

UDC: 37.018.8.011.3-051:314.151.3-054.73(4)

(Review paper)

DEVELOPING CULTURAL BONDS BETWEEN EUROPEAN CITIZENS AND MIGRANTS (DEV CULT)

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Abstract: It is widely acknowledged that school teachers and educators face many challenges as they deal with increasingly complex and diverse learning situations and meet competence demands in a constantly changing cultural environment with the high flow of migrants in Europe. Providing attractive, effective and efficient high-multicultural possibilities for school teacher training supports school teachers and teachers educators to address skills deficits and update their competences throughout their career based on the current situation of the social crisis as the integration of migrants in the school setting and minimizing the respective cultural gap is one of the main objectives of the DEV CULT research project.

In this paper, we will present current situation in schools across EU and results of the survey as a basis of new teaching methodology with e-learning component.

Key words: cultural bond, migrants, teachers, students, parents...

Introduction: Schools across Europe are seeing a rise in the number of children born and raised in a different country, therefore integration of migrants is at the top of the EU political agenda, while education has a vital role in closing the gap and fostering the integration of immigrant students in schools. The DEV CULT research project aims to combine the aforementioned in order to provide effective solutions for integration, social inclusion and bonding between native and immigrant populations in European schools; enhancing school teachers' competences and fostering more interaction between teachers, parents and students who coexist in multicultural classrooms.

According to the European Commission Education and Training Monitor 2017, common problems in the field of all EU participating countries are: lack and insufficient teacher education, especially initial education and in-service training for integration of migrant students in classrooms; little engagement in Intercultural Education; increasing performance gap between foreign- born and native- born students; large proportion of the refugees are young and poorly qualified, which starts from initial school education; contradiction between intercultural ideas and the national and mono-cultural thinking as well as cultural prejudice present in societies and schools.

The above challenges are the ones being addressed by the DEV CULT through the design and development of a new methodology.

Our research team prepare guidelines and a training course, as well as an e-learning component for teachers aiming to minimize the cultural gap in schools, foster better cooperation and intercultural dialogue and create stronger bonds among native and immigrant pupils in multicultural classrooms.

Preliminaries: A recent article examined the impact of educational systems and provided explanations beyond language skills and socio-economic background (Borgna and Contini, 2014). Using data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey, the authors compared results for 17 countries. They focus on second-generation immigrants and their achievements at the end of compulsory schooling, about age 15. Unlike previous studies, Borgna's and Contini's measure is not the average achievement-gap between immigrant and native pupils, but the relative position of immigrant students within the achievement distribution of natives with the same socio-economic background. One of the most striking results from this study shows the existence of educational penalties that don't operate along the lines of socio-economic background, but specifically affect migrants. According to the authors, "in ten countries, the average second-generation immigrant lies below the 35th percentile of the mathematics achievement distribution of natives with the same socio-economic background." Similar results were found for reading and science.

Collection of Good practices was our starting point in defining "Basic Elements for Methodology and Guidelines". The *main objective* of this activity was to collect *tools* and *methods* that educators can use for the development of intercultural bonds in classroom and for minimizing the cultural gap. It will support teachers in the development of their *intercultural competence* and inclusion of an intercultural dimension to their educational practices through examples of tools and methods to deploy for this purpose.

Intercultural competence is the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant attitudes, skills and knowledge in order to interact effectively and appropriately in different intercultural situations.

In general, *good practice* is a way to work/teach/educate to achieve the set objectives.

It:

- Brings a transformation
- Replicable
- Ethical
- Can be seen as an inspiration (allows to copy a model that fits but it can also serve as possibility for adaptation according to the individual context)
- Effective at delivering a particular outcome

The reaserch team collected, revised and selected 17 good practices, which will be used as a basis for the development of the giudelines. The partners collected the practices embracing the experience from different countries of the EU, which contributes to the diversity of methods and approaches.

Methodology: (*Participants, process and survey instrument*)

To provide the basis for the development of the subsequent outputs the research team carried out national surveys targeting (1) experienced school teachers in multicultural classrooms, (2) parents, (3) students.

The objective of the survey was to detect skills and competences as well as the needs of the target groups and “set the scene” in order to customize DEVCULT project overall contribution to enhancing their skills and competences.

The surveys included the analysis of the tools and methods and investigated the opinions of school teachers, parents, and students both native and with migrant background about the cultural gaps in multicultural classrooms.

There were developed 3 questionnaires, one for each target group. Each questionnaire contained 10 questions. In total, here were collected 160 questionnaires filled in by teachers, 150 questionnaires filled in by parents, and 157 filled in by students in 4 countries- Macedonia, Bulgaria, Spain and Cyprus.

Results and discussion: Regarding the *Questionnaire for Teachers*, the majority of the respondents from Spain (90% of the survey participants) and Macedonia (93%) stated that *they have migrant students in their educational centres, they do not have this group of students*.

As for the experience of working with migrant students, the results varied from country to country: the overwhelming majority of the interviewed teachers from Spain (92%) and more than a half of the teachers from Bulgaria (a great deal – 13% and yes – 44%) affirmed that they have worked or work with them, while 40% of the teachers of Cyprus have just a little experience, and 83% of the teachers of Macedonia who participated in the survey stated they don’t have any experience.

The current situation with migrant students in educational centres is also different in the partnering countries: the majority of the Spanish teachers (90%) currently *have migrant students* in their classes, but the majority of the respondents - 93% from Macedonia, 80% from Cyprus, and 64% from Bulgaria – stated that they *do not have migrant students*. The majority of the teachers of all the countries participated in the survey believe that *school need to offer support and motivation* to the teachers who work with this group of students. To interact effectively with this group of students, the teachers consider *important to do a specific training (all the countries), online resources and/or ICT application (Macedonia, Bulgaria), an educational assistant in class (Spain, Cyprus)*. The majority of the teachers from Cyprus, Macedonia, and Spain who participated in the survey believe that *migrant students should attend preparatory centers / classes* in the school before they are included in classrooms for formal education (60% - Cyprus, Macedonia- 82%, Spain – 92%). More than a half of the Bulgarian teachers (57%) do not think so. The teachers believe that (1) *clearly assessing the competences of migrant students* for better initial evaluation (Macedonia and Cyprus), (2) *providing support from the peers* (schoolmates/classmates) (all the countries), and (3) *having a mentor* at the school (Bulgaria and Spain) would enable the better inclusion of migrants in the school. Answering the question about the performance of migrant students, two thirds of the teachers from Macedonia and Spain believe that it is about the same as their fellow students, while 52% of the Bulgarian and 60% of the Cypriot teachers consider that migrant students normally underperform compared to their fellow students. Among the reasons why migrant students may underperform academically, the teachers of all the countries stated (1) not enough support by the school system and (2) language barrier. The majority of the teachers from Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Cyprus think that the creation of a social media group (Facebook, Instagram) specifically made for migrant students to join would be a good way to make them feel a sense of inclusion. 84% of the respondents in Spain consider unnecessary the creation of such a group, which can be explained by the numerous groups (Facebook, blogs, WhatsApp groups) that Spanish schools and classes usually have.

The answers of the respondents, who filled in the *Questionnaire for Students*, can be summarized as follows:

1. The majority of the Spanish (82%) and Cypriot (91%) *have migrant students in their school*, whereas more than a half (57%) of the Bulgarian and all the students from Macedonia stated *they do not have migrant students*.
2. All the Spanish, Cypriot, Bulgarian, and more than a half of Macedonian (56%) students who participated in the survey stated that *they think that migrant students should be allowed to be part of a school*
3. All of the Spanish and the majority of the Cypriot (82%) and Bulgarian (79%) students who participated in the survey stated they *do not think that the school should inform you before they plan to include migrant students*. On the contrary, the majority of the Macedonian (86%) students *think that the school should inform you before they plan to include migrant students*.
4. The overwhelming majority (91%) of the Spanish, Cypriot (82%), and Bulgarian (89%) and more than a half of Macedonian students stated that their *schoolmates accept migrant students*.
5. The majority of the Bulgarian (89%), Spanish (82%), Macedonian (76%), Cypriot (63%) think that *learning the culture of the migrant students would make schoolmates interact more with them*.
6. All the Cypriot and the majority of the Bulgarian (83%) and Spanish students (82%) feel that *language may be a barrier to communicate with schoolmates who are migrants*. More than a half of the Macedonian (60%) students *do not think so*.
7. All of the Spanish and Bulgarian students and the majority of the Cypriot and Macedonian students stated that they *personally make migrant students feel welcome at their school*, through (1) accompanying them, helping with their tasks, (2) activities in groups, school trips and school camps, (3) playing with them, (4) explaining what they have to do, (5) being their friend, (6) introducing them to some of the activities I attend as acting, sports activities, (7) defending them from some negative comments, (8) If they are alone or notice that they are not so interactive with others, I would go to meet them to make them more comfortable in the school environment.
8. All the Spanish, Cypriot, and Bulgarian students said that if they had a classmate who was a migrant, *they would sit next to him/her*, whereas more than a half of the Macedonian (52%) students *would not do this*.
9. All the Spanish, Cypriot, and Bulgarian as well as the majority of the Macedonian (84%) students think that migrant students *should participate in projects and events together with other students*.
10. All the Spanish and the majority of the Bulgarian (90%) and Cypriot (82%) students *want to be included in a group to support migrants* organised by their school. On the contrary, more than a half of the Macedonian (52%) students *would not like to be included in such a group*.

As in the previous Questionnaires, the opinions of the *parents* who participated in the survey, vary from country to country:

Thus, all the parents from Spain and the majority of the parents from Bulgaria (90%) and Cyprus (83%) *have had a previous contact* with migrants, whereas 81% of the parents from Macedonia *haven't had any contact* with migrants (adults, children).

All the Bulgarian and Cypriot as well as the majority of the Spanish (94%) and Macedonian parents (81%) think that *every child has a right to education, without discrimination on any*

base. All the Cypriot parents and the majority of the Bulgarian (90%), Spanish (86%) and Macedonian (around 71%) parents *approve the inclusion of migrant students in formal education* (schools). The majority of the Macedonian (81%) and Bulgarian (65%) and a half of the Spanish parents think that the *school should inform them before they plan to include migrant students*, whereas the majority of the Cypriot parents do not think so. About half of the parents from Macedonia and Spain and 40% of the parents from Bulgaria and Cyprus would be interested to *attend workshops in the school to promote ways to assist migrants in feeling more included at schools*. Moreover, 40% of the Bulgarian, 33% of the Cypriot and 22% of the Spanish parents would like to be *included in the school's team for supporting migrant students*. The majority of the parents from Bulgaria (81%), Macedonia (71%), Spain (64%) as well as a half of the parents from Cyprus consider that a *migrant student in their child(ren) class will NOT affect the quality of the lesson*. The parents think that *support from their peers* (Cyprus – 83%, Macedonia -61,9%, Bulgaria – 40%, Spain – 36%) and *having a mentor at the school* would enable the better inclusion of migrants in the school. All the Spanish and Cypriot parents as well as the majority of the parents from Macedonia (81%) and Bulgaria (80%) would *allow their child to be a member of an NGO*, which cooperates with the school for more successful inclusion of migrants.

All of the parents from Bulgaria, Spain, and Cyprus as well as the majority of the parents from Macedonia (76%) *encourage their child(ren) to support migrant schoolmates*. All of All of the parents from Bulgaria and Spain as well as the majority of the parents from Cyprus (92%) and Macedonia (76%) think that their child will *develop a sense of empathy if he/she is surrounded by migrants*. All of the parents from Bulgaria and Spain as well as the majority of the parents from Cyprus (92%) and Macedonia (76%) think that their child will *develop a sense of empathy if he/she is surrounded by migrants*.

Conclusions: Increased diversity is an opportunity to make schools more inclusive, creative and open-minded. Due to the aforementioned rise in schools in the number of children born and raised in a different country, strains are placed on the educational systems as well as on teachers capacity to provide for and create an integrated and friendly environment in multicultural classrooms and in the school setting in general, with many immigrant children often to be left to lag behind in academic achievement. In fact, students born outside the EU are twice as likely to leave school early.

The innovation of the research lies in the fostering of real interaction between the various target groups of the project during the overall implementation of activities (i.e survey, interaction discussion groups between parents, teachers and students both natives and with migrant background) aiming to acquire knowledge and providing intercultural activities and dialogue which will indicate the difference in views, opinions and ideas of how to minimize the cultural gap within school settings incorporating all the needed elements of diversity into the creation of the DEVCULT methodology with e-learning component and Guidelines. The change in mentality of all involved target groups will accommodate innovative elements and breaking stereotypes deeply rooted in local societies, thus complementing the fight against discrimination and segregation toward migrant groups and vice versa.

Apart from the results, the DEVCULT will manage to develop innovative methodology and tools for school teachers in multicultural classrooms that will help them develop the role of a liaison between the different cultures. Such methodology is expected to overcome the main obstacles that keeps the respective cultural gap from growing among school teachers, parents, students both coming from migrant backgrounds and local societies. The expected results are the following:

- strengthening the profile of the teaching professions, including teachers, school leaders and teacher educators, through actions with the following objectives: enhancing teachers'

professional development; supporting teachers in dealing with diversity in the classroom (including pupils with a migrant background); supporting teachers in adopting collaborative and innovative practices;

- inclusive education in line with the Paris Declaration, as priority will be given to actions addressing diversity in the school setting, by developing mainly intercultural competences, combating discrimination and segregation toward migrant population (i.e pupils);
- enhancing the access, participation and performance of disadvantaged learners and facilitating their transition in a more friendly environment by fostering much needed competences in school teachers and educators in order to be able to accommodate the real needs of migrant populations;
- developing and implementing the concept of a multicultural teaching approach as a new strategy and method in teaching, through developing guidelines and training courses for school teachers, leaders and other educational staff;
- developing innovative methods for interaction discussion groups in order for the participants (educators/ trainers/ parents/students) to “feel like a migrant” and thereby enhance their empathy in their daily contact;
- promoting an awareness of the importance of cultural diversity in Europe;
- promoting understanding of cultural backgrounds and providing reflection in order to increase tolerance and to reduce prejudices and xenophobia.

Culturally responsive teaching has been proposed as one way to enable teachers meet the needs of all students, including those with migrant background. Culturally responsive teaching it's a pedagogical way to facilitate and support the achievement of all students, enabling as well the integration of foreign students in the classroom. By closing the cultural gap, there is an impact on wider social measures such as education, social inclusion and citizenship.

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