

Summary report

WP 13 - Teachers as Cultural Workers

This Work Package comprehends the analysis of the data gathered in the empirical study, within the scope of the concept “teachers as cultural workers”, that is, to what extent teachers are aware of diversity and how they deal with it in their daily practice. In sum, to what extent teachers are aware of their role as intercultural educators and act as such, according to their statements.

In order to organize the relevant data for this WP, five broad categories were outlined at the 5th transnational meeting:

- A. Professional role in developing a multicultural society and/or multicultural nation-state.
- B. Impact on how students see themselves as intercultural citizens or on their participation in multicultural societies
- C. Disbelief that their teaching has any connection with the development of a multicultural democracy
- D. Conceptual Framework
- E. Teacher Education

A. Professional role in developing a multicultural society and/or multicultural nation-state

There seems to be a general concern about students from ethnic minorities, but no well-structured school strategy to facilitate their arrival and development in school life. Most teachers seem to assume that “dealing with cultural diversity” is a synonym to fostering students’ integration. The concept ‘integration’ takes on different understandings. The most common one, as we could gather from the interviews, describes it as a natural process in which pupils will most likely get along with each other and only needs to be addressed if there are any visible complications. In any case, speaking Portuguese properly seems to be regarded as a passport both to successful integration and school achievement, so it is also very common for schools to provide tutorials to students who do not speak or speak very little Portuguese, however this is not always possible, as some schools lack the means to ensure the tutorials. These tutorials focus mainly on language acquisition (Portuguese) but also on other subjects where pupils show real difficulties. In any case, immigrant students are to attend regular classes, like any other student. Evaluation procedures may vary and adapt, but that is not expected nor fostered: it is in the hands of the School Board. On the other hand, some teachers argue for a ‘zero year’, in which Portuguese non-speaking students do not attend regular classes, but Portuguese language support classes only, in

order to better prepare them for a regular year in the Portuguese school system.

It is frequently stated that exhibitions are held in school for the whole school community, where immigrants have an active role and have the chance to share their culture, namely mostly through gastronomic specialties and dance performances. This kind of social event is common to all stages of education (from primary to secondary), but is more frequent at the primary stage, namely at the end of the school year. However, cultural diversity is often depicted as something exotic and curious, which can be appreciated from the safe distance of a single event. Therefore, there is but little evidence of its efficiency in destroying stereotypes and promoting intercultural dialogue in the long term. It may, nevertheless, help to deconstruct prejudice regarding the persons involved in these events.

Although the general attitude towards students from ethnic minorities seems to be positive, there is still a lot of prejudice, especially towards Roma, which has repercussions in teaching practices and school policies. Most teachers say that they try to promote respect and acceptance of cultural diversity in their daily practice, but the urge to do it arises mostly when the class or the school itself is culturally diverse and it is up to the teacher's own initiative to carry it out, as there seems to be no structural direction or willingness in implementing and supporting this approach.

B. Impact on how students see themselves as intercultural citizens or on their participation in multicultural societies

Within the scope of this category, it could be gathered that the more widely used strategies by teachers to promote students' intercultural awareness are namely: debate, discussion and use of materials referring to daily life, such as newspaper articles, etc. It was also argued that the best way to accomplish this goal is the actual live interaction between peers in the classroom and school grounds, for pupils will naturally get along. Some teachers pointed out that 'affection' is a priority when dealing with students. Exchanges programmes are deemed as excellent ways to boost students' intercultural development, but, even if within the scope of a school project, these programmes are often very expensive and are not supported by the school. This means that, eventually, financially favoured students are more prone to participate in such projects, which reflects one way of how inequality is still visible in the Portuguese school system. In addition, when developing such projects teachers are faced with a tremendous amount of bureaucracy which greatly demotivates them. Projects are also seen as 'property' of a certain group of teachers, as there is little cooperation between fellow teachers and with school.

Another issue which was dealt with was the evaluation of students' intercultural development. Many teachers stated that it is important to assess this dimension, but were rather unsure of how they should do it. So, this dimension is often incorporated in the section "values and attitudes", to which a small percentage of the pupils' final mark is already assigned. Many teachers prefer to assess this dimension in an informal way.

C. Disbelief that their teaching has any connection with the development of a multicultural democracy

Taking up a general overview, few teachers openly demonstrated disbelief that their teaching has any connection with the development of a multicultural democracy. However, many complained that they were unable to carry out their job as well as they would like to and as it would be hoped for, because of institutional restraints, namely lack of time, pressure to comply with the curriculum and bureaucracy.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a tendency to assume that cultural difference made invisible results in just and equal civil/legal rights, whereas one does not necessarily imply the other. Therefore, according to this perspective, it follows that a well-intended teacher might not focus on the differences.

One of the aspects which we came through is related to unconscious stereotypes and prejudice. Teachers often seem to reproduce the following stereotypes of students:

a) Eastern students generally are very well accepted, hard-working and successful;

b) Chinese students are considered to be very good at Maths but very reserved and consequently isolate themselves;

c) Africans students are usually associated to high drop-out rates, low socio-economic stratum, social problems;

d) Roma students are often crudely considered uncivilized, misbehaving, with no respect for the Portuguese society and no interest in school. (However, some teachers admit that some change and adjustment is needed, in order to motivate Roma students)

Obviously, practically no teacher would overtly admit to be racist, on the contrary, they refuse that idea. Prejudice against ethnic minorities was mostly detected in primary schools, more specifically against Roma. There is no evidence that account for prejudice against Roma in the other education stages, for there are too few Roma in those stages.

D. Conceptual Framework

After conducting a considerable number of interviews, a general lack of theoretical knowledge among teachers was noted, i. e. no references to books or authors were made by teachers while talking freely about their teaching practice regarding the intercultural dimension of citizenship education.

Moreover, not many teachers were familiar with the expression intercultural educator. When asked to describe the role of the intercultural educator, some teachers hesitantly referred 'knowledge' of other cultures, teaching about other cultures, getting on with students from ethnic minorities. Many teachers, even though they had not worked on the concept of an intercultural educator as such, define it as someone who tries to rise awareness of different cultures and promote cultural exchange. Some teachers link the concept 'intercultural educator' to someone who helps immigrants and/or ethnic minorities to integrate. According to this viewpoint, s/he will be mostly needed in schools which are visibly culturally diverse.

As intercultural education seems to be often closely related to values and education in values, it is therefore often defined as *a matter of being reasonable* [é uma questão de bom senso (FG-D2:345)]. It is also often

associated to the notion of 'sensitivity', i. e., being open-minded and aware of the 'other', taking into consideration pupils' backgrounds and acting based on this awareness, which is sometimes described as being part of one's innate personality (it depends on the teacher's personal initiative).

Teachers do not show a structured knowledge of the official European and national recommendations, but when asked about the main concepts conveyed in those documents, they highlight namely 'respect' (for differences), 'tolerance', as well as 'acceptance'.

E. Teacher Education

With regard to teacher education, most teachers have not taken any pre-service or in-service teacher development courses directly related to the intercultural dimension of citizenship education. Nevertheless, many say that they would like to acquire more education in this area. The urge to acquire more education in this area comes from the consciousness some teachers have that they are not prepared to deal with the growing number of students from ethnic minorities. As some state, they mostly rely on their sensitivity and sensibility. Some teachers agree that *there are no 'recipes'* [Não existem 'receitas'. (FG-J6:1375)]. Each context offers different challenges, which can be overcome using specific tips or tricks, but not without implementing an intercultural approach. However, some teachers, who draw merely on their experience, personal values and sensitivity to deal with the daily school challenges, feel they need no further education at all.

Notwithstanding most teachers admitting the need for further education, governmental policies are overloading teachers with bureaucratic and extra-teaching tasks, which drain their energy and prevent them from dedicating themselves more actively and efficiently to their teaching. Changes in school policies have also pushed in-service teacher education leaves from working time to holidays, which prevents teachers from attending their own development programmes. In addition, many teachers are tired and demotivated, as their initiatives (e. g. European Club) are often boycotted by the very institution for which they work.

Taking up a general overview, teachers feel that in-service education would be more effective if it offered a balanced combination of theory and practice, emphasizing however practice (methodologies, activities, practical empirical guidelines) and, at times, project work.