Intercultural Education in Schools – A comparative study

European Parliament
Committee on Culture and Education
Public hearing
“Intercultural Schools”

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Agenda

1- Intercultural educational policy of European Institutions

2- Educational achievement of minorities and migrants

3- Conclusions and policy recommendations
1- Intercultural educational policy of European Institutions

In about thirty years the theory discourse of intercultural education in Europe has evolved:

- From a narrow focus on cultural difference, especially concerning minorities and majorities
  - To a broader perspective including all differences

- From a narrow focus on the education of migrant or minority students
  - To a broader perspective encompassing the whole curriculum for all

- From intercultural education
  - To an education for diversity & citizenship
Diversity: several intersecting lines of difference

- Culture, ethnic background (in some discourses, e.g. in the UK and the USA, „race“
- Language
- Religion
- Gender and sexual orientation
- Ability / disability
- Socio-economic status (rich / poor; more or less educated)

More lines of difference may be relevant depending on the context: age etc. The concept of diversity transcends a narrow and static concept of cultural difference (cf. Dietz, 2007)
1- Intercultural educational policy of European Institutions

Changing priorities

- Intercultural education in Western Europe since the mid-1970s: mostly conceived as a pedagogical reaction to the increasing number of migrants

- In Eastern Europe: mostly concerned with ethnic minorities

- Current state of the theoretical discussion: looking for an educational conception that includes all forms of plurality and diversity; citizenship education in a global perspective

- Transnational similarities or at least convergence
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European institutions and the celebration of diversity

- Council of Europe: pioneer (Micheline Rey, Louis Porcher). Main idea: Migrants and minorities HAVE cultures and languages that must be respected, also cf. UNESCO Recommendation on education for international understanding (1974)

- European Commission - skeptical for many years, but began to use the terms intercultural education, inclusion of diversity and fostering multilingualism from the 1990s on

- The European Parliament promotes the same ideas, namely integration of migrants through schools and multilingual education (for ex. Portas 2005)

- Policy of student mobility and international cooperation: Erasmus, Erasmus mundus, Comenius – based on the ideal of mutual understanding and pursuing the goal of intercultural dialogue.

\[\Rightarrow\] The theoretical discourse and the declared content of European policies are very similar; importance of transnational networks
1- Intercultural educational policy of European Institutions

From a report by the European Parliament

“What is in fact involved is promoting understanding from a crosscultural perspective, this being a building-block of a European identity. Immigrants must not be integrated by erasing differences or obliging them to abandon their native languages and cultures. On the contrary, what enriches us is the incorporation and ‘mixing’ of different roots in a cosmopolitan common heritage. That is why Commissioner Ján Figel was right to say that if there is genuine integration, it will be multilingual. And hence crosscultural, since the result of interaction amounts to much more than the interacting elements added together or lined up side by side.” (Portas 2005)
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How influential are European policies on intercultural education and the celebration of diversity?
gutta cavat lapidem…
1- Intercultural educational policy of European Institutions

Multi-layered gaps

- Between European and national educational policies about intercultural education and diversity

- Between national educational policies (if they are pro intercultural education) and their implementation at the meso and micro level.

- According to Eurydice (2004: 70), most educational systems in Europe offer intercultural education (or similar approaches); this survey is based on the analysis of official policy documents

- But qualitative comparative research shows important differences and even dissociations from European policies
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Different ways of playing out intercultural education or the inclusion of diversity in European educational systems

- Intercultural education or the inclusion of diversity in integrative educational systems (Italy, Sweden)

- Intercultural education or the inclusion of diversity in selective, multi-track educational systems (Germany, Hungary)

- Main focus on migrants (Western Europe) or ethnic minorities (Eastern Europe) de facto in most countries

- Intercultural education as a transversal dimension in intended curricula (Germany)

- Intercultural education is rejected: national / social cohesion, citizenship education / éducation à la citoyenneté in integrative educational systems, but with different priorities concerning the treatment of minority groups (England, France)
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Different strategies between two poles: Universalism vs. particularism

- Universalism: differences are declared as not significant. All individuals and groups are claimed to be treated in the same way, advocating universal values and norms

  ⇝ risk of discrimination

- Particularism: differences are enhanced and declared as very important; cultural, linguistic and religious rights entitle to special treatment

  ⇝ risk of segregation

None of these strategies guarantee equality and equity in education
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2- Educational achievement of minorities and migrants

Regardless of structural conditions, educational systems have a common problem:

- Migrants, ethnic minorities and students born to educated parents have poorer academic achievement. School reproduces social inequality.

- The educational systems of some countries perform better: they achieve better results in their task of schooling migrant and minority students (Stanat / Christensen 2006).

- Risk of increasing neo-assimilationism in national policies: the OECD after PISA analyses encourage national educational policies in their one-sided strategies (L2 only; assimilation)

What role does intercultural education play?
2- Educational achievement of minorities and migrants

Neo-assimilationist policies (OECD) vs. intercultural and diversity policies of European Institutions

In the field of school education, the diversity friendly and intercultural course of European policies is counteracted not only by some national policies, but also by the OECD approaches. Especially since PISA, the OECD has substantially contributed to legitimising host country language–only tendencies at the expense of migration and minority languages and of bilingual education. A neo-assimilationist course is emerging as an opposition to pro-diversity European policies.
2- Educational achievement of minorities and migrants

The interpretation of the PISA-results (OECD 2001) seems to encourage neo-assimilationist tendencies in national educational systems: OECD counteracts European prodiversity policies.
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Fields of action of intercultural education

- Intercultural education, integration of diversity and national cohesion – shifts in national policies
- Integration of minorities and school achievement necessary to reduce social differences and inequality
- Multilingualism, integration of migrants and minorities, a contribution to European integration
- Implementation of intercultural school policies: necessary structural conditions and reforms in member states
- European mobility and exchange programmes: intercultural potential, problems of realisation
3- Conclusions and policy recommendations

Macro level

- Political opinions about intercultural dialogue and about European integration are diverse and controversial, therefore European policies find only partial resonance in national realities.

- This basic condition can at best be changed in a long-term perspective more effective dialogue between European institutions and national governments.

- Better information by European institutions towards member States.
3- Conclusions and policy recommendations

Meso level

a matter of effective educational policy reforms (national, regional, local)

- Monitoring of what is taught in schools; problem of quality control

- School reforms (incl. pre-school) to overcome early and unjust selection and tracking based on social and ethnic origin

- Mobility programmes (Erasmus etc.): better supervision for quality control.
3- Conclusions and policy recommendations

Micro-level

- Qualified early childhood education and care for all (0-6 years of age)

- High quality instruction in L1 and L2: appropriate time-slots and funding, qualified teachers

- Teacher education must explicitly & extensively address intercultural education, inclusiveness, diversity and / or citizenship education

- More research at the micro-level in order to reveal more about what happens in everyday life of schools

- More effective forms of dialogue between research and policymaking

- Dissemination of best practice: responsibility of researchers and local authorities.
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