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Welcome of the participants of the GET-IN-Conference in Hannover, 28<sup>th</sup> September 2006

I am Claudia Schanz and I am the advisor for intercultural Education in the Ministry of education in Lower Saxony. It is a pleasure for me to welcome you here today.

It is an honour for us that we are the hosts for this GET-IN-Conference in Hannover. I hope you have some time to visit our interesting and multicultural town too.

For me it is an opportunity to participate and to profit from your experiences and approaches in the field of intercultural education. I hope to get new ideas for our ministry.

Most probably we all agree on one point: that we will have to make great efforts to improve the education of children with migrational background in our multicultural societies.

It is a known fact that youth with a migrational background participate less often in international exchange-programs. But especially for them it is of extreme importance to widen their horizon in contact with young people of other countries. The same applies for schools with a high percentage of students with migrant backgrounds.

In your network-programme you mention the aim of *improving the participation rates of ethnic minority students, especially girls and multicultural issues in exchange-programs*. As far as I know you have succeeded in increasing the number of participating schools in your projects. I am keenly looking forward to the presentation of the schools that will follow after the conference has been declared open.

In my opinion one reaps good harvest when committed people like you with various experiences and from different countries join hands to work on a common field.

But it is not always an easy work: language barriers have to be overcome, intercultural and conceptual conflicts have to be solved with your expert knowledge.

At times you will perhaps feel like the person in this picture:



Or you may feel like Don Quixote, who fights against wind-mills:



The exchange of thoughts across barriers, rising up to challenges, strengthens all who participate in this process and leads to solidarity amongst us and ultimately to a common European consciousness.

We in the ministry of education in Lower Saxony work intensively to improve the education of the children with migrant-backgrounds.

I would like to mention some of our projects:

Before that, however, I would like to describe the socio-political background on which we have to work:

About 27% of all pupils and students have a migrational background. For the youngest children below 10 years of age - the percentage is 30%. This makes it clear that this is not a marginal group as some people still think. These pupils have to be looked upon as an integral part of each school, a normal and permanent part of the

student-community. This is something politicians concerned with education must grasp.

I am not saying that they must be seen as a homogenous group. On the contrary: Each student is different and has to be seen in context of his or her individual needs. Accordingly this development has to be supported. But there is a common background to it, when we go on to improve their situation:

The children, the youth with a migrant background have to be seen in the context of their competences!

Unfortunately we still often see them from the viewpoint of being "people with deficits". This is a viewpoint I would like to call ignorant tolerance, i.e. a tolerance which tends to ignore! This way of thinking must be overcome.

Fortunately after 40 years of immigration politicians have realized that Germany shall permanently remain multicultural and multilingual. Finally a national Program for integration will be moulded. At the beginning of this week I was in Nuremberg at the first meeting for the promotion of language skills.

What does the state of lower Saxony do to improve the participation of migrant children in education?

1. All children have to go through a screening system to examine their competence in the German language, before they start school. They then take part in a language course. Our future aim is to integrate the parents as partners of the school in this process.
2. The promotion of German as a second language has to be continued during the school career.
3. For new immigrants we have special language classes.
4. In the grades 1 to 4 the main language of the immigrants shall be taught to retain their multilingual skills.
5. Lower Saxony has 230 Teachers for the original languages of the bilingual children. These teachers are not only important for the children to help them in their process of a balanced identity. They are also important partners for the parents of the immigrant children.
6. We have about 35 advisors for intercultural education in the state, in various towns. They are linked with each other in their work.

7. We have about 50 Trainers for the Program: "A world of difference". They visit the schools and kindergartens on demand and carry out trainings with the teachers or students as wished by the institution. Most of this work is honorary.

I hope this short description has given you an overall view of our endeavour in this field. In case you are interested I would be happy to give you more information.



Now I wish all participants a fruitful/successful conference. May each of you take something home from this richly set table.

I thank you for your patience and for bearance.