based on equality and human rights.

In post-apartheid South Africa, governmental and municipal organizations are legally bound to ensure diversity and inclusion (CHE 2015, Cloete et al. 2006). However, inequality for Black individuals within the society still prevails in terms of education and career opportunities (Mayer & Barnard 2015). At the same time, discourses of "de-racialization, de-colonialization, de-gendering and de-masculinization" are vivid (Badat 2016: 80) are vivid; new, creative and effective ways to deal with these challenges remain to be found (Mayer & Louw 2013).

The South African school is a private, British-orientated international school (grades 7 to 12). It prepares students for Cambridge-system examinations to prepare for university. The school is placed in a previously white metropolitan area. Values such as discipline, internationalization, endeavour and individuality are core. Class sizes vary between 10 and 25 students. The student body consists of approximately 80% students of South African or other African background, while 20% are international. The parents are mostly highly educated and

are working as diplomats, business people, doctors or academics. Because the school requires high school fees, the parents belong to the upper middle or upper class and represent the financial elite in South Africa.

In recent years, Germany has advanced to being a multicultural society albeit one that is constantly challenged by society's reaction to increasing numbers of migrants and refugees in the country (Karakayali 2018). Multiculturalism has become a derogatory term in Germany; how people of different origins can live together needs revisiting (Schönwälder 2009). In contemporary Germany, it is common that citizens position themselves verbally as "multicultural" but do not necessarily have a multicultural mindset (Hage 2012). This might be anchored in Germany's recent history, as well as its role in Europe as a unified country of former East and West Germany. Germany's historically pro-immigration role is based in its history and its development since the two world wars (Kühnhardt 2018).

The school A. attends in Germany is a governmental school, grades 5 to 12. Students aim at finishing school with their *Abitur* to enter university. The school is based in an upper-class area of a medium-sized city. It is a humanistic *Gymnasium*, with Latin and Greek as core languages. The school has a reputation for having "gifted" learners, being conservative, and catering to the educational elite. The majority of students are German; the percentage of so-called *foreigners* at the school is relatively low: 10% -15% of the entire student body of approximately 1,000 students, with 28 to 32 students per class. The "foreigners" are mainly from other European countries or are so-called *Deuschtürken* ("German Turks").² Since 2015, with the strong influx of refugees from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, the school has had to include a few select refugees. Parents of the German students usually hold university degrees (master's or doctorate) and work in professions such as law, medicine, or university education; they belong to the city's educational elite.

2.3 The individual

A. is an eleven-year-old, able-bodied boy of Black South African³ origin with dual German and South African citizenship. He grew up bilingual -- English and German -- and has lived in both countries for several years. A. was adopted at the age of eight weeks and grew up in a predominantly white German able-bodied middle-class family, having an older sister and one younger brother. The children speak English with the mother and German with the father. A., as a highly gifted learner, taught himself reading from the age of three and at the age of 11 was in Grade 9.⁴ His major interests revolve around technology, programming, reading, drawing, cooking and scientific discussions. He does not enjoy social contact with peers and prefers reading or talking with older adolescents and adults. A. has travelled extensively with his mother and his siblings due to his mother's profession. He has already held talks at international conferences.

2.4 Ethical considerations and limitations

Ethical clearance was given by the German research institution. This study is limited to a single longitudinal case study within a qualitative research paradigm. It provides subjective, in-depth information on a single individual occupying two CCZs. The findings are not

² *Deuschtürken* belong to the second, third or fourth generation of Turkish immigrants to Germany. The first generation came to Germany in the 1950s and '60s. From the second generation onwards, these people are usually bicultural and bilingual.

³ As an official racial category in South Africa, "Black South African" includes individuals of African, "Coloured" ("mixed race") or Indian origin (Department of Labour 1998). These groups are defined as "previously disadvantaged groups" due to racial discrimination and segregation during Apartheid. They are currently empowered through institutional legal actions such as Black economic empowerment and affirmative action.

⁴ The research reported here covers A. from the age of six.

generalizable but rather provide an in-depth example of individual analysis within the two contextual settings. Future research can be inspired by this research and duplicated in multiple settings.

3. Research findings

The South African school is highly diverse, multilingual, multicultural and multi-religious. At the time of the research in South Africa, A. attended grades 6 to 8. A. really enjoyed his South African school. At the time of the following interview excerpt he attended Grade 8:

I like to go to this school, because teachers and students are kind and friendly and they never question me in terms of where I come from and why I have got the parents I have. I told them I speak German and English and nobody asks me why I do not speak an African language. Or questions me. They take me the way I am – I am just A.

A. feels accepted within the CCZ as an individual, not as a representative of a certain ascribed cultural or language group. He feels respected in his personal hybridity as a bicultural and bilingual person. The school seems to be successful at implementing an inclusive school concept in which diversity is fostered and the culture built on the diversity of its students (see Schneider 2018, Sleeter 2018). The school does not seem to attempt to homogenize or assimilate bi- or transcultural individuals, but rather develops a transcultural approach to social justice and equity through diversity. This is in contrast to the Norwegian school system described in Dewilde and Skrefsrud (2016) and a “sink and swim” philosophy (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2017). The private school is prepared for diversity; its core objectives include preparing students for future globalized work interactions (Meier & Hartell 2009; Werning, Löser & Urban 2008). In another interview, A. talked about feeling accepted the way he is:

I feel that I can be the person I am. People know me and accept me just as a human being. I like to read and they let me read. I do not like to interact too much with people, so I just read during break time. I am an introvert.... they just let me read. Nobody calls me a loner or names. They know me as the reader!

A. is a gifted learner with a high IQ and low interest in social interaction. He enjoys reading and occupying his mind rather than social interaction. By spending his break time reading, A. is an exception, conscious about being different to the mainstream. However, his difference is accepted and even celebrated (as in Schulte, Webster, Anttila & Haseman 2018). Reading becomes a safe zone (Dewilde & Skrefsrud, 2016): it provides him comfort and gives him the opportunity to define himself in the CCZ through one of his important identity parts: reading. It makes him unique. It is a stable and consistent characteristic for him and his school community within a “super-diversity” space (Vertovec 2007). In his reading world, he finds himself in a reality in which he does not need to negotiate power issues, inequalities, similarities or differences (Fine et al. 2008, Torre et al. 2008).

His reading world is removed from the sociocultural interaction of the CCZ. He places himself in a position of power: as “the reader” he is perceived as intellectual, knowledgeable and well-read: acknowledged values in the school community. Becoming “the reader” constitutes a highly creative and powerful act while defining himself as a human being like everyone else (O’Sullivan-Lago, de Abreu & Burgess 2008). Through being human, he creates similarity and continuity within the respected values and practices of the school (as in Mahalingam 2008). He thereby uses two constructive, positive yet stable identity constructions (Mayer 2015, Mayer & Maree 2018), defining himself in a creative and original way that simultaneously provides a feeling of safety. Establishing these creative identity parts is based on the interplay of his identity with the CCZ (Csikszentmihalyi 2014). It provides a high-quality solution for his identity development within the CCZ (Sternberg & Lubart 1995).

A. enjoys the CCZ complexity in terms of translanguaging (Canagarajah 2013) and multifold cultural perspectives.

What I like about the school is also that you get to know people from all over. They come from different places, have different knowledge and experiences. Speak different languages. I can even say some Russian words. People are different and still share common interests. Sometimes I join in the table tennis team, although I cannot play well. They show me how to do it right.

A. enjoys the hybridity of the CCZ and uses the translanguaging (Canagarajah 2013) to learn words in Russian, thereby contributing to the exchange of ideas, knowledge, identity and lived experience (as in Soja 2010) and the practice of changing (cultural) perspectives (Glăveanu 2015, Runco 2015). He is willing to take risks and is motivated to tackle tasks and manage challenges creatively (Sternberg & Lubart 1995) through participation, new memberships and improvement. He expands his responses to the question “who am I?” (Mayer 2005) by developing a sporty identity element. Besides that, A. enjoys theatre and becomes part of the theatre group:

I like to play theatre and they appointed me as one of the main characters in the school end theatre play. That was cool, I really loved it and after the play, lots of people and parents came to me to congratulate me....

Through the theatre, A. develops his identity as “the actor”, which gives him the opportunity to take on a different role and play it according to his interpretation. That provides A. influence, self-efficacy, power and a change in perspective to act out different parts of his hybrid identity and use his abilities and knowledge in a new way than during school time (Glăveanu 2015; Runco 2015). Playing the main character helps A. create a self-defined and well-controlled safe zone on stage: an exposed role within the hybridity of the CCZ (Dewilde & Skrefsrud, 2016). He becomes known for his acting abilities which then become a stable part of his interest and identity at school.

Discourses on race, citizenship, language ability, biculturalism, and racial and gender segregation as often described in South Africa (Cloete, Bunting & Maassen 2015; Mayer & Barnard 2015) are hardly recognisable in the CCZ, where super-diversity is accepted and social justice and equity not reached through homogenization (as in European contexts) but rather through acceptance and respect of the super-diversity, which is viewed as a resource and not a threat.

3.1 Creative identity development in German contact zones

In this CCZ, A. experiences role and identity ascriptions relating particularly to race, national and continental belonging and his African origin. He finds himself marginalized through exclusive educational concepts and by his peers (Meier & Hartell 2009; Werning, Löser & Urban 2008). He does not enjoy attending the German school in Grade 9, because he feels stigmatized and reduced to being “the African” (Longerbeam 2016):

I feel a bit different in this school. Although I speak German fluently and although I am German, people see me more as African.... I resist, because I am German and South African at the same time – and more – and I... I actually just wanna be me.

By ascribing A. a continental identity of “African”, the peers monoculturalize him and limit him to choose his African identity (Longerbeam 2016). A. is irritated that, within this rather monocultural, mainstream-orientated CCZ, he is reduced to a racialized, negatively connotated continental identity. He is not accepted as part of the German in-group. As in the

South African context, A. keeps defining himself as “I just wanna be me...”: i.e., as an individual, as himself. He thereby keeps his safe zone (Dewilde & Skrefsrud 2016) that he successfully built in the South African CCZ and started to call the “I-zone”. This strict I-relatedness is a creative act to overcome the racial and continental identity ascriptions.

A. then establishes himself with a second identity part: before he entered the humanistic school, he had learned Latin, so he is accepted into the Latin class. A gifted learner, he is already well-advanced and surprises his peers. A. comments:

I learned Latin because... I like languages. People are usually surprised I know Latin. Sometimes it can be fun... but, in school, most of the time I hate it, like most of the people in my class....

Through his ability to speak and write Latin, A. develops a safe space within the CCZ of the Latin class. He describes himself as the “Latin humanist”, which is accepted and respected by his peers and teachers. He becomes part of the Latin-speaking community and establishes himself in the elite and relatively monocultural CCZ of the Latin speakers at the school. By being accepted in this in-group, A. starts to create a safe zone, not in terms of protecting himself from diversity, but rather from the school's monoculturalism and monolingualism. This safe zone becomes his super-diversity (Vertovec 2007). The Latin competence provides him a new and creative identity aspect, a kind of “third culture”: his own space of translanguaging (Canagarajah 2013) in English, German and Latin within himself.

This “third culture” provides access to the Latin in-group. However, this does not mean that A. feels more accepted as a human being. He feels marginalized, since he does not share similar experiences, thoughts, values, practices or even transcultural knowledge (Mahalingam, 2008). The space is clearly marked by power asymmetries: A. holds the power of transcultural knowledge and experience and translanguaging, while the majority of his classmates are anchored in a monoculture and their first language: German.

A. recreates his “reader” identity, spending as much time as he can in the school library. He makes friends with the librarian and students from Grade 12, who are impressed by A.'s perseverance in spending all of his spare time in the library. Soon, they find out that he speaks English fluently and is highly knowledgeable. A. explains:

I made friends in the library. The Grade 12s... they come to me to discuss stuff and they ask me to help them with their work... which I do. They hardly speak English. So I help them.

Through his perseverance in reading, his language ability, and his general knowledgeable, A. creates another safe zone: he becomes the “English-speaking reader” and is soon known in the higher grades for his knowledge and his language abilities. This new identity provides him an image beyond “the African” and the “Latin-speaker”, giving him access to more members of the CCZ. However, all three identities seem disconnected, fragmented and not acknowledged as part of a complex individual entity who wishes to be seen as a whole human being.

For A., it is obvious that the CCZ as dominated by the German-speaking monoculture talks about multiculturalism (Hage 2012) but does not display a multicultural mindset: “they speak about culture and globalization, but they do not know what it means; they just want to speak to the ones who are the same”. In the context of globalization, such a mindset needs to change (Schönwälder 2009) for future generations to be successful in complex super-diverse societies.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The findings show that the CCZs in the two countries differ greatly in terms of diversity, school structure and approach to diversity and inclusion with respect to the school's clientele. Therefore, A.'s identity development and his creative ideas on how to place himself within the diversity of the CCZ differ greatly and creatively.

The South African school provided support for hybridity, the conscious negotiation of (trans-)culture and identity aspects, and discourses on power and agency. Through its strong culture of respecting diversity and its open approach for finding creative solutions to deal with differences in thinking, behavior and perspective, the school provides a perfect base for the creative development of healthy hybrid identities and inclusion. Within this CCZ, A. was able to develop creatively and establish a stable identity with safe zones as:

- the reader,
- the actor,
- a sporty learner,
- a translanguager, and
- a human being.

He managed to create a balance for himself as a self-defined individual within the stimulating, multifold, hybrid school context (“the reader”, “the actor”), but also as part of social interaction (as a human being and a sports player), sharing parts of the CCZ subgroups. He was able to define by himself when he wanted to see himself in his individual safe zones (reader, actor) and when he wanted to be part of the discourse on difference, similarity and translanguaging. This freedom of moving in and out of complexities, establishing himself as an individual and also part of social interaction, made A. able to develop himself creatively and healthily.

The German school did not explicitly care for or otherwise support bicultural or bilingual identity nor cater for inclusive education, but rather stayed within the monocultural tradition of the dominant culture and language group (Meier & Hartell 2009; Werning, Löser & Urban 2008). Marginalization, discrimination and stereotyping are still vivid (Baker 2011) when it comes to experience of diversity and foreignness. Cultural and linguistic plurality (Freire 1970) were not yet implemented; agency was only provided to minority group members when they assimilated to the context: in A.'s case speaking Latin, being an English-speaker and acting for the monoculturalists as the English-as-a-second-language teacher.

Tensions and insecurities arise when monocultural contexts (Mattei & Aguilar 2016) experience plurality and people's world views get threatened by choice of cultural perspective. Diversity aspects keep on being fragmented and reduced – in A.'s case, African, Latin speaker, English speaker, knowledgeable helper – to reduce the complexity and diversity and reinstall the questioned “sense of belonging” (Mattei & Aguilar 2016).

In the German CCZ, A. established safe zones for himself – not to feel safe from the complex CCZ, but rather to protect his intra-psychological cultural complexity, which was reduced, marginalized, discriminated against, and stigmatised in the monocultural CCZ. Creatively, he managed to develop selected identity parts to connect and be (partly) accepted in the dominant mainstream culture as:

- the African (ascribed by peers),
- the Latin speaker (within the Latin community at the school),
- the reader and the English speaker (in the library),
- the knowledgeable person and English speaker (to the twelfth graders), and
- the I-zone inhabitant (limited to himself: a space for super-diversity and hybridity).

A. was creative first to establish his own, consciously self-aware hyper-diverse safe I-zone, in which he could protect his multiple identity parts and keep them alive with his integrated bicultural and bilingual identity. In this I-zone, he did not let external ascriptions reduce him as an individual or as a human being. He was further creative in establishing himself as a linguist who speaks a “dead” language (Latin) and a “world” language (English), thereby creating new spaces in the CCZ for sociocultural interaction: safe spaces in which he could stimulate himself through bringing in fragmented diversity aspects that others in the system could make use of (functionalized diversity). Critical reflection and truly inclusive school contexts are needed to start creating transcultural consciousness within the German governmental school system -- not only to use the potential of bicultural, bilingual, hyper-diverse and gifted individuals, but otherwise to appreciate the richness and stimulation coming from the diverse backgrounds and potential translanguaging (Canagarajah 2013).

Identity ascriptions in the contexts described refer to (un-)conscious discourses on race, power and accessibility to resources and social interaction. While racial identity ascriptions play a predominant role in the negotiation of power, agency, and marginalization in the German context, the South Africa CCZ managed to implement a space for super-diversity (Vertovec 2007) within a larger societal CCZ that is still racially divided (Mayer & Barnard 2015).

In both contexts, A. developed creative new ideas to develop himself and cope: on the one hand with the super-diversity, on the other with the super-monoculturalism. In both cases, he developed safe identity spaces to keep his identity stable.

The study shows that individuals who have grown up in a super-diverse CCZ might not feel threatened by multiplicity and translanguaging as described in Western discourses, but might rather suffer from the limitations of the monolingual monoculture. Safe spaces and safe moments need to be created not only to reduce complexity for the monoculturalists, but also to establish living complexity for the super-diverse individuals.

The South African CCZ with its openness to and respect for diversity and creativity impacted on A.’s identity development in a healthy way, making him engaged, motivated and successful, while the German school culture with its focus on monocultural homogenization and non-acceptance of diversity (through decreased ambiguity tolerance) meant reducing himself to safe spaces of fragmented identity parts. He managed that creatively but did not feel well in this context. It can be concluded that:

- Even where super-diversity in educational systems is the norm, safe moments might be needed to create stable and continuous identities. However, this might not be necessary for individuals who have grown up in super-diverse contexts.
- When school is conducted with a fundamental acceptance of super-diversity, diversity is not experienced as a threat but as a way to freedom, stimulation, respectful humanity and task-oriented motivation.
- Ways to equality and power distribution in super-diverse contexts can be created through basic mutual respect of heterogeneity, not through homogenization.
- Translanguaging can be used in schools as a natural learning field and motivational space to develop cultural competences, multilingualism and multi-perspectivity.

- Ambiguity tolerance is developed when growing up in inclusive, transcultural CCZs and can help individuals to deal with complexity less anxiously.
- Conscious recognition of cultural complexity in super-diverse educational contexts is part of normality and nothing that leads to feelings of unsafety, particularly when clear guidance with clear boundaries is given.
- This case study provides insights into perspectives on super-diversity experienced as stimulating and motivational in the South African context -- perspectives that can serve as a successful example for creating constructive hypercomplex CCZs in a society that is, due to its history, still torn by racial divides.

Further research should focus on CCZs in terms of exploring various individuals' perspectives (e.g., leaders, teachers, learners of various backgrounds, parents) within different country contexts. Both culturally specific and universal best practices should be developed. Intersectionalities such as gender, age, language competencies, and cultural background need to be taken into account. The contribution of school structures toward creating safe CCZs and fostering creative identity development need to be explored.

Future practice should build on these findings. Schools need to create awareness regarding CCZs; become knowledgeable on hyper-diversity concepts and how complex systems work; and learn to understand, manage and create meaningful, healthy identities in contexts of varying cultural complexities. Culture-context specific trainings should be developed for staff and students.

Creativity trainings and counselling prepare individuals to develop strategies for dealing with CCZ challenges. Well-working, peaceful, sustainable CCZs in schools can serve as models for the broader society, for workplaces, and for virtual CCZs online.

About the author



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