

Nominee for the Carl Bertelsmann Prize 2008

Education Directorate of the
Canton of Zurich:
Quality in Multicultural Schools
(QUIMS)

Qualität in
multikulturellen Schulen

1. Migration – status and policies in Switzerland

Switzerland has become an immigration country through the past 50 years. Today it is home to a higher proportion of immigrants than classic immigration countries like the US, Canada or Australia. The migration policies of Switzerland have long been characterized by the “guest worker” principle. In that period, integration was never formulated as a political objective. However, contrary to expectations, the majority of immigrants stayed on permanently. Now, for the first time, the Aliens Act (Ausländergesetz, AuG), which came into force January 1, 2008, lays down the principles of a migration and integration policy for all of Switzerland. On the one hand, it confirms the so-called dual admission system, with tighter restrictions on immigration from countries outside the EU. Only limited numbers of well qualified or specialist workers are admitted from those countries. On the other, it introduces active policies to strengthen Switzerland’s integration efforts.

The pattern used to be that most immigrants moved to Switzerland for work or professional reasons. Today, by contrast, the main reason for migration to Switzerland is family reunion. In 2005, about 95,000 individuals migrated to Switzerland. The proportion of immigrants in the total population is about 23.8 percent. At the same time, Switzerland registers the lowest naturalization rate in Europe. Even second- and third-generation descendants of immigrants remain foreign nationals.

2. Education system and policies

The main responsibility for education in Switzerland rests with the cantons and municipalities. Within the municipalities, individual schools have far-reaching autonomy, so that individual school developments are possible. Still, the cantons are responsible for implementing any integration measures.

The Swiss education system comprises pre-schools, primary schools and stage I and stage II secondary schools, as well as tertiary education. The first selection of students for different school types with lower or higher academic aspirations takes

place after only four to six years at primary school, at secondary stage I. In this system, young people of migrant origin are clearly over-represented at schools leading to lower academic qualifications and in classes offering special, remedial lessons.

3. Integration through education

The proportion of young people of migrant origin among the school students in Switzerland has grown markedly in recent years, to just under 24 percent in 2004. The attainment of students of migrant origin lags far behind the performance of their indigenous peers. Even if second-generation migrant students do significantly better than the first generation, there remains a considerable attainment gap in the science subjects and in math and reading.

The activities supporting the integration of students of migrant origin have been intensified since the PISA studies. More than half of the cantons started projects to support or integrate students with foreign native languages. Special emphasis was put on measures aiming to increase the integrative potential of schools or raise the quality of multicultural schools, and on amending or revising the existing curricula.

In 2007, the population of Canton Zurich was 1.3 million, of which about 23 percent were of migrant origin. 21.4 percent of the 231,840 school students of all grades came from a foreign or foreign-language background.

The compulsory Volksschule (elementary school) leading to grade 9 underwent numerous changes since the new Volksschulgesetz (elementary school law) of the Canton came into force on January 1, 2008. Apart from the extension of all-day care and the introduction of integration classes for children with special educational needs, the QUIMS (Quality in Multicultural Schools) program was adopted as part of the legislative framework for education. Thus, within ten years, QUIMS developed from a school trial to a statutory support program for multicultural schools in Canton Zurich. All Volksschulen with at least 40 percent foreign-language or foreign-origin children in their intake now receive additional funds from the Education Directorate, to promote educational success, language skills and integration by specific measures.

4. Principal integrative elements of the QUIMS program

The explicit goal of QUIMS is to reduce inequality in education and integrate all students into their schools. The implementation of QUIMS is intended to start a development process that should not only support children of migrant origin, but generally promote individual learning through inclusive school practices, benefiting all children.

Since the latest development of the program under the new Volksschulgesetz, the schools are committed to three obligatory fields of action for their QUIMS measures:

- *Language support:* Promoting literacy for all students e.g. by language competence assessments, preparation of good reading texts for different language competence levels, and creative work with speech and writing. Further support through integrated “native language and culture” lessons.
- *Attainment support:* Integrative and differentiated learning support e.g. through holistic assessment and guidance, cooperative learning, problem solving assistance, support at school stage transitions by involving parents and mentors, etc.
- *Integration support:* Building a culture of appreciation and equity by introducing rules and rituals, involvement of intercultural mediators, establishment of parent councils, etc.

Each QUIMS school independently determines its focus areas within the three pre-defined fields of action. The measures derived from that are defined, tested and integrated into the respective school program by each school for itself.

Before the QUIMS measures are actually started at a school, the (county) schools commission, as the municipal schools control authority appoints a QUIMS officer proposed by the respective school conference and school management team. This person, be it a teacher or the school principal, must take part in a special certification process carried out by the Pädagogische Hochschule Zurich (Zurich University of Teacher Education). The QUIMS officer is tasked with preparing and coordinating the QUIMS activities for the entire teaching staff. Also, a school team is established to support the acceptance of QUIMS among the teaching staff. Other than that, all QUIMS measures are carried out within the existing structures at the school.

First-time participating schools are given an introduction as well as regular advice and training measures during the first two years. All QUIMS schools benefit from the experience accumulated at the three previous stages of the project. Networking meetings support the knowledge transfer between the schools. Further support is offered in terms of recruitment and placement of partners for QUIMS measures, e.g. intercultural mediators employed by the responsible authority (Volksschulamt) of Canton Zurich.

Contact:

Volksschulamt des Kantons Zürich
Kantonales QUIMS-Team
Walchestrasse 21
8090 Zürich
Switzerland

Phone: +41 (0)43 259 53 61
E-mail: ikp@vsa.zh.ch
Internet:
http://www.volksschulamt.ch/site/index__gast-d-1756-23-1874.html

Status: August 2008