

Editorial

Transculturality in Teacher Education

As collaborators and facilitators of the learning process, to which extent can (future) school teachers find meaning, inspiration and practical benefit in the notion of transculturality? This consideration was the programmatic starting point of the Digital Autumn and Winter Schools organised by the Heidelberg School of Education in 2020 and 2021 respectively. In the course of the virtual exchanges, which brought together numerous international students as well as scholarly participants from seven time zones and a broad range of disciplines, the guiding question was answered in the affirmative.¹ The present ninth issue of the *heiEDUCATION JOURNAL* is a direct result of the 2020/2021 events. As such it aims to record key contributions from the virtual exchange and make them available to a broader public in the hope that the discussion on the significance of transculturality in (teacher) education may continue.

Transculturality has developed as an antithesis to the perception that ‘culture’ can be defined by (geographical) borders, national divisions or a center-periphery dichotomy, and has rather emphasized processes of exchange, interaction, complexity and translation in the past and present. A transcultural approach, thus, goes beyond the ideas of inter- or multi-culturalism and offers a recalibration of perspectives, a self-reflexive shift and a reconsideration of global entanglements (cf. Abu-Er-Rub et al. 2019; Ortiz 1995; Welsch 1992 and 1999; Epstein 2009; Juneja, Kravagna 2013).

The importance of transculturality as a productive concept for future teachers becomes particularly apparent when considering e. g. the work by Mary Louise Pratt, who defined classrooms as “contact zones”, i. e. “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relation of domination and subordination” (Pratt 1991, p. 34). To be ready for such situations of “different agendas and power relations cutting

1 Several students’ contributions were published in the Heidelberg School of Education’s blog Fokus Lehrerbildung; cf. <https://hse.hypotheses.org/category/transkulturalitaet>.

across classroom, at national, institutional and everyday levels” (Collins 2019, p. 16) and to be able to critically approach them, has been an aim of teacher education particularly since the 1990s. As dialogical spaces, classrooms foster “reciprocal learning” and “mutual and respectful exchange of ideas rather than the simple integration of knowledge from one culture into another” (Ryan 2013, p. 287). This corresponds to Paulo Freire’s notion that teachers and learners simultaneously occupy both roles (cf. 1970, 1998). Learning with and from each other may therefore pose a certain challenge to the more traditional power relations that govern hierarchical classroom settings.

The understanding of educational spaces as culturally diverse suggests that developing “transcultural competence in dealing with the other” (Wulf 2010, p. 46) should form an integral part of teacher education programs. Relevant to such a transcultural competence-driven “learning community” (hooks 1994, p. 8) are also theories of positionality and intersectionality, which draw attention to the dynamic ways in which gender, race, class, age, (dis)ability and other factors constitute various discriminatory as well as privileging situations (cf. Crenshaw 1991, 2017; Martin, Van Gunten 2002; Roth 2020). These approaches should be applied individually as well as on a collective level as part of a critical transcultural reflexion. To embrace the notion of transcultural educational spaces then means to facilitate learning to happen without harm to people, place or time and involving both students and educators on an equitable journey together (cf. Smith 2020; Manathunga 2015; Cadman, Song 2012; Gabb 2006).

With this in mind, a focus on transculturality in teacher education should rest on a critical apprehension of inherited historical entanglements, present-day power disparities and an attempted future which hopefully will be more just. “Today, education can no longer be understood as national education only”, as Wulf (2010, p. 46) rightly argued. Applying a transcultural perspective to teacher education may help us in constructively re-examining discourses on race/ethnicity, gender, class, age and (dis)ability, challenging concepts such as ‘normal’ and ‘other’, recognizing global interconnectedness and recommending a relational approach to the linguistic, social, economic, political and environmental aspects of our everyday and professional lives (see Pranaitytė 2021). Moreover, it may affirm pre- as well as in-service school teachers on their way to become and remain reflective, culturally sensitive and open-minded educators, who fulfil a highly demanding task for our society and its future, namely to empower school children to competently address the major societal challenges of their times.

The contributions gathered here address various ways in which a transcultural approach can enrich teaching and learning practices. The authors differ considerably in their styles as well as in their perspectives, yet we as editors con-

sider this diversity a suitable reflection of the main concept of this special issue: In a truly transcultural manner it aims at bringing together university lecturers, in-service as well as pre-service teachers, teacher educators and students in a debate which strives to apply the notion of transculturality to learning spaces and to think of ways how it can foster teacher education.

While acknowledging that the reproduction of inequality is part of a social practice of boundary making in everyday life, including educational systems, **Carola Mantel and Tamina Kappeler** focus on the actions to be considered to counter it and to offer tools for teachers to apply a ‘transcultural lens’. They argue for the concept of transculturality to be helpful in shedding more light to such social dynamics. The authors suggest to shift the perspective from a “first sight” to a “second look” which moves beyond initial judgements into a state of doubt and questions. Since Mantel and Kappeler are well aware of the highly complex nature of the situation in which teachers find themselves, they do not expect them to change social structures of inequality that have been re-established over centuries. Instead the authors offer concrete steps and support in daily interactions, not least by admitting that “we are in this together.” Or as in the words of the quoted Persian poet Rumi: “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”

English language and literature classes often delve into aspects of British (popular) culture and its migratory and post-colonial issues, thus a transcultural approach is indeed a crucial one in such contexts. Hence the contribution by **Corinna Assmann** deals with a truly significant but often neglected aspect of transcultural competence learning – comedy and its potential to be employed in educational settings. The portrayal of cultural diversity, especially in the context of laughter, can easily become a gesture of degradation. As Assmann shows the comedy sketch series *Goodness Gracious Me* is a direct response to this exclusionary practice, in that it subverts established roles and meanings and offers ways of ‘laughing back’ to counteract hostility and aggression caused by misrepresentations of South Asians in Britain. Applying a predominantly white comedy tradition and re-inscribing difference into the idea of Englishness fits not only the changing demographics in Britain, but also emphasizes its transcultural dimension of learning. In this way, as the author argues, new alliances of laughter may be created that do not run strictly along cultural lines, when similarities can be found within differences and laughter can create a common ground for understanding.

The contribution by **Chinyere Harris, Rozena Raja and Minerva Francis** is a refreshing attempt to reveal the notion of transculturality through a conversation between educators and thus to offer an intra-view. Printed in an as-it-happened conversation manner, this text offers a unique opportunity for the reader to follow the discussion between three female scholars of col-

our in their attempt to diffract transcultural entanglements. The intra-view is punctuated by live conversations and silent discussions in which they independently write and comment on each other's comments. Filled with theoretical deconstructions, (re)considerations and 're-turnings' as processes that prolong engagement of collaboration in teaching and learning experiences (as offered by Karen Barad 2014), this contribution also offers meaningful ways to use transculturality in the contact zones.

Britta Klopsch and Renata T. Rivkin Haag in their contribution suggest to use the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic as an incentive to rethink the 'grammar of schooling', i. e. the structure and rules that organize school life. Rather than going back to old patterns of schooling, the pandemic could initiate a joint international development of a 'new normal' that corresponds to the current life of a digital and entangled knowledge society. Four areas of change are identified by the authors: teacher collaboration in professional learning communities; formative over summative performance feedback; partnerships between teachers, parents and communities; and the switch to hybrid learning environments, in which learning within and beyond school buildings is merged into a coherent whole. The transcultural approach comes in precisely as an underlying premise to reconsider schooling on a global scale, to re-evaluate collaborative learning, and to encompass the (cultural) entanglements of post-COVID-digitized societies.

Carsten Wergin's contribution starts with the 'Western' differentiation between nature and culture and offers ethnographic cases and tools for both of these notions to be taught on more equitable terms. The author also discusses the challenges this division could pose to teacher education. To illustrate the hypothesis of human interdependence with the environment, Wergin uses collected ethnographic data from Northwest Australia and Southern Germany. Central to the approach of 'transecological thinking' is a more inclusive understanding of people and place and a more convivial approach towards being in the world. Wergin argues for a new way of learning which is based on individual as well as collective experiences of conviviality and mankind reconnecting with their natural environment. As the author points out, transecological teaching through such immersive engagements in turn could be an asset in the context of education for sustainable development.

As an educator with 'on the ground' experiences of the educational everyday life in Indonesia and the United States, **Jonthon Coulson** was particularly interested in the notion of transecology as presented by Carsten Wergin during the 2020 Autumn School. Therefore we asked Coulson to provide a comparative view of the differing educational systems and how they would 'respond' to Wergin's proposed opportunities for learning transecologically. Introducing the concept of nature as teacher, Coulson argues that the approach of learn-

ing from the ‘living country’ is all too often ignored in classrooms as well as in post-colonial theory. Pointing out that nature’s teaching is not of the intellectual type, but utilizing bodily senses, the author explains that learners “receive nature’s teachings and recognize themselves as inter-connected”. Drawing on transcultural notions of mobility and entanglement, Coulson states that learning from nature is most successful outside the classroom, in extra-curricular spaces such as parks, botanical gardens or nature reserves.

Beyond the thematic focus, the ‘forum’ section offers two complementary contributions: While **Constanze Bartsch and Marion Bönnighausen** explore the potentials and limitations of Homi Bhabha’s Third Space concept for teacher education, **Marcus Callies, Erik Hanke, Andreas Klee, Christine Knipping, Nils Quentel, Daniela Schansker and Hendrik Schröder** examine discipline-specific aspects in the interlocking of teaching methodologies and subject sciences.

We hope that the selection of texts gathered in this issue meets with your approval and wish you a stimulating and insightful read.

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