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The Internationalization of Teacher Education: Different Contexts, Similar Challenges

Abstract

This is a comparative study focused on the internationalization of teacher education in three countries – Bulgaria, Switzerland, and South Africa. The authors stress on the fact that on the one hand, teacher education is exposed to the increasing imperative to internationalize but on the other hand, teacher education is traditionally to a very large extent nationally shaped. The classical fields of internationalization of teacher education – individual mobility of students and staff, program and provider mobility, internationalization of the curriculum, internationalization of the campus, international cooperation – are used as a basis for constructing the chapter. The authors present these fields in teacher education in Bulgaria, Switzerland, and South Africa. Then, comparing the three different national contexts, some common features, similarities and differences between the countries are analyzed. Finally, the study ends with synthesizing two main challenges that illustrate how an appropriate internationalization of teacher education is still to be developed.

Keywords: Bulgaria, Switzerland, South Africa, internationalization, teacher education, higher education, individual mobility, program mobility, curriculum, campus, international cooperation

Introduction

Even though higher education has always been international in the sense of a transboundary participation in creating and developing universal knowledge, the insistence on the imperative to internationalize higher education has increased drastically (e.g. Stier & Börjesson, 2010). The respective discourse is, meanwhile, omnipresent; and higher education institutions are requested to signpost explicitly their internationalization strategy. It seems as if internationalization had become an end in itself. In this sense, simple indicators for internationalization (such as the number of international students, the number of lecturers with an international track record) have entered higher education rankings and count, therefore, as indicators of quality (Brandenburg & Federkeil, 2007; Scott, 2009). This illustrates that internationalization has indeed become a key issue for higher education institutions. But, it illustrates as well a certain risk of assuming a logic of maximization: the more the better – internationalization as an end in itself.

This latter connotation represents a considerable challenge for teacher education. On the one hand, teacher education in academic contexts is exposed to the increasing imperative to internationalize and is prompted to find appropriate institutional answers. On the other hand, teacher education is conceived as an institutional process of reproducing *national* education systems and has, therefore, a locally oriented mission to qualify teachers for specific national contexts – for national contexts which are strongly locally governed. Therefore, teacher education

is traditionally to a very large extent nationally shaped. Its particular characteristics are influenced by complex configurations of historical, political, social, cultural and educational factors of the respective national context and focus always on own educational needs. Therefore, teacher education supplies a very locally anchored and regulated employment market and serves, in this sense, a very different need than the majority of higher education study programs in, for instance, finance, trade, industry, or technologies.

Between these poles of an increasing imperative for internationalization, on the one hand, and the traditionally strong anchorage in local contexts, on the other hand, teacher education is challenged to develop own ways of an appropriate internationalization. Against this background, the aim of this contribution is to illustrate different ways of developing an appropriate internationalization for teacher education in different contexts. By comparing the cases of Bulgaria, Switzerland and South Africa, it outlines how these different cases respond analogously to the global imperative for internationalization and where they develop different particularities. In doing so, it contributes to a better understanding of how different contexts understand the underlying notions of internationalization and how differently internationalization can be aligned with the nationally bound teacher education systems. In this regard, it takes up the growing evidence on the disparity of concepts, aims, and notions of internationalization in higher education (e.g. Stier, 2010; Stier & Börjesson, 2010; Maringe, Foskett & Woodfield, 2013) and specifies this disparity for the case of teacher education.

Furthermore, by illustrating different ways of developing an appropriate internationalization for teacher education, this contribution counterbalances the risk of assuming a logic of maximization and the connoted commercialism and commodification of international study programs. It rather asks what teacher education hopes to achieve through processes of internationalization and revisits the question of ‘why?’ (Deardorff, 2014, p. 35). Thereby, it turns the focus back to the question of what quality of internationalization can mean in teacher education.

In order to outline three different ways of internationalizing teacher education, this contribution draws on the well-established definition of Jane Knight, conceiving internationalization of higher education as “a process of change through integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension in the goals, functions and delivery of higher education. The suffix ‘isation’ denotes process and differs from an ‘ism’, which suggests an ideology. Thus it is inevitable that internationalisation will continue to evolve” (Knight, 2013, p. 81). Respective trends are sometimes discussed in the framework of the term “globalization of education”. Following Teichler (2007, p. 52), “internationalisation” refers to an increase of transnational, and, in this sense, transborder activities, whereas “globalisation” refers to the process of blurring or dissolving borders. Because the higher education landscapes are still strongly anchored in national regulations, frameworks and paradigms (Scott 2009), the term “internationalisation” seems more appropriate in this context.

In order to illustrate different ways of developing an appropriate internationalization for teacher education in different contexts, it is important to note that the internationalization of teacher education comprises much more than merely being a product or a facet of globalization. In the sense of Knight’s definition, internationalization means the integration of “international, intercultural and global

dimensions in the goals, functions and delivery” (see above) of teacher education. Therefore, the following parts describe how these core dimensions of internationalization are implemented in three different teacher education contexts. For this description, it considers the classical fields of internationalization (Knight, 2012a; Leutwyler, 2013):

- Individual mobility of students and staff: To what extent do students and staff have the opportunity to travel to foreign countries for education purposes and which aims are followed? How is individual mobility structurally embedded in teacher education programs?
- Program and provider mobility: To what extent does teacher education participate in the so called “second generation” of internationalization (Knight, 2014, p. 48)? What kind of twinning or franchise programs are offered? Do they offer any joint or double degrees with international partners? If so, which purposes are followed?
- Internationalization of the curriculum: How are international, intercultural and global dimensions represented in aims and objectives of teacher education study programs?
- Internationalization of the campus: To what extent are the teacher education institutions internationally or interculturally diverse? Is the student corps international or does it reflect the respective diversity of the national school system? To what extent do the lecturers have international experiences?
- International cooperation: What kind of international cooperation is institutionally embedded in teacher education and which aims are followed?

The following parts of this article describe these classical fields of internationalization in the teacher education systems of Bulgaria, Switzerland and South Africa. A subsequent comparison analyses similarities, analogies and differences in these three responses to the imperative for internationalization. A conclusion, finally, summarizes key findings of the comparison and outlines desiderata for the future internationalization of teacher education.

Internationalization of teacher education in three different contexts

Bulgaria

During most of the 19th Century, while being part of the Turkish Empire, Bulgaria did not have its own system of teacher education. Many Bulgarian teachers received their education in France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Russia, Greece. After the Liberation (1878) the newly established school system needed a lot of qualified teachers. As a result of that need the first Bulgarian university, today’s Sofia University, originated as a Higher Pedagogical Course in 1888 in Sofia and quickly developed into a modern European university. Teacher education has been part and parcel of the Bulgarian higher education system since its very beginning. The 1920s and 1930s saw strong German influence on education in Bulgaria. In the years of socialism (1944-1989), dominated by Soviet pedagogy, the internationalization was predominantly kept with other socialist countries. In 1989 the socialist regime collapsed and a new period of deep changes concerning all aspects of life began. Since then Bulgarian higher education and teacher education in particular have largely been opened to the world.

Individual mobility of students and staff

The total number of students in Bulgaria is 284'000, of which 273'000 are Bulgarian students and 11'000 are foreign students (NSI, 2014). Students enrolled in Bachelor and Master's Education programs are 7 to 8%, while PhD students in Education programs are 10% (ib.). About 24'000 Bulgarian students study at universities throughout Europe and the student mobility rate of Bulgaria is 9.0% (Eurostat, 2014). There is no reliable data on the number of Bulgarian students in other continents. According to non-official foreign sources, the total number of Bulgarian students abroad is now around 80'000 (EBBS, 2015).

Bulgarian students and academic staff have large opportunities to travel to foreign countries (mainly EU member states) for educational, research and qualification improvement purposes. Such opportunities are provided by the Ministry of Education and Science and EU exchange programs. The most used programs for student mobility are Erasmus, Erasmus plus, Grundtvig, Explore.

Program and provider mobility

Using Jane Knight's (Knight, 2012b, p. 4) classification of three generations of crossborder education – 1) Student mobility; 2) Program and provider mobility; 3) Education hubs – it can be said that the internationalization of teacher education in Bulgaria is at a very early stage of the second generation – Program and provider mobility. Some twinning Master programs are offered (for example, MA Program "Management of Education in English Language Teaching", jointly run by Sofia University and Amsterdam University). There are also some distance programs at both Bachelor and Master degree with English language instruction.

Internationalization of the curriculum

All Bachelor, Master and PhD Programs (both their curricula and disciplines' syllabuses), including all teacher education programs, are accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Agency at every 3, 4 or 5 years. One of the important criteria is how the given program corresponds to the relevant programs in other EU universities. This accreditation process permanently requires internationalization of curricula and syllabuses.

Student mobility, curriculum equalization and mutual degree recognition are supported by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). This system was introduced in 1999 by the Bologna Declaration, later on was extended to European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System with no change of the abbreviation ECTS.

Internationalization of the campus

There are no separate teacher education institutions in Bulgaria. Teacher education is integrated into the higher education system. Teacher education can be obtained at university faculties of education (this is the most often case) or at teacher colleges which are in some universities' structures (this is much seldom case). Study programs as Preschool and Primary School Education, Sport Education, General Pedagogy, Social Pedagogy, Social Work, and other programs as Social Sciences, Humanities, Natural Sciences, Technologies that prepare subject teachers – are predominantly national. Foreign students prefer to enroll in programs as Special Education, Speech Therapy, Fine Arts Education, Music Education.

There are two major minority groups in Bulgaria – Turks and Roma. While the Turkish minority is very well represented in teacher education programs, the enrolment of Roma students is insufficient.

It is difficult to estimate to what extent the lecturers have international experiences. It depends on the university, personal professional background, knowledge and skills.

International cooperation

The following types of international cooperation are institutionally embedded in teacher education:

- Establishing academic and research networks between Bulgarian and foreign universities;
- Attracting foreign lecturers, external reviewers of academic programs, and experts in international projects;
- Creating new forms of twinning and distance Master and PhD programs;
- Implementing ECTS into a larger and deeper scale;
- Harmonization of higher education legislation, teacher education curriculum and teaching practices with those of EU member states.

Nowadays, the internationalization of teacher education in Bulgaria mainly means Europeanization and particularly – European Unionization.

Switzerland

The Swiss teacher education landscape has undergone a far-reaching reform after the turn of the millennium. This reform, strongly in line with the Bologna framework, resulted in the virtual abolition of more than 150 teacher education seminaries (allocated at higher secondary level; ISCED-level 4) within only a few years and in the nationwide establishment of 15 Universities of Teacher Education up to 2005. Since then, these Universities of Teacher Education are part of the Swiss higher education system and award Bachelor degrees (for pre-primary and primary teacher study programmes) and Master degrees (for lower secondary teacher study programmes). However, the recent history has not yet allowed for a consolidated position of Universities of Teacher Education within the Swiss higher education system. The young Universities of Teacher Education are conceived as different from the traditional universities with their histories of up to 550 years. This can also be seen in the answers to the increasing imperative to internationalize: Swiss teacher education institutions feel still urged to legitimate their status as higher education institutions and use internationalization efforts for this purpose as well (Leutwyler, Mantel & Tremp, 2011). Nevertheless, they are commissioned with a very locally oriented mission to qualify teachers for specific national contexts (see above). The following paragraphs describe how Swiss Universities of Teacher Education deal with these conflicting priorities in the classical fields of internationalization.

Individual mobility of students and staff

Individual mobility is still the most prominent facet of internationalization in the Swiss teacher education landscape. International student mobility is considered as “the most important feature of internationalization of Swiss Universities of Teacher Education” (cohep, 2008, p. 4; translation by the authors). Accordingly, the Universities of Teacher Education promoted these activities; the number of students

participating in an international exchange increased incredible 57% in only three years between the academic years 2008/09 and 2011/12 (cohep, 2013), but remains still far below the share of traditional universities. In Swiss teacher education, the number of outgoing students outreaches the number of incomings by far (ib.). The impact of this individual mobility tends to be overestimated as some stable evidence suggests that not all participants can benefit (see for an overview Leutwyler, 2014). To make use of the potential of such exchange stays, the challenge is to develop a meaningful conceptual and curricular embedding of respective experiences. This challenge implies still a lot of open questions, but it is increasingly addressed by the majority of Swiss Universities of Teacher Education.

Program and provider mobility

This classical field of internationalization is hardly implemented in the Swiss teacher education landscape. Even though, on a global scale, this form of internationalization gains rapidly influence (Knight, 2012a), Swiss teacher education does hardly follow this global trend. This is because the employment market of teachers is largely locally bound. Furthermore, awarding certification as authorization to teach is still nationally regulated. Against this background, issues about brain drain or about an increasing commercialization of program and provider mobility are not under debate in the Swiss teacher education landscape.

Internationalization of the curriculum

In Swiss teacher education, an internationalization of the curriculum has a relatively strong history – even though respective approaches are not labelled as “internationalization”. Indeed, classical expressions of an internationalization – such as courses in Comparative or International Education – do not exist in Swiss teacher education institutions. However, Intercultural Education is well positioned in many Swiss Universities of Teacher Education; and ‘interculturality’ can be read as a pedagogical operationalization of internationalization (Leutwyler, Mantel & Tremp, 2011). Intercultural Education addresses, in this sense, the demands for teachers and schools for dealing productively with an internationalized society in a globalized world. This content-wise translation of internationalization focusses, on the one hand, on dealing with linguistic and cultural diversity in schools. On the other hand, it deals with the challenges of a globally interconnected world, including concepts such as Global Learning, Development Education or Education for Sustainable Development.

Internationalization of the campus

The approaches to make internationalization alive “at home”, on the universities’ own campuses, are not very developed yet in the Swiss teacher education landscape. A respective international or intercultural opening of the faculty or the student body is less pronounced than in other branches of the Swiss higher education system. So, not only the Swiss school system, but also the Swiss teacher education system suffers from a monolingual and monocultural habitus (Gogolin, 1994; Sieber & Bischoff, 2007): Whereas 8.3% of the Swiss teacher education students hold a foreign passport, the foreigners in traditional universities amount to 27.2% (FSO, 2011). Even though the status ‘foreigner’ does not describe sufficiently the linguistic and cultural diversity of the student body, the data

indicates that international and intercultural biographies in teacher education seem to be rather exceptions.

International cooperation

International cooperation is a very general facet of internationalization, including very different approaches, programmes and activities. On the one hand, Swiss Universities of Teacher Education participate in many international research networks and projects and, in doing so, legitimate their integration in the general higher education sector. These research cooperations range from small-scale projects to large-scale assessments (such as the OECD's PISA) whose Swiss parts are implemented by Universities of Teacher Education. However, both the participation rate and the success rate in competitive international funding schemes are clearly lower than those of the traditional universities. This might be read, once again, as a sign that Swiss Universities of Teacher Education are still less internationalized with regard to international cooperation.

On the other hand, the term 'international cooperation' is also expression of a paradigm shift from a classical 'development aid' to a more partner-like approach in so-called development cooperation (Mason, 2011). In this regard, an increasing number of funding schemes for scientific cooperation with partners in developing or transitional countries have emerged. One of these is eligible only for Universities of Teacher Education and focusses on Global Learning and Development Education specifically in Teacher Education (SBE, 2012). In this framework, nine Swiss Universities of Teacher Education have institutionalized so-called North-South partnerships with universities in the Global South and can apply for funding for specific activities with their partners. Respective activities contain the chance to tackle issues and train skills related to globalization, but also the risk of reproducing asymmetrical relationships, feeding unrealistic and non-productive ambitions on the part of the participants, and nourishing postcolonial dynamics (Leutwyler & Lausset, 2016).

South Africa

South Africa occupies 1.2 million square kilometres (471'000 square miles) at the southernmost part of the African continent. The total population of the country is 54 million. Until 1994, the country had a system of racially segregated education, and was cut off from the international world by the international academic boycott (Harricombe & Lancaster, 1995). Both ended in 1994. A new Constitution based on the liberal Western European model was set in place. The new education policy was desegregation, and the international academic community welcomed South Africa once again.

Teachers were originally imported from Europe, mainly England and the Netherlands. During the nineteenth century, a normal school system of teacher education commenced in South Africa; and by the end of the nineteenth century, teacher education colleges came into being. During the twentieth century, the normal schools fell away and a system developed whereby primary school teachers were educated mainly at teacher training colleges and secondary school teachers mainly at universities. By the end of the twentieth century, the teacher colleges were closed, and universities are now tasked with the education of all teachers. There is

currently more or less equilibrium between teacher supply and demand. South Africa has a teacher corps of 410'000.

Individual mobility of students and staff

Since the academic boycott against South Africa has been lifted, a number of Education Faculties has commenced with projects of sending some student teachers for practice teaching abroad, i.e. to schools in countries in Europe, North America and elsewhere in Africa. However, these projects are very small, only a tiny number of students can participate, and in any case, it is only for spells of three weeks. The post-1990 internationalization of the student body of South African universities has not been impressive. In 2012, only 72'859, or 8.3%, of the 880'514 students at South African universities were international students (IEASA, 2014, p. 18). Moreover, 87% of these international students were from Africa (ib., p. 20). Hence, it was more a case of students from the north of South Africa flocked to South Africa (with its by far most developed higher education system in the Sub-Saharan African region), than internationalization in the truly global sense of the word. Staff did not internationalize forcibly either. According to the international CAP (Changing Academic Profession) survey of the academic profession, only 7% and 11% of the academic profession of South Africa got their first degrees and their doctorates from institutions outside South Africa (CAP project, 2013).

Program and provider mobility

While demand exceeds supply in South African higher education by far and although the South African gross higher education enrolment ratio of 17% is extremely low for an upper-middle income country, the private and off-shore campus sector is very, very poorly developed in South Africa. In 2011, 377'000 students in South Africa passed the terminal secondary school examination with grades high enough to qualify for university admission, yet universities could only take in 128'000 students (Cloete & Butler-Adams, 2012, p. 32). In other upper-middle income countries, such as Brazil, Mexico and Malaysia, this figure is typically around 40 percent. Less than 20'000 students attend private universities (Wolhuter, 2011) and off-shore campuses on South African soil are limited to two Australian based universities (Bond & Monash) both fairly small with limited program offerings (mainly in the economic and management sciences), in which education is not included. Though the *Higher Education Act* makes possible the establishment of private universities and offshore campuses, the experience with a few “fly-by-night scams” resulted in government being hostile and setting up a bureaucracy making it devilishly difficult for foreign and private suppliers of universities to open operations in South Africa.

Internationalization of the curricula

In the pre-1994 era, South African teacher education programs at universities followed the (European) continental model, consisting subjects of the basic sub-disciplines of education, such as Philosophy of Education, History of Education, Sociology of Education, Comparative Education. These hooked onto the international corpus of knowledge in each of the fields, although, because of the academic boycott, curricula did not reflect much of post-1960 developments in each sub-discipline. After 1994, at the direction of the Ministry of Education, teacher education programs were redesigned, to train teachers for the following seven

specified roles of teachers: learning facilitator; interpreter and designer of learning programs and material; leader, administrator and manager; community, civil and pastoral role; learner and lifelong researcher; assessor; learning area/subject/phases specialist. These have little international currency, and certainly there are no edifices of scholarly knowledge for any of these to which any teacher program abroad is based upon, and this reform has strengthened the parochial nature of teacher education in South Africa.

Internationalization of the campus

The internationalization of the campus is constrained by the very factors constraining international mobility of staff and students, as outlined above. As far as the intercultural diversity of campuses is concerned, pre-1994 universities in South Africa were, as education at all levels, characterized by segregation, i.e. there were separate universities for students of various racial groups. While desegregation has been one of the cornerstones of post-1994 education policy, desegregation of universities (as desegregation at all levels) was very much a one-direction process, of more affluent and academically stronger Blacks to the campuses of the historically White universities, who now became integrated; while the historically Black universities still have a largely (90% plus) Black student corps.

International cooperation

When the doors to the international community reopened in 1994, and when the outside world and academic community took an interest in the South African project, MOUs (Memoranda of Understanding) were signed between South African universities and foreign universities. Unfortunately, many remained pieces of paper and did not result in many instances of practical cooperation.

Comparison of the different contexts

Having these different contexts in mind, some interesting patterns arise. Therefore, the following part compares the insights in the different contexts with regard to the units of analyses: the individual mobility of students and staff, program and provider mobility, internationalization of the curricula, internationalization of the campus, and international cooperation.

With regard to *individual mobility of students and staff*, comparable patterns arise. In all the mentioned contexts, individual mobility seems to be the cornerstone of internationalization in teacher education. Bulgaria's good embedding within the European mobility programs (such as Erasmus) facilitates the participation of students and staff, although a higher emphasis is led on outgoing than on incoming mobility. This is also the case in Switzerland, where the number of outgoing students outreaches the number of incomings by far. Interestingly, in South Africa, the situation is contrariwise: The general reputation of South Africa's higher education system attracts many regional students also in teacher education; incoming mobility has, therefore, a more important meaning than in the other mentioned contexts.

With regard to *program and provider mobility*, Bulgaria seems to be the only context in which this so-called second generation of internationalization (Knight, 2012b) is addressed in teacher education as well. Neither the Swiss nor the South African system has opened up the teacher education landscape for a supra-national

regulation of teacher licensing. Program and provider mobility, therefore, shows prototypically how teacher education is stronger locally anchored and nationally bound than other parts of higher education (such as economy or engineering).

With regard to the *internationalization of the curricula*, teacher education programs in all mentioned contexts express a form of embedding in international structures. In the Bulgarian case, accreditation checks a content-wise correspondence with relevant programs in other universities of the European Union. And the curriculum is structured along the guidelines of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The latter aspect is valid for the Swiss system as well. The case of South Africa shows how the individual disciplines represented in teacher education programs are internationally oriented – as it is the self-conception of any scholarly discipline. Nevertheless, the redesign of teacher education to prepare for specified roles shows the strong national anchorage and influence – an influence that represents a certain tension with the generally global and international orientation of scholarly disciplines.

With regard to the *internationalization of the campus*, all the mentioned contexts exhibit a predominantly national orientation in teacher education. The campus internationalization in the sense of diversification benefits, if at all, from being embedded in bigger universities with more internationalized branches (in Bulgaria) or from general societal developments (in South Africa). Nevertheless, the tendentially monolingual and monocultural habitus of the teacher education units is clearly detectable in all mentioned contexts.

With regard to *international cooperation*, all the mentioned contexts show how teacher education has conceptualized itself as a scholarly endeavour, striving for possibilities for international cooperation and exchange. However, the Bulgarian example illustrates how international pressure may reduce the noble intentions of scholastic cooperation to a push towards harmonization. And the Swiss and the South African case illustrate the general attempts to internationalize teacher education which result in laudable activities – in activities which remain, nevertheless, below the level of other branches of higher education.

Conclusion

This contribution has shown how three cases, Bulgaria, Switzerland and South Africa, deal with the tension between an increasing imperative for internationalization, on the one hand, and the traditionally strong anchorage in local contexts, on the other hand. Although the contexts are different, the challenges for teacher education remain quite similar.

Firstly, teacher education has conceptualized itself as a scholarly endeavour and has benefitted, in this sense, from the embedding in traditional scholarly institutions. This embedding both claims and supports the efforts towards a comprehensive internationalization of teacher education. Nevertheless, the results of these efforts remain in teacher education below the level of most traditional parts of higher education. The challenges in this regard are twofold: On the one hand, teacher education is prompted to increase international activities of its students and staff as well as of its departments, institutions and curricula. On the other hand, teacher education is prompted to explain why ‘internationalization’ means something different to teacher education than to traditional scholarly disciplines and why,

therefore, expectations should differ in this regard. Teacher education may be a full-fledged part of the higher education system without following the same general, overarching imperative for internationalization. But the argument for this statement is still to be developed by teacher education institutions.

Secondly, teacher education is in all three cases largely nationally bound and supplies a very locally anchored and regulated employment market. This might explain the quasi ‘parochial nature’ of teacher education. However, such a strong national anchorage and influence contradicts the basically global and international orientation of scholarly disciplines. This contradiction results in the challenge for teacher education to maintain its scholarly autonomy and academic freedom on the one hand, and to consider, on the other hand, the specific developmental needs of particular professional communities.

These two challenges illustrate how an appropriate internationalization for teacher education is still to be developed, considering the poles of tension between higher education institutions and local regulations. Thereby, teacher education may benefit from its specific status: It does not have to follow blindly a ‘mainstream-internationalization’ with its trends towards the connoted commercialism and commodification of education (Deardorff, 2014). It can independently revisit the question of ‘why’ (ib.): Which aims and goals, which processes and activities of internationalization improve the quality of the core mission of teacher education? This is a great opportunity for teacher education. However, it has to address it actively and by its own.

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