Valorizing Intercultural Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

Despite the interest of interculturality as a priority in the EU, the development of intercultural competences and skills on lifelong learning processes has yet to be achieved. According to an ERICarts study, to move towards a strategy for intercultural dialogue, main changes of paradigm still need to take place. Particularly in the field of education, it is necessary to move from traditional canons to open processes of creative interaction and build bridges by developing intercultural skills and competences through educational and media programmes. The aim of this paper is to identify and valorize the best practices of two LLP projects (MIH and EHISTO) that focused on the development of intercultural skills and competencies in education. The team involved in this paper will implement a self sustainable network, centred around a technological ecosystem that will support the promotion of methodological innovation, open knowledge and sharing of experiences and good practices, both in classroom and policy contexts, as so as three iterations of an intercultural learning programme, as part of a strategy of promoting intercultural learning in education. This will also include policy dialogues, aimed at raising the interest of educational authorities and promoting their involvement.

Keywords: Interculturality, Intercultural Learning, Intercultural Dialogue, Valorization, Lifelong Learning Programme, Policy Dialogue, Intercultural Skills and Competences, Learning Technological Ecosystems.

Resumen

A pesar del interés por la interculturalidad como una prioridad en la Unión Europea, el desarrollo de las competencias interculturales las y habilidades en los procesos de aprendizaje para toda la vida aún no se ha logrado. De acuerdo con un estudio de

ERICarts, para avanzar hacia una estrategia para el diálogo intercultural, los principales cambios de paradigma todavían están por desarrollarse. Especialmente en el campo de la educación, es necesario pasar de los cánones tradicionales para abrir procesos de interacción creativa y construir puentes interculturales mediante el desarrollo de habilidades y competencias a través de programas educativos y canales tecnológicos relacionados con los medios sociales. El objetivo de este trabajo es identificar y valorizar las mejores prácticas de los dos proyectos del Programa *LifeLongLearning* de la Unión Europea (MIH y EHISTO) que se centraron en el desarrollo de habilidades y competencias en la educación intercultural. El equipo involucrado en este trabajo tiene el propósito de desarrollar una red autosostenible, en torno a un ecosistema tecnológico que apoye el fomento de la innovación metodológica, el conocimiento abierto y el intercambio de experiencias y buenas prácticas, tanto en el contexto del aula como en el de las políticas educativas, así como hasta tres iteraciones de un programa de aprendizaje intercultural, como parte de una estrategia de promoción del aprendizaje intercultural en la educación. Esto también incluye el diálogo político, encaminado a elevar el interés de las autoridades educativas y la promoción de su participación.

Keywords: Interculturalidad, Aprendizaje Intercultural, Diálogo Intercultural, Valorización, Programa Lifelong Learning, Diálogo de Políticas, Competencias y Habilidades Interculturales, Ecosistemas Tecnológicos para el Aprendizaje

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Introduction. Interculturality Background

Intercultural Dialogue is an on-going priority of the European Union (European Commission, 2013), explicitly stated in most EACEA actions and other EU policies. Since the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu), it became an active priority of the European Union. This is part of the very nature of the Union, composed by 27 countries, many different languages and cultures, and therefore it constitutes an undeniable and unavoidable challenge to be tackled. An active European citizenship has to be constructed on the basis of public awareness and understanding of the rich diversity of European culture and the cultural heritage that non-European citizens living in Europe bring. The development of reciprocal understanding and intercultural approaches is however a considerable challenge and no one simple way has as yet been encountered despite the large number of policies devoted to promote intercultural dialogue, both inside and outside the European Union[26], but it is clear that education and training is key, as a range of EU studies (ERICarts, 2008) indicate. These studies point to the fact that national policies approach intercultural dialogue in education principally from the perspective of civic education (throughout Europe) and intercultural education (in some countries).

There are also intercultural dialogue activities in higher education, be it in specific courses or in the context of international exchanges. But the development of intercultural competencies and skills as part of an overall political vision or national strategy on life-long learning processes -starting from kindergarten, extending into primary and secondary education

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26   In fact, a large number of EU policies promote intercultural dialogue in fields related to Culture, Audiovisual Sector, Multilingualism, Youth, Research, Integration and External Relations, among others (http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-policy-development/intercultural-dialogue/intercultural-dialogue-in-eu-policies_en.htm).

and reaching far into the different areas of professional training and life-long learning programmes- has yet to be achieved (ERICarts, 2008, p. viii). Intercultural education is a clear policy objective for education only in a few EU countries, while in the rest the promotion of intercultural dialogue remains limited to guidelines and some special resources for schools. To move towards a strategy for intercultural dialogue, main changes of paradigm still need to take place. Particularly in the field of education, it is necessary to move from traditional canons to open processes of creative interaction (ERICarts, 2008, p. 146), and both governmental and non-governmental actors should work together to build bridges by developing intercultural skills and competencies through educational and media programmes (ERICarts, 2008, p. 147). This should be addressed not only to students, but also to teachers and other gate-keepers, by means of the development of special resources, intercultural courses or training courses at the university level, training of trainers programmes in intercultural literacy and related techniques, etc. (ERICarts, 2008, p. 152). These recommendations are central pillars of this team's activities.

However in addition to these policy perspectives, there has been other activity in the area of interculturality, which is one of the specific objectives of the European Parliament and the Council in the field of lifelong learning (Official Journal of the European Union, 2004, art. 1.3); during the last five years, a significant number of projects with a relation to this area -multiculturality/interculturality- have been funded within the different EU programmes, and this number is a clear indication of the fact that the subject is of interest to a sizeable proportion of the educational research community. At the same time, however, the degree to which these projects have become part of the educational discourse in Europe is limited, despite the valuable results that many have produced. There is a clear problem of fragmentation and dispersal, in which few projects achieve a critical mass that is sufficient to put interculturality on the

"educational map". At the same time, these projects indicate a body of knowledge about intercultural learning and its practical implementation in educational contexts across Europe that, if valorized, could make a substantial contribution.

We aim at identifying and valorizing the best practices of previous LLP projects that focused on the development of intercultural skills and competencies in education (school and higher, vocational and adult education). It will be done by generating an active network of practitioners in intercultural learning, both at classroom and policy level.

Our team is well aware of the challenge of valorizing intercultural learning. Among the list of projects initially to be highlighted are MIH - Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook: Tools for Learning History and Geography in a Multicultural Perspective (http://mihproject.eu) and EHISTO- European history crossroads as pathways to intercultural and media education (http://www.european-crossroads.eu). From 2007, the European Commission has financed more than 500 initiatives and projects related to intercultural dialogue in the fields of Education & Training, Youth, Culture and Citizenship[27]. In this period, a total of 346 partnerships in Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig have been registered that relate to interculturality (52 of them recognized as "star projects")[28]. Again from 2007, over 120 multilateral projects with a relation to this area have been funded within the different LLP actions[29]. Although many of these projects have achieved remarkable results, most of them have not been able to gain enough critical mass to put interculturality in the "educational map". On the other hand, it is also certain that there is not a strong consensus or common approach to civic (and intercultural) education in

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27   Source: EVE Platform (http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/eve)

28   Source: European Shared Treasure (http://www.europeansharedtreasure.eu)

29   This includes Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig, Leonardo da Vinci, KA1, KA2, KA3 and KA4 (including Multilateral Projects, Networks, Accompanying Measures and/or Studies), and Jean Monet actions.

Europe or even within one country (ERICarts, 2008), which constitutes an obstacle for the development of common European strategies aimed to promote intercultural dialogue in education.

The results of these projects, the experience acquired during the development of MIH (García Peñalvo *et al.*, 2012) and EHISTO projects, aimed to promote intercultural dialogue in the fields of History and Geography, and other multicultural experiences all over the world (García Peñalvo, 2013) show that there have been remarkable experiences in the practice of intercultural education, but it is necessary to step forward to put together the best practices in a common framework to promote, discuss and share intercultural activities, learning programmes, resources and strategies, both addressed to teachers, educational practitioners in general and other gate-keepers (policy makers and other stakeholders).

The innovation of this research programme is located in the fact that it aims not only to valorize the projects participated in by the institutions involved but, potentially, all those funded by the LLP during the last years and related to intercultural dialogue, in order to create a network of practitioners in intercultural learning.

The following sections will be addressed to present the main results of both MIH and EHISTO projects and, finally, a future research activities to be carried out with regard to the valorization of best practices in intercultural learning will be discussed.

From MIH to EHISTO: Intercultural Teaching and Learning of Geography and History at School

MIH project (Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook: tools for learning History and Geography in a multicultural perspective) is a Comenius Multilateral Project funded with support from the European Commission that has been developed from 2009 to 2011.

Conceived from the idea of educating lower and upper Secondary School pupils in a process of construction of a European identity by involving them in the culture of other countries, MIH project meets this need by providing new methodological and ICT tools that could help teachers and pupils to plunge deeper into both cultures and languages of another nations via their History and Geography, and opens the way to introduce a European perspective in History and Geography school curricula and classroom activities.

The Handbook (García Peñalvo *et al.*, 2012) is one of MIH most significant results. It should be considered a guide for teachers, intended for both in service and future teachers at the secondary level (lower and upper Secondary School in Europe). Its purpose is to contribute to the development of multicultural and interdisciplinary discussions related to epistemological and didactical issues in education, regarding how History and Geography are effectively taught among different countries of the European Union (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain).

The Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook accompanies the teacher through:

- The epistemological and methodological approach to the teaching of History and Geography in a multicultural and interdisciplinary perspective, according to the results of the research carried out during the MIH project;

- The design and deployment of learning objects (Digital Modules), that allow, by using historical and geographical documents and contents, the construction of materials for individual learning and classroom activities;

- The comparative description, in terms of contents and didactical proposals, of a digital modules selection produced during the project;

In addition, the Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook provides to the teacher with suggestions, based on several criteria and strategies for the use of digital modules as learning materials, in order to integrate them into the curricular programmes or used in a CLIL class.

Furthermore, Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook will be useful for teachers in order to let them analyse their contexts, to set an appropriate framework for the use in the classroom of the model proposed and by providing a wide range of tools to create their own learning objects and evaluate them with colleagues and with students in classroom.

As a continuation of MIH project activities, from 2012 to 2014 EHISTO project (European History Crossroads as Pathways to Intecultural and Media Education) is being developed. EHISTO is conceived as a comparative study on a European level; it aims at the critical discussion of popular History publications with regard to the key question of a responsible mediation of history in mass media. The project responds to the increasing significance of a commercialised mediation of history within the public historical culture and reflects the fact that these representations, which not always meet the EU standards for history education, can have a lasting impact on the young generation's understanding of history. Thereby EHISTO contributes to the transfer of critical media skills within and outside of school and history classes.

The tangible subject matter of the analysis are so called "History crossroads" – historical topics which are relevant in school curricula and represented in all European history magazines. By comparing national accounts of History, the project connects the media critical level with a cross-culturally comparing objective and explores similarities and differences of European cultures of remembrance based on transnational occurrences and developments (e.g. migration, religion, cultural exchange, conflicts and peace treaties).

Based on the research results obtained in the first phase, the project will develop theoretical and empirical tools. These will help to develop quality criteria for popular representations of History in commercialised print media as well as didactically sound online teaching material and, last but not least, transnational workshops for the education and training of teachers.

Discussions. Towards a Valorization of Interculturality throughout a Network of Practitioners

After the results collected within MIH and EHISTO projects (EHISTO is still under development), the methodology that will be implemented for the future research (covering the next two years) will be based on an action-research process that will involve practitioners, both educational practitioners and policy makers, in order to build a network for promoting intercultural teaching and learning. This will begin with a series of tasks related to the implementation of the network (both technological ecosystem and supporting documents), the collection of good practices extracted from the projects funded by the LLP with a relation to interculturality and the design and development of the intercultural learning programme (phase 1). The results of the studies carried out during this first stage will generate a significant collection number of resources and good practices that will make the network valuable from the outset and, at the same time, will serve as the starting point for the development of the learning programme. The collection of good practices will be discussed in several virtual and face-to-face focus groups and on the basis of these discussions the mentor guidelines and the learning programme itself will be developed.

After the completion of this first preparatory stage, three iterations of an Intercultural learning programme will be implemented (Phase 2). These activities will be one of the key

strands of work for the rest of the research programme. Every iteration is much more than a single repetition of the previous learning programme. The first one is developed taking into consideration the good practices and resources collected from intercultural dialogue projects under the LLP, and is addressed to teachers and policy makers selected by the institutions involved in the research team. The second iteration will continue to be led by the research team, but they will be supported by some of the participants involved in the first programme, and the programme will also incorporate resources and practices developed by participants during the first iterations. The third iteration will be entirely driven by a network, created as a legal entity (association, foundation, etc.) as a result of this research.

The network of practitioners will be technologically implemented as a social networking ecosystem, that is to say, a software environment developed previously by GRIAL Research Group at the University of Salamanca, that will be used to support the network activities. It has three main spaces, the first of these is a private space for the coordination among partner institutions involved. It includes tools to publish and exchange documents, to facilitate partners' discussions, to clarify doubts, to schedule and carry out meetings, etc. The second space is the public web space of the network. It has a double function; first as a dissemination tool, where all the information about news, events, resources, reports and so on may be found, and second as an instrument for the engagement of new members for the network during and after the research programme. The third space is the community section for network members in which interaction and communication between members about intercultural learning can take place; this will also be useful as the main hub for the online learning programme.

This ecosystem is naturally conceived as an environment linked to social media channels for the automatic dissemination of the developed activities.

Acknowledgements

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