

## Trust-Based Learning and Its Importance in Intercultural Education

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**Abstract:** In his article "Trust-Based Learning and Its Importance in Intercultural Education" Clemens Seyfried introduces the concept of "trust-based learning," an approach he developed for learning in an intercultural world and applied in primary and secondary education. The objective of the concept is the raising of opportunities students with (im)migrant background in education. Seyfried presents an overview of the educational situation of (im)migrants and ethnic minorities in the European Union with special focus on Austria, followed by a description of the said concept of trust-based learning including the results of a statistical survey conducted in Austria. The focus of the concept is the importance of trust, framed by the following question: is there a difference in the self concept of students regarding trust as a determining variable for learning by students with and without an (im)migrant background? The article closes with a proposal for a new approach in pedagogy in general and in intercultural education in particular.

## Clemens SEYFRIED

### Trust-Based Learning and Its Importance in Intercultural Education

Scholarship about pedagogy and (im)migration suggests that there exists difficulty in describing the situation of (im)migrant students in the European Union (EU) today. The difficulty resides in the fact that the twenty-seven countries of the EU use different categories when collecting primary and secondary school data and the data categories of such as citizenship, belonging to a minority group, or the students' first language remain insufficient to gauge the state of affairs of the EU's (im)migrant population insufficiently (see, e.g., EACEA

<[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/101EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/101EN.pdf)>; on the issue of the ideological nature of the taxonomy of "migrant" versus "immigrant" see Tötösy de Zepetnek and López-Varela Azcárate). Further, statistical data is difficult to analyze because there is, in general, "a lack of comprehensive and comparable data on the educational situation of migrants and ethnic minorities in the EU Member States" (Luciak

<[http://inst.at/trans/15Nr/08\\_1/luciak15.htm](http://inst.at/trans/15Nr/08_1/luciak15.htm)>). Overall, the situation is that (im)migrant students are disadvantaged in terms of enrolment in type of school, duration of attending school, indicators of achievement, dropout rates, and types of school diploma obtained. This argumentation is borne out in the evaluations of the EU's EACEA: Education, Culture & Audiovisual Executive Agency, according to whom the educational success of (im)migrant students is comparatively higher in countries with lower levels of economic inequality, high investments in child care, and a developed system of preschool education. The educational success of (im)migrant students is better in comprehensive educational systems with a later selection of students for different tracks of education and worse in systems of high selectivity (see EACEA

<[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/101EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/101EN.pdf)>).

In order to remedy said situation, some of EACEA's recommendations include the implementation of an effective system of preschool, primary, and secondary school system, the improvement of opportunities by making the educational system comprehensive and less selective at the same time, the integration of elements and symbols of the cultures of origin into school life and curricula, the desegregation of schools and classes where there is a concentration of minority students, the adequate preparation of teachers for reaching (im)migrant students, and the encouragement of students of (im)migrant background to engage in careers in teaching (see EACEA

<[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/101EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/101EN.pdf)>). With regard to above described shortfalls of educational systems in countries of the European Union, there is a need of theoretical points of departure, namely frameworks upon which improvements can be based. I postulate that one approach would be "trust-based learning" and I present a brief outline of theoretical frameworks relevant for the development of trust-based learning and its application and practice in intercultural education. The concept and framework of trust-based learning thus serves as a map of the integration of (im)migrant children into the educational system and thus into society (see Seyfried, "Subjektive," "Trust-Based"; see also Seyfried and Seel; Seyfried, Seel, Huber). Geneva Gay argues that concepts for the definition of multicultural education — i.e., intercultural: I use the current concept of "intercultural" — express the multiple approaches and perspectives of diverse disciplines like anthropology, sociology, psychology, and pedagogy.

However, if one attempts to arrive at a general definition, one could describe multicultural / intercultural education as "a concept, a framework, a way of thinking, a philosophical viewpoint, a value orientation and a set of criteria for making decisions that better serve the educational needs of culturally diverse student population" (Gay 28). A.J. Banks differentiates between four different levels of approaches with regard to the development of intercultural curricula: level one is defined as "The Contributions Approach" whereby socially constructed elements of school life constituting elements and factors of "peer pressure" — such as "idols," the significance of holidays in diverse cultures, the aspect of food, etc. — are implemented as an integral part of the curriculum; level two, "The Additive Approach," represents the content, concepts, and lessons and are added to the curriculum without reforming the structure; level three, "The Transformation Approach," implements the change of the structure of the curriculum to enable students to view concepts, issues, and events from the perspec-

tives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups; and level four, "The Action Approach," is where students shape issues and learn to make decisions on important personal, social, and civic issues and take responsibility for looking for solutions. Arnd-Michael Nohl analyses different concepts of intercultural education and arrives at the conclusion that the European "pedagogy for foreigners" (*Ausländerpädagogik*) remains lacking of concepts and practices of integration, thus of deficit-orientation and he develops the concept of multi-dimensional "collective affiliations" similar to Banks. My last example of relevant frameworks is Paul Mecheril's work who follows Nohl in his criticism of deficit-orientation with the addition that while intercultural pedagogy accepts and focuses on cultural differences, at the same time differences regarding age or gender remain ignored.

Niklas Luhmann's social communication systems approach is particularly relevant for my framework. According to Luhmann, communication occurs in settings of complexity and contingency. Thus he postulates that at the same time we need possibilities and avenues for reduction and simplification without which we are not able to manage communication in daily life or in professional contexts. Thus, Luhmann assumes that trust is a possibility for the necessary reduction of complexity and contingency. Preceding Luhmann, Erik H. Erikson points out the importance of trust in his framework of developmental psychology according to which trust is the first stage of development of the child from birth to one year. At this stage, the fundamental attitude of trust or mistrust to each other obtains the relevant experiences for later development in age and world view. Also Franz Petermann takes the term trust and adds a connection between trust, empathy, and self-efficacy and he argues that the competence of empathy is a necessary basis for the development of trust (note: these concepts are based on the theory of social-cognitive learning of Albert Bandura). Last but not least, the proposition with regard to trust as a basic point of departure of pedagogy Barbara Thies bases on empirical data in her 2005 study that it is evident that trust between students and teachers improves commitment and confidence in learning. Trust-based learning is also relevant for the development of professional and personal competence: Aaron Antonovsky connects in his theoretical and applied framework professional competence with health of the pedagogue and his/her competence of trust a central position. Similarly, Edward L. Deci's and Richard M. Ryan's concept of self-determination motivation occupies a central factor. Further, the importance of trust is integrated in Clemens Seyfried's model of subjective relevance in a professional and personal and thus social context. What said concepts of competence signify is their condition and applicability for the development of motivation and the parameters of the postulate are developed in empirical research in neuroscience and pedagogy (see Braunstein, Seyfried, Reitingen; Reitingen; Seyfried and Reitingen).

An important factor of my framework of trust-based learning is the work of Günter Krampen and Petra Hank who point to the importance of trust in daily life and that trust is not elaborated on scholarship: they argue that trust is mainly used in the context of interpersonal trust. Thus Krampen and Hank develop the "triad of trust," a model that distinguishes between "interpersonal trust," "trust in oneself," and "trust in the future." The concept suggests an outside-inside-outside process of development: "prototypically starting in ontogenesis from the development of interpersonal trust (outside; i.e., trust in other persons), then turning into the development of trust in ones own competencies (inside; i.e., trust in oneself), and resulting in the future (outside; i.e., trust in the future not only ones own, but in the future or relatives, friends, ingroups, outgroups, society, and humanity too)" (Krampen 110). This concept suggests trust as a determining variable for the ability to act in any way. The framework is built on the model of action theory of personality development, a differential expectancy-value model (see Krampen; Krampen and Hank). In turn, these concepts are based on social learning theory, an attempt "to account for human behaviour in relatively complex social situations" (Rotter, Chance, Phares 1). Consequently, if trust is a determining variable for the ability to act, two questions are important for my framework of trust-based learning, namely, are there differences concerning trust by students with and without (im)migrant background and which structure of the developing and learning process is advantageous in intercultural education?

The data compiled and analyzed by EACEA applies of course to Austria, where the distribution and patterns of students with native German language proficiency and non-native German language (im)migrant background is between 11% to 34%, depending on the type of school (i.e., preschool, elementary, and secondary school) (see Bundesministerium

<[http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/18975/zahlenspiegel\\_2009.pdf](http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/18975/zahlenspiegel_2009.pdf)>). For the development of my framework of trust-based learning I structured a survey questionnaire based on the above explained triad of trust. The variables "interpersonal trust," "trust in oneself," and "trust in future" were defined as dependent variables. Further variables included were "integration in class," "social atmosphere," and "examination behavior." 403 students in the age from eleven to fifteen years of age were surveyed in one school where the school's composition of students was similar to the distribution of students regarding (im)migrant and non-(im)migrant background in Austria (the selection of the school was based on the statistical data by the Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur [Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts, and Culture]

<[http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/18975/zahlenspiegel\\_2009.pdf](http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/18975/zahlenspiegel_2009.pdf)>). The reliability analysis of the data of the survey revealed a reliability coefficient (Crombach alpha) between 0.705 and 0.897. One of the foci of the survey was on whether there would be a significant difference between students of (im)migrant and non-(im)migrant backgrounds and, surprisingly, there was no significant difference save a tendency to significance in the variable of "interpersonal trust" ( $p = 0.07$ ). However, in the variance analysis of a general linear model an interesting result of data came about: if the factor "(im)migrant background" is combined with the variable gender (girl/boy), one can observe a significance in the variable trust in oneself ( $p = 0,012$ ). This surprising result requires a brief explanation: in the context of the special biographical background of most of the group in this study suggests that girls do not as much challenge the "outside" environment as boys. It is assumed that this is because girls are more protected against value conflicts in traditional families. In this atmosphere, girls are at times prohibited to go outside of the family and this is why girls have significantly higher "self trust" scores than boys. Altogether, the differences in the scores of trust are not only an effect of (im)migration or non-(im)migration background (and this confirms the findings of Nohl and Mecheril).

The importance of trust can be deduced from the correlation between the variables of triad of trust as they are "interpersonal trust," "trust in oneself," "trust in the future," and the variables "enjoy school," "integration in class," "social atmosphere," and "examination behaviour" (these second group of variables are meant to describe the social-emotional atmosphere). Further, there is a high significant correlation at the 0,001 level between the variables of trust and the variables considering the recognised social-emotional atmosphere. Comparing this result with the question concerning differences between students with and without (im)migration background, there are different outcomes: the group with no (im)migrant background has a high significant correlation (at the 0.01 level) with the variables of social-emotional atmosphere and in the same way with the different dimensions of trust. These are the same effects one can observe by the whole group. The group of (im)migrant background differs in two aspects: at first, the significant effects are not as high as in the first group and not as often. The most significant correlations demonstrate the variable "interpersonal trust" and the least trust in future. This refers to a not so deeply structured construct of trust by persons of this group.

Having considered the results of the survey, I suggest two important points: the dimensions of trust are not a significant difference between students with and without background and a closer view brings special perspectives. The combined factors of "(im)migration" and "gender" demonstrate that significant differences concerning the independent variable "(im)migration" are evident. There are significant correlations between variables of trust and of variables of the social-emotional atmosphere. These correlations have different characteristics in the two groups of students of (im)migrant and non-(im)migrant background in that there are indications of a lack of integration of trust in dimensions of experiences in the school environment of Austria. Thus, the challenge in institutional learning processes is relevant and of importance in that teachers have to handle different requirements from different groups. Teacher training is in many cases oriented on the assumption that didactical and methodical competencies are the way as to how to deal with these new requirements, hence the importance of a new approach to implementations of methods in the processes of learning in schools of the EU. The enormous effort concerning the maintenance of discipline and the motivation to acquire knowledge often has the opposite effect versus the initial intention. As more teachers are trying to improve motivation and concentration, fewer students are aware of their own responsibility. If the process is starting without grip on reality and as my analysis of the survey suggests without a base of trust, the chance for successful learning vanishes. Thus my proposal that trust-based learning would improve

the process of learning in three sequences: working towards an atmosphere of trust, setting an innovative environment by methodical and didactical reflections, and outcome oriented evaluation and self evaluation which enhance the next starting point of the learning process. The results of this study underline the perspective of intercultural education as it is argued by Nohl and Mecheril. Clearly, the behaviour and learning habits including the conjoining results of learning are not pertaining to the criteria of (im)migrant or non-(im)migrant background of the students. Hence my proposal that the efforts towards an innovative learning environment ought not to focus on differences in background. Instead, the framework of trust-based learning allows to implement a differentiated approach for a development oriented situation in the classroom. The significant correlations between variables of trust and of social-emotional atmosphere in the school environment – students, teachers, and the curricula – indicate that trust is a determining variable for successful development and learning. Therefore, a concept of learning in a framework of trust-based learning and its implementation present an alternative approach for the actual challenges in pedagogy.

Note: Above article is a revised version of Seyfried, Clemens. "Mapping Intercultural Education and Trust-based Learning." *Mapping the World, Culture, and Border-crossing*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and I-Chun Wang. Kaohsiung: National Sun Yat-sen UP, 2010. 31-37. Copyright release to the author.

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