Teacher´s Constructions of Differences in Vocational Schools for Pedagogical Professionals

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Abstract

Heterogeneity and inclusion are current concepts in vocational schools for pedagogical professionals. The following article deals with an ongoing research project in the field of teacher education for vocational schools in Germany. As part of a research program for teacher education, this project focuses on processes of creating, working on and reflecting on differences (Sturm, 2016) by (future) teachers. In order to design an inclusive teaching practice, it is important to know more about how teachers construct difference. The fundamental research conducted in the context of this project contributes to filling the gaps of previous empirical findings (Sturm, 2016; Burda-Zoyke & Joost, 2018) and specific demands of socio-educational courses. Given the relatively limited amount previous research on the inclusion-oriented handling of heterogeneity in vocational training, especially in socio-educational programmes, group discussions were conducted with vocational school teachers. In this article, the theoretical and methodological approach is introduced. The article concludes with an outlook on the future implementation of the results and development of teacher education.

Keywords

reflexive inclusion, vocational training for educational professionals, construction of differences

1 Introduction

The paper focuses on the theoretical framework of the research project and discusses the opportunities and challenges in the context of didactics of social education. First of all, the paper reflects on inclusive education between international demands and challenges of the examined field, the German social education, followed by the theoretical frame of heterogeneity and difference. Subsequently an overview of the research design, the methodological approach as well as an outlook on the processing of the research data is given. Finally, the possibilities of a future implementation of the results and the development of teacher education are presented and a reference to the European context is given.

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1.1 Inclusive education – international requests and national challenges

Inclusion is a human right. Currently, the most important policy document is the United Nations Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006), which most European countries have signed.

"Internationally inclusion stands for the human rights-based program of a comprehensive de- segregation of marginalised individuals and groups disadvantaged in social participation that encompasses all areas of society" (Häcker & Walm, 2015, p. 11, translated by the author).

Special attention is drawn to CRPD-Article 24 which states: "(…) States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning (…)" (United Nations, 2006). Even though the challenge of inclusion concerns society as a whole, in most cases the field of education is held responsible for developing and implementing useful concepts. Currently, high expectations are put on inclusive education. However, a lack of substantial definitions and concrete concepts is evident. In summary, inclusion is both a mission statement (Friese, 2015, p. 149) and a process (Häcker & Walm, 2015, p. 11). So, inclusion is first a political guiding principle that now has to be designed pedagogically. That means, that inclusion especially is a process, "evolving inclusive strategies" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p. 8).

„Inclusion involves changes. It is an unending process of increasing learning and participation for all, an ideal or aspiration that is never fully reached. There is no fully inclusive setting. (…) An inclusive setting then may best be described as one that is on the move" (Booth et al., 2006, p. 5).

The claim that the inclusive process applies to all educational institutions is the same worldwide; from childcare to school and to university. In contrast, the design of the process and strategies of inclusion vary across countries and related to administrative, financial and educational regulations (Meijer, 2010). In Germany, legal requirements have been adopted in recent years, such as: "Guidelines for the Education Policy of the German Commission for UNESCO" (DUK, 2014) or the Recommendations for schools for diversity published by the Conference of Presidents and Rectors of Universities and other Higher Education Institutions and the Standing conference of the State Minister of Education and the Arts in the Federal Republic of Germany (HRK & KMK, 2015). In summary, these guidelines emphasize the didactical perspective such as individual advancement, the cooperation within and outside the school and last but not least teachers' attitudes to inclusion and heterogeneity (Burda-Zoyke & Joost, 2018, p. 16). This latter topic is also the starting point of the research project.

1.2 Research project

The research project „Recognising heterogeneity in socio-educational courses" (Heterogenität in sozialpädagogischen Bildungsgängen (an)erkennen, January 2016 - June 2019) is part of the research programm "DoProfiL- Dortmund Profile of inclusive teacher´s education" funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) in the as part of initiative "Qualitätsoffensive Lehrerbildung" (teacher education quality initiative). The funding programme helps universities to modernise and adapt their teacher education programmes to new demands as new media, inclusion or an increased practical orientation (BMBF, 2017).

The focus of the sub-project is the reflective perception and dealing with heterogeneity in socio-educational courses. The project aims at raising awareness among students regarding to a conscious and reflective approach to difference in class by dealing with the processes of creating, working on and reflecting on differences (Sturm, 2016). Specifically, the students learn to deal with individual ideas of heterogeneity and to recognise the influence these ideas have on their own lesson planning as well as their own teaching practices.

Therefore, previous empirical findings in the field of general-education schools need to be clarified with regard to socio-educational programmes. In addition, with regard to teacher education, the question arises whether specific differences are particularly relevant. The processing

in this sub-project takes place via two approaches: One is a conceptual approach, where a teaching concept for teacher education is developed against the background of the reflection processes described above. As this requires deeper knowledge on how heterogeneity is dealt with in socio-educational courses, the second approach is about the conduction of group discussions with vocational school teachers.

1.3 Background: Teachers in school-based programmes for educational professionals

For a better understanding, a short outline of teachers in socio-educational courses is given. Vocational education in Germany is offered in the form of the dual system and in full time schools. This school-based vocational training is offered in a wide range of school-based programmes (Hippach-Schneider & Huismann, 2016, p. 21). It is very common in professions like nursing/social pedagogy, nutrition and health/care. Hence there are many educational programmes, types and levels of qualifications for pedagogical professionals. For example, the most famous qualification is called "staatlich anerkannte Erzieherin", it is a course of training at an upper secondary level including work experience, leading to the official qualification of educator ("Erzieherin") (Oberhuemer et al., 2010, p. 181). "Erzieherinnen" trained in this way are qualified to work in kindergartens and infant-toddler centres and in areas of youth services. But there is only one teacher's education programme with the specialization in social education to train all these educational professionals in different fields.

This teacher´s educational programme for vocational training specializing in social education is offered only at five universities in Germany. Besides that, it should be mentioned that social pedagogy exists as courses of study at universities and universities of applied sciences. However, these are not considered in this article, as the focus is not on the training of social educators, but on teaching social education in vocational training (Gängler & Wustmann 2004, p. 1). Teachers with a specialization in social education represent only one quarter of all teachers in social-education programs while there are many teachers with different qualifications (Kleeberger & Stadler 2011, p. 15). On the other hand, the socio-educational courses have received enormous quantitative expansion in recent years. This is mainly due to changes in the field of early childhood education in Germany and expanding daycare services for children under three resulting in an enormous demand for "educators/Erzieherinnen". Here, the contradiction between expansion of socio-educational courses and a lack of research activity in corresponding teacher education becomes obvious.

1.4 Research in teaching and learning in socio-educational programmes

Practical and theoretical relevance in socio-educational courses requires specific didactics with corresponding research and theory development (Karsten 2003; Gängler & Wustmann, 2004). What is the current state of research? The field of didactics of social education is characterized by a lack of research activity (Karber, 2014). Ursula Rabe-Kleberg (2008) notes that there are hardly any studies available referring to socio-educational courses, the form and content of training or the learning environment or the qualifications of teachers. This statement is still largely valid today and becomes even clearer in the context of personal services occupations. Marianne Friese (2010) describes the research as deficient in terms of qualification and curriculum research, didactic surveys and educational research. Some individual exceptions can be mentioned such as the research projects of the German Youth Institute (Deutsches Jugendinstitut/DJI) or the study by Andreas Gruschka (1986).

In order to design inclusive teaching practice, it is important to know more about teacher's conceptions of difference. In particular this applies to teachers in courses for educational professionals. Inclusion and heterogeneity are current concepts in the debate on vocational education and training. However, in the discourse on inclusive education, vocational schools have

been less focused than other schools and their teachers. This is especially true for courses for educational professionals.

According to previous empirical findings in the field of general-education schools, the following constructions of difference are of special interest: differences along social categories such as gender, socioeconomic status or migration background as well as pupil´s achievement (Budde, 2013; Sturm, 2018). On this basis, Tanja Sturm (2018) identifies important results from various studies such as language and the manner of its use or the orientation towards stereotypical gender roles. Also planning of teaching is dominated by these categories (Budde, 2013). Conversely Andrea Burda-Zoyke and Janine Joost (2018) conducted their study in the field of vocational training. Their empirical findings show, that most vocational teachers tend to be positive towards inclusion, depending on different vocational programmes, forms of disability and heterogeneity categories. These results are now to be reviewed and specified for socio-educational programmes. This is needed because the field is characterized by a lack of research activity and by a contradictory situation, as shown above.

1.5 Theoretical framework – heterogeneity and difference

From a historical perspective heterogeneity is not a new concept. What is new, however, is the orientation towards heterogeneity in school compared to an earlier orientation towards homogeneity. In addition, the term heterogeneity is often used as an indefinite concept and suggests difference as constructed exclusively outside school (Budde, 2017, p. 25). Moreover, heterogeneity and difference are understood as a social construction (Budde 2017; Sturm 2011). Heterogeneity and inclusion are to be understood as concepts that aim at the "interaction of social difference categories, subjectivity and educational practices" (Budde & Hummrich 2015, p. 165, translated by the author). From this point of view difference is not only brought into the school by pupils, moreover difference is socially constructed in interactive situations. Accordingly, due to teaching practice and didactical interaction differences among pupils are (re)produced (Budde, 2017, p. 25). Therefore, the perception, interpretation and recognition of difference between teachers are the basis for a conscious and reflective treatment of difference in the classroom and contradictory demands on school and teaching (Sturm, 2016).

In order to inclusive teaching practices the theoretical framework of this study is based on a reconstructive research approach to teaching practice. For this reason, an essential point of reference in this paper is "reflexive inclusion" (Budde & Hummrich, 2015; Dannenbeck & Dorrance, 2009). Reflexive inclusion describes a specific understanding of difference. Differences are understood as socially constructed and (re)produced in interactions, so that difference categories are the product of social constructions (Budde, 2015). Briefly, the starting point is the development of a critical attitude towards (own) pedagogical practice as well as the reflection of processes of stereotyping and reification (Budde & Hummrich, 2015). Inclusion in this sense means a *process* (see above.), change and transformation, as well as a "specific mode auf reflection" (Häcker & Walm, 2015, p. 11).

Reflexive inclusion aims at the perception of differences, understanding of incorporated social disadvantages and discarding of implicit norms through their deconstruction (Budde & Hummrich, 2015). Therefore, it is important to recognize the dynamics of the social construction of difference. Heterogeneity is not simply existent, but is always created through practical action, differentiation und categorization (Dannenbeck & Dorrance, 2009). In this context the professional orientations of the teachers are of central significance for the implementation of inclusive concepts.

2 Methods

This explorative study refers to the dealing of heterogeneity by teachers in socio-pedagogical courses. Therefore, a reconstructive perspective of school and teaching research is taken.

Research questions refer to the didactical strategies teachers do follow in dealing with heterogeneity and how differences are handled within them.

2.1 Methodological framework and Outlook on the processing of the research data

At this point, only a very brief insight into the applied methodological framework is possible. The methodological framework is based on the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2010; Przyborski, 2014) the approach of which refers to action and collectivity. That means also the "change from the question *what* social reality in the perspective of the actors, to the question *how* this reality is produced or accomplished in these actors' every day practice" (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 102). Practice is understood as action as well as talk, presentation and argumentation.

Referring to the works of Karl Mannheim, access shall be provided to guidelines for action and thus to teaching practices. The documentary method distinguishes two different levels of knowledge - the reflexive or theoretical knowledge and the conjunctive or tacit knowledge. Important components of the documentary method, particularly the interpretation of group discussions, are the distinction of immanent and literal meaning and the process of the discourse as well as to identify its "culminating points in the dramaturgy of the discourse" (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 105).

To reconstruct conjunctive knowledge referring to the documentary method data was collected in group discussions. The requirement is that they must contain descriptions of everyday teaching practice. In this sub-project five group-discussions were conducted. Three to five teachers practicing in vocational training for educational professionals were involved in each group discussion.

"Concerning the practice of research, this methodological difference between the immanent and the documentary meaning, resp. the difference between the observations of the first and the second order, results in a clear-cut separation of two working steps" (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 110). The first step is called *formulating interpretation* and the second step *reflecting interpretation*, which includes the "interpretations in reflection upon implicit self-evident knowledge" (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 110). Later on, the next step of analysis is the step of typification. So far, culminating points in the group discussion have been selected and initial formulating interpretation and the reflective interpretation are currently worked out. Due to the current evaluation, no final results can be presented yet. Only first indications can be given. On the one hand, they refer to previous research; on the other hand, there are references to specific conceptions of difference. The latter refer to a broader range of backgrounds and ages among pupils and thus to the specific framing of vocational training. Further evaluation, especially the reconstruction of conjunctive knowledge, will extract the results more specifically.

3   Conclusion and outlook on future implementation of the results

Following the UNESCO´s statement, inclusive education aims at the realization of the human right of education, equal opportunities and social participation for everyone. This claim needs to be realized by teachers and teaching practice. Against this background and taking into account future inclusive educational practice as a frame for the investigation, empirical findings are required for a contextual supplement to teacher training. Tanja Sturm (2011) argue for gaining more knowledge about conceptions of difference by teachers, because this seems "to deliver interesting ideas and options for supporting teacher training both in- and pre-service. It can already be concluded that didactical understandings as well as the one of one´s profession should be raised and reflected upon within teacher education" (Sturm, 2011, p. 39).

This project tries to put this into concrete terms for socio-pedagogical training. In the future, the results will be incorporated in teacher education such as in form of transcript excerpts as a support offer in the sense of Case-based learning. This is intended to support reflecting teaching orientations.

The demand on reflection in teacher training seems to be relevant beyond the national borders, but the didactical design is related to educational regulations of the countries. But that would be another empirical question.

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