Digital Diversity:
Crafting Inclusive AI Narratives

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Focus-Group Interviews and Analysis
Germany

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Digital Diversity: Crafting Inclusive AI Narratives (D2CIN)

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Project	Digital Diversity: Crafting Inclusive AI Narratives (D2CIN) Project Number: 2025-1-DE02-KA210-VET-000354956
Work Package / Activity	A1.2 – Focus-Group Interviews and Analysis
Session	Germany – Education Content Design Experts
Date & Time (Local)	Hybrid Session: 24 October 2025; 15:00 – 16:30
Location / Platform	Mimic Productions Office, Berlin
Moderator / Note-taker / Accessibility Lead	Dr. Violeta Vasileva (COO, Mimic Productions)

Participant Overview

Category	Number of Participants	Background / Role	Experience & Affiliation
AI Developer	1	Specializes in designing and implementing AI systems and adaptive learning tools	5-7 years of experience in UX and digital product design
UX & Product Designer	1	1 UX & Education Platform Designers	Bring experience in user behaviour and interfaces
Avatar Specialists	2	2 digital humans and avatars specialists	Bring experience on storytelling, and human–computer interaction
Market Research Expert	1	Professional researcher in the company specializing in UI	Bring experience in analyzing user behavior, educational needs and accessibility expectations across diverse learner groups.
Creative Education Technologist	1	Professional focused on innovative uses of AI and avatars in education.	Brings hands-on experience in designing digital tools, integrating AI and interactive media

Category	Number of Participants	Background / Role	Experience & Affiliation
Educational Expert	1	PhD Researcher in digital technologies and sustainable education practices	Brings guidance, ensuring that AI-driven learning tools align with educational standards, learner need, and ethical teaching practices

Consent obtained from all participants

Yes

Recording method:

The focus group sessions were audio recorded using a digital recording device to ensure accurate capture of discussions. Notes were also taken by the moderator to support transcription and thematic analysis.

Data storage location & retention:

Audio files and transcripts are securely stored on a private organizational drive managed by Mimic Productions. Access is restricted to the project research team only.

Session Summary (≤150 words)

The Mimic Productions focus group brought together seven team members with diverse backgrounds in AI, UI, avatar development and creation, education and creative technology. Participants discussed how unbiased AI avatars should behave, what constitutes bias in training and interaction models, and which safeguards are needed for ethical educational deployment.

A strong theme was the tension between neutrality and contextual accuracy: while unbiased avatars should avoid stereotypes, they must still provide culturally relevant guidance (e.g., workplace norms differing between Germany and China). Participants also debated how much personalisation is acceptable, whether avatars should appear human at all, and how cultural or visual identity can unintentionally trigger user bias.

Ethical concerns emerged around politics, religion, and representing controversial groups (e.g., Scientology). Participants agreed on the need for transparency, accreditation, human oversight, and the possibility that non-human or stylized avatars may avoid many bias-related pitfalls. The discussion provides rich insights for the Personalized Feedback Navigator and the Handbook.

1. Bias Mitigation & Ethics

Participants consistently emphasized that **neutrality does not mean lack of context**, and that unbiased AI should avoid stereotypes while still providing the *most accurate guidance for the user's situation*.

Examples:

- Workplace norms differ by country, so completely universal answers may become unrealistic or even misleading.

- Humans inherently bring bias; participants stated that AI should be held to higher standards of neutrality.

One participant summarized the challenge:

> "Everybody has bias. So we want an avatar that *knows things about you*, but does not *judge* you because of them.

Another said that neutrality must avoid *taking political or ideological sides*, particularly in training contexts.

Representative Quotes

- "Unbiased means: not referring to stereotypes or characteristics we usually assign to a culture or nation."
- "An avatar should not suddenly talk to me in Hindi because I'm from India. That's a biased assumption."

Implications for the Navigator & Training

- Integrate **ethical guardrails** preventing political/religious persuasion.
- Provide **bias-awareness prompts** for designers.
- Avoid inferring attributes (e.g., ethnicity → language).
- Educators need training on **cultural context vs. cultural judgement**

2. Inclusive Data Management

Participants discussed whether avatars should use personal data to adapt responses. The core tension:

- **Personalisation = better contextual support**
  vs.

- **Personal data = potential source of bias or profiling**

Example: Location-based suggestions (e.g., furniture pricing) can be helpful but can also lead to discriminatory pricing or assumptions.

One participant said:

"If the avatar knows I'm in Germany, it could give relevant advice—but not make assumptions about my identity."

Concerns Raised

- Automatic inference of nationality, religion, or socio-economic status.
- Stored preferences could create biased treatment (e.g., always showing "affordable" solutions to "non-Western-appearing" users).

Implications

- Require **explicit consent** for any personalization.
- Use **data minimization** (only what is essential).
- Show users what data is used and why

3. Inclusive UX & Representation

This topic sparked one of the most vivid and passionate debates in the session. Participants were divided on a core tension:

- **Should educational avatars represent real human diversity, or**
- **Should they avoid human features entirely to prevent triggering user bias?**

Some argued that diverse human representation is essential for inclusion, while others cautioned that any human likeness - skin tone, gender expression, cultural markers - can activate user prejudices and undermine neutrality. This raised fundamental questions about whether inclusivity is best achieved through realistic representation or through intentionally non-human, stylized avatar designs that circumvent bias altogether.

Comments included:

- "Maybe avatars should *not be human at all*."
- "People are biased. If someone is racist and the avatar is Black, the problem won't be the avatar—it will be the user."
- "Giving them a human face creates bias automatically."

Some argued that stylised, non-human avatars (e.g., mascots) avoid cultural stereotypes. Others preferred human representation *but with user control* (e.g., selecting from multiple avatars).

Implications

- Consider **non-human, stylized, or culturally neutral avatars**.
- If human avatars are used, provide **multiple options** for comfort & cultural adaptability.
- Include **representational guidelines** in the Handbook.

4. Ethical Safeguards for Educational Deployment

Participants were clear: **strong ethical protections are mandatory** before deploying conversational AI for learning.

Suggested safeguards:

- Human review of sensitive content.
- Clear guardrails around politics, religion, ideology.
- Transparent lesson plans and learning goals.
- Accreditation (similar to product safety before market release).
- Testing with educators before deployment.

Quotes:

> *"This can't be just made by tech people; actual teachers must oversee it."*
> *"There must be a certificate that this is safe to use in school contexts."*

5. Trust in AI Avatars

Participants connected trust with:

- Transparency
- Lack of judgement
- Predictable behavior
- Professional, neutral tone
- Avoiding overly "cheerleader-like" responses

One participant noted GPT-style models often become too encouraging:

> *"It cheers me on too much… If I'm clearly wrong, it shouldn't say 'you go girl'."*

Implications

- The Navigator should include criteria evaluating:
  - Tone neutrality
  - Avoiding emotional manipulation
  - Transparency in reasoning

6. Explainability, Control & Accreditation

Participants emphasized **explainability** as essential to prevent manipulation or hidden bias.

Examples:

- Users must understand why an avatar adapts tone or content.
- Over-personalization creates confusion or distraction.
- Too many controls overwhelm users.

Quote:

> *"There should be an accreditation process, like safety checks for cars."*

Implications

- Navigator must include explainability scoring.
- Only essential personalization options should be included.
- Mandatory documentation on how adaptations occur.

7. Representation, Culture & Identity

Many participants emphasized that explainability and user control are essential for building trust in AI-driven educational avatars. They argued that users should always understand why the avatar adapts its tone, speed, or content - especially when those changes affect learning outcomes.

At the same time, the group warned against overwhelming learners with too many settings or customization options, noting that excessive control can create confusion, distract from the educational goals, or even encourage biased personalization choices.

Striking the right balance is crucial: the system should offer clear, human-readable explanations for its behavior, provide only the most essential controls, and avoid over-personalisation that could reduce clarity or trust. Ultimately, participants agreed that transparency supports engagement, while simplicity supports effective learning.

Participants referenced:

- Regional depictions of religious figures
- The idea that cultural consistency can help relatability

But they cautioned:

> *"If the concept is inclusive AI, maybe having a 'face' at all is not doing the right thing."*

Implications

- Provide culturally adaptive but **non-stereotypical** designs.

- Consider hybrid avatar archetypes: part-human, part-stylised.
- Test representation with target communities.

Navigator Criteria and Practical Strategies

From the German Focus Group session, three evaluation criteria emerged naturally from the way participants talked about AI behavior, user expectations, and the risks of misinterpretation or misuse. Rather than approaching the criteria from a theoretical or academic angle, participants framed them from a practical production standpoint - what would actually make an AI avatar trustworthy, usable, and ethically safe in a real learning environment.

i) Avoiding Assumptive Behaviour

The Navigator should identify where the avatar makes assumptions about the user - such as inferring language, culture, or preferences from appearance or location. The focus is on spotting uneven treatment, subtle stereotypes, or politically/ideologically slanted responses.

ii) Ensuring Clear and Inclusive Communication

The tool should check whether the avatar communicates clearly and comfortably: appropriate speech pace, neutral tone, readable gestures, and easy-to-follow delivery. Accessibility is seen as cognitive clarity rather than just technical compliance.

iii) Transparent and Responsible Adaptation

Adaptation must be visible and explainable. The Navigator should flag any case where the system alters or simplifies content without informing the learner, ensuring that adaptation supports learning rather than hiding information or creating inconsistencies.

Handbook Recommendations

The participants emphasized that the Handbook should be highly practical and grounded in real examples rather than abstract theory. They recommended including clear case studies that contrast harmful AI behaviors with inclusive, well-designed ones to help designers recognise pitfalls.

Neutral language guidelines were seen as essential, along with concrete testing protocols for assessing cultural sensitivity in avatar interactions. Participants also stressed the value of straightforward “do and don’t” lists for visual and behavioral representation, helping creators avoid stereotypes or assumptions.

They requested step-by-step checklists covering ethics, accessibility and communication clarity to guide teams through the entire design process. Finally, the group suggested including a dedicated chapter addressing whether avatars should be human at all - exploring the advantages and drawbacks of non-human or stylized designs as a way to avoid triggering user bias.