

discussion paper

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*International Conference*

**FAILING IDENTITIES,  
SCHOOLS AND MIGRATIONS**

TEACHING IN (TRANS)NATIONAL CONSTELLATIONS

*University of Bremen*

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**Teacher Education in the (Global) Migration Society**

Movements of people across borders have taken place almost everywhere and in every historical era. Migration is a universal human activity. The social significance of the crossing of borders is not simply given, but rather generated in complex processes in which social reality is affirmed, negotiated, and changed. Phenomena of crossing borders have long been and are currently significant drivers of societal change and modernization. The consequences of movements that cross, constitute, and weaken borders can be studied and understood as phenomena in which new knowledge, experiences, languages, and perspectives have been introduced into different social contexts, which have in turn been rearranged, modernized, and revived. Even if migration is not an exclusively modern phenomenon, it is nonetheless characterized by specifically modern conditions. In recent times, cross-border movements of people have attained a particular significance for individuals and societies worldwide. This is connected to at least three main factors: growing global inequalities, technological developments in the transport of people and goods, and a growing acknowledgement worldwide of the principle that each person should be able and permitted to influence her or his own destiny. Transnational migration movements (migration for work and education, forced migration, commuting migration, etc.) challenge the order of exclusive societal contexts, such as nation-states, that are primarily oriented towards particular priorities.

For us as the organizers of this conference, the academic discussion of the theoretical and empirical basis and the goals of teacher education in globalized migration societies is a long-term project on which we have been working since 2013 in cooperation with the Universities of Bremen and Oldenburg as well as with researchers from other locations. According to our understanding, migration phenomena have a strong impact on and frame all societal areas in general and school education in particular. From this perspective, the following questions arise when it comes to teachers' self-understanding and education:

What should teachers know about conditions in migration societies and the historical backgrounds of these conditions? How intensively should teachers examine their own experiences and positions in the globalized migration society? What role should the critical examination of processes and (hidden) traditions of racialization play in teacher education? How can teachers take into account the differences among students that are relevant to the learning process without this consideration leading to a strengthening of stereotypes? How can teachers learn to critically reflect on their culturally influenced normativity without promoting normative arbitrariness? How should pedagogical professionalism be developed as a form of action that is oriented on the universality of human rights? Is this even possible under the conditions of an educational system that is primarily interested in generating human capital? What contradictions are characteristic for professional practice in schools? How can teachers address these contradictions such that less exclusion is possible? What ethical but also didactic challenges does global inequality present to teachers in the Global North? And what about teachers of the Global South? What ethical but also didactic challenges do power relations present to teachers who could be discriminated against on the basis of racist patterns of social distinction? And what challenge is presented to those teachers who do not tend to have experiences of racism? When and how are race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability related to one another in the classroom in terms of intersectionality? Which tasks arise from this for the teachers?

Questions like these characterize the range of tasks and the necessary considerations that we believe are important in the context of teacher education in the global and local migration societies. Our conference will provide a platform where these kinds of questions can be discussed. The focus will be on starting a productive exchange based on these and other questions related to schools and teacher education and to establish cooperation projects and (transnational) networks. We view this paper as an impulse for the critical further development and discussion of approaches and ideas on schools and teacher education under societal conditions that are shaped by the cross-border movements of people.

**Note:** In the lecture hall foyer, there are bulletin boards where you can write down questions, comments, and criticisms of this discussion paper. We very much look forward to receiving your feedback!

## **1. Education under conditions of global inequality and differentiating circumstances in migration societies**

We live in an era that is fundamentally shaped by people's migration projects. Over 1 billion people worldwide are considered to be migrants. In this age of migration, radical international political and economic changes have turned us into both witnesses of and actors in the globalisation process. Consequences of global inequality are now more directly and more intensively experienced. The long-term consequences of colonialism and nationalism seriously challenge the nation-state as a promise of both collective security and individual freedom. Now at the latest, as the global circulation of money and goods increasingly follows people's transnational mobility, the question arises as to the extent to which the nation and the nation state, as the structuring principle of modern society that both excludes and includes and was originally closely linked to the idea of a collective identity created through school education, can still meaningfully provide the sole framework of formal education.

Characteristic phenomena of migration societies include the translation and mixing of languages as a consequence of movement, living with a lack of or an insecure residency status and unclear prospects for the future, the establishment of in-between cultures and hybrid identities, the ascription of foreignness, structures and processes of racism, or even the creation of new forms of belonging such as forms of re-ethnicization or increasing and at the same time decreasing religiousness. The extensive task and responsibility that state education has when school is viewed as a method of empowering all people is highlighted especially by the increase in racist statements and attacks, the enormous growth of political parties and positions in Europe and the world that make nationalist and racist statements, and the increasing social acceptance of racist remarks - including against refugees and asylum-seekers, migrants, and those who are marked as having a migrant background.

Against this background, the issue for us is a kind of education that facilitates educational processes for all subjects and groups in a societal context shaped by migration in which the individual and collective ability for action is linked with the willingness to be responsible for a plural society characterized by mutual respect and acceptance. Serious interest in global societal relations and the circumstances to which these predispose people in different ways, in the resources and potential for self-determination, in the degree to which people around the world depend on each other which lends itself to a type of post-familial solidarity with the *Other* in the global migration society - these would be standards that school education could use when measuring its success, rather than output-oriented competencies.

## **2. School as an institutional framework for teaching and learning – What tasks should schools fulfil in the migration society?**

Migration phenomena have a significant impact on educational institutions and significantly shape the reality in which professionals are working. As a consequence, school is currently influenced by processes and effects of globalisation, global inequality, and transnational migration more than ever before. In regard to school, however, migration in Germany has so far been perceived as relevant primarily by focusing on the presence of children and adolescents who immigrated themselves or whose parents or grandparents immigrated. But migration as it pertains to school means more than just focusing on these target groups. Today especially in urban contexts, children and adolescents have direct contact with the

plurality of languages, religions, cultural value systems, and inequalities. Due in part to the influencing power of migration the world is moving “closer together” in all areas and levels of society. This occurs not least through the media and familial connections with events happening far away. The world and people as a whole are thus increasingly in close contact with one another. This can also be seen in the example of climate change, which does not stop at the borders of nation-states but has very apparent transnational effects. The current intense experiences with forced migration and asylum makes clear that the nation-state can no longer be the sole reference point for politics and pedagogy, and that globalisation has become a dimension that can be directly experienced right where we are. This must be reflected in all aspects of (school) pedagogy in order to uphold the pedagogical principle of making the actual life experiences of the children and adolescents the starting point for their educational process.

What does this reality mean for schools in a migration society?

- Besides the possible questioning of established school structures and content, which could be experienced as leading to insecurity, the reality of the migration society includes the opportunity to take responsibility for our own actions (for example, by recognising the consequences our actions have on the lives of people thousands of kilometres away). To take advantage of this opportunity, first there would need to be a re-conceptualisation of the curricula and structures of the nationally focused educational system to include a translocal and transnational perspective, as the national orientation also means it conveys limited perspectives.
- To this end, innovative ideas are needed to open up the structures, contents, and focus of all subjects to issues that are international and related to the migration society. These issues must be considered in the education and diversity of pedagogical staff. It is about a school reality that is primarily shaped and must be shaped by the teachers - a reality that does not stop at the imaginary boundaries of the nation-state, Europe, or the West, but takes seriously the fact that the world has always had close connections that are drawing increasingly closer.
- In schools in the migration society, it is important that the general institutional conditions and pedagogical practitioners are able to deal with the changing reality in a flexible and reflective way.
- Teachers represent the key actors for the required re-structuring of schools. We believe their pedagogical professionalism is essential for overcoming an educational system perspective which is limited to the nation state, for example, and that this professionalism is expressed through attitudes and actions that are informed, sensitive to differences, and critical of discrimination in the migration society. It is key that these perspectives are reflected in all phases and institutions of their education and continuing training to successively build up and expand teachers’ professional abilities.

### **3. Requirements for pedagogical professionalism in the migration society**

Teachers in all types of school and all subjects at schools in migration societies...

- ... view themselves as pertinent actors to achieve a reflective school culture,
- ... grapple with the fact that pedagogical actions occur on a case-by-case basis and cannot be carried out using one specific formula for all,
- ... become familiar with their profession’s antinomies, in which they are inextricably involved every day, and can reflect on the knowledge of these “paradoxes” and be able to act appropriately to the situation despite this knowledge.
- ... have pedagogical and social-theoretical knowledge, for example critically related to (post-colonial) power relations in the migration society, phenomena of Othering, or the persistence of

- the national self-understanding of many educational institutions, or the tension between the monolingual school culture and a society that is de facto multilingual, or the plurality of the educational biographies of the pedagogical counterparts, or the tendency to ethicize and culturalize social inequality even in and through state educational institutions,
- ... have knowledge related to social differences and their intersectionality (e.g. racism, sexism, ableism, classism),
  - ... are astute teachers because, in addition to pedagogical and subject-related knowledge, they are also knowledgeable about the (historical origins of) current global conditions of migration societies, the close connection between school selection and capitalism, the “impossibility” of acting correctly as a teacher, and the question of what responsibility means,
  - ... can critically reflect on the structures of knowledge, feelings, and prejudices conveyed to them on the basis of their individual-collective global position and experience because they know about the history and present of racist forms of action and legitimation and have reflected on their own affective involvement in these types of thinking,
  - ... know about the structuring effects of race categories in everyday as well as pedagogical situations and can critically distance themselves from these effects,
  - ... accordingly, are interested in enabling learning and educational conditions in which the pedagogical counterparts can develop, try out, and strengthen respectful forms of actions,
  - ... critically consider the plurality of positions and (educational) biographies in migration societies,
  - ... reflect on their own practices of pedagogical interpretation and action regarding stereotypes, stigmatising attributions and ascriptions
  - ... and attempt to deconstruct these,
  - ... reflect on their own national-ethnic-cultural loyalties, and also how they are perceived by others in school interactions from a national-ethnic-cultural point of view and take this into account in their actions,
  - ... question the images of (groups of) people described and marked as being different using their own evaluation schemes and their own experiences,
  - ... also question both the institutional actions and structures in regard to the extent to which they contribute to the exclusion of those who are considered nationally, ethnically/racially, or culturally as Others as well as the institutional mechanisms of the construction of the Other.

From the perspective of *teacher education in the (globalized) migration society*, it is about the teachers' courage and ability to recognize the social and historical conditionedness of their own actions and responsibly dealing with this. We believe this is a desirable, political component of teachers' pedagogical professionalism.

#### **4. Contributions to teacher education - education as a contribution to social change?**

As important as techniques are for the practical work of a teacher, they are not particularly helpful for recognizing the antinomic structure of the profession and acting responsibly with this knowledge. The antinomies include, for example: support/selection, self-improvement/leadership, uncertainty/certainty, closeness/distance, assistance/monitoring, civil rights/human rights. Teachers must (be able to) be aware that their actions are a part of the antinomic structure of social relations that are reflected in the school and classroom.

The issue is to question the foundations of teacher education in terms of their validity for educating teachers in the (global) migration society and to work on a *fundamental reform movement* using these questions and by learning and implementing a culture of systematic scrutiny. With Paulo Freire and Antonio Faundez, we could speak of the pedagogical principle of “Learning to Question” as an important

moment in professionalization theory (on that point, Freire & Faundez: "Learning to Question: A Pedagogy of Liberation"; 1989). From this perspective, being a teacher is to be understood as a political activity in the best sense of the term because it is about actively shaping society without overwhelming young people with the teachers' own perspectives, while still offering them a framework from a responsible perspective based on human rights in which they can grapple with the key issues of our time, which is shaped by the movements of people.

From this perspective, the following questions must be revisited in respect of teacher education in the migration society:

- What new or different knowledge should teachers have as opposed to schools that have a particular (national or ethnic) sense of "We"?
- What new or different abilities should teachers have as opposed to schools that have a particular (national or ethnic) sense of "We"?
- What new or different things should teachers be concerned with compared to schools that have a particular (national or ethnic) sense of "We"?
- What new or different topics should teachers touch on as opposed to schools that have a particular (national or ethnic) sense of "We"?
- What new or different things should teachers consider and reflect on in their pedagogical considerations and actions as opposed to schools that have a particular (national or ethnic) sense of "We"?

Moreover, we would like to use the opportunity afforded by this conference to discuss different experiences, concepts and visions in a global perspective.