

# SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DIVERSITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION



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EDITED BY  
GYÖRGY MÉSZÁROS – FRANCISKA KÖRTVÉLYESI



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Association for Teacher Education in Europe – Magyar Pedagógiai Társaság  
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# TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY

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## ABSTRACT

*Teachers play a key role in dealing appropriately with culturally diverse classrooms. Research on teacher competences highlights the important function of teachers' beliefs. However, hardly any evidence addresses the crucial question of what actually shapes the beliefs about intercultural education and how these beliefs might be developed. Against this background, the present contribution suggests a conceptual approach to understand teachers' beliefs about intercultural education. By drawing on intercultural theory, the paper provides a framework of analysis on how teachers' beliefs about intercultural education differ according to different levels of intercultural sensitivity. Implications for teacher education are discussed.*

## KEYWORDS

*Intercultural Education; Teachers' Beliefs; Teacher Education*

## INTRODUCTION

In modern societies, globalisation, individualisation, and pluralisation of values and cultural norms are self-evident. Against this background, societal developments such as the omnipresent migration or the recognition of cultural minorities are conceived as circumstances that produce new cultural and social constellations. Accordingly, the current educational discourse states 'diversity' as a crucial concept and claims an appropriate dealing with differences regarding culture, gender, or aptitudes. As central actors in education, teachers play a key role in acting appropriately in the context of social and cultural differences – differences, which are continuously socially constructed, by others as well as by themselves (Budde 2012).

Research on teacher competences suggests that the teachers' beliefs are crucial for performing specific functions and tasks in teaching, e.g. for dealing effectively with diverse students (e.g. Klieme and Hartig 2008; Klieme and Vieluf 2009; Reusser et al. 2011). Admittedly, the term 'belief' has still to be considered as a "messy construct" (as identified already more than 20 years ago, see Pajares 1992) and a clear distinction from related concepts (such as subjective theories, attitudes, conceptions or propositions) is still lacking. Nevertheless, a clear consensus has been reached that "beliefs

matter" (Reusser et al. 2011, 489) and that beliefs include affectively loaded and normative elements that influence strongly teachers' perceptions, interpretations and judgements of specific situations (ib.). Against this background, the term 'belief' is used in this contribution in the classical sense of Richardson as "psychologically held understandings, premises or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (1996, 103).

Even though the important function of beliefs is empirically well documented, teachers' beliefs are rather scarcely investigated with regard to intercultural education. In this regard, an overview on the state of research shows a range of different foci: (a) Studies on the belief orientation among teachers in general, (b) investigations that led to the development of typologies, (c) a scrutiny that deals with the relation between teachers' beliefs and their classroom management, (d) approaches that regard beliefs as part of a 'collective intercultural competence', (e) examinations on the coherence or incoherence between teachers' beliefs and the prevailing policy discourse as well as (f) research on the relation between teachers' attitudes or beliefs and diversity-related burnout and stress. The approaches hardly address the question of the preconditions among teachers that shape their beliefs, however, (g) some studies deal with teacher beliefs related to sociocultural categories such as ethnicity, gender or class. The state of research shall now be presented in more details along these different foci.

## GENERAL BELIEF ORIENTATIONS

In many studies, teachers' belief orientations were scrutinised in a general way regarding the overall orientation among teachers about diverse students: In the Serbian context, Macura-Milovanović, Pantić and Closs (2012) have examined the development of Inclusive Education (IE). They refer to a key finding of a former analysis on the development of IE in the Western Balkans. This finding entailed that the prevailing understanding of IE was rather narrow among educationalists, in the sense that it was often applied to the education of certain groups such as persons with disabilities, while a broad understanding would mean that IE was seen as a principle that prevents exclusion from education of any kind (Pantić et al. 2010). The authors explore reasons for this narrow understanding and hypothesise that many teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of diverse students were negative or uncertain including teachers who „show outright hostility to including students with non-standard profiles, without recognizing that their behaviour is discriminatory, justifying their views in ways that blame the victim" (ib., 33–34). Consequently, the authors argue that the issue of teachers' attitudes towards IE is one of the major challenges in developing teacher preparation for IE in Serbia.

In the German context, Marburger, Helbig and Kienast (1997) have scrutinised teachers' attitudes towards cultural diversity and state an overall deficit-orientation: Teachers' attitudes are found to follow a cultural ethnocentrism and a readiness to marginalise students and their parents with a non-German background (ib., 56). Similar findings come from a study by Sterzenbach and Moosmüller (2000) who confirm this deficit-orientation and conclude that teachers in Germany were insufficiently prepared to deal with cultural heterogeneity. Weber (2003) has focused on teachers' perception of educationally successful female students with a Turkish background and found that teachers in German gymnasiums had a

deficit orientation even towards these educationally successful students. Slightly differing findings come from Kratzmann and Pohlmann-Rother (2012) who ask whether and in what ways stereotypical attitudes towards children with a Turkish background and their families appear among early childhood educators in Germany. Some stereotypical attitudes were indeed found, but a part of the respondents were shown to have a differentiated image of the families and not to apply stereotypes. Several studies from the USA also conclude on a general deficit orientation towards diverse students, for instance Cochran-Smith, David and Fries (2004) as well as Nelson and Guerry (2013) referring to in-service teachers, or Silverman (2010) referring to pre-service teachers.

For the Australian context, Buchori and Dobinson (2012) have found that early childhood educators viewed the cultural backgrounds of diverse students as a "cultural baggage" (ib., 51) and as a burden and restriction to them. The educators were also found to be concerned about enabling the students to adapt to the dominant culture and to be in fear that their students would fall below curriculum standards.

Apart from these repeatedly mentioned deficit orientations found among teachers, there is also a study from Hong Kong, in which teachers' attitudes are described to be in a state of struggle. Hue and Kennedy (2012) show that the interrogated teachers articulate struggles in four particular regards: in conceptualizing a new rationale for cultural responsiveness to diversity, in developing intercultural sensitivity, in strengthening the home-school collaboration and in broadening ethnic minority students' aspirations for their education and careers. The authors argue that the teachers who work with culturally diverse students, are engaged – like their students – in a cross-cultural process "through which they learn the culture of ethnic minority students, relearn their own culture and reexamine the relevant rationale underlying cultural responsiveness" (ib., 119).

## DEVELOPMENT OF TYPOLOGIES

While the aforementioned studies deal with teachers' beliefs in a general way, the following investigations are pursued in a more differentiating way seeking to develop typologies on different belief orientations among teachers: Bender-Szymanski (2001), for instance, has investigated the way, pre-service teachers in Germany handle and reflect on intercultural experiences in multicultural classes. She has defined two different ways: Firstly, a 'synergy oriented' way, which is described as a „bi-perspective situation analysis" (ib., 94) based on an appreciation of cultural difference as well as an awareness of one's own participation in an intercultural situation. Secondly, she defined an 'ethno-oriented' way, which is described as having a deficit view on students who appear to be culturally different and as having an expectation that culturally different students and their families should adapt to the norms and regulations of the teacher's own culture. Another suggestion for two different kind of teacher beliefs comes from Akkari, Loomis and Bauer (2011) who have examined pre-service and in-service teachers' attitudes towards cultural diversity in Western Switzerland. They conclude that the teachers are divided regarding their posture taken towards cultural diversity: On one side, there are those who support practices of indifference towards cultural diversity and on the other side, there are those who have a critical stance against the "monocultural school system" (ib., 9).

Additionally, there are studies that define more than two kind of beliefs and suggest several types of teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity. One such study has been conducted by Edelman (2006) who has scrutinised the question of how primary school teachers in Switzerland think about cultural heterogeneity in their classes. The teachers' subjective interpretations and attitudes are presented in a six-type-typology: (1) a 'dissociating-distanced' type, for whom cultural heterogeneity has no meaning at all regarding his or her pedagogical practice and who keeps distanced from cultural issues altogether; (2) a 'tacitly-acknowledging' type, who acknowledges the cultural heterogeneity of all students and stresses the importance of a harmonic class community in which all students are equally appreciated, while potential differences and similarities remain unspoken. Teacher team work is not seen as particularly important in this respect; (3) an 'individual-language-oriented type', who views linguistic heterogeneity as an important resource for the whole class and includes this resource into the lessons. Additionally, specific language support is given to disadvantaged students in order to increase equal educational opportunities for all. This approach is based on individual initiative, as team work is not experienced as helpful in this regard; (4) a 'cooperative-language-oriented' type, who deals with cultural heterogeneity by focusing on language diversity regarding it as a central resource for all students including appreciation for the first language as a basis to learn the language of the majority. These teachers are part of an innovative team that continuously reflects on its approach; (5) an 'individual-synergy-oriented' type, that understands language as well as cultural knowledge as an important learning potential and constructively includes these resources into lessons of all subjects. Here again, the approach is based on individual initiative as team work is not experienced as helpful in this regard; (6) a 'cooperative-synergy-oriented' type, that appreciates cultural heterogeneity as learning potential for all and attributes central meaning to it in the whole teaching and learning process. These teachers' pedagogical practice is shaped by a whole school culture and intensive cooperation with parents and within the team. According to the author, this typology shows that the teachers' subjective interpretation of cultural diversity as well as their personal interest in dealing with this diversity explain to a large extent how they deal with cultural heterogeneity. These factors are seen to be more influential than school context factors as within similar context conditions, different orientations are found among different teachers (ib., 243).

Another typology comes from Lanfranchi (2008) who has asked about pre-school and first grade school teachers' strategies in dealing with cultural differences in Switzerland. By identifying contrasting cases, the author suggests an approximation to a typology and describes five types: (1) a type that focuses on the adaption to the predefined monocultural school regulations and expects adaptation by culturally foreign children and their parents while being ready to exclude; (2) a type that has a deficit oriented perspective on immigrant children and wavers between not wanting to perceive differences and negative stereotyping; (3) a type that has a biologicalist interpretation of culture but nevertheless seeks to foster contacts between children with different backgrounds; (4) a type that has a resource oriented perspective on immigrant children and focuses on the social integration of all children; (5) a type that has a differentiated perspective on different kinds of social difference and reflects school norms regarding their appropriateness in specific situations. The author concludes by stressing a range of aspects that should more strongly be taken into consideration in teacher education, including a critical reflection of the teachers' beliefs and values (ib., 256).

Another typology has been suggested by Stier, Tryggvason, Sandström and Sandberg (2012) who have explored pre-school teachers' understanding of and practical approaches to ethnic and cultural diversity in Sweden. A typology was defined describing four different – yet partly overlapping – approaches which are seen as increasingly productive in the order mentioned: an 'instrumental,' a 'co-productive,' a 'facilitative proactive,' and an 'agitative proactive' approach. The authors characterise each approach by a particular 'interaction mode,' 'reflection mode' and an underlying conception of culture – all of which are seen to be affecting the identity process of the children. The least productive type, the 'instrumental' approach, is found most often in the – although not representative – sample and the authors emphasise the need for intensified teacher education which challenges the underlying conceptions and attitudes towards cultural difference.

## RELATION BETWEEN TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

While the above mentioned studies focus on the description of different beliefs, one study also tackles the question, in what ways different beliefs are related to teachers' actions: Makarova and Herzog (2013) have scrutinised how acculturation attitudes are related to the classroom management among teachers in Switzerland. They show that teachers' attitudes towards diverse students are indeed related to their way of teaching (ib., 264). Additionally, the authors describe how different attitudes towards immigrant students' acculturation have different effects on the teaching practice. They distinguish between an 'integration,' 'assimilation' and 'separation' attitude and show – amongst others – that teachers with an 'integration' attitude have a high propensity to punish students for misbehaviour, but they also show high levels of diagnostic expertise in social areas, while teachers with an 'assimilation' attitude are also likely to punish students for misbehaviour, but tend to have low levels of expertise in diagnosing social tensions among students.

## TEACHERS' BELIEFS AS PART OF A 'COLLECTIVE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE'

Another approach draws attention to teacher beliefs by regarding them as part of a "collective intercultural competence" of teacher teams: Ulf Over (2012) puts a focus onto schools as a whole and asks about the individual teachers' theories about an 'interculturally competent school' in a secondary school in Germany. The findings show three main fields of discourse and tension: the attitude towards cultural diversity in a tension between 'distanced' and 'open'; the way of dealing with cultural diversity between 'feeling overloaded' and 'actively designing'; and the responsibility being attributed either to the students or to the institution. The author follows an application-oriented approach and shows, how uncovering the implicit theories of the teachers can help improve and create an 'interculturally competent school' (see also Harmon and Wilson, 2011, who find a "lack of collective beliefs" among teachers in the USA).



## TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND POLICY DISCOURSE

A further approach comprises studies focusing on the coherence or incoherence between teacher beliefs and the prevailing policy discourse: Bereményi (2011) has scrutinised teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards Roma students in Spain. The study reveals a main incoherence between a deficit-compensation paradigm that is applied by the teachers and intercultural education principles that teachers are supposed to follow. Similar findings are presented by Mizrachi (2012) who states an incoherence in Israel between the educational actors' own „worlds of meaning“ (ib., 185) and the liberal message in the multicultural education policy discourse. However, some teachers were also found to be in a role as mediators between the liberal ideas and the population by translating and adjusting these ideas and by engaging students into a dialogue. Govaris and Kodakos (2003) find *coherence* rather than *incoherence* and describe this coherence as problematic: They find teachers in Greece to have an overall defensive attitude towards the idea of a multicultural society and see this attitude in close connection to the assimilative orientation of the Greek school system.

## TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND DIVERSITY-RELATED BURN-OUT

An again different approach deals with the relation between teachers' attitudes or beliefs and “diversity-related burnout” and stress: Tatar and Horenczyk (2003) have investigated ‘diversity-related burnout’ among teachers in Israel. They distinguish between an ‘assimilative’ and a ‘pluralistic’ attitude among teachers and found the highest levels of diversity-related burnout among teachers who have an assimilative attitude and who additionally work in schools with an assimilationist orientation, while teachers with pluralistic views showed the lowest degree of diversity-related burnout.

## TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND SOCIOCULTURAL CATEGORIES

A few studies relate different beliefs to socio-cultural categories such as ethnicity, gender or class: Beady and Hansell (1981) have investigated whether the ‚race‘ of elementary school teachers in black schools in the USA was associated with the teachers' perceptions of effort and their expectations for student achievement. Controlling for teachers' sex, education and years of teaching experience, as well as average school achievement and socioeconomic status, the data revealed that “black teachers expected their black students to be more successful in college than white teachers” (ib., 199). Quijoch and Rios (2000) published a review on the literature on minority group teachers – mainly from the USA – and conclude in their synthesis that „many minority group teachers, in comparison with their European-American counterparts, are more likely to bring a critical, social justice orientation and consciousness that stems from their real, lived experiences with inequality [...]. Minority group teachers have a greater sense of how to develop (and therefore enact) culturally relevant curriculums and to understand the human, social and communal nature of teaching and learning“ (ib., 522). Ford and Quinn (2010) asked about pre-service teachers' dispositions for intercultural learning in the USA and revealed differences

related to gender: Females showed a larger agreement in questions on multicultural engagement such as on the need for multicultural instructional practice or the need for teachers' multicultural awareness. Differences also appeared between White and non-White students as non-White students were found to be able to understand cultural differences and to have a self-awareness and a desire for social justice. In line with these findings, Cochran-Smith, Davis and Fries (2004) describe White middle-class teachers in the USA to have a deficit orientation towards diverse students and to have low expectations and fears about students who are different from themselves (ib., 934).

The above mentioned studies ask – in many different ways – about the kind of beliefs. Some of them additionally relate the beliefs to different contexts such as classroom management, “collective intercultural competence”, policy discourse or stress. And some few studies investigate how teachers' beliefs might be related to socio-cultural categories such as ethnicity, race, gender or class. But, the state of research has shown that hardly any studies address the question *what shapes* teachers' beliefs about intercultural education. From the perspective of teacher education, this can be seen as one of the crucial questions: If teacher education aims at preparing and supporting teachers for dealing effectively with culturally diverse settings, it has to understand how teachers conceptualise key facets of intercultural education and how these conceptualisations might be influenced.

## A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH: THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS' BELIEFS

Intercultural theory suggests that beliefs about intercultural education are shaped differently depending on the level of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett 1986a; 2011). This level of intercultural sensitivity expresses the level of complexity in the perception of cultural differences and similarities. This is a constructivist approach applied to the field of interculturalism: perceptions take place on different levels of sophistication and complexity. The complexity refers to sets of categories that are used to organise the perception of phenomena. According to Bennett (Bennett 2004, 73) «more cognitively complex individuals are able to organize their perceptions of events into more differentiated categories.» This means that a higher intercultural sensitivity is reflected in a more differentiated and more sophisticated way how to perceive specific constellations and situations regarding cultural differences and commonalities.

An individual's development of intercultural sensitivity can be seen as a development process for which an elaborated model has been provided by Bennett (Bennett 1986b; 2011). His 'Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity' (DMIS) conceptualises the development of intercultural sensitivity in different stages. The DMIS defines five distinct kinds of experience that spread across the continuum from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative worldview. The most ethnocentric stage is called 'denial' of cultural difference (expressing a worldview that does not notice other cultures or constructs them in very vague ways as 'foreigners' or 'immigrants') and is followed by 'polarisation' (expressing a worldview that organises and polarises the perceptions in terms of 'us' and 'them'). The middle of the continuum is named 'minimisation' of cultural difference (expressing a worldview that avoids cultural difference by assuming 'deep down, we are all the same'). This

'minimisation' stage is conceived as a transitional stage leading to the two more ethnorelative orientations of 'acceptance' (expressing a worldview that perceives one's own culture as just one of many other equally complex worldviews) and 'adaptation' (expressing a worldview that allows for flexible frame shifting in order to organise one's own experience through the perspective of another culture) (Bennett 2004; Hammer 2011).

The level of intercultural sensitivity – including the respective beliefs according to such a level – can be seen as a crucial precondition for acting with intercultural competence: It "creates the potential for increased intercultural competence" (Bennett 2004, 73). The existing literature, however, does not portray a conception of how teachers' beliefs change or differ depending on the level of intercultural sensitivity, i.e. depending on the complexity of how individuals perceive schooling and teaching. Regarding intercultural sensitivity and focusing on levels of perception, decisive differences between ethnocentric and ethnorelative worldviews have to be expected. In other words, teacher students, teachers and teacher educators will most probably have different images of cultural differences and similarities and therefore also upon Intercultural Education if they are in an ethnocentric stage of development or if they have developed an ethnorelative perspective.

The summary of the current state of research made clear that, up to now, no evidence addresses the question of how teachers' beliefs about intercultural education are related to their intercultural sensitivity. Therefore, a new conceptual approach should identify how perceptions regarding intercultural education differ according to different levels of intercultural sensitivity. In doing so, it could refer to the 'Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity' (DMIS) which conceptualises the development of intercultural sensitivity in different stages (see above).

With such an approach, a translation of different levels of intercultural sensitivity to the school context is provided: How are different levels of intercultural sensitivity reflected in perceiving specific situations in school? What are prototypical operationalisations of different levels of intercultural sensitivity in teaching? By answering these questions on an empirical basis, 'intercultural education' may be moved from normatively imbued top-down training to a need-based support of teachers.

## CONCLUSION: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

The conceptual approach suggested above explains how more or less differentiated categories are reflected in different individuals' beliefs about intercultural education (see for a detailed illustration: Petrović et al. 2013). The *theoretical relevance* of this approach has to be seen against the background that the discourse about 'intercultural competence' lacks a specific focus on teaching and schooling (Leutwyler et al. 2009; Sieber 2007). A vast body of literature defines normative claims for intercultural education and identifies the features of interculturally competent persons in general

(see e.g. Deardorff 2009). But only very scarce approaches identify what 'intercultural competence' means specifically for teachers: What does it mean to act interculturally competent in the school context?

The specific challenge in the school context arises from the predominantly monocultural setting of schooling as it is reflected both in its history and its current self-conception (Gogolin 1994). School as an institution is an expression of culture and has the duty to socialise the following generation into a given culture (Bruner 1996). Schools are historically targeted at contributing to the development of cultural cohesion in societies. Monoculturality, in this sense, is both aim and programme of the historically developed institution 'school' (Radtke 2004, 630). Establishing common norms and a common notion of normality is a central aim in schooling; or explained with Foucault's terms: Normalisation of individuals is a central characteristic of modern societies (Foucault 1973, 1976). In this perspective, the role of schooling is to contribute to this normalisation of pupils. Therefore, dealing with cultural heterogeneity in schools cannot be limited to dealing with individual cultural peculiarities. Rather, interculturally competent teachers are required to deal appropriately and productively with both the conflicting priorities of individual diversity on the one hand and the societal function of schooling on the other hand. The predominant discourse on intercultural education and on interculturally competent teachers, however, lacks a specific consideration of these conflicting priorities. The suggested approach could contribute empirical evidence to better conceptualise different forms of dealing with these conflicting priorities and, in doing so, to define key features of intercultural competence in the context of schooling. In this sense, the suggested approach has the potential to contribute to theory development in intercultural education.

This approach has also a *practical relevance*. In many countries, teachers have been found to have a narrow understanding of Intercultural Education referring only to students with special needs, to immigrant students or to minority group students rather than having all students in mind as all students would need to be included into this learning process (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2012; Sieber 2007). Furthermore, in many countries, different ethnic groups have different opportunities to succeed in education. Although many of these countries legally dispose of more or less appropriate policies regarding Intercultural Education, their implementation does not succeed appropriately. This may be shown in the cases of Switzerland and Serbia: Whereas the access to education is formally ensured also for marginalized groups in both countries, quality education considering the special needs of marginalized groups is not provided sufficiently both in Switzerland and in Serbia. This fact is reflected by the high percentage of school failure e.g. for Serbian children in Switzerland (Bundesamt für Statistik 2010 [Swiss Federal Statistical Office]) as well as e.g. for Roma children in Serbia (Macura-Milovanović et al. 2010). It may be assumed that the more or less appropriate policies in this regard are not implemented in daily teaching – precisely because they do not fit the teachers' individual belief systems. The explicit connection of individuals' belief systems and normative demands of curricula and legislations has to be seen as a key issue in intercultural education on the level of teacher education. Fostering productive dispositions of teachers will only be possible when contradictions, discrepancies and ruptures between the biographically imbued beliefs of individual actors, on the one hand, and officially taught claims of policies and curricula, on the other hand, are explicitly dealt with (Kidd et al. 2008; Villegas 2007). Thus, the knowledge about deeply held beliefs is a basic prerequisite to support teachers for dealing effectively with culturally diverse settings. It allows for moving intercultural education from normatively imbued (and, therefore, mostly ineffective) top-down training to a need-based support of teachers.

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