Part 2

Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Training

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CONSTRUCTIVIST FOUNDATIONS OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHER TRAINING

Introduction

In modern societies, globalization, individualization, and pluralization 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 consideration of 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 (Prengel, 1993).

As central actors in education, teachers play a key role in dealing effectively with a culturally diverse student body. Tasks and challenges can be seen in two particular areas: Firstly, teachers and schools need to provide equal educational opportunities as immigrant children and minority group students are often disadvantaged within the school systems. This can be seen for instance in their overrepresentation in special education and in their underrepresentation in higher education (Petrović, 2010). Secondly, all school children, regardless whether they belong to a the ethnic minority or the ethnic majority, need to be prepared to live in globalized, pluralistic and culturally diverse societies; and one of the learning environments for that are the school classes and schools themselves (Petrović & Zlatković, 2009; Sieber, 2007).

How can teachers be prepared to deal with these challenges? Research on teacher competence shows that the teachers' personal dispositions are crucial for performing specific functions and tasks in teaching (e.g. Klieme & Hartig, 2008; Lipowski, 2006). Such dispositions correspond to deeply held beliefs, values and norms which are strongly anchored in individuals' subjective theories. These subjective theories may interfere with the normative claims inherent to the officially taught concepts how to teach productively in culturally diverse settings. The subjective theories, therefore, may constrain the implementation of these concepts – an issue that will be taken up later.

Subjective theories represent the individuals' cognitions about the world and their connected emotions, volitions and motivations (Dann, 1992). They express, therefore, the individuals' understandings and interpretations of how the world

functions; they express how individuals have constructed their worldviews, in other words: their realities. Hence, subjective theories have to be understood in the framework of a constructivist approach that stresses the argument that the perceptions of phenomena are never expressions of a so called "objective" world, but rather subjective reconstructions of personal experiences with the world and its phenomena (von Glasersfeld, 1984).

The following part outlines this framework of constructivist theories and shows how teachers' dispositions in dealing with cultural heterogeneity can be understood within constructivist approaches to Intercultural Education. This leads to the pivotal question how teachers actually construct their understanding of Intercultural Education which will be claimed as an important research desideratum in the second part. Thirdly, we conclude that the investigation of individual images of Intercultural Education is of vital relevance for both theory and practice.

Constructivist Approaches to Intercultural Education

In order to understand how student teachers, teachers or teacher educators regard matters of cultural differences and similarities, constructivist approaches ask how individuals' reality is being constructed and, therefore, what images individuals have created regarding cultural phenomena. In order to contextualize this approach, some general aspects of constructivism are outlined in a fist part and are, subsequently, applied to the field of interculturalism. This application will point to the fact that constructions take place on different levels of sophistication and complexity, a fact that is especially important for teacher training.

Theorists of constructivism have shown that reality is constantly constructed in interactions with others by assigning an individual meaning to an event or an experience (e.g. Kelly, 1955; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; von Glasersfeld, 1984). Based on our constructions, we expect other people to act in a certain way and we therefore anticipate their behavior according to the image we have created about them. We build hypotheses upon the way our reality works and in order to predict the behavior of others, and we test these hypotheses in an ongoing process of constructing and re-constructing. In this process, our worldview is sometimes being confirmed and sometimes challenged so that it needs to be enlarged or changed. We adapt our worldview according to the way we are able to perceive the events and experiences that occur to us and that we react to. Piaget (1970) developed this constructivist epistemology for educational matters and showed how the development of cognition is a constant process of oscillation between assimilation and accommodation of individual cognitive structures. Against this background, individual cognitions do not *match* reality, individual cognitions rather *fit* the world outside (von Glasersfeld, 1984, p. 21). Hence, subjective theories as expressions of individuals' cognitions fit the reality as long as they are "viable" (ibid., p. 22).

Applying this constructivist approach to the field of interculturalism, it becomes apparent that perceptions take place on different levels of sophistication and complexity. This complexity refers to sets of categories that are used to organize the perception of phenomena. According to Bennett (2004, p. 73) "more cognitively complex individuals are able to organize their perceptions of events into more differentiated categories." He adds that this ability usually refers to particular domains:

> For instance a wine connoisseur may be able to taste the difference between two vintages of the same variety of red wine, while a lay drinker may only be able to differentiate red wine from white wine. So a sophisticated sojourner can observe subtle differences in nonverbal behavior or communication style, while a naïve traveler may notice only differences in the money, the food, or the toilets. As categories for cultural difference become more complex and sophisticated, perception becomes more *interculturally sensitive*. (ibid., p. 73)

Bennett (2004, p. 62) claims that intercultural sensitivity can be seen in a six-level-model of development. Along this model, the first three levels take place within an ethnocentric worldview and the levels four, five and six within an ethnorelative worldview. Bennett's model describes a major change in the quality of intercultural perceptions when people move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. Individuals with an ethnocentric worldview experience their own culture as only reference to construct their reality while the deeply held beliefs and behaviors from their primary socialization remain unquestioned. They are seen as "just the way things are". In contrast, individuals with an ethnorelative worldview experience their beliefs and behaviors as only one organization of reality among many other possibilities.

This constructivist approach to interculturalism points to two crucial issues: First, teacher students, teachers and teacher educators construct their images of cultural differences and similarities according to their constructions of reality. These images influence their thinking, feeling and acting in the context of cultural heterogeneity and may fit their personal experiences. But it is an open question to what extent the different images fit officially taught regulations and curricula. Second, these processes of construction and re-construction take place on different levels of complexity; perceptions can be organized into more and more differentiated categories. 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.

Uncovering Images of Intercultural Education as a Research Desideratum

Against this background, understanding the different images of Intercultural Education is of pivotal relevance for teacher training institutions and constitutes, therefore, an important research desideratum. If teachers are supposed to implement productive concepts of Intercultural Education in their daily teaching, teacher training must not only communicate such concepts. But rather, teacher training is prompted to facilitate a fit between individual images, on the one hand, and productive concepts of Intercultural Education, on the other hand. As central actors in education, teachers' concepts and beliefs about integration, diversity, multiculturalism and plurality as well as about the specific educational needs of marginalized groups regulate to a large extent how respective policies are implemented and to what extent they reach the daily teaching. These concepts and

beliefs about Intercultural Education are strongly anchored in individuals' subjective theories and may interfere with the normative claims inherent to the officially taught concepts and curricula. However, only very sparse knowledge about these beliefs is available. The deeply held beliefs of student teachers, teachers and teacher educators are barely investigated in relation to Intercultural Education. Some findings exist that show a deficit view in the sense that minority children are perceived mainly as having problems and facing specific challenges, but not with their resources (Pantić, Closs & Ivošević, 2010; Steinger, Leutwyler & Lottenbach, 2012). However, hardly any evidence addresses the beliefs about the roles and duties of as well as the challenges for teachers and school systems regarding Intercultural Education.

The research desideratum of uncovering different images of Intercultural Education seems to be relevant in various contexts. This will be exemplified by the Swiss and the Serbian context, by two countries with very different histories and with very different political and social constellations. For the *Swiss context*, the relevance derives from the fact that migration flows have changed dramatically in the last decades. Migration nowadays is qualitatively different than migration 20 years ago. Whereas two decades ago, migrants came largely from socio-economically deprived classes looking for low-skilled jobs, migrants come nowadays from very diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, including more and more highly educated specialists with high affinity to educational issues. Furthermore, Intercultural Education includes nowadays the preparation of future generations to live in culturally diverse contexts and to participate productively in a global economy with all its intercultural challenges. Therefore, Intercultural Education is no longer limited to issues of integration of disadvantaged minority children. Consequently, Intercultural Education is prompted to consider different constellations and challenges in schools than 20 years ago. However, teacher educators, pre-service and in-service teachers might still cultivate the image of an "immigrant child" as 20 years ago. Furthermore, pre-service teachers that grew up in already very culturally diverse settings may have completely different experiences with intercultural encounters than their teacher educators who grew up in more homogenous settings decades ago. It may be assumed that these different contexts of growing up leave marks in the subjective theories and in the individuals' disposition regarding Intercultural Education. As the current concepts of Intercultural Education are strongly influenced by scholars and teacher educators having grown up in different contexts than pre-service teachers do, it is an open question to what degree the concepts of Intercultural Education as taught in teacher training fit the experiential background of the student teachers and, therefore, their worldviews that structure their perceptions and their daily teaching.

For the *Serbian context*, teachers' attitudes towards social and educational inclusion are recognized as an especially strong challenge (Pantić, Closs & Ivošević, 2010, p. 64). 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 (dealing with requirements of the European Union that puts a stronger focus on the recognition of plurality and heterogeneity). Whereas the recently imposed policy discourse in Serbia (cf. the new Law on the Foundations of the Education System; NARS, 2009) focuses on "diversity" or "plurality",

traditional views emphasize more the notion of "homogeneity". Pupil diversity was not addressed in teacher training and mainstream schools and teachers were, therefore, never equipped with the knowledge, strategies and tools to address differences at all, and even less to address them inclusively (Macura-Milovanović, Pantić & Closs, 2012; Zlatković & Petrović, 2011). Nowadays, a special emphasis is given on different levels to the integration of Roma (cf., among others, the "Decade of Roma Inclusion" 2005–2015). However, attitudes and dispositions towards other cultural and ethnic minorities in Serbia have to be considered as well, especially toward Albanian, Hungarian, Croat and Bosniaks/Muslim (Biro et al., 2002; Zlatković & Petrović, 2009). The constellation of Serbia being a multi-ethnic country with a legacy of socialism and war is reflected in these major shifts in the official policy discourse. Therefore, similar as in the Swiss context, the concepts of Intercultural Education as taught in teacher training are elaborated mainly by scholars and teacher educators having grown up in very different contexts than pre-service teachers do. Therefore, also in the Serbian context, it remains an open question to what degree these concepts fit the experiential background of the student teachers and, therefore, their worldviews that structure their perceptions and their daily teaching.

Conclusion: Theoretical and Practical Relevance

These two very different contexts illustrate why it seems relevant to consider constructivist approaches in Intercultural Education and, therefore, to uncover different images of Intercultural Education. The relevance of uncovering these images of Intercultural Education is evident both on a theoretical and a practical level. The *theoretical relevance* of investigating images of Intercultural Education has to be seen against the background that the discourse about "intercultural competence" lacks a specific focus on teaching and schooling (Leutwyler, Steinger & Sieber, 2009). A vast body of literature defines normative claims for Intercultural Education and identifies the features of interculturally competent persons in general. 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 seems twofold: Firstly, there is the challenge to deal with cultural difference and to include the diverse cultural backgrounds; and secondly, there is a duty and a mission of modern schools to function as norm-setters – thus, obviously, intercultural competence of teachers has specifics that have largely remained undefined until now. Therefore, uncovering different images of Intercultural Education may be seen as a contribution to the specification of teaching-specific issues and challenges and teaching-specific facets of intercultural competence. In doing so, such type of research contributes also to theory construction in Intercultural Education. This contribution might result in 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.

The *practical relevance* of investigating images of Intercultural Education has to be seen against the background that, in many countries, learning how to live in a pluralistic, multicultural society is still not a priority. 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, Pantić & Closs, 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 (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2008) as well as e.g. for Roma children in Serbia (Macura-Milovanović, Gera & Kovačević, 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, therefore, as the key issue in Intercultural Education on the level of teacher training. 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, Sanchez & Thorp, 2008; Villegas, 2007).

Thus, the knowledge about deeply held beliefs are a basic prerequisite to prepare pre-service teachers for dealing effectively with culturally diverse settings. It allows for a better understanding of teachers' role conceptions and of the subjective meaning, importance and challenges regarding teaching in a culturally diverse setting. This allows for moving Intercultural Education from normatively imbued (and, therefore, mostly ineffective) top-down training to a need-based support of teachers. Uncovering images of Intercultural Education plays, therefore, an important role for preparing teachers to deal with the challenge of providing quality education for all and of preparing future generations for a just, democratic and pluralistic society.

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