DEVELOPING SCHOOL CAPACITY FOR DIVERSITY

Sabine Severiens

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The results of the relevant SIRIUS activities of 2012–14, in combination with a literature review, suggest strategies to address four areas for improvement that will help build schools that are committed to—as well as capable of—furthering the achievement of all their pupils, and reducing the gap between the academic outcomes of immigrants versus the native born. The areas for improvement are language diversity, the learning environment, social psychology and acculturation, and parent and community connections.

The first strategy to improve professional capacity for diversity concerns the formation of professional learning communities where teachers learn together how to utilise diversity to further learning outcomes. The second strategy is to form networks of schools and centres of expertise. The third strategy is to support the development of dedicated teacher training programs. Training programs that take diversity as a starting point and address it from all perspectives prepare teachers to become experts in the topic, capable of supporting students from migrant backgrounds to achieve their full potential.

I.   INTRODUCTION

The European policy network SIRIUS is committed to increasing the educational position of migrant children and decreasing the so-called achievement gap between children from migrant and minority backgrounds versus children from native and/or majority backgrounds.

School quality is at the top of the SIRIUS agenda. Research on education and migration shows that school quality is of great importance for children from migrant backgrounds. In comparison to children from high socioeconomic and majority ethnic/cultural backgrounds, the academic success of migrant children depends more on the quality of schools attended. The SIRIUS commitment to improving the educational position of migrant children therefore means improving the quality of schools themselves. This brief uses the concept of professional capacity to frame SIRIUS's recommendations regarding school quality.

II. SCHOOL CAPACITY

A school's professional capacity is commensurate to the capacity of its teachers, administrators, and other staff. Several variables are taken into consideration when measuring such capacity. What is the quality of the instructors' content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and interpersonal skills? Do administrators maintain ongoing professional development, and give teachers responsibility for changes to the school (a necessary condition for school improvement[1])? Do school staff work together as a cohesive, professional community, focused on the core problems of improving teaching and learning?[2]

As Charles Payne[3] put it: 'Teacher quality matters and matters most to the most disadvantaged schools'. In their review of factors that improve student learning in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, Muijs et al.[4] describe 'learning communities' as groups of teachers and administrators that continuously seek and share learning and act on what they learn. Schools with learning communities ('learning schools') are characterised by reflective dialogue among teachers, who collaborate, take collective responsibility for student learning, and work continuously to improve teaching practices. Muijs et al. argue that learning schools are more effective in encouraging student achievement in disadvantaged areas than are schools where teachers do little to reflect on their practices.

SIRIUS activities in 2012, 2013, and 2014 addressed a variety of topics relevant to professional capacity in schools. Activities included a survey, three peer reviews, a meeting of policymakers on the topic of professional capital, and a meeting for teachers from migrant and minority backgrounds. Combined, the anecdotes and data gleaned from these efforts offer an overview of the state of professional capital in the schools of SIRIUS Member States.

III. IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMMIGRANT CHILDREN: FOUR FUNDAMENTALS

The four fundamental areas for improvement presented below are based on an analysis of relevant SIRIUS activities in 2012–14, as well as on a review of literature on professional capacity and its role in the academic achievement of students with a migrant background.[5]

1. Language diversity. Many children from migrant backgrounds entering the educational system in their new countries have limited language skills in the language of instruction. In order to be successful in school, it is of paramount importance to have good competence in the language of instruction. Teacher expertise in effective ways to address linguistic diversity is key.[6]

2.   *The learning environment.* A commitment to improving outcomes for migrant children and reducing the achievement gap requires a coherent and integrated school policy on dealing with diversity in the learning environment and curriculum. This includes differentiated instructional practices, and teaching materials and assessment methods that are fair and stimulating for all students. It requires teachers to have excellent pedagogical competence and competence in building positive classroom climates.[8]

3.   *Social psychology and acculturation.* Teachers in urban schools need training in the topics of migration, acculturation, social psychology phenomena, and ethnic identity issues relevant to the diverse environments they teach in. Research indicates that teachers are likely to have lower expectations from immigrant children, which in turn lowers these students' self-esteem and perpetuates lower education outcomes.[9] In contrast, those students able to combine the cultures of their origins and new homes (forming a transcultural or 'hyphenated' identity) are often the most successful pupils.[10] Understanding these and other issues relevant to children of immigrants will help teachers better support all students; it will also assist teachers in assessing their students' starting positions and progress. Finally, it will help teachers to develop a positive attitude towards diversity and utilise their students' diversity as a rich source for learning in classrooms.

> **Box 3. Example of ethnic identity issues**
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> A Lithuanian teacher explains the importance of understanding how students' identities are formed:
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> *'We have a problem with our Lithuanian kids, because of the economic situation in our country. Some parents go abroad to work and after a couple of years they come back. If kids had a better life living in, for example, Great Britain, they are not proud being Lithuanians and they come back and they have negative views of Lithuania: "Lithuania is a poor country, I don't want to be Lithuanian". At first when I heard that, I was shocked. Because we were always raised to be proud of being Lithuanian. I was brought up in Soviet Union times. And still we were a country [to] ourselves and not part of the Soviet Union'.*
>
> *Source*: SIRIUS meeting for teachers from migrant backgrounds (2014, Brussels).

> **Box 4. Good practices: Belgium**
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> Belgium has introduced what it calls 'extended' schools. These seek to encompass various domains and fields in the learning environment, among which are health, physical and psychological security, competence development, social participation, and preparation for the future. Extended schools are for all pupils, but focus on issues of diversity (ethno-cultural, religious, linguistic, and so on). An important focus of the project is ensuring equal opportunities for all children and young people, especially the disadvantaged. Part of the project is the professional development of all staff involved, including school staff.
>
> *Source*: SIRIUS survey (2012).

4.   *Parent and community connections.* Urban teachers who succeed in engaging the parents of their diverse pupils—as well as cooperating with community organisations—will further support achievement in their schools. Payne[11] describes connecting with families as one of the most difficult but also one of the most relevant areas of expertise in urban schools that serve pupils from diverse backgrounds. Research clearly shows that parental involvement and academic support, as well as communication between teachers and parents, stimulates children's achievement. Schutz[12] argues in a review on school-community relationships that one way to achieve more sustainable development of schools in poor neighbourhoods is by involving community organisations: 'reforms have to start in and with the community, if they are to have any real hope of long-term success.'

IV.   DEVELOPING CAPACITY IN THE FOUR SUGGESTED AREAS

In order to develop the expertise in the four areas outlined in this brief, SIRIUS recommends implementing three strategies.

1.   *Build professional learning communities that focus on diversity*

Schools with diverse student populations should be

Box 5. Good practices: Greece

Greece has implemented a series of policy measures on school development and teacher training that aim to develop teaching skills, specifically to meet the needs of heterogeneous classrooms. Among these are new teaching methods with a focus on diathematic (cross-subject) teaching and project work. Regional and local seminar workshops for teachers have been held on the particulars of the new approaches. This raises awareness among teachers regarding the needs of students with various social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

Source: SIRIUS survey (2012).

supported to institutionalise principles of collegiality and cooperation in more coherent and focused ways. For example, teachers learn a great deal by cooperating and observing one another's classrooms, and by taking the time to reflect on and improve their practices, with a central focus on student learning. Schools would do well to support teachers in these efforts, thus building professional learning communities (PLCs).

Hargreaves and Fullan[13] describe PLCs as consisting of three elements (1) communities, working in groups with collective responsibility, committed to improvement, respect, and care; (2) a focus on long-term organisational learning instead of quick-fix solutions, alongside a commitment to improving student learning and well-being; and (3) professional improvements and decisions that are informed by (but not dependent on) statistical information, guided by experienced, collective judgment.

In the context of schools with diverse student populations, a focus on student learning implies a focus on diversity. Teachers in PLCs with a focus on diversity learn together about how to utilise this diversity to further learning outcomes. In a collaborative effort, they design differentiated learning materials that are relevant for children from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. A PLC with a focus on diversity also invites teachers to learn to build on the funds of knowledge that their students bring to school (instead of using the 'clean slate' approach).

Aside from building PLCs in individual schools, Hargreaves and Fullan also make a plea for schools to develop as networks of practice. They use the term *co-opetition*: collaborative competition (competition in the spirit of community), with collective responsibility (as teachers learn to identify with all students in the school).

2. Build networks of expertise on diversity

The second strategy to increase professional capacity regarding dealing with diversity is to form networks of schools and centres of expertise. These networks will facilitate understanding of the academic position of migrant children and help improve learning outcomes.

3. Develop teacher training programs dedicated to diversity

The third strategy to build professional capacity in the area of diversity is to support the development of dedicated teacher training programs. Sending out teachers to a one-day course on, for example, migration or discrimination will not help students from migrant backgrounds improve their performance to a significant extent. Teacher training programs that take diversity as a starting point and integrate the topic into the curricula of all courses—and address it from all perspectives—prepare teachers to become experts in the topic, capable of helping students from migrant backgrounds achieve their full potential.

Box 6. Good practices: Germany and Austria

The Mercator Institute's project for 'Language Training and German as a Second Language' was founded in June 2012. The project goals have been to advise regional governments as well as universities on language education, support them in strengthening the development of language skills in teacher training, fund and promote national and practice-oriented research in this field, as well as help form networks and initiate and support qualification measures for key stakeholders in language instruction.

In the Austrian school initiative Interculturality and Multilingualism—An Opportunity, schools are asked to submit proposals in accordance with the principle of 'intercultural education'. (This principle was introduced by the Federal Ministry of Education in the early 1990s.) Since 2006, when the initiative started, more than 500 projects have been supported. The education ministry, in cooperation with teacher training institutes, has organised nationwide seminars with academic inputs, practice-oriented workshops, and set the groundwork for building networks.

Source: SIRIUS survey (2012).

V.   KEY CHALLENGES

The results of the relevant SIRIUS activities of 2012–14, in combination with a literature review, suggest that the implementation of the three strategies outlined will help build schools that are committed to—as well as capable of—furthering the achievement of all their pupils, and reducing the gap between the academic outcomes of immigrants versus the native born. Stakeholder communities, networks, and programs would do well to develop expertise in (1) linguistic diversity, (2) migration and integration, (3) the learning environment, and (4) the creation of open schools that involve parents and communities.

All strategies presuppose a sociopolitical awareness among teachers, school leaders, and policymakers regarding inequality and the specific positions and ethnic/cultural backgrounds of students. The key challenge is to raise these levels of awareness as well as to organise continued attention and action across policy-making levels—resulting in actual school development along the suggested lines. It will continue to be necessary *to promote and enhance the knowledge transfer of stakeholders in order to improve the education of youth from migrant backgrounds,* which is the general mission of SIRIUS.

Box 7. Good practices: The Netherlands

The Erasmus University Rotterdam offers a four-year program specifically aimed to prepare excellent teachers and pedagogues for urban classrooms. The program includes diversity courses (for example 'Child-rearing practices in different migration groups') as well as general educational courses that include diversity topics (for example the course 'Personality development' includes addresses the topic of ethnic identity development).

Source: SIRIUS survey (2012).

ENDNOTES

1   Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan. *Professional capital: transforming teaching in every school* (Oxon: Taylor & Francis, 2012).

2   Penny Bender Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Anthony S. Bryk, John Q. Easton, and Stuart Luppescu, *The Essential Supports for School Improvement* (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2006), https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/essential-supports-school-improvement.

3   Charles Payne, *So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2008).

4   Daniel Muijs, Alma Harris, Christopher Chapman, Louise Stoll, and Jennifer Russ, 'Improving Schools in Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Areas – A Review of Research Evidence', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 15 (2) (2004): 149–75.

5   Sabine Severiens, Rick Wolff, and Sanne van Herpen, 'Teaching for diversity', *European Journal of Teacher Education,* 37 no. 3 (2014): 295-311.

6   See also the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Closing the gap for immigrant students* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2010), www.oecd.org/edu/school/oecdreviewsofmigranteducation-closingthegapforim-migrantstudentspoliciespracticeandperformance.htm.

7   SIRIUS survey: Sabine Severiens and Tom Tudjman, *Professional capital in schools as regards education for migrant children. An exploration of policies in the SIRIUS network countries* (Barcelona: Kit-book, 2013).

8   Elisabeth Cohen and Rachel Lotan, 'Equity in heterogeneous classrooms', in *Handbook for Multicultural Education*, eds. James Banks and Cherry McGee Banks, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 736-50; Geneva Gay, 'Classroom Practices for Teaching Diversity: An Example from Washington State', in *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge*, eds. Tracey Burns and Vanessa Shadoian-Gersing (Paris: OECD, 2010), 257-87; Luis Moll, 'Literacy Research into Communities and Classrooms: A Sociocultural Approach', in *Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Literacy Research*, eds. Richard Beach, Judith Green, and Timothy Shanahan (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1992), 47-73.

9   For example, Jussim and Harber published a review of 35 years of research on teacher expectations in which they found that powerful self-fulfilling prophecies are selective and are more common among groups suffering from stigmatisation, such as immigrant children. See Lee Jussim and Kent Harber, 'Teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies: knowns and unknowns, resolved and unresolved controversies', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 9 no. 2 (2005): 131-55.

10 Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2001).

11 Payne, *So Much Reform, So Little Change*.

12 Aaron Schutz, 'Home Is a Prison in the Global City: The Tragic Failure of School-Based Community Engagement Strategies', *Review of Educational Research* 76 (2006): 691-743.

13 Hargreaves and Fullan, *Professional capital: transforming teaching in every school.*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sabine Severiens is the SIRIUS 'Schooling' work package leader. She is a professor of educational science at Erasmus University Rotterdam as well as at the University of Amsterdam, both in the Netherlands. Her research programme focuses on migration and diversity in education.