

**Serbian Education for Roma Inclusion:  
Understanding and assessing teachers' intercultural sensitivity in Serbia**

**Summary**

In contemporary societies, globalisation, individualisation, and pluralisation of values and cultural norms are obvious. Against this background, the current educational discourse states "diversity" as a crucial concept and claims an appropriate dealing with differences regarding culture, gender, or aptitudes. Thereby, recognition and appreciation of diversity constitute overarching aims of education and are seen as basic requirements for democracy and equality in modern societies. As central actors in education, teachers play a key role in implementing these overarching aims. Research on teacher competences suggests that the teachers' personal dispositions and beliefs are crucial for performing specific functions and tasks in teaching, e.g. for dealing effectively with diverse students.

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: Studies on the belief orientation among teachers in general; investigations that led to the development of typologies; a scrutiny that deals with the relation between teachers' beliefs and their classroom management; approaches that regard beliefs as part of a 'collective intercultural competence'; examinations on the coherence or incoherence between teachers' beliefs and the prevailing policy discourse; research on the relation between teachers' attitudes or beliefs and diversity-related burnout and stress as well as studies that deal with teacher beliefs related to sociocultural categories such as ethnicity, gender or class. However, the existing literature does not address the question what shapes teachers' beliefs about intercultural education and how these beliefs might be influenced.

Intercultural theory suggests that beliefs about intercultural education are shaped differently depending on the level of intercultural sensitivity. 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 and, therefore, for dealing effectively with culturally diverse students. The existing literature, however, does not portray a conception of how teachers' beliefs change or differ depending on the level of intercultural sensitivity. This lack of knowledge regarding how more or less differentiated categories are reflected in different individuals' beliefs shall be tackled in the proposed project. It aims at identifying how the perception regarding intercultural education differs according to different levels of intercultural sensitivity and investigates prototypical operationalisations of different levels of intercultural sensitivity in teaching. Thereby, it considers the specific Serbian situation with the strong emphasis on the inclusion of Roma.

The proposed project is planned to be undertaken in cooperation with 2 Serbian universities and aims at addressing the lack of knowledge regarding the specifics of intercultural competence in the context of school and teaching. It will contribute empirical evidence that allows a better conceptualising of different ways in dealing with cultural diversity by teachers. The specifics of a school and teaching context are seen in conflicting priorities between individual differences on the one hand and the societal function of schooling on the other hand. By investigating teachers' ways in dealing with these conflicting priorities, the proposed project contributes to theory development in intercultural education.

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards social and educational inclusion were identified as an especially strong challenge in Serbia. Thus, by enabling a profound understanding and a sophisticated assessment of teachers' beliefs about diverse students in the Serbian context, the chosen approach shall provide empirically gained insight that enables an effective adaptation of teacher education contents and curricula. Therefore, the proposed project aims at supporting the development of pre-service and in-service teachers' intercultural sensitivity and competence regarding the inclusion of all students in Serbia.

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