

PREPARING TEACHERS FOR MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS

PREPARACIÓN DEL PROFESORADO PARA LAS ESCUELAS MULTICULTURALES

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ABSTRACT

Teachers throughout Europe have to adapt to heterogeneous classes and respond to the learning needs of pupils with diverse linguistic or cultural backgrounds. This paper reports some of the findings of an Erasmus Intensive Programme that was set up to address the issue of educational inclusion. The programme gave twenty student teachers the opportunity to discuss inclusive teaching strategies and to develop the attitudes needed for working in inclusive environments. The aim of the study is to identify the student teachers' representations of inclusive education and provide deeper understanding of what these conceptions involve. The findings suggest that the student teachers participating in this study have unclear ideas about inclusion, which in turn has implications for the overall in-service and pre-service education offered to teachers.

Key words: Student teachers. Inclusive education. Representations. Teacher training.

RESUMEN

Los docentes de toda Europa tienen que adaptarse a clases heterogéneas, y han responder a las necesidades de aprendizaje de alumnos con diversos orígenes lingüísticos o culturales. Este trabajo presenta algunas de las conclusiones de un Erasmus Intensive Programme que se creó para abordar el tema de la educación inclusiva. El Programa dio a veinte futuros maestros la oportunidad de discutir las estrategias de educación inclusiva y de desarrollar las actitudes necesarias para trabajar en entornos inclusivos. El objetivo del estudio consiste en identificar las ideas sobre la educación inclusiva que tienen los futuros maestros y proporcionar una comprensión más profunda de lo que implican estos conceptos. Los resultados sugieren que los futuros maestros participantes en este estudio tienen ideas confusas sobre la inclusión, lo cual tiene implicaciones para la educación desde una perspectiva general, tanto en ejercicio como previo al mismo, ofrecido a los docentes.

Palabras clave: Docentes. Educación inclusiva. Representaciones. Formación del profesorado.

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1. Preparing Teachers for Multicultural Schools

Today's European teachers have to deal with an increasing proportion of students from linguistic minority or ethnic minority backgrounds. Although European national policies prioritize the teaching of the language of instruction to immigrant pupils, they have not all adopted the same policies and the integration of children into the educational systems may remain unsatisfactory or inadequate.

The 2008 NESSE expert report² underlines the fact that “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 attained” (2008: 7). Among different factors, the report lays great emphasis on the influence of the teacher/student relationship and the content of their interaction on student achievement in any system of education.

In 2010, in the majority of European countries, the proportion of the population born abroad was somewhere between 10 % and 20 %. Luxembourg registered the highest proportion of around 32 %, followed by Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia and Austria, where the percentage varies between 15 % and 19 %. However, in one third of EU countries, the ratio did not exceed 10 %.

In the same year, in almost all states for which data are available, the proportion of young people aged 5-9 who were born abroad was below 10 % of the total population of the same age³.

These figures explain why Europe should be able to cater for the needs of its most vulnerable groups of population particularly those from linguistic minorities. In some cases, increased migration even becomes a challenge for social cohesion especially as some countries have faced longstanding issues of integrating minorities. As a consequence, inclusive education for migrants and minorities has to be considered as a means of ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all.

2. A historical perspective of inclusive education in Europe

Until the 70's, European countries, especially monocultural France built their educational systems around the notions of equality and universality. The ideal pursued by policy makers was to ensure social cohesion and preserve the unity of the nation. In some countries such as France or England, the first step towards the acculturation of migrant children has been the acquisition of the national language. This requirement is referred to in many official texts. School is naturally assimilationist, its role being to transmit republican values to the children who will become citizens. Children have to abandon any specific sociocultural specific characteristics which differ from the host nation when they go to school.

Two opposite conceptions of the question of ethnic diversity are to be distinguished: one is described as assimilationist, the other as pluralistic. In its positive meaning, assimilation is the desired result of the acculturation process. It is reached when the immigrant population accepts the host country's lifestyle and values. Its main aim is to keep a homogeneous society by smoothing over the differences. Education is generally viewed as a means of ensuring the acculturation process of minorities. It expects minorities to merge into the mainstream society. Assimilationist societies have made it possible for every child to receive the same education, regardless of language, social background, religion or gender.

Understandably, this process has been criticized as one leading to a weakening of one's original cultural identity and practices. Pluralism can then be considered a positive development nurturing tolerance and cultural exchange. On the other hand, a pluralistic policy may come into conflict with traditional notions of national identity and citizenship.

Thus, educational institutions have had to adapt to the growing number of migrant population, as well as to the change in the direction of debates and policies about how to accommodate cultural diversity. Teachers have had to develop their competences for dealing with all facets of socio-cultural diversity. This accounts for the fact that the alternative term of “inclusion” was introduced as a more accurate way of describing the

² Education and the Integration of Migrant Children

³ Source : Eurydice report, Key Data on Education in Europe 2012

quality of education offered to all pupils attending mainstream schools genuinely adapting to meet their needs, and valuing differences.

While the rights of disabled people to an appropriate education have been on the agenda of international policy makers, it was only in 1994 that the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs made inclusive education a global issue (UNESCO, 1994). The term “inclusive teaching” has since been applied to the teaching of children with special needs related to disabilities. In recent years, the definition of ‘inclusive teaching’ has broadened so as to encompass issues of gender, ethnicity, class, social conditions, health and human rights. Dash (2008: 21) stipulates that:

In education, ‘inclusion’ refers to the placement and education of children with disabilities in regular education classrooms with children of the same age who do not have disabilities. The underlying premise of inclusion is that all children can learn and belong to the mainstream of school and community life. Inclusion is a basic value that extends to all children.

The World Education Forum held in Dakar (Senegal) has stressed the need for all countries to “design diversified education delivery systems, flexible school curricula and new education environments within the community” [...] promote and strengthen intercultural and bilingual education in multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural societies” (2000: 39). And Ainscow (2002: 9) advocates for addressing the needs of those learners who remain marginalized by existing educational arrangements”. According to him, inclusion involves a particular emphasis on the groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement.

The UNESCO definition states that inclusive education is “an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination” (2008: 3).

This trend is having a profound and lasting influence on the way teachers are being trained, whether in initial or in-service training. Teacher training institutes over Europe recognize the need for adapting teacher training methods to this new reality because teaching large numbers of children with a migration background in the classroom represents the greatest difficulties that teachers encounter in their career.

The European project “Immigration and Cross-Cultural Teacher Training” led by Pitkänen et al. in 2002 stated that:

With the increase in trans-national mobility, European higher education institutions need to review their current policies and practices and to support the recognition and acceptance of ethnic and cultural diversity [...] Efforts need to be made to develop teacher training that can provide students with cognitive powers, attitudes and operative competencies required to function effectively in multi-cultural environments (2002: 1).

3. Integrating intercultural competence into teacher training

Teaching demands more than mere technical strategies or disciplinary knowledge, it is essentially a social practice⁴.

The nature of teaching is constantly requiring situational judgments based on complex situations and diverse settings. Diversity is both an issue for teachers in general [...] as well as for teachers with

⁴ Source: Council of Europe. (2009). “Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity- A framework of teacher competences for engaging with diversity”.

expertise in a particular aspect of diversity. How teachers are prepared to engage with diversity in its broadest sense is of crucial importance (2009: 69).

The NESSE report emphasized the need to adapt teacher training to a multicultural society. “Initial teacher education and in-service training should prepare teachers adequately for teaching migrant students. The element of support should be increased in the role of the teacher and positions of teacher assistants should be introduced for practising with students and helping underachievers [...]” (2008: 82).

This leads us to consider what key competences teachers should acquire in order to be able to work efficiently in multicultural contexts.

According to research, it is necessary to help teachers surmount ethnocentrism and negative attitudes towards minorities. Analyzing representations and attitudes of teachers in relation to their migrant pupils’ difficulties is an important factor in integrating inclusive teaching guidance into teacher training. Similarly, teacher training should include tools to identify and analyze the pupils’ conceptions and learning obstacles in order to develop strategies and methods for helping them. These questions were central to the Erasmus programme which was set up and will be described in the next section.

The model of intercultural competence we have used for our research is the one supplied by Byram (1997: 31-35). Byram explicitly states that his model is designed to help language teachers understand the concept of intercultural competence. According to him, three main factors influence intercultural communication: attitudes, knowledge and skills.

Attitudes of curiosity and openness, a willingness not to abide by ethnocentric views of the world but to analyze them from the viewpoint of others are necessary for successful intercultural communication.

Another important factor is knowledge. Individuals should develop “knowledge about social groups and their cultures in one’s own country, and similar knowledge of the interlocutor’s country” as well as “knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels”.

Finally, Byram describes the skills of interpreting and relating understood as “the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one’s own”. These skills are complemented with the “ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction”.

4. Teacher Training in Multicultural Settings Erasmus Intensive Programme (TTIMS)

An Erasmus Intensive Programme: Teacher Training in Multicultural Settings (TTIMS⁵) set up in April 2014 brought together 20 student teachers from four European countries, Austria, France, Spain and the United Kingdom, to consider the challenge posed by the increased diversity of the mainstream European classroom to new teachers in order to address the issues of underachievement of particular groups of pupils. TTIMS adopted a multi-faceted approach where each individual’s point of view shed a specific and complementary light on the nature of inclusive teaching.

The objectives of the project were designed with reference to the Lifelong Learning Programme, Europe 2020, which sets long term strategic objectives for sustainable and inclusive growth. Thus the project made mobility a reality by having intercultural observation practices carried out by all participants. It helped improve the quality and efficiency of education and training by making structured and guided school observation abroad a keystone when devising teaching tools towards inclusive education. It promoted equity and social cohesion by providing teachers with adequate tools and comparable strategies. And finally it enhanced creativity and innovation at all levels of education and training by contributing to a basis for teacher training on the issue of inclusion of minority groups.

⁵ See website at : ttims.espe-aquitaine.fr/

During the first part of the programme, the student teachers were introduced to theoretical principles drawn from current research as well as strategies and tools for intercultural pedagogy and intercultural learning. They carried out guided observation in multicultural classrooms both in their home country and abroad to identify and understand the intercultural difficulties met by pupils from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

During the second part of the project, they were able to provide feedback and investigate into the existing differences on teaching practices in multicultural settings within international teams. The backbone of the project was to make it possible for trainee teachers to share, reflect, exchange and improve their intercultural methodologies after the period of observation abroad. Pedagogical reflection was enhanced and cultural understanding developed by working collaboratively.

The pre-mobility activities in their home institutions supplemented by observations made during their period abroad led to the production of a document presenting the issues they had identified for use as a self-development tool and as a framework for teachers to promote and support inclusive education in intercultural and multilingual settings⁶.

5. Objectives and methodology

The study of their representations on inclusive teaching was considered as an essential basis for future teacher training syllabi. The notion of representation follows Moscovici's definition according to which social representations are "a system of values, ideas and practices" (1972: xiii) that help establish a social order and, more importantly for our research, enable communication among members of a community through a shared code for social exchange and for naming various aspects of the social world.

The student teachers' representations were collected through a questionnaire which contained twenty questions. Our study will focus on the last three which were open-ended sentences the student teachers had to complete:

- Give your definition of diversity
- Finish the following sentences in your own way: the easiest pupils to include are ... / the most difficult pupils to include are ...

A total of 20 statements were collected, one from each student teacher and broken down into 44 discourse units, each with a distinct meaning. All student teachers except one had had no teaching experience, apart from short teaching practicums without any experience of full class responsibility.

The statements collected were coded according to the following criteria based on Byram's definition of intercultural competence (1997):

- Pursuit of equity and social justice;
- Positive attitude to differences, respect for all pupils, however different, by all members of the educational community;
- Intercultural competence or the ability to acknowledge differences and react accordingly;
- Critical awareness of educational practices or refusal of exclusive practices.

The analysis of the student teachers' discourse will provide understanding of the assumptions upon which teaching is organized today and a basis for improvement of teacher training tools.

⁶ Prezi presentation available at: http://ttims.espe-aquitaine.fr/?page_id=212

6. Definition of diversity

The quantitative analysis showed a majority of positive and even affirmative statements concerning pupils considered as different. Out of the 44 meaningful statements isolated, all of them are positive. Each statement considers diversity as a permanent and essential feature of modern society, and therefore of their future professional environment. The discourse is consistently optimistic, broad-minded and generous. It will be cross-checked with the second and third questions to see how genuine their feelings are.

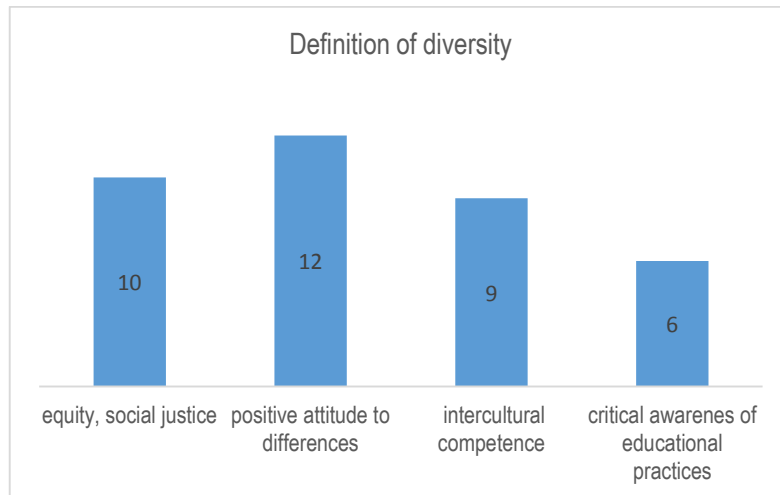


Chart 1. Terms used to define diversity

7. Qualitative discourse analysis of the representation of inclusion

A close discourse analysis allows a deeper understanding of the way diversity is contemplated. It has to be noted that only four student teachers were English-speaking natives, so this accounts for some slight mistakes or clumsiness in style. To ensure respect of authenticity, all quotations have been unaltered.

- Social justice is an important feature for the student teachers, the rights of every individual are mentioned four times. Equality is mentioned twice. The terms ‘individual freedom’ and ‘choices of identity’ even reaffirm the refusal of assimilation or acculturation, as defined earlier. One statement adds the notion of acceptance and respect: “Diversity encompasses acceptance and respect; it refers to the respect of different cultures and interculturality”.

Twenty-one statements are related to open-mindedness and intercultural competence.

- Differences are considered as the “normal way of being”. It is simply “the mixture/being together”. “All society is diverse”. The German term of “Vielseitigkeit” is even mentioned to reinforce the idea of plurality.

Strongly positive terms are used: diversity is an “enrichment”, it “can be the wealth and strength of our world”. One quote makes this clear: “Simply different personalities in a community which can be used as an enrichment for the whole global society”.

Other statements insist on the “opportunity for new perspectives” created by such diversity. We are encouraged to “embrace and celebrate the differences between the individuals”. “And we need to understand that each individual is unique to take advantage of diversity at its most”.

- Intercultural competence can be felt in the use of the term itself ‘interculturality’ and the idea that “we have to [...] see ourselves living in a world society rather than isolated in borders of states. “Diversity is the intersectionality of individuals (gender, age, social origin; ethnic background...)

A political dimension emerges in the following declaration: “Diversity is the most important treasure we should protect and promote in order to fight ignorance, extremism, dictatorship of the norm and loneliness”. Finally, it is asserted that “the best part about diversity is when you can benefit from it by sharing your diversity with others, either by speaking with them, learning a bit more about their culture or simply spending time with them”.

- Not surprisingly, critical awareness of educational practices is not well developed as the student teachers have had no or very little experience of teaching. When mentioned, the educational sphere is reduced to the teachers through the use of the pronoun “we” as in the following examples:

“And we need to understand that each individual is unique to take advantage of diversity at its most.”

“Diversity is the most important treasure we should protect and promote [...]”

A subtle criticism of the traditional pattern of education can be perceived in the qualification of the educational environment which should be “safe, positive, and nurturing”. Diversity “should be seen as valuable assets” in education. And the differences should be the subject of “exploration”.

This leads us to the next part of our analysis to put into perspective their representation of inclusive education in general and the one built with the pupil in mind.

8. The inclusion of pupils

The corpus collected was generated from the following request: “Finish the following sentences in your own way: the easiest pupils to include are ... / the most difficult pupils to include are ...” The opposite question format was chosen in order to cross-reference and obtain as accurate a picture as possible of their representations. The focus of the question was the pupil, considered from the point of view of the teacher having to face children from a different origin and culture.

The criteria used to analyze the data collected are three fold.

- Personal features included interpersonal qualities and pupil personal involvement.
- The features linked to the environment are related to the classroom atmosphere, the social environment of the school, and the teacher’s role.
- Thirdly, the features linked to cultural origin referred to existing cultural or linguistic concepts as well as to the attitude of the ethnic group towards the host country. This refers to the way the ethnic group which the pupil belongs to tries to integrate into the host country.

The quantitative data identified the factors the student teachers thought would be key to inclusive teaching.

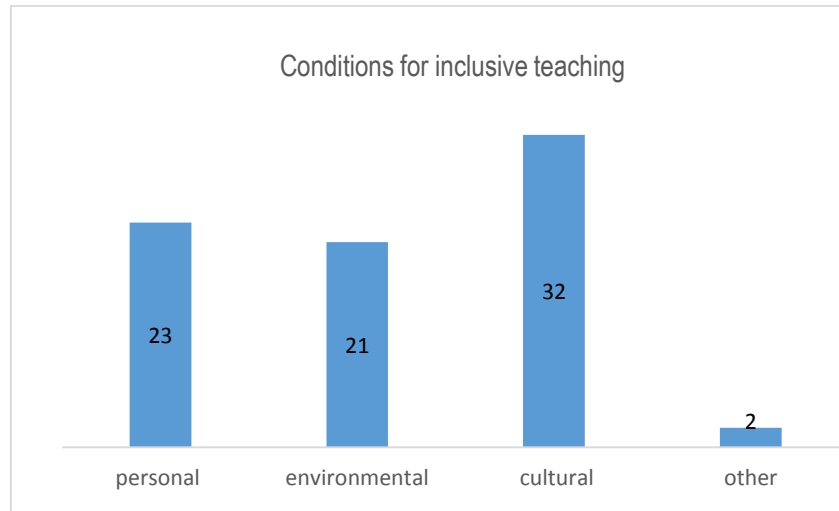


Chart 2. Factors conditioning inclusive teaching

Although purely personal features are numerous, as well as those linked to the school environment, a majority of statements refer to the cultural origin of the pupils. This highlights the fact that the very positive view of inclusive teaching held by students when considering it from a theoretical point of view becomes less positive when contemplating actual teaching conditions. This is probably due to the fact that they perceive the reality of teaching in a more practical way.

9. Qualitative analysis of the representation of inclusion factors

9.1. Personal features

The “ideal” pupils, who are considered easy to integrate, are described as “motivated”, “open-minded” or “thankful”. They are “willing to participate”, they “want to learn”. The picture painted of these ideal pupils could also be used to describe non-migrant ones as the adjectives used by the student teachers are applicable to anyone entering the school system. They qualify children who will succeed in general. They “love school and have understood the importance to learn”, “they feel motivated in the learning process”, they “are able to be in contact with other people”.

They also “have confidence and want to contribute in the mainstream classroom”, they “are open minded and embrace the cultural diversity of their peers”. As a result these pupils “can develop their intercultural competence”. The concept of intercultural competence already present in the first part of the corpus appears here again, this time as a necessary personal characteristic of the pupils themselves.

On the contrary, difficult pupils to integrate are “narrow-minded and arrogant”. They may “reject the school because of personal problems, social or cultural”. Or they “do not want to be in contact with the others, “do not want to share experiences...” They may also “feel they are different and they are not motivated”. It is not possible to figure out whether this last statement implies a causal relation between the first and second parts of the sentence, but in such a case, it would be relevant to relate it to the actual cause for feeling different. It might be attributed to the teaching methodology or attitude in class, but also to the classroom atmosphere.

The analysis of these quotes seems quite similar in interpretation to the ones found above. They allude to an ideal pupil and smooth over differences. It seems to stem from the same positive, optimistic view of diversity.

9.2. *Environmental features*

The student teachers recognize the influence of the environment when it comes to facilitating the inclusion of children in the class. They clearly distinguish between the influence of the social environment and of the educational environment.

So, easy to integrate children are those who “are shown respect to and who feel comfortable in the new group”, “who are welcomed in class and feel that the other pupils are open-minded”. They also need to be “supported both by their 'new' community and their family and friends”. This support can come from the family which needs to give its help to avoid a feeling of rejection. Those who “are used to speeches or attitudes toward the foreigners that don't show open-mindedness and will probably imitate this at school” may be interpreted as applying to the migrant children but also to the children from the host country. Therefore, the pupils who are difficult to integrate are those “whose self-esteem is being weakened. They will then seal off from the rest of the group”.

Other statements point towards teacher-dependent features. Two quotes blame teachers if the pupil “doesn't feel welcome in their 'new' community”. It is plainly stated that “we, as teachers, need to think that having heterogeneous classrooms, is an opportunity of enrichment, not a disadvantage”. This has an influence on the pupils' attitude who may “have no confidence and think that they are not going to be accepted as equals in the mainstream classroom or in the society”.

Teachers need to “make sense around schooling activities and interactions”. Their responsibility is very strong, they are “responsible of building up this attitude in his or her class”. Teachers even have a stronger role in helping “those pupils even more”.

The personal and environmental factors pinpointed by the discourse analysis reveal once again the obvious need for inclusive practices. But a further study on the cultural factors brings a different light on this as we are going to see now.

9.3. *Features linked to cultural origin*

The quotes pertaining to this category build a more complete picture of inclusion. Easy to integrate children have to “know who they are and have confidence in their identity”. It is added that they should “really know their mother tongue and have safe base from his culture”. This means that a stable basis for inclusion is necessary, the feeling of comfort needed to accept another conception of life has to be already strong to facilitate the integration of new norms. It is reinforced by the parallel statement describing difficult children as those who “are lost between several languages or cultures without referential at home, with their family”.

Besides a stable family background, children should show a willingness to integrate into the new culture. Several instances express this proactive attitude. They are children who “do not wish to only stay in their community”, “who are interested in the target country” or who “are willing to reflect on their own values and beliefs”.

The teachers' task will be made easier with children who “understand that you can keep your own culture, in addition to the culture of your host country”. Another student teacher mentions the idea that pupils should “value education and/or for whom there is no or little contradiction between belonging to their host country and keeping their own identity/culture(s)”.

The acceptance of differences may encounter obstacles of a more devious kind. Student teachers subconsciously adopt the point of view of the dominant culture. Their discourse expresses the concept of willingness on the part of the migrant child. When the rest of the analysis showed open-mindedness and tolerance, terms that show how much the will to integrate participates in the success of the educational process crop up in the discourse. The negative verbs “refuse”, “reject” are used four times, the expressions “not willing”, “do not recognize”, “make efforts” partake in creating the same impression. The following examples reinforce this interpretation. Difficult children to integrate are those who “do not recognize they have explicit needs for embracing linguistic and cultural change”; or “refuse to make efforts to learn the target language and who are not willing to ‘take risks’ when trying to learn about the country/culture/language etc. (anything that is different to their home country)”.

They show that inclusive practices are not easy to implement and that far from the concept of inclusion, these student teachers follow an assimilation pattern according to which migrant children should show thankfulness to the host country for accommodating them.

Conclusion

The idealistic vision of inclusive multicultural schools tends to become blurred when the student teachers project themselves into a professional posture. The use of terms as shown above shows the complexities of including migrant children without falling into the pattern of assimilation. The study carried out, albeit narrow in scope, outlines the constant oscillation between an assimilationist and a multicultural model. One last quote about easy children to integrate reflects this tension: "But all in all I do not agree with that sentence, because all in all inclusion can be challenging. Nevertheless it is a necessary step to help and contribute to the well-being of every individual".

Studying teachers' representations has been the first step towards the identification of the requirements of inclusive teacher training. Future developments in this area of research will contribute to a set of guidelines for more effective teacher training in today's multicultural society. As far as the teacher mentors and trainers involved in the programme were concerned, they regarded it as a starting point for adjusting their training practices in the future. The last word will be left to Zay (2010: n.p.):

If we make the operating concept of education to otherness the focus of our proposals of school curricula and specific procedures, this involves rethinking the strategies to help schools and teachers, and the teachers with their pupils, not only according to the content taught and the tools used, for example textbooks (...), but also in the form of a community encouraging the development of a citizen identity by belonging to multiple communities open onto one another, those of the families, the peers, the school, the city⁷.

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⁷ « Si nous mettons au centre de nos propositions comme concept articulateur des programmes, des cursus scolaires et des dispositifs spécifiques, l'éducation à l'altérité, cela implique de repenser les stratégies d'aide aux établissements et aux enseignants et de ceux-ci avec leurs élèves, non seulement par rapport aux contenus enseignés et aux outils utilisés, par exemple les manuels scolaires (...), mais aussi sous la forme d'une communauté favorisant l'élaboration d'une identité citoyenne par appartenance à des communautés multiples et ouvertes les unes sur les autres, celles des familles, des pairs, de l'école, de la ville ». (Our translation)

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