

*Intercultural Education in Europe:  
The Bridge Teaching Values of Cultural Diversity*

Rudyk Iryna, University of Padua, Italy

The European Conference on Arts & Humanities 2020  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

The phenomenon of migration is not new in the history of humanity. Nevertheless, European countries are still facing difficulties when it comes to the integration of migrant children. In the present paper, intercultural education is seen as a solution to integrate and preserve migrant children's culture. Surprisingly, analysis of its theoretical approach revealed some significant practical weaknesses. As a result, this paper suggests that theoretical methods may not be enough to promote multicultural understanding based on equality, respect and diversity.

Keywords: Diversity, Intercultural Education, Identity, Cultural Values

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## **Introduction**

The increasing number of young migrants in Europe has brought a necessity to provide a new educational system. Intercultural education has been seen by the Council of Europe and UNESCO as a solution to this issue. The educational approach has been thought not only with the intent to preserve the cultural heritage of migrant children but also to cross cultural borders, which have risen in a multicultural society.

Both institutions have also provided definitions of the new educational approach. According to UNESCO, intercultural education has the aim to promote and establish a dialogue between “*individuals and/or groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds and heritage*” (Guidelines for Intercultural Education, 2007).

The Council of Europe in “T-KIT for Intercultural learning” defines intercultural education as

*“[...] an educational approach that can lead to social transformation so that people from different cultural backgrounds can develop positive relations based on the values and principles of human rights and on seeing cultural differences as positive things”.*

Both guidelines describe the values and principles of this approach, but despite the T-KIT provides theoretical methods on teaching intercultural education, it does not provide a common practical solution, which may create difficulties on developing multicultural education. As a result, in some cases, instead of promoting awareness of the positive values, there could be a risk to reinforce cultural borders.

For this reason, the first part of the paper introduces four theoretical levels of intercultural teaching and skills. In the second part, theoretical methods are seen in practice by the comparison of polish and Italian intercultural approach. The aim of this comparison is to demonstrate how the socio-political situations of both countries may have influenced the development of this new educational process. As a result, this paper will show that four of the T-KIT’s levels and definitions of intercultural education may not be enough to develop an efficient intercultural education in Europe.

## **Literature Review**

In the past intercultural approach was seen as an individual issue and was focused on cultural and individual identity. As a result, this limited approach had led to any long-changes. It was then believed that being in contact with people of a different cultural background would reduce stereotypes and injustice, but without a specific approach and certain conditions neither this idea provided positive changes (T-KIT, 2018).

Hopefully, the increasing number of migrants brought a necessity to analyze, understand and represent different cultures. Scholars such as Priscilla Rogers and Joo-Seng Tan (2008) Hall (1959; 1966), Hofstede (1980), Turner (1997), Schwartz (1999) had given an essential contribution to this phenomenon. Indeed, thanks to their studies the Council of Europe and UNESCO defined intercultural education.

Today, the intercultural educational guide of UNESCO states that this educational approach is thought to *“develop [e] an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding”*.

To promote these skills the Council of Europe developed four levels of intercultural activities.

The first level

*“is based on simple activities mostly useful as starters to get people to begin thinking about intercultural learning”*.

The second level is

*“designed to help people develop communication and group work skills, while at the same time stimulating their interest in issues related to culture and intercultural learning”*.

The third level is based on

*“longer activities designed to develop a deeper understanding and insights into an issue.”*

The last, fourth level

*“require good group work and discussion skills, concentration and cooperation from the participants [...]”* (T-KIT, 2018).

The T-KIT's levels give a good definition and model of intercultural education. However, they can also be used singularly, which may not provide children with the right understanding of intercultural principles. The efficiency of the project becomes relevant especially when the number of migrant students in the country is high.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), number of migrant aged 19 or under *“rose from 28.7 million in 1990 to 36 million in 2017”*.

Among them, there are also unaccompanied and separated children. As data reported, the migrant children settle mostly in low and middle-income countries rather than in high-income countries.

Indeed, the percentage of migrant children under 19 years old was 17.8% in Poland, while 16.8% in Italy (UN DESA. 2017). Nevertheless, Poland developed an efficient intercultural approach, while Italy struggled. Below the comparison of both intercultural approaches are reported.

The primary school attended by Chechen children in Białystok (Poland) had seen the intercultural approach as a combination of theory and practice.

*“121 pupils took part in the pilot program. The groups were very diversified. Apart from interpersonal differences, there were also biological, national, and religious differences”* (Młynarczuk-Sokołowska A., 2013).

The intercultural project had started with theoretical lessons. Once intercultural principles through lessons were introduced, students joined culinary and dance workshops. After the course, students with their parents and teachers visited Białystok cultural heritage. During this trip parents of migrants and locals had a possibility to establish contacts (Młynarczuk- Sokołowska A., 2013).

The second educational project was based on a photographic workshop, which involved students from two different towns, schools and environments. Together, they discovered about Belarusian Wedding Reception (Charytoniuk), Oriental Mosaic of the Podlasie Region (Szostak-Król), Jewish Cemetery (Poczykowski), Shabbat Shalom(Sztop-Rutkowska).

Teenager’s photos, which depicted the multiculturalism of the Polasie region, were then exhibited for the local community including migrant families (Młynarczuk-Sokołowska A., 2013).

These intercultural projects

*“ [...] were based on educational games that motivated students, fostered creative energy and were thought-provoking. They helped students to go beyond stereotypes and develop the ability to perceive the Other as interesting and important”* (Młynarczuk-Sokołowska A., 2013).

A totally different approach has been used in Italy, where there has been a significant increase in the influx of migrants particularly at the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, for the first time, the CM 301/1989 <sup>1</sup>law has allowed migrant children to study in Italian schools. Therefore, children were split into groups of two-to-three children per class, while their tutors were teachers specialized in children disabilities. Although this document has provided the integration of migrant students into classes, it had not introduced the understanding of intercultural education. Only in the 1990s, the CM 205 <sup>2</sup>law mentioned the idea of multiculturalism. Indeed, according to Gianna Pasquale (2004) different intercultural activities were organized, but they built only *“work in progress”* in schools. For this reason, Italy is still facing difficulties. There is no specific practical intercultural approach. Teachers are intuitively adapting their pedagogical approach because of *“a lack of specific teaching tools for their work”*. To solve this issue cultural mediators are introduced. Even though, they do not develop multicultural projects in schools.

The weakness of the Italian intercultural approach lies also at the academic level. In fact, migrant students tend to go to vocational schools while the Italians prefer academic schools (Busotti L., 2014).

## **Discussion**

Intercultural education has deemed to be the solution for the integration of migrant children. However, it also gives big advantages to local children. Indeed, local and

migrant pupils in the Polish schools developed knowledge about respect to other, curiosity, stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination and cultural difference in communication.

Poland succeeded in the intercultural approach thanks to the collaboration between the University of Białystok Foundation and the Foundation of Education and Creativity.

Furthermore, to highlight the necessity of intercultural project at school is the rector of the University, Jerzy Nikitorowicz, who states that

*“The paradigm of coexistence constitutes the basis for intercultural education. It also determines its main goal, which is to prepare society for living in the post-modern world, where diversity is inherent”* (Młynarczuk-Sokołowska A. 2013).

In Italy, institutions seem to struggle when there is a necessity of multicultural projects. In fact, according to Gianna Pasquale(2004) :

*“Italian legislation in this field, even though it is effective and potentially rather advanced, has not yet a systematic and programmatic implementation in ‘real’ school.”*

It suggests that the weakness of the Italian approach does not depend only on economic decisions. As a result, migrant children are integrated thanks to cultural mediators in schools, but direct contact and development of intercultural skills seem to be missing.

What this small study shows is that considering migrant children as an emergency and not as a cultural resource may raise borders between cultures. UNESCO Guideline and the T-KIT are useful to have a clear idea of what intercultural education means in practice, but they are not enough. For this reason, there are still countries which face difficulties in developing this type of projects.

## **Conclusion**

In the world where the phenomenon of migration is changing the geographical, historical and social ideas of nation, teaching new generation differences has become a global necessity. In this paper, the new pedagogical approach is analyzed and compared to show that two guidelines are not enough for an efficient practical educational approach. As a result, there is a need for human and financial resources. Without referring to some practical methods reported in the T-KIT, this paper suggests that in order to create a common efficient intercultural approach among migrant and local children, further research might be recommended.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm301\\_89.html](https://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm301_89.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm205\\_90.html](http://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm205_90.html)

## **Bibliography**

Bussotti Luca “The Italian Way to Intercultural Education: Innovation and Resistance”. *Research gate*. 2017.

Młynarczuk-Sokołowska Anna “Intercultural Education: from Theory to Practice”. *Social Contexts of Child Development*. 2013.

Pasquale Gianna “Towards a New Model of Intercultural Education into Italian School”. *Science Direct*. 2015.

The Council of Europe “*T-Kit 4. Intercultural learning. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*”. 2018. UNESCO *Guidelines on Intercultural Education*. 2006.

<https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/child-and-young-migrants>

[https://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm301\\_89.html](https://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm301_89.html)

[http://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm205\\_90.html](http://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm205_90.html)