Difference as a Contribution to Education Theory and Global Learning from a German Perspective: 'We should learn more about the cultures of foreign children'

Gregor Lang-Wojtasik
University of Education, Weingarten (Germany)

Abstract
This article begins by quoting students in a seminar on intercultural education in a German University. Moving from the perception of student teachers that they should learn more about the cultures of foreign students, the article explores understandings of difference from three perspectives. Firstly, difference is used as a construct to describe *distinctions* – in the practice of education and connected empirical educational research. Secondly, difference is used as a labelling of *contrasts* – with contrasts examined within the discourse of international and intercultural educational science. Finally, difference is used to denote a mark of *differentiation* – for education in world society. These three explorations of difference provide routes into a framework for understanding global learning and for outlining consequences for teacher education and research.

Keywords: intercultural education, global learning, diversity education, school theory

Difference as a Contribution to Education Theory and Global Learning[1]

The concept of 'difference' is central to educational discourse. From the perspective of global learning, it is a meaningful theoretical construct opening a wide range of possibilities for reflecting on complexity in world society. In this article, I examine the concept of difference from a number of different angles, in order to explore the possibility that a more nuanced understanding than the one commonly used in ordinary language might provide a contribution to education theory, and thereby to global learning. While this article is made in the context of German educational research discourses, it is hoped that the arguments put forward may also provide insights for other contexts, discourses and theoretical perspectives.

The following sections offer a theoretical analysis based in the descriptive meta-perspective of system theory; in other words, looking at education phenomena, empirical results and mid-range theory along four continua or dimensions – spatial, factual, temporal and social (cf. Luhmann, 1995; Treml, 2000). The article does not focus on broader issues of holistic approaches to culture and identity *per se*, nor on

concepts of global learning, intercultural education, or citizenship education in general.

Difference as a Description of Distinctions

Difference within educational practice

I am interested in the differences that are assumed to be relevant in working with students of teacher education. So I will deal first with difference as an educational phenomenon and a starting-point for this profession.

I started to work as a Professor of Educational Science (focussing on intercultural education and global learning) at the University of Education, Weingarten in October 2007. Weingarten is in Upper Swabia, near Lake Constance. During my first semester of teaching in the new post I asked students in one of my classes why they were interested in intercultural education and global learning. Three of them – as examples of the majority view on this question in my classes – responded with the statement that: 'We should learn more about the cultures of foreign children...'.

At first, this response seems to be more or less politically and educationally 'correct'. There do not seem to be any discriminating or racist semantics in it; the focus of consideration is 'foreign' children or adolescents (i.e. immigrant children and young people). It is assumed that as a teacher one has to deal with different cultures, and these cultures are assumed to be unlike the cultures of the trainee teachers. The statement indicates the need for learning by those student teachers who, it is assumed, have little or no knowledge about these 'other' cultures. This perceived obligation on the part of teachers, indicated by the 'should', could be seen as a well intentioned contribution to democracy.

Looking at the sentence a second time, one can perhaps also already see within it dimensions of the tensions within intercultural education and global learning as both teaching and research fields. From a German perspective, I would suggest that behind this statement several dimensions of difference are hidden, the understanding of which is necessary for clear communication. Key questions include:

1) Where are these 'foreign children' situated (birth place vs. place where they currently live)?
2) How is culture(s) defined and understood?
3) What kinds of learning and experiences about these culture(s) should be made available to student teachers? What is the goal of including these within teacher education?
4) Who are 'we' (as opposed to 'them')?

It seems clear that by using the term 'foreign' that my students are referring to people living outside of what is considered home for them. They are 'foreigners' in contradistinction to those who are 'natives'. These 'foreign' adolescents have, it is

supposed, a distinctive cultural background. They are distanced from the majority within the region of Upper Swabia, the federal state of Baden-Wuerttemberg or Germany as a whole. Their cultural background is unknown, but of sufficient interest to my students that they wish to gain more information about it. In consequence, there is a tension between access to new sources of information and growing recognition of a lack of knowledge. The statement quoted addresses an experience of learning in the present, with the potential to both change previous ideas and to create new perspectives in the future. The 'we' indicates a group of people, understood by themselves to be 'natives'. This group is supposed to widen their horizons by learning about the culture of 'foreigners'.

From the perspective of intercultural education and global learning, the statement from students highlights the fact that schools in the beginning of 21st century are confronted with a series of global challenges. These might be construed as, inter alia, globalisation, migration, a search for orientation and increased individualisation. These challenges can be analysed along a number of continua or dimensions: spatial, factual, temporal and social (see Table 1).

	Difference... ... as an educational phenomenon	**... and its connected challenges**
Spatial	'Foreigners'/ 'natives'	Globalisation
Factual	Lack of knowledge/ increasing information	Migration
Temporal	Experiencing learning in the present between past and future	A search for orientation
Social	We/ others	Individualisation

Table 1: Difference as an educational phenomenon and connected challenges

Against this background, interactions within schools become clearer. From the perspective of teachers, for example, pupil groups may increasingly appear to be widely diverse in terms of their cultural, ethnic, linguistic and social backgrounds. This suggests that the requirements for a professionalised teacher education need to be changed. And what about the perspectives of the adolescents themselves – do we know how they deal with difference?

Difference within empirical educational research

In a recent investigation by the German Youth Institute, entitled *How Children Experience Intercultural Everyday Life*, 1,208 children between 5 and 11 years of age in kindergarten and primary school – and who did not have a German passport – were surveyed (DJI, 2000). Selected children then were engaged in structured interviews individually or in groups. One pivotal result of the research was that although the children knew about their varying citizenships and national origins, this had very

little meaning in their daily interactions. Their selection of their friends, for example, was framed in individual and age-specific definitions of friendship, as well as being dependent on particular circumstances and contexts (DJI, 2000: 106). This leads to the question of whether aspects of national and cultural difference are as important as they are generally thought to be. If this is the case, then some may ask why we should learn about the cultures of adolescents from immigrant backgrounds at all. One answer is that empirical educational research among older students indicates a strong connection between social origin (linked with migration) and school performance.

Looking to the empirical educational research of the 1960s in Germany one finds the 'Catholic working girl of a rural area' (Peisert, 1967; quot. a. Fend, 2006: 39) as a subject of interest and research. This research construct was a mixture of the central results of empirical educational research as a whole. Four disadvantaged groups of the population were identified in the research of the time (as measured by their entrance to grammar school): children from rural areas, Roman Catholic children, girls, and working class children (Fend, 2006: 39). The 'Catholic working girl from a rural area' therefore took centre stage as the main focus for educational research in that era.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, and against the background of large scale assessments (PISA, PIRLS, etc.) that have a very strong impact on discourses of education politics and science, however, the central figure of focus for empirical educational research in Germany has changed. The typical 'Catholic working girl from a rural area' has been replaced by the 'immigrant boy in a socially disadvantaged area of a city' (Deutsches PISA-Konsortium, 2001: 351ff; ISA-Konsortium Deutschland, 2004: 269ff.). We know from the first set of PISA data that more than 20% of 15 year old pupils showed a performance in reading below or just equal to competence level I (on a range of five levels)[2]. This means that they are not (or are only barely) able to identify the key themes of a subject with which they are familiar, or to easily create connections between their previous knowledge and the given task. Students with the following characteristics were found to be more likely to fit into this group: low social class, low education level, male, and with a family history of migration (Baumert and Schuemer, 2001: 401). These young people are commonly characterised as 'pupils at risk' because their competencies are not considered sufficient to take part in working life or to gain further qualifications.

We also know from PIRLS 2006 (Bos *et al*, 2007) that two-thirds of children in Germany from immigrant backgrounds have not achieved basic reading competence – which would allow them to deal with texts in a firm and independent way that can open them to new, self-contained learning fields – by the end of fourth grade (Schwippert, Hornberg, Freiberg and Stubbe, 2007: 266). So we are confronted with the valid empirical finding that there is a strong correlation between social origin (connected with migration) and reading performance in German schools. This sug-

gests that many immigrant adolescents do not have the necessary cultural capital at their disposal to deal with the demands of school (Bourdieu, 1983). This is because their schemas of perception, thinking and acting may be very different to those being developed in the 'normal case' by the majority of middle class families (Baumert and Schuemer, 2001: 329f).

These lines of difference in cultural capital become visible in relation to constructions of what a 'normal school' should look like. Underlying this construction is a belief about how society should be organised and which benchmarks should be used to measure schools. Several researchers have explored this 'normality construct of a pupil' (Wenning, 2004: 573; Wenning, 1999: 328ff.; Hansen and Wenning, 2003: 187ff.), which is a standardised perception of the child as pupil. This idea of a 'normal pupil' implies particular patterns of activity and interpretation, and in Germany is most often based on the so-called 'normality' of the attributes of middle class children.

So we can surmise that we have to deal in a different manner with adolescents with immigrant backgrounds. They may not have at their disposal the cultural capital to get along well in middle class oriented schools (in distinction to those of the middle class, who are more likely to possess this cultural capital), and school attendance and performance can be affected by this. In light of these insights from empirical educational research, the following understanding of difference – with reference to spatial, factual, temporal and social dimensions – begins to emerge (see Table 2).

	Difference... **... as an educational phenomenon**	**... as a phenomenon in empirical educational research**
Spatial	'Foreigners'/ 'natives'	Adolescents with/ without immigrant backgrounds
Factual	Lack of knowledge/ increasing information	(No) connection to cultural capital
Temporal	Experiencing learning in the present between past and future	Low/ wide future perspectives of knowledge
Social	We/others	Low social class/ middle class
The construct of perceived normality of the national school is a key reference point		

Table 2: Difference as an educational and empirical phenomenon

In summary, it is obviously not enough to simply increase teachers' knowledge about the 'cultures of foreign children', because the following questions remain:

1) Who are the 'others'? What impacts does migration have on children? How is this connected with social concerns (such as limited literacy)?
2) How is 'culture' defined and understood? How is this connected to understandings of nationality?

3) What resonance can be felt in the term 'culture' of foreign children? Why is it used in the plural?

4) Who is supposed to learn and about what?

Difference as the Labelling of Contrasts

We now move to examine another perspective on difference – this time as the labelling of contrasts. Here I believe it is helpful to explore the discourses of two branches of educational research in Germany: international comparative educational research and intercultural education research. These are two distinct historical lines, and both have been involved in labelling differences. Below I deal with each in turn.

International comparative education

Research in international and comparative educational science in Germany from 1945 until 1990 dealt mainly with three areas:

- Comparison of educational systems in the East and the West (in particular West-Germany and East-Germany, as well as the USA and the Soviet Union) – especially with reference to education policies, law and pedagogy;
- Education for Europe focussing on the exchange of citizens from different nations within a unified Europe (a 'Europe of the nations');
- Educational research in cooperation with educationalists from Third World countries, dealing with the educational challenges between nations in the North and in the South or the 'First World' and 'Third World' (Gogolin and Krueger-Potratz, 2006: 72-79).

Exploring these three areas of educational research one can see that international and comparative educational research deals mainly with the differences between nations – and especially between West and East or between North and South. Underlying this work is an assumption of difference between one's own system and an 'alien' or 'other' system. In consequence, it is possible to label a contrast between mainstream/dominant culture and a minority culture, for example, or between a national language and its 'dialects'. The focussed contrast between one's own systems and alien ones is equally prominent in other associated educational fields (Gogolin and Krueger-Potratz, 2006: 79-101). It is particularly evident, for instance, in the consideration of *colonial education* with its contrasts between the master and the colonised (Adick and Mehnert, 2001; Gogolin and Krueger-Potratz, 2006: 80ff) and also in the field of *ethno-pedagogy*, which deals with the contrasts between modern-progressive and traditional-conservative 'cultures' (Mueller and Treml, 1996; Krebs, 2001).

Intercultural education

The starting point for intercultural education in Germany is usually traced back to the 1950s. Some commentators have claimed that since that time it has moved 'from an education for foreigners to an intercultural education for all' (Niekrawitz, 1991). However, this striking phrase reduces the complex history of the subject in a problematic way. It suggests, for example, that 'education for foreigners' in the 1950s was homogeneous and that different phases of intercultural education followed step-by-step after it. However, the process has been much more complicated. Today, for example, we also would have to add conceptions of diversity education (Nohl, 2006: 132-136; Prengel, 2006) and migration education (Mecheril, 2004) to this discussion.

At the same time, the challenges of intercultural education in today's Germany, many of which were already apparent as early as the mid-19th century, are often ignored. As in the case of international and comparative education, 'nationhood' is the starting point for analysis in intercultural education, and migration is a key issue. In dealing with this, it is important to remember that the term 'German nation' has a number of important historical connotations. The 'German nation' as an idea has existed since the Middle Ages. It was then further enforced through the formation of the German Reich in 1871 – largely on the basis of shame and animosity in confronting other nations. However, the frequent assumption that these beliefs are common to a homogenous German nation refers mainly to this idea, and not necessarily to the reality of everyday life.

From the perspective of the sociology of migration – one of the main areas for discussion of intercultural issues in Germany – dealing with difference within a nation can include both *inclusion* and *exclusion*. It also involves four lines of difference that need to be considered: citizenship, ethnicity, culture and language.

Concerning *citizenship* in Germany it is clear and verifiable whether someone is legally recognised as foreigner or native. This recognition has legal consequences: in the 16 federal states of Germany there are various bureaucratic methods to deal with the school attendance of children and youths that are of precarious legal status (e.g. threatened by deportation). In the federal state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, for instance, these adolescents are not compelled to take part in compulsory schooling, but they do have the right to go to school (Terres des Hommes, 2005: 9). This means that in practice they are not forced to attend, and that their parents – many of whom may be poorly acquainted with the education system and may also struggle with language problems – must apply for them to have that right. So if these students are not involved in compulsory education, we could asked a rather pointed question: Why should we, as teachers, learn something about their cultures?

The term '*ethnic*' refers to various populations beyond national or federal borders. Prominent examples include the Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria or the Basques in France and Spain – or indeed people from Swabia that live in other federal states

of Germany such as Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria[3]. In my students' response it is not clear to which ethnic group the 'foreign children' they refer to belong. It would be interesting to know whether they are referring to children who are, in all likelihood, born in Germany and socialised in Upper Swabia, but whose parents come from elsewhere. Furthermore, what in particular should we learn about their ethnicity (if we use it as synonym for culture)? The everyday discourse on culture shows that it is something ontological, or specifically connected with nations (i.e. in many cases it is assumed that culture = nation). In consequence one can distinguish, for example, between German, British, Irish, French, Polish or Turkish 'cultures'. Thinking about this difference it leads to the problem of *culturalisations*; i.e. personal attributions due to 'cultural phenomena'. The assumed cultural membership of the self is supposed to be something clearly manifest separated from the 'culture' of the other. But what is German culture? How is it distinguished from a Swabian-ethnic identity? What might be a 'dominant' or 'mainstream' culture in Germany?

Linguistic difference becomes visible where language competence is measured only in the context of a majority language. The competence in the first language or ability to learn the lingua franca is not taken into account. Possibly those abilities are not noticed because they are limited to contexts inhabited by children and youth with immigrant backgrounds (e.g. Kracht, 2000). Until the recruitment ban of 1973 there were only about half a dozen migrant languages in use in Germany. Since the 1990s this has changed significantly, and languages from more than 100 other nations can now be found in Germany (Gogolin and Krueger-Potratz, 2006: 22). However, in Germany the so-called 'bad language competencies' of 'foreign children' are still mainly assessed only in terms of children's ability to speak German. Perhaps, then, my students' response indicates a necessity to learn more about the languages of 'foreign children'. But with what aim? And about which of these languages?

The unfolding of citizenship, ethnicity, culture and language as contrasting lines of difference is prominent in Germany because there is an assumption that the nation is homogenous. However, we should be careful with this notion, as the territory that is today's Germany has never truly known homogeneity in language, culture or ethnicity (Krueger-Potratz, 2005: 63). Furthermore, this idea of a homogeneous nation corresponds with the previously discussed construction of what constitutes a 'normal' German school. In contrast to this construction is the reality that pupils and student groups are, and always have been, heterogeneous. Nevertheless, the accepted standards for 'normal' school achievement are the age-appropriate mastery of the national language as a language of instruction and medium of education, and a family context which creates an intellectual and social environment to support the duties of the school (Krueger-Potratz, 2005: 89). To put it bluntly – everything that falls outside of these standards is expected to create a problem for students, teachers and schools.

As a result, there is also an implicit presumption that those who do not fall into the 'normal' category need to develop further. Consequently the quotation from my students could be interpreted to mean that they believe an increase in teachers' experiences would allow them to better support the development of 'foreign children'. Use of the term 'development' itself can be problematic, however, as it suggests that the children are lacking in some way, rather than simply different. It also highlights the *power* of those participating in the dominant society and the *powerlessness* of those who are not able to do so (Mecheril, 2004; Nohl, 2006: 202 – 226).

So why then should we learn more about the cultures of foreign children? The discourses of international and intercultural comparative educational science are centred on the notion of the nation as a spatial reference point. Debates thus deal with comparisons between citizens with reference to particular constructs of a nation. That in turn leads to consequences that can be outlined with regard to spatial, factual, temporal and social dimensions, as outlined below (Table 3).

	Nation as a Reference	
	One's own and Others	**Inclusion and Exclusion**
Spatial	West/East and North/South	Citizenship/non-citizenship (nation)
	Colonial power and colonised territory	Ethnicity of majority or minority (region)
Factual	Dominant culture/minority culture	Migration/natives
		(Ontological) inter-culture
Temporal	Progression and tradition	Development/underdevelopment
Social	Colonial masters and colonised people	Power/powerlessness
	National language and dialects	Majority language/minority language
	The construct of perceived normality of the national school as a reference point	

Table 3: Difference as a reference point to describe difference in the discourses of international comparative and intercultural education research

In many ways, international and comparative education research lost its central observational locus due to the end of confrontations between the East and the West. The lines of difference therefore have to be reformulated in an era of globalisation (Scheunpflug, Lang-Wojtasik and Urabe, 2006). Intercultural education needs to consider and conceptualise how education can address linguistic, ethnic, national, social and cultural pluralism in a democratic setting (Krueger-Potratz, 2005: 15). The central challenge to both pedagogical practice and educational theory is therefore now the same: how to deal with heterogeneity (Warzecha, 2003; Bos *et al*, 2004; Tanner, 2006).

Heterogeneity is not a new concern in terms of either pedagogical practice or schooling theory. Since Johann Amos Comenius in the 17th century we have known

that it is a challenge to teach everyone everything completely (*omnes, omnia, omnino*; Comenius, 1960). So what's new? Does the challenge and risk of globalisation provide an opportunity to re-locate heterogeneity within the context of a world society? Is it possible to refer to contexts beyond national differences? If so, then a better understanding of how difference is conceptualised may offer an opportunity to explore the complexity of educational phenomena and connections more deeply. This should also lead to consequences for both teacher education and pedagogical practice.

Difference as a Mark of Distinction

Difference as a theoretical orientation

As an epistemological starting point, a proper understanding of difference is at the heart of a radicalisation of science in general. The beginning of scientific awareness is founded on difference, e.g. the decision to *support* a position also means a corresponding decision to go *against* an alternative position. In this article I have argued that there is a theoretical contribution contained in this duality: when difference is taken as starting point of analysis it may enable us to describe educational phenomena. The following comments are informed by this epistemological perspective.

Education in a World Society

Looking again at the quotation from my students: 'We should learn more about the cultures of foreign children...', I am now interested to discuss what this means concerning the particular challenges for education at the beginning of 21st century.

Following Niklas Luhmann, society today can only be described as a 'world society'. This perception occurs as a problem- and communication-interconnection (Luhmann, 1995; Luhmann, 1997: 145ff.). It is possible to describe the phenomena, attributions and connections within this framework alongside the four central challenges I have described which confront education in a world society – globalisation (spatial), migration (factual), search for orientation (temporal) and individualisation (social).

In the *spatial dimension* we experience a delimitation of the supposedly secure borders of a nation – economically, politically and socio-culturally. Furthermore, we can observe parallel developments of both globalisation and localisation, described by some researchers as 'glocalisation' (Robertson, 1995).

This is connected to the perception that values are becoming universalised, for example, through the process of *McDonaldization* (Ritzer, 1993). People become aware of events in diverse locations at the same time, which can have an identity-causing character founded in local fundamentalist tendencies (Castells, 1997). In addition, the importance of the borders of nations, and the role of the nation state in global decisions, seems to have declined (Castells, 1996; 1997). This can be seen,

for example, in everyday international financial transactions, or in new possibilities for the global organisation of social action networks.

Concerning the *factual dimension* we experience a growth in informational complexity which significantly complicates decisions and accountability. Simple causalities may be insufficient to understand the relationships between knowledge and activity (Scheunpflug, 1996). Experiences of contingency – i.e. the actual selection of something fitting in contrast to something functionally possible – become the norm rather than the exception (Treml, 2000: 265-271).

In regard to *temporality*, we experience – especially through the global dissemination of phones and the internet – a simultaneity of unsimultaneity (when time appears simultaneous but is not, e.g. in dealing with emails). We also observe an acceleration of social change (UNDP, 1999). Thus it becomes more and more problematic to effectively make decisions. Furthermore, intergenerational dialogue becomes more complicated. In consequence, teachers often feel that they can not trust in their own knowledge, acquired in school and university, to successfully communicate with adolescents and to inspire them to learn.

Socially it is increasingly challenging to locate familiarity and strangeness. This is due to the increasing differentiation – or individualisation – of lifestyles around the world. For example, a colleague in a rural school in Senegal is perhaps closer to me than a colleague in my local school in Germany. That is because the Senegalese colleague and I share an interest in innovative teaching methods and started a correspondence about it via the internet, in contrast to the German colleague – who supports teaching methods which have not been considered innovative since the 1950s. In addition, it is increasingly clear that social and economic disparities – for instance the connections between poverty and wealth – can not simply be located *between* nations or regions, but are also evident *within* nations and regions.

According to this analysis of the present situation, schools can therefore be seen as societies' central laboratory for tackling problems, and creating possibilities to develop connections to a diverse world society (Lang-Wojtasik, 2008)[4]. Therefore to deal with the challenges of the contemporary world in a qualified way requires teachers whose professional development allows for the acquisition of relevant competencies.

In conclusion we have to understand that learning offers new possibilities for connectivity to a multidimensional world society. Concerning globalisation – prescribed as delimitation and glocalisation from the perspective of a nation – a re-conceptualisation of spatial references seems to be necessary – between local, regional, national and global processes. The difficulties in decision-making (e.g. the selection of one thing as opposed to something else) becomes more visible in the context of a *complex* and *contingent* world society. Against this background a growing perception of migration leads to a radicalisation of the connectivity of cultural capital to

the multidimensional world society. The key point is, therefore, which *knowledge* is selected out of the pool of information available and which aspects constitute either lack of knowledge or a 'null curriculum'[5].

We live in an era which can be characterised by a *simultaneity of unsimultaneity* – i.e. things appearing to happen at the same time even though they happen in different time frames, scales and world-time differences. We also live in an era of increasingly rapid social change which creates uncertainty regarding time. People find it difficult to decide in the present which takes into account the past, and have a view to the future – because each of these tempora dimensions has become more provisional, less certain. This has been characterised elsewhere as a *dissemination of disorientation* concerning *incertitude*[6]. It is essential to have anchors between the past and the future, and to encourage intergenerational dialogue in order to facilitate stability in the present. We also have to be able to address the growing *individualisation* which intensifies the tensions between freedom and equality. The equality of *freedom* and *individualisation* radicalises itself in the *plurality of inequality*. Thus justice appears as a possibility of individualisation/pluralisation and of otherness. Consequently it becomes clear that it is insufficient just to learn something about the cultures of foreign children without taking these realities into account.

Captured using the developed schema, this now looks as follows (Table 4):

	World Society		
	Societal challenge	**Educational challenges**	**Difference as an orientation point**
Spatial	Globalisation	Delimitation and glocalisation	Global, national, regional, local
Factual	Migration	Knowledge and lack of knowledge	Diversity of information and cultural capital
Temporal	Orientation	Security and insecurity	Stability and sustainability
Social	Individualisation	Familiarity and strangeness	Pluralisation and justice
	Connectivity to a diverse world society		

Table 4: World society, challenges and difference as points of orientation

Global learning is one cross-sectional teaching and research field which offers opportunities to analyse the challenges I have described above – theoretically, empirically and practically. It has roots in development education, ecumenical learning, peace education, human rights education, and environment education, among others (Lang-Wojtasik, 2003). Through global learning pupils can acquire the necessary competencies and participate in activities that enable them to work accountably on sustainability and international justice within a world society.

Difference as a Starting Point for Further Research and Professionalised Teacher Education

Prospective teachers – whether they are engaged in global learning or not – should be enabled through their training to perceive difference in both reflexive and self-reflexive dimensions. They should be able to address difference constructively and take it as a didactic challenge in their practice. This is particularly important in their involvement in school development processes. In addition to a necessary palette of additional qualifications (e.g. in diagnostics and mentoring, school social work, media competence, conflict management, etc.) it is also beneficial for teachers to rethink the relationships between theory and practice. It is not sufficient to make didactic decisions in our era based either on crass normativity or on the basis of 'commonsense' intuition. It is essential to instead undertake research in the area of teacher education and which focuses on the target groups of education (i.e. students and teachers).

So what might that research involve? One starting point for analysis would be which constructs of difference are visible in the educational practice of teachers and prospective teachers. Key questions might include:

1) How do they deal themselves with the challenges of living and working in a world society?
2) What connections do they see between these challenges, their didactic thinking, and their daily work with pupils?
3) How important do they think origin-based disparities are for students attempting to acquire particular competencies?
4) What strategies do they have to try to bridge the gaps between individual learning styles and standardized learning processes in schools?

A direct confrontation with difference can be included in practical training, and can offer opportunities for theory-based reflection on educational practice.

Further research is also needed to understand how adolescents with an immigrant background deal with issues related to globalisation, migration, disorientation and individualisation. Barbara Asbrand's study, *Orientations Within World Society* (2006), raised a number of questions that are useful for future research:

1) How do children from immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds make sense of global and local processes?
2) Which media (e.g. music, internet) are prominent for them beyond regional and national borders?
3) What kinds of cultural capital do children with/without immigrant backgrounds possess and to what extent does this provide a connection to the larger world society?

4) How can it be made possible to offer stable and sustainable options of knowledge, to allow orientation?

5) To what extent it is possible to deal with individualisation and to realise educational justice through plurality within the existing frameworks of educational institutions?

If we take the challenges posed by the world society seriously, all existing blueprints of educational theory will have to be rewritten – including education theory, instructional theory, socialisation theory, and others (Scheunpflug, 2003). This could be possible based on the systematics of an actual school theory (Lang-Wojtasik, 2008). Moreover it is fruitful to devise an educational theory and a didactics of difference, in order to make connections between difference as an educational and empirical phenomenon and theoretical perspectives, as suggested in this article.

Conclusion

After a long journey through the mentioned discourses we can summarise what all this means to the initial quotation of the students: 'We should learn more about the cultures of foreign children...'. So how can we reformulate this? This article considers the very practical view of students to describe distinctions. This was taken as a starting point to reflect on selected aspects of difference within empirical research. We examined the discourses of international and intercultural comparative educational science, and showed that difference is mainly used to label contrasts in various ways. This was the starting point for considerations of education within the world society, in which difference has the function of marking differentiations. Finally, the consequences for teacher education and further research were outlined.

Against this background, it is desirable that teachers know more about the daily life and the present socialisation of adolescents within world society. Teacher training and education – pre-service and in-service – should include ways of encouraging individual learning in a pluralised world. Aspiring teachers should have the opportunity to critically reflect on their own role, history and presumptions, accepting this as the staring point of a challenging profession.

***Gregor Lang-Wojtasik**, PhD, has been a teacher for primary and secondary schools and a mediator. He currently works as a professor of Educational Science at the University of Education, Weingarten with a specialisation in 'Education of difference: Intercultural Education and Global Learning'. His main research interests are international and comparative educational science, school theory, school development and basic education, qualitative-interpretative educational research, and system-theoretical educational science. Email: langwojtasik@ph-weingarten.de*

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Notes

1 This article is the revised version of a paper, given as inaugural speech on the occasion to take up the chair for Educational Science (specialisation: Education of Difference – Intercultural Education and Global Learning) at the University of Education, Weingarten, Germany in May 2008. I would like to thank Julia Franz, Julia Lang and Liam Wegimont for kindly enriching discussions on earlier drafts of this article.

2 A similar trend can be found in the results of PISA 2003 and 2006 (Deutsches PISA-Konsortium, 2001; PISA-Konsortium Deutschland, 2004; PISA-Konsortium Deutschland 2007).

3 I refer here to implicit tensions which I felt from the first days of my work in this region of Germany.

4 In the German context, I have used the term 'refugium' which refers to a refuge or resort – e.g. a place in which one has the space to retrench oneself from the challenges of everyday life and actual being. It underlines the basic function of schools as sheltering institutions which offer selected opportunities to deal with society, and is described in many of the school theories in use in Germany.

5 In the German context this is described as the difference between 'Wissen' (Knowledge) und 'Nichtwissen' (Ignorance). In the context of communication-theory (Luhmann, 1997: 70) the second term encompasses the perceptional problem of information selection; e.g. selecting information indicates that one is always *not* selecting other information, of which there is more and more available in the world society of the 21st century.

6 It is not new that there is a gap of legitimation between past, present and future. The new quality within a world society seems to be the more prominent visibility of the problem; i.e. to deal with the legitimation of decisions in the present with reference to the past and perspectives of connection in the future creates insecurity and vagueness what (and how and why) to decide, such as to create constant orientation possibilities beyond generations.

CRITICAL THINKING FOR DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION: MOVING FROM EVALUATION TO RESEARCH

Dates: October 3rd and 4th 2009
Venue: Lecture Theatre I, Aras Moyola, National University of Ireland, (NUI) Galway, Ireland.

Hosts: Development Education Research Centre (DERC),NUI Galway; The Development Education Research Centre, Institute of Education, University of London and The International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning.

Background to the Conference

Development education and the related fields of global education, global learning, global citizenship and education for sustainable development have grown significantly across Europe over the past decade. Much emphasis has been given to development education's contribution to building support for development. However with the emergence of a growing network of academics and researchers, there is a recognition of the need move beyond measuring impact in terms of government or NGO agendas, and towards the importance of learning in itself. The organisers would like to announce a call for papers and invite you to this international conference.

Conference Aims

This conference seeks to :

- address the extent to which development education, global learning/education and global citizenship are influenced by government and non-governmental organizations priorities;
- review the extent to which evaluation has been used to legitimise policy and practice;
- discuss approaches within development education and related fields that have begun to move beyond issues of evaluation and towards broader questions about research and learning processes.

Target Audience: This conference will bring together academics, policymakers and practitioners interested in development education, global education, global citizenship and education for sustainable development. Contributions aim to address ways in which critical thinking and new pedagogies can emerge, connecting the practices of development education with theories of learning for a global society.

Speakers: Professor William Scott, University of Bath, UK; Dr Vanessa Andreotti, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, Professor Annette Scheunpflug, University of Erlangen-Nurnberg, Dr. Helmuth Hartmeyer, Austria Development Agency.

Further details about the conference including booking details from:

http://www.nuigalway.ie/dern/conf_criticaldeved.html