

Intercultural Competence as an Aim of Transnational and National Projects: Some experiences from Europe

Hubert Ertl, University of Oxford

Peter F. E. Sloane, University of Paderborn

The process of European integration has been facilitated by political programmes in recent decades. The explicit aim of these programmes has been the formation of intercultural competence.

It is important to note that the field of intercultural competence has two perspectives in countries such as Germany:

Firstly, the aim is to increase the flexibility of the German economy in the European economic area in order to improve economic activities that go beyond national borders. This aim is not only linked with economic competitiveness but also with the wider process of political integration.

Secondly, Germany itself has become a multicultural country. This development has become more important since the fall of the Iron Curtain and the increasing inclusion of Eastern and Central European countries into the integration process that started in Western Europe after World War II. Therefore, intercultural learning is no longer restricted to transnational projects and situations but has become an inner-German and therefore national issue. For instance, thirty percent of pupils in schools in medium-sized German towns and cities have a migration background.¹ In some cities this proportion is even higher.

It can be argued that Germany is facing challenges today which have been subject of the political discourse and of educational work in the United Kingdom for decades.

Against this background our contribution will focus on the connection between the challenges of intercultural situations within the wider context of European integration and the questions posed by increasingly multicultural societies within one country and its culture.

The contribution will draw on examples from a number of different projects. One particular focus will be on the framework for projects in education and training provided by the European Union

¹ The term 'migration background' is used as a collective term in the German discourse to refer to refugees (including refugees from eastern Europe with German nationality), asylum seekers, and other people from abroad living in Germany (BLK, 2004, p. 2).