

Applied Research Partnerships with Developing and Transition Countries

Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences and Universities of Teacher Education

Project title

Images of Intercultural Education and their Implications for Teacher Training

Foto: Daniel Piltax

Thematic focus

Teacher Training; Inclusion; Cultural Diversity

Year

2012/3

Project location

Serbia and Switzerland



Swiss Institution

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Partner Institution

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Description

The European Training Foundation identified teachers' attitudes towards social and educational inclusion as a major issue for the entire Western Balkan region, but as an especially strong challenge for Serbia. This challenge reflects the fact that Serbia has undergone various transitions: from a socialist country (with a strong emphasis on "homogeneity" and "uniformity") to an era of war (with its strong focus on ethnicity) and later on to the post-war constellation (with a stronger focus on the recognition of plurality). The educational system is prompted, nowadays, to deal with new legislative frameworks and to prepare future generations for a just, democratic and pluralistic society.

As central actors in education, teachers play a key role in this task. Their individual beliefs about integration, diversity, and plurality regulate to a large extent how respective policy reforms are implemented and to what extent they reach the daily teaching. However, only very sparse knowledge about these beliefs is available. The present project uncovers these beliefs and proposes methods and instruments to connect systematically and consciously different individuals' belief systems with the normative implications of the officially taught concepts and the demands of legislations and curricula.

Development relevance

Intercultural education, as it is in the focus of the present project, deals with the special needs of minority children in school. In doing so, it incorporates the challenge that in both countries of the project, in Serbia as well as in Switzerland, different ethnic groups have limited opportunities to success in education. Against this background, preparing teachers for dealing effectively with the special needs of marginalized

groups is an important step for accomplishing quality Education For All (EFA). The present project contributes, in this sense, to the EFA-goal 6 "improve the quality of education" which, in turn, contributes to the global pursuit of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially MDG 2 on universal primary education and MDG 3 on gender equality in education.




Preparing teachers to deal productively with cultural diversity in schools as a main challenge for teacher training



The research team working together on the proposal and the methodology

KFH

Rektorenkonferenz der Fachhochschulen der Schweiz
Conférence des Recteurs des Hautes Ecoles Spécialisées Suisses
Conferenza dei Rettori delle Scuole Universitarie Professionali Svizzere
Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Main features of the project

The expected results of this project consist of (a) a typology of issues and challenges in intercultural education as well as (b) a toolbox for teacher training to address effectively these different issues and challenges considering different individuals' belief systems. The leading question of the project refers to theories on the development of intercultural sensitivity (e.g. Bennett, 1993) and asks how different stages in this process of development can be related to the notion of intercultural education amongst pre-service and in-service teachers. Insight shall be gained in order to understand the individual's belief system and subsequently relate them to the normative implications of the officially taught concepts and the demands of legislations and curricula. Contradictions and discrepancies shall be uncovered and a typology of issues and challenges in intercultural education shall be developed. This typology shall lead to conclusions and consequences for a more effective teacher training in intercultural education and allows for moving teacher training from normatively imbued top-down training to a needs-based support of teachers and teacher students. As a product, a "tool box" will be developed containing a range of training material for intercultural learning as well as easily accessible background information for practitioners.

The methodology for the present project is structured according to the concept of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It shall include the following steps:

- (1) Review and analysis of relevant scientific literature as well as curricula of teacher training institutions, learning materials in the field of intercultural education and policy documents and legislations in both countries.
- (2) Semi-structured interviews with pre-service teachers and in-service teachers in Serbia and in Switzerland.
- (3) Tests on intercultural sensitivity with the same sample using the widely recognized instrument "Intercultural Development Inventory" (IDI; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003).
- (4) Analysis of data in each country context according to the methodology of content analysis (interviews) and the IDI framework.
- (5) Comparison of data and development of a typology of issues and challenges in intercultural education, eventually separated for each country context.
- (6) Definition of consequences for intercultural education in the field of teacher training.
- (7) Development of a "tool box" containing a range of training material for intercultural learning as well as easily accessible background information for practitioners.

The research value of this project consists of the systematization and the development of a typology of issues and challenges in intercultural education, considering perspectives of different stakeholders in education. This allows for defining the specific requirements and conditions for teachers and teacher educators when dealing with cultural heterogeneity. Against the background that the discourse about "intercultural competence" lacks a specific focus on teaching and schooling, the specification of teaching-specific issues and challenges is also a contribution to the definition of teaching-specific facets of intercultural competence. In doing so, the present project contributes also to theory construction in intercultural education.



School in Serbia: Some ethnic groups have limited opportunities for educational success



Teaching in culturally diverse classes in Switzerland: Educational goals for all