

The Europeanisation of intercultural education? Responses from EU policymakers

Abstract:

European societies rely on different models to address cultural and religious diversity in education, with different potential consequences for the experiences youth have in schools. Some prefer the term intercultural education emphasising dialogue and interaction while others have historically followed the idea of multicultural education. In recent years, despite the principle of subsidiarity, European institutions have become a key player in education including intercultural education. This article draws on four semi-structured interviews with EU education policymakers to explore the Europeanisation of intercultural education, specifically why and how national educational discourses are shaped by European directives and guidelines. We found that European discourses often run counter to national policies and that EU officials are deeply engaged in promoting intercultural educational philosophies and tackling the educational attainment gaps via the soft-law tool of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The study raises questions about the legitimacy of such EU interventions in national policy domains and assesses the usefulness of a more integrated approach to intercultural education in Europe.

Keywords: Intercultural education, Europe, policy, migration

Intercultural education and dialogue: The role of the EU

In recent decades, EU institutions have become a major supranational player in education (see Council of Ministers of Education, 1988; 1993; 2006; 2007; European Commission, 1996; 2002), with school-related issues shifting from a small concern of the EU to a major focus of the organisation's activities (Dale & Robertson, 2009). Despite unifying calls from EU institutions and the Council of Europe for an intercultural dimension in the wake of increasing migration-related diversity (e.g. Council of Europe, 2007; European Commission, 2008), all EU countries have considerable autonomy in the field of education. EU actions therefore serve mainly to complement national level initiatives, for example through the increasingly important Open Method of Coordination (OMC). This is an intra-European means of governance through which the EU identifies common challenges across member states, pinpoints best practices, and encourages countries to review their existing national policies. Some scholars argue that the promotion of cultural diversity in education has helped transform nation-centred schooling approaches and curricula into more inclusive ones (see Schissler & Soysal, 2005). Others, however, hold that the EU 'still adheres to some of the key components of the nationalist discourse it seeks to evade' (see Hansen, 1998: 15), pointing to the ways in which EU education policies assume the idea that a common pan-European 'culture' is inherent and inherited, despite the rhetoric of 'unity in diversity'.

The education of immigrants is an important aspect of EU immigration policy. Policy concerned with immigrant integration has been successively enforced since the Treaty of Amsterdam came into force in 1999. The importance of immigrant integration was further underlined in the Tampere conclusions in 2009 and has thereafter been reiterated in several Council conclusions. Most recently, its importance was approved in a Directive on the status of

third country nationals' long-term residency in the EU, with respect to employment, education, social protection, freedom of association and movement, amongst others. As regards the educational disadvantage of migrant children and students in particular, the 2008 Joint Report on the implementation of the Education and Training (ET) 2020 programme sets this as one of the priorities for the period 2009-2011. ET 2020 is a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. The European Council of 13-14 March 2008 called on member states to improve the achievement levels of students with a migrant background.

Additionally, the EU has responded to educational challenges arising from migration-related diversity by making 2008 the year of intercultural dialogue (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006: 46) and by adopting the Green Paper 'Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems' (European Commission, 2008). The document lists earlier findings from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) studies which show that migrants have lower educational achievement than their peers and that, in some countries including Germany, second-generation students have lower grades than first-generation students. The document also stressed that the learning of a host language is a way of creating social cohesion together with promotion of the heritage language as a way of respecting diversity. The introduction to the Green Paper reaffirms that although educational policies remain a matter for member states, the combination of linguistic and cultural difference with socio-economic disadvantage presents an increasingly widely shared challenge in Europe. The Green Paper recognizes that the way in which education systems deal with the integration of migrant children is a foremost concern at EU and national levels if Lisbon objectives and the objectives set in the ET 2020 framework are to be met.

In this context, the aim of this study is to carry out an empirical investigation of the EU agenda regarding intercultural education and the affordances of this agenda to influence national educational policies with regards to intercultural education.

Researching intercultural education

This study aims to explore the extent to which intercultural education has been shaped by European influences. We conducted interviews with four officials in the European Commission, who were selected on the basis of their involvement in issues related to intercultural dialogue, culture and education. Our snowball sample consisted of two male and two female participants; their years of experience varied between 5 and 17. The first interviewee (Mr Stephan) has been working in the Cabinet of the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth; while the second (Mr Henry) has been a policy officer at the Directorate-General (DG) for Education and Culture in the Unit School Education - Comenius. Moreover, we carried out one interview with a female of the same unit (Ms Lucas) and another female interviewee working at the Cultural Policy and Intercultural Dialogue Unit of the General Director of the DG Education and Culture (Ms Thompson). All the names used are pseudonyms. One methodological caveat is in order here in the sense that this study focuses exclusively on discourses of European policymakers. However, there are some assumptions and comments in the interview extracts that refer to member states. It might therefore be beneficial in a follow-up project to elicit some of the responses from national policymakers across Europe.

The duration of the interviews was approximately 45 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in English. The interview focused on definitions of intercultural education and understandings of the policymaking dynamics between national and European educational arenas

(see Table 1). Interview questions arose from our thematic review of the existing academic and policy literature and included topics such as ‘work programme’ (Questions 1 and 2), ‘European policies’ (Questions 3-5), ‘policy rhetoric’ (Questions 6-7), ‘multilingualism’ (Question 8), ‘school achievement’ (Questions 9-10), ‘European programmes’ (Questions 11-13), and ‘teacher education’ (Questions 14-15). The interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed so that no verbal information was lost. Any syntax mistakes in the participants’ quotes in the findings section are due to the fact that English was not their mother tongue. To maintain credibility, we adopted a member check measure (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Thus interviewees were asked to review and revisit the interview transcripts and the themes that emerged from their interview accounts.

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In order to examine the multiple positions and viewpoints addressed by the interviewees, we carried out an inductive analysis of the data in order to identify the thematic priorities of each interview. These priorities were compared and contrasted across the different interviews so that common themes could emerge. This enabled us to identify similarities and differences in the definitions of intercultural education and intercultural policy goals that were proposed by the interviewees. Then, we read our data closely and we also kept notes about our thought processes. After that, we began examining our data for groups of meanings, themes and assumptions and tried to locate how these were connected within a theoretical model (Robson, 2002). We continued the process of analysis and we divided the data into thematic categories: contested discourses of intercultural education; inclusion of immigrant students and school achievement;

harmonisation of national intercultural policies; the intercultural dimension of European programmes; and inclusion of immigrant students and multilingualism. Finally, we began looking at our data in order to substantiate the emerging thematic categories with raw data.

Conceptualising intercultural education

According to Banks and McGee Banks (2009), intercultural education encompasses the development and implementation of official policies and reforms that aim to promote equal education opportunities to culturally and/or ethnically diverse groupings, regardless of origin, social rank, gender or disability. The literature illustrates an intense debate about intercultural education and the arguments for (see Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997) and against it (see Stables, 2005). The acceptance or rejection of intercultural education does not deny the existence of culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse societies. Our study aims to help specify the ‘story’ of intercultural policy development at the European level, rather than recognising the changing stories that make up the narratives, and especially the very different policies and practices that have persisted at national levels, as overviewed briefly below.

European societies rely on different models to address cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in education, with different potential consequences for the experiences youth have in schools. For example, Germany, Greece and Ireland prefer the term interculturalism and intercultural education (which is also the preferred term at European institutional level). In contrast, Britain and the Netherlands have historically worked with the concept of multiculturalism. The work of Koopmans et al (2005, 2012) is equally indicative of the range of national policy-practice links, arguing that cross-national differences continue to exist due to different historical legacies and that these have not become smaller over the past three decades. The idea of interculturalism, as distinct from multiculturalism, has hitherto more commonly been

found in Dutch and German accounts of integration, particularly in the field of education (Gundara 2000). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2006), multiculturalism describes the culturally diverse nature of societies. It not only refers to elements of ethnic or national culture, but also includes linguistic, religious and socioeconomic diversity. In contrast, interculturalism refers to evolving interactions between cultural groups. Multicultural education uses learning about other cultures in order to produce acceptance, or at least tolerance, of these cultures whereas intercultural education aims to go beyond passive coexistence, to achieve a developing and sustainable way of living together in culturally diverse societies through the creation of respect for, and dialogue between, different cultural groups. Another initiative that started to develop in the 1980s to address the ethno-cultural and religious diversity in schools was antiracist education. Community groups began to draw attention to the way racism in education delimited the academic progress of their children. Antiracist education teaches an awareness and understanding of the 'racist' structure of society while promoting equality of opportunity and combating racism. While a country like Germany has intertwined intercultural and antiracist philosophies, Britain has promoted multicultural alongside antiracist ideologies. This indicates the combinations and contradictions of the concept of intercultural education with the use of multicultural and antiracist education in Europe.

Intercultural education stresses the dynamic nature of cultures, which are an 'unstable mixture of sameness and otherness' (Leclercq, 2002: 6). Cultural boundaries alter and overlap to create a third space, within which locals and immigrants share a hybrid cultural identity. Moreover, the model provides an active and periscopic approach by empowering minorities through *inter alia* education. It aims to challenge power relations and promote social change (Tiedt & Tiedt, 2002). Intercultural education suggests that discrimination and its elimination

should be addressed both at the structural-institutional and individual levels. In this model, every individual has to take action towards social emancipation.

In addition, intercultural education suggests that social-justice and equity values should guide the transformation of both pedagogy and the curriculum in order to empower marginalised students (Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010). To this end, intercultural education reveals the ‘hidden’ educational processes that perpetuate discrimination. It moves beyond the provision of plain understanding to the acquisition of skills that presuppose the transformation of these processes (Leclercq, 2002). Intercultural education asserts that teachers and students ought to recognise oppression by promoting education for empathy, moral consciousness and examination of discrimination from the victim's perspective (Banks, 2006). Arguably, Europe’s and the EU’s turn towards intercultural education seems to influence educational policies, curricula, school textbooks, and teacher training. Therefore, the current study examines in what ways intercultural education has influenced policy discourses. In the remainder of this article, we analyse in turn the range of themes that emerged from our interviews with European policymakers.

Contested discourses of intercultural education

Our data suggests that intercultural education discourses first became intertwined with the European educational agenda in the 1980s. Our interviewees seemed to locate the shift towards intercultural education at the core of debates on social (in)equality and, by extent, social justice. However, Ms Thompson emphasised that the European integration project was primarily driven by an economic process aiming at the development of a single market. Nonetheless, she also claimed that Europeanisation in the economic domain has given rise to a snowball effect in relation to cultural and educational issues including inter alia intercultural education:

Ms Thompson: The EU aims to ensure that human rights, equality and social justice are protected. In order to safeguard immigrants' and minorities' rights, intercultural education has gradually become an increasingly important need in education. It is a fashionable topic for the last 30 years.

The participants seemed to provide a humanistic and democratic rationale for the emergence of intercultural education discourses in EU policies. They argued that the protection of minority and immigrant rights was the reason for the development of intercultural education in the EU endeavours. On the other hand, Mr Henry argued that intercultural education should also develop for EU states to combat immigrants' unemployment and promote economic development and cohesion.

Beyond the rationale lying behind the development of intercultural education, the interviewees were asked to reflect upon the goals of intercultural education by discussing not only the educational provisions for the increasingly diverse European societies, but also the barriers to the development and implementation of these provisions. All the interviewees underscored social inclusion and equal educational opportunity as the major objectives of such an agenda. For example, Ms Lucas argued that 'the focus that we had was mainly on social inclusion; for instance, how to tackle segregation, how to give everybody equal education opportunities, how to link up with the parents and so on'.

The interviewees argued that intercultural education should focus on enabling immigrant inclusion in the social and cultural spheres. Nevertheless, Mr Henry explained that intercultural education should also take account of socio-economic differences in order to promote immigrant inclusion in the economic domain. His remarks drew upon the Rainbow Paper which was

produced by the Platform of Intercultural Dialogue. The Platform has incorporated the issue of socio-economic differences in their definition of intercultural dialogue:

Mr Henry: This platform developed a very interesting document, this is the Rainbow Paper, so it is a sort of a policy statement about intercultural dialogue (...). They give us a definition of their understanding of intercultural dialogue, which I think is a good definition (...). It contains very interesting remarks about what is considered an issue related to diversity, it is really an issue of socio-economic differences.

Mr Henry explained that the Platform produced the Rainbow Paper in the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008) to define and promote notions of intercultural dialogue and intercultural competences. The Rainbow Paper has become a benchmark for intercultural education in Europe. It defines dialogue, competence and action as the three principles for Europeans to live, work and come together. The title of the paper implies the polychromy of the rainbow, which symbolises cultural and other forms of diversity across European societies. The Paper moves the debate on intercultural education a step forward as it places migration and minorities at the core of intercultural dialogue while arguing that intercultural dialogue can turn our diversity away from being socio-cultural difference into active inter-group collaboration (Rainbow Platform, 2008). In addition, the Paper communicates various recommendations on intercultural dialogue within education, including inter alia: intercultural learning; countering segregation and discrimination in schools; enabling teachers to promote intercultural dialogue; and sustaining educational content in support of intercultural dialogue. Last but not least, the

Paper suggests that monitoring national policies may guarantee the sustainability of intercultural dialogue. It is noteworthy that Mr Henry and Ms Thompson suggested that all EU member states should adopt the Rainbow Paper's recommendations on intercultural dialogue within education.

Despite the European drive towards the development of shared definitions of intercultural dialogue, including initiatives such as the Platform of Intercultural Europe, the terminology of 'intercultural education' is not shared by all member states. The interviewees argued that some member states have either never used or abandoned the term. They also asserted that other member states have deployed alternative concepts such as social justice, inclusion and/or integration. Moreover, they asserted that intercultural education has been given diverse meanings within the education policies of the national states. The interviewees cautioned that no single or universal meaning ascribed to intercultural dialogue exists. For example, Mr Stephan and Ms Thompson argued that while some member states aim to promote immigrants' social inclusion, others seek to establish harsher policies regarding immigration, which *inter alia* impact on education policies.

All four policymakers problematised the diversity of meaning ascribed to intercultural education across EU member states. According to them, beyond the EU, policy stakeholders and mechanisms located within member states substantially influence the definition of educational initiatives dealing with diversity at the national level. Two of the EU officials moved a step forward and explained that although some member states develop educational policies according to the EU guidelines regarding intercultural education, these policies are often counteracted by practices in EU member states:

Ms Thompson: The problem with intercultural education is that very often, when you see it in practice, you see that there are all sort of different practices [...]

Everybody agrees on the importance of intercultural education, but you can see that some practices are even counterproductive [...] The principle is that there is nothing legally binding in culture and in education. [...] You know France has the principle of integration as assimilation, while the UK and the Netherlands would focus rather on multiculturalism. I mean, these are really national choices which the Commission doesn't intervene at all. [...]

Mr Stephan: There are good examples in Europe. There are very bad examples but this is an issue that the member states again have full responsibility to deal with. Now, sometimes we tend to look at the issues of intercultural education, as issues that the blaming goes to the migrants and you will see in certain member states that this has been even their policy. I think that we should look at the member states and the mechanisms within the member states in many cases, as part of the problem.

The above quotes show that although member states endorsing intercultural education represent a substantial mass, contradictory or problematic intercultural policies continue to persist in education across Europe. Mr Stephan contended that 'there is monitoring, there is continuous communication with member states' in order to meet the EU-derived guidelines. Nonetheless, 'there is not a blame and shame trend' suggesting the disposition of legal and financial penalties to member states. Mr Stephan goes on to explain that given the principle of subsidiarity, member states 'identify themselves the best way to address their problems', while they 'choose how to do their policies'. In order to overcome these barriers, all interviewees suggested that EU member states should develop policies which promote immigrant inclusion by reducing their achievement gap with their native peers, while combating early school leaving.

Inclusion of immigrant students and school achievement

All EU officials in this study pointed to lower levels of school attainment among immigrant students, in comparison to their native peers, as a potential barrier to inclusion. The interviewees based their remarks upon the results of cross-country comparative studies including the PISA study (Ms Lucas and Ms Thompson). The interviewees argued that migrant and minority students comprise a group which is at risk for early school leaving, while they present lower levels of school achievement in comparison to their native peers. Arguably, they seemed to interconnect the problem of lower school achievement with inclusion and segregation. For example, Mr Stephan concluded that segregated educational systems lead to immigrants low school achievement and vice versa. Similarly, previous research (see for instance Retali, 2013) has indicated that the percentages for early school leaving are higher for immigrant pupils than for native pupils, while broad estimates suggest that within Europe six million young people have no clear prospects for their further education and employment (Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, 2008).

It is worth mentioning that three of the interviewees placed particular emphasis on Roma students and the need to develop specific educational measures for combating early school leaving among this group. Mr Henry felt that ‘we have the conclusion from the Council on school leavers (...) We noticed that specific groups like Roma have more problems with this and they need to be helped in a specific way’. According to our respondents, the goals of reducing the achievement gap and combating early school leaving should also apply to ethnic minorities, such as the Roma. Arguably, policies for intercultural education should not only encompass cultural differences but should become conducive to the success of all students, irrespective of their ethnicity, gender, social rank or disability.

When specifically questioned about the reasons for the lower achievement of immigrant and/or minority students, our four EU officials referred to a combination of socio-cultural and structural factors. The following quotes illustrate the factors which were identified by the interviewees as reasons for immigrant and/or minority students' poor achievement:

Ms Lucas: It [language] is seen as an indicator of the education system and the education systems of course are language bounded. Of course the measurement of the education system is based on language standards. [...]

Mr Henry: For the Green Paper on migrant education, we were analysing this research very much and really it is not concluded. It seems that it depends very much on the socio-economic conditions of the family. [...]

Ms Thompson: It is clear that teachers very often express the value of the majority society in a very subconscious way. (...) So the attitudes they have, even subconscious attitudes that they have for pupils, may be very influential to students' achievement and their motivation.

The interviewees argued that school achievement is constrained by the language barrier and the socio-economic background of migrant students. Research (see OECD, 2012) showed that, in many European countries, immigrant students have a lower socio-economic status compared to their native peers, and that lower socio-economic backgrounds have a negative impact on performance (see Sirin, 2005; Gouvias, Katsis & Limakopoulou, 2012). Nonetheless, the school performance of immigrant students from lower socio-economic backgrounds seems to be positively influenced when their peers come from higher socio-economic levels (Retali, 2013).

Similarly, previous research has interconnected family language and school performance, suggesting that students, who do not use the language of instruction at home, present lower performance than their peers (Gatchercote, 2010; OECD, 2012). On the other hand, Ms Thompson suggested that school achievement depends on teacher attitudes and competences to deal with diversity, which in turn relate to teacher training in diversity issues. Official EU documentation (Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union, 2008) has suggested that immigrant and/or minority students' lower achievement should be traced in the educational policies, in the type of school system and in the educational system per se and not in the deficits of immigrants. Nevertheless, Stanat and Christensen (2006) indicate that immigrant students' school achievement differs across the countries in which they receive their education. They explain that as educational policies regarding diversity and equality of opportunity vary across countries, some countries better address these issues than others.

Despite pointing to the barriers to immigrant and/or minority students' school success, the interviewees still identified future prospects in overcoming the aforementioned problems. The interviewees were asked to describe the EU practice and to articulate the conditions required for reducing the achievement gap and for combating early school leaving. They illustrated that the fight against early school leaving is incorporated as a key target in the Europe 2020 strategy, within which provides the member states with possible solutions in order to reduce the percentage of early school leavers to 10% by 2020 (Mr Stephan).

Ms Lucas and Ms Thompson suggested that the development of key targets allows member states to develop more coherent strategic approaches in the disposition of the EU Structural Funds in order to combat early school leaving among immigrant and minority students. The officials seemed to argue that because of these key targets, member states better

identify the opportunities provided by these financial instruments in order to cater for immigrants' social and educational needs. Arguably, these key targets may enhance the ability among member states to better link their planning for education policies combating early school leaving with the Structural Funds. To this extent, the EU officials made reference to national programmes aimed at combatting early school leaving, which are funded by EU Structural Funds. Examples of such programmes involve practices such as the development of the Zones of Educational Priority (i.e. Mr Stephan and Ms Lucas); the employment of mediators for Roma students (i.e. Mr Henry); and other educational programmes focusing on language learning (i.e. Mr Stephan and Ms Thompson).

Furthermore, it is interesting that the interviewees endorsed suggestions for improving teacher training. All interviewees argued that raising cultural awareness should be included in teacher training. They suggested that the changing cultural composition of today's societies and the diversification of EU educational goals 'creates the need for different curricula ... which means that you have to train your teachers accordingly' (Mr Stephan). Likewise, they clarified that teacher training on addressing cultural diversity has found plenty of space in the multilateral projects and other programmes, which are widely funded by the EU. One key area of training identified by EU officials was in relation to prejudice and handling teachers' discriminatory behaviour. Furthermore, reflecting upon the last quote, culturally diverse schools are more demanding in terms of the collaborative networks needed between schools and families. It is noteworthy that research indicates that 'better school achievement of all pupils undoubtedly requires adequate forms of communication and cooperation between schools, parents and institutions that help migrants' (Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union, 2008).

Our interviewees also argued that in order to enhance immigrants' achievement across Europe, member states should harmonise their educational policies which address diversity according to EU guidelines and directives. Nonetheless, they suggested that in such a process the states should take into consideration the 'realities' of their countries. The next section describes the process of harmonisation as suggested by our EU officials.

Towards harmonising national intercultural policies?

As already argued, EU institutions have placed emphasis on the adoption of an intercultural dimension by member states in order to address migration-related diversity in education. Accordingly, the interviewees critically discussed the ways in which EU institutions may exert influence on policy processes of the member states in order to promote intercultural goals such as equality, social inclusion and active citizenship via education. The analysis of the interview data identified the following mechanisms of influence, which are discussed below: the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), exchange of best practices and monitoring and assessment. The aforementioned mechanisms operate as unifying calls from EU institutions for an intercultural dimension in the national policies of the member states.

The officials in this study accredited the OMC as the most successful mechanism deployed by the EU in order to influence national policy processes addressing diversity. They claimed that 'through the voluntary participation of member states in the OMC, the EU is able to identify migration-related challenges faced by the member states in order to set a commonly accepted intercultural educational agenda' (Ms Thompson). Nonetheless, Ms Lucas emphasised that because of the principle of subsidiarity in the field of education, the EU seeks alternative soft law mechanisms of influence, which do not pose official sanctions on laggards. Ms Lucas

thus argued that the OMC depends upon peer pressure between the member states in order to promote the harmonisation of member states' intercultural policies.

When the interviewees were asked to describe the OMC in relation to intercultural education, they explained that each member state appoints an expert, who comes from the pertinent Ministry (i.e. Ministry of Education). According to the interviewees, the expert groups communicate their conclusions and/or suggestions on intercultural education to the Council of Ministers, who negotiate and approve the final Communications on the specific issue:

Mr Henry: The Commission tries to influence member states by putting policy documents on the table of the Council of Ministers and we have for instance one and a half years ago come to the conclusion on the issue of the education of migrants (...)
So there was agreement at the EU level among educational leaders upon this topic.

According to the interviewees, during discussions at the Council of Ministers' meetings, member states agree upon specific goals which are included in the Communications mainstreamed by the EU. An example of this are the 'Council Conclusions on the Education of Children with a Migrant Background' referenced by the interviewee in the quote above. The document was produced by the Council of the European Union in November 2009 and 'requires Member States to offer such children free tuition, including the teaching of the official language or one of the official languages of the host State, as well as to take appropriate measures to promote, in cooperation with States of origin, the teaching of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin' (Council of the European Union, 2009: 1). The document entails an important development in the field of intercultural education, as it urges member states to develop an

integrated policy for the achievement of these objectives. Thereafter, the document urges member states to agree upon specific benchmarks and indicators to measure best practice.

Despite the development of common goals within the OMC context, Mr Henry and Ms Thompson cautioned that the Communications developed by the Commission are not legally binding or mandatory. They argued that member states have only a ‘moral’ (i.e. Mr Henry) and a ‘political’ (i.e. Ms Thompson) responsibility to adhere to these goals. Nevertheless, member states are expected to submit, at regular intervals, monitoring reports on the policies, which have been adopted in order to meet these goals.

It is interesting that the interviewees appeared to endorse suggestions for EU-funded research-based monitoring within the field of intercultural dialogue. They argued that comparative research should inform intercultural policy development in the EU. To this end, Ms Lucas referred to a research project evaluating the Zones of Educational Priorities across 10 countries in order inform further policy development. Ms Lucas further explained that research enables the EU to identify possible needs of the member states in order to develop and implement target-specific and/or tailored-made policies under a common European framework.

The interviewees argued that the periodic monitoring of the progress on the achievement of common goals mobilises processes of mutual learning and peer review among member states on intercultural issues. The use of indicators enables the EU to identify successful policies related to intercultural education, which are thereafter streamlined to other member states:

Mr Stephan: We don’t inform them about the bad solutions. We show the best practices. We might identify strategies that they don’t work so well in some cases, but the focus is to tell to the member states what works. [...]

Ms Lucas: There is a tendency in the Commission to mainstream on some important topics and of course human rights is a topic. Cultural diversity became also a mainstream issue.

Goals and indicators appear to reinforce the exchange of best practices and expertise in order to stimulate new policy approaches in the field of intercultural education. Moreover, the EU through mainstreaming procedures aims to disseminate examples of best practices on intercultural education among member states. Beyond the OMC, EU officials demonstrated awareness of other mechanisms of influence, such as the diffusion of ideas via member states' participation in European Programmes.

The intercultural dimension of European programmes: Youth, Mobility and Exchange

EU officials participating in this study indicated that the harmonisation process towards an intercultural policy orientation is not entirely self-induced or self-determined by member states. Various European programmes seek to enhance cooperation between the European Commission and national agencies in order to facilitate the exchange of best practices regarding intercultural education. Mr Stephan noted that 'in education the EU plays a part there which is mostly related to the programmes [...]. The new generation of programmes will have a sole dimension on international exchange'.

According to our sample of interviewees, European programmes aim to increase respect and familiarity with other cultures, while promoting intercultural competences, openness and intercultural understanding. Mr Stephan argued that there are different strands of European programmes including 'programmes for policy, practice and mobility'. It is noteworthy that

three of the participants suggested that the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue has given rise to various intercultural programmes and events regarding policy and practice (Mr Henry, Ms Lucas and Ms Thompson) as it aimed at reinforcing mutual understanding and respect through *inter alia* education.

Accordingly, several interviewees appeared to suggest that the European year has been designated to launch a new era of European programmes related to intercultural dialogue. They portrayed 2008 as a year of projects, festivals, debates, information campaigns, competitions and networking; all aiming at raising public awareness in Europe and fostering active citizenship and a sense of European belongingness. Drawing upon the interviewees' accounts, such programmes may consolidate EU's commitment to solidarity and social justice. Nevertheless, only Mr Henry discussed the need to pursue the sustainability of these programmes. Mr Henry cautioned that the member states should understand the need to continue such programmes beyond the European year if intercultural education is to succeed in Europe.

Some interviewees suggested that the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue has promoted the development of intercultural programmes particularly focusing on children and youth in order to equip them with the knowledge and skills to function effectively in an increasingly diverse society:

Ms Thompson: There is of course of the Youth Programme which has also the European voluntary service, which is quite relevant in terms of the intercultural dialogue. The Citizenship Programme also focuses on intercultural dialogue and it also supports short mobility programmes.

First and foremost, our interviewees referred to the Youth in Action Programme, which was established in the framework of the White Paper on Youth in 2001. The Paper suggests member states' cooperation in four priority areas, involving participation, information, voluntary activities and a greater understanding and knowledge of youth. Furthermore, the Europe for Citizens Programme (formerly Citizens for Europe) was an additional dimension in the interviewees' accounts. This Programme aims to bridge the gap between citizens and the EU by promoting an active European citizenship and by developing a sense of belongingness and a European identity. Therefore, the programme seeks to facilitate intercultural dialogue by enhancing mutual understanding and respect among European citizens (EACEA, 2011).

Only some of the interviewees referred to European Programmes aiming to support national policies or educational measures related to intercultural education. However, all interviewees pointed to transnational mobility programmes as the major strand of such programmes. For example, 'mobility programmes are actually intercultural education because intercultural education is a practice in order to be able to start intercultural contact and this is what it creates at the level of teachers, pupils and children' (Ms Lucas). They argued that mobility facilitates intercultural dialogue and cultural exchanges among people. The interviewees cited teacher and student exchanges within the context of Comenius, Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus programmes. However, Ms Thompson mentioned the mobility of artists as an additional form of cultural interchange.

The interviewees' inferences were in line with EU recommendations proposing that teachers should spend time abroad as part of their initial teacher training or in the course of their teaching careers. In discussing the positive outcomes brought about by teachers' participation in mobility programmes, the EU officials in this study pointed to the exchange of best practices and

methods in terms of teaching in culturally diverse settings. Moreover, they asserted that teacher mobility programmes increase respect and familiarity with other cultures (Ms Lucas), while improving teachers' competence in European languages (Mr Stephan). Notably, previous research in the field suggests that student exchange programmes such as ERASMUS 'are relevant for intercultural education in schools to some degree because many students are in teacher education' (Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union, 2008: 42).

Although all interviewees underlined the positive influence of mobility and exchange programmes on intercultural understanding and competence, Mr Stephan identified some challenges to these programmes:

Mr Stephan: Mobility supports intercultural dimension and the EU pays more and more attention to the factor of mobility. (...) We talk about 250,000 students per year. The goal is to do better (...) but we realise of course that it is (...) very difficult to address perhaps groups that are mostly minorities.

Mr Stephan contended that the rate of participation of minorities and migrants in mobility programmes is very low compared to their native peers. He argued that the actual participants in these programmes have limited opportunities for interaction with minority and immigrant groups. Nonetheless, the available literature suggests that individuals may abandon stereotypical approaches and demonstrate cultural awareness as a result of their interpersonal relationships with minorities (Johnson, 2002).

Moreover, Mr Stephan indicated that member states seek to increase their participation in internal mobility programmes within the EU by exerting political influence through fiscal

incentives and resource allocation. However, he explained that the rates of exchanges with third countries (non-EU countries) are rather low:

Mr Stephan: If you take the international dimension of these programmes, like Erasmus Mundus, the numbers are really low. So you may be talking for example for a country like Egypt to have 20 students per year. Obviously, you cannot count on these programmes just by themselves to support your intercultural policy.

Mr Stephan appeared concerned that such a distinction between the European and the non-European world may reinforce the external borders of the EU. Such concerns are also raised in the literature suggesting the creation of a ‘Fortress Europe’ that describes both the external exclusion of the Islamic world due to the emergence of religious fundamentalism, and the internal ostracism of migrants of non-European origin within Europe (Stalker, 2002). The creation of a Fortress Europe under these terms will ‘act as an additional layer of nationalism as European Unionism creating a boundary in this “new” identity and politico-cultural space vis-à-vis the non-European other’ (Trimikliniotis, 2001: 61).

Finally, Mr Stephan identified language differences as an additional barrier to implementing European mobility programmes. Mr Stephan asserted that although mobility programmes foster the ideal of multilingualism, the participants’ language skills are often scarce. Accordingly, there is increased mobility between member states which share a common official language:

Mr Stephan: Certain member states have tried to put limits to student mobility programmes. For example, Austria, because of the same language, has huge numbers of students from Germany. Austria has tried to - the case is in court actually now – prevent students to go in such high numbers in Austria. We had a similar case with Belgium and France.

Mr Stephan explained that students and teachers are often bounded to the selection of countries for their exchanges according to their personal language skills. Nevertheless, member states should not restrain intercultural exchange by prohibiting access to students from specific countries. As Mr Stephan observes ‘in mobility there is no subsidiarity’. On the other hand, ‘the language issue will have to be looked at more closely in each country: educational systems that have neglected the teaching of foreign languages need to improve this’ (Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union, 2008: 42). Arguably, better language policies are necessary in order to promote the EU’s focus on multilingualism.

Inclusion of immigrant students and multilingualism

All EU officials participating in this study suggested that the principle of subsidiarity intersects also the language policies adopted by member states; while causing political friction on the issue. Mr Stephan clarified that the development of the national language policies adheres to the member states’ conceptualisation of immigrants’ integration as inclusion or assimilation:

Mr Stephan: Language is an important dimension of intercultural education and yes, there is a strong policy of multilingualism. Multilingualism is an issue at the European level that created political friction. [...]

Ms Lucas: Language is in the member states competences and different member states have different approaches (...) In some countries we can see that they value also the mother language of migrants. You can see it in Sweden, also UK (...) because they came to the conclusion that this helps their integration (...) In France they do their best to teach the immigrants their national language.

Although some member states encourage the bilingual development of immigrants, Ms Lucas indicated that other member states adopt language policies that reinforce linguistic assimilation. Such policies impose on immigrant and/or minority populations the use of the official language of the host country. The argumentation behind these policies is that immigrants integrate better in the host society if they learn the official language of the host country. According to Banks (1998: 252), ‘this type of language policy promotes cultural assimilation’. Furthermore, such policies are at odds with EU goals nurturing cultural diversity and, by extension, multilingualism. The Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union (2008) promulgates that the immigrant languages are an essential part of the cultural heritage of Europe. Similarly, EU official documentation suggests that immigrants should also entail a target group of the multilingual policies of the Union (Portas, 2005).

Political friction on the issue of bilingualism or multilingualism was evident among our interviewees. When questioned about the value of multilingualism among immigrants and or/ minority groups, they expressed different opinions:

Mr Stephan: Erdogan [The Turkish Prime Minister] lately in Germany said that the Turkish students migrating in Germany should first learn the Turkish language. (...) I

think from a linguistic point of view, as well, we should cater for the students to learn first their mother language and of course to support them in the language of the host country as well. [...]

Ms Thompson: There is a part of research that says learning the mother language is essential to also learn the language of the host country and other research says there is no evidence on that; it is better to actually focus on the language of the host country. For the Green Paper on migrants' education we were analysing this research very much and really it is not concluded.

Ms Thompson expressed the opinion that although 'languages are a richness' for Europe, 'realistically sometimes sticking to the language of families may become a disadvantage'. She thus explained that:

Ms Thompson: If you are in a disadvantaged family and they keep enforcing on you the family language instead of learning very well the language of the host country, probably this will turn out as a disadvantage for you. If you are in a family where the parents are highly qualified, then bilingualism will actually be an asset.

Ms Thompson claimed for the intersection between bilingualism and immigrants' socio-economic status. Previous research proposes that 'the maintenance of migration and minority languages with the help of school institutions is a necessity for minority children from linguistic and psychological points of view' (Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union, 2008: 39). Nonetheless, the disparity and inconclusiveness of the language policies across member

states begs additional questions on the influences of socio-economic status of immigrants on bilingualism.

Discussion and conclusions

European institutions have come to play an important role in national policy processes related to intercultural education. They have urged the development of policies fostering an intercultural dimension in education. As indicated by the interviewees participating in this study, Europe seems to play an important role in the development of intercultural policy by becoming a mechanism of influence for educational change. The participants argued that through mechanisms of influence such as financial incentives, diffusion of ideas and stakeholder learning, the EU has imbued the European socio-political environment with discourses of equality, social inclusion and active citizenship. Moreover, the participants explained that beyond setting the agenda, the EU has defined intercultural policy goals (through efforts such as the Rainbow Paper) to which member states may ascribe to.

Nonetheless, our four participants cautioned that there is often a gap between EU policy rhetoric and practices across EU member states. They explained that although the official EU policy includes manifestations about inclusion, social justice, and multilingualism, in practice immigrant students seem to be often marginalised, while they present lower achievement levels in comparison to their native peers. Drawing upon the participants' claims, it appears that European discourses, which reinforce the intercultural dimension in education, often run counter to national policies of the member states arguing for assimilation to the dominant cultural and linguistic norms. In some cases, while the terminology of an intercultural dimension in education has been adopted, it has been diversely interpreted within national policies. Thus member states

either do not share the concept of intercultural education or they attribute different and often conflicting meanings to the concept.

Our interviewees suggested that there are structural and institutional barriers to the development of intercultural education in Europe, including the absence of legally-binding agreements for implementing EU guidelines for intercultural education across member states, and the limited EU research-based monitoring in order to evaluate the implementation of intercultural policy across member states. They explained that the exclusive use of framing mechanisms, such as the OMC, entails a ‘soft’ mode of European influence on the development of national intercultural policies (Radaelli, 2003). Thus, they cautioned that the absence of strong legal incentives allows for intercultural policies to be ignored or interpreted and implemented at will by member states.

Drawing upon the findings of this research, we suggest that in order to systematise the concept of intercultural education and to constellate its diverse meanings, European influences on national policies, such as intercultural education, should entail an ‘interactive process of policy-making whereby member states co-construct, influence or shape the formation of policies, which get crystallised as “European”’ (Alexiadou, 2007: 107). The adoption or implementation of European educational policies at the national level should involve processes of translation and re-contextualisation. To this end, the flows of EU ideologies and discourses should be mediated by national histories, cultures and politics (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

In conclusion, the interviewees appeared to identify additional ways in which the EU may support the development of intercultural education in its member states. European institutions could invest on elite learning by promoting changes in national actors’ beliefs and value systems through learning processes (thick learning). Thick learning on intercultural education could occur

across the levels of the national educational systems (i.e. from the state actors to the school actors). To this extent, effective measures could be taken in order to provide national actors with learning opportunities on the latest trends on intercultural education policies, including partnerships between schools, communities and the civil society; language learning; promotion of native language and culture; teaching for parents; and teacher training. The EU needs to face the challenge to ‘bridge the increasing gap between some national policies and the European policy that is subsumed under the label of intercultural education’ (Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union, 2008: 43).

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Table 1: Interview guide for policymakers

1. Immigration within and towards Europe saw a significant growth. How does this situation affect education in Europe?
2. Could you please describe how the work of your team influences issues related to intercultural education in Europe?
3. How do European policies that promote intercultural dialogue give every pupil equal educational opportunities?
4. Which activities and programmes related to intercultural education does the work programme of your institution involve?
5. In what ways has the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue influenced member states? How did the Commission ensure the sustainability of these influences?
6. How does the EU attempt to find common ground in the deliberations regarding immigration and education trends?
7. What are the official goals of the Commission (or your DG) regarding usage of terms like multicultural and intercultural education?
8. Taking into consideration the importance of multilingualism, how do you attempt to meet this challenge?
9. How do you aim to back the action plan to fight early school leaving among migrant pupils in Europe?
10. How do you aim to increase learning opportunities for immigrant pupils?
11. To what extent do existing programmes such as ‘Youth in Action’ and ‘Citizens for Europe’ contribute to the implementation of intercultural education at national level?
12. What is the impact of European mobility and exchange programmes for the development and implementation of intercultural education at national level?
13. How do you estimate the value of such programmes in promoting intercultural understanding and education?
14. In what ways do you nurture intercultural understanding among pre-service teachers?
15. How do you promote diversity-friendly training among the teacher communities across Europe?