

INTERCULTURALITY AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION – REPRESENTATIONS AND PRACTICES OF A GROUP OF EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to give an insight into interculturality and practices of intercultural education by a group of partners before and after having participated in the development of a project on intercultural education. The group was formed of 12 people representing different institutions in the community, namely primary schools, associations and the local council. Data were collected via an initial and a final interview, carried out individually with each of the partners. The answers given by the participants in the initial interview showed that, although they believe in the importance of implementing intercultural education, there was some initial ambiguity and indefiniteness in the representations of what this concept really means and sometimes interculturality is merely and restrictively associated with multiculturalism. In the final interview, the partners stated that their representations of these concepts changed after participating in the project, thus helping them to differentiate between both. They also mentioned that their participation was an opportunity for rethinking and improving their work practices concerning intercultural education.

Key-words: Interculturality, multiculturalism, intercultural education, social representations, change through experience.

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*Santos, M., Araújo e Sá, M.H., & Simões, A.R (2012). Interculturality and intercultural education – representations and practices of a group of educational partners. Contribution to Plurilingual and intercultural education, a special issue guest-edited by Mike Byram, Mike Fleming & Irene Pieper. L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature, 12, p.1-21.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17239/L1ESLL-2012.02.05>*

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1. INTRODUCTION

As part of a study currently being developed by the University of Aveiro (UA), a group of educational partners was formed. His aim was to design, implement and evaluate a joint project on intercultural education in Primary Schools (with children between the ages of 6 and 10). The group was formed of 12 people representing various institutions in the local community working together and participating in the data collection for the project evaluation.

This article aims to present the results based on two main objectives: (i) knowing the partners' representations of intercultural education, before and after participating in the project, (ii) understanding how the work and training sessions contributed to the evolution of their representations and their work practices, as well as future projects on intercultural education.

Data were collected via two semi-structured interviews carried out individually with each of the partners. On the one hand, the initial interview helped us to think how we should coordinate the project, since we were given information about training needs on interculturality and intercultural education, on activities to be implemented in the project and the appropriate resources. On the other hand, the answers to the final interview gave us an insight into the partners' opinion of the project, its perceived impact on the students, parents, teachers and the community as a whole, as well as of the curriculum designed for implementing an intercultural approach in education.

We begin this article by presenting the theory framework on which our study is based (namely the concepts of interculturality, intercultural education and social representations), followed by an explanation of the methodology used to collect data, a brief presentation of the work plan and the partners involved, and the discussion of the results.

Finally, we will present the conclusions about the impact of the project on intercultural representations and practices of the partners, and the implications of this type of approach on the development of future strategies for the promotion of intercultural education.

2. INTERCULTURALITY, INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

Intercultural educational can be understood as a holistic educational approach, based on the respect and appreciation for cultural diversity. It proposes an integrated model of education which aims at giving equal opportunities for all, promoting dialogue, communication and intercultural competences, and overcoming racism, discrimination and exclusion (Aguado & Malik, 2006). In order to prepare students for citizenship and interculturality, it is essential to give them the opportunity to think about the way they interact with other individuals or groups, acknowledg-

ing and understanding their characteristics within universal human values (Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2002).

This educational approach should be understood as a continuous process, considering the context of implementation, the needs and the resources available, and not as a single action or intervention (Beacco et al. 2010). It should encourage teamwork based on cooperation and solidarity, enabling close links between the schools, the families, and the community (Gil-Jaurena & Ballesteros, 2009).

Thus, intercultural education with an inclusive focus should not be seen as a way to integrate migrant students and to avoid more immediate concerns with “foreigners” or “difference”. Intercultural education, indispensable for all students, is not seen as an option, but as a necessity and a moral duty. Students should be given the opportunity to see diversity as normal and as a means for personal development (Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2002; Breeze, 2003; Gil-Jaurena & Ballesteros, 2009). Consequently, it is necessary to rethink some educational practices based on activities that merely celebrate difference, such as “cultural weeks” or “gastronomy days”. These practices put certain groups in a category of “others”, thus making it difficult to know them and to avoid conflicts rather than deal with them, as they are part of our everyday lives (Aguado, Jaurena & Benito, 2005).

Above all, intercultural education aims at ensuring respect for the fundamental rights of each student as a citizen. It is based on values such as social cohesion, solidarity, participatory democracy, mutual understanding and the respect for linguistic and cultural diversity. These values should be included in the philosophy behind the design of the syllabi, teachers’ ethics and work methodologies. Thus, intercultural education should be implemented through activities and significant experiences for students, to enable them to (re)construct their identity (Cavalli et al. 2009).

Teacher education plays a crucial role in this particular area (Permisán, 2008). It prepares teachers for developing theoretical tools with which they can: i) interpret and value diversity, ii) overcome their own stereotypes and prejudices, iii) raise awareness of the complexity of intercultural contact, iv) improve methodologies to encourage intercultural education, thus valuing cooperation, solidarity and strategies to promote a better link with the community (Rey-von Allmen, 2004).

However, in schools, and in society in general, there are different conceptions of the meaning of *interculturality*, which is often used ambiguously and even inappropriately (Abdallah-Preteille, 2003; Aguado & Malik, 2006). It is often mistaken for “*multicultural*” (Portera, 2008), thus proving the need for better understanding of this concept (Beacco, 2011). While the multicultural perspective

“denotes the empirical fact that the different cultures exist and may interact within a given space and social organisation” (Council of Europe, 2008, p.11)

and refers to the knowledge of other cultures (which then leads to stereotyping and emphasizes cultural differences), the intercultural perspective goes beyond that and relates to the dynamics between cultures, to cooperation and sharing, to

the attempt to attain unity in diversity. The term *intercultural*, as the prefix *inter* suggests, refers to exchange, interaction and mutual development between groups or individuals, and to the need for reflection on these relations (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2003; Blaszyńska, 2008; Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002; Portera, 2008).

Interculturality involves a wide range of cognitive, affective and behavioural competences. These include knowing different cultures, their practices and products; encouraging tolerance and respect towards diversity; researching, discovering and interpreting the practices of other cultures; and gaining cultural awareness, by critically evaluating the practices and products of other cultures, as well as our own.

Interculturality also means interest, curiosity and empathy towards people of other cultures and using this diversity awareness to interact with others and, hopefully, working towards common goals (Byram, 2009; Deadorff, 2006; idem 2009).

In this article, we believe it is essential to analyse the social representations of the partners of the implemented project on interculturality and how they evolve during the course of the project, since representations may influence the way they work (Castellotti & Moore, 2002), the way students learn and what they learn (Carignan, Sanders & Pourdavood, 2005). Social representations are a

“set of concepts, statements and explanations originating in everyday life in the course of inter-individual communications. They are the equivalent in our society of the myths and belief systems in traditional societies” (Moscovici, 1989, p.181).

They can also be defined as a “form of knowledge, socially created and shared, with a practical objective and contributing towards the construction of a reality which is common to a social group” (Jodelet, 1989, p.36).

Therefore, social representations are not linked to the way individuals respond to stimulus in their social environment (Farr, 1995). Instead they are related to the way social groups construct and organise the meaning of that stimulus. This meaning, built on the relation with other groups, will determine the individuals’ response to that stimulus (Vala, 2000) From this perspective, social representations, also referred to as common sense theories (Moscovici, 1989), are transmitted through tradition, education and the media (Jodelet, 1989).

Knowing that the research on social representations could cover a multiplicity of potential methodological procedures (Abric, 1994; Moscovici, 1989), we resorted to a qualitative interview for collecting data, which enabled us to access the group’s opinions and attitudes, limited to a specific moment and culture (Cabecinhas, 2009). Similarly, we cannot ignore the fact that there is an element of subjectivity in the work of the researcher whose perceives his/her object of study and gives it meaning. This means that all interpretations need to be seen in a way which limits their nature of generic, absolute truth.

By analysing social representations we try to

“understand and explain the nature of the social bonds between individuals, the social practices they engage in, and relationships within and between groups” (Bonardi & Roussiau 1999, p.25).

By accessing the partners’ representations, we wanted to understand what they implicitly or explicitly know (or think they know) about intercultural education. This is important because these representations influence their practices and the transmission of social, economic, ideological and emotional values to the students (Castellotti & Moore, 2002). Therefore, by becoming aware of their representations it becomes easier for the partners to rethink and improve their educational practices (Van den Berg, 2002).

3. METHOD

In September 2010, a team of researchers from the LALE/ CIDTFF, a research and training structure working in the learning of languages in cooperation with the community (www.ua.pt/cidtff/lale/), contacted different institutions in the district (some of which are groups of schools, cultural and immigrants’ associations, local councils and libraries) in order to ascertain their availability to form a group of educational partners with the purpose of developing a project on intercultural education.

During the academic year 2010/11, the group (which will be described in the following section) had the opportunity to participate in several meetings and undergo training on interculturality and intercultural education. During these sessions the members of the group shared their doubts, experiences, ideas and (re)constructed knowledge. They were then able to jointly design a set of activities on intercultural education. The activities were aimed not only at the students of the participant teachers, but at the school community as a whole, involving also other students, parents, staff working in schools, other teachers and the whole community.

Before the group began the project, the research coordinator carried out a semi-structured 30-minute interview with each one of the partners. The purpose of this data collection instrument was: (i) to inform the researchers about the partners’ perceptions of interculturality, (ii) to know their opinion on the importance of implementing intercultural education (iii) to learn about their experience in implementing intercultural education activities. A script was drawn up beforehand with questions to which the interviewees responded as the conversation continued (Pardal and Correia, 1995).

After the completion of the project, a new semi-structured interview was carried out with the purpose of discovering: (i) the dynamics of the representations of the partners on interculturality and intercultural education, following the work carried out in partnership throughout the year (ii) the repercussions of intercultural education training for the project’s activities and in their plans for future work practices and (iii) their views regarding the impact of the project on other partners,

participants and public. Both interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed, using a contents analysis technique (Bardin, 2008). The collected data were organised into four main categories, which we will present and discuss: (i) initial representations on interculturality and intercultural education; (ii) intercultural education practices before participating in the project; (iii) final representations on interculturality and intercultural education and (iv) assessment of the project's impact.

3.1 Characterizing the partners

Twelve participants were involved in the project, all representing different institutions in the municipality of Aveiro, as presented in the following table:

Table 1 Characterization of the partners

Partner	Institution they represent	Role or position	Target-public
P1	Primary school 1	Teacher	Students 1 st Gr.; (6-7 yrs)
P2	Primary school 1	Teacher	Students 2 nd Gr; (7-8 yrs) with 2 foreign students (Moroccan and Cape-Verdean)
P3	Primary school 1	Teacher	Students 3 rd Gr; (8-9 yrs)
P4	Primary school 1	Teacher	Students 4 th Gr; (9-10 yrs)
P5	School grouping	Board member of the school grouping	Students from 1 st to 9 th Gr. (6-13 yrs) and teachers of the school grouping
P6	Primary school 2	Teacher	Students 3 rd and 4 th Gr (8-10 yrs) with one foreign student (Ukrainian)
P7	Primary school 1 and 2	Teacher of Music as an extra-curricular activity	Students 1 st to 4 th Gr. (6-10 yrs)
P8	Primary school 1 and 2	Teacher of Music as an extra-curricular activity	Students 1 st to 4 th Gr. (6-10 yrs)
P9	Cultural Association	Socio-cultural animator (works with musicians, actors and comedians from different nationalities)	A wide range of people of different ages, nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds
P10	Ukrainian immigrants' association	Coordinator at an immigrants' association (lessons in Ukrainian; language awareness activities)	Immigrant students 6 to 16 yrs
P11	CERCI (an institution that works with physically or mentally disabled people)	Speech therapist	Physically or mentally disabled children
P12	Municipal Library and the Council (double function of one individual)	Librarian (responsible for "story telling")	A wide range of people of different ages, nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds

3.2 *Brief description of the project*

The joint project on intercultural education was developed during one academic year, encompassing three types of work sessions:

- fourteen meetings, in which the partners discussed theoretical concepts, shared previous experiences and planned a set of activities for students;
- ten intermediate work sessions, in which the partners carried out in-class activities;
- two events which took place in one of the schools, around Christmas and at the end of the academic year, with the purpose of sharing the work developed and raising awareness of intercultural education.

A brief description of some of the activities carried out during the intermediate work sessions, as well as their objectives, participants and outcomes can be found in table 2.

3.3 *Data analysis presentation and discussion*

Initial representations on interculturality and intercultural education. With the purpose of learning partners' representations of interculturality, we began by asking, in the initial interview, what the concept meant for them. The answers were varied, but broadly within two categories: one group of partners links interculturality with cultural diversity in human societies. This group is closer to the perspective of multiculturalism (Portera 2008). The other group is closer to the intercultural perspective, because it focuses on a dynamic perspective of cultures, intercultural relations and intercultural competences, rather than static representations and stereotypes.

In fact, half of the answers acknowledge the significance of diversity, associated with different traditions. For example, P7 associates interculturality

“with internationality (...) to different countries”

and P8

“with different cultures/ customs/ traditions”.

This seems to be a static perspective of peoples and cultures, with no exchange or interaction between them, which is closer to a multicultural perspective, according to several authors (e.g. Portera 2008). Other participants, such as P5, associate these concepts with

“other cultures and other ethnicities/ for example/Romanies”,

P1

“knowing other cultures”,

and P12

“the respect and consideration for what is different from us”.

These concepts may demonstrate some ethnocentrism, because “others” are considered different. Besides, the notions of “other cultures” and “what is different from us” seems to stratify people and groups according to certain features that make them exotic, different and distant (Aguado, 2008; Mata & Malik, 2009).

Table 2: Summary description of the intervention plan

Objectives	Description of the activities	Dates	Target-public	Partners
Raising-awareness on cultural and musical diversity; exploring sounds	Performance by a musical orchestra (music instruments made from different materials)	Nov 2010	All classes (schools 1- 2)	P9
To develop openness, interest, curiosity and empathy towards other cultures and languages	Awareness-raising session on Arabic and its writing system. (i) to pronounce and write words; (ii) comparison of the Arabic and Latin alphabets; (iii) identification of common lexicon; (iv) contact with a native and exploration of cultural aspects	Nov 2010	Students from 1 st G (school 1)	P1 and 1 teacher from UA
	Awareness-raising session on Ukrainian and its writing system: (i) hand puppetry show in Ukrainian; (ii) to pronounce and write words; (iii) comparison of the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets; (iv) contact with a native and exploration of cultural aspects	Mar 2011	All classes (schools 1-2)	P10
To develop skills on communication, cooperation skills, respecting others and non-discrimination	Collaborative games: heterogeneous groups (different ages, genders and nationalities) in order to experience inclusion or exclusion and related feelings	Nov 2010 and Mar 2011	All classes (schools 1- 2)	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P9
Encouraging a harmonious relation between the school, the families and the community	Intercultural Christmas party where the work carried out throughout the academic year was shown. Short video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJbEg9v64rU	Nov-Dec 2010	All classes (schools 1-2)	All partners
Encouraging critical thinking with regards to other countries' traditions and values	Reading intercultural stories, and reflection on characteristics, traditions, religions and languages included in the stories	Feb 2011	All classes (schools 1- 2)	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P12
Discovering the value of unity in diversity; joint work with the aim to achieving common goals	Inventing an imaginary people with its own language, writing system, clothing, games and traditional dances and presentation of this imaginary people to the scholar community	Feb 2011 to Jun 2011	All classes from schools 1 and 2	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, and P8

The other half mentioned “intercultural”, which echoes or implies interaction, due to the prefix *inter*. The participants, therefore, considered that interculturality is not only linked to a juxtaposition of different cultures but also to the relation between them (Coste, Moore and Zarate, 2009). From the second group of interviewees, P6 said that “Interculturality makes me think of the various cultures and the relation there might be between them”; P9 says

“the prefix ‘inter’ refers to the relation with others/ in fact/ the relation between different people/ each with its own culture and identity”.

The answers given by this group convey a dynamic view of the cultures Therefore and an interaction between individuals and groups. This view is suggestive of an intercultural perspective, according to several authors (e.g. Blaszynska 2008; Portera 2008).

Interviewee P8 mentioned the need to think about the said interaction:

“what springs to mind [when I think about interculturality] is the action between different people/ thinking about cultures and the relation between them”. Thus, according to Byram (2009), analysing the interaction and contact between people from different cultural backgrounds is a primary feature of interculturality. And one which enables each person to reflect on his/her own culture.

On the other hand, we wanted to know how much importance was attributed by the interviewees to the implementation of the intercultural approach in education, by asking them how relevant intercultural practices were to them. Again, the answers to the initial interview gave us an insight into their representations of interculturality and intercultural education, and especially their purpose.

All interviewees were aware of this subject area, as they all agreed on the importance of activities about interculturality. According to P1

“there should always be these types of activities/ all year round. Intercultural education is always important. (...) because it is a way to know other people/ other cultures/ because we might need to travel abroad at any time or/for instance/ we might have to work with someone of a different nationality with other habits. Learning this is useful for the whole of our lives.”

This teacher believes that through intercultural education students get to know other peoples and cultures, thus preparing themselves for intercultural interaction. Indeed, according to several authors, one of the purposes of intercultural education is to give individuals the ability to live in multicultural societies and to see diversity as a force for mutual development (Gil-Jaurena & Ballesteros, 2009).

P2 believes that

“it is always important to carry out this type of activity. (...) because sometimes there is conflict between children of the same nationality. But conflict arises because we all have our differences (...) and we have to consider each situation and deal with our differences. So it is important to intervene and know how to manage conflicts.”

This teacher seems to be aware of the fact that interculturality is not restricted to cultural differences, and links intercultural education with the ability to manage conflicts even between children of the same nationality, since her concept of diversity includes each person's characteristics. This opinion coincides with that of the authors who believe that intercultural education should be included in all situations of education, and that conflicts, rather than being avoided, should be seen as part of our everyday lives and dealt with (Aguado, 2008).

P9 also says that

"it is always important [to carry out this type of activity]/ because from the moment we approach interculturality/ direct or indirectly/ we are encouraging mutual respect and fighting against racial prejudice, whether in the short or long term/ this ends up stirring people's reactions. We hope/ we make them react to things/ that otherwise/ would cause some discrimination or would lead them to look at other people in a different way".

This interviewee seems to consider that intercultural education is necessary in all situations of education, because it encourages non-discriminatory and anti-racist attitudes (Gil-Jaurena & Ballesteros (2009).

Moreover, four interviewees believe that these types of activities are necessary, especially in the presence of foreign students. P8 said

"I think it's always necessary to carry out [these types of activities] but when different cultures are represented in the classroom it becomes more (...) pertinent";

P9 said

"most of the projects I developed were aimed at minorities/ specific recipients".

On this matter, the literature recommends that intercultural education is not used solely in situations with minority groups. Rather, it should be implemented in all educational situations, and should even serve as the basis for all education (Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2002; Breeze, 2003).

In short, the data show that, despite there being awareness of interculturality and of practices which promote intercultural education, at the beginning of the school year the partners seem to have various representations of these concepts: the way it can be developed in the schools and its objectives. Furthermore, the information provided by the data collected coincides with the literature, since ambiguity concerning interculturality has already been widely described (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2003; Aguado & Malik, 2006; Beacco, 2011; Portera, 2008). In this study, the term "interculturality" is linked to two different perspectives: on one hand, it highlights the differences between individuals, cultures and diversity under a static perspective; on the other hand, it emphasizes the dynamic relation of interaction and dialogue between individuals and cultures. This difference in perspective may reflect the need for training and for a deeper analysis of the concepts in order to construct a holistic approach to intercultural education. In our opinion, it is important to go beyond diversity and differences, and to actually focus on the interaction and mutual development which diversity can bring.

3.4 Intercultural education practices before participating in the project

With the purpose of understanding their experiences of intercultural education, and still in the initial interview, we asked the participants whether they had already carried out activities related to this matter. Only one participant, P11, had never carried out these types of activities.

We asked them to describe those activities (see table 1 for understanding the context of their work and the activities they may carry out in those contexts). These proved to be varied, promoting different competences. Some focused on discovering and knowing different cultural groups, their customs, practices and products; these competences coincide with the concept of interculturality advocated by Byram (2009) and Deardorff (2006). Such is the case of P3 who encouraged students to search on the internet for the ways of life and traditions of other countries, and to display this information on posters.

Other activities had the purpose of increasing students' curiosity about linguistic and cultural diversity, and broadening their horizons. These are also considered important in the development of intercultural competences according to Byram (2009) and Deardorff (2006). In this regard P1 spoke about students exchanging letters with foreign students, thus writing in a foreign language and learning about other traditions and places; P2 spoke of volunteering abroad, where she had had the opportunity of working with children of other nationalities; P7 frequently teaches students songs in different languages, including Portuguese sign language, thus making them aware of language diversity. P8 mentioned an awareness-raising activity whereby students had to read a list of ingredients in food packages written in different languages; P10 often takes multi-lingual hand puppetry shows to various schools. On the other hand, and outside the school environment, P9 spoke about introducing artists of different nationalities at the events organised by the cultural association where she works; P12, representing the Municipal Library, often promotes "book-crossing" between different nationalities as a way of encouraging contact between citizens.

There are also activities which aim at encouraging analysis and assessment of foreign practices and customs. P4, P5 and P6 carried out reading activities with texts about other peoples and their cultures, followed by debates.

We were, therefore, able to discover more representations on interculturality and intercultural education beside the description of these practices. These seemed to include the development of cognitive, affective and behavioural competences, thus falling within the vision of interculturality which encompasses openness, interest, curiosity and empathy towards other cultures. Raising awareness on diversity may be used to interact with other and act together towards a common goal (Byram, 2009). It is important to highlight that most of the activities described were jointly organised with other institutions in the community, such as libraries, immigrants' associations or other schools. The interviewees showed an interest in

involving the community in intercultural education, which according to Beacco *et al.* (2010) is one of the principles to be taken into account when planning the syllabus.

Although the partners in these groups present different perspectives on interculturality and different approaches to the concept, they seem keen to work and develop new skills on this field. Thus, despite being quite a heterogeneous group – on a cultural, social and professional level – it seemed perfectly adequate for developing a project on intercultural education.

3.5 Final representations on interculturality and intercultural education

As previously stated, and following the project on intercultural education, we carried out a new set of interviews with the participants. Our purpose was to ascertain if the project had caused an impact on: the evolution of the representations of interculturality and intercultural education; the rethinking of practices; and the development of intercultural competences both in partners and students.

When asking the participants about the meaning of interculturality, we noticed an evolution in their representations. Unlike the data initially collected, none of the interviewees in the final interview linked interculturality only with diversity under a juxtaposed perspective (as had happened with P7 and P8). Their representations now referred to a perspective which respects and values diversity, as well as interaction between peoples and their cultures. P4 said that

“interculturality/ intercultural education/ interaction between all people/different or not/ the joint experiences. By learning that others are different and if we respect and accept them and interact with them we can grow and learn new things”.

P7 stated that

“interculturality has to do with the interaction between people/cultures... and we must understand the richness of this diversity”.

P1 also mentioned that

“interculturality is linked to the fact that we are able to interact with people with different languages, social and cultural background/ we are able to accept those differences and live together harmoniously”.

In these three responses, we noticed that the interviewees were aware of that change in their representations of interculturality, and they thought it a positive change. They mentioned that they had not previously considered this but they are now able to distinguish interculturality from multiculturalism. For example, P6 stated:

“the impression I get is that/ multiculturalism is as if all cultures were represented/ and none of the cultures clashes with each other. But that’s not interculturality/ it’s the relation that comes out of celebrating differences/ not seeking to annul neither one or another. (...) Maybe it’s/ being interested/ it’s wanting to know more about other/getting along with others.”

Similarly, P10 said that before participating in this project he had no perception of the differences between multiculturalism and interculturalism. But he now understands that

“‘multi’ means many cultures/ ‘Inter’ means interaction/ a relation between people. It’s not simply being with other people but relating with them/ interacting/ respecting/ understanding and valuing one another”.

Seven of the interviewees considered that the change in their representations was due to the training sessions, which enabled them to understand the authors’ positions on this subject and to think about them. Regarding this matter, P1 said that

“I was already aware of these issues [intercultural education’s] but I became even more aware/ I had the opportunity to think and develop this matter/ because I learned things which I didn’t know or never thought about/ such as interculturalism and what it means/ in the beginning I had a different idea.”

These interviewees were mainly referring to a specific training session at the initial stage of the project, where a special focus was put on the difference between inter, pluri and multiculturalism. The main objectives and guidelines of intercultural education were also presented. This session was followed by a phase in which the partners had to think about this subject. Then a collective definition of intercultural education was negotiated, along with its potential use in the project. Other meetings also enabled sharing, analysis and the discussion of different practices and resources for implementing intercultural education, for example the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (Byram *et al.* 2008).

Five of the interviewees added that participating in the project enabled them to think about the way they can work in the future, through intercultural education practices. P10 stated that:

“we learned that we can do a lot for the schools or other organisations/ we can have a lot to show and share with others and I had never realised that. This project gave us lots of ideas and showed us how we can do it.”

We can conclude that the work meetings and the training sessions were seen as important. The participants were able to reconstruct their representations of interculturalism and intercultural education, and they also found other ways to include these subjects in their work practices. According to Permisán (2008), teacher training in intercultural education is as important as ongoing training. According to Rey-von Allmen (2004), it should focus on knowledge and professional experience, both of which were considered during the aforementioned sessions. This way, teachers can be confronted with their own prejudices and stereotypes on race, ethnicity, class and other cultural matters. They also have the opportunity to develop positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion (Permisán, 2008).

With regards to the importance of implementing intercultural education, there was an increase in the number of interviewees (six in the final interview) who believed that intercultural education is important in all situations of education, and should be considered the basis for all education. For example, P2 said that

“it is the foundation of all education (...) because it is the citizens’ education. That’s where learning to read/count/write/etc comes from. It’s the basis for everything. Because our schools are challenged/ to become more intercultural. And/ therefore/ when these values are well defined/ then the whole of the community becomes receptive to other cultures/other knowledge”.

P1 also mentioned that through intercultural education students

“learn to accept and respect everyone/ to live with diversity/ to take advantage of that diversity” and highlights the importance of “passing on those ideas to our children/ to our students”.

Four interviewees also believed that intercultural education should form part of the primary education syllabus and be taught transversally because it links with the subject of “values and citizenship” and raises awareness among teachers and students of playing a role in society (Ministério da Educação, 2001). That is the case of P4:

“the subject must always be taught because it’s linked to citizenship education/ values/ and education in general. It is developed by our students/ from the first year and must be part of primary education syllabus/ transversally/ because it is not an isolated area/ it’s in everything”

and P3

“from now on I will always try to include interculturality/ I mean/ I think it already is. Intercultural education is always there/ isn’t it/ we always teach values/citizenship/ respect/ diversity. It’s essential because they are not taught in one subject/ it should be included in everything/ it’s transversal.”

This understanding of intercultural education had not been mentioned by the interviewees in the initial interview, which leads us to believe that by participating in this project the interviewees were encouraged to think about curricular development. As Beacco (2011) points out, interculturality must be transversal to the syllabus, assuming a particular importance in the teaching of history, languages and religion, because it teaches about all the religions in the world, different beliefs and historical facts, thus enabling the students to understand cultures and religious, and avoiding prejudice.

On the other hand, the importance of intercultural education, especially for integrating minority groups such as immigrants, is highlighted by one of the interviewees. Despite linking intercultural education with the respect for other peoples and values, P7 also added:

“I think it’s a very pertinent subject to our society and to the whole world because of globalisation. Immigrants arrive in our country but the Portuguese also go abroad. Values/ respect / should be taught/ even because some of our students might to look for work in other countries/ they have to be able to integrate.”

P7 hereby reminded us that, despite the fact that only one of the participants had been teaching foreign students, the subject of migration had been included in the planning of the project’s activities. It is important to remember that the activities

were jointly developed with P10 (representing an immigrants association), and focused on contact and interaction with immigrants, raising awareness of their culture, language and traditions.

Finally, the interviewees acknowledged the importance of intercultural education, highlighting that this approach is particularly important for educating students for citizenship, as the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* (Council of Europe, 2008) mentions. It encourages the development of competences and the respect for human rights, as well as openness to diversity.

4. ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

Still referring to the final interview, we aimed to understand the opinion of the participants regarding the impact produced by the activities designed and implemented by the partners (see Table 2 with the description of some of the activities) both on the partners, on the students and on local community.

With regards to the impact on the students, seven of the interviewees stated that their participation in this project was very important. It enabled them to learn from diversity, not only cultural but also social, linguistic and religious. They also learned from values and attitudes such as respect, solidarity and critical thinking. P5 highlights one of the activities in which one of the partners, P10, a Ukrainian citizen, went to the schools to speak about the Ukraine and its traditions, and to present a hand puppetry show in Ukrainian. The children learned some words in Ukrainian and this partner said that

“the children/ were very surprised with/let’s say/ the sounds/ it was something completely different. I think it was very instructive/ learning words in Ukrainian and comparing them to Portuguese/ because they were very different”.

Furthermore, students had the opportunity to watch videos about the history, geography, religion and culture of Ukraine. Finally, P5 concluded that

“I believe they understood the message; we are all people/ citizens of the world/ which is to say/ with our language and traditions and we all should be respected/ and we have a lot to learn from each other/ by living together.”

This activity aimed at raising awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, reflecting on differences and similarities between different languages and writing systems, and comparing specific features of different cultures. To this extent, and according to Beacco *et al.* (2010), we can say that the activity coincided with the guidelines for the plurilingual and intercultural *syllabi* of Primary Education.

Meanwhile, P3 considered that the activities encouraged students to abandon individualism and ethnocentrism and develop openness and solidarity:

“I think this work was really necessary/ to encourage openness/ to know how to give and get from others (...) I think they’re improved a little/ more sympathetic/ more aware of the need to sharing and learning with what their classmates can give”.

P2 also believes that intercultural education must be implemented via different strategies and activities, since there are no unique formulae, and underlines the opportunities for reflection which those strategies offered the students:

“I think that it also enabled many moment for reflecting. I tried to give them the largest possible number of experiences/ so they could experience interculturality situations/ but I also tried to make them think about this subject”.

Thus, it is important that the methodologies used in implementing intercultural education are varied and adjusted to each context (Cavalli et al. 2009).

In short, the interviewees considered that the project had a positive impact on the students, enabling them to develop their intercultural competence, inasmuch as the activities carried out enabled contact between different nationalities, using different languages, respecting and valuing diversity and discovering and constructing knowledge (Aguado & Malik, 2006; Beacco, 2011).

With regards to the impact on the partners, three of the interviewees emphasised the development of collaborative work competences, especially the respect for others, their ideas and opinions. P7 said that

“(…) in the group of partners/although we were all different/ we all learned from each other/ sharing experiences/ with materials brought to the sessions/ we did things little by little/ while we were realising what we had and what we needed to do in that situation”.

In this case, the interviewee alludes to the way in which activity planning was carried out, in several work meetings during the academic year, involving all the partners and where each one shared experiences from other contexts, materials produced in other activities, resources that were made available to the group and ideas for developing new activities.

Thus, the project was constructed following the guidelines of Beacco *et al* (2010) for developing and implementing plurilingual and intercultural education. It was designed systematically, from the analysis of each situation and the resources available. This process, in the words of P7, was also a way of developing group work competences, as the participants learned to listen to and respect colleagues' opinions, share doubts and ideas and jointly construct a meaning for the work they were doing. Collaborative work described by the partner provides, according to Wenger (1998), an exchange of information, a communication of experiences, a sharing of reflections and, consequently, the professional development of all participants.

With regards to the impact on the parents of the students, four interviewees stated that the project reached them via the students, thus making them aware of interculturality and consider the importance of intercultural education. This idea is highlighted by P1: “

(…) [parents] were also aware of everything that was done here in the school/ and of the partners of the project/ and for them interculturality is now part of their lives”.

P1 also said that the activities carried out by their children as part of intercultural education made their parents “curious about this subject, and want to know more about it, and about the purpose of their children’s education in the light of interculturality/ the purpose of the activities and how important that is for their education”.

With regards to the impact on other teachers working at the same schools as the partners (but who didn’t participate in the project), four interviewees stated that they became more curious about the subject and showed an interest in participating in the project. P5 said that

“the idea I got was that it had a lot of impact. (...)things started being publicised in our school group newspaper/ so it reflected the work carried out/ people got to know the work we were developing on interculturality and became curious/ some were even interested and said that would like to have participated/ especially in other primary schools.”

Regarding the impact on the local community, two interviewees showed an interest in involving the community in the work that was being carried out and thought that the project had a positive impact. For instance, P2 said that

“the project also had an indirect public. Firstly, there were the events/ for both the families and for the community/ even because the venue’s door was open for those who wanted to go in/ you could even see it from the stairs. I usually say that/ they might not even understand the messages but even from their windows they saw something different. And that/ just by asking what was going on/ generates change. So/ I think we will never be able to quantify how many people were in contact with this project”.

This interviewee mentioned one of the events which took place at one of the schools. The purpose of the event was to present the work developed by the student as part of the intercultural education project, through singing, plays, posters and exhibitions. The entire community was invited to the event and to think about values, attitudes and knowledge transmitted by the children and their work. As mentioned by P2, these moments of sharing with the community reached a considerable number of people and made them aware of the need to implement intercultural education.

As for the impact on future practices, six interviewees said they may adopt work practices in line with intercultural education. They mentioned some of the activities they plan to carry out. P1 intends to generate debate and make the students think about media stories that occurred in different parts of the world, thus contributing towards the deconstruction of stereotypes:

“[I intend to do work on this subject] (...) from day-to-day situations/ to talk about this subject whenever possible. Through stories/ the news/ discussing ideas and thinking together/ because it is a very comprehensive subject/ always very up-to-date and we only need to turn on the TV and watch the news of different cultures and their impact in society and I think it’s important to work on this subject / so we are aware of who we are and the world we live in/ the people that live in it/ the stereotypes and the conflicts and why they exist”.

Regarding the dissemination and the creation of future networks, interviewee P2 suggested the activities be presented to other classes and other schools: "(...) you could sum it all up in one video and present it at schools". This way, the partner might be suggesting that the work developed is not forgotten and may be used for raising awareness of intercultural education with other students and teachers.

With regards to the impact of the project on the institutions in the future, three of the interviewees said they had developed activities on intercultural education. P10 envisages how these activities may help bring two different communities together and promote intercultural dialogue:

"with this project on interculturality (...) we understood how we can publicise our work/ bridge the gap between Portuguese and Ukrainian culture / improve the relations between two peoples/ so that institutions understand that they can form more partnerships with us".

This partner is aware of the importance of participating in the project, as he can replicate some of the activities he carried out, thus helping to bring two cultures closer together.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout this article, we have attempted to present and compare the representations of interculturality and intercultural education practices of a group of partners working in education during one academic year, during which they participated in the design and organisation of a joint project on intercultural education.

We found that their representations of interculturality and intercultural education seemed to have evolved, and were more developed and carefully thought through in the final interview than in the initial interview. Unlike in the first interview where these concepts were frequently mistaken for multiculturalism, their representations showed interaction between cultures and an appreciation for diversity in the final interview.

This evolution may also have a repercussion on their work practices, since the participants stated they intend to continue doing work of this kind in the future. With regards to this, they suggest developing joint activities that encourage dialogue between cultures, deconstructing stereotypes, or even the dissemination of this project and its implementation in other schools.

Even though twelve interviewees mentioned that before the project they had already carried out activities on intercultural education, not least because it is a component of the primary education syllabus, some recognised that they were not always aware they were doing so. We highlight the importance of collaborative work and ongoing training as a means of promoting personal and professional development, encouraging more conscientious attitudes and behaviours, and providing a foundation for future practice.

Finally, we believe that the participation in the project on intercultural education made a positive contribution towards changing mentalities and attitudes not

only within the group of partners involved but also the target-public, students and other community members. Data from interviews with the partners suggest developing attitudes such as increased curiosity and awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, information collection and knowledge construction of different cultures, respect and critical thinking.

We believe that the project presented here might be a feasible proposal to introduce intercultural education in the syllabi, thus promoting the development of intercultural skills not only for teachers and pupils but also for the community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Project co-funded by the FCT (Foundation for Science and Technology) under the programme QREN – POPH – Typology 4.1 - Advanced Training (subsidized by the European Social Fund and the MCTES (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education)).

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