

## An Analysis of the Practices and Approaches Adopted by a Multi-ethnic School in Bremen (Germany): A Case Study

Logamurthie Athiemoolam

*Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape 6020, South Africa*  
*E-mail: logamurthie.athiemoolam@nmmu.ac.za*

**KEYWORDS** Multicultural Education. Diversity. Integration. Germany

**ABSTRACT** Initially Germany adopted an approach known as *Auslanderpädagogik* ('foreigner pedagogy') to cater for the educational needs of non-German immigrant children. This later changed to intercultural pedagogy in the 1980s that aimed to prepare all children to adapt to a culturally diverse society. The study aimed to examine the extent to which the practices and approaches adopted by the most multi-ethnic school in Bremen (Germany) represented a piece-meal or a whole school approach to multicultural education. The qualitative case study was conducted at the Brecht Schule in Bremen comprising learners from over 32 countries. The data collection strategies included observation of lessons and the school environment, in depth interviews with the principal and 10 teachers and the administration of open ended questionnaires among 200 learners. The findings revealed that although the school needed to include more teachers from other ethnic backgrounds and that the teachers were sceptical about aspects of the curricular and their ability to assist learners with psychological and emotional challenges, the school was adopting major features of the whole school approach in its quest to make provision for a diverse learner population.

### INTRODUCTION

During the first decade of Turkish immigration to Germany little was done to make provision for the non-German population in the educational system as the immigrants were regarded as temporary labourers who would return to Turkey (Gaebel 2011: 6). Guest worker children and their educational needs were addressed through policies of assimilation called *Auslanderpädagogik* ('foreigner pedagogy'). These policies were similar to those of special needs education and enabled schools to have non-integrated classrooms. Faas (2008) asserts that the 'disability' of these children was that they could not speak German which meant they could not follow the German educational system.

The deficit model on which immigrant education was built remained one where the deficiencies which guest worker children had could only be overcome through *Auslanderpädagogik* that, according to Auerhimer (2006: 76) allowed "the monocultural and monolingual identity of

German schools [to] remain untouched". Although the policies for non-Germans associated with the *Auslanderpädagogik* in the educational system were common during the 1970s there were politicians and organisations that recognised the need for reform (Gaebel 2011).

In the 1980s, however, government officials and educators increasingly shunned the *Auslanderpädagogik*, recognising that the deficit-oriented and assimilationist philosophies were inadequate. Instead as pointed out by Gaebel (2011) intercultural education, Germany's form of multicultural education, was introduced and persisted throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This philosophy of education attempted to "address all children in order to prepare them for a life in a culturally diverse society, trie[d] to establish cultural identity, guarantee[d] mother-tongue teaching and modifie[d] curricular towards a multicultural representation of values" (Hoff, in Faas 2008: 110).

However, according to Faas (2008), schools in the past decade have received mixed messages from the government with regard to multicultural education. He contends that although at the national level, efforts to support cultural diversity are reflected in the 2000 citizenship laws and the 2006 anti-discrimination law, the local levels of education still privilege a European agenda over a multicultural approach in the curriculum. In many states, multicultural education

---

*Address for correspondence:*  
Logamurthie Athiemoolam  
19 Crossandra Street,  
Malabar,  
Port Elizabeth,  
6020 South Africa  
*Telephone:* +27/41/4575519  
*E-mail:* logamurthie.athiemoolam@nmmu.ac.za

remains Eurocentric, with a specific focus on EU countries and Germany's identity within the European community, with little attention being given to immigrants within the German context (Faas 2008).

It is with this background in mind that the paper proposes to examine the strategies adopted by the most multi-ethnic school in Bremen (Germany) henceforth referred to as the Brecht Schule to address the needs of a diverse learner population. The research question for the purposes of this article is: *What strategies does the Brecht Schule adopt to cater for the needs of their multi-ethnic learner population and what is the measure of their success?*

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework aims to use the tenets of multicultural education as proposed by Nieto (2002), Bennett (1995) and Banks (1995) as the foundation from which to examine the extent to which the Brecht Schule had adopted multicultural educational principles to cater for its extensively diverse learner population.

Nieto's (2002: 29) definition of multicultural education entails transforming the entire school by challenging and rejecting racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society, accepting and affirming pluralism on all levels that is ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic and gender and instructional strategies as well as the interaction among teachers, students and families and the way that schools conceptualise the nature of teaching and learning.

Bennett (1995: 13) describes multicultural education as an approach to teaching and learning that is based upon democratic values and beliefs and that seeks to foster cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies and an interdependent world. The 4 dimensions identified by Bennett include the movement toward equity, the multicultural curriculum approach, the process of becoming multicultural and the commitment to combat prejudice and discrimination.

For the school to be regarded as multicultural according to Banks (1995), it must articulate the following 5 dimensions namely content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, an empowering school culture and social structure. The various dimensions proposed by the 3 theorists in-

dicating that for schools to be truly multicultural in nature, they need to adopt the whole school approach to multicultural education. This article proposes to examine the extent to which the Brecht Schule has adopted principles synonymous with the whole school approach to multicultural education as proposed by Nieto (2002), Bennett (1995) and Banks (1995).

The literature review that follows will provide an overview of the various approaches that schools may choose to adopt when their learner population becomes culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse.

### Literature Review

#### *Approaches to the Desegregation of Schools*

The transformation of mono-cultural schools into multicultural ones means that schools have to meet the challenges and demands of the transformed school if they hope to become successful multicultural centres of learning. While some schools, however, make concerted efforts to rise to these challenges, others merely adopt policies which would enable them to bring about the minimum of changes to their learning environments.

On the basis of a study by Bennett (1995) and the research conducted by Sagar and Schofield (in Maehr and Bartz 1984) and Pettigrew (1973) in the field of desegregated schools, there appears to be three predominant approaches adopted by schools to adapt to their changing learning environments. These approaches are namely assimilation, pluralistic co-existence and integrated pluralism.

Giddens (1989: 735) defines assimilation as "the acceptance of a minority group by a majority population in which the minority group takes over the values and norms of the dominant culture". The implication is that the minority passivity changes while the majority holds the power of tolerance or rejection, ultimately demonstrating acceptance of the assimilated minority. This approach leads to dissatisfaction among minority groups since, according to Dekker and Lemmer (1993: 38), they are excluded from social structures and social and economic mobility are difficult to achieve. Assimilationist ideology according to Sagar and Schofield (in Maehr and Bartz 1984) holds that integration will have been achieved when the minority group can no long-

er be different from the white majority in terms of economic status, education or access to social institutions and their benefits. This will be accomplished by fostering a colour-blind attitude where prejudice once reigned. Stated in its boldest form, the assimilationist charge to the schools is to make minority children more like white children. Bennett (1995) contends that this response is often based on the erroneous assumption that to recognise race is to be racist. However well-meaning, such an approach leads to the labelling of some as 'disadvantaged', and reinforces notions of certain groups as inferior (Verma and Ashworth 1986:6). The adoption of a colour blind approach as highlighted by Lemmer et al. (2012) inhibits schools from identifying the opportunities inherent in a diverse school community which limits their ability to provide effective education for all learners.

Compatible with the assimilationist approach to desegregation is the 'business as usual' approach which Sagar and Schofield (in Maehr and Bartz 1984: 208) describe as the adoption of the same basic curriculum, the same academic standards and the same teaching methods that prevailed under segregation. In such schools the learners are expected to adjust to the school and not the other way around. Bennett (1995: 25) asserts that this type of response does not consider whether old rules or procedures are desirable when the nature of the learner population has changed.

Pluralistic co-existence which is based on the separation of different racial or ethnic groups, allows learners to maintain different styles and values, but within a school environment characterised by separate turfs for different racial groups. Bennett (1995) maintains that there are typically different schools within a school and little or no attempt is made to encourage the learners to mix. Sagar and Schofield (in Maehr and Bartz 1984: 221), in their research on desegregation in schools, cited an example where a principal tolerated almost complete informal re-segregation of the learners to the point where there were considered to be 'two schools within one school'.

Integrated pluralism on the other hand as pointed out by Sagar and Schofield (in Maehr and Bartz 1984) affirms the equal value of the school's various ethnic groups, encouraging their participation, not on majority-defined terms, but in an evolving system which reflects the

contributions of all the groups. According to Bennett (1985) a policy consistent with integrated pluralism has the best potential for encouraging good race relations, academic achievement and personal development among learners. Compatible with integrated pluralism is the whole school approach to multicultural education which adapts the instructional programme, learning content, teaching strategies, learning styles, assessment and environment to cater for a diverse learner population (Dekker and Lemmer 1993). The study proposes to examine which of the approaches highlighted above predominate in the Brecht Schule.

## METHODOLOGY

### Qualitative Case Study Approach

This study focused on the qualitative research tradition of a case study where an in depth analysis of the case in this instance a multi-ethnic secondary school consisting of learners from 32 countries in Bremen (Germany) was done objectively. The aim of using the case study approach was to gain a "rich detailed understanding of the case by examining aspects of it in detail" (Thomas 2009: 115).

Merriam (1988: 7) defines a case study as an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a programme, an event, a person, a process, an institution or a social group. The aim of the qualitative case study was to gain insight, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing. In the context of this study it could thus be defined as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single phenomenon or entity, namely the practices and approaches adopted by a multi-ethnic secondary school in Bremen (Germany).

### Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised the principal, staff and learners from the most multi-ethnic secondary school in Bremen (Germany) which will be referred to as the Brecht Schule for ethical reasons to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The school was purposively selected as it is the most multi-ethnic school in Bremen and the participants representing staff, the principal and learners were also purposively selected as they could provide the in depth rich thick data for the purposes of this investigation.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the principal, 10 teachers selected purposively, observation and the administration of open ended questionnaires amongst 100 grade 10 and 100 grade 11 learners. Grades 10 and 11 learners were selected as they had been at the school for a longer period of time and were furthermore also better able to articulate their experiences.

### Data Collection Strategies

Semi-structured interviews were conducted through the medium of German with the principal and the 10 purposively selected teachers in the respective schools and were tape recorded for further analysis and investigation. Informal discussions and interviews were also conducted with learners in the corridors, their classes and on the school's playground. The interview questions for the teachers and principal focused on whether they experienced problems teaching in a multi-ethnic school and the extent to which they were able to resolve these problems, the inter-ethnic relationships between learners both within and outside the classroom, their intervention strategies to cater for diversity in their classes and school, what the school is doing to address diversity and what the school still needs to do to cater for greater diversity, the extent to which they believed that the school was a good example of a multi-ethnic school.

A cross section of 100 grade 10 and 100 grade 11 learners filled out open ended questionnaires to establish what their impressions were of their multi-ethnic learning environment. The open ended questions which consisted of 6 questions, focused on whether learners experienced any challenges attending a multi-ethnic school, the programmes that the school implemented to cater for the diverse needs of the learners, what they liked and did not like about their school, the extent to which they believed that their school was a good example of a school where learners from different cultural and linguistic groups could work and learn together and their overall impression of their multi-ethnic learning environment.

Observation involved observing the inter-ethnic relationships among learners and teachers, teachers' attitudes towards ethnic learners in the classroom, teachers' approaches to teaching in multicultural contexts and the school's

approaches to dealing with a diverse learner population.

### Validity and Reliability

Validity was achieved by means of triangulation since the study involved the use of multiple sources of data collection. For the purposes of this investigation, triangulation involved interviews with the principal of a multi-ethnic secondary school in Bremen (Germany), observation of lessons and inter-ethnic relationships among and pupils and teachers and the administration of questionnaires among the aforementioned groups. Reliability was achieved by means of member checking of tape recorded transcripts by returning the written transcripts to the interviewees for verification of the data and to establish whether the results obtained were plausible.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis focused on descriptions, themes and assertions and on inductive reasoning, which involved making observations, finding information and drawing conclusions.

The evaluation of the data aimed to provide personal information on the dynamics of the Brecht Schule in terms of the strategies and approaches adopted to accommodate a diverse student body and on participants' perceptions of their outcomes and impact. The techniques employed in the qualitative approach, as mentioned above, ensured that the data collected was information rich in character and quality. Categories emerged from the informants rather than being identified *a priori* by the researcher. The emergence of these categories provided rich "context-bound" information leading to patterns or theories that helped explain a phenomenon (De Vos 2005: 338). Themes were identified from the 'rich thick data' and analysed qualitatively.

### Background to the School

The school identified for the purposes of an in depth case study was the Brecht Schule (*nom du plume*) in Bremen. This school was selected because it had a diverse population representing learners from both Germany and 32 other countries. The Brecht Schule is situated in a multicultural working class neighbourhood in

Bremen and caters for the needs of learners from about 32 countries. According to the school's recent statistics about 40% of the learners are from other ethnic groups while the remaining 60% are indigenous Germans. Although the school comprises learners from various African, European and Asian countries, the Turkish group constitutes the majority of ethnic learners in the school. Consequently, the school has endeavoured to accommodate Turkish learners by enabling them to study Turkish as a second language and by employing Turkish teachers. Most of the learners in this school are from Gröpelingen and Oslebshausen, which are lower socio-economic areas in Bremen. Consequently, the school has to cope with and address more problems of a socio-economic nature than other schools in the Bremen area.

The school is an example of a semi-comprehensive school, a co-operative but not fully integrated "Gesamtschule" in Germany, since it incorporates Haupt-, Real- and Gymnasium classes. Such semi-comprehensive schools are presently however not a major feature of the school system with most schools still separated according to the school types mentioned above.

### FINDINGS

In the past as pointed out by Ortloff and McCarty (in Wiggan and Hutchison 2009: 81) institutionalised discrimination against non-Germans was based on them not belonging to the German "Volk". This ethno-cultural standard as highlighted by Brubaker (1992) preserved a monocultural German identity that was white, European, German-speaking and Christian, despite a rapid increase in linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic diversity. In spite of these past challenges however, the manifestations of globalisation, the impact of integration policies of the European Union, and the need for population growth have brought about reforms that have redefined Germany as a multicultural nation (Ortloff and McCarty, in Wiggan and Hutchinson 2009: 81).

In his analysis of the programmes implemented in Germany, Lynch (in Banks and Lynch 1986: 136) contended at the time that there was continued and marked inequality of educational opportunity and life chances between indigenous and immigrant populations, with a lack of social and cultural integration of some 'foreigner' groups. Proportional over-representation of

certain foreign pupils, (mainly from Mediterranean countries) in special education, was complemented by the under-representation of these groups in academic, high-status secondary education and a low proportion of foreigners attending preparatory classes, where the education provided, was poor.

In analysing the findings that emerged from this in depth study of a multi-ethnic school in Bremen (Germany) it is evident that some schools such as the Brecht Schule are making an effort to address diversity in their schools in a positive and creative manner. Prior to 1982 as pointed out by Lynch in his research in Germany (in Banks and Lynch 1986: 136) proposals for making intercultural experiences an issue and topic of learners' everyday learning, and extending intercultural experiences to all children, foreign and German, received virtually no attention.

### The Classes and Buildings

Although the school was over 80 years old, it was well maintained and made provision for both the academic and extracurricular activities of learners. Extracurricular activities included sports, music and community projects. In the music classes learners were encouraged to play a range of musical instruments representing various cultures of the world and also to sing songs which were representative of the ethnic groups of which the school comprised.

The classrooms were very neat and there were a range of charts and pictures representing various cultural groups on the walls. A number of classes also had profiles of the learners in a particular class, which provided the visitor with background information relating to the various ethnic groups in the class. This information referred to languages spoken, food, cultural background and countries of origin. An analysis of the information in the respective classes was indicative of the range of countries and cultural backgrounds, which many of the learners in the school represented.

In all the classes learners had access to maps and atlases, which enabled them to trace the origin of some of the learners in their classes and provided them with a better background to the world at large. The school's cafeteria catered for the needs of both Muslim and non-Muslim learners. The school also aimed to make provision for certain learners from lower socio-economic

conomic backgrounds by providing them with meals after school and making arrangements for them to remain in school while a teacher supervised their homework and assisted them with their emotional problems. This building also comprised a lounge where learners could wait for their parents until they were able to fetch them after work.

### **Inter-ethnic Relationships among Learners**

The learner friendship groups in this school were very multi-ethnic and heterogeneous. While conducting observation sessions I noticed that the learners from the various ethnic groups communicated well with each other both in and outside the classrooms. The degree of mixing among the groups during break times was also quite conspicuous, since most of the friendship groups or 'cliques' were also mixed.

During visits to the Real-, Haupt- and Gymnasium classes, it was evident that learners from the various ethnic groups were able to co-operate with each other effectively in the execution of group activities and tasks. The positive inter-ethnic relationships among the learners was corroborated by their questionnaire responses in which all respondents, representing various ethnic groups, indicated that they did not experience problems working or associating with learners from other ethnic groups. In informal discussions with the learners as well it emerged that they were very proud of their school and contended that it was a good example of a school where learners from various ethnic groups could work together harmoniously.

### **Teachers' Viewpoints on Their Experiences at Brecht Schule**

The Brecht school comprised 65 teachers predominantly of German descent of whom only two had less than 10 years of teaching experience. The average years of service for teachers in this school represented about 20. Teachers adopted positive attitudes towards learners in their multicultural classes and were friendly towards learners both in and outside the classroom.

Interviews with teachers revealed that 8 of them had been teaching at the school for over 20 years and were committed to their school and serving this community. The common viewpoint

was that they enjoyed teaching in this school because of the multicultural learning environment and also because of the contributions which they were able to make to the community and society at large. The view expressed was that although there were no major inter-ethnic clashes in school and that the various ethnic groups were able to co-operate with each other, the school had to contend with social problems which emanated from the community.

Since most of the pupils were from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the teachers had to contend with unemployed and single parents and there were also conflicts in the community among the various ethnic groups. At least 5 of the teachers mentioned during the interview that assisting some of the learners who experienced psychological problems was challenging as they did not have adequate experience to assist learners who exhibited aggressive behaviour or who suffered from depression. They contended that the school required psychological services and an adequately trained counsellor to assist learners with their psychological and emotional challenges.

Some teachers were sceptical about the German as a foreign language Programme (VOK: Vorbereitungskurs) which aimed to meet the language needs of learners who were mainly refugees attending the school from other countries especially Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries. Those teachers who were involved in the teaching of German as a foreign language felt that they lacked the skills to teach the language at this level as they were not trained in the teaching of German as a foreign or even a second language during the course of their professional training at university. In this sense they do not always feel competent to assist learners who struggle to communicate through the medium of German. One of the teachers articulated her views as follows:

*Ethnic minority learners need to be taught by teachers with adequate expertise in addressing their respective language needs, since we cannot teach them how to be part of German society if the learners do not even have a basic knowledge of the German language to participate in it.*

At least two of the teachers felt that for the non-German learners to function effectively in German society they would need to have a working knowledge of the language and culture. One

of the teachers in this regard, Teacher Y emphasised that the school should make a concerted effort to prepare non-German learners to function in German society by creating ample opportunities for them to engage with German language, art, music and literature. In this way they will be better prepared to function in German society.

The interviewed teachers also indicated that at the time when they completed their teacher training programme at universities, they were not trained to teach learners from diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. One teacher contended that the experience that she now has in working with learners from other ethnic backgrounds was gained after much turmoil, challenges and by trial and error. She felt that even currently universities were not doing enough to empower prospective teachers with the necessary skills to work in multicultural learning contexts. The isolated course on intercultural pedagogics was not adequate to prepare teachers to function in diverse learning environments.

In spite of the challenges highlighted by some of the interviewees, the teachers were satisfied that the school was making a concerted effort to promote greater school/community cooperation by involving the community to participate in the many projects that it undertakes.

The only non-indigenous German teacher at the school from a Turkish background, who had been teaching at the school for the past 5 months, described her experiences as follows:

*I don't experience any major problems teaching in this school and I have a good relationship with the principal and my colleagues. The school is really doing its utmost in order to accommodate diversity and to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of all the pupils in the school as a whole. Indeed the mere fact that Turkish is being offered as a language at the school indicates that the school is serious about multiculturalism. Most schools in Germany tend to focus on the assimilation of pupils into their schools.*

In reflecting on the content and the material that she covered in her classes, she was sceptical about the content in textbooks and the curriculum in that she felt that it tended to be slanted more towards the German culture at the expense of others. According to her, in spite of an attempt to include non-Germans in social sci-

ences textbooks and to focus on new topics that were more multi-ethnic in nature, textbooks were still more Eurocentric in nature. She further indicated that in textbooks where the non-German is included, he/she is still represented as a foreigner trying to come to terms with his/her experiences in an alien environment. For the most part the ethnic minority youngsters are depicted as youth who have to live between two worlds. The Turkish teacher also felt that a more concerted effort needed to be made to employ teachers from other ethnic backgrounds rather than only employing indigenous German teachers.

Most of the teachers indicated that although they would like to cover more multicultural issues and themes in their classes, they were constrained from doing so due to a lack of resources and the expectations to cover prescribed material that could not be regarded as multicultural but rather reflective of the majority culture, namely the German culture and language.

Whilst some teachers felt that ethnic minority learners should master the German language to function successfully in German, others were more accommodating of linguistic and religious diversity. Teacher Z for example articulated her views on the latter issues as follows:

*There are many different cultures, beliefs and languages and we must learn to appreciate all of them because that is what makes the world interesting. Languages may sound different from ours and beliefs may be different but that does not mean that they are inferior to ours or of less importance.*

Bennett (1995: 13) articulates this viewpoint succinctly with her contention that since multicultural education is an approach to teaching and learning that is based upon democratic values and beliefs, it seeks to foster cultural pluralism within culturally diverse societies and an interdependent world.

In an interview with a more engaged teacher namely Renate X, the co-ordinator of many multicultural projects in the school, it was evident that some teachers were doing their utmost to ensure that the school gave recognition to its multicultural learner population. Renate X informed me that at present the school could be regarded as a good example of a multicultural school that other schools could emulate because of the collective efforts of the principal, staff and learners of the school. When she started her teaching career in 1966, she was not trained

to teach in multicultural learning environments because, at the time, Germany was not as multicultural as it is today. She indicated that the methods and approaches to teaching that she adopted earlier in her teaching career were very different from the approaches that she adopted today. In her quest to solve the problems which she experienced initially in multicultural classes, she sought to find out as much as possible on multicultural education and approached people who were able to provide her with the assistance that she required.

In response to a question relating to why she took the initiative to change her approach, since she could have continued with her old methods of teaching, she expressed her viewpoint as follows:

*I became disillusioned with my teaching because I could not cope initially with the changing learning environment. I didn't have any chance to teach properly since the distance between me and my learners seemed to grow bigger and bigger. I then realised if I could change my attitude and teaching strategies then they would change their attitudes towards me and this is what I did.*

Another reason why she needed to change was because she realised that the roles of teachers in Turkish and Russian schools were different from those in German ones. She furthermore needed to change her methods and approaches to teaching so that it would take into account the needs of all the learners in her classroom and indeed in the school as a whole. This entailed greater use of co-operative learning to facilitate inter-ethnic communication on a range of topics and issues. She also dedicated more time to her learners by discussing their personal problems and issues during the break times. She discovered that if she was able to develop close relationships with the learners by establishing what their problems were and why they reacted in the ways that they did in the classroom, and then she would be better equipped to teach them in the class. She summed up this viewpoint as follows:

*It is only when one is able to sort out the learner's behavioural, emotional or psychological problems that one will be able to teach effectively in the classroom.*

She also changed her teaching material and adapted the curriculum so that her teaching would take into account the needs of all the learners in her classes, not only the needs of the indigenous German learners. One of her best

projects was one entitled 'Andere Länder, andere Kulturen – eine Welt', because it enabled teachers and learners alike to build bridges across the various cultural groups. Although she indicated that the inter-ethnic relationships in the school were good at present, she admitted that there were conflicts among the ethnic groups in the community. To this end the school had arranged the afternoon support centre where learners were assisted with their homework and provided with a meal. This also afforded members of the community the opportunity of meeting other parents in the afternoon when they came to fetch their children after work.

The pedagogy that Renate X espouses is a multicultural one since it, as pointed out by Wink (1997: 147), successfully balances a 'caring heart with critical eyes.' Renate was able to change the nature of the teaching/learning dynamic and the climate in which education takes place since as suggested by Nieto (2010: 192) such teachers begin by first learning about their students and then build on their students' talents. In this sense then teachers like Renate X perceive learners as active, engaged and co-constructors of learning.

### **The Principal's Approach**

The principal adopted an 'open door' policy in attempting to meet the needs of a multicultural learner population. He discovered that this policy worked for the school in that problems could be solved amicably in an open environment. According to the principal when he was appointed about 12 years ago, the school was in a very bad state of disrepair and there were major inter-ethnic clashes on the school's premises. However, the school had been transformed over the years into a relatively good one with few inter-ethnic clashes. He attributed the school's success to the dedicated teachers and the school's ability to adapt to the changed demographics by adopting a more integrated approach. The school did not merely expect the ethnic learners to adapt to the school, but aimed to adapt the learning environment to meet the needs of the multicultural learner population as well.

### **The School's Approaches to Address Diversity**

An important mission of the school was to empower all learners with skills so that they could become successful members of society. Fur-



thermore, the school aimed to make all learners proud of their own cultures while simultaneously being appreciative and accepting of the other cultures that constituted the school as a whole.

The principal contended that since the school was situated in a lower socio-economic area, it had to assist learners with their personal and emotional problems. He described the school's special focus as follows:

*Our special focus is on the integration of the socially disadvantaged groups, many of whom represent ethnic minority groups from various countries. A typical example of a disadvantage experienced by our ethnic learners is that they are living between two cultures which could create tension in their lives.*

He indicated, however, that since the teachers were fully aware of the socio-economic problems experienced by the learners they were very sympathetic to their needs and had a good understanding of the challenges which the learners were confronted with on a daily basis.

In an attempt to achieve the school's goals of ensuring a better learning environment for all learners, it adopted new approaches of teaching and learning and novel ways of doing things. The school was open in the afternoon, like a second home where teachers, learners and social workers could meet each other in a relaxed environment. The school did not only offer games, sport and cultural activities, but also assisted learners with their homework and aimed to improve their German usage. A group of learners organised activities for all the learners in the school during the school breaks, while the 'Schulfonds Association', which comprised parents, managed and administered the cafeteria.

The field of prevocational and polytechnical learning was a core of the school's programme. This was achieved by, among others, adopting an inter-disciplinary approach in project orientated disciplines like technical and textile studies, home economics and career guidance. In the gymnasium, economics formed part of the social and science subjects. The school also offered learning projects where learners could select a learning area, which was offered, organised and co-ordinated in collaboration with experts from outside the school. This is an emancipatory process since students were provided with the freedom to as pointed out by Gay (2000) move beyond the traditional canons of knowledge and explore alternative perspectives and

ways of knowing outside the confines of the classroom. The school aimed to promote awareness of other cultures by its involvement and close association with the ethnological museum in Bremen. One of the projects involved public exhibitions of musical instruments from around the world, jointly co-ordinated by the school and the museum.

In order to enhance multiculturalism, groups of senior learners visited primary schools and made them aware of the games, which children played around the world. The school's ethos was that learners from other countries and cultures should voice themselves on the same level as Germany and enjoy the same credibility so that all learners would be enriched by the myriad of multi-cultural experiences.

The school also had a mobile museum on the history of handicrafts and homemaking of different groups in the Bremen area. Presently the groups of learners were focusing on the daily lives of women during the early centuries and today. These groups of learners were responsible for taking the exhibition to primary schools in order to make the learners aware of the changing role of women in society. Although the school housed all the material for the museum, it worked in close association with the ethnological museum in the execution of its proposed projects and exhibitions. The series of projects mentioned above enable the learners to become more actively involved in shaping their own learning, to find their own voices and to engage in more ways of knowing and thinking (Gay 2000).

The *Weißer Rose Projekt* which had been jointly co-ordinated between members of staff and the learners in the school, aimed to combat racism in both the school and in society at large. According to one of the teachers and co-ordinators of the project:

*One can't fight hatred and racism with the head, one has to fight against it with all one's senses.*

Key features of the *Weißer-Rose-Projekt* which was initiated by the learners and student representative council aimed to initiate action against violence among the youth, racism and xenophobia and to encourage the youth to be actively involved in a range of projects that affect society at large. Recently the school body voted unanimously against racism in their school and declared their school free from racism. It

was with this unanimous backing and support from the student body that they could proudly represent their school at the conference entitled 'Schule ohne Rassisme'.

In the field of prevocational training the school embarked on many projects, which led to joint partnerships between various companies and organisations in the Bremen area and the school. This programme, referred to as the 'Eisbergmodell', enabled the learners to work on projects in conjunction with one of the partner companies and ultimately present their projects to a wider community. It also taught them punctuality, friendliness and good behaviour.

### Learners' Views of the School

The learners' views of the school were gleaned from informal interviews as well as from their questionnaire responses. The learners indicated that their school could be regarded as a good example of a school where learners from various ethnic and linguistic communities were able to work together harmoniously and were accommodating of all the learners, irrespective of ethnic group or religious beliefs. Their responses were corroborated by my own observations of extensive inter-ethnic mixing both in and outside the classroom and by the many 'mixed' friendship groups, which the researcher observed on the school's playground during breaks.

Most learners in responding to a question on what they liked most about their school focused on the good inter-ethnic relationships. This viewpoint was encapsulated effectively by the following response:

*What I like best about the school is that Turks and other cultures work well together with Germans and understand each other.*

Other learners also felt that their teachers were very understanding and accommodating of all the learners in the school, irrespective of ethnic background or language. This viewpoint was summed up as follows by two of the learners:

*The teachers are really very good and we can trust them. They also help us with our homework after school.*

Although the learners were generally satisfied with their teachers and their school, a number of learners indicated in their questionnaire responses that they would like the school to

employ more teachers from other ethnic backgrounds such as Turkish, Russian and Eastern European amongst others.

A summary of some of the most positive features of their school included the range of extra-curricular activities which included karate, basketball and cultural activities extra classes in German for foreigners, pre-vocational training, teaching strategies that enable learners to think critically and to work in groups, the inclusion of subjects like music, art, computers and textiles and good inter-ethnic relationships.

In response to questions relating to what they disliked about their school the respondents from the Brecht Schule identified graffiti, the smoking area, lack of plants and trees and the untidy playground as problematic. Improvements that they wished to see in the school focused on the establishment of football fields, the erection of a bigger hall, new buildings, renovation of school buildings and grounds and improving the environment by planting flowers and having more greenery.

### DISCUSSION

It was evident from the learners' interview responses that the inter-ethnic relationships among the learners in this school were good. This was corroborated by both teachers and the principal of the school during informal interview sessions with them. The good inter-ethnic relationships among the learners could be ascribed to the school's philosophy which focused on character building and co-operative learning. Indeed the many interesting projects undertaken by the school bore testimony to the school's resolve to ensure that learners from all ethnic backgrounds were able to work together harmoniously for the benefit of the school as a whole.

The school's focus on addressing inter-ethnic issues decisively could account for its success in ensuring inter-ethnic co-operation among the various groups in the school. Projects such as the Weiße Rose project which aimed to conscientise learners about injustices and discrimination in society, enabled learners from all ethnic groups to be more proactive when confronted with these problems in school and in society at large. This personal awakening and call to action or what Freire (1971) referred to as conscientization also means learning to work with colleagues in collaborative and supportive

ways, challenging conventional school policies so that they are more equitable and just and working for changes beyond the school. The critical perspective that seemed to permeate the curriculum enabled students to, as described by Nieto (2010: 146), “become instruments of their own learning” and to “use what they learn in productive and critical ways.” It is precisely this ability to reflect critically on their learning that motivated them to initiate the *Weise Rose Project*. They were thus able to use the knowledge to explore the conditions in their lives and designed strategies for changing them (Nieto 2010: 146).

The good inter-ethnic relationships could be ascribed to the school’s resolve to bring the various groups of learners closer together by enabling them to work co-operatively and collaboratively on a variety of projects. According to Nieto (2010), an important goal of multicultural education is to improve race relations and to help all students acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interactions.

In addressing issues relating to a multicultural school body, the school had resorted to a ‘whole school approach’ in order to meet the needs of all the learners in the school. In the Brecht Schule the entire school environment had been adapted to take cognisance of the needs of the diverse learner population and this found its expression in the charts, the types of projects, the teaching strategies and the adaptation of the learning environment. Furthermore, the recognition of Turkish as an important language in the school, the reception classes for non-German speakers and the after-care programme for learners, all formed a significant part of the ‘whole school approach’ to multicultural education. The fact that the school recognises the importance of Turkish is significant especially since the education system in the past as highlighted by Lynch (in Banks and Lynch 1986: 136) marginalised ethnic minority children by neglecting home languages, except for reasons of economic self-interest.

Projects such as the ‘Eisbergmodell’, ‘Andere Länder, andere Kulturen, eine Welt’, ‘Papierfabrik’ and others aimed to provide the learners with diverse experiences aimed at contributing to their self-development and providing them with multiple historical perspectives. The types of projects which the school had embarked on aimed to give credibility to the ethnic minor-

ity learners, rather than assimilating them completely into a German school culture. The school aimed to tap into the ‘funds of knowledge’ provided by the various ethnic learners. Adopting a truly global perspective as demonstrated in the school allows us to view culturally and linguistically students and their parents as resources who provide unparalleled opportunities for advancement and enrichment (Saravia-Shore, in Cole 2008).

Most of the learners in the school had a good understanding of the beliefs and cultures of other ethnic groups which had developed as a result of the inter-cultural projects. Infusing culturally responsive and responsible pedagogy across the curriculum has shown to ensure greater success for every student (Cole 1995).

For learners to develop cross cultural skills in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, teachers must have the attitudes, knowledge and skills to make their classrooms effective learning environments for all learners (Saravia-Shore, in Cole 2008). In the context of the Brecht Schule although some teachers like Renate X made extensive use of co-operative learning, taught from a global perspective and aimed to present the world views of a variety of cultures so that the learners would be enriched by the experiences, others expressed the view that the ethnic minority learners needed to master German so that they could become fully functioning citizens. The latter teachers’ views are more in keeping with an assimilationist ideology rather than an integrated pluralist one. This confirms the findings of Ortloff and McCarty (in Wiggen and Hutchison 2009: 83) who in their study on indigenous German teachers’ perceptions of the good citizen with reference to ethnic minority Germans discovered that teachers, often well intentioned, understood ‘a good foreigner to be an assimilated foreigner’. Their findings also indicated that textbooks and curricular reproduced the white Christian construction of being German. This viewpoint was also clearly articulated by the only non-German teacher in the Brecht Schule who expressed the view that social science textbooks tended to represent ethnic minority learners from a deficit perspective and tended to regard them as outsiders.

According to Mercado (1993) to become a multicultural teacher one needs to become a multicultural person first. For teachers to become multicultural persons they need to learn

more about the students and about the world in general. This can be achieved by “stepping out of one’s own world and learning to understand some of the experiences, values and realities of others” (Mercado 1993: 80). In an analysis of the teachers’ approaches it is evident that a number of them were able to step out of their own worlds and to acquire a better understanding of the learners’ world around them. The hidden curriculum also conveyed to all learners in the school, irrespective of ethnic background, that they were valued, respected and all were able to enjoy the same rights and privileges. This contrasted sharply with the ‘colour blind’ or ‘business as usual’ approaches which conveys to learners through the hidden curriculum, that there is very little room for their languages, cultures and world views in the context of the school as a whole. The disadvantage of the colour blind ideology as suggested by Atwater (2007) is that it inhibits critical thinking on issues relating to race, class and social justice. In this sense then the school and a number of teachers have ventured to challenge the enforced monoculturalism, synonymous with the assimilationist approach, that was a feature of past educational practices in Germany and still adopted by a minority of teachers in the school.

A number of teachers were also sceptical about their training and that of the present generation of teachers in intercultural pedagogics. This viewpoint had already been articulated by Essinger and Ucar (1984) when they were critical of the immature theoretical development of concepts such as intercultural or multicultural education in teacher education which according to them reflected the intellectual conservatism of German teacher education and retarded the development of more pluralist approaches.

An important cornerstone of the ‘whole school approach’ is the creation of a democratic school environment which values all learners, their cultures and the contributions that they are able to make to the school as a whole. In this regard the learners were encouraged to make their own decisions on the projects that they wished to embark on and the autonomy afforded to the SRC enabled it to make independent decisions in a democratic environment with the support of the principal and teachers.

In an analysis of the school’s practices and approaches it is evident that it has adopted some key aspects of the whole school approach to

multicultural education as proposed by Nieto (2002), Banks (1995), Bennett (1995) and Dekker and Lemmer (1993) by addressing issues relating to the curriculum, teaching strategies, knowledge construction and prejudice reduction. By adopting certain features of integrated pluralism as proposed by Sagar and Schoffield (in Maehr and Bartz 1984), Bennett (1985) and others the school had demonstrated that the implementation of such an approach in diverse learning environments leads to improved inter-ethnic relationships, harmonious co-existence and well balanced, motivated teachers and learners.

The fact that a number of teachers were sceptical about the portrayal of foreigners in textbooks and lamented the lack of availability of adequate multicultural educational resources in their school, demonstrates their commitment to ensuring that the voices of all groups are equitably represented in material. In their study on citizenship education by examining various social science textbooks Ortlof and McCarty (2006: 89) contended that a notion of the exotic still tended to underlie chapters on Islam and migration. Thus difference and exclusion still tended to be the primary forces at work in some textbooks. This tends to invoke Banks and Banks (2001) second stage namely ‘Heroes and Holidays’ in curriculum change. The fact that some teachers like Renate X have encouraged learners to embark on projects involving the co-construction of knowledge and linked to community participation resonates more strongly with the curriculum for social action (2001) which is the 4<sup>th</sup> and final stage of curriculum change. In spite of these successes, the school needs to take cognisance of the demographics of its staff and make a concerted attempt to employ more ethnic minority teachers, enhance the intercultural skills of the staff and provide more enhanced counselling services to assist learners with emotional and psychological problems.

According to Gaebel (2011), Germany’s continuing struggle with what rights ‘foreigners’, in particular those of Turkish descent, should be given reveals a country still deeply entrenched within the identity constructions of the past. If continued efforts towards multicultural education (*multikulti*) in Germany are to succeed, it is clear that the German culture must relinquish its hold on the imagined community of the Volk. In order for Germany to leave this behind, they must first as suggested by Oberndorfer (1987: 292)

reject “the premises of its ideological justification” and take up “full engagement in a republican constitutional praxis”.

### CONCLUSION

This paper provided an in depth analysis and background to a multi-ethnic school namely the Brecht Schule in Germany which aimed to embody the principles of multicultural education and the whole school approach in its philosophy and approach. The Brecht Schule focused on a number of key areas in its quest to address issues relating to meeting the needs of a diverse learner population. In the range of projects that it undertook and in its methods and approaches it aimed to make all learners feel valued by creating a school environment which was nurturing and which promoted multicultural perspectives of reality. However, although the school has adopted a more integrated pluralistic approach to the integration of minority learners, which has the best potential for facilitating teaching and learning, there are challenges relating to the teachers perceived lack of skills in teaching German as a foreign language and multicultural education as well as their lack of skills to provide psychological support to learners with personal and emotional problems. Another area of concern that the school needs to focus on is the establishment of a more multi-ethnic staff complement, which is lacking at present.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Appointment of Multicultural Staff

Presently there is only one non-German member of staff out of a staff of 65 members. Both the Turkish teacher and the learners felt that the school needed to make a concerted effort to employ more teachers from other ethnic backgrounds as this will further contribute to the multicultural ethos of the school. In order to realise the goal of creating a multicultural staff the school could work more closely with universities in both Bremen and Oldenburg to identify young teachers from other ethnic backgrounds who could be placed at the school for teaching practice. The school could also work with the Ministry of Education to ensure that qualified teachers from other ethnic backgrounds are placed at the school. The school thus needs to

do much more to ensure that the staff is more multicultural and representative of the multi-ethnic learner population. This is of paramount importance since it is crucial for learners from other ethnic backgrounds to have role models from their own ethnic backgrounds if they are to rise above their present circumstances. Furthermore, by being taught by members from their own ethnic backgrounds, they will realise that they could also pursue careers such as teaching.

#### Psychological Services at School

Since the school is situated in a lower socioeconomic area characterised by single parents, alcoholism and violence, the learners attending the school will also be affected by their experiences outside the school. For these learners to function effectively in the school system it is imperative that the necessary support systems are in place to ensure that they are able to achieve academic success. A number of teachers indicated that since they do not have the relevant training, they are not able to assist learners with their psychological and emotional challenges. It is thus imperative that the school aim to recruit the services of a counsellor and also employ teachers who have specialised in the field of school guidance and counselling. The presence of such skilled members on the staff will enhance the quality of psychological support that the school is able to provide.

#### In Service Training for Teachers

Some teachers were sceptical about the German as a foreign language programme offered by the school due to unqualified staff and their lack of training in such programmes. If the German as a foreign language programme is to be meaningful to both teachers and learners from other ethnic backgrounds then teachers need to receive on going guidance and support from the Ministry of Education. Since teachers feel limited in their capacity to provide meaningful learning experiences to non-indigenous German children in the German language, in-service training in the form of workshops could be held on a regular basis for these teachers. Furthermore universities specialising in teaching training programmes need to ensure that they design programmes and modules that focus on the teaching of German as both a foreign and a second

language, so that the future teachers will acquire the relevant skills in teaching German at the required level.

Some teachers perceived lack of knowledge in multicultural education and their lack of training in the field could be overcome by means of workshops presented at both the school and at universities. It is also imperative for universities to provide more structured programmes in intercultural pedagogics which form a more coherent and meaningful part of teacher training programmes than the piece-meal approach that is currently being adopted.

### **Content and Resources to be More Multicultural in Nature**

Some teachers were critical about the content in textbooks as they felt that it was not multicultural enough and still tended to portray the non-indigenous German learner from a deficit perspective. A few teachers also indicated that multicultural resources were limited in their school. To overcome these challenges teachers should take the initiative to supplement their textbook material with a range of material from various sources that will cater for the needs of a multi-ethnic learner population. Since Renate X, has extensive experience and expertise in the creation of multicultural education resources, the school should encourage her in a more constructive way to present workshops to staff on materials development for multicultural classes.

### **German Classes for Parents**

Although the school is making a concerted effort to ensure greater school/ community relationships there may be a need for the school to present German classes to parents from ethnic backgrounds as well. If parents become more proficient in the language of the school and the country they will be better placed to assist their children with their homework and will feel more confident to play a more constructive role in the school's extra-curricular and engagement activities. The school should conduct a survey to establish which parents would like to attend such classes and then make a concerted effort to implement such classes in the school so that parents are better prepared to make a constructive contribution to the school as a whole.

## **REFERENCES**

- Atwater SA 2007. An investigation of teachers' colour blind racial attitudes and diversity training experiences: Implications for teacher education. *Education and Human Development*, 1(2): 1-15.
- Auernheimer G 2006. The German education system: Dysfunctional for an immigration society. *European Education*, 37(4): 75-89.
- Banks JA 1995. Multicultural education: Historical development, dimension and practice. In: JA Banks, CAM Banks (Eds.): *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*. New York: Macmillan, pp. 3-24.
- Banks JA, Banks CAM 2001. *Handbook of Research in Multicultural Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bennett CI 1995. *Comprehensive Multicultural Education*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Brubaker R 1992. *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press.
- Cole RW 1995. *Educating Everybody's Children: Diverse Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- De Vos AS, Strydom H, Fouche CB, Delpont CSL 2005. *Research at Grassroots*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Pretoria: van Schaik.
- Dekker EI, Lemmer EM 1993. *Critical Issues in Multicultural Education*. Durban: Butterworths.
- Essinger H, Ucar A 1984. *Interkulturelle Erziehung in Theorie und Praxis. Sulzberg*. Allgau: Pädagogischer Verlag Schneider.
- Faas D 2008. From foreigner pedagogy to intercultural education: An analysis of the German responses to diversity and its impact on schools and students. *European Educational Research Journal*, 7(1): 108-123.
- Freire P 1971. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Gabel K 2011. The failed project of multiculturalism: The case of Turkish immigrants and in German education. *The Journal of Multiculturalism in Education*, 7(1): 1-24.
- Gay G 2000. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Giddens A 1989. *Sociology*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Hernandez H 2001. *A Teacher's Guide to Linking Content, Process and Content*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Lemmer EM, Meier C, van Wyk JN 2012. *Multicultural Education: A Manual for the South African Teacher*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Lynch J 1986. Multicultural education in Western Europe. In: JA Banks, J Lynch (Eds.): *Multicultural Education in Western Societies*. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Ltd, pp. 125-152.
- Mercado CI 1993. Caring as empowerment: School collaboration and community agency. *Urban Review*, 25(1): 79-104.
- Merriam SB 1988. *Case Study Research in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Nieto S 2002. *Affirming Diversity: The Socio-political Context of Multicultural Education*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. White Plains, New York: Longman.
- Nieto S 2010. *The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities*. Columbia: Teachers College Press.
- Oberndorfer D 1987. The open republic. In: D Gokurk, D Graming, A Kaes (Eds.): *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration 1955-2005*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 292-293.
- Ortloff DH, McCarty LP 2009. Educating for a multicultural Germany in the global era. In: GA Wigan, CB Hutchison (Eds.): *Global Issues in Education: Pedagogy, Policy, Practice and the Minority Experience*. Plymouth, London: Rowman and Littlefield Education, pp. 81-102.
- Pettigrew T 1973. *The Case for the Racial Integration of the Schools*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh.
- Sagar HA, Schofield JW 1984. Integrating the desegregated school: Problems and possibilities. In: M Maehr, DE Bertz (Eds.): *Advances in Motivation and Achievement*. Greenwich, CT: Jai Press, pp. 208-228.
- Saravia-Shore M 2008. Diverse teaching strategies for diverse learners. In: RW Cole (Ed.): *Educating Everybody's Children: Diverse Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, pp. 41-97.
- Thomas G 2009. *How to do a Research Project*. London: Sage.
- Verma GK, Ashworth B 1986. *Ethnicity and Educational Achievement in British Schools*. London: Macmillan.