

Chapter #7

PLURILINGUAL AND INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS AND ITS INTEGRATION INTO PRACTICAL DOMAINS OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Anne Julia Fett & Peter Grüttner

Center for Teacher Education, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

ABSTRACT

Dealing with cultural heterogeneity has become one of the most crucial challenges for teachers making it necessary to linguistically and culturally diversify teacher education (HRK, 2015). The project “Intercultural Ambassadors at Schools and in Teacher Education” aims precisely at this kind of diversification. It has been initiated at the Centre for Teacher Education of the University of Halle as a measure of professionalization. The project has the intention to raise prospective teachers’ awareness of different beliefs and values in culturally heterogeneous teaching/learning environments. In so doing, it defines the dimension of plurilingualism as a vital component of cultural diversity, which is inseparably linked to culturally heterogeneous interpretive schemes. Accordingly, the immediate experience of cultural as well as linguistic differences is at the centre of the project: future teachers are put into an international Co-Teaching-situation in a culturally mixed team. Together with foreign teachers and students, they enter a teaching/learning setting in which they first experience and later reflect on the cultural dimension of their individual idea of school and teaching.

Keywords: education for diversity, cultural heterogeneity, plurilingualism, co-teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

Current social challenges such as cultural heterogeneity, social inequality and technological change have an impact on the teaching profession and are transforming and diversifying the demands placed on prospective teachers. In order to react to this kind of transformation, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has designated up to 500 million euros in two funding phases (2014-2019 / 2019-2024) for the “Qualitätsoffensive Lehrerbildung”, an initiative which supports new approaches and projects in the realm of teacher education. During the first phase, 49 projects at 59 German universities of teacher education receive funding. Selection criteria have been, amongst others, the lasting impact of the projects on the improvement of teacher education and the harmonisation of the three training elements of the teacher degree. The KALEI project (“Kasuistische Lehrer*innenbildung für den inklusiven Unterricht” / “Casuistic Teacher Education for Inclusive Education”) at the Centre for Teacher Education of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg has been selected for funding. It is focusing on the development of a teacher education which raises prospective teachers’ awareness of heterogeneity, enables them to embrace diversity and to reflect teaching/learning situations in heterogeneous groups.

Although the definition of “inclusion” as a “pedagogy of diversity” (Prenzel, 2006), which comprises different dimensions of heterogeneity, has been fixated as an international standard by the UNESCO a decade ago,¹ in German academic as well as everyday language a narrowing definition is surprisingly prevailing. “Inclusion” is thus too often related

exclusively to the dimension of ability-disability, and if ever a culturally broader concept is applied, it tends to reduce the dimension of “cultural heterogeneity” to its mere linguistic scope, focusing on the inclusion of pupils as non-native speakers. This kind of reductive view can even be detected in large-scaled international conferences, which are addressing current developments in teacher education and are nevertheless neglecting the fact that linguistic diversity is not more (and, of course, not less) than a part of cultural heterogeneity (Kaiser, 2017).ⁱⁱ

A closer look at the heterogeneity dimensions defined by the UNESCO in 2008 („race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability“) reveals that actually every dimension is permeated with culturally dimensioned patterns. Consequently, these patterns play a crucial role in processes of in- and exclusion and are thus highly relevant for educational disadvantage. In this perspective, it becomes clear that the question of how to deal professionally with diverse, culturally shaped values and beliefs within culturally heterogeneous teaching/learning environments is at the core of teacher education – and clearly goes beyond language sensitive approaches.

The project “Intercultural Ambassadors at Schools and in Teacher Education”, as part of the KALEI project’s section “Internationalisation of Teacher Education”, tackles precisely this question: it prepares prospective teachers not only for an effective handling of plurilingualism, but also raises their awareness of culturally heterogeneous values and beliefs.

2. BACKGROUND

With regard to its intention of an internationalisation of teacher education Germany is facing very similar challenges as other European and non-European countries: in view of rather rigid and crowded curricula on the one hand and various concurrent requirements (such as e.g. the digitisation of teacher education) on the other hand, the implementation of a cross-curricular internationalisation strategy often falls behind. Beyond that, the fact that, as Hélot (2012) states, “teacher education institutions are often slow to take on board the growing linguistic diversity of the school population” (p. 225) might be due to other individual reasons, such as staff shortage or the perception of intercultural awareness raising as an extra-curricular rather than a cross-curricular concern.

As a result of these shortcomings, future teachers too often do not feel prepared for culturally heterogeneous teaching/learning settings. This tendency is amplified by the fact that, in a large-scale perspective, only a small group of prospective teachers goes abroad during their studies. As the “Hochschul-Bildungsreport 2020” (“Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft”, 2015) has revealed, even though in comparison to students of other degrees teacher trainees consider periods spent abroad more important for their future profession, their international mobility is significantly lower. Only every fourth or fifth prospective teacher (23%) spends time abroad during their studies – compared to e.g. 36% of all economics students and 29% of all medical students. As a further differentiation according to subject matters shows, the overall mobility rate of future teachers (23%) drastically decreases in the STEM subjects, with the subject of mathematics showing the lowest international mobility rate (11%) (p. 55).

Due to the rather selective German school system with its segregated school types up from the fifth grade, the majority of future teachers graduated from a “Gymnasium” (the most advanced secondary school, comparable to the British grammar school). This kind of school biography also implies relatively few experience with cultural heterogeneity. In this way, many students might have addressed plurilingual and intercultural issues on a theoretical

level, but completely lack the immediate experience of cultural as well as linguistic differences in the classroom – and have a need to acquire the essential practical knowledge in this realm in order to be prepared for an effective pedagogical action in heterogeneous teaching/learning settings.

This situation and the resulting need for a format of intercultural cooperation which can be easily integrated into the practical domains of the curriculum has been the point of departure of the international Co-Teaching-Project.

3. OBJECTIVES, DESIGN, AND METHODS

3.1. Objectives and design

The project “Intercultural Ambassadors at Schools and in Teacher Education” creates a setting of intercultural cooperation by bringing together foreign teachers and students and prospective teachers in the stage of teaching practice placements.

The initiative aims at the lasting implementation of intercultural and plurilingual awareness-raising into the two periods of curricular practical placement (Schulpraktika I und II), which present an integrative part of the teacher degree at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg.

In a first step, foreign Master and PhD students, prospective students from the University’s “Preparatory German Courses for Refugees” as well as foreign teachers are brought together with future teachers as Co-Teaching-Partners. The culturally mixed teams of two are then trained as Intercultural Ambassadors of culturally open schools in order to be placed in partner schools of different school forms during the period of practical placement. The training starts with a two-day full-time seminar “Cross-cultural Mediation and Linguistic Awareness” which prepares students and partners for their commitment through the reflexion of individual aims as well as through case work and role play. Communication and presentation techniques are imparted, furthermore within the seminar section “Intercultural Understanding – Intercultural Values” participants acquire basic theoretical knowledge of World Ethics, Human Rights Education and Intercultural Competence.

The seminar concept is based on the assumption that education for linguistic tolerance and education for World Ethics and democratic citizenship are essentially linked. Countering the “monolingual habitus”, which Gogolin (2008) has proven to be at the core of the German education system from the 19th century onwards, project participants get to know different forms of bilingualism within and outside the context of school, alongside with pedagogical methods which support linguistic heterogeneity. The question of how pupils speaking a minority language can be encouraged to value their own and their classmates’ linguistic competences is approached through an engagement with the proper linguistic biography. Applying the concept of “plurilingual repertoire” suggested by, amongst others, Hélot (2012), the culturally mixed teams of two reflect on their own and the pupils’ experience with different languages in its life-long dynamics.

Within this stage and through the following phases of preparation, realisation and reflection of Co-Teaching-Lessons, all teams are continuously accompanied and supported by the cooperating teaching methodologists as well as by the cooperating teachers in partner schools. All Co-Teaching-Teams have space for discussion and are encouraged to reflect cultural dimensions of school, differences in self-conception and teacher habitus and not least differing value orientations.

At the same time, the Co-Teaching-Lessons are conceived to give pupils of all participating schools an insight into cultural, linguistic, religious and social diversity. Depending on the subject matter, a Japanese student co-teaching a Geography lesson on

volcanism and seism might give insights into her own experiences with earthquake preparedness at school in Japan, while a Syrian teacher co-teaching the same subject might focus on cultural as well as geographical aspects. During the co-taught English and Spanish lessons, not only the competence of co-teachers as native speakers is brought to class. For example, an English teacher from Turkey might co-teach a lesson with a German partner, opening up an intercultural perspective not only on Turkish language and culture, but also on the tuition of English in Turkish schools as well as on other aspects linking more than two cultures and languages.

The project is recorded (audio and video) and scientifically evaluated. Beyond that, all collected data are didactically worked up, anonymised and fed into an Open Access Portal for further free investigation as well as for didactic application within intercultural formats in school and teacher education.

3.2. Methods

Due to the innovation of the format and the multitude of intercultural team-constellations it implicates, the collected data (audio and video) appear particularly insightful: the research design goes beyond previous studies on Co-Teaching, by transferring it into the area of cross-cultural educational research. Interaction patterns of the different Co-Teaching-Teams are contrasted employing the Documentary Method (Bohnsack, 2011), which is particularly suited for the study and confrontation of social practices as well as for the exploration of implicit knowledge within comparative research designs.

A case comparison with regard to different school forms is implemented. In winter term 2017/2018 the project has started with a focus on two school subjects, English and Geography, and accordingly with teaching methodologists from those two subject matters collaborating. Foreign students from Japan and Syria have participated in the first cycle. In summer term 2018, also Spanish has been included as another subject and this time, foreign teachers from Turkey and Colombia with several years of professional experience have joined the project, opening up new possibilities and research perspectives in the realm of multi-professional collaboration and collegial feedback on teaching. Prospective teachers of the second cycle have largely profited from their partners' teaching experience and the insights they gave them into the school system and teaching methods of their country of origin. At the same time, the evaluation of the second cycle has shown how foreign teachers have greatly benefitted from their first teaching experiences in German schools and have been motivated to pursue the recognition of their degree in Germany.

During the first project cycle, the following research questions, which are particularly focusing on implicit and explicit value systems, have been developed:

- How do prospective teachers deal with plurilingualism and culturally shaped ideas of school and teaching within the intercultural cooperation situation (Co-Teaching)?
- Does the experience of the intercultural cooperation situation have an influence on the attitudes of future teachers, foreign project participants and/or pupils towards cultural and linguistic heterogeneity?
- Does the cooperation affect the prospective teachers' expectation of self-efficacy relating to teaching situations in culturally heterogeneous groups?

Not only the videography of the Co-Teaching lessons themselves, but also the videography of reflection meetings conducted with every single culturally mixed team retrospectively has been very insightful. Evaluation has shown that prospective teachers'

dealing with plurilingualism on a theoretical as well as on a practical level during the introductory seminar, the preparation phase and finally during the co-taught lessons has enhanced their linguistic tolerance and appreciation. Remarkably, the analysis has proven that the majority of participants has assessed the preparation phase, and especially the autonomously handled one-to-one exchange with the Co-Teaching partner prior to the lessons as the most valuable part of the project. Furthermore, the majority of the teams has stated to have used the non-German partner's language or English for one-to-one communication during the preparation phase and beyond. This was certainly not due to a lack of linguistic competence in German on behalf of the international Co-Teaching partners, as all of them mastered German at least on level B2 (CEFR) or higher. Instead, this result seems to indicate an action orientation in favor of linguistic diversity in general (or the minority language in particular) assumed by the Co-Teaching-partners from the beginning of the project. As a reason for this choice, amongst others, the achievement of linguistic "symmetry" – defined as a similar competence of both partners in the spoken language – has been stated (especially referring to English).

The claim made by Hélot (2012) that prospective teachers are to be encouraged to reflect on languages and their own "plurilingual repertoire", that they are to be given the opportunity to "observe the differences between the language(s) of the classroom and the language(s) of real life, and should be educated to value linguistic and cultural diversity" (p. 218) thus seems to be answered to a certain degree through the project outcome.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Initially, the project "Intercultural Ambassadors at Schools and in Teacher Education" had been planned and designed as a cooperative format between prospective teachers and international students. As a reaction to current political and social processes, this initial conceptual design has been changed, and a different orientation has shown to be more effective. As a result of the so-called "refugee crisis", between 2015 and 2018 thousands of Syrian teachers have moved to Germany and are currently searching for a recognition of their degree. From 2016 onwards, a just as large number of teachers from Turkey has emigrated and is eager to work in their profession in Germany. Unfortunately, the recognition of foreign teacher degrees is often a lengthy procedure (depending on the estimated equivalence and thus validation of the foreign degree). Arising problems comprise the lack of documents that have been lost while fleeing from war and violence, the language requirements (usually C2) which are very hard to fulfill, and not least the requirement of two subject matters which have to be studied within a special degree course defined as teaching degree ("Lehramt"). Given these demands, teachers from countries such as Syria and Turkey, where teaching degrees tend to comprise one single subject, are usually forced to return to University in order to study a second subject and to "catch up" on every single topic which has not been considered equivalent or which has not been part of their foreign teacher degree.

As a consequence, in Saxony-Anhalt, where Halle is located, only a remote part of teachers in public schools are non-German. We had the possibility to access the statistical data regarding the nationalities of teachers in Saxony-Anhalt for the year 2017, and discovered that out of a total of 15.669 teachers only 72 were non-German. That is a surprising number and illustrates an asymmetrical constellation which can be encountered at schools: while more than 10.000 pupils in the federal state's primary, secondary and vocational schools have a migratory background, those pupils' teachers are – almost always – German.

Considering this situation, we decided to involve foreign teachers in the process of recognition of their degree into the project instead of focusing on international students as co-teaching-partners. Retrospectively, this decision has been proven to enhance the project in many respects: future teachers have come in contact with the teachers' biographies, they have profited from their professional experience and their teaching methods, and at the same time, pupils and teachers in the participating partner schools got to know a more symmetrical teaching/learning setting in which a culturally heterogeneous class has met a culturally heterogeneous team of teachers. Beyond that, in our evaluation international teachers who participated in the project repeatedly underlined the positive effect of the co-teaching on their professional self-conception: while on a bureaucratic level institutions were reluctant to recognize them as "teachers", pupils at schools accepted them as their teachers without any hesitation. Furthermore, in many occasions the cultural background of the international Co-Teachers also increased the participation of non-German pupils in cultural heterogeneous classes. Arabic-speaking pupils were included as experts into teaching units focusing on the international teachers' culture and language and thus arouse their classmates' curiosity about their bilingualism and multicultural identity.

The project's future research directions are shaped by this new orientation towards a format of cooperation between prospective and foreign teachers. It now appears promising to contrast differing teacher habitus and to carve out and confront their cultural and individual dimensions. For this scientific purpose, the sequence-analytical habitus reconstruction ("Sequenzanalytische Habitusrekonstruktion") appears to be an adequate means (Kramer, 2017).

5. CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

The evaluation of the first project cycle has shown that not only prospective teachers, but also participating students from abroad benefit greatly from the project, by getting directly in contact with German school life, its predominating pedagogical practices and institutional arrangements. Considering that currently in Saxony-Anhalt a lot of teachers from abroad are in the (rather lengthy) process of recognition of their degree, the project's second cycle has been focusing on foreign teachers in the process of degree recognition, not least in order to offer them the opportunity of a first contact and working experience within the German school system.

In case of a positive funding decision, the project might be sustainably implemented within the curricular structure of practical placements for future teachers of all subject matters at the University of Halle in the course of the following three years.

In so doing, the dimension of plurilingual and intercultural awareness-raising could become an integrative part of the practical phases and thus of teacher professionalisation. In the long term perspective, Beacco's and Byram's (2003) claim that "plurilingual awareness should be structured and assisted by schools" (p. 16) can only be answered if also applied to institutions for teacher education.

First results have shown that by means of the international Co-Teaching experience during the practical phases of teacher education prospective teachers profited from their international partners' teaching experience and the insights they gave them into the school system and teaching methods of their country of origin. At the same time, foreign teachers benefitted from their first teaching experiences in German schools and all participants' linguistic tolerance and appreciation has been enhanced.

Anyway, to counter the aforementioned significant lack of international exchange (e.g. in the form of academic and practical student experiences abroad) that recent studies have shown and more generally a lack of intercultural education in teacher education, a lot of work still has to be done. For an effective cross-curricular implementation of internalisation strategies into teacher education, creative and effective ways have to be found. At the same time, international mobility has to be integrated into teacher degrees and valued as a key qualification. Reliable “mobility windows” within the curricula have to be found and recognition has to be guaranteed in order to avoid a lengthening of studies.

Meanwhile, on the level of an “internationalisation at home”, the project “Intercultural Ambassadors at Schools and in Teacher Education” offers a straightforward and effective means to enhance intercultural awareness in teacher education and to prepare future teachers for effective pedagogical action in the intercultural classroom. By addressing cultural heterogeneity and culturally shaped beliefs and value orientations, it works against a narrow definition of “inclusion” and counters the reduction of “intercultural awareness” to a mere linguistic sensitivity.

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AUTHORS' INFORMATION

Full name: Anne Julia Fett

Institutional affiliation: Zentrum für Lehrer*innenbildung, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

Institutional address: Dachritzstr. 12, 06108 Halle (Saale), Germany

Short biographical sketch: Anne Julia Fett holds a PhD in German Studies which she completed as a cotutelle with the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus programme "Cultural Studies in Literary Interzones" at the Universities of Bergamo, Perpignan and Sydney. She has worked as a German teacher in Italy (Florence) and as a University lecturer in the Netherlands (Nijmegen) and Germany (Münster). From 2016 to 2017 she has coordinated the language section of the initiative "Integration of Political Refugees with Academic Backgrounds or Ambitions" at Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences. Since 2017 she is a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Teacher Education of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg within the project "Internationalisation of Teacher Education". Her research focuses on the pedagogical dealing with cultural and linguistic heterogeneity in different European countries (esp. Italy, France, Germany) in a comparative perspective. She also develops training formats for intercultural professionalisation, for students as well as for in-service teachers.

Full name: Peter Grüttner

Institutional affiliation: Zentrum für Lehrer*innenbildung, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

Institutional address: Dachritzstr. 12, 06108 Halle (Saale), Germany

Short biographical sketch: Peter Grüttner graduated at Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg (MLU) with a Master's Degree in Intercultural Communication (Majors: Latin American Studies and Anglo-American Studies). In 2013 he went to Brazil (Florianópolis) for a research stay (funded by the DAAD). He then worked as the coordinator of MLU's International PhD Network from 2014 to 2016. In 2016 he started to work with the Center for Teacher Education at Uni Halle in a BMBF funded subproject called the "Internationalisation of Teacher Education". Over the years he gained profound knowledge building and expanding an international network to facilitate student stays abroad and designing complementary courses for culture and language learning at the students' local university. His research interests include (but are not limited to) education and learning in different cultures, cultural beliefs and teaching, culture and language learning, migration and international networks in education.

ⁱ „Internationally, however, [inclusion] is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. It presumes that the aim of inclusive education is to eliminate social exclusion resulting from attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability“. Cf. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2008). *Inclusive Education. The Way of the Future. Reference Document of the International Conference of Education. 48th session, Geneva 25-28 November 2008*, 5. Available at:

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ⁱⁱ Accordingly, the congress *New International Perspectives on Future Teachers' Professional Competencies* (University of Hamburg 2017, September, G. Kaiser (Chair)) contains a section entitled *Linguistic and Cultural Heterogeneity* in which de facto not a single talk addresses non-linguistic aspects.