Christoph Knoblauch / Julia Hofmann / Reinhold Boschki

Cultural and Religious Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Teams

Potentials of Diverse Teacher Teams for Inclusive Learning Environments

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Potentials of Diverse Teacher Teams for Inclusive Learning Environments

Abstract

This paper investigates the role of cultural and religious diversity within Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) teams. Through an explorative meta-analysis of international research on diversity in educational teams, the paper explores the significance of diversity in ECEC settings, aligning with national and international educational plans. It addresses challenges related to cultural and religious diversity within ECEC teams and suggests potential approaches to leverage diversity for enhancing inclusivity. Through a review of empirical studies, the paper identifies practical strategies for effectively managing cultural and religious diversity in early childhood settings.

Keywords

religious education – early childhood – diversity – teacher teams – meta-analysis

Christoph Knoblauch / Julia Hofmann / Reinhold Boschki

Kulturelle und religiöse Vielfalt in Teams für frühkindliche Bildung und Betreuung (ECEC)

Potenziale religiös und weltanschaulich vielfältiger Fachkräfteteams für ein inklusives Lernumfeld

Abstract

Der Artikel untersucht die Rolle kultureller und religiöser Vielfalt in Fachkräfteteams im Kontext frühkindlicher Bildung. Auf der Grundlage einer explorativen Metaanalyse internationaler Studien zu Diversität in Bildungsteams wird die Bedeutung von kultureller und religiöser Vielfalt in Kindertageseinrichtungen untersucht und vor dem Hintergrund nationaler und internationaler Bildungspläne reflektiert. Der Artikel diskutiert Herausforderungen, die mit kultureller und religiöser Vielfalt in Kindertagesstätten verbunden sind, und reflektiert inklusive Ansätze. Anhand eines Überblicks über empirische Studien werden praktische Strategien für einen effektiven Umgang mit kultureller und religiöser Vielfalt in frühkindlichen Einrichtungen diskutiert.

Schlagworte
Religiöse Bildung – Frühe Kindheit – Vielfalt – Fachkräfteteams – Meta-Analyse

Cultural and Religious Diversity in ECEC

ECEC institutions play a pivotal role in shaping the future generations of our society. The foundation of education during these crucial years greatly influences a child's cognitive, social and emotional development[1]. To educate and prepare children for a society that is fundamentally shaped by diversity,[2] pedagogical approaches are needed that sensitively perceive and constructively shape diversity[3]. Since schools reflect society, promoting diversity within educational institutions can foster an environment that cultivates individuals to become inclusive members of the broader society. Diversity is a central theme in most national and international educational plans and its constructive perception within educator teams is frequently discussed[4]. However, diversity is embedded in broader institutional, professional, and social structures. In this article, we adopt a specific theoretical stance that focuses on the potential of diverse teams for inclusive education. At the same time, we acknowledge that professional hierarchies, collective identities, and power dynamics within teams influence how diversity is experienced and managed in practice.

The fact that educational plans for early childhood in different countries address cultural and religious diversity suggests that these issues play a role in the lives of children, parents and professionals and are relevant to society as a whole. In this context, the importance of cultural and religious diversity[5] is discussed on a global[6] and local[7] level in various curricula for ECEC. The image of the child as an active and independent constructor and an associated subject-oriented pedagogy often serve as justification patterns for the thematization of cultural and religious diversity in contexts of early childhood education[8]. Children's lifeworlds

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1   Cf. OECD: Starting Strong 2017. Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care (21. Juni 2017), 11, in: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264276116-en [retrieved 02.02.2024].

2   This paper takes into account that education systems use different definitions of the terms 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' and discuss these terms in individual societal, historical and political contexts (OECD, 2023:11). Therefore, this paper supports the view that the above terms have to be approached holistically.

3   Cf. GRIESHABER, Susan / CANELLA, Gaile Sloan: From Identity to Identities, in: GRIESHABER, Susan / CANELLA, Gaile Sloan (Eds.): Embracing identities in early childhood education: diversity and possibilities, New York / London: Teachers College Press 2001, 3–6.

4   Cf. MCCARTHY, Cameron / REZAI-RASHTI, Goli M. / TEASLEY, Cathryn: Race, Diversity, and Curriculum in the Era of Globalization, in: Curriculum Inquiry 39/1 (2009) 75–96. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-873X.2008.01438.x.

5   Within the framework of these dimensions, other dimensions are also negotiated, since diversity must always be discussed from a holistic perspective, cultivating critical insights into various aspects of diversity, encompassing dimensions such as socioeconomic status, age, gender, disability and others.

6   Cf. ARIZANDY, Aan: Inclusive-Dialogic Religious Education: A Model for Cultivating Multi-Religious Character in Early Childhood Education (ECE), in: Proceedings of the International Conference on Early Childhood Education and Parenting 2019 (ECEP 2019) 15–16. DOI: 10.2991/assehr.k.200808.003.

7   Cf. KNOBLAUCH, Christoph: Frühkindliche religiöse Bildung in den Bildungsplänen: Curriculare Perspektiven in der Diskussion, in: Frühe Bildung 12/1 (2023) 13-20. DOI: 10.1026/2191-9186/a000601.

8   Cf. STOCKINGER, Helena: Dealing with religious difference in kindergarten. An ethnographic study in religiously affiliated institutions, Münster / New York: Waxmann 2018.

are shaped by cultural traditions, worldviews, and religions in different ways and to varying degrees, and related topics, such as values and existential questions, are influenced by worldview and religious perspectives[9]. Recognizing the importance of providing a nurturing and inclusive environment for young children in these diverse contexts, the question arises as to how educators can constructively meet the challenges of culturally and religiously diverse groups of learners. One interesting and promising option is to work specifically and constructively in culturally and religiously diverse teacher teams: A diverse teaching workforce not only can foster a more inclusive learning environment for minority students but may also contribute to the development of intercultural competencies among all children. [10] However, studies show that diversity in professional teams is mediated by factors such as professional roles, social expectations, and institutional norms. Educators with diverse backgrounds may face different levels of authority within teams, influencing their ability to shape pedagogical practices.

As the perceptions of educators regarding cultural and religious diversity significantly impact their outlook on working with diverse children and families[11], this article explores the potential benefits of cultural and religious diversity in ECEC teams, emphasizing its role in fostering a more sensitive atmosphere and facilitating culturally and religiously responsive education.

To approach the potential of diverse teacher teams for inclusive learning environments, the interconnectedness of cultural and religious diversity is first discussed. Further, challenges arising from culturally and religiously diverse teaching teams in ECEC will be addressed. Therefore, assumptions from the scientific discourse on the constructive use of diversity in professional daycare teams are examined and discussed concerning cultural and religious diversity. To accomplish this, empirical studies on diversity in professional daycare teams are reviewed and basic considerations on cultural and religious diversity in early childhood are reflected upon[12]. Afterwards, results in the field of diversity in teaching teams will be looked at to identify possible potentials for culturally and religiously diverse teams in ECEC. The aim is to develop strategies for dealing with

9   Cf. GRÜMME, Bernhard: Öffentliche Religionspädagogik. Religiöse Bildung in pluralen Lebenswelten, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2015.

10   Cf. YIP, Sun Yee / SAITO, Eisuke: Equity and inclusion: Finding strength through teacher diversity, in: Management in Education (2023) 5. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/08920206231193834.

11   Cf. SHUKER, Mary Jane / CHERRINGTON, Sue: Diversity in New Zealand early childhood education: challenges and opportunities, in: International Journal of Early Years Education 24/2 (2016) 179. DOI: 10.1080/09669760.2016.1155148.

12   Cf. JOHANNESSEN, Øystein Lund / SKEIE, Geir: The relationship between religious education and intercultural education, in: Intercultural Education 30/3 (2019) 260-274. DOI: 10.1080/14675986.2018.1540142.

cultural and religious diversity in the early childhood sector by making constructive use of the diversity of professional ECEC teams.

The subsequent sections of this paper provide an initial theoretical framework for a research project that is currently emerging. In 15 daycare centers in southwest Germany, pedagogical professionals – regardless of their religious affiliation – are being recruited to complement traditionally more homogeneous Christian teams in daycare centers run by the Catholic Church. The project examines the impact of culturally and religiously diverse teams on children, parents, professional teams, management and communal networks. Ethnographic studies and qualitative interviews are being conducted and focus on the potential of religious education in diverse ECEC settings. The project is being scientifically monitored by research teams from the University of Tübingen and Ludwigsburg University of Education.

The Interconnectedness of Cultural and Religious Diversity

Paul Tillich, who influenced the anthropological shift in religious education, offers a perspective where culture serves as an expression of religion, and religion as an important content of culture[13]. This perspective underscores the close connection between the two. Witte further delves into the intricate relationship between religion and culture, highlighting the elements of participation and distance. Religion, he asserts, is both less and more than culture. It is less in the sense that it encompasses only a portion of human life, and more because it encompasses the divine, which remains distinct from the worldly realm. Religion, in essence, is an integral aspect of the culture it resides in, and the dynamics of participation and distance shape their interdependence[14]. The exploration of culture and religion must be undertaken in tandem, as they are intricately connected. In many cultures, religion plays a significant role, for instance in shaping cultural identity and influencing symbols and value systems. Religion, closely tied to ethical and moral principles, plays a pivotal role in shaping culture. In essence, religion is an integral component of culture, and it can be viewed as such[15]. In their lifeworlds and educational institutions, children explicitly and implicitly encounter various religious and ideological concepts, often associated with traditions and rituals from cultures different from their own. Establishing a

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13 Cf. TILLICH, Paul: Religionsphilosophie, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1962.

14 Cf. WITTE, Markus (Ed.): Religionskultur – zur Beziehung von Religion und Kultur in der Gesellschaft. Beiträge des Fachbereichs Evangelische Theologie an der Universität Frankfurt am Main, Würzburg: Religion-und-Kultur-Verl. 2001, 11–17.

15 Cf. ZIRKER, Hans: Art. Religion, Religionskritik, in: METTE, Norbert / RICKERS, Folkert (Eds.): Lexikon der Religionspädagogik, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 2001 (= 2) 1672–1677.

harmonious coexistence of diverse worldviews, including religious, secular, and atheistic perspectives, is not self-evident but is a fundamental requirement for a democratic society. To achieve this, it is crucial for children and young people to learn how to approach individuals from other cultures and religions without preconceived notions and to understand and respect their unique needs[16]. Culture and religion are inherently intertwined and cannot be studied in isolation. Understanding this interconnectedness is essential for creating inclusive ECEC environments: Many cultural practices are closely tied to religious beliefs. However, cultural and religious diversity does not operate independently of social and institutional structures. Research on multiprofessional teams in early childhood settings highlights that workplace hierarchies and professional roles significantly shape interactions among educators. The negotiation of diversity is often influenced by institutional policies and social positioning within teams, which may reinforce existing power relations.[17] For instance, certain holidays, dietary restrictions, or dress codes may be influenced by religious traditions. Teams with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds and with knowledge of these connections can better accommodate the needs of children and their families, creating an environment that respects both cultural and religious diversity.

Challenges in culturally and religiously diverse teaching teams in ECEC

In the following, three initial challenges are identified that relate to dealing with diversity in culturally and religiously diverse educational teams in ECEC. These are the challenge of early childhood education institutions in dealing with diversity, the challenge of colleagues in dealing with diversity in ECEC teams and finally the challenge of dealing with diversity in the institution and in everyday practice with children, parents and other stakeholders.

1. Working together in culturally and religiously diverse teaching teams leads to the challenge of how the teams deal with diversity in their institutions. This raises the question and challenge of how institutions produce and reproduce differences. Working together in culturally and religiously diverse teaching teams brings both opportunities and challenges, particularly in how institutions structure and negotiate diversity. Social mechanisms such as hierarchi-

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16 CARUSO, Carina / WOPPOWA, Jan: Kulturelle und religiöse Vielfalt in Schule und Unterricht: ein Blick auf religionskooperativen Unterricht als Basis für eine demokratische Konvivenz, in: Sektionstagung Empirische Bildungsforschung (Ed.), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft: Münster.

17 Cf. FRÖHLICH-GILDHOFF, Klaus / WELTZIEN, Dörte / STROHMER, Janina: Unterstützungspotenziale für multiprofessionelle Teams in Kindertageseinrichtungen. Zentrale Erkenntnisse einer Längsschnittstudie in Baden-Württemberg, in: Frühe Bildung 10/1 (2021) 4–15.

zation and collectivization shape how professionals interact within teams. Research indicates that religious and cultural diversity is often navigated through implicit team norms, which can either foster inclusion or reinforce existing group boundaries. Recognizing these dynamics is crucial to developing strategies for constructive diversity management.[18]

2. Teaching teams in ECEC institutions need to consider how they deal with differences in their team. How are individual differences perceived and dealt with?

3. Finally, how do ECEC teams deal with differences in practice? What policies are in place and is the aim to minimise or maximise diversity? What can a didactics of diversity in the elementary sector look like?

To meet the challenges described above, the first step is to look at international research findings on diverse teaching teams in the school context to develop possible starting points for early childhood education and cooperation in religiously and cultural plural teams in ECEC institutions.

Diversity in Teacher Teams: Perspectives from Scientific Discourse

1. Belonging and Representation

The thesis that promoting greater diversity within the teaching profession can contribute significantly to fostering inclusivity in schools has been set up in the scientific discourse many times[19]. Cultural and religious diversity within the teaching team, for instance, seems to encourage a sense of belonging for families and children[20]. But even though student populations become more diverse in many countries, teams of teachers tend to be mostly homogeneous in terms of cultural and religious diversity in many states: In Germany for example less than 10% of the teachers have a migrant background, whereas more than 33% of the student population has one[21]. Similar patterns can be found in countries such as the USA[22] or the UK[23]. Consequently, students hailing from minority and cul-

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18   Cf. Stockinger 2018 [Anm. 8], 195,207.

19   Cf. Yip / Saito 2023 [Anm. 10], 1.

20   Cf. Shuker / Cherrington 2016 [Anm. 11], 178.

21   Cf. Statistisches Bundesamt (Ed.): „24,3 % der Bevölkerung hatten 2022 eine Einwanderungsgeschichte". Pressemitteilung Nr. 158, in: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2023/04/PD23_158_125.html [retrieved: 04.03.2024].

22   Cf. Furuya, Yukiko et al.: A Portrait of Foreign-Born Teachers in the United States, in: https://iir.gmu.edu/publications/industries/education (Full report) [retrieved: 04.03.2024].

23   UK Government: School workforce in England: reporting year 2022, in: https://explore-educationstatistics.service.gov.uk/ find-statistics/school-workforceinEngland [retrieved: 02.02.2024].

turally diverse backgrounds often find a lack of representation among their educators, with few teachers belonging to the same cultural or ethnic groups. This absence not only impacts these specific students but also deprives the wider student body of the chance to benefit from a richer array of experiences and valuable learning opportunities[24]. With diverse teacherteams, students can discover role models who share their life experiences, leading to increased comfort and success in learning environments where their cultural and religious backgrounds are acknowledged and esteemed. Educators from various cultural and religious backgrounds can bring in their experiences, knowledge, and competencies, as well as their unique perspectives. They might find it easier to connect with students who share similar cultural and religious backgrounds thereby offering possibilities for representation[25]. Against this backdrop, research indicates that the presence of cultures represented by children and families already enrolled in ECEC service is perceived as bolstering a sense of belonging for newcomers. The cultural diversity within the teaching team seems to have a similar effect, fostering a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere[26].

2. Development of competencies

An equitable education system is characterized by its commitment to providing high-quality education accessible to everyone, while valuing diversity and recognizing the distinct needs, abilities, characteristics, and learning expectations of both students and communities. It is a system dedicated to eradicating all types of discrimination to ensure that education is truly inclusive and fair for all[27]. In this context, it is important to recognize that culturally and religiously responsive education is intricately connected to the promotion of inclusive education. Therefore, it acknowledges the diversity in backgrounds and life experiences among

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24 Cf. Joseph-Salisbury, Remi: Race and racism in English secondary schools, London: Runnymede 2020.

25 Cf. Georgi, Viola B.: Self-efficacy of teachers with migrant background in Germany, in: Schmidt, Clea / Schneider, Jens (Eds.): Diversifying the teaching force in transnational contexts. Critical perspectives, Springer Science and Business Media 2016, 59–72.

26 Cf. Shuker / Cherrington 2016 [Anm. 11], 178.

27 Cf. UNESCO: Defining an Inclusive Education Agenda: Reflections around the 48th session of the International Conference on Education, in: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186807 [retrieved: 02.02.2024], 126. Language barriers, for example, are one form of exclusion. In her study from 2018 to 2021, Yasemine Karakaşoğlu looks at the Canadian understanding of inclusion in terms of its intersectional diversity dimension, which takes ethnic and cultural diversity into account. Using the example of Gordon Bell High School, she shows that German schools should not only value migration-related multilingualism but actively integrate it into the curriculum and promote it. Future teachers can be trained in language sensitivity and teamwork in multi-professional groups in order to act with sensitivity to differences in heterogeneous classes and to critically scrutinise discrimination. Karakaşoğlu comes to the conclusion that different levels of learning and socialisation can be taken into account through structured cooperation in multi-professional teams. Cf. Karakaşoğlu , Yasemine: Winnipeg – Inklusion und Wellbeing als zentrale Bausteine für Bildung im Kontext von Multikulturalität, Migration und Mobilität, Bremen: 2020 (= TraMis 8), 24, 26, 27. DOI: 10.26092/elib/370. Hierarchisation processes are another form of discrimination in multi-professional teams. In the school context, teachers take on a dominant role due to their expertise, longer training and numerical superiority. As a result, their perspective can prevail in the team and the views of others, such as those of school social workers, are pushed into the background. Cf. Otto, Stephan / Wasserfuhr, Veit: Multiprofessionelle Teams an Schulen. Ein Scoping Review, in: iit-perspektive 73 (2014) 3. DOI: https://doi.org/10.23776/2024_15.

children sharing the same classroom. An inclusive education system is linked to enhanced academic performance among students and nurtures their socio-emotional development, self-esteem, and positive peer relationships[28]. To establish fair and inclusive learning environments that empower every learner to reach their educational potential, it is essential for teachers to possess a comprehensive set of competencies, knowledge, and attitudes[29]. However, research shows that teachers frequently experience a sense of unpreparedness when confronted with the diverse needs of students within their classrooms: According to the TALIS survey, a mere 26% of lower secondary teachers express feeling adequately prepared, or even very well-prepared, to teach in diverse classroom settings after completing their initial teacher education. Furthermore, only 33% of experienced in-service teachers report feeling confident in effectively addressing the challenges posed by multicultural classrooms[30]. This is problematic insofar as teachers play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Educators who possess a deep understanding of their students' diverse demographic backgrounds and are attuned to the intricate challenges posed by systemic social issues like marginalization and inequality are essential in creating an inclusive educational environment, particularly for students originating from ethnic minority and migrant backgrounds[31].

3. Self-reflection and sensitivity

Working in teacher teams with colleagues with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds can help teachers reflect on various dimensions of diversity and their individual contexts of socialization. It seems crucial for teachers to develop a critical self-awareness of their own cultural perspectives, educators should examine how their behavior, caregiving routines, and curriculum plans are influenced by their cultural, familial, and individual values[32]. Regular reflection through conversations in authentic teams with diverse backgrounds can lead to positive attitudes towards diversity. In a study of German schools, Karakaş states that teachers with a migration background can counter discrimination and

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28   Cf. UNESCO: Global education monitoring report 2020, in: https://gem-report-2020.unesco.org/ [retrieved: 02.02.2024].

29   Cf. CERNA, Lucie et al.: Promoting inclusive education for diverse societies. A conceptual framework, in: OECD Education Working Papers 260/17 (2021). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/19939019.

30   Cf. OECD: TALIS 2018 results. Teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners 1 (2019). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en.

31   Cf. YIP / SAITO 2023 [Anm. 10], 1.

32   Cf. ANG, Lynn: Critical Perspectives on Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood: Building an Inclusive Curriculum and Provision, in: Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development 30/1 (2010) 50.

racism by addressing discriminatory and racist observations and experiences[33]. In addition, the exchange can lead to a change of perspective and the adoption of perspectives for greater sensitivity towards people with different religious and cultural attitudes in the teaching teams. Research shows that attitudes toward diversity significantly shape educators' perceptions of working with diverse children and families, either in a positive or challenging light. Those with favorable attitudes seem to embrace differences constructively, acknowledging their roles as educators. They proactively collaborate with families and external organizations to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for effective teaching[34]. A teaching workforce that reflects the diversity of teachers and students can enable teachers to develop intercultural and interreligious competencies[35] and help students and their families to find representation within their schools and the educational system[36]. Teachers who can share similar cultural and religious backgrounds and lived experiences with their students can play a vital role in establishing a culturally and religiously responsive learning environment[37].

4. Resources and connections

Furthermore, a diverse teacher workforce can offer diverse cultural and religious resources for all teachers[38]. This is especially interesting, as teachers with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds can draw upon their personal life experiences to shape their teaching methods, often incorporating these experiences intuitively[39]. In addition to professionals, children and family members are also active in the institutions. Due to their individual backgrounds, they have different resources and are connected to other actors through EC. Professionals can open spaces for the resources of children and family members. A 2008 survey of licensed, chartered ECE services in New Zealand asked for examples of children and families who were successfully integrated and operating in the EC

33   Cf. Karakaş, Nurten: Benachteiligungs- und Diskriminierungserfahrungen, in: Georgi, Viola B. / Ackermann, Lisanne / Karakaş, Nurten (Eds.): Vielfalt im Lehrerzimmer. Selbstverständnis und schulische Integration von Lehrenden mit Migrationshintergrund in Deutschland, Münster et al.: Waxmann 2011, 230−241.

34   Cf. Shuker / Cherrington 2016 [Anm. 11], 181.

35   Cf. Weber, Judith: Religionssensible Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen. Eine empirisch-qualitative Studie zur religiösen Bildung und Erziehung im Kontext der Elementarpädagogik, Münster / New York: Waxmann 2014, 313-315.

36   Cf. Buckskin, Peter: More aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI): Final report, University of South Australia 2016, 29.

37   Cf. Weber 2014 [Anm. 35]; Gay, Geneva: Culturally responsive teaching. Theory, research, and practice, New York: Teachers College Press ³2018, 28−56.

38   Cf. Fibbi, Rosita / Gómez, Rosa Aparicio: Teachers of immigrant origin: Contextual factors and resource mobilization in professional life, in: Schneider / Crul, Maurice / Pott, Andreas (Eds.): New Social Mobility. Second Generation Pioneers in Europe, Cham: Springer 2022, 105−131. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05566-9_5.

39   Cf. Mantel, Carola: Being a teacher with a so-called 'immigrant background': challenges of dealing with social boundaries, in: Intercultural Education 31/2 (2020) 173−189. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2019.170229.

setting. The analysis shows that the achievement of successful inclusion in ECEC was (1) facilitated by organizing events that commemorated particular cultural festivals or activities, as well as events that celebrated the broader spectrum of cultures represented within their service, and (2) through the daily practices in the institution, such as aligning with the children's sense of belonging through language or by incorporating artefacts, songs, and words into the program[40]. Both aspects can only be provided by educators who can genuinely introduce stories, customs, and festivities to the institution due to their shared cultural or religious backgrounds. These personal and authentic experiences can also be helpful for teachers to better understand pupils and parents from similar cultural and religious contexts[41]. Within the school context, incorporating the perspectives of teachers with diverse experiences and worldviews broadens the horizons of discussions concerning school policies, curriculum development, and teaching methods[42]. Furthermore, a diverse teacher team has the potential to develop networking opportunities in diverse contexts with parents and the community.

5. Conclusion

This review and reflection of international empirical studies on diversity in teacher teams shows that a diverse teaching workforce can not only foster a more inclusive learning environment for minority students but also enhance the experiences of students by promoting the development of intercultural competencies. These findings align with the outcomes observed in research on how diversity positively impacts creativity within team dynamics[43]. Additionally, having teachers' voices with diverse cultural and religious contexts in schools can have the potential to enrich discussions in curriculum development, teaching practices, and school policy-making by broadening worldviews and perspectives. Establishing a diverse teaching workforce necessitates a comprehensive strategy encompassing the attraction of culturally diverse candidates to enter initial teacher education, the recruitment of teachers from various backgrounds, and the establishment of a nurturing work environment to ensure the retention of these educators.

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40   Cf. SHUKER / CHERRINGTON 2016 [Anm. 11], 178.

41   Cf. RADHOUANE, Myriam / AKKARI, Abdeljalil / GUARDIA, Consuelo: Understanding social justice commitment and pedagogical advantage of teachers with a migrant background in Switzerland: a qualitative study, in: Journal for Multicultural Education 16/2 (2022) 159–170. DOI: 10.1108/JME-10-2021-0192.

42   Cf. AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: Spotlight. Diversity in School Leadership, in: https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/research-evidence/spotlight/diversity-in-school-leadership.pdf [retrieved 04.02.2024].

43   Cf. HUNDSCHELL, Andreas et al.: The effects of diversity on creativity: A literature review and synthesis, in: Applied Psychology 71/4 (2022) 1598–1634. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12365.

Potentials of culturally and religiously diverse teacher teams in ECEC

The preceding discussion and reflection on the research base suggest that culturally and religiously diverse teacher teams can (1) provide opportunities for belonging and representation for a diverse student body, (2) promote the development of intercultural and interreligious competencies among all students, (3) promote self-reflection and sensitivity concerning diversity within their teacher teams, and (4) develop diverse networking opportunities with parents and the community. Through deliberate contemplation and personal immersion in cultural and religious diversity, diverse teams possess a remarkable capacity to effectively influence culturally and religiously responsive education. This becomes especially evident when considering their potential to provide guidance and establish essential frameworks for the development of cultural and religious competence within the early childhood sector. This approach ensures that individuals with diverse backgrounds and varied life experiences can engage in collaborative learning within the school environment[44]:

1. Diverse teams can introduce elementary topics such as values and existential experiences from a variety of perspectives and reflect on them together with the children. In doing so, it can become clear to children that their individual topics and personal ideas can find constructive partners who share similar religious and cultural backgrounds. At the same time, these partners can draw on experiences with other topics and beliefs and bring them into the conversation.

2. Culturally and religiously diverse early childhood education and care (ECEC) teams can engage in collaborative efforts to craft a curriculum that embraces a broad spectrum of cultural and religious viewpoints. This curriculum might encompass narratives, songs, and activities that not only celebrate diversity but also cultivate a strong sense of belonging among all children.

3. Diverse teams can bring a variety of elementary impulses into the institution and thus create a multitude of approaches. Specific religious and cultural approaches, such as special storytelling forms and songs, create individual offerings and make diversity tangible for children. Educators from diverse backgrounds can organize celebrations and activities around cultural and

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44   Cf. DEWEY, John: Democracy and Education. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, New Work: The Macmillan Company 1916.

religious holidays, providing children with opportunities to learn about and appreciate different traditions.

4. Diverse teams can create impressive elementary reflection opportunities, for example, by actively bringing individual religious experiences and ideas into the diverse encounters with children. The personal faith tradition can become a topic and at the same time enable the possibility of identification and the perception of difference.

5. Diverse teams can offer elementary experiences by making cultural festivals and rituals in the facility a topic and offering participation. They can model this authentically, from a particular tradition, while incorporating other traditions.

6. Diverse teams can offer elementary encounters by making their diverse networks accessible to the facility. Parents, associations, communities, professional groups, and many other networks can be involved in this way as partners with different affiliations for culturally and religiously responsive education. They can initiate collaborative projects that involve parents and community members, providing opportunities for them to share their customs and traditions. This approach serves to strengthen the connections between the ECEC institution, the local communities and the families it serves, creating a stronger sense of unity and understanding.

7. Diverse teams can offer, in terms of competence acquisition, the learning of a linguistic ability to deal with diverse phenomena and narratives in practice. This competence can also be expressed in an awareness of diversity.

8. Diverse teams can, through self-reflection and sensitivity, develop the courage to openly address issues concerning religious and cultural aspects. These issues are then not ignored but shared within the ECEC team.

These potentials can be developed constructively if they are offered (a) sustainably, (b) interdisciplinary, and (c) in a way that is sensitive to diversity in a holistic way. In particular, the parameter "diversity responsive education" can become a special quality feature of diverse teams here: The individual child's reflections and constructions on cultural and religious topics and convictions can be authentically perceived, strengthened and sensitively reflected against the background of other ideas. The development of cultural and religious competence in children is consequently promoted in the context of the double principle of authenticity and sensitivity. In this context, a diversity-sensitive attitude also keeps in mind

possible prejudices against cultural and religious contexts and can recognize and invalidate them from the diverse perspectives and experiences of the team.

The constructive acceptance of cultural and religious diversity is the task of all ECEC institutions. Accordingly, these institutions need authentic specialists with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds who can competently provide information about their socialization and thus do justice to the diverse backgrounds and ideas of children.

Against the backgrounds discussed here, ECEC institutions can profit from culturally and religiously diverse teams and need a conception,

1. … which places children and their ideas and experiences at the center, offers them options for dialogue and thus gives children a voice[45],

2. … which perceives children in their manifold relationship dimensions, thus offering them the option of belonging[46],

3. … which consciously perceives children's ability to interact in diverse contexts[47],

4. … which views ECEC institutions as a living and learning environment in which children's diverse imaginations and experiences meet[48],

5. … which reflects social structures and counteracts exclusion and hierarchization,

6. … which includes the perspective of parents and professionals and considers them as co-constructors[49],

7. … which takes into account the acquisition of religious and cultural competences[50]. Authentic educators with diverse experiences and backgrounds are necessary for all of the above. Given the diversity of cultural and religious identities and the possibilities for relationships that arise from them, the per-

45 Cf. GRUNERT, Cathleen / KRÜGER, Heinz-Hermann: Biographieforschung und pädagogische Kindheitsforschung, in: KRÜGER, Heinz-Hermann / MAROTZKI, Winfried (Eds.): Handbuch erziehungswissenschaftliche Biographieforschung, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften ²2006, 241–257.

46 Cf. BOSCHKI, Reinhold / SCHEIDLER, Monika / BIESINGER, Albert (Eds.): Religionspädagogische Grundoptionen. Elemente einer gelingenden Glaubenskommunikation, Freiburg / Basel/ Wien: Herder 2008, 111–118.

47 Cf. ROSSBACH, Hans-Günther / KLUCZNIOK, Katharina / ISENMANN, Dominique: Erfahrungen aus internationalen Längsschnittuntersuchungen, in: ROSSBACH, Hans-Günther / WEINERT, Sabine (Eds): Kindliche Kompetenzen im Elementarbereich: Förderbarkeit, Bedeutung und Messung, Berlin: Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, Referat Bildungsforschung 2008, 87.

48 Cf. FLECK, Carola: Religiöse Bildung in der Frühpädagogik, Berlin / Münster: LIT 2011, 182.

49 Cf. TEXTOR, Martin R.: Bildungs- und Erziehungspartnerschaft in Kindertageseinrichtungen, Norderstedt: Books on Demand ³2020, 9–15.

50 Cf. WILLEMS, Joachim: Interreligiöse Kompetenz, in: https://bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/100070/ [retrieved: 04.02.2024].

spective of culturally and religiously responsive education must be a broad one that does not focus only on an explicit cultural or religious educational practice but is open to diverse cultural and religious contexts[51]. Being open to the present question means the active acceptance of cultural and religious diversity through the constructive inclusion of cultural and religious diversity in the form of pedagogical professionals with different contexts. Culturally and religiously responsive education is then seen as supporting and challenging self-education that develops in multiple relational dimensions and culturally and religiously diverse learning environments. Against this background, culturally and religiously responsive education needs an educational anthropology that focuses on relational events[52]. The dialogue in culturally and religiously diverse teams, the authentic conversation about cultural and religious convictions, values, existential experiences, and socialization can thus be described as the core of development for a culturally and religiously responsive attitude that permeates all further encounters in the educational partnership[53].

Conclusion

As early as 1996, the European Commission indirectly formulated the requirement for culturally and religiously diverse teams in its quality objectives for early childhood: *"Education and the learning environment should reflect and value the child's family, home, language, cultural heritage, faith, religion, and gender."*[54] In this quotation, the verb *"reflect"* is particularly important: children should be allowed to recognize that their characteristics, experiences, ideas, and beliefs can also be found in the institution. This can certainly be seen through topics, methods, and materials, but it becomes particularly clear and lasting in authentic encounters with pedagogical professionals. Cultural and religious diversity in ECEC teams can offer various potentials for creating a more sensitive and inclusive atmosphere within early childhood education. It can enhance cultural competence, communication, and the ability to provide culturally and religiously responsive education. Diversity is not merely a desirable aspect of ECEC institutions; it is essential for nurturing the future generation in an increasingly multi-

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51 Cf. NIPKOW, Karl Ernst: Religionspädagogik, in: METTE, Norbert / RICKERS, Folkert (Eds.): Lexikon der Religionspädagogik, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 2001 (= 2) 1720–1721.

52 CF. SCHAMBECK, Mirjam: Interreligiöse Kompetenz. Basiswissen für Studium, Ausbildung und Beruf, Göttingen / Bristol: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2013, 160.

53 Cf. WEBER 2014 [Anm. 35].

54 NETZWERK KINDERBETREUUNG UND ANDERE MASSNAHMEN ZUR VEREINBARKEIT VON BERUF UND FAMILIE FÜR FRAUEN UND MÄNNER DER EUROPÄISCHEN KOMMISSION: Europäische Kommission: Qualitätsziele in Einrichtungen für kleine Kinder. Vorschläge für ein zehnjähriges Aktionsprogramm, o. O. 1996, 20.

cultural and interconnected world. By embracing cultural and religious diversity, ECEC institutions can create opportunities for children to engage with diverse perspectives. However, diversity in ECEC teams does not function in a vacuum; it is embedded within institutional structures, social hierarchies, and pedagogical traditions. Therefore, programs have to be further developed that foster competencies within diverse teams, focusing on culturally and religiously responsive approaches and contextual perspectives[55]. Children independently construct thoughts about cultural and religious contexts and make experiences in a heterogeneous learning and living environment. It is important for ECEC institutions to be sensitive and reflective about these experiences and at the same time to actively embrace them as learning opportunities. For this purpose, institutions need educational professionals who can offer authentic, reflective, and thus professional approaches to their world, which reflect diversity within the framework of a culturally and religiously responsive pedagogical concept. Teacher teams should therefore bring diverse backgrounds with them in order to enable all children to participate in the institution in a sensitive and prejudice-conscious manner. In this way, supposed foreignness can be reflected as what it actually is: the normality of life. In their encounters with other children, parents, and the social environment of the institution, children often already experience diversity as a real part of their lifeworld – this reality should be reflected in ECEC institutions. The encounter with professional pedagogical staff from one's own cultural or religious tradition and other traditions can help to get authentic answers to urgent questions, to get to know new things, to reduce prejudices, and thus to develop acceptance towards others. Basic concepts of diversity education, such as the double principle of learning, are particularly effective: I learn about the other, and in the process, I learn about myself. Educators undoubtedly need specific skills and knowledge to navigate the various dimensions of diversity discussed here effectively. However, it is crucial to emphasize that possessing the right dispositions and attitudes, those that genuinely foster a sense of welcome, acknowledgment, and embrace of diversity, takes precedence. When considering the necessary dispositions, three attitudes articulated by Dewey can be seen as fundamental to reflective practice: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness.[56] These attitudes provide valuable starting points toward creating truly inclusive and embracing educational environment.

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55 Cf. FORMOSINHO, João / FIGUEIREDO, Irene: Promoting equity in an early years context: the role of participatory educational teams, in: European Early Childhood Education Research Journal 22/3 (2014) 401. DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2014.912902.

56 Cf. DEWEY, John: How We think, a restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative Process, Chicago: Henry Regnery 1933.