Intercultural Learning in Elementary Schooling

Magdeburg, 24.1.2009

Prof. Dr. Ute Massler
PH Weingarten
Structure of presentation

- What is my understanding of culture and intercultural competence?
- When and how do children develop awareness for diversity?
- What are the aims of intercultural competence with regard to small children?
- How can we foster intercultural learning / intercultural competence in elementary schooling?
- Open questions / discussion
Culture / Intercultural learning

"... culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs".

UNESCO
(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2002)

⇒ must be studied and taught (!) "indirectly" by looking at behaviour, customs, material culture (artefacts, tools, technology), language, etc.
Intercultural (communicative) competence / ICC

- **Intercultural competence** (IC) is the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we perceive as being different from our own.

- IC focuses on establishing and maintaining relationships.

- „*Intercultural Communicative Competence*“ (Byram, 1997) is the ability to interact in a foreign language with people from another country and culture.

- ICC = aim of intercultural learning.
How do children develop stereotypes or prejudices?

Children learn

- by observing differences and similarities among people and
- by absorbing the spoken and unspoken messages and judgments about those differences

(Wagner 2001: 2 ff)
When and how do children develop awareness for diversity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Infants notice skin colour differences (Katz, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Children notice and ask questions about differences and similarities among people (Derman-Sparks, 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ½ to 3 ½ years</td>
<td>Children become aware and begin to absorb socially prevailing negative stereotypes, feelings and ideas about people (Derman-Sparks, 1989) children take over discriminating language expressions (nigger, gypsies,…)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 years onward</td>
<td>Children allocate discriminating language to groups of people or individuals as well as themselves (Oberhuemer, 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Seemingly racial attitudes tend to stay constant (Aboud, 1988)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Damage done to children’s development caused by negative discrimination

Minority children are in danger of:
- Developing lower self-esteem
- Generally performing less well in society (education, career, …)

Majority children are in danger of:
- Developing moral double standards
- Pretending to accept diversity, while feeling the opposite
- Constructing identity on a false sense of superiority
- Developing fears about people different from themselves
- Not developing skills for interacting with human diversity in society

(Dennis, 1981; Derman-Sparks, 1989; Miel, 1976; Wagner 2001)
How can we foster intercultural communicative competence in elementary school children?

1. Approach focusing on differences between cultures and the problems of minority children

2. “Tourist” approach
Tourist Approach

Activities about "other" cultures often exhibit the following problems:

* Disconnection
* Patronization
* Trivialization
* Misrepresentation

(Derman-Sparks, 1989)
Anti-Bias approach

Prerequisites

• accept multilingualism and multiculturalism as a form of living
• see culture-related conflicts as developmental chances
• nurture each child’s construction of a confident self-concept and group identity (bicultural if appropriate) (Wagner 2001)

Teaching aims (Anti-Bias approach) => developing

• curiosity and openness towards foreign languages and foreign cultures
• language and culture-related self-awareness and flexibility competence with regard to foreignness (*Fremdheitskompetenz*)
• sensitivity for and capacity to act against negative discrimination
• focussing on similarities between different cultures but not denying differences nor problems of minority children

(adapted from Derman-Sparks 1999; Ulich 1994, 1998; Ulich/Oberhuemer, 2003)
Basic principles / avoiding tourist approach

- Linking cultural activities to concrete children and their families
- Differentiating between cultural practices of an ethnic group and how a specific family lives
- Connecting cultural activities with children's daily life
- Starting out by discussing cultural diversity within elementary school group
Principles and examples for activities in Anti-Bias programmes

Family background

- Photo board: people in our family
- Poster: What languages we speak
- Read or look at books about different ethnic groups within group
Principles and examples for activities in Anti-Bias programmes

Cooking

• Cook what some but also what all families cook
• Don‘t use stereotypes (Leonie/Mohamed‘ s family cooks …, NOT: German/Turkish people cook …)
• Refer regularly to cultural diversity of the food we eat every day
• Don‘t force children to eat, show them how to renounce politely without offending anyone
Teacher competences

Teachers need to know:

• How to see their own culture in relationship to society’s history and current power realities
• How to effectively adapt their teaching style and curriculum content to their children's needs
• How to engage in cultural conflict resolution with people from cultural backgrounds other than their own
• How to be critical thinkers about bias in their practice
• How to be activists to create change
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Datum</th>
<th>Uhrzeit</th>
<th>Veranstaltung</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26.01.</td>
<td>20:00</td>
<td>Schulanfängereleternabend in der Kita- Immergrün</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.03.</td>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>Eltern- Kind- Spiele- Nachmittag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.03.</td>
<td>ab 9:00</td>
<td>Sprachheiluntersuchung für interessierte und besorgte Familien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.06.</td>
<td>20:15</td>
<td>Thematischer Elternabend in der Kita- Immergrün</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.07.</td>
<td>15:00</td>
<td>Sommerfest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.07.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stadtteilfest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References

- Derman-Sparks, L. http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Empowering+children+to+create+a+caring+culture+in+a+world+of...-a014982881 (retrieved from the net: 16.12.09)
www.elias.bilikita.org

The ELIAS project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

Disclaimer: This product reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

© Early Language and Intercultural Acquisition Studies
Herzlichen Dank für Ihre Aufmerksamkeit.

www.ph-weingarten.de