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INTER NETWORK
Intercultural education. Teacher training and school practice.

State of Innovation on Intercultural Education
-as seen by the members of the Inter Network

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Table of Contents

Our purpose is to transform educational ideas and practices from an intercultural perspective. We agree that current educational systems do not equally benefit all students, and we propose intercultural education as a useful approach to change school and to contribute to transformation of society into a more inclusive and fair one.

We use to start each one of our projects analyzing the previous state of the art, the context of each participant institution and country as well as the needs we are able to identify regarding the implementation of intercultural education. One of the conclusions of these analysis use to point out the fact that we use the same terms but we do not always mean the same ideas; that is to say, that the surface of our common assumptions could hide some disagreements that need to be deeper analyzed.

This is why it was decided that one of the first tasks of the current Network project would be to develop again a State of Innovation. The team that overtook the coordination of this task decided to start analyzing partner's ideas within the INTER Network. This Report shows the results of this analysis.

The original INTER Network proposal deal with four different dimensions on Intercultural Education that constitute the structure of our common work:
- theoretical foundations
- teacher training
- school practices
- resources and communication.

In order to find out what Intercultural Education means for different partners and also to benefit from each other ideas, we thought that a questionnaire could be a useful tool to gather opinions in a short time from such a wide and scattered group.

Our intention was to get answers from a personal (instead of an institutional) point of view and along three different lines: ideas on the topic, analysis of the own context (defined by each partner on a professional, national, European or whatever other basis), and the distance between both, the ideas and the context. Asking about gaps we tried to clarify and refine the limits of our agreements and to point out our major disagreements on what partners think Intercultural Education is, how it should be implemented and which are the main difficulties we find on putting our ideas into practice.

We included the following guidelines to fill in the questionnaire:

We expect that you answer from your own perspective, giving us few and significant references only when you think they are necessary

We don't want long answers but meaningful ones, so please take your time to think about them

When we ask about the context we expect you to talk about what you know / work / are interested in, and it should not be only focused on your national context; remember this is a European network and we need to offer a global perspective

The final questions were as follows:

Regarding **Theoretical Foundations** we asked:

-What do you think Intercultural Education is?

-Is it different from how is it used in your context?

-Please, give us five meaningful theoretical references and tell us why do you choose them

About **Teacher Training** we wanted to know:

-Competences and skills an Intercultural teacher should have

-Programs in Intercultural Education you are aware of

-Needs or gaps you see in this area

-Further comments and suggestions to improve Intercultural Education

On **School Practices** we tried to find out:

-Practices you know which follow Intercultural Education perspective

-Gaps between Theory and practice (including Teacher Training Programs)

And finally we intend to know about **Resources and Communication**:

-Resources you are aware of following an Intercultural perspective

-How do you think communication among members of a school community should be from an Intercultural approach?

-Gaps you see from this perspective

The main problems identified in answering the questionnaire were related to the ambiguity of some of these concepts, which are used in a different way in different contexts, and also to the difficulty in limiting and defining a context to cross-compare it with personal ideas. We, the members of the group in charge of the analysis, participated answering the questionnaire as well. This fact made us aware of the difficulties and made it possible for us to help partners to clarify the questions up to a certain point.

The answers we got did not have information about the specific people answering the questionnaire, since we gave the possibility of working it individually or collectively, and we did not ask for any information about the respondents. The answers were written in four different languages (Spanish, English, Italian and French), but we have to be aware also of the fact that some questionnaires were answered in one languages and then translated into English by different people. Perhaps the more explicit case of translation misunderstanding we are aware of was about the expression "to increase differences" that puzzled us until we spoke with the people who apparently had wrote it and found out that they were as puzzled as we were, because what they really meant was "to value differences".

We dealt with the complexity of the answers from a two-fold perspective. On the one hand we wanted to point out our common ideas, what we already shared, what we already agreed on. On the other hand we have also identified our disagreements as material for further discussion and enrichment.

To make the analysis, we first reduced the answers to short sentences, and from there we tried to extract what we thought were the underlying concepts; of course, it is important to notice that this process is embedded in our own interpretation. After that, and as a way to validate the process, we turned it around, searching for the concepts in the answers provided by the questionnaires. Our purpose was again two fold: first, to confirm that the concepts selected were actually used by participants; and secondly, to contextualize them and use some excerpts as examples. This complex process let us easily compare and group the main ideas.

The preliminary results were presented in a Conference in Warsaw and we concluded trying to open a general discussion among partners on some ideas that we thought needed more discussion. We also opened a forum in the virtual platform to keep alive this discussion, but until now nobody has participated. We still hope that this Report will encourage the discussion.

After the Warsaw Conference, on writing the last version of our paper to be included in the Proceedings, we had the impression that we needed to keep on exploring the answers in order to reflect more exhaustively the richness of the partners' ideas. Once this second analysis was done by the coordinators, we met face to face in Verona with the rest of the Work package team to share our ideas for the final Report.

Our first conclusion is that, generally speaking, we agree more on theory than in what has to do with practice. With this we mean that **OUR THEORETICAL IDEAS ON WHAT INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IS** have more in common than what we think about how its practice should be.

Most of us agreed that Intercultural Education has to do first of all with **culture** in general, or **cultures** in particular, and some of us even identify it with **cultural awareness**. We have some examples from partners' own words about what intercultural education is.

The other two ideas related to Intercultural Education, which partners agreed on more are **equity** and **inclusion.**

On a third level partners have stressed the ideas of **collaboration**, **participation**, **exchange**, and **relation,** which we consider slightly different ways of expressing the same idea.

Finally, we would like to point out three ideas that partners identify with Intercultural Education that are also related to each other: **learning**, **understanding**, and **questioning**.

Reflecting on some of the concepts shared by partners, it seems as if we were speaking about three different dimensions that are part of the definition of Intercultural Education.

The first dimension is related to the **"aims" of intercultural education**; here we have concepts such as equity, inclusion, mutual understanding, respect, citizenship and growth. And we also find the concept of Europeanism/European identity.

The second dimension refers to the **"means", strategies or processes to implement an intercultural approach in education**. Here we are speaking about learning, understanding, questioning; and the group of "relation" terms: communication, relationship, exchange, and participation, cooperation, collaboration. And the concept of assimilation also appears here.

The third dimension of concepts makes explicit which are the **"materials", the tools to build an intercultural society**. The concepts we can include here are: curiosity, critical awareness, cultural relativism (and we have to explain what we mean and discuss on it), consciousness and experiences. And we should include here the concepts of differences, cultural diversity and minorities as well.

Answers were divided between those of us who plainly said no, and those who thought that they are. But it is important to notice that people who said "yes" specified very close and specific contexts, such us, the Inter Network itself or some other project they are involved in, or their own classroom or some university courses. On the other hand, those who answer "no", many times explain that, in their contexts, Intercultural Education is identified only with minorities and immigrant students, and associated with the idea of deficit and compensation. Thus, in spite of the opposite answers (some said plainly yes, some others plainly no) we see here a general agreement shared by almost all partners, and this is the idea that Intercultural Education is put into practice only in small contexts very close to the members of the INTER Network.

We collected **SIGNIFICANT REFERENCES ON INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION**. Some references have been introduced by partners, others are simply mentioned. So we have organized them into three categories: "commented references", "web sites" and "other references". We are not going to list them here, there are available in the final Report of the State of Innovation in the website of the INTER Network (http://internetwork.up.pt/).

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The second Dimension of the analysis concerns Teacher Training. We wanted to know what the members of the Network thought about teacher training in intercultural Education. We were interested in partners' opinions on the issue but also their perception about their contexts, and the gaps they identify between what they think it should be and what they thought it is. Besides these gaps we were interested in their ideas on how these gaps could be overcome.

Partners identified ideas about Intercultural Education mostly with the addressing of **differences** (either in a positive way, as a possibility, or in a negative way, or as something that needs to be solved), and also with the building bridges –or common values- among them, stressing the need to live, participate and collaborate.

But most partners have stressed **Flexibility, Communication** and **Critical thinking** as the most important competences, skills and attitudes for intercultural teachers; and only after these **Awareness of differences** become important, together with **Equity, Awareness of own prejudices and stereotypes** and **Empathy**. Some of us have also claimed the importance of **Respect, Participation**, and the need **To Teach about other cultures**. With less agreement we have quoted **Openness to change, Curiosity, Diversity, Inclusion**, and **Collaborative work**. Finally, the ideas of **Openness to the environment, to become a role model, to develop common values**, and **Cultural relativism** have also reached agreement to a certain point.

We see that most of these categories entail ideas that could be understood as different or complementary angles of the same core, which is represented more by the ability to adjust oneself to different environments and contexts and critical awareness of the self than by stressing the idea of difference or even diversity. In this way what we claim about intercultural teachers has to do more with diversity of any student than with students of "other cultures", that is to say that the cultural differences we identified in the first dimension with Intercultural Education, are less important as teacher competences than a general ability to reflect and change with the social environment.

We share most of the ideas, and even when we do not, we are stressing different angles of a complex ideal teacher who should be flexible, use critical thinking, have good skills to communicate, be inspired by the idea of equity, being aware of the limitations of prejudices and stereotypes, to use empathy as a tool and to be able to manage differences. S/he should show respect for students, promote participation and be able to teach and learn about other cultures, be open to change, be curious, develop cooperative work, value diversity and be oriented to inclusion, use cultural relativism as a tool, but should also be able to build common values, become a role model and be open to the environment.

This question was not answered in all the questionnaires. The answers showed that only a small group of partners know called Intercultural education courses, but they do no follow this perspective in their opinion.

The most generalized claim in the answers to the questionnaires is the **gap between theory and practice**, and the need **to start introducing the intercultural approach in the curriculum**. Many partners claim also that **more training in practice** is needed, what others emphasize as more practical knowledge, and also that a **better communication among social actors** (policy designers, parents, head teachers, teachers and other school staff, other workers, and students) is crucial.

Most of the answers claim further and better teacher training, emphasizing the need to facilitate (with ideas, exchange, materials, critical thinking, theory reflection, an extra teacher in the classroom, involvement of the whole school, more time for teachers, a more stable career for teachers, etc.) the **transformation of the current school into an Intercultural education center**. There were also more specific ideas are in the whole Report available at the website of the INTER Network (http://internetwork.up.pt/).

The third dimension of our analysis concerns School Practice. We were interested in gathering opinions regarding the practice of Intercultural Education, and again we tried to get partners' reflections on gaps they perceived between their ideas in theory and the practice in the schools of their environment. We asked the following questions:

The answers show a major disagreement, very easy to be perceived, at least at first glance: there are some partners who see their ideas on Intercultural Education put into practice in their environments, and give some or even many examples of this, and there are other partners who clearly do not. But let us take a closer look.

There are more answers saying that yes, Intercultural Education is being used than those who said no. Some are more or less in between. Among those who answered yes, many quoted their own practices. There are only few clear "yes", but they have no problems in giving examples (some of them provide the same or similar examples), and neither do they in justifying why they thought these are environments where Intercultural Education is put into practice.

It is interesting to notice here that some practices were offered as examples of Intercultural Education by some partners, and the same practices are offered by other partners in just the opposite way: as practices that from the perspective of the person answering the questionnaire lack an Intercultural approach. The most significant are: Compensatory programs, Linking Classrooms in the Community of Madrid, and Intercultural events. We can explain these contradictory answers in two ways: a) they emphasize different aspects of the same practice (i.e. in Linking Classrooms some point out to the variety of students while others stress the fact that these students are being taught apart form the rest of the school), and b) the persons who answered have different ideas on what Intercultural Education is, some seem to link Intercultural Education with "different cultures", whilst others identify it with inclusion of all students *at the same time.* This contradiction could be easily traced down to the first dimension of the questionnaire where a major disagreement appeared among those who closely link Intercultural Education with "cultural differences", "others", "minorities", "ethnicity" and even "culture", and other partners who criticize this identification and claim for a wider sense of the intercultural approach, as an educational perspective for ALL students (since we are all diverse) and not for specific groups labeled as "different".

Here we all agreed that there was a gap, and suggestions from partners to fill in this gap are shown in the whole Report available at the website of the project (http://internetwork.up.pt/)

Partners answered in two different ways. Some of them (five questionnaires) understand "resources" mainly as human resources and strategies. But most responses identify them with "material resources": books and articles, audiovisual materials and web sites. Again, all are listed in the whole Report at the website of the project (http://internetwork.up.pt/).

The concepts that partners link to intercultural communication in this context are **collaboration, horizontality, reciprocity, respect, coordination, proximity** and **commonality.** Some of the answers put again the focus on **differences,** and there are two responses that outlined the **difficulties on communication**, especially between school and parents. The meaningful examples of intercultural communication provided by partners are linked to the ideas of **open schools** and **learning communities**.

NEEDS AND GAPS REGARDING RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATION identified by partners are available in the whole Report at the website of the project (http://internetwork.up.pt/).

Regarding partners' answers on what Intercultural Education is, we found out that the most repeated concepts were Culture and Difference. But both were used with very different meanings, even opposite, if we consider our interpretation of the context where these words appear.

Roughly speaking, we can divide answers into two groups. One of them seems to reflect a static vision of culture that leads us to conceive it in an essentialist manner, as a kind of cluster inside which we can classify people according to some features (differences), assuming that everybody within the same cluster or group shares the same way of thinking, behaving and living. In this sense, culture is conceived as an object, instead of considering it as an operational concept that refers to a process. Consequently, culture is seen as something closed, fixed, that we can teach or learn about. However, some other partners show a concern about this way to think cultures, and pointed out the need to consider culture in a dynamic, non essentialist way.

In the same way, many partners stressed that Intercultural Education has to do with differences. Even though none of the partners focused on this idea as the most important, many used it as a concept in the shadow when speaking about any of the above mentioned. The discourses showed that when partners were speaking about culture, equity and inclusion, collaboration, exchange, participation and relation, and even learning, understanding and questioning, they were thinking about differences.

From our point of view, answers show two ways of thinking about differences. Some partners refer to differences in a way that allows us to easily think that all our differences are included (for example, when "different backgrounds", "different ways", etc., are mentioned). But there is another way to refer to differences (for example, "to accept differences") which assumes that some people are different and some others are not; that means that only a group of people is defined on the basis of their differences, and that these differences pose a challenge to the rest of us that should be answered in some way[1].

We think that culture and difference are the actual key concepts underlying our assumptions on Intercultural Education, and more discussion is needed in order to clarify how we conceive them, as they determine our understanding of the intercultural approach and its implications for changing educational ideas and practices.

Other concepts to be discussed are Europeanism, as part of the aims of intercultural education; assimilation, as a process to build an intercultural society; and finally minorities as material to work from an intercultural approach.

[1]Inés Gil Jaurena arrived at the same conclusion in her Ph D thesis titled "El enfoque intercultural en la educación primaria: una mirada a la práctica escolar" [*Intercultural Approach in Primary Education: School Practice at a Glance*] Madrid, UNED, 2008.

Regarding Europeanism, or the building of an European identity, we consider this as a very narrow approach to the intercultural issues. Although we are working in a project of European scope, in our opinion the intercultural education approach goes beyond frontiers and closed identities.

On the other hand, assimilation would be a wrong approach from an intercultural perspective: it leads to the invisibility of diversity. This concept usually appears linked to minorities, another controversial concept if we consider it as a material to work on intercultural education.

Together with the assumptions about culture and difference, we have identified other two relevant matters for discussion among partners regarding teacher training.

In the first place, some partners think that intercultural competences cannot be taught nor learned. It seems to mean that not everybody can become an intercultural teacher: only teachers with a specific way of thinking (some kind of social ideals or "ideology") or possessing a special character could be able to do it.

On the second hand, and referring to teacher training needs, while a group of partners point out the need for reflection and analysis of their own ideas and practices, some others asked for a more practical training, focused on tools and strategies that teachers can easily apply to school practice, a kind of "recipes" for multicultural school environments.

Regarding School practices, it is interesting to notice that some were offered as examples of Intercultural Education by some partners, and the same practices are offered by other partners in just the opposite way, as practices that from the perspective of the person answering the questionnaire lack an Intercultural approach. The most significant are Compensatory programs, Linking Classrooms in the Community of Madrid, and Intercultural events. We can explain these contradictory answers in two ways: a) they emphasize different aspects of the same practice (i.e. in Linking Classrooms some point out to the variety of students while others stressed the fact that these students are being taught apart form the rest of the school), and b) the persons who answered have different ideas on what Intercultural Education is, some seem to link Intercultural Education with "different cultures", while others identify it with inclusion of all students at the same time. This contradiction could be easily traced down to the first dimension of the questionnaire where a major disagreement appeared among those who closely link Intercultural Education with "cultural differences", "others", "minorities", "ethnicity" and even "culture", and other partners who criticize this identification and claim for a wider sense of the intercultural approach, as an educational perspective for ALL students (since we are all diverse) and not for specific groups labeled as "different". This second sense has more to do with the concepts of "inclusion", "participation", "shared values".

Finally, in the dimension of **resources and communication**, we would like to point out to the fact that two of the responses focused on the difficulties and limitations of the family-school relationships. One of the answers blames the families for their lack of involvement, while the other blames the teachers who are interested in maintaining families away from school. This is so because sometimes teachers believe that families are opposed to some innovative methods related to the Intercultural approach, and some other times because they think plainly that families must not interfere in school.

As a result of the process of analysis of the questionnaires, and having in mind the agreements and disagreements, our proposal is to use them to delve deeper and to make more complex the concept of Intercultural Education and its relationships with teacher training, school practices and resources. To do so, we think further discussion on the following questions could be a starting point, not only among partners but also among the community at large:

- We agree more on theoretical ideas than in what we consider an intercultural practice. How can we overcome this gap?
- Some people relate intercultural education with the building of Europe. In which sense do you think both ideas can be related?
- Regarding the concept of difference. Do you think that intercultural education has to do with differences? In what sense?
- Many partners think that intercultural competences cannot be taught and/or learned. Do you agree? Why? And, which do you think are the implications of both positions in the selection of teachers?
- Some of the identified teacher training needs on intercultural education focus on practical knowledge and tools to be easily implemented, others insist on research and reflection. Which aspects do you think should have more weight in the teacher's curriculum?

We encourage you to participate in this discussion sending your comments, opinions, suggestions using the CONTACT section of the web page (http://internetwork.up.pt/).