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**Developing Intercultural Competence through
Training Courses at European Level**

Doctoral thesis - Summary

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Introduction

“In a world of unforeseen changes, globalization, dynamic technologies, educated employees and customers [...] the capacities of the past will no longer be good in the future. New ones are needed.” (Bogathy, 2007, p.37). Although for several decades there have been discussions about the need to develop citizens’ competences to manage cultural differences, very few measures have been taken at the level of public policies or university level besides the international exchange programs for students. Only in recent years, after it was proven through practical experiences and research that this competence, the intercultural competence, was not automatically developed, have the institutions acknowledged that they have to make a bigger effort in this sense (Hiller and Wozniak, 2009).

This thesis aims to bring a contribution in the field, both at theoretical level and at empirical level. In the first part we present a synthesis of the literature, organized around three main questions: What is intercultural competence? How can intercultural competence be developed? How can intercultural competence be evaluated? with the aim of offering a clearer image of the empirical research and theories and of emphasizing the gaps in the literature. Starting from these results, we propose a coherent model in intercultural education, an analysis of the way in which we consider the educational intervention with an intercultural dimension must be organized. In the end, the empirical studies offer evidence regarding the way in which the intercultural competence can be developed through training courses organized in various environments.

Culture and identity

The perspective of culture has evolved from an essentialist view (the idea that culture is predefined and static) to a constructivist view (culture seen as dynamic, in a continuous evolution and multifaceted). In this context, identity is in an ongoing process, is never an accomplished fact (Brah, 2004). Although there is a psychological need to have a coherent

identity, identity is not static, it evolves and takes form continuously in the interaction with others and with the environment. “Identity becomes a "moveable feast": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us [...] Within us are contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about (Hall, 1992, p. 277).

As Gavan Titley (2010) states: The tendency to see and valorise people as belonging to cultural groups underplays and simplifies identity and the importance of gender, class, sexuality, disability and political allegiance in practices of identity as well as practices of discrimination [...] The question is not whether or not culture should be engaged with, but how, in relation to whom, to what extent, in interrelation with what, and with which underlying meanings.
(p.72).

Cultural diversity – multiple perspectives

Diversity is not a new phenomenon, but the perspectives upon diversity, the interpretations and practices in the field represent a continuous challenge. Diversity is a widely used concept, both in daily life and in political discourses. The current perspective upon diversity has changed from the recognition, appreciation and management of diversity to inclusion and development of an intercultural society. This perspective goes beyond the celebration of diversity and the organization of “folkloric events”, towards the creation of sustainable frameworks for the affirmation of the cultural identity in all aspects of life, as well as of opportunities for personal development and contributing to society as a whole.

One of the recurrent topics of the consultations underlying the development of the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue in 2008 is the fact that the previous approaches regarding the management of cultural diversity (such as multiculturalism) are no longer appropriate in societies in which diversity becomes greater and greater.

If multiculturalism was a policy whose aim was the respect for cultural identities of the individuals living in the same social space, interculturalism goes beyond the simple coexistence, towards a society in which people live together in a space characterized by respect, interaction, communication and authentic relationships. “Interculturalism has already processed the lessons of multiculturalism’s limitations, replacing a static parallelism with an emphasis on dynamic interaction and exchange” (Tittley, 2012, p. 164).

In the centre of an intercultural society lies the concept of integration, understood as the situation in which all citizens (beyond any kind of categorization such as majority, minorities, immigrants) have the opportunity to affirm their cultural specificities and to participate in communication and dialogue processes with the rest of society on the basis of a democratic collaboration.

The intercultural perspective requires us mainly to recognize that reality is plural, complex, dynamic and changeable and that interaction is an integral part of all lives and cultures. The intercultural perspective means to ensure mutual respect through such an interaction and to develop communities of individuals who support one another, eliminating relationships based on domination and rejection.

Interculturality refers to the capacity to experiment cultural otherness and to use this experience as a basis for reflection upon the aspects that are usually implicit within our own culture or environment. “Interculturality implies openness towards and interest in, curiosity and empathy for the people belonging to different cultures and the use of the acquired knowledge and sensibility to evaluate our own patterns of perception, thinking, feeling and behaviors for a better self-knowledge and self-understanding” (Byram et al. 2009, p.10).

Intercultural competence

Intercultural competence is a topic studied by several disciplines (psychology, communication, business, education, linguistics, etc.) and from numerous theoretical perspectives. In the last 30 years a series of authors have tried to define the term “intercultural competence”, without any agreement on how this definition should be achieved.

Nevertheless, all definitions and conceptualizations recognize that, in general, intercultural competence implies the skill to interact efficiently and properly with people belonging to other cultures, the interaction referring both to behaviors and to communication (Perry and Southwell, 2011).

The intercultural competence is a multifaceted, intra- and inter-personal process which takes place both at situational level and at developmental level when people with different cultural backgrounds meet. In the context of globalization, intercultural competence is necessary, for instance in order to obtain performance in intercultural team work, in international collaboration and in commercial relations in multicultural environments¹.

A series of theories describe the elements that make up the intercultural competence, but we cannot speak of an agreement upon the similarities and differences between intercultural competence and other related concepts or of a notable theory in the field. There is a complete lack of empirical evidence that may support comparisons between different models. The study carried out by Deardorff in 2004 is the first document showing consensus among senior experts in the intercultural field.

¹ Definition realised by members of a consortium of European universities and organizations (in which I represent the Intercultural Institute Timisoara) in the framework of the project EDICC – European Diploma for Intercultural Competence, www.edicc.eu

Regarding the component elements of the intercultural competence, J.M. Bennett (2008, p. 97) states that there is a “clearly an emerging consensus around what constitutes intercultural competence, which is most often viewed as a set of cognitive, affective and behavioural skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts”. But the terminology used varies: “global mind-set” (Bird and Osland, 2004), “global competence” (Hunter, White and Godbey, 2006), “global learning” (Hovland, 2006; Musil, 2006), “culture learning” (Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi and Lassegard, 2002), “intercultural effectiveness” (Vulpe, Kealey, Protheroe and McDonald, 2001), “cultural intelligence” (Early and Ang, 2003; Peterson, 2004; Thomas and Inkson, 2004), “global leadership competence” (Jokinen, 2005), “intercultural communication competence” (Collier, 1989; Dinges, 1983; Dinges și Baldwin, 1996; Hammer, 1989, Y.Y. Kim, 1991; Spitzberg, 1989, 1994) or, of course, “intercultural competence” (Deardorff, 2004, 2006; Graf, 2004).

On the other hand, the relationship between different attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviors that together make up the intercultural competence has not been established yet. In this sense, there is an acute need for empirical studies in this field. According to Barrett (2011) the questions that still need an answer are:

- How is each of these component elements developed at individual level?
- What are the social, educational, cognitive and motivational factors that influence the development of each component element?
- Is there a certain order in which these elements are developed?
- Is the development of certain component elements a prerequisite for the development of other component elements?
- How are the different component elements inter-related cognitively and affectively?
- To what extent does the intercultural competence vary according to the specific cultural environments in which the individual lives and the specific intercultural encounters he/she experiments in that environment?

The progress in this field is blocked by the imbalance between the low level of theorizing about intercultural competence and the sophisticated statistical tools, accessible for testing the theories. Van de Vijver and Leung (2009) consider that, although there has been an increasing interest in intercultural competence, we cannot assert that this has led to a better understanding of intercultural competence and a more adequate use of the methodology in the field. There is a series of models, definitions and approaches of intercultural competence, but they need to be tested, supported by empirical data. It is also important that the research identifies which are the most efficient interventions for the development of the intercultural competence and which are the most efficient tools and methodologies for the assessment of this complex concept.

The development of intercultural competence through education

The general objective of intercultural education, to prepare individuals for life in an intercultural society, essentially implies supporting them in developing their intercultural competence. This aspect is closely connected to the third pillar of education defined by UNESCO “learning to live together”, which consists in “developing an understanding of others and appreciating interdependence – carrying out common projects and conflict management – in the spirit of respect for pluralism values, mutual understanding, peace” and cultural diversity. Individuals must acquire knowledge, skills and values which should contribute to the development of solidarity and cooperation among diverse individuals and groups in society. These desiderata are closely connected to those mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, referring to the aim of education to “promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups.”

A coherent approach in intercultural education means a transversal, interdisciplinary approach that leads to social transformation provided a series of measures are complied with. In this paper we propose a coherent model of intercultural education from our perspective, presenting below the most important aspects that should be taken into account when elaborating an educational process for the development of intercultural competence.

Firstly, intercultural education is an **educational approach**, it is a quality of education and not an aim in itself. It is a process whose aim is to develop the interest and skills to acculturate of all, to live together in diverse societies (Nedelcu, 2008). Intercultural education is an educational philosophy which guides the choices made in activity planning. It is a holistic and transversal approach, a lifelong process, developing at all ages.

Intercultural education has a potential for **social transformation**, it is a tool for social change. Tackling aspects of everyday social and political realities, intercultural education offers a framework for the analysis of the life and work contexts, offering means to analyse the situations in which culture is useful in understanding and acting in a context and the situations in which it is less useful. (Titley, 2004).

Intercultural education offers models and theories which help us understand the world we live in and it does not try to create an ideal world, in which reality must be adapted to the models. Thus, individuals are encouraged to find by themselves solutions for a better and fairer world, a world of **solidarity and social cohesion**.

Intercultural education underlines the importance of **multiperspectivity**, operating at the level of perceptions where there is no absolute truth. The way in which individuals perceive reality is reality to them. The change of perceptions leads to the change of reality. The search for an objective reality brings no benefit to intercultural exchanges. Intercultural education is positioned against the tendency to impose the worldview of the majority, its way of presenting history, rejecting thus any reminiscent idea regarding racial superiority or ethnic hierarchy.

The approach and methods of intercultural education must be focused on “action” in order to develop participants’ competences to act towards the social change they have identified as necessary (Ohana and Otten, 2012), to take a stand **against discrimination, racism and other forms of intolerance and social injustice**. Understanding of the way in which stereotypes and

prejudices function, their impact on ourselves, on the others and on interpersonal relations lies at the basis of the development of those attitudes and behaviors that promote a positive social change, prevent social injustice and strengthen positive relations.

Intercultural education processes stimulate **critical thinking** in general, and particularly in relation to the media and political discourse. Individuals learn to navigate through what they are being “served” by the media, to deconstruct the stereotypes so often launched by the media, politicians and other persons they interact with (Ohana and Otten, 2012). Through intercultural education people learn to deconstruct and reconstruct reality, to “unlearn” what they have already learnt.

Intercultural education offers **an alternative to multiculturalism** (Rus, 2010, Lentin and Titley, 2011, O’Cinneide, 2012). The intercultural approach facilitates the dialogue between different socio-cultural groups, it tackles aspects of power relations and encourages positive relations in society. Intercultural education seeks to ensure balance between freedom of expression and respect for cultural diversity, recognizing and respecting the existence of different practices and perspectives upon the world. The human rights framework acts as a guardian which establishes the limits of cultural relativism. The cultural practices have to be in harmony with the human rights in order to be accepted by the whole society.

Intercultural education aims towards **a society of equal opportunities** and authentic dialogue, in which each voice can be heard. Ensuring a formal representation of minorities and immigrants in order to satisfy the requirements of cultural diversity is not enough. It is necessary to reach the upper levels on Arnstein’s ladder of participation (1969) in order to ensure cultural diversity in decision-making groups and to create frameworks and develop competences of the members of minority groups and migrant communities to take initiative. Equal opportunities does not mean equal treatment, it means different treatment with the aim of having a society of equality and social justice.

Many recent articles have criticized the apparent de-politization of intercultural education (Özdemir, 2012). The current approach of intercultural education requires its “**re-politization**”. Tolerance and intercultural sensitivity are often presented as final aims of intercultural education. This approach implies that cultural identities are problematic in themselves, without taking into account the institutional foundations of state racism (Titley, 2010). Intercultural education should approach aspects of structural discrimination and develop strategies in order to reach a consensus for action and social transformation.

Intercultural education is a response to the conflicts which appear in multicultural societies, with the aim to promote encounters and exchanges on an equal footing between different groups or communities (Lafraja, 2012). From an intercultural perspective, **conflict** is seen as a source of development. When people with different worldviews meet, there is a potential of conflict. Avoiding conflict only makes the situation worse and increases the potential to create parallel societies. Intercultural education offers individuals the tools necessary to become active citizens, capable of questioning and ready to be questioned by others, to listen and be listened to, to have the courage to disagree, but also to look for win-win solutions.

The figure below offers an outline of the aspects mentioned before, of the main elements of intercultural education, a model aiming at contributing to the development of a coherent and comprehensive perspective in intercultural education.

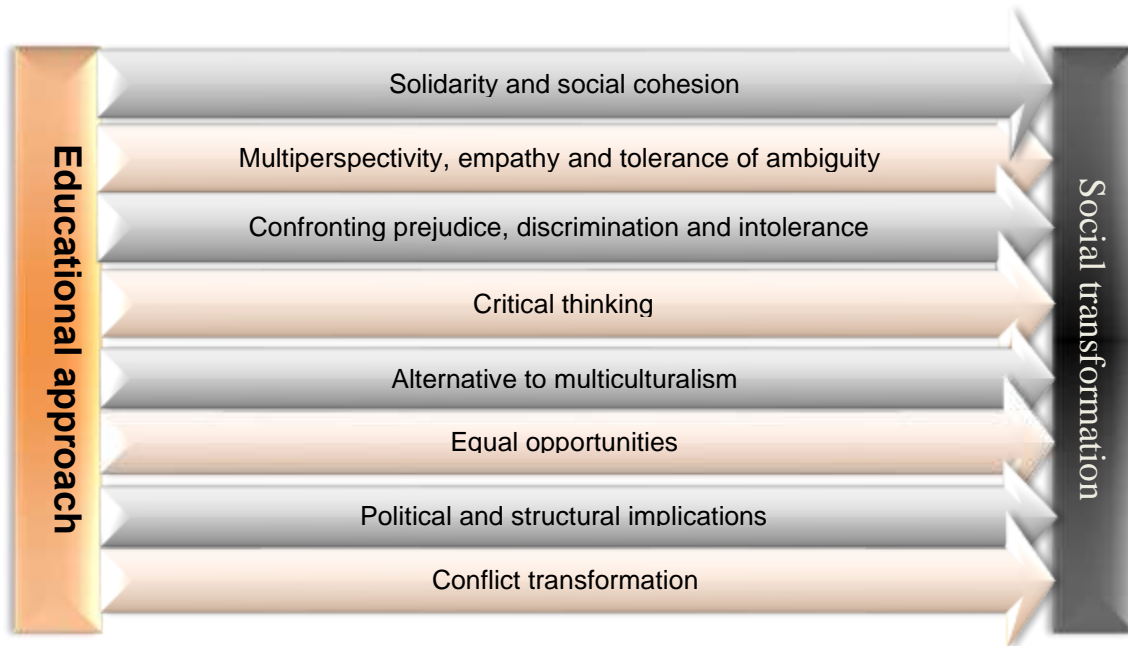


Figure 1. Outline of the main constitutive elements of a coherent approach in intercultural education²

Intercultural education is one of the measures that must be taken by public authorities with the aim of enabling citizens to live together in harmony, in diverse societies, to develop their intercultural competence, to engage in intercultural dialogue, to have authentic relations with those perceived as different.

Although there are various ways of developing the intercultural competence, as well as some evidence that this can be developed, Mendenhall et al. (2004) shows that many studies lack methodological rigor, making it thus difficult to evaluate the efficiency of the interventions. Education can develop certain aspects of the intercultural competence, aspects that are related to knowledge, but there are very few studies or none at all that show how other aspects of the

²Figure published in Neștian, O. (2013). Civic and Intercultural Education: A Means for Community Development and Attitude Change. *Global Education Magazine*, 4, pp. 57-60

intercultural competence are developed, especially those which are more difficult to measure. That is why there is a need for qualitative and quantitative studies, in order to understand the ways in which intercultural attitudes, skills and knowledge can be developed (Perry and Southwell, 2011).

Empirical studies

In a series of three empirical studies we propose different methods of evaluating the impact of the educational intervention on self-perceived intercultural competence and on the development of different elements of intercultural competence. Also, taking into account the fact that there are no studies in the literature on the relationship between the results obtained by using evaluation tools of the training courses and those obtained by applying questionnaires to measure the intercultural competence, we can assert that these studies open new perspectives in the field, bringing the research and practice in the field closer together.

In the first empirical study we present a set of indicators for intercultural dialogue in non-formal education activities, which can be applied both at local level and at international level, developed through a mixed methodology of expert consensus. Hundreds of non-formal education trainings with an intercultural dimension are organized yearly at European level, but also at national level, without the existence of a minimum set of quality indicators. “The indicators for intercultural dialogue in non-formal education activities” have both an evaluative role and an educational role.

The indicators for intercultural dialogue proposed in this document aim to reduce the discrepancy between different interpretations in the field of intercultural education and to facilitate the reflection of trainers and facilitators regarding the processes and concepts in the field.

This tool comprises 18 criteria, each criterion having a series of indicators on the following dimensions: people, content, process. Each indicator is necessary, but not sufficient in order to satisfy the criterion it belongs to. The three dimensions refer to the following aspects: (1) people – all those directly involved in planning, implementing and evaluating the educational process, mainly the trainers/facilitators and the participants; (2) process – the interaction between participants, both planned and unplanned aspects; (3) content – the topics approached both at a theoretical and at a practical level.

The criteria and indicators are also divided according to the three stages of a training activity, the preparation stage, the implementation stage and the follow-up stage. The preparation stage refers to the definition of the activity framework, including the institutional, cultural and thematic aspects, the target group, the aim and objectives of the activity. This stage also includes the creation of a support network and of a training team, as well as the planning of the training process. The implementation stage refers to the learning dimensions both in the formal and the informal framework of the activity (program, approaches, methods, ways of communication and cooperation, etc.) and includes both the planned aspects and the unforeseen ones, as well as elements of the reflection and evaluation carried out within the activity. The follow-up stage focuses on a series of aspects, such as: the systematic and participative evaluation of the activity, the commitment for future activities made by those involved in the activity, a realist approach of the long-term objectives and a structured way of supporting the future activities and networks that may be created as a result of the contacts and ideas generated within the activity.

In 2013 the tool is being tested for all training courses in the field of non-formal education organized by the Council of Europe and other partners, and after the testing stage it will be made public to all the trainers and course providers interested in the intercultural dimension. The testing is carried out before and during the activity but also retroactively, for the trainings carried on in the last year. The tool is also being tested within the research presented hereinafter with the aim of identifying whether there are correlations between the results obtained through the application of the evaluation tool for the indicators for intercultural dialogue and the results

obtained through the application of the other tools, respectively intercultural competence self-evaluation and acculturation orientation and stereotype measurement.

The tool developed within this study is the only tool of this type available at European level and it pursues the development of a coherent and consistent approach in intercultural non-formal education activities. This set of indicators does not pursue the realization of a hierarchy of intercultural education activities, but aims to stimulate the open thinking and innovation in intercultural understanding and to develop the skills necessary in multicultural societies, in which the local and global aspects are interconnected, creating a bridge between the setting up of objectives and the concrete activities carried out in order to achieve them.

“The indicators for intercultural dialogue in non-formal education activities” have both an educational role and an evaluative role. When it is used retrospectively, the tool can offer a clearer image of the way in which the educational activities have been carried out and of the relationship between the objectives proposed and the results obtained. When it is used before the elaboration of a training course, it can serve as a guideline in establishing the objectives, choosing the team, selecting the participants, the contents and the processes approached.

The limitations of this research refer to the fact that, although the tool was developed over a period of three years, involving multiple resources and a significant number of experts in the development of a coherent approach for intercultural dialogue in non-formal education, we are still at an early stage, a careful testing in practice being necessary in order to be able to draw valid conclusions regarding its utility and potential.

In the second empirical study we present an analysis of the way in which intercultural competence can be developed through training courses, using both virtual media and traditional media. There are very few studies that can offer information regarding the efficiency of various educational methods in the development of intercultural competence and even less studies that analyse the training activities carried out in virtual media. In order to bring a contribution in this

field, we have analyzed the way in which participants perceive the development of their own intercultural competence as a result of their participation in different courses, as well as the way in which they perceive the impact that different methods and topics approached within the course have had upon the development of the intercultural competence.

It is not common practice to ask the course participants to make a self-evaluation of their competences. Very often, the evaluations refer to the learners' satisfaction regarding the content of the course and the way it was delivered. But competence evaluation implies more complex tools. If in some cases the competences can be easily measured, in the case of intercultural competence there are no universally recognized and accepted tools yet. The measurement of intercultural competence also involves a series of ethical aspects and the need for continuous contextualization. In international environments this becomes even harder. That is why the research carried out until now makes use of self-evaluation methods or evaluates aspects connected to knowledge rather than aspects connected to skills or attitudes. At the same time, “the change of values and attitudes is essential. There may be no real change without a change of attitude” (Bogathy, 2004, p. 283).

This study has two main objectives. The first refers to the analysis of the way in which participants perceive the development of their own intercultural competence as a result of their participation in the course. The results show that after taking part in an intercultural education course the subjects perceived themselves more competent, both “objectively” (they evaluated different dimensions of their own intercultural competence at a higher level than they had evaluated them before the course, more dimensions in the case of the online course and just 1-2 in the case of the other courses) and “subjectively” (after the course participants were asked to evaluate themselves at the present moment, but also retrospectively, referring to the moment before the course, the differences being significant in all the dimensions measured).

A closer analysis shows that, regarding certain dimensions of intercultural competence (empathy, multiperspectivity, interpretation and relation skills, action orientation – in the case of the online

course, respectively interpretation and relation skills – in the case of the face-to-face course) the participants evaluated themselves retrospectively in a more negative way than they had evaluated themselves at that respective moment, a situation which confirms the Dunning-Kruger effect.

The second objective of the research refers to an analysis of the way in which participants perceive the impact of different methods and topics approached in the course on the development of different dimensions of the intercultural competence.

After taking part in the course, the subjects reflected upon the impact of the course on the development of each dimension of intercultural competence. The qualitative analysis offers relevant information related to the following aspects:

- *Development of intercultural competence at individual level* – regarding the dimensions of intercultural competence, participants identified modifications in attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices, worldview, understanding of the human rights based approach, understanding of the deep significations of diversity and of the different dimensions plurality, cultural relativism, migration and minorities, skills related to verbal and non-verbal communications, active listening, situation analysis, as well as motivational aspects.
- *The relationships between different elements* – the clearest connections mentioned refer to the relationship between attitudes and skills, for instance between tolerance of ambiguity and communication, but also between different skills, for instance between critical thinking, multiperspectivity and social analysis.
- *Types of methods which contribute to the development of the intercultural competence* – the most often mentioned and best argued ones refer to: case studies, cooperation with the other participants, learning various opinions and experience based accounts, discussions, reflecting on the learning process, simulations and role play, content aspects, but also the need to contextualize and transfer into practice the things learnt.
- *The intercultural approach in education* – if we tried to build a successful model of intercultural education based on the participants’ reflections, this model would include

the following aspects: human rights; equality, justice, fighting against stereotypes and prejudices; political and institutional dimension; power relations; culture, identity and society seen as dynamic aspects; direct interaction; respect for otherness and action orientation. This model resembles to a great extent the intercultural education model proposed in the theoretical part of this paper and integrates aspects referring to the functioning of society, the structural dimension and the more general framework of human rights.

The comparisons between three training courses using an evaluation tool for the course and an evaluation tool for its impact upon the self-perceived intercultural competence shows that there are differences between the three courses. The main limitation of this endeavor is the fact that no conclusions can be drawn for now regarding these differences, due to the small number of courses analyzed and the fact that it is difficult to make up a rigorous control group. As we are dealing with research of courses carried out in practice, the number of participants will always vary and their motivation to participate in the course also has an impact which is difficult to measure and balance. Thus, the selection of participants has an important role in the result achievement.

In the pre-test version of the questionnaire the subjects were asked, through open questions, to give examples of situations in which they had used different elements of the intercultural competence. The examples offered by the over 100 participants from different parts of the world may represent a basis for the creation of a questionnaire for the measurement of the intercultural competence. In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire and to prevent the perpetuation of the situation in which the measurements are made from an ethnocentric perspective, its elaboration needs to be the contribution of a group of researchers from different parts of the world. Otherwise, the questionnaire can fall into the trap of an ethnocentric perspective.

In the third empirical study, by using instruments to measure the acculturation orientations and stereotypes, we have made an analysis of the impact of an educational project with an

intercultural dimension in Romanian schools. Recent sociological studies have confirmed the persistence of negative attitudes towards Roma at the level of the Romanian society, but also, in general, at European level (Neșțian and Rus, 2010). This study focuses on the extent to which a civic education project with an intercultural dimension can contribute to the decrease of the negative stereotypes on Roma and to changes in the acculturation orientations.

The results of this research show that educational interventions focused on intercultural dimension have a much bigger impact on the attitudes towards diversity than those which do not take into account this dimension. As a result of taking part in a civic education project with an intercultural dimension a series of modifications were registered regarding the acculturation orientations and stereotypes of teachers and students. Although these modifications are not very big, they are significant in relation to the control group and offer a detailed image of the impact that a training course can have at attitudinal level. For a better understanding of the way in which acculturation orientations change through educational activities, it would be interesting to evaluate to what extent a global approach, at the level of the whole school and even community, could have different effects.

Although it can be offered as an optional subject in the Romanian schools, intercultural education is far from reaching the desideratum of a transversal approach in education in order to contribute to social transformation. Intercultural education overlaps with education for democratic citizenship, the latter already having multiple tools to ensure quality at school level, which support the need for a whole school approach. “The school context is in fact a set of learning environments and situations where education for a democratic citizenship happens” (Bîrzea, 2005) as well as intercultural education.

One of the limitations of this study is the fact that it could not establish a relationship between teachers’ attitudes and students’ attitudes. We consider it important to analyse this relationship in future research, in order to identify whether the simple application of certain educational principles can contribute to the development of students’ positive attitudes towards diversity

regardless of the teachers' attitudes or whether it is absolutely necessary that teachers' attitudes (expressed or not) should be positive. In the former case, the educational policies should focus on providing teachers with the educational tools necessary for an integrationist approach in education; in the latter, it would be necessary first of all to develop teachers' intercultural sensitivity.

Another limitation of the study is the fact that teachers who took part in the course enrolled voluntarily, having thus an internal motivation to participate and an interest in the topic. We do not know to what extent the modifications would appear in a group of teachers who were not interested in this topic. On the other hand, students' participation was not voluntary, as the activities of the project were carried out within the school curriculum.

The results of this research can be a source for the decisions regarding a series of public policies in the field of education. For instance, practices such as the introduction of information about Roma in the history handbooks can determine a decrease of exclusionism, but could also generate an increase of segregationism; that is why it is important that this information be complemented by activities focused on dialogue, interaction and a human rights approach.

General conclusions and directions for further research in the field

This paper started from the acknowledgement of a lack of coherence regarding research, practice and public policies in the field of intercultural competence. Public policies are often developed in connection with the international scene or with pressures from the European institutions or different lobby groups rather than in connection with a careful analysis of the research and practices in the field. On the other hand, there is a lack of dialogue between research and practice; the practitioners are “playing it by ear” rather than acting according to empirical or theoretical research. As far as the research is concerned, due to the fact that the field of intercultural competence is rather new, there are very few studies which analyze the impact of the various educational practices and which go beyond the simple acquisition of knowledge.

The conceptualizations of intercultural competence developed until now focus mainly on the relationship between two people coming from different cultures without taking into account the aspects related to power relations, political and institutional context and the more general framework of human rights. With this paper we have tried to bring these aspects to the forefront and to offer a perspective on intercultural competence that goes beyond cultural aspects, having a deeper understanding of society plurality, in which political and social dimensions are considered as important as cultural dimensions; a perspective which reflects realities more adequately, without falling into the trap of too strong a focus on the “culturalization” of the interactions and losing sight of other dimensions with an important role in interaction dynamics.

One of the limitations of the research regarding the impact of training courses on the development of intercultural competence is related to the fact that this type of courses are attended by people who are interested in the subject and already have a certain openness and thus it is difficult to randomize and ensure a rigorous control group.

Another limitation is related to the resources, both human and material, but especially time, necessary for the achievement of rigorous research and for the analysis of different types of interventions. Training courses focused on the development of intercultural competence are not very often organized, which means that the samples one can work with over a period of 2-3 years are also quite reduced. The same difficulty appears in connection with the creation of evaluation tools through a consensus among experts, as well as their testing into practice.

The contributions brought by this research refer both to theoretical aspects and to methodological aspects. Firstly, we have analyzed the literature in order to offer a clear image of the knowledge and research in this field and to underline the most important theories and concepts. The results of this analysis show that, although significant progress has been made in the field in recent years, we cannot speak of a notable theory yet, and at an empirical level there is an acute need for studies testing the existing theories into practice and making connections between

intercultural competence and educational processes pursuing its development. As a result of this endeavor, we have proposed a tool comprising a set of indicators for intercultural dialogue in non-formal education activities, which can be applied both at local level and at international level, developed through a mixed methodology of expert consensus.

At empirical level, we have brought evidence regarding the way in which participants in different intercultural education courses perceive the development of intercultural competence as a result of their participation in the course and the impact of different methods and topics upon the development of the intercultural competence. We have also analyzed the impact of intercultural education processes at attitudinal level, getting thus “out of the rut” of knowledge testing.

The results emphasize a series of aspects relevant for the research in the field: intercultural competence can be developed through educational processes; intercultural education activities have the potential of producing modifications even at attitudinal level; the use of a set of indicators for intercultural dialogue in educational activities with an intercultural dimension has the potential of structuring the educational interventions around a coherent and efficient model and can be related to intercultural competence self-evaluation methods.

Starting from the results obtained, we envisage several directions for future research:

1. Continuing testing the tool of indicators for intercultural dialogue into practice, in non-formal education activities in order to stimulate the continuous reflection on the intercultural approach in education and to support trainers, facilitators and providers of non-formal education activities to consciously and systematically approach the intercultural dimension in the development of their activities.
2. Updating the set of indicators for intercultural dialogue as a result of practical testing, as well as an internal and external evaluation tool.

3. Testing the set of intercultural indicators in relation with different models of intercultural competence in order to identify to what extent the proposed educational approach can contribute to the development of intercultural competence.
4. Developing a coherent model of intercultural education – in the theoretical part of this paper we have proposed a model based on empirical research, which can be updated and related to models of intercultural competence. A series of authors underline the need for a better theory of intercultural competence. Thus, a new model, which connects the educational aspects with the development of the intercultural competence, can bring an important contribution in the field, especially if it is based on empirical studies.
5. Analyzing the impact of the training courses on stereotypes and acculturation orientations through a larger series of studies, in order to establish to what extent there is need for a more coherent and comprehensive approach, taking into account the fact that isolated interventions cannot have very big effects.
6. Applying different tools to measure the stereotypes and acculturation orientations towards Roma of subjects from different professional categories, for instance, students in psychology, journalism, law and education sciences. The results of this type of research can serve, together with the results of the research evaluating the impact of the different training courses, as a basis for public policies regarding educational approaches for Roma inclusion.

A lot of research in the field of intercultural competence focuses on identifying the variables which predict intercultural efficiency (Dinges and Baldwin, 1996). This research brings an important contribution in building the conceptual understanding of the intercultural competence and the educational processes focused on its development, as well as regarding the transfer at the level of practitioners and the larger public.

If, in the past the main preoccupation was to select employees qualified for working in intercultural environments, at present the main challenges are connected to the development of the work force in order to function adequately and efficiently in intercultural environments. Such

an effort needs a greater focus on the development of the intercultural competence rather than on its definition.

The multifaceted, multidimensional and contextual nature of the intercultural competence continues to challenge the researchers and practitioners interested in understanding it. Whereas the challenges regarding the conceptualization of intercultural competence continue to exist, the present efforts lay the foundations of an exploration of the complex dynamics of intercultural competence and affirm the need to focus the educational processes on the development of the intercultural competence.

Thus, with this paper, we bring a contribution in the field, both through the results obtained and through the different methods and models proposed. Therefore, at theoretical level, not only have we made an analysis and synthesis of the literature in the field, but we also proposed a coherent model in intercultural education, created on the basis of the theoretical analyses and of the vast practical experience in the field. At the same time, the research presented in this paper includes empirical studies, using qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as studies based on a consensus among experts.

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