

Chapter 9

TEACHERS' COMPETENCIES IN SUPERDIVERSE CLASSROOMS

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It is a worldwide phenomenon: student populations in classrooms (from preschool to secondary education) are becoming increasingly diverse. This is a challenge for teachers: their students not only differ in terms of ability, interest and learning preferences, but also in ethnic background, social economic status, religion, home language, migration history, etcetera. In particular in larger cities, this phenomenon of what has been called 'superdiversity' puts great demands on teachers. Diversity in the classroom creates new possibilities for learning and can be a source of inspiration, but many teachers experience it as a complex challenge. They feel they cannot meet the needs of all students and observe that diversity can entail misunderstanding and exclusion. In this paper, I will explore what the ideal set of competences should be for teachers who work in superdiverse classrooms. I will use an instrument which we developed for a training course on cultural diversity for primary school teachers, that is able to assess the level of intercultural sensitivity. Finally, I will present a set of recently developed learning materials that can be used in kindergarten and primary school classes, to reflect with children on issues such as having respect for diversity, and living together in multicultural settings.

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Wrap-up

Schools have an important role in raising children, in making them aware of unwanted forms of bias. Children are not born with discriminatory behaviour other than that at very young age they already can observe differences. What is crucial here is that schools have the task to guide children in showing that differences and similarities are just there, and that children should not turn differences into prejudices or other unwanted biased behaviour. It certainly helps when schools, on an organisational level, create inclusive contexts, in their school policy. It helps when the environment breathes a welcoming atmosphere. But first and foremost, teachers play a tremendously important role in guiding children towards non-biased behaviour, respect for diversity and a sense of inclusion.

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