

# NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

## Rethinking Citizenship Education in European Migration Societies

### Political Strategies - Social Changes - Educational Concepts

# Conference Paper

## Contribution to Workshop 5, Session 1: Intercultural Citizenship Education – New Perspectives for Learning at Schools

### “Paradoxes of Intercultural Education. What children can learn about immigrants from German schoolbooks” Frank-Olaf Radtke, University of Frankfurt/Main

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1.

My remarks are based on a study<sup>1</sup> dealing with currently used school books for the primary and lower secondary level I (grades 1 through 10) for the teaching subjects “Home country/Sachkunde<sup>2</sup>” and “Social studies/Politics/Civic Education” respectively in two German states, Hesse and Bavaria. The subject matter of the study has been the *mode* of making immigrants and their children a subject of discussion, i.e. the *forms* of their construction in textbooks. The patterns of description and picturing of “foreigner/alien”, “immigrant”, “refugee”, “stranger resp. strangeness” were studied. This study represents the first survey of German schoolbooks consistently oriented in discourse analysis. Its findings shall help allow an estimation of the effects of the texts in schoolbooks preparing for a still untackled research of their impact.

Schoolbooks are seen as one medium among others with which socially validated and commonly shared patterns of apperception of the social reality are rehearsed, acquired, and reproduced again and again. Above all, in schoolbooks knowledge is validated through complex processes of accreditation passed on to the next generation. Schoolbook knowledge is treated as institutionalized and socio-culturally approved. Schoolbooks are insofar regarded as part of a thematic discourse on immigrants in the respective teaching units. A guiding research question was how do education attempts, which claim to contribute to normative socialization and enlightenment, relate to the out-of-school conditions of mass media communication. In this context it was of particular interest to clarify what role the program of

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<sup>1</sup> Findings of a research project at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main, completed 2005, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation [[http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/fb/fb04/personen/radtke/Publikationen/Bilder\\_von\\_Fremden.pdf](http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/fb/fb04/personen/radtke/Publikationen/Bilder_von_Fremden.pdf)]

<sup>2</sup> Subject taught at primary school (Grundschule) familiarising pupils with scientific and technical phenomena and with social, economic and historical aspects of their home region.

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Intercultural Education, developed during the 1990s, plays in the generation, correction or also corroboration of the public images of the “alien/stranger”.

2.

The most important finding of the study was the observation, valid for all schoolbooks, that in an essentializing way a guiding distinction between ‘we-’ and ‘they-groups’ was consistently made, which is used to distinguish between indigenous/residents/natives on the one hand and immigrants and their descendants on the other. This distinction between ‘we’ and ‘they’ is impregnated with other attributes such as the distinction between ‘own’ and ‘foreign/alien’ which is negotiated through ‘culture’ and ‘cultural difference’, or also the distinction between ‘modern’ and ‘pre-modern’ with which the host country or the country of origin are characterized respectively. To these basal or guiding distinctions – we–they, own–alien, and modern–pre-modern – other discriminations can be accrued.

Even though we have to assume that one of the decisive functions of the school is to cultivate a national identity – from which the necessary distinction between inside and outside is part and parcel – the findings are yet not trivial because they stand in opposition to the declared pedagogical program of Intercultural Education. Especially the civic education programs of the EU aim at integration and tolerance and at reducing prejudices and discrimination.

Importance is consistently attached to the distinction between Germans and non-Germans in the schoolbooks. This differentiation advances the praxis of distinction of the public media in the construction and reproduction of the ethnic order system. It is remarkable, however, that without exception the schoolbooks make use – as it was shown in detail – of the same (stereotypical) patterns that are pivotal in the public debates. Attempts to problematize the discourse about immigrants itself or to foil the attribution of group characteristics can be found in schoolbooks only exceptionally. Insofar, it can be said that schoolbooks contribute to the continuation of the public discourse on immigrants (‘how we should/have to talk about the immigration/alien problem’). They are thus part of the “doing ethnicity” process in the sense of the production of a social construction of a social problem: foreignness.

In one crucial point, the contribution of school books to the discourse on immigrants differs from the manner in which the ethnic order system is approached in the public media: the introduced essentializing distinction between ‘own’ and ‘alien/foreign’ is persistently positively evaluated and emphatically appreciated. Differences between Germans and foreigners (confession, customs, tradition) are indeed stressed, but then associated with the objective ‘education for tolerance’. Foreigners are to be positively assimilated by the pupils – contrary to the public discourse. The aim here is the reduction of discrimination and the promotion of appreciation for diversity, but also the assistance to those disadvantaged/discriminated against/people “who are worse off than us”.

The pedagogical “tolerance” and “assistance” program, however, easily becomes entangled in inextricable paradoxes. The school books can never avoid the (representation) paradox to have to touch upon ethno-cultural differences, indeed to construct and highlight them, in order to hereafter normatively plead for not to attach importance to them in the social intercourse. In as much as in this context of tolerance the matter is not only about social problems – which could be solved through integration, or about religious avowals – which could be apportioned to the freedom of conscience – but is rather about permanent traits such as phenotype, complexion, origin, etc. The claim for toleration, i.e. acquiescence up to a certain point, does not lead to recognition/appreciation and to respect of the other. The extension of the imperative of tolerance to permanent traits departs from the realm of variable freedom of opinion and conscience (‘agreeing to disagree’), which could be secured through plurality. In its place inferiority/deviance is detected – this can be tolerated for the time being – however, from which the persons concerned cannot “escape” on their own.

3.

In summary, it can be stated that in schoolbooks – additionally burdened by retardation – the same patterns of depiction commonly found in the public discourse about immigrants can be found. In order to be able to identify them as such, immigrants are presented resp. depicted with typecasting attributes in which recurrent semantic characteristics such as skin or hair color, traditional beard, or headpieces are associated with each other. These attributions are assorted along polar oppositions; ‘we’/‘they’,

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'own'/'alien', 'modern'/'pre-modern'. Their highlighting is the paradoxical precondition for affirming identity and for directing the pedagogical efforts in the program of education for tolerance/education for the reduction of prejudices towards the social invalidation of the differences/characteristics just emphasized, thus the suspension of discrimination. Immigrants remain thereby asymmetrically the object of study by their German schoolmates or of their (integrative) help; they have anyhow no voice of their own.