

PEN/PAPER AND ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIOS: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR DEVELOPING REFLECTIVE THINKING OF TURKISH EFL STUDENT TEACHERS?

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Abstract – *This study investigates the role of portfolio development on the improvement of the reflective thinking ability of five Turkish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) student teachers from a University in Turkey. In this case study, participants' reflective papers written for their pen/paper and electronic portfolios and their interviews were analysed. The results showed that the process of preparing a pen/paper portfolio provided a useful approach to enhancing professional development, with a few negative comments regarding the time involved in keeping the portfolio, positive comments regarding the support and collaboration that peers provided, as well as its contribution to their professional development in terms of reflective thinking and self-confidence. The results of the interview analysis also supported the notion that student teachers generally responded favourably to the development of a written portfolio. On the other hand, the process of preparing an electronic portfolio did not enhance reflective thinking since the student teachers were more concerned about the technicalities and the layout of the electronic portfolios rather than the content of the artefacts.*

Introduction

In the last two decades, the ability to engage in reflective practice has been widely addressed in the literature as one of the most important activities associated with teaching and teacher formation (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Rodgers, 2002; Griffin, 2003; Lee, 2005). The concept of reflective practice dates back to John Dewey's (1933) notion of reflection as 'an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds supporting it and future conclusions to which it tends' (p. 6). Donald Schön (1983, 1987) further developed Dewey's concept of reflection, and explained that teachers improve their teaching through continuous reflection on their practice and through their interactions with students; thus, he linked reflection to action. He indicated that through these reflections teachers could begin to develop a level of understanding about what they are as teachers.

The importance of reflective practice in pre-service teachers is a constant theme in teacher education literature (Yost & Sentner, 2000; Brownlee, Purdie & Boulton-Lewis, 2001). Posner (2000) argues that without critical reflective skills, the knowledge and skills gained in a pre-service teacher training programme may be quickly and easily forgotten. Therefore, teacher education programmes have explored various approaches to support student teachers' reflection such as reflective journals (O'Donoghue & Brooker, 1996; Lee & Loughran, 2000), writing activities (Ferguson, 1989; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Richards & Ho, 1998), teacher narratives (Canning, 1991) and portfolios. Among them, portfolios are 'logical vehicles for this type of activity because they provide a systematic, continuous way of planning, supporting and monitoring a teacher's professional advance' (Bird, 1990, p. 244).

Portfolios in teacher education

Although portfolios have been used extensively in arts and architecture, they have been introduced to education in the 1980s (Lyons, 1998). Since then, educational researchers and practitioners cite the increasing use of portfolios as a learning tool in teacher education programmes (Barton & Collins, 1993; Loughran & Corrigan, 1995). A portfolio in teacher education could simply be defined as a collection of information about a student teacher's abilities gained in different contexts over time. Wolf & Dietz (1998) described the essential features of portfolios:

'A portfolio is a structured collection of teacher and learner work created across diverse contexts over time, framed by reflection and enriched through collaboration that has as its ultimate aim the advancement of teacher and learner learning.' (p. 13)

When learners are engaged in portfolio development, a battery of benefits has been proposed in a number of sources (Dutt-Doner & Gilman, 1998; Georgi & Crowe, 1998). These benefits are: (i) receiving support and guidance from those involved in the portfolio process; (ii) being able to share ideas about portfolios with peers; (iii) improving communication with faculty; and (iv) developing organisational skills.

The potential of portfolios to enhance reflective thinking has been of special interest to teacher educators and researchers. Several studies (Winsor & Ellefson, 1995; Wade & Yarbrough, 1996; Tillema & Smith, 2000; Davies & Willis, 2001; Zubizaretta, 2004; Cardona, 2005; Orland-Barak, 2005) have reported that developing portfolios promote reflective thinking because 'with reflection, the

portfolio can become an episode of learning; without reflection, the portfolio may be little more than an exercise in amazing papers' (Wolf & Dietz, 1998, p. 14). Therefore, for educational purposes, it is essential that the written narratives in a portfolio does not become a mere scrapbook of descriptions, but should contain reflections on learning and teaching experiences.

Reflection involves analysing, comparing, synthesising, clarifying and choosing, which manifests itself in reflective writing. Since 'purposeful writing is internalized into one's ongoing thinking' (Roland, 1995, p. 122), by reflective writing, the students can move from the specific to the general as well as develop a habit of reflection (Griffin, 2003). Therefore, the educational literature has focused on the medium of writing (journal writing and portfolio writing) as potentially beneficial to making explicit the implicit or 'tacit' (Schön, 1987).

In sum, with the introduction of the portfolio and guided support throughout the portfolio preparation period, student teachers not only develop their abilities to think reflectively but also raise their enthusiasm for learning about themselves, peers and the process of teaching. However, while the use of portfolios is becoming popular, research on this issue is still in its infancy in the area of second/foreign language (L2) teacher education.

Jadallah (1996) and Antonek, McCormick & Donato (1997) conducted case studies to examine reflective thinking of EFL/ESL (English as a Second Language) student teachers by analysing their portfolios developed during teaching *practicum*. Jadallah (1996) argued that providing students with teaching experiences and subsequent reflective analysis resulted in opportunities 'to construct meaning about teaching and learning on the basis of their own particular experiences within the context of a specific classroom' (p. 74). Similarly, Antonek, McCormick & Donato (1997) emphasised that portfolios allowed student teachers 'to select and document activities and behaviours in their classroom,' which would also develop 'decision-making skills' (p. 16). The researchers concluded that portfolios 'are highly appropriate' tools to 'mediate teacher development that is comprehensive, individualistic and reflective' (p. 24). These studies were conducted on the use of traditional pen/paper portfolios, and they highlighted the potential of portfolio development for developing reflective practice. Consequently, the demand of implementing portfolio writing in teacher education programmes has been seen favourably and thus accepted (Rodgers, 2002). However, several studies (Dutt-Doner & Gilman, 1998; McKinney, 1998; Stone, 1998) have shown some limitations of using portfolios in teacher education. These include: (i) storage; (ii) maintenance; and (iii) accessibility. Student teachers collect a variety of artefacts – such as evaluations from supervisors and co-operating teachers,

reports of observations of teaching, lesson plans, learner work samples, and photographs of teaching experiences – in their portfolios. Most portfolios that are being used in teacher education programmes are printed mainly and compiled in a three-rings binder (i.e., paper portfolios). As Georgi & Crowe (1998) argued, these storage, maintenance and accessibility problems can be solved through the use of technology, that is through developing electronic portfolios.

Electronic portfolios

An electronic portfolio, sometimes referred to as ‘multimedia portfolios, electronic portfolios, e-folios, webfolios’ (Kilbane & Milman, 2003, p. 7) is similar to pen/paper portfolio; however, the medium used to present and organise the portfolio artefacts is different. It is organised by using a combination of media tools such as audio/video recordings, multimedia programmes, database, spreadsheet and word processing software, as well as CD-ROMs and the World Wide Web with hypermedia links connecting that evidence to the objectives of the course and programme. According to Barrett (2000), an electronic portfolio includes the use of electronic technologies that allows the portfolio developer to collect and organise artefacts in many formats. MacDonald et al. (2004) define electronic portfolios as ‘multimedia environments that display artefacts and reflections documenting professional growth and competencies’ (p. 1) with several benefits for teacher education, such as: (i) increase in the technology knowledge and skills; (ii) facility in distribution; (iii) storage of many professional documents; and (iv) increase in accessibility (Heath, 2002; Norton-Meier, 2003; Williams, Wetzel & Wilhelm, 2004; Barrett, 2005; Milman, 2005; Strudler & Wetzel, 2005). With the creation of electronic portfolios, student teachers not only can display the best work as a professional, but also exhibit the knowledge and skills in using technology.

On the other hand, Wetzel & Strudler (2006) also discussed the following disadvantages of electronic portfolios: (i) issues of programme implementation; (ii) access and reliability of the technology; and (iii) the amount of time and effort needed to develop portfolios. However, despite such disadvantages, teacher education programmes have begun to explore the use of technology as a tool in the development of portfolios because of following reasons: (i) electronic portfolios enable them to distribute their work relatively easily and the multimedia possibilities make the work seem more sophisticated; (ii) electronic portfolios are more portable and accessible than pen/paper portfolios and require less or no physical storage space; and (iii) writing in the electronic portfolios can be viewed not only as computer-

mediated textual literacy, but also as a new form of art with its own written discourse and way of thinking.

In sum, teacher educators have reported that the process of developing portfolios can help student teachers better understand the complexities of teaching, make connections between classroom learning and teaching experiences, and become reflective practitioners. With this understanding in mind, it is then necessary that a teacher education programme need to put portfolios into practice in order to meet the challenges and needs of current educational practices, to keep with the technological innovations and to investigate the quality of reflection in the portfolio development. In doing so, as Orland-Barak (2005) suggests, it is essential to ‘examine further the “taken-for-granted” assumption that the portfolio constitutes an effective tool for enhancing the type of reflective practice as espoused by educational theorists’ (p. 28). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the following research question: ‘In what ways does preparing pen/paper and electronic portfolios influence EFL student teachers’ reflective thinking?’

The Turkish context

Major change in the Turkish teacher education system took place in 1981 with the Higher Education Reform, through which all teacher training institutions of the Ministry of Education were transferred to the university system (Simsek & Yildirim, 2001; Saban, 2003). Before 1981, the responsibility for training high school level teachers lay mainly with the Faculties of Arts and Sciences in universities, and with four-year Higher Teacher Schools governed by the Ministry of Education. Today, out of 98 universities, 65 (60 state and 5 private) have Faculties of Education, which follow an obligatory curriculum (Tercanlioglu, 2004). For English language teacher education programmes, all Faculties of Education follow a standardised curriculum prescribed by the Higher Education Council (YÖK) with a knowledge base drawn from linguistics and learning theory (YÖK, 1997; cited in Cakiroglu & Cakiroglu, 2003). YÖK requires a three-semester field experience as part of the teaching *practicum* during the four-year teacher education programme: one during the second semester of the first year and the other two in the first and second semesters of the fourth year. Students are required to do actual teaching only in the last session. The aims of teaching *practicum* are: (i) to develop student-teacher confidence in the teaching endeavour; (ii) to enable them to develop some practical skills needed in their future role as teacher; and (ii) to enable them to be active and familiar with forthcoming professional responsibilities.

The research method

This study was carried out in a large public university in Turkey, which had an enrolment of around 11,241 students for the 2006-2007 academic year. Its Faculty of Education was first established in 1982. During the 2006-2007 academic year this faculty had over 1500 student enrolments in both undergraduate and graduate level programmes related to preschool, elementary and secondary education.

The present study was conducted in the Department of Foreign Language Education, which offers a four-year undergraduate programme in English Language Teacher Education. The basic components of this programme consist of English language development, linguistics and field-specific courses such as foreign language teaching methodology. The *practicum* courses consist of observation and practice teaching. During the first semester of their fourth year, student teachers are given opportunities to observe EFL classes in primary and secondary schools. During the second semester of their senior year, student teachers get engaged in teaching. Even though YÖK does not require the development of portfolios as part of assessment in teacher education programmes, this department asks student teachers to develop teaching portfolios as one of the requirements of the teaching *practicum* component of the programme.

The participants

Five senior EFL student teachers (one male and four females) participated voluntarily in the present study while they were carrying out their teaching practice. All these student teachers were graduates of State Teaching Schools for teacher candidates. The age range of the group was between 20 and 22. They had been learning English for approximately 12 years, mostly in the classroom setting in Turkey.

In the study, the researchers were simply the facilitators who trained the participants on how to prepare their pen/paper and electronic portfolios, solved their technical problems and provided comments on their artefacts.

Data collection procedures

The portfolio project acted as a supplementary learning tool to *practicum* course assignments. It added an extra 20% to the participants' final grade. The data collection procedures continued for approximately 27 weeks. The data collection instruments were ten (five pen/paper and ten electronic) portfolios (with around 80 entries) and semi-structured interviews.

Portfolios

All portfolios were written in English since the participants were future English language teachers, and their proficiency level was sufficiently high for them to express themselves in English. The portfolio tasks aimed to develop student teachers' reflective skills, not language skills.

The student teachers developed pen/paper portfolios during the first semester, and electronic portfolios during the second semester of their senior year. In the first two weeks of the first semester, the researchers explained to the class the purpose of the study and selected volunteer student teachers to participate in the present study. Afterward, they trained the whole class, including the participants, on how to develop pen/paper portfolios. It was explained to them why it is important to reflect on experiences and they were trained on how to write reflections. Moreover, they were shown Hatton & Smith's (1995) reflective criteria. Developing pen/paper portfolios was the *practicum* requirement in which they were required to carry out some tasks that encouraged them to reflect on their teaching. These tasks included writing journals, making lesson plans and presentations, writing self- and peer-evaluations, and engaging in written dialogues with co-operating teachers and university supervisors. The participants created their pen/paper portfolio artefacts from the third week onward of the first semester.

Electronic portfolio development was not a *practicum* requirement. Student teachers developed an electronic portfolio on a voluntary basis, and with the purpose of examining whether it enhances reflective thinking. While the participants started to develop their electronic portfolios in the second semester, the rest of the class continued to develop artefacts for their pen/paper portfolios. In the first two weeks of the second semester, the participants were trained on how to create portfolios by using the Hyperstudio authoring tool, and on how to upload their artefacts to their portfolios. From the third week of the second semester, the participants started to do assignments similar to the ones they were required to do in the first semester, and uploading them onto their electronic portfolios.

For both pen/paper and electronic portfolios, the participating student teachers were required to do the same three tasks, namely: (i) written class reflections on classroom observation tasks, expressing how they reacted to a particular class activity; (ii) evaluation papers; and (iii) written narratives of everyday events. Thus, these two types of portfolios were different versions of the same material, written at different times. They were also allowed to add self-chosen artefacts to their portfolios. The organisation of the portfolios was left in the hands of the participants. At the end of the year, after the portfolio project, they presented their portfolios to the rest of the class.

Content of the portfolios

(a) **Classroom observation tasks.** The student teachers were required to attend the co-operating schools to which they were assigned during their senior year. While observing the lessons, they were required to perform certain tasks from a list of a variety of tasks included in Wajnryb (1992). These focused observation tasks required the student teachers to analyse a specific aspect of a lesson. Therefore, the participants wrote about the learning environment (task 1), managing error (task 2) and giving instructions (task 3).

(b) **Evaluation papers.** The student teachers were also required to carry out self- and peer-evaluations after each microteaching session. They were asked to reflect on the most and least effective aspects of their own and peer's teaching to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences.

(c) **Student teacher narratives.** This activity gave the student teachers a chance to express some of their thoughts and feelings about the teaching profession to develop a deeper understanding of themselves (such as why and how they see themselves as future teachers) and gain insights into the complexities of a teacher's day.

Semi-structured interviews

Merriam (1988) indicated that it is important to collect data through interviews when the researchers are interested in past events and experiences that are impossible to replicate. Since the purpose of the study was to investigate the participants' experiences and perceptions of the portfolio development process, the study employed semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted before (pre-interview) and after (post-interview) the portfolio project. These interviews were conducted and recorded by one of the researchers. All the interviews were conducted in either Turkish or English, depending on the participants' preferences. Some of the interview questions were:

- (i) What role do you see the portfolio playing in your life as a student teacher?
- (ii) Do you think you will develop any new skills as a result of preparing a portfolio?
- (iii) Do you think preparing a portfolio will make you more reflective than before? How?
- (iv) What would be the advantages/disadvantages of preparing an electronic portfolio over a pen/paper portfolio?
- (v) Will you use your pen/paper portfolio and electronic portfolio in the future?

Data analysis procedures

The portfolios were examined to identify the levels of reflective thinking. For this purpose, Hatton & Smith's (1995) framework (see Appendix A) was used. This framework views reflection as a hierarchical developmental sequence, 'starting the beginner with the relatively simplistic or partial technical type, then working through different forms of reflection-on-action to the desired end point of a professional able to undertake reflection-in-action' (p. 45). Within this framework, Hatton & Smith (1995) developed an instrument to measure different stages of reflectivity: (i) descriptive writing (mainly descriptive reports of events or literature – not reflective); (ii) descriptive reflection (providing reasons based on personal judgments); (iii) dialogic reflection (a type of discourse with oneself and exploration of possible reasons); and (iv) critical reflection (involving reasons given for decisions or events which take account of the social, cultural or political contexts). Their four levels of reflective writing was an appropriate tool to analyse the various levels of reflection because, as suggested by Orland-Barak (2005), they are 'practical, ethical, critical and transformational' (p. 33).

After the data were organised, the researchers began coding the data into categories by using a reflection-coding scheme, again based on Hatton & Smith's (1995) framework. Depending on the type of reflection found in the portfolio artefacts, each idea unit was coded according to the following scheme: dw – descriptive writing; dr – descriptive reflection; dre – dialogic reflection; and cr – critical reflection. The frequencies of these codes were counted; then, in order to check for statistical difference between pen/paper portfolios and electronic portfolios in terms of reflective thinking, the Friedman 2-related samples test was conducted. Thus, the analysis of single reflective units provided the answer to how the participants' levels of reflection differ in their pen/paper and electronic portfolio writing. In addition to quantitative data, descriptive data was also presented by giving quotations from the written artefacts. The researchers analysed each portfolio separately and then conducted a cross-case analysis.

In addition to that, the researchers were also interested in the perspectives of the student teachers regarding the impact of portfolio preparation on their reflective thinking. Therefore, the interviews were transcribed to identify and analyse emerging recurrent patterns and themes. After the interview data were divided into thematic categories, the researchers counted, coded and classified each category and made a list of themes and patterns for each participant. This was followed by analysis across cases.

Findings and discussion

The levels of reflective writing

The reflective papers (e.g., student teacher narratives, reflection papers on the classroom observation tasks, and the evaluation papers) in the student teachers' pen/paper portfolios, as expected, showed evidence of their development in reflective thinking (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: Mean ranks between the portfolios

Stages of Reflectivity	Pen/Paper Portfolio		Electronic Portfolio	
	Mean rank	<i>p</i>	Mean rank	<i>p</i>
Descriptive writing	1.60		4.00	.05*
Descriptive reflection	1.90		2.80	
Dialogic reflection	2.70		2.00	
Critical reflection	3.80	.031*	1.20	

* $p < .05$

Their pen/paper portfolios exhibited descriptive reflection at the beginning, then dialogic reflection, and at the end of the first semester these became more critical in nature. For instance, while examining the language teaching approach of the co-operating teacher, one of the student teachers mainly used descriptive writing in her first task because it provided her with a way to illustrate the classroom actions. She did not use any comments of her own, but just descriptions:

'She opens class every day with having a short discussion section. She asked whether they did their homework. Then she checked their homework and continued with the lesson.'

When writing the reflective essay on one of the classroom observation tasks (i.e., 'the learning environment'), another student teacher engaged in descriptive writing only in the context of the high school classroom, since it was the first time she observed an actual classroom. As she examined the nature of the language learning environment, she mainly used descriptive writing because it provided her with a way to illustrate the interaction among the various social components of the school (i.e., the teachers, the students, the parents, and the school administration):

'My co-operating teacher was talking to me the other day about her experiences when they give bad grades to students. She was concerned. She said she may receive a lot of pressure from both the administration as well as the students' parents to give the student a more acceptable grade.'

This student teacher used descriptive writing to relate her co-operating teacher's dealings with the administration and parents over the issue of student grades.

The second category of reflection used was 'dialogic reflection' which is a form of discourse with oneself where the student teacher seeks possible reasons for his/her actions (Hatton & Smith, 1995). For instance, in one student teacher's written narrative in her pen/paper portfolio, she exhibited dialogic reflection as she examined her beliefs on language learning and teaching based on both her experiences as a language learner and as a language teacher. Her reflection on her beliefs was characterised by the use of dialogic reflection:

'I believe that language means communication and therefore language should be taught communicatively. I feel that students learn best when they learn by doing.'

Dialogic reflection enabled another student to learn from her teaching experiences by rethinking her teaching methods and choice of materials and activities. Her writing revealed a stepping back from the experience of planning and presenting the lesson, as she evaluated the lesson and suggested possible changes:

'In general, I think I achieved what I wanted. The only thing that I would have changed was making the format for the adjective exercise more open-ended.'

In the portfolio entries written at the end of the first semester, there was evidence of 'stepping back' from the events to examine their actions by taking into consideration the social, historical and political contexts (Hatton & Smith, 1995) that influence the actions and events. The entries thus exhibited 'critical reflection'. A case in point of more critical thinking is the following quotation, in which one student teacher moved from describing a teaching approach used by the co-operating teacher, to linking this approach to its social consequences in her future classroom:

'It's personalised. I think that one of my goals in my future class would be to create a small community where students participate to the classroom discussion. You need to consider your students' interest and learning styles while making them participate in the class activities.'

By sharing personal information, she not only captured students' attention and participation, but also created a social environment or 'small community' in her classroom. For example, in his reflective paper on 'managing errors' another student teacher used critical reflection. While addressing the social nature of the classroom, he commented on the effects of teachers' approaches to error correction:

'In order to be effective, teachers should be careful while they correct the students. Students will be discouraged if they are corrected for every mistake.'

His critical reflection enabled him to examine error correction from the perspective of a teacher's relationship with her or his students.

Overall, in their pen/paper portfolios, student teachers were more aware of reflexivity and how the process of reflective thinking worked. In other words, the student teachers were well aware of what they were expected to do in their portfolios in which they managed to step back from the events and to reflect on their experiences, giving personal judgments and alternatives for the events.

On the other hand, the language and the level of reflective thinking in the electronic portfolios were descriptive in nature, indicating that they were operating at the lowest stage of reflection according to Hatton & Smith's (1995) framework. The predominant category of reflective writing was the category of 'descriptive reflection'. Even though they developed the same materials in the second semester, the entries in their electronic portfolios were not as critical as expected. The example below illustrated one of the descriptive entries a student teacher wrote in his electronic portfolio:

'The teacher explained the vocabulary about theatre. She gave the class a list of 10 words, through which she tried to make it fun by having the students' role play the meanings. They seemed very interested in this activity.'

The reason for this outcome might be that student teachers were very much concerned with the technicality of completing the electronic portfolios so that they might have given importance to the surface elements of their electronic portfolios rather than to the content. The multimedia possibilities of electronic portfolios (e.g., text, audio, graphics, animation and video) allow student teachers to present information from their coursework and their field experiences in various formats. In this case, student teachers added different artefacts which they themselves selected, such as digitised pictures of themselves and their peers, PowerPoint presentations from other courses, videotaped interactions with students, scanned

samples of their work, short animated graphics, and so on. They opted to add these artefacts to display their learning and to demonstrate their ability to use integrated technology. They did the same tasks as in their pen/paper portfolios, but they were more concerned with what other documents they might add to make their electronic portfolios more colourful and interesting rather than what they would write:

‘For my electronic portfolio, I decided to videotape the lessons I taught in practice teaching. So I learned how to set up the video cameras. Learning how to do these things helped me to understand more about how technology can be integrated into language teaching. Having video segments in my electronic portfolio was very exciting.’

Like the teachers in Orland-Barak’s study (2005), the student teachers in the present study depicted the experience of having an electronic portfolio as a ‘favourable image’ (p. 36) of their teaching that exhibits their achievements professionally; therefore they focused on presenting a favourable image through their portfolios as a neat and professional collection of their teaching practice.

Even though electronic portfolio preparation did not enhance reflective thinking, the process of creating electronic portfolios supported student teachers’ ongoing professional development because the possibility of using different technological applications aroused teachers’ interest in technology and their motivation to use it. One student teacher stated that:

‘The skills that I learned from developing electronic portfolios have definitely inspired me to learn more new things in using technology, and I will definitely update and improving my portfolio in the future.’

Through the creation of electronic portfolios, therefore, teachers explored and increased their knowledge about the application of technology.

The thematic units in interviews

The results of the interview analysis in terms of the participants’ opinions on portfolio preparation and its impact on the development of their reflective thinking supported the findings discussed above.

In the content analysis of pre-interviews, two themes on early beliefs about portfolio preparation emerged: (i) portfolios are tools that facilitate finding employment; and (ii) portfolio preparation is an overwhelming and time-consuming process.

During the pre-interviews, the student teachers termed portfolios as a ‘tool for job search’. In other words, at the beginning of the project, they saw the portfolio as a tool that served them to search for a job. They felt that it gave them a big advantage over other applicants, since portfolios helped them to showcase to future employers the knowledge and skills learnt during their teacher training. For instance, one student teacher believed that preparing a portfolio *‘is a good idea, but I am sure it would be very useful in finding a job, because at the end, you have a chance to show what you did in your teacher education to prospective employers.’* This finding is consistent with the point made by Hurst, Wilson & Cramer (1998) and Anderson & DeMeulle (1998) who suggested that portfolios would help student teachers obtain a teaching position when they applied for a job.

Student teachers knew that the portfolio preparation process would not be an easy one: they saw it as an ‘overwhelming’ and ‘time-consuming’ process. One of the student teachers expressed her frustration with the time her portfolio would take, especially in writing the student teacher narratives. She stated, *‘writing teacher narrative and journals will be a little bit time-consuming. You need to go in depth, be clear, just writing these reflections will take a lot of time.’* In addition, they also reported that the amount of time they would spend preparing the electronic portfolio would be even more time-consuming, particularly with all the different technologies used. They believed learning the skills needed to develop the electronic portfolio would take extra time away from the academic content. One student teacher indicated that the electronic portfolio should be a part of all classes within the programme so that they could prepare it for the whole year. She said, *‘I think it is really necessary because then we can use different technology in different classes, and also we can prepare the portfolio not only for one course but for the other courses. I think each class should have time to do it.’* This finding is consistent with that reported in the literature (Zidon, 1996; Dutt-Doner & Gilman, 1998; Harris & Curran, 1998; McKinney, 1998; Stone, 1998), namely that time is a limiting factor when preparing portfolios.

In post-interviews, however, student teachers actually expressed pride in their portfolios, especially so with their electronic portfolios. Each student teacher engaged in the portfolio preparation seemed to experience a sense of professionalism as the semester progressed. For these student teachers, the portfolio preparation process provided them with the opportunity to monitor their professional growth:

I prepared items for the course first and put them in the portfolio. But then I realised what I have done is something valuable, I learned from it [portfolio] and it will affect my teaching in the future because I see my growth in it.

In addition, they also mentioned that their portfolio preparation process was a collaborative act with support from each other as well as from faculty members and the researchers. This echoes what Burke, Fogarty & Belgrad (1994) have said about collaboration. These authors argue that ‘though schools usually focus on students working alone, the real world allows and encourages people to talk, ask questions, get help and receive feedback’ (p. xvi). The student teachers in the present study talked to each other, with their co-operating teachers and with the researchers. For instance, one of them explained that the help and support she received from her classmate made an important contribution to her success:

She helped me because I was having problems with the portfolio, especially with the electronic journal. I talked with her, asked her what she wrote. She described what she did and it helped me in writing my reflective statements.

According to the student teachers, collaboration was an important aspect of the portfolio preparation process. This finding reinforces other studies that view collaboration as a productive practice (Routman, 1994; Kieffer et al., 1996).

Even though at the beginning of the project student teachers seemed to be overwhelmed by the idea of preparing an electronic portfolio, at the end they mentioned that preparing it helped them develop their technical skills because they used a variety of multimedia artefacts to present information from their coursework and their field experiences. For instance, as one of them said, ‘*It was just the fear that was holding me back. But now, in terms of benefits from technology, I feel more confident, and I can now say that I can use a computer.*’ All student teachers in this study agreed that they had learned new computer skills in the process of preparing their electronic portfolio. This finding is consistent with the findings of McKinney (1998), Richards (1998), Piper (1999) and Wright, Stallworth & Ray (2002) who also report that student teachers developed a positive attitude toward the use of electronic portfolios in their teaching.

The results of data analysis indicated that student teachers generally responded favourably to portfolio preparation. They looked closely at their strengths and weaknesses. They were actually proud of their portfolios and what they had achieved, especially when they finished their electronic portfolios. In addition, data from the interviews revealed that reflecting on portfolios enabled the student teachers to: (i) examine themselves and their teaching practice; (ii) organise their beliefs and thoughts in theories and practice; and (iii) initiate, reflect and improve their teaching and themselves. For instance, one of them

said that *'to reflect on yourself as a teacher, you need to think about your beliefs, and on what you were taught during your teacher training.'* He said that his reflections in the portfolio helped him to 'structure' his thoughts. He said, *'it [the reflection] did help me because I learned many things about teaching during my teaching practice period, so it helped me to structure my thoughts about foreign language methodologies.'*

Reflective thinking enabled the student teachers an opportunity to look at themselves as teachers, to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of their performances as teachers as evidenced in their pen/paper portfolios. However, when they talked about reflection in their electronic portfolio artefacts, they were more concerned about the layout of the portfolio. One of them said, *'I believe it should seem professional and creative; so I gave importance and time to the design of the artefacts, not the content of the narratives.'* They saw their portfolios as a physical product of their own that showed their professional development. They wanted to document their teaching practice in an organised way, and the electronic portfolio provided them with an opportunity to create a professional collection of materials that represented an important period of their training and development as a foreign language teacher. The student teachers stated that the pen/paper portfolio allowed them to be reflective and to make connections between theory and practice. They also stated that they developed their technology skills, not their reflective skills, as a result of participating in the electronic portfolio project.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicated that the pen/paper portfolio development process helped student teachers to be reflective and make connections between theory and practice. It also helped them think about their strengths and weaknesses as future teachers. It is clear, therefore, that portfolio development encourage teachers to become more reflective about their teaching practices – an insight that has already been reported by several researchers in diverse national contexts (Vavrus & Collins, 1991). The present findings within a Turkish context also reinforce Hatton & Smith's (1995) research that presents reflection as a hierarchical developmental process by which the student teachers start with a 'relatively simplistic or technical type' of reflection, move through forms of reflection-in-action (descriptive reflection to dialogic reflection to critical reflection) and ultimately reach the stage of reflection-on-action.

On the other hand, the findings of the present study indicated that, contrary to what was expected, although electronic portfolio development enhanced student

teachers' professional development in terms of increased technology knowledge and use, it was not as effective in terms of enhancing reflective thinking. By compiling the portfolios in an electronic environment, student teachers appeared to be more concerned with the technical aspects and the layout of their portfolios, rather than the content of the artefacts. Consequently, critical reflection in the electronic portfolios was mostly absent.

The findings of the present study also support the views expressed by Shulman (1992), namely that portfolios can document the unfolding of teaching and learning over time as well as provide teacher candidates the opportunity to engage in analysing their actions. Nowadays, technology use is widespread in teacher education. However, this study also showed that there is a lack of reflective thinking in developing electronic portfolios. Therefore, it is essential to explore effective ways through which student teachers can practise and develop their reflexivity while writing in an electronic environment.

There are several implications of this study for teacher education. First, as discussed in the literature review, portfolios – whether paper-based or electronic – can be considered to be an effective tool for critical examination of practice. The limited success of electronic portfolios in promoting critical reflection can be overcome, particularly if portfolios are part and parcel of continuing professional development, not just a one-off project in teacher training. Student teachers need to develop and use their portfolios throughout their teaching career. They also need to get support from faculty and their peers, as well as be supportive to others throughout the process.

Second, the findings of this study suggest that for electronic portfolios to be successful, adequate training in technology should be provided to student teachers so that their focus remains on reflection, not on the use of the technology itself. Teacher training programmes that ask their students to use electronic portfolios would therefore do well to provide adequate facilities, equipped with the required hardware and software, so that student teachers develop the proficiency required by electronic portfolios, and become so adept at using it that their attention can focus more effectively on critical reflection and analysis.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The present study has a number of limitations. Some of these arise from the use of case study methodology: the research outcomes reported here are grounded in information about a specific population, and generate insights about how a particular group of student teachers performed in a specific context. The research did not attempt to generalise the findings and to make claims relevant to all EFL

student teachers, or to predict future behaviour. Therefore, this study is limited to portfolio preparation by five senior student teachers. Additionally, this study was not intended to thoroughly examine all areas of teacher knowledge, but rather focused exclusively on reflective thinking.

Future research needs to be conducted to examine the possible effects of portfolio development on the professional growth of student teachers after the teacher candidates start to teach in regular classrooms. In addition, it is recommended that future research continue to be conducted regarding the use of both paper and electronic portfolios in foreign language teacher education programmes, particularly research with a longitudinal focus. For instance, the researchers suggest conducting this same study in a foreign language teacher education programme over four years, following the teacher candidates from their first semester through their graduation in order to document student growth. A content analysis of each year's portfolio would provide much valuable information.

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APPENDIX A

Hatton & Smith's (1995) Criteria for the Recognition of Evidence for Different Types of Reflective Writing

Descriptive writing (not reflective):

- (i) Description of events that occurred/report of literature.
- (ii) No attempt to provide reasons/justification for events.

Descriptive reflection:

- (i) Reflective – not only a description of events but some attempt to provide reason/justification for events or actions but in a reportive or descriptive way (e.g., 'I chose this problem solving activity because I believe that students should be active rather than passive learners').
- (ii) Recognition of *alternate* viewpoints in the research and literature which are reported (e.g., '... Tyler (1949), because of the assumptions on which his approach rests suggests that the curriculum process should begin with objectives. Yinger (1979), on the other hand argues that the "task" is the starting point').

Two forms:

- (a) Reflection based generally on one perspective/factor as rationale.
- (b) Reflection is based on the recognition of multiple factors and perspectives.

Dialogic reflection:

- (i) Demonstrates a 'stepping back' from the events/actions leading to a different level of mulling about, discourse with self and exploring the experience, events and actions using qualities of judgment and possible alternatives for explaining and hypothesising.
- (ii) Such reflection is analytical or/and integrative of factors and perspectives and may recognise inconsistencies in attempting to provide rationales and critique (e.g., 'While I had planned to use mainly written text materials I became aware very quickly that a number of students did not respond to these. Thinking about this now there may have been several reasons for this. A number of the students, while reasonably proficient in English, even though they had been NESB learners, may still have lacked some confidence in handling the level of language in the text. Alternatively a number of students may have been visual and tactile learners. In any case I found that I had to employ more concrete activities in my teaching').

Two forms, as in (a) and (b) above.

Critical reflection:

- (i) Demonstrates awareness that actions and events are not only located in, and explicable by, reference to multiple perspectives but are located in, and influenced by, multiple historical and socio-political contexts (e.g., 'What must be recognized, however, is that the issues of student management experienced with this class can only be understood within the wider structural locations of power relationships established between teachers and students in schools as social institutions based upon the principle of control' [Smith, 1992]).

SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITIONS AND THE LIFE-COURSE: AN ECOSYSTEMS ANALYSIS OF A COHORT OF AT-RISK YOUTHS IN MALTA

DAMIAN SPITERI

Abstract – *The manner in which school to work transitions are approached by young people is a significant aspect of their educational experience because of the implications that this transition has on their overall socialisation as members of society. This exploration is focused upon how a cohort of young men who attended a second opportunity all-boys' school for at-risk students in Malta, in the early to mid 1990s, engage in these transitions. It is aimed at defining how influential the participants perceive their relationships with their primary carers or families-of-origin during their upbringing years to have been in their defining occupational or career outcomes, whether their schooling influenced these beliefs, and how this was further evolved as they gathered increased work-experience over time.*

Introduction

Young people today witness and live the existence of what Furlong & Cartmel (1997) call 'diversified routes into the labour market' (p. 40). This implies that the linear transitions that characterised such studies as Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour* may not be as immediately applicable to wider society as they were when Willis' work was published originally. This is because, very often, in today's times, people opt to take up different jobs, rather than choosing a 'job for life'. This infers that transitions tend to have become more protracted than they were traditionally (Jones & Wallace, 1992; Hannan, Raffé & Smyth, 1996; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Walther et al., 2002). Young people today thereby envisage changing jobs time and time again, sometimes re-engaging themselves in schooling in some interspersed period between different jobs, or somehow combining schooling with work.

So as to avoid stereotyping the young people through simply focusing on them as 'the young people who once attended this school', an ecosystemic appreciation of their reality is being proposed. The ecosystemic model does not focus so much on distinguishing between what is in the person's realm and what is in the situation's, as is traditionally done when adopting a 'person-in-situation' approach. Rather, it views any data given as a transactional complexity that cannot easily be broken down into any component parts. Thus, as suggested by Gilgun

(2005), school to work transitions are presented as being on a meso-level as they are influenced by the combined influence of generally two micro-level factors such as school-work, work-home, or home-community. They are also influenced by exo-level factors such as the type and quality of employment available. Another further influence is on the macro-level factors. These would include such societal aspects as the manner in which gender is constructed and lived. Such factors may serve to impede certain jobs from being available to certain people.

The ecosystemic approach subscribes to an unfolding and unpacking of people's life experiences within a broad social and personal context. Since life-course analysis is also geared to essentially exploring 'the total space' (Levy, 1991, p. 90) in which people's lives evolve, it can be clearly seen to augment ecosystemic approaches to describing, understanding and exploring reality. Hunt (2005) traces the origins of the life-course perspective to the Chicago School of Sociology, including the symbolic interactionism approach relating to the growth of the self resulting from social interaction and internalisation. The life-course approach envisages exploring people's interactions within the context of events and circumstances as they actually take place within people's lives (Levy, 1991; Hunt, 2005). It lends itself to a psychosocial understanding of reality that addresses itself to the total matrix of things of which individuals, families, groups and communities are constituents, and where the whole is thereby greater than the sum of the individual parts.

The life-course approach is highly consistent with the adoption of an emic view of the evolving nature of the participants' lives and has been deemed to be of particular value to this study due its consideration of the social surroundings of individuals (Gielle & Elder, 1998). It thereby subscribes to the notion that people can participate simultaneously in multiple activities, and that roles and role changes do not necessarily occur independently of one another (Marini, 1984). For instance, it is possible to be first a husband and then a father, and it is equally possible to be both a husband and a father simultaneously. Yet, there is also an element of the person's 'adaptation to concrete situations and events' (Hunt, 2005, p. 23) that is implied, as can be seen if assessing the impact that being a husband and a father has on a person's life, in particular from the point of view of the person concerned.

Thus, within the context of a cohort of people who once attended second opportunity schooling, focus needs to be laid upon exploring their subjective understandings of events and circumstances that arose in their lives, their interaction with other agents of socialisation that impinge upon decisions that they take, and the multiple life-course activities that they engaged in as seen and understood even prospectively. Stated otherwise, the life-course approach as adopted in this study, is directed at generating an exploration of the sum-total of experience, reflection and action that comes to be embodied in the participant's sense of being, knowing and

doing at any given moment in time and its impact as understood in future. This implies that any decisions that the participants make is not correlated with a singular self-efficacy, but rather with influences stemming from dynamic interactions with other people or with events that somehow leave a mark on subsequent decisions that people take. This, nonetheless, does not override the influence of structural factors that may be experienced through an intergenerational taking up of similar jobs or of other factors, such as whether a person resides in an area that is stigmatised and thereby finds it less easy to find a job than had s/he come from elsewhere.

The present study thereby explores how influences deriving from families-of-origin and from schooling, within a wider ecosystemic perspective, instigate people to take certain life-course decisions when they are at a later age. Ekstrom et al. (1986) found out that among a cohort of high school students, those who stayed on were differentiated from those who dropped out, in virtue of a number of dimensions. Those who dropped out, generally, had a lower socio-economic status. They also tended to lack any form of home-support for education. Furthermore, they had overall negative attitudes toward schooling and school work. This finding nonetheless triggers off another line of questioning. Namely, how do participants perceive and experience such factors, and how do they employ this 'data' to forge decisions, particularly in the labour market?

This line of questioning stands at the centre of the current study, which focuses on at-risk young people in Malta. These young people were assigned, when at school, to attend a special second opportunity school, given the *nom-de-plume* of St. Paul's School. St. Paul's offers an educational set-up for students who are either habitual school absentees or who present behaviour that the authorities deem to be overly disruptive within the mainstream system of schooling. The participants in this study either rejected the mainstream system of schooling or they were rejected by it. This was when they were aged around 14 to 16. This is the age-group for which this school caters. By focusing on this particular group, I explore their school-to-work transitions. The aim is to better understand how these young people approach work and how they position themselves in relation to different jobs and occupational outlets within the broader labour market over their life-course.

Methodology

The participants were purposely pre-selected to have attended St. Paul's between 1990 and 1995. At the time of writing, they were aged from approximately 25 to their early 30s, since they were born between 1975 and 1980. This age-related criterion generates a greater consistency in the study than would

have been possible had a wider age-range been rendered permissible. This particular homogeneity is suited to an analysis of the participants' assertions using a qualitative methodology that is consonant with the idea that every participant's experience of events in his life is unique (Kelley, 1995). Moreover, such a methodology allows for a greater appreciation of subjectivity since quantitative research tends to be more positivistic than its qualitative counterpart. For instance, it may not always be possible to 'break the data down' into 'variables' that can be easily defined, quantified and then analysed in the light of the quantifications suggested – as is ordinarily subscribed to in quantitative analysis.

The qualitative approach adopted involved the use of individual interviews with six participants. Each interview lasted around an hour and was commenced with the researcher explaining what the interview aims at exploring. Participants' informed consent was obtained after sharing with them relevant information regarding confidentiality. They were also furnished with data on other issues, such as how the research findings would be analysed and presented. The researcher adopted a low profile during the interviews, intervening only when the clarification of certain points was necessary or to otherwise engage the participants in further developing their stories. Interviewing was chosen as the preferred method of data collection since it allows an easily accessible way of gaining the interviewee's trust. Data collected could be validated by asking further questions. More importantly, interviewing allows people space to engage in personal reflection when building their 'narratives'. The latter would be used in this study to reconstruct the participants' experiences.

Interviews were analysed using grounded theorising. This involves analysing participants' narratives in a flexible way that allows the identification of narration themes. This approach is a means to bring out specific interpersonal contexts, life-experiences, events and subjective understandings stemming from a theory that is developed inductively from a corpus of data. The process involves three steps – namely, open coding, axial coding and selective coding – even though this process is cyclical rather than linear. This is because the nature of coding in grounded theory brings about a situation where it is necessary to return and re-examine the data for different pieces of information at different times. New topics may emerge while the data analysis is taking place. These would need to be explored to saturation, taking note of variations and deviant cases that can further consolidate the grounded qualities of the theory that is being developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Open coding usually takes place mainly at the beginning of a study. This type of coding involves conceptualising and categorising data. It is approached by identifying, labelling and categorising individual phenomena that are then clustered together and related to one another as themes to form categories. Within the present study on school-to-work transitions, these categories were phrased

using words that were elicited by the participants themselves, what Strauss & Corbin (1990) call 'in vivo' assertions.

Axial coding is the process of relating categories to their subcategories by linking them at the level of properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Properties are 'characteristics of a category, the delineation of which defines and gives it meaning' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 101). Dimensions show how each property can vary, for instance, on grounds of frequency or occurrence. In the current study, axial coding was approached by engaging in an exploration, using the constant comparison method, about any interrelated patterns that could give rise to a phenomenon's occurrence. The concepts that emerged during the open coding were re-assembled using propositions about these interrelated patterns. These emerging propositions then formed a theoretical framework that served as a guide for further data collection analysis. At the end of this stage, the core categories and their relationships were formed.

Selective coding is normally the final stage of data analysis in grounded theory, as it builds upon the previous open and axial coding strategies. Selective coding is 'the process of selecting the central or core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 16). At this stage, theoretical saturation must be reached, implying that no new properties, dimensions or relationships would be discovered during analysis. Two central concepts that emerged from this analysis were that: (i) any actions that participants have taken in their later years have been influenced by other people, particularly those who served as agents of socialisation during their upbringing years; and (ii) any actions made were deemed by them to be subject to their exercise of personal agency.

Results

Co-constructed realities – 'I would not be where I am had it not been for my family when I was younger'

The participants were interested in jobs that could offer them 'satisfaction' as they defined the term. Particular themes that were clearly expounded by the participants included use of physical strength and job-security. Enrico claimed that his view of a better job was one where he could use physical strength:

Then I managed to find other work, in construction as well. It is there [in this line of work] that I find my satisfaction. It is there that I am happiest. I build, I carry and I suffer just as my older brothers do. ... and like until some time ago, my father did as well.

‘Building, carrying, and suffering’ are usually construed as tenets of blue-collar jobs. There is a particular habitus that is invoked. This is best illustrated by using Bourdieu’s (1976,) assertion that ‘each family transmits to its ... [members], indirectly, rather than directly, a certain cultural capital and a certain ethos. The latter is a system of implicit and deeply interiorised values [and thereby an integral aspect of habitus]’ (p. 110). From an ecosystemic perspective, a number of inter-operational influences can be observed. The reference to the older brothers and father working as they did implies that Enrico must have received messages that compensated for the suffering that he deems as intrinsic to the job. Thus, rather than focusing on working in construction, he is focusing on something that his family members did, and this is seen in a positive light.

On the other hand, Gigi – rather than in the intrinsic motivators cited by Enrico – was more interested in the security that a job offered:

I left that job as a barman because I was fed up with the fact that they always promised me the wages that they owed me, and these wages never turned up. I left and worked as a cleaner in the bar that was next to theirs. That was the first job that I found [after this happened]. I went and I took it. Both my parents had been unemployed for some time. Neither one knew how to read and write. Thereby they did not find work easily. Being unemployed is not exactly something to shout home about, I’ll tell you that much. As far as I am concerned, I could work at every type of work, the most important thing is that I am working.

The account that Gigi offers relates to his own suppositions about what he considers as normative and appropriate behaviour of his employers. He brings out clearly that individuals and their environments have a potentially inter-influencing effect. Unlike Enrico, he did not gravitate to a particular type of job since he perceived it as something familiar. He referred specifically to his distaste of the possibility of being unemployed, something he had witnessed in his family-of-origin. From an ecosystemic perspective, there is a reluctance to separate the person from the environment, and in Gigi’s case, his choice of work must not be seen strictly in the light of any one parameter, such as class reproduction. Rather, it must also be seen in its particular transactional context. His family’s choice of jobs was limited by low educational levels. Although proud that he had achieved more educationally than his parents did, Gigi mentioned unskilled and semi-skilled jobs as opportunities he engaged in¹. While Enrico and Gigi were assigned to St. Paul’s School, this, in itself, is not indicative of their underachievement nor is it a statement of their class background.

In contradistinction, Paolo and Melchiorre come from a middle-class background. Melchiorre’s father was a clerk, whereas Paolo’s was a teacher.

Melchiore, who was working his way up in the army, claimed that:

... in order to achieve a high-up position in the army, exams are what you need. Till now, I always managed to achieve a pass in whatever examinations I sat for. Now I aspire to go in for even more examinations. There is a chance that I may also be sent abroad to pursue my studies even further. If I pass in my examinations with flying colours, they [my superiors at work] are very likely to send me [abroad]. ... I always remember my father's words when I was younger. He always used to tell me 'study – whatever you study will be for yourself'. Today, I say that it would have been better for me if I had taken heed of his words. ... Recently, he told me that if I want to study to get somewhere higher up in the army and I need a push financially, then he is ready to help out.

Melchiore originally joined the army at a low rank. While he may have had the ability to realistically achieve a more senior rank, he was held back by the lack of certification that he is now aspiring to achieve. Paolo, on the other hand, was more inclined to derive his own goals from his aspirations to proceed in his studies in computing. He undertook a series of computing courses so as to design his life-course around an occupational area of his own choice:

The fact that I have chosen my career has given me a certain amount of maturity ... as a career I have chosen computers and now that I have sat for my first examinations and succeeded, I shall carry on with the others. As you know, I have carried out a number of jobs. However, previously, I had never discovered a suitable line of work for myself. When I used to work with Cable Television, and I did well over there, I kind of managed to be in a better position to decide what I wanted out of life, work-wise. From there I went on to find a job in computers, I became more conscious about my strong points, and I also started to study by myself and attend courses on computers. Today, I run my own small business in computer repairs. I am also aspiring to work as an instructor in one of the private schools When I was younger, my parents always tried to encourage me to take an interest in my schooling. It was from there that I derived all the enthusiasm to study that I have today. I always remember my father with a book in his hands.

Both Melchiore and Paolo were interested in achieving certification. Both refer to family-of-origin contexts where they were 'pushed' to study. Moreover, both observed that their lack of interest in schooling when younger did not discourage them from studying further once they were older in view of investing in a career. Using ecosystem thinking, this recognition of the full field of events and transactions present in their case moves the focus away from a narrow view

of individual pathology, either that associated with their placement in St. Paul's or that associated with emotional characteristics exhibited when they were younger. Melchiorre directly refers to his father's positive reinforcement of his schooling and how this served to influence future decisions. Melchiorre makes more emphasis about his father's assertion rather than to his actual (lack of) schooling, showing the influential aspect of the home-school focus during his childhood. Consonant with this consideration is that both Paolo's and Melchiorre's class background assisted them to come to their current position and perceive predictable futures unfolding before them. In their case, class differences and family connections were not really annulled when they attended a particular type of school and opted out of achieving the relevant certification at a young age. Rather these aspects of their socialisation and upbringing receded for some time 'into the background relative to the newly emerging "centre" of the biographical life plan' (Beck, 1992, p. 131), this 'centre' being their current career aspirations. From an ecosystems perspective, this implies that rather than focusing merely on their individual strengths and shortcomings, their current aspirations must also be viewed in the light of the total social context and their transaction with this larger environment.

Intrapersonal realities – 'If it has to be, then it's up to me'

Giacomo and Taddeo described their upbringing as being '*highly problematic*' and '*not lacking in challenges*' respectively. Both Giacomo and Taddeo had been what can be termed as child carers, namely children who looked after their parents rather than the other way round. Giacomo's parents were both binge alcoholics and Taddeo's mother suffered from depression. Giacomo's father offered very little support to the family. Taddeo's father had become chronically in debt and, due to stress, he was unable to work during most of Taddeo's growing-up years. The manner in which Giacomo and Taddeo describe their backgrounds shows that they depict their environments as the matrix of their lives, something that has influenced them, and something that has triggered their reactions. From an ecosystems perspective, the deep transactional connectedness between the family and the individual is brought out by exploring the interrelatedness between different influencing factors on people's lives.

For instance, although both Giacomo and Taddeo attribute the manner in which their life-courses evolved to decisions that they had taken themselves, they also attribute their success to their ability to allow other people to be involved in their lives. Giacomo experienced an upward social mobility compared to his unemployed father and mother. He obtained his 16+ school leaving examinations and eventually embarked upon a post-secondary level course of studies in

catering. Taddeo carried out a similar course of studies abroad. His father had worked as a bus-driver for some time and his mother was unemployed.

In Giacomo's case, there was a teacher at St. Paul's School who took a personal initiative to invite him home to study. Giacomo attributes his success in examinations to this initiative. In Taddeo's case, he was placed in care for some time when his parents found that they were unable to cope with family life. He credits the inputs from professional staff, including teachers and social workers, in assisting him in his own career progression. In his adult life, he then re-constructed an alternative account of his care years by describing himself as a 'boarder':

My going to St. Mark's was not a totally bad idea. Today, that is how I think of it. However, at that time, I wanted to be at home more, even if I do not look upon the experience as an ugly one. It was like I was a boarder at a school somewhere.

Giacomo and Taddeo do not confirm Willis' (1977) assertion that working-class kids attend working-class schools and end up with working-class jobs. They allowed educators to take an active interest in their lives and to thereby foster overall contexts that were supportive of their learning. If analysed from an ecosystems perspective, where such aspects as the interpersonal relationships that they fostered with their teachers are seen as part of a larger series of events in these people's lives, their account cannot be totally isolated from the home environment. Thus, Giacomo explained that his mother always encouraged him to take his studies seriously. In this manner, he experienced a similarity in frames of reference that was reinforced mutually at home and school, even though he asserts that his only memories of his father were those of a person who hounded his family home with violence. His mother had transmitted her respect for schooling to him, as can be judged by his simultaneously working and saving money to attend a post-graduate course:

I have mother to thank for my having succeeded as I have done, because, despite everything – that she used to get beaten by my father, the alcohol problem that she had, despite everything, despite the fact that I missed a lot of schooling, she instilled in me a respect for studying. Today, I know that that was the biggest present she could have given to me.

With regard to the interventions of other professionals, Giacomo states that:

They opened all the doors for me. The social worker encouraged me to attend that school [St. Paul's School]. The teacher took a personal interest and used to come teach me at home. They managed to give me the desire to carry on battling with life. ... From there I learnt that so as to advance

myself in life, it is up to me to do it. And if I was to study something, I am doing that for myself. So as to get on in life, I have to study. I have to choose a line of work that is appropriate for me, I have to become an expert in that line of work, and carry on learning within that line of work for the rest of my life.

Giacomo's focus on his own intrapersonal efforts is brought out through his assertion that he had developed the '*desire to carry on battling with life*'. Nonetheless he attributes this motivation to his interactions with the professional people he refers to. Their interventions served to influence him further by empowering him. As a result, he was reflexive and engaged his studies in a purposive way, understanding how his choices and behaviours impinged on the evolution of his life-course.

In contradistinction, Taddeo distinguished himself from his peers when he was in care and built a self-identity of a resilient person. He claimed that he did not want to be like his peers at the 'boarding school' and that he would do himself an injustice if he were like them. This is explained in the following passage:

I was a repeater and around 12 years old when I went to ... [the school in question]. It is not that I had not learnt anything at primary school, as there were things I did learn. I think that even there [St. Mark's] I was [academically] more advanced than the other students. Many of them had foster parents, and they used to say that their mothers or fathers used to see them as burdensome. Remembering the students there [St. Mark's], I realised that I had a gift with the upbringing that I had had, and I wished to progress forward. They do so much in life and sometimes they know neither their father nor their mother.

Taddeo held this resilience into his adult life. Just as when at school he wanted to be an ideal student different from the others, in later life he did not want to hold jobs that were not attuned to the manner in which he defined his career progression. After working as a dishwasher and restaurant server, he rekindled his desire to study catering and develop his skills in such a way as to translate his love for cooking at home into a labour market destination:

Because my father had to work long hours, I ended up at home with my mother. She was sick with depression. I had to take care of her. I did the cooking for everyone [at home]. From there I learned to cook. I learned, as well, to love cooking. It was from there that I was inspired with the desire to become a cook.

Both Giacomo and Taddeo bring out the importance of undertaking jobs that they enjoy. Specialising in a job is associated with life-long learning by Giacomo.

With Taddeo, there is more of a chance factor that is invoked in his narrative, for he could have 'learnt' to hate cooking, for instance, on the grounds that it was imposed on him due to his particular circumstances of daily living as a young adolescent. Nonetheless, the narratives of Giacomo and Taddeo show how complex and multifaceted ecosystemic elements are in shaping peoples' lives.

Conclusion: within a defining social context, 'Its my life, I live it as I want to'

Despite originating from a similar class background, research participants did not experience school-to-work transitions in similar ways. Rather, other factors, including home-background and the manner in which the transition process itself was conducted were influential.

Since all the participants were men, this infuses the study with a certain construction of masculinity. This can be evidenced in Enrico's emphasis on physical labour, suffering and forbearance. Melchiore's military aspirations betray certain masculine connotations too. However, other participants chose destinations that were not necessarily associated with masculine constructions of the self. For instance, Giacomo had to cope with being brought up by an alcoholic mother and a violent father. He lived with all the uncertainties associated with an alcoholic home, and yet eventually moved on to pursue post-16 education. Taddeo had a mother regularly hospitalised for depression. Yet, this did not stop him from pursuing and obtaining certification in an occupational area of his own choosing. Other participants had to deal with problems of illiteracy in their families-of-origin and looked for jobs that would give them a sense of empowerment so as to avoid unemployment.

Giacomo and Taddeo, on the other hand, perceived certification and personal career mobility as associated with learning new skills. This motivated them to pursue their studies as adults. Labour market theorists (Osterman, 1989; Soskice, 1999) point out that, from among all potential candidates the people who opt to remain on at school are the ones most likely to believe that extending their education would benefit their prospective career. Giacomo's and Taddeo's aspirations are consistent with recent findings in the employment literature which indicate that people 'who want to maintain their employability must be willing to learn new skills regularly' (Watts, 2005, p. 66). Their motivation to pursue adult education opportunities mediated the effects of their class origin and labour market destination. This said, both Taddeo and Giacomo perceived the influences of their families-of-origin as significant in terms of their eventual labour market choices. Yet, in employing an ecosystemic perspective, attention

must also be paid to all interacting elements always present in a case. Identification of transactional factors is subject to understanding how these people engaged in transactions within the context of different agents of socialisation over their life-course.

The study shows that participants operated at an intersection between their individual aspirations and the personal and social capital that they had available to make those aspirations materialise. Their aspirations were forged in the context of the messages that people around them, particularly in their growing-up years, conveyed to them. As Gergen (1985) alleges from a social constructionist position, 'the process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is (also) the result of an active cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship' (p. 267). Delving deeper into this line of argument, it is how people perceive the events and circumstances that constitute the stories that they build in their own minds that is pivotal in their approach to reality (Alheit, 1994). However, this process is not divorced from the overall context, the schooling context, the family context, or the labour market context.

Some influences are more evident than others, yet others such as class or gender may not be as apparent. This does not mean that they are not operational and this study shows that such structural influences do play a part in young people's labour market destinations as can be seen when a young person takes up a blue-collar job just as his father had done before him. Notwithstanding this, some participants forged their own life-course by not allowing themselves to be constrained, for instance, by their lack of school qualifications. Others felt that they were in the jobs that they aspired to and that their lack of schooling was less detrimental when seen in the light of their total life-plans. Some of the participants did not see school as relevant to their future careers, implying that their inclinations to social mobility stemming from success at school were allayed.

Overall, thereby all participants face a defining social context, even though they see themselves as living their lives in the manner they want to. Thus, empirical focus cannot be laid on either intrapersonal/interpersonal issues or structural factors that can influence people's lives without also attributing due weighting to such transactional issues – as when students interact with teachers or when they are assigned to a particular school – and this has forbearing on decisions taken later in their lives. This is because how the participants define and handle the different situational factors that they encounter over time significantly influences how they go about living their lives and forging their life-course.

Note

1. Participants like Enrico were limited in how far they could go, as they did not know how to read or write. In considering that in 1995, when they would have been in the 15 to 20 year-old bracket, 51.9% of the working age population had not completed secondary school education (Ammerman, 2004), it is not surprising that certain people in Malta, including some of the research participants, would not have a high standard of education. Moreover, from statistics derived from the year 2000, it has been extrapolated that while 8.5% of those aged between 25 and 64 years in the EU are participating in education or training, in Malta this figure stands at only 4.4% (Camilleri, 2004).

Damian Spiteri has recently completed his PhD thesis entitled 'The School-to-Work Transitions of a Cohort of At-Risk Youths in Malta' wherein he explored how structure and agency interact in the lives of his research participants as they engage in their transitions. Having worked for eight years as a guidance teacher and a teacher of social studies at a school that specifically caters for youths with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, Dr Spiteri has considerable work-based experience with at-risk youths. He currently works as a teacher assigned to the Anti-Substance Abuse Unit that forms part of the Safe Schools Programme, an initiative of the Malta Education Division. Dr Spiteri, who is also a qualified social worker, works as a part-time social worker with Caritas (Malta), an agency which is committed to alleviate poverty and promote human development and social justice. His e-mail address is: damianspiteri@yahoo.co.uk

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DIALOGUE AND HEGEMONY: SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF 'CHARLAS' FOR CRITIQUE AND PRAXIS

JOSEPH P. ZANONI

Abstract – *A theoretical framework for discourse analysis is presented focusing on the themes of the formation of hegemony through dialogue and the development of critique and praxis through informal interaction. Sociolinguistic inquiry in traditional elementary and secondary classrooms has contributed to expanding knowledge related to student capacity development and teacher preparation. A similar discourse analytic approach may also be directed to adult learners in traditional and community-based settings to increase understanding about the phenomenon of adult adaptation to new community environments. The lessons of immigrants and their learning facilitators of problem solving and adaptation to new circumstances should be a value to educators, teacher educators and policy makers seeking authentic participation, capacity growth and sustainable development, particularly in the culturally hybridic Mediterranean region.*

Introduction

The Mediterranean region is being rocked by waves of immigration consequent to accelerating transnational movement of capital, new socio-political formations and ramifications of climate change (Aubarell & Aragall, 2005; Cassarino, 2008). Education inquiry and policy development has a strong role in understanding and addressing the background, aspirations and developing knowledge of new immigrants in their process of integration into diverse cultures and societies (Colombo & Sciortino, 2004; Reyneri, 2004; Mattheoudakis, 2005). Heeding Mazawi's (2008) call to explore the 'imaginary horizon of community' through the co-construction of participatory education inquiry (Borg & Mayo, 2006) and turning from the 'culture of the null hypothesis', it is argued that qualitative critical discourse analysis (Luke, 1995; Rogers, 2004) of adult educational interaction in the community will show how immigrants are making meaning, solving problems and creating strategies in new settings that will have profound consequences for both their success and social sustainability.

A theoretical framework for discourse analysis is presented focusing on the themes of the formation of hegemony through dialogue and the development of critique and praxis through informal interaction. Sociolinguistic inquiry in

traditional elementary and secondary classrooms (Cazden, 2001) has contributed to expanding knowledge related to student capacity development and teacher preparation. A similar discourse analytic approach may also be directed to adult learners in traditional and community-based settings to increase understanding about the phenomenon of adult adaptation to new urban areas.

Immigrant adults seeking to live and work in new sociocultural environments meet unfamiliar hegemonic discourses (Apitzsch, 2002) during their first conversations in the community that impact their experiences of social justice (Ayers, 1997) because of the precarious and marginal status and inequitable conditions (Murray, 2003; Reyneri, 2004; Borg & Mayo, 2006) provided them by dominant societies. Educators exploring curriculum study with recent Latina/o immigrants in Chicago, Illinois, learned that informal conversational dialogues called 'charlas' or 'echar platica' (Guerra, 1998) are preferred to traditional didactic lectures (Zanoni et al., 2006). Along with practical or social directions in conversation, dialogue (Borg & Mayo, 2001, 2006) becomes an important language function to raise awareness about dominant power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) relations. It is argued that educators need to examine the possibilities of sociocultural language practices to understand how this discourse functions and how to create curriculum to enhance adult experience with critique and social praxis (Gramsci, 1988) to achieve social justice. Elements of Southern Mediterranean to Northern Mediterranean migration circulation show that marginalisation and isolation of new immigrants and the creation of alterity (Suarez-Orozco, 1991; Borg & Mayo, 2006) may not be uniform (Cassarino, 2008). Curriculum inquiry is proposed to understand how immigrant adults form funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and how they utilise this knowledge.

The 'charla' process is presented as one way that participants form their conception of the world (Gramsci, 1971; Ives, 2004) through heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981) and hybridic (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Tejada, 1999) interactions. 'Charlas' are a Latina/o cultural practice for the development of epistemology, identity and agency; immigrant groups with practices that value close family interaction and informal verbal exchange may demonstrate similar language functions. Democratic social relations (Mayo, 1999) are developed through 'charla' practice through which actors create meaning and propose social praxis. 'Charla' participant reflection on praxis and critique of outcomes shows how Gramsci's view of the 'war of position' (Mayo, 1999; Fontana, 2000; Borg, Buttigieg & Mayo, 2002) can lead to the promotion of subaltern social hegemony. Curriculum study may focus on the process of how voice is recognised, critiqued and animated to create and sustain praxis in Mediterranean and American communities.

Conception of the world

The construct of ‘conception of the world’ may be described as a worldview, viewpoint, perspective or paradigm. One starting point in Gramsci’s interpretation of Marxism is to examine how individuals incorporate meanings and metaphors to create a conception of the world. This conception enables the person to balance his or her own understanding of history and social relations as a basis for personal and social identity and agency in the larger realm of social hegemony. Gramsci prefigures Schutz’s idea of ‘human intersubjectivity’ (Tedlock, 1979) and the social determination of knowledge (Salamini, 1974) as a regime of truth (Foucault, 1980). Folklore, ‘archaic values’ (Reyneri, 2004, p. 1145) and other narratives contribute to ‘common sense’ which is the basis for the development of a conception of the world according to Gramsci.

Ives (2005) describes Gramsci’s view in this way, ‘In elaborating his central argument that “everyone is a philosopher” he notes that in “language”, there is contained a specific conception of the world’ (p. 461). Organic philosophers build perspectives through language and need to recognise that this very language is charged with power. The process by which the concepts are formed already embodies relations, histories and meanings that must be recognised to identify, understand and critique dominant social relations. Bakhtin (1981) describes the phenomenon this way:

‘For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions.’ (p. 293)

Taken together, Gramsci and Bakhtin emphasise that, both in what is said and how it is said, the utterance reflects the speaker’s worldview. A necessary starting point in recognising and transforming hegemony is the ability for the individual to become self aware of language use and function, to recognise how personal meanings relate to the close social group understandings, and to explore how the utterance may propel social critique and action.

Before a new social order based on justice may be realised, educators must carefully examine how individuals create their conceptions of the world, social identity and agency as a transition to critique and social praxis. Conceptions of the world are not genetically immanent and are not transferred by osmosis from elders to youth. Social language and cultural practices are essential in establishing and

maintaining knowledge, the value of knowledge, how individuals see themselves and their ability to act in the social world (Herrera & Torres, 2006). Immigrant Latina/os in the United States and migrants throughout the Mediterranean arrive in new communities with a repertoire of social practices (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003) that formed their conceptions of the world and may serve as a means of enculturation and acculturation (Gonzales et al., 2004); this process is contrasted with the traditional view of cultural assimilation (Padilla & Perez, 2003). The hegemonic stance promoting the need for immigrants to assimilate often is 'islamophobic' and recognises their cultural practices as deficit (Suarez-Orozco, 1991; Borg & Mayo, 2006), misrepresents their migration aspirations and educational backgrounds (Reyneri, 2004) and does not consider their unique needs as adult learners (Mattheoudakis, 2005). Family conversation, 'echar platica' (Guerra, 1998), is a syncretic (Mannheim & Tedlock, 1995), dialogic social language process central to socialisation and to the development of funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) that sustain and promote the material and social well being of families and informal social networks (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003; Colombo & Sciortino, 2004).

Educational inquiry continues to focus on communities of learning in the Mediterranean (Borg & Mayo, 2001; Herrera & Torres, 2006) and the United States (Rodriguez-Brown, Li & Albom, 1999; Rodriguez-Brown, 2003) to propose perspectives that will enhance the continuity (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Reese & Gallimore, 2000) and relation between families and schools to maximise the skill development of children in traditional educational institutions. There is a strong challenge and need to enhance continuity and parental involvement of Latina/o families in the US since they are provided inequitable educational opportunities; Latina/os are projected to grow the school-aged cohort for many years to come (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). Dominant culture views of identity reflecting atomisation and a 'guided missile' approach to life choices (Lightfoot, 2006) underlie the challenges that Latina/os and all 'Other' immigrants face in the process of acculturation and integration in the Mediterranean and the US. Fresh educational inquiry needs to focus on the experience of new adult immigrant learners in community-based settings and the ideological reproduction of language practices (Street, 1995). Participatory action research (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003; Nygreen, 2006) in community-based workers' centres for occupational health learning is a step in this direction. 'Charla' sessions are proposed to address the experience of participants regarding health at work; empirical analysis of session transcripts may reveal the conversational means and concepts explored by participants to understand their conceptions of the world, critique and the development of social praxis.

‘Echar platica’ language practice

Considering Latina/o cultural language practices, ‘echar platica’ (Guerra, 1998), is a conversational and familial interaction promoting integrity (Suarez-Orozco, 1991) where narratives between generations create the basis of knowledge and is an important process of producing, valuing, and validating knowledge throughout a lifetime. The viewpoints of sociolinguistic researchers will be explored to describe the role of the conversational ‘charla’ process in epistemic formations.

‘Charlas’ are one expression of Latina/o sociolinguistic language practice that may be compared and contrasted to other forms of interaction identified in the literature as ‘memorias’ (memories and reflections on oral social history) and ‘la bendicion’ (blessing) by Olmedo (1999), ‘consejos’ (advise or counsel) by Delgado-Gaitan (1994), ‘relajos’ (relaxing or joking) by Farr (2005), ‘dichos’ (proverbs) by Dominquez Barajas (2005) and ‘corrido’ (ballads) by Pizarro (1998). In general, ‘charla’ may be described as an overarching language practice where participants may express and deploy multiple language forms such as these specific ones described. Informal conversation is a means by which participants discuss and dialogise (Bakhtin, 1981) the meanings and intentions of specific and recognised language forms or genres; ‘a memoria’, ‘consejo’ or ‘dicho’ is not just dropped into discourse but is presented in the context of informal discussion where ideas are considered, reflected upon, debated and integrated into consciousness. ‘Charla’ or ‘platica’ may provide a more open and fundamental ‘discourse state’ because it is one of the first language practices of families and continues as a practice throughout Latina/o life in family and multiple forms of social interaction.

Guajardo & Guajardo (2008) emphasise the importance of ‘platica’ practice through their own personal experience of family stories told by grandmothers to teach and transmit knowledge which becomes a method for shaping learning and knowing throughout life. Not only would children gain knowledge through ‘platica’ but, through the practice, children would display what they learned and skills they acquired from many sources. Family ‘platica’ is a prime example of the social construction of knowledge where ideas that surface in the conversation of participants would be examined, critiqued and filtered through the communal viewpoints of the shared language practice.

The ‘charla’ or ‘platica’ practice may encompass many outcomes and intentions for participants. While passing the time or gossiping may be one function of informal conversation with little import for education, ‘charla’ or ‘platica’ may be a process of experiencing respect, engaging in prioritising, problem solving and in the expression of power through language activity and

subsequent action. Olmedo (1999) describes the ethnographic process of Puerto Rican 'abuelas' (grandmothers) discussing their 'memorias' (memories and reflections) in informal conversational groups. The 'abuelas' experienced 'respeto' (respect) in a variety of linguistic and behavioural rituals and well as reconceptualising and prioritising their cultural experiences to decide on the values and meanings that were most important to transmit to the upcoming generation. In a 'funds of knowledge' approach (Moll et al., 1992) in these conversations, the emphasis was on the knowledge created and interpersonal agency that would be most important for the future well being and sustainability of their children's and grandchildren's families.

Hybridity and heteroglossia

Hybridity is a fecund construct in Latina/o epistemology described by Anzaldua (2000) as a 'mestizaje' practice, part of a borderland metaphor, in larger conversation about colonial hegemony (Street, 1995) and English language literacy dominance. Informal conversation practice affords participants opportunities for hybridity through 'collage, code-switching, genre switching' (p. 8) which Anzaldua describes as her hybrid practices in writing, teaching and communication. In the Southern European context of critical pedagogy, Borg & Mayo (2006) use the cosmopolitan hybridity found in the urban physical environments as a metaphor for cultural practices; they explicate Giroux's concept of 'border crossing' by challenging deficit, assimilationist viewpoints of immigrant subjectivity and agency. Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Tejada (1999) use hybridity in classroom language practice as a way to question identity formation in post-colonial borderlands. Inspired by Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism, hybridity is a means for individuals and social groups to play with and create concepts, stances, identities and interpretations in the ongoing process of problem solving and learning through informal conversation. Hybridity is also recognised as a means to alter social discourse (Pappas et al., 2003) and impact social change (Kamberelis, 2001).

Bakhtin's construct of heteroglossia has power and potential for visualising meaning creation when considering 'charla' discourse formation. Bakhtin's view of dialogue takes place on the intrapersonal level through thought and then on the interpersonal level through exchange of utterances in direct, face-to-face conversations or 'dialogic interanimation' (Wertsch, 1991). The meaning of language is not fixed or neutral to Bakhtin; meaning in an utterance is always addressed or directed toward a specific position or location. Holquist (1990) describes the importance of utterance stating 'what happens in an utterance, no

matter how commonplace, is always more ordered than what happens outside an utterance' (p. 84). In the arc of arrival to its position, the meaning encounters and is challenged by related meanings which interact in dialogue with the original meaning. Bakhtin (1981) states:

'If we imagine the *intention* of such a word, that is, its *directionality toward the object*, in the form of a ray of light, then the living and unrepeatable play of colors and light on the facets of the image that it constructs can be explained as the spectral dispersion of the ray-word, not within the object itself (as would be the case in the play of an image-as-trope, in poetic speech taken in the narrow sense, in an "autotelic word"), but rather as its spectral dispersion in an atmosphere filled with the alien words, value judgments and accents through which the ray passes on its way toward the object; the social atmosphere of the word, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle.' (p. 277; emphasis in original)

These encounters may alter the character of meaning, hybridising or fusing it with other meanings, creating a new meaning or changing the trajectory and ultimate arrival of meaning to a stable understanding.

Internally to the individual consciousness, these meaning utterances begin with the voices of others and may at some point belong half to the individual and half to others. 'The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). In this way, internal thoughts and utterances may be viewed as the history of meanings that have been learned from the family and social group and align with Gramsci's construct of the interaction of common sense and the conception of the world.

The value of the 'charla' process may be seen when individuals recognise the dialogic process of meaning creation in the utterance and share this co-creative, negotiative process with a close social group. When a meaning is offered to a group in conversation, the 'charla' may externalise the internal dialogic process through social language exchange. Taken in a context that maximises the power equity between participants, a rich exchange may occur that seeks to uncover the shared internal dialogic processes and opens the dialogue to critique and challenge from multiple views. While a consensus may be reached regarding the meaning, divergent positions may be argued and seen from specific points of view and for specific reasons. Creating this social language environment may allow teachers to enhance the process of critique, social action and reflection; Borg & Mayo (2006) describe this setting, in the Mediterranean context, as the authentic dialogue

promoted by Paulo Freire (1970) which may address hegemony, social contradictions and the fear of oppression.

Ives (2004) describes the phenomenon in this way, ‘Heteroglossia or multiaccentuality, then, comes not from language, nor even from social diversity itself; rather, it is the product of different groups of people using the same signs from different perspectives. That is, it is the product of both social diversity and language use’ (p. 81). Bakhtin’s image of an interactional ray of meaning reflects Gramsci’s (1992) vision regarding the process of discipline and critique needed to see the social implications of hegemony created through dialogue,

‘The same ray of light passes through different prisms and yields different refractions of light: in order to have the same refraction, one must make a whole series of adjustments to the individual prisms. Patient and systematic “repetition” is the fundamental methodological principle. But not a mechanical, material repetition: the adaptation of each basic concept to diverse peculiarities, presenting and re-presenting it in all its positive aspects and in its traditional negations, always ordering each partial aspect in the totality. Finding the real identity underneath the apparent differentiation and contradiction and finding the substantial diversity underneath the apparent identity is the most essential quality of the critic of ideas and of the historian of social development.’ (p. 128)

Organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1996) or specific intellectuals (Foucault, 1980) discern and communicate a clear understanding of critique through dialogue with members of their social group. Gramsci sees the converse of Bakhtin’s directionality of meaning, where worker leaders organise and refine meaning through discussion and establish the pull of a guiding light based on negotiated interaction with working class comrades. Curriculum studies may focus on voice animation analysis starting with observing how the voice of organic intellectuals animates reflection and practice through informal discourse.

Social and meaning relations in everyday discourse

Critical pedagogy for adults features the participation of learners and the leading role of learners in directing curriculum activities. Adult learning interactions in Greece (Mattheoudakis, 2005), Malta (Mayo, 2003) and a parent empowerment programme in Malta (Borg & Mayo, 2001) all highlight the importance of listening and the evidence of listening for authentic adult involvement in curriculum activities. Bakhtin’s emphasis on utterance addressivity (Holquist, 1990; Wertsch, 1991) supports this perspective in an inverse to the traditional

pedagogical participation framework. In traditional settings, the instructor, in a position of power, is lecturing to address students, to impart knowledge, in an interaction that Freire (1970) described as the ‘banking model’ of education; the instructor deposits knowledge into the brains of the students and reproduces the social conditions that favours forms of expert knowledge.

Wertsch (1991) describes Bakhtin’s commitment to addressivity by stating, ‘He insisted at many points that meaning can come into existence only when two or more voices come into contact: when the voice of a listener responds to the voice of the speaker’ (p. 52). When critical educators open discussion, creating environments where students may address each other and the instructor as equal participants, meaning positions are revealed (Morrell, 2004). Holquist (1990) elaborates by saying, ‘the subjectivity whose placement is determined by the structure of addressivity requires us then to be answerable for that site, if only in the sense that the subject occupying that particular place (who *is* that place) will be the source of whatever response is called forth from it by the physical forces of nature and the discursive energy of society’ (p. 167; emphasis in original). A dialogue may then ensue in a hybrid environment where the possibility of discussing all viewpoints and positions is then managed by the instructor and negotiated by participants.

In describing the usefulness of the novel related to cultural reflection and production, Bakhtin described the functioning of language genres. Genres are socially recognised sets of language communication that create expectations for the type of language used and the outcome of interaction. Examples of genres include the exchanges involved in buying a newspaper, greeting neighbours, holding a meeting, participating in a lecture or speaking on the telephone; each setting has routines and expectations for exchanges, turn taking and the content and complexity of the communication. Bakhtin believed that the novel was an advanced form of cultural production because the author in the novel presents a multitude of genres, most importantly the primary genre of informal conversation and discussion which is normative and from which all other genres stem (Holquist, 1990).

Bakhtin’s priority on conversational genres in the novel leads directly to the importance of the informal conversation that is the primary interaction of ‘charla’ discourse. The ‘charla’ is the novel of cultural production; superseding the novel, the ‘charla’ creates its interaction from the dialogue and interplay of multiple authors exchanging meanings through the addressivity of their utterances. Ives (2005) describes Gramsci’s linguistic stance that meanings in language are not fixed but are defined in relation to each other. The ‘charla’ is the social environment where these meanings may interact and become animated most directly.

In the 'charla' as well, social relations reflecting power equity are expressed and are the basis for the potential of lively exchange and proposals for action. Mayo (1999) states: '... every effort is made to promulgate democratic social relations and to render the learners the "subject" of the learning process. The culture of the learner makes its presence felt through a dialogic teaching process. The educator's task is to facilitate the means whereby this culture is examined critically by the learners themselves, so that the "common sense" is converted to "good sense" ' (p. 138). Mayo's insistence on equal and democratic social relations in critical pedagogy and Bakhtin's vision of dialogic meaning creation in conversational discourse potentiate each other during 'charla' interaction.

Leps (2004) describes Bakhtin's interactional process stating, 'Speakers who engage in dialogical relations are altered by their introduction to transgredient elements that modify their ideological horizons' (p. 273). The meanings encountered, shared and debated through informal conversation reflect the ideology of the participants and the animation of the discourse through these exchanges may change the viewpoints of participants, leading to new positions and possibilities of action. Goffman's constructs of production format emphasising author, animator and principal in the role of the speaker and participant framework in the role of the listener may assist the recognition and analysis of the dialogical exchanges in the 'charla' (Kamberelis, 2001). In the 'charla', the production may be more direct and participants more engaged due to their close social relation and trust. It is argued that the social justice needs of immigrant workers in the community may be advanced through the creation of informally guided discussion with the goal of uncovering and negotiating meaning and generating strategies for social action.

Building on the commitment to equitable social relations in community-based workers' centres in the US, the dialogue of the 'charla' may be used to identify, exchange and enhance the funds of knowledge that Latina/o families create and maintain in many well established communities. An opportunity and consequence of 'charla' dialogue is reciprocity; the primary means may be to communication in the conversational interaction, but it may also be to material ways through sharing knowledge or resources. In the US, workers' centres may be unique urban settings for new immigrants to reveal and gain new funds of knowledge. If traditional funds of knowledge are recognised in established Latina/o communities and are routinely shared, it will be even more important to immigrants who are travelling and living far from their original networks to access and share funds of knowledge in the new community.

In the Mediterranean, promotion and analysis of informal discourse among immigrants in community-based settings may reveal valuable insights to promote self-awareness and agency in the process of integration and to inform public

policy. Reyneri (2004) challenges the common sense construct that most immigrants to contemporary Italy are poorly educated peasants from rural areas; he describes a range of immigrant capability and viewpoints he defines as 'underprivileged,' to 'underachievers,' to 'upwardly mobile' to 'privileged,' each with particular educational experience and social status. His labels need to be critiqued regarding class power relations and given allusions in education to meanings that blame the learner for their social position. Nonetheless, his labels are a heuristic for the subjectivities of immigrants (Borg & Mayo, 2006) as they bring their aspirations and education to seek employment. While some underachievers may welcome blue-collar employment available in Northern Italy, an upwardly mobile immigrant may reject this work based on the undervalued social status associated with the position. Promotion and analysis of informal discourse with immigrants seeking work may assist them in clarifying their goals and viewpoints, to critique the social relations that promote inequity and to outline informal or social support to gain skills, take action and to sustain themselves and their families in the contemporary economy.

Recent inquiry (Cassarino, 2008) presented results of interviews with returning migrants to the Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) and explored the construct of return preparation given interaction between return preparedness, resource mobilisation and the context of the sending and receiving countries. While a debate of the history, motivation and power relations inherent in this initiative is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is clear that many migrants originating from Maghreb countries seek to return to their countries of origin. Analysis of informal discourse of migrants contemplating and preparing for return migration may reveal how they access informal social networks (Colombo & Sciortino, 2004) to gather the information they need to make the best decisions about practical financial decisions or how their impending move may impact their families and social relations both in their country of residence and origin.

Critique and the war of position

Educational researchers conducting inquiry in school settings utilise Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue in teacher and student interaction. Recognising that the teacher has a significant role in managing classroom interaction and setting discourse patterns, researchers conducted inquiry to describe in large and small scales how the teacher can enhance dialogue (Nystrand et al., 2003; Pappas et al., 2003); the teacher's role is mediating the dialogical process. It is argued that adult education teachers and organic intellectual worker leaders may also take a mediating role in guiding discussion around the hegemonic war of position to critique meaning and to create social action.

By foregrounding reflection and dialogue about social action, evaluation of the action and new meaning may be created. There is a link between power and knowledge (Kamerelis, 2001), where the agency of immigrants taking action to protect themselves on the job or communicating about protection may lead to risk reduction or protective outcomes and new capacities to act. This curricular reflection is another aspect of what Fontana (2000) describes as ‘the organization and deployment of ideological and cultural instruments of struggle’ (p. 319) that add to the war of position. The power to act creates new knowledge that may then be shared and evaluated through the ‘charla’.

The war of position may also manifest in discourse critique due to Gramsci’s observation that in language ‘residues of these struggles and linguistic changes are never totally erased’ (Ives, 2004, p. 81). Sociohistorical meanings that are embedded in discourse may be another focus of ‘charla’ critique lead by a facilitator. As a mediator, the discussion leader may ask what participants think about certain terms such as a ‘macho’ attitude displayed when asked about risk at work. The leader may draw out the meanings and probe regarding the sociocultural basis or history of the term. Orality shows the cognitive capabilities of participants and is part of the continuum of literacy where writing is not more valued or instrumental than oral discourse. According to Street (1995), ‘all people have conventions for formalizing, distancing, analyzing, separating, holding some things constant, acting as if the evanescent world could be “fixed”’ (p. 157). Repositioning or animating new meanings may be evident or traditional meanings may be supported in the dialogic process of exchange.

Bakhtin draws a distinction between authoritative discourse that is transmitted integrally and does not allow for interpretation or representation and ‘internally persuasive’ discourse that allows for dialogic transformation (Wertsch, 1991). Brandist (1996) describes this tension: ‘This does not mean the struggle for hegemony consists merely of a conflict between two preformed ideologies but a conflict of *hegemonic principles*’ (p. 103; emphasis in original). Given Gramsci’s emphasis on the persuasive power of hegemony, critical educators should be sensitive to the emergence of internally persuasive discourse and to examine through dialogue the elements and aspects which give the discourse animation, force, and direction. Regarding the metaphor of war, Holquist (1990) states ‘Bakhtin translates Dostoevsky’s dictum that the heart of man is a battleground between good and evil into the proposition that the mind of man is a theater in which the war between the centripetal impulses of cognition and the centrifugal forces of the world is fought out’ (p. 47). Discourse analysis should be directed to compare and contrast the function of persuasiveness for the individual with the social group and to determine through dialogue what makes a position or view more or less persuasive.

Culture (Tedlock, 1987) and art (Leps, 2004) emerge dialogically. Where there is asymmetry in dialogic relations, there is an opportunity for critique. Tedlock (1987) states, 'What is ethnography if it is not the phenomenology of asymmetry, of otherness, foreignness? And what would ethnography be if its practitioners gave up seeking out asymmetries of the kind that exist across separate languages, including languages very different from one another?' (p. 329). Interpretation and reflexivity are central to this dialogic process. Catalytic validity is one potential outcome from qualitative inquiry in education where participants consider how their participation in the process promoted or hindered their goals for transformation (Lather, 1986).

Participants of workers' centres may measure the impact of their ability to critique power relations through dialogic descriptions of the war of position in 'charla' discourse. Power/knowledge that advances their economic sustainability may then be further promoted. In Egypt, Herrera (2006) described a community-based participatory research project where she and colleagues worked together with a school leaders, teachers, parents and children to renovate and upgrade a girls elementary school in her Cairo neighbourhood. Something so simple as choosing the colour mauve instead of the traditional grey for the walls and carrying through the painting process in one classroom was a salvo in the war of position to signal participation and respect for the environment that lead to changes for the students, teachers and administrators. The war of position continued in the project since the school was divided into two shifts, where the morning shift of teachers and students were fully engaged in the school transformation and the afternoon shift was coolly neutral. Examination of informal discourse may uncover elements that persuaded or were barriers to participation or how their agency may lead to further action and reflection.

'Charla', 'currere' and curriculum in workers' centres

'Currere' (Pinar, 1994) is the action of curriculum in lived experience. It is the summation of lessons from the school of life, 'La Universidad del la Vida' (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2008), and the reflections that a person may make based on formal and informal experiences, the path of learning in evolving life. 'Charla' discourse is part of the path of learning, part of Latina/o repertoires of cultural practice. 'Charla' dialogic meaning-making may take place naturally within the family and social groups that are part of the Latina/o community in the US. Curriculum studies hold a promise of leading conscious reflection on communal praxis or group 'currere' in community-based workers' centres that takes place through encouraging and analysing 'charla' discourse.

By directing critical pedagogy to practical reflection, workers' centre participants may enhance their ability to form praxis critiquing current hegemony and developing new hegemony, thereby deepening their sustainability in communities. Mayo (2005) states, 'testing ideas about work against one's own work experience constitutes education through praxis, an important feature of the democratic approach to work promoted by Gramsci and others' (p. 9). Researchers may empirically analyse and demonstrate the role that dialogue plays in recognising a conception of the world and creating a war of position through critique to create social praxis. The skills developed and shared may have greater impact in the community utilising critical pedagogy to bring about change for social justice. In Greece, Matheoudakis (2005) conducted inquiry with recent immigrants and found respondents valued access to Greek language learning but many were unable to participate due to their urgent need to work. He recommended the development of language learning programmes designed in practical ways oriented to employment and everyday conversational interaction as a means to economic and social integration; immigrant associates, such as workers' centres, should participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of these projects.

Moving from a formal, institutional approach to curriculum that favours 'treatment' or 'intervention' as is often proposed in health disciplines, educational researchers need to encourage and listen to informal conversational discourse among community learning participants to uncover what working immigrants are doing now in their efforts to raise critique and form praxis. Participatory action research is a design for inquiry that is well suited to the goals of adult learning in workers' centres. Any idea for programming or skill development from a disciplinary perspective needs to be grounded in the beliefs, motivations and strategies of the leaders of workers' centres. As Street (1995) argues, there are diverse ideological and power dynamics imbedded in any kind of skill building or educational programme; 'natural' goals such as literacy or safety and health at work need to be problematised to uncover the hidden colonial and hegemonic assumptions about who sets the goals and how they are achieved.

Conclusion

Watkins (1993) described African-American curriculum studies as 'orientations' to ethnic identity, creation of knowledge and capacities in sharing culturally authentic worldviews based on cultural practices, decisions regarding identity and agency, and stakes in relating to dominant hegemonic practices. Gutierrez & Rogoff (2003) guide the discussion of culture in education by clarifying their stance that inquiry should reflect a description of cultural practices

as individual or group repertoires and not as essential or reductive characteristics, 'essentialised and stable identities' (Sultana, 2008), linking individuals to membership in an ethnic group. Individuals participating in a culture have a multivariate experience depending upon the development of the culture, social group membership and individual capacities, facilities and intentionalities of cultural practice (Borg & Mayo, 2006). Educational researchers need to move from a stance of homogenising, creating, or accepting monolithic representations of culture, recognising that individual and cultural expressions are variable and that cultural contexts are highly dependent on interaction and location (Gutierrez & Correa-Chavez, 2006). Inquiry should seek to describe a continuum of variation in cultural practices through communities, social groups and individual repertoires.

To understand capacity and skill development, educational researchers turn their attention to the phenomenon of dialogue, discourse and language practice. Learning and skill development takes place in many settings and contexts throughout the life span, beginning in families and continuing in schools and community settings (Schubert, 1986; Street, 1995). Community-based organisations created by immigrants in the United States called workers' centres (Fine, 2005) organise and educate recent migrants to empower members seeking to integrate their activities in the economy and to gain skills in democratic participation.

Curriculum study through analysis of informal 'charla' discourse seeks to show how participants form their conceptions of the world, use language to uncover, understand, describe and critique hegemony, then plan and reflect on social praxis. Critical discourse analysis may also be fruitful in discovering the exchange of indigenous knowledge from regions south to south and enhancing interpretive analytical understandings in participatory interactions with communities to co-construct and engage in a 'counter discourse' to neo-liberal educational policy (Sultana, 2008). The lessons of immigrants and their learning facilitators of problem solving and adaptation to new circumstances should be valuable to educators, teacher educators and policy makers seeking authentic participation, capacity growth and sustainable development, particularly in the culturally hybridic Mediterranean region.

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PROBLEMATISING ‘CROSS-CULTURAL’ COLLABORATION: CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION SETTINGS

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Abstract – *Many EU projects are premised on the assumption that collaboration between academics and students from different national contexts adds value to knowledge production and to learning. It is very rare to come across accounts of how challenging such cross-cultural collaboration can be, especially when the notion ‘culture’ is expanded to include both national and gendered identities, as well as cultures embedded in particular academic disciplines. This paper sets out to explore the ‘critical incidents’ that arose in the context of an Erasmus curriculum development project, showing how these ‘incidents’ open a window onto the complex and challenging processes that come into play in cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary settings.*

Introduction

This paper is one of the ‘products’ developed in the context of an Erasmus curriculum development project called **CROSSLIFE**, which focuses on cross-cultural collaboration in the field of lifelong learning and vocational education. The project offers an 18 month-long learning pathway to students registered in MA or PhD programmes at the Danish University of Education, and the universities of London, Malta, Monash, Tampere and Zürich, with tutors from all six institutions involved in lecturing and mentoring through both virtual and face-to-face meetings¹. The project therefore could be seen as a ‘higher education consortium’, as Beerkens & Derwende (2007) call this kind of international cooperation between institutions of higher learning. Students are clustered in home-groups, but interact with and across all groups via Skype telephony, video-conferencing, and workshops². The course focuses on both content and process issues. The substantive focus is on Vocational Education and Training (VET) including, for instance, the issue of policy borrowing and lending in VET-related areas in both the EU and beyond. The process dimension examines the issues that arise when academics and students from different ‘cultures’ collaborate in their attempt to generate a deeper understanding of a particular area of research. In this paper, it is this second, process-oriented dimension that is foregrounded.

A key assumption underpinning many EU programmes in education and training is that research and learning can be enhanced through bringing together academics and students from different countries. It is however surprising to note that while *content* outcomes from such collaboration are given high visibility through publications, accounts of the *process* issues that arise in the production of that content are rarely to be seen³. This paper is an attempt to address that gap.

The article is divided into two parts. The first part considers the general meaning of 'culture'. The latter term is here defined broadly to include not only considerations of 'national' cultures, but also cultures that are linked to gendered ways of being, and to academic disciplines. These distinctions help us unpack the implications that cultural diversity can have for cross-cultural collaboration, especially between academics involved in researching, planning, studying and teaching together. They also provide us with a more nuanced way of considering 'cross-cultural competence', which often tends to be limited to the kinds of attitudes, values and skills that are required when people from different national cultures interact.

The second part of the paper connects the theoretical reflections about 'culture' with 'critical incidents' that arose in the course of a three-day CROSSLIFE curriculum planning workshop held in Malta in March 2007, which brought together ten project members from four different countries⁴. These 'incidents' were 'critical' in the sense that, for individual workshop participants, they represented key instances or moments that arose spontaneously while interacting with colleagues, and which opened a window onto the complex and challenging processes that come into play in cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary settings.

'Culture' and its meanings

It is important to define 'culture' if we are going to analytically consider the cross-cultural issues that arise when working with colleagues and students from different countries, European or otherwise. In the tradition of Clifford Geertz (1993), 'culture' is here taken to mean 'a forum for negotiating and re-negotiating meaning and for explicating action' (Bruner, 1986, p. 65). Moreover, culture is an 'ensemble of tools of discourse that a group employs towards exchanging information, expressing states of consciousness, forming bonds of solidarity, and forging common strategies of action' (Bowles & Gintis, 1988, p. 22). Growing up in a certain cultural context entails the imparting of these meanings, practices and tools of discourse. This process is not necessarily explicit, but is more likely to be implicit, involving what can be referred to as 'embodied' knowledge. This process of 'socialisation' or 'enculturation' takes place not only in the early years, but is

a lifelong developmental process whereby individuals interact with others and with their broader environment.

These ‘forums’ for communication, or ‘webs of significance’ (Geertz, 1993), can be organised around different aspects of human existence and experience. In what follows, we will look at three elements of culture that proved to be particularly pertinent when it came to understanding the challenges of cross-cultural collaboration in academic labour, namely ‘national’ cultures, gendered cultures, and disciplinary cultures. It is important to consider each of these at some length, acknowledging at the same time that there are other elements of culture – such as religious affiliation, for instance – that could prove to be equally if not more important in collaborative settings.

National identities

While ‘culture’, as we shall see, is not only marked by national borders, much of the interaction between *CROSSLIFE* participants was coloured by the different national experiences that formed identities and shaped them in particular ways. Differences in behaviour, expectations, attitudes and values were, overtly or covertly, attributed to ‘national cultures’, and it therefore becomes critical to unpack the notion and to problematise it.

For a start, it is immediately clear that ‘national’ and ‘cultural’ identities are not one and the same thing. Indeed, the boundaries surrounding culture can be smaller or larger than the confines determined by the nation state. The borders of the latter unit are often the outcomes of historical and political processes – such as wars and treaties signed by leading elites – rather than markers of the boundaries of the kind of cultural ‘forum’ referred to earlier.

The process of nation state building is in fact often accompanied by violent forms that have as a goal the ‘production’ of cultural homogeneity as a basis for a collective identity inside national borders. Among these violent forms one can refer to so-called ‘ethnic cleansing’, or to a very rigid language policy – with the goal being of marking a sharp cultural difference against ‘the other’. Benedict Anderson (1991) describes nations as ‘imagined communities’ to highlight the fact that part of the process of nation-building is to create a culturally homogenous community that is identical with the borders of the nation state. Once established these nationally defined borders of course *are* real, and with time can and do end up shaping human interaction in spatial and temporal terms, thus generating ‘national cultures’ that wield an influence on the way of being of individuals. Nevertheless, while in some contexts it may make sense to talk of ‘national cultures’, or even of a ‘European culture’, it is critical to acknowledge that such terms are constructs, and that the very act of speaking of ‘culture’ in this way

serves to reify it, giving it a ‘solidity’ and ‘permanence’ that is ideological. There is no such a thing as a closed, homogenous national culture, but there are national states as ‘imagined communities’ that are influential in shaping the individual’s identity and behaviour and to some extent lead to ‘cultural homogeneity’ within the defined national borders.

Indeed, the very fact of focusing on ‘culture’ – whether in national or European terms – actually serves to *create* the object of our analysis, a case, therefore, of what Dale & Robertson (2005) would refer to as *productive* discourse. In many ways, notions of national or supra-national cultures are generated discursively: politicians keen to have national unity often make references to ‘a national culture’ that unites an otherwise heterogeneous population, serving to distinguish them from others, who are, in this way, considered to be ‘outsiders’, located in a different cultural space defined by national and/or cultural borders. On a broader scale, the discourse around Europe often essentialises ‘culture’ (Wilterdink, 1993) in an attempt to generate a collective identity among a disparate group of nations, and in order to demarcate fault lines that keep the ‘other’ out (Sultana, 2002). Much of the debate about Turkish aspirations to become a member of the European Union – like earlier ones concerning Morocco – have revealed the extent to which Europe *is* a political and economic construct, with considerations of culture serving to legitimise particular points of view.

In relation to this, it should be acknowledged that education – including, for instance, European study programmes – is part of the EU strategy to create a ‘European identity’ as a foundation for the European integration process, that is it is part of European *identity politics* (Kraus, 2004). In aiming for a ‘European identity’, a key assumption and argument is the project of a ‘shared’ cultural heritage. Education and education policy are thus part of the discursive production of cultural homogeneity embedded in re-structuring political units. This notion is caught by the interesting twist that Habermas gives to the idea of a ‘learning society’. Reflecting on the need for a European constitution and for the necessity of constructing a ‘European’ sense of identity, Habermas (2001) points out how individuals have historically been able to make the ‘abstract leap’ from building their sense of belongingness to a ‘clan’ to that of belonging to a ‘nation’, and that nothing precludes learning how to extend this educational process to generate a sense of identity *beyond* the nation to supra-national cultural and political consciousness.

The acknowledgement that ‘national cultures’ are constructs opens up an important analytical space: it provides us with the possibility of conceptualising ‘culture’ in a more *anthropological* sense, namely in ways that prevent us from ‘glossing over’ differences in the manner in which meaning is co-constructed within and between groups of interacting individuals. Such groups typically

cohere around a variety of forms of *embedded identities*, reflecting more or less conscious forms of membership in – and allegiance to – *bounded/bonded communities*. This embeddedness manifests itself through discursive codes and symbols, such as language, dialect, linguistic registers and jargon, as well as values, aesthetic taste, beliefs, and what Bourdieu would refer to as ‘habitus’ – all of which are shared in order to create feelings of group identity and of ‘belongingness’. Bourdieu’s notion of ‘habitus’ tends to surround the notion of culture with a certain deterministic flavour considering ‘habitus’ as a more or less stable part of a person’s ‘inventory of behaviour’. We are here in the realm of dispositions that are deeply ingrained through socialisation – in other words, dispositions which are basically unalterable, and which therefore tend to create a certain pattern and stability in the group membership of individuals, largely attributable to their ‘distinctions’ and social class location (Bourdieu, 1984).

Nevertheless, the way individuals belong to one ‘cultural unit’ varies from person to person, and a ‘cultural unit’ is not a monolithic bloc but rather manifests a high degree of diversity. Such diversity arises from the uniqueness of individuals, as well as from the nature of the social structures in a society, which give rise to differences related to gender, class, ethnicity, religion and so on. The ‘culture’ of a group, community or nation is always under construction and a permanent object of negotiation, as is the positioning – by oneself or the others – of individuals within that cultural unit. ‘Culture’ is at the same time ‘stable’ and ‘in flux’. Culture is an effect of homogenising practices and at the same time ‘produces’ cultural borders and collective identities, categorising some as ‘insiders’ and others as ‘outsiders’, some as ‘us’ and others as ‘the other’.

Working with an understanding of culture as articulated above helps us see people not only as belonging to one (national) ‘culture’ but also as being positioned within that ‘culture’ in ways that are socially structured by different factors. Individuals can have privileged access to – and interactive rights in – different groups marked by their social class, gender, ethnic, and religious location in the overall social structure. It is easy to understand how individuals can belong to several groups within one culture where meaning and identity are expressed in particular ways, whether these are political parties, sports clubs, music genres, and so on. These groups exist within ‘national cultures’ but also beyond national borders. Sociology and anthropology have shown us that typically individuals weave their identities in complex ways, claiming membership in a variety of cultural (as well as so-called ‘sub-cultural’ or ‘counter-cultural’) groupings. This ‘promiscuity’ in membership has been heightened by the new technologies, which permits exposure to and interaction with ‘cultures’ that have cross-spatial boundaries and which can take virtual rather than visceral forms. On an individual level that process is described as ‘process identity’ or even ‘fragmented identity’.

As with 'culture', the category 'identity' is also in permanent flux and is built up by more or less temporarily integrating different aspects within the process of identity formation. Identity and culture have some stability but are at one and the same time undergoing a process of continual transformation (Baumann, 2004).

There is often a continuity of values in the usually overlapping set of 'forums' to which an individual belongs, even if the 'language' spoken in the different groups may vary. Still, one of these 'forums' (e.g., social class membership) could provide the key 'linguistic' structure that defines the interactions in all the other groups, so that being working class, for instance, more (in some accounts) or less (in other accounts) determines which political party one associates with, which sports one practices or supports, which music one listens and dances to, and so on.

How such different aspects and elements of national identity/identities influence and structure the academic collaborative process is a key focus for our reflection, and as we shall see in the second part of the paper, contributed much material when CROSSLIFE workshop participants came to write up their critical incidents.

Gendered identities

The category gender played also an important part in structuring cross-cultural collaboration among CROSSLIFE participants in particular ways. The issue of gendered identities, for being a 'woman' or a 'man' – however these categories are *socially* constructed within particular 'cultures' and discourses (Butler, 1990, 1993) – is also one of the 'key influences' of personal existence. Much of the scholarship in gender studies in fact alerts us to the ways gender functions as a source of 'collective identity' that provides a resource for the individual identity-building process. This active construction of one's gendered identity follows not only national borders, but is also differentiated *across* and *within* 'national cultures', a fact that helps us refrain from either essentialising gender or reifying gendered hierarchies (Holmes, 2007). Gender boundaries can therefore be said to both *intersect* with and to *transgress* national borders, in the sense that the categories 'female' and 'male' have generic relevance, even if there are many ways to understand and interpret these categories, both in culturally-embedded as well as individual ways.

A wide range of research done in feminist theory and gender studies allows us to understand gender today primarily as 'doing gender', that is as a social practice that actualises, interprets and re-enforces culturally specific understandings of 'female' and 'male' in social practices, all the while acknowledging differences within gender. Among the latter especially those that are linked to class- or race-based social relations (Hooks, 1981). As 'queer-theory' has taken pains to point out, being a 'woman' or being a 'man' can be lived in many different ways.

Awareness of the fact that ‘genders’, however they are conceived, are socially constructed – and as such contingent and changeable – does not mean that ‘gendered-ness’ is not highly relevant for the personal and social life of people. Women and men do not find it easy to overcome the limits set by belonging to one of the two gender categories. Gender may very well be a social construct, but this is lived in very deeply personal ways, and as a ‘way of being’, since we grow up – and live – in gendered social environments (Maihofer, 1995), where ‘social life continues to be organised along very gendered lines’ (Holmes 2007, p. 38).

Critically important too in considering gendered identities is the insight by such authors as Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding and Rosi Braidotti who emphasised the structural ‘in-visibility of masculinity’ (and of ‘whiteness’). The fact that, in Western societies, male (and white) are considered to represent the norm, leads to men enjoying a hegemonic position as an ‘unmarked category’, representing ‘objectivity’ (Haraway, 1988). In contrast, and as a consequence, women are structurally marked as a ‘special-interest group’ which is so-named by men who, as representative of the ‘referent’ or the ‘norm’, have the power to ‘locate’ others without themselves being socially located. It is for this reason that Haraway, among others, makes a case for a ‘politics of positioning’ that renders the partial position from which people interact transparent because it is part of the argument they make and the way they behave.

Crossing cultures for CROSSLIFE members also entailed confronting such issues, thus making being ‘male’ and being ‘female’ a focus for reflection on the ways gender plays itself out in academic collaboration.

Disciplinary identities

Many collaborative ventures among academics set out to add value to their endeavours by including researchers from different disciplines. Cross-disciplinary teams also tend to form in an unplanned manner, when, as with CROSSLIFE, the project focuses on education where, typically, researchers have a varied background in the humanities and sciences⁵. This can be considered to be both an opportunity and a threat to cross-cultural collaboration, in the sense that *academic disciplinary traditions* are ‘knowledge forums’ bringing together ‘academic tribes’ (Becher, 1989) that have developed their own ‘codes’ and ‘language’, as well as acting as powerful sources of belief (Clark, 1983). These ‘tribes’ have also developed their own specific ways of generating, valuing, validating and legitimising meaning, as well as of distinguishing themselves from other disciplines not only by their object and methods of research but also by their ‘codes’ and ‘languages’. As Knorr Cetina (1999) has argued, ‘epistemic cultures’ determine how people know and what they know.

In these ways, academics mark ‘insiders’ of their academic discipline, as well as ‘outsiders’. Cross-cultural work among scholars and researchers would therefore demand an enhanced awareness of the way ‘scientific’ protocols are embedded in competing academic disciplinary traditions. As Schoenberger (2001) notes, we as academics ‘need to think explicitly from time to time about our own disciplinary culture, including its epistemological and ontological commitments; who it includes and excludes; what it values and what it does not value highly; and so on’ (p. 379). Cross-cultural work across disciplines also requires an effort to develop dispositions and competences that enable individuals to ‘read’, ‘translate’ and ‘decode’ the work of colleagues, and to converse in their ‘language’. While this, as the critical incidents generated during the CROSSLIFE workshop confirmed, is easier said than done, it is not an impossible task. This is because while ‘each tribe has a name and a territory, settles its own affairs, goes to war with others’ and has ‘a variety of symbolic ways of demonstrating its apartness from others’, ‘nevertheless the whole set of tribes possess a common culture: their ways of construing the world and the people who live in it are sufficiently similar for them to be able to understand, more or less, each other’s culture and even, when necessary, to communicate with members of other tribes’ (Becher, 1994, p. 151). The ‘stability’ of these academic tribes means that disciplinary cultures can even transcend national cultures, as witnessed by international discipline-based associations, international conferences, and cross-national collaboration between academics.

Border crossings

CROSSLIFE’s ambition to examine the often-unexamined complexities that surround ‘culture’ and cross-cultural academic work has to confront at least two challenges. On the one hand cross-cultural work is difficult, given the seeming *impossibility of sharing meaning* of codes, symbols and practices embedded as this is in deeply-engrained dispositions that are culturally shaped through process of socialisation and ‘enculturation’. On the other hand, we have the critical humanist notion of culture as an *educational project*, where education is defined as a process that provides individuals with the dispositions and competences to converse with communities other than one’s own. From this perspective, the curricular emphasis on learning languages, a range of ‘subjects’, as well as opening up windows on the world beyond one’s own town or village is precisely to enable the citizen to move out of and transcend the parochial, and to become a more global citizen or, in the language of education, a ‘cosmopolitan’.

In this sense, CROSSLIFE can be seen as a small ‘laboratory’ in which participants try to soften and blur the boundaries drawn by their regular

membership in ‘disciplinary clans’ as well as in national-, class-, gender-based cultures (to mention only a few of the many possible borders and boundaries). This is well worth the effort, as it is through these attempts at ‘border-crossing’ (Giroux, 2005) that we develop tools of discourse that facilitate the exchange of information, the development of a shared understanding of meaning, the expression of states of consciousness, the forming of bonds of solidarity, and the forging of common strategies of action, including cross-cultural planning and research as well as teaching and learning. This cultural project, however, is, ironically, jeopardised by the very entities that set out to promote it. This is true of EU policy discourse, for instance, which, as Heikkinen (2003) points out, endangers authentic dialogue through ‘the shared simplistic, a-cultural terminologies and rhetorics’ (p. 31), avoiding and eliding the complexity of the cultural embeddedness of phenomena.

Learning from the ‘critical incidents’ generated in the CROSSLIFE ‘laboratory’

The challenges that arise in attempting to ‘cross borders’ have been caught experientially by the CROSSLIFE partners during a three-day planning-workshop in 2007, referred to in the introductory section of this paper. At the end of the workshop, and inspired by the ‘Critical Incident Technique’ (CIT) developed, among others, by Flanagan (1954) and Fivars (1980), participants were asked to write two or three ‘critical incidents’ that they experienced in the course of the curriculum planning meeting, and to reflect on the significance that these incidents potentially had for doing scholarly work together cross-culturally. These critical incidents provided enough ‘raw’ qualitative data to facilitate ‘experiential learning’, thus enabling the whole group to reflect on the sets of cross-cultural issues, tensions and difficulties that might arise for academics as well as for students in working together, and on the implications that this might have for organising teaching and learning contexts with students and lecturers from different countries⁶.

The thoughts, feelings and reflections of partners involved in the attempt to talk to each other ‘across cultures’, and as expressed through the articulation of critical incidents, are here synthesised and organised around the following key-themes:

- Difficulties encountered in writing up the critical incidents
- Tensions and challenges involving value differences
- Tensions and challenges involved in trust-building

- Tensions and challenges around the medium of communication
- Tensions and challenges around the notion of ‘academic traditions’
- Issues related to different roles in the group

Each of these is considered in turn, with an effort to tease out the implications that these challenges have for lecturers, researchers and students embarking on collaborative academic work.

Difficulties encountered in writing up the critical incidents

A first point that emerges from the exercise of writing down a critical incident concerning issues of cross-cultural work is the range of difficulties the participants reported having when attempting to articulate their experiences. Among the difficulties referred to were the following:

First difficulty. A major difficulty encountered by many was the ability to *disentangle cultural from other issues, including personal ones*, that is to account for tensions that arose due to:

- cultural orientations that are the results of individual’s belonging to a ‘cultural forum’ as described above, that is in relation to embeddedness in national cultures, social class or gender cultures.
- organisational and academic practices which might themselves also be rooted in regional, national, disciplinary or institutional cultures *or*
- individual personality traits (e.g., a person might have a more ‘competitive’ rather than ‘collaborative’ orientation when working in a group context or some people are in general more extrovert than others) and such orientations might be rather more linked to personality and biography than to broadly cultural traits.

Given that identity, biography and social environment are closely inter-linked, comments about an individual’s actions may end up being (or being perceived to be) personal criticism rather than a discussion about more broadly structural features (such as attitudes or behaviours absorbed from a surrounding culture). *Writing up a critical incident raised concerns that, in doing so, the feelings of individual group members might be hurt.* The way individuals occupy space and time in group interaction, how quickly or slowly they move to the core of the group or remain on the periphery may very well be a feature of personal characteristics,

in the way a person processes new situations. However, it may also be closely inter-linked with power arising from processes and dynamics that have, for instance, strong gendered issues layered in. The situation is rendered more complex by the fact that perceptions are strongly influenced by the pre-existing relationships that exist between members of the group (e.g., whether one finds the other likeable or not), by the nature of the group dynamics, and the specific situation in which such dynamics are played out. Factors such as these contribute to the blurring of the category 'cross-cultural' critical incident.

Additionally, some participants in the critical incident exercise felt that one (national) culture does not quite determine who they are. Often people have lived in different countries, have forefathers or relatives with other nationalities, and live or work together with people with very different cultural backgrounds. Due to these facts one might consider oneself as being already 'cross-cultural' in one's very own identity and also as experienced in cross-cultural social settings, and might feel uncomfortable when viewed reductively as representing one culture.

The implications are:

- Learning groups made up by members from different disciplines and from different national and cultural contexts may need to be aware of the various layers of intra- and inter-cultural diversity in order to be more effective communicators and collaborators.
- The very notion of 'cross-cultural' communication, as the basis of the **CROSSLIFE** project, may itself be overly optimistic given the complex inter- and intra-personal processes involved in constructing meaning in the context of a group and the diversity within every 'cultural unit'.
- It is important to acknowledge that groups are always heterogeneous and group dynamics are always complex. The dynamics in cross-cultural groups is perhaps more complex than that in groups where the members share the same 'cultural background', though in some ways, the fact that diversity is signalled by the very composition of the group enhances the awareness that the 'otherness' of participants should be recognised (Akkerman et al., 2006).
- Another way of putting this would be to state that obstacles in communication within a culturally mixed group are often complex and intertwined, and cannot be easily 'explained away' by referring to 'culture'.

Second difficulty. There was a concern that, in an effort to describe and account for irritating experiences due to cultural diversity, individuals would end up using *cultural stereotypes*. The trap is not only to simplify things by using this

kind of ‘explanation’ for a person’s behaviour but also to reinforce the stereotypes, even if these are used in a critical manner. Sometimes perceptions of cultures – whether one’s own or those of others – are so deeply engrained that they are barely available to one’s consciousness and hence not particularly susceptible to examination and problematisation. During the *CROSSLIFE* workshop, differences were attributed to (often essentialising) *regional* besides *national* groupings, such as ‘Nordic’ or ‘Anglo-Saxon’. Needless to say, the content of these categories need to be unpacked, not necessarily (and simplistically) to see whether there is any ‘objective’ basis for them, but rather to see what gives rise to them in one’s consciousness in the first place (e.g., perceptions of historically-embedded academic traditions, or of broad cultural frames of mind).

The implications are:

- Awareness of deeply embedded cultural prejudices can be heightened if such prejudices are pointed out by the person whose culture is being stereotyped.
- To some extent, typecasting is ‘unavoidable’ because we all grow up in cultural contexts that are full of stereotypes about who we are (‘us’) and who ‘the other’ is (‘them’). The challenge is perhaps to acknowledge that we do work with stereotypes, and that we need to allow the experience in cross-cultural interaction to question these deeply embedded orientations towards ‘us’ and ‘the other’.
- Another challenge for cross-cultural communication and cooperation is the tendency to over-generalise or over-individualise. As already noted earlier, ‘good’ or ‘bad’ habits of people with a different ‘cultural background’ are likely to be interpreted as an expression of her/his ‘culture’ rather than as an individual trait. At the same time, one’s cultural background does in fact influence one’s behaviour.
- To question stereotyped perceptions and unpack the content of culturally bound categories, however, requires a degree of trust in the group, as well as a sense of belonging, both of which take time to be established.
- There are specific sets of challenges in establishing this level of trust, especially if the interaction between members of the group is based solely or largely on virtual communication and the group is constituted as a group more or less by accident. There are also other sets of challenges in building up this level of trust between academics and their students.

Third difficulty. A third difficulty concerned *feelings of ‘awkwardness’, ‘embarrassment’, ‘discomfort’ and ‘uneasiness’* associated with expressing what one felt during interactions with others, with some of these feelings being triggered off by ‘cultural differences’ in the broad sense that the term is being used here. The reports reflecting on the critical incidents in communication indicated that individuals sometimes felt ‘misunderstood’ or even ‘silenced’ by the reactions and attitudes of others, and that this created ‘tensions in the air’ and a negative sense which, of course, one and all have learnt to handle as part and parcel of life, but which are nevertheless very real. That sense of ‘hurt’ and/or ‘anger’ and ‘frustration’ was generally balanced by an awareness that individuals in the group were not being consciously or wilfully unpleasant, and that relations, even if sometimes marked by stress, were generally governed by an overall feeling of good will.

The implications are:

- Cultural assumptions that we carry around with us are often so deeply rooted that they are not immediately available to us to reflect on them, so that individuals end up behaving and reacting in ways that ‘silence’ or ‘misconstrue’ others. This could be due to different cultural backgrounds that imply different ways of acting or maybe to different personal styles of acting or their individual ‘habitus’. However, the educational work of alerting each other about such cultural forms of power is felt as an awkward exercise, and individuals often prefer to put up with it than to make an issue out of it. The question arises as to whether a multi-cultural learning group should bring these issues and processes to the surface, as one way of dealing with them is to articulate them. This would however require particular sets of skills in human communication and competences in management of group dynamics combined with a high capacity of reflectiveness among the group members – and a strong basis of trust within the group – if the openness and transparency is to be constructive.

Tensions and challenges involving value differences

Project partners may value different aspects of the work they are doing together in different ways. The origin for these differences may be varied, and may be rooted in culture (national or otherwise), stage in the life-cycle (e.g., still having dependent children at home or other relatives to take care for), gender, and so on. Furthermore, differences in what is valued may also be influenced by the institutional requirements and routines of the different universities and national university systems people are based in (e.g., a partner may put more emphasis on

product than process because job tenure at his or her institution is dependent on publications) (see also Beerkens & Derwende, 2007). Negotiations about values and meaning are difficult because they easily touch very personal and/or sensitive questions.

The implications are:

- Value differences are important in a group and indeed such differences need to be acknowledged. Due to age, for instance, students in different phases in their life-cycle may have different priorities. They may also have different access to such resources as time and finance, and due to a variety of personal situations, specific targets may be more or less difficult to achieve. Course demands and mutual expectations need to take this into account.
- Different values, irrespective of their origins, need to be acknowledged. Research on group dynamics and group facilitation (Tuckman, 1965, 2001) suggests that partners typically go through a series of stages, that is 'forming', 'storming', 'norming', 'performing' and 'adjourning'. It may be important to have facilitators who can 'manage' such processes in order to make sure that value (norming) issues are adequately addressed.
- Negotiations about values and valuing processes are necessary in order to understand each other and find common rules for the group, but this process has to be handled carefully and skilfully.
- Working successfully through the 'norming' stage facilitates trust building among group members, and a great sense of feelings of belonging to the group, shared targets, ownership and commitment.

Tensions and challenges involved in trust-building

The importance of trust-building as a basis for communication between and within cultures came through in many of the critical incidents. Trust can be jeopardised for several reasons, including, for instance, when partners feel that there is not the same level of commitment to the project, or when individuals feel that some of the agendas related to the project are being set elsewhere, or when people feel stereotyped and not recognised as individuals.

The implications are:

- Trust-building should be an explicitly set task for the group. This can be part of the 'norming' process where ground rules are established, and where

agreement is reached on appropriate professional behaviour, shared methods, and working procedures and tools.

- Trust is difficult to build up when group members do not know each other well, and this has pedagogical implications (e.g., students and academics may find it difficult to overcome anxieties in asking questions, which might make them appear to be less gifted than other members in the group or to raise issues that may be sensitive).
- Trust is built up not necessarily by talking about it as a goal, but in actually performing group tasks, around which and out of which group processes will evolve. Some of the most powerful of these team-building processes may not, in themselves, be project-task oriented: leisure activities can sometimes be the most effective ways of creating 'joint foot-ground and contact surface'. They can also create more appropriate contexts in which differences (cultural or otherwise) can be worked out in a positive manner, while in traditional academic contexts the 'script' inherent in the formal situation can easily lead to confrontation, aggression and frustration. Interaction in the context of 'leisure' seems to engage people with each other at a more personal level, possibly lessening the impact of other layers that impact on relationships, derived deep from the history of nation states, language, academic disciplines or gender relations.
- We have to also accept to some extent the limits of active trust-building measures within a given group due to personal relations between the members. Nevertheless, learning groups need to reach a certain level of trust among their members because that is a crucial condition to enable (cross-cultural) learning.
- Ultimately, in organising positive teaching and learning environments, it is clear that actors have to have the competence of 'being human beings', that is of valuing such qualities as tolerance, respect and honesty.

Tensions and challenges around the medium of communication

(a) Written vs. other forms of expression. Some academic traditions place a great deal of emphasis on the printed word, using journal articles and chapters as the key reference point for discussions in a seminar setting, focusing on exegesis and critical debate in relation to texts. Other traditions use texts only as a springboard to discussion, in which the main focus is not the text itself, but the participant. The function of preparatory documents for planning meetings and

learning situation may also be seen differently as are the related expectations toward the other participants concerning this issue. This may also have implications for such pedagogical issues as assessment, with the former tradition privileging written forms of assignment-setting, and the latter oral assessment. Similarly, and possibly for related reasons, some traditions are more open to ICT-based forms of communication between participants in a learning situation. We are therefore here in the realm of cultural patterns of interaction and communication, where again aspects of gender (different ways of expressing masculinities and femininities), of class, of national and also institutional culture are layered into the way we present ourselves to others and open ourselves to them.

(b) English as the language medium. Groups can sometimes be divided by the use of the same language: while they may be using English as the *lingua franca* for communication, the same words (e.g., the term ‘case-study’) may have different meanings and connotations in the different academic/disciplinary traditions that individuals belong to in their home country. Talking the same language can in fact be even more hazardous for communication than talking in different languages, since attention is focused on the superficial surface of ‘sameness’ of language, forgetting that the use and meaning of the English words is inevitably rooted in one’s own cultural background and mother tongue.

In addition, those who are not native speakers of English often feel vulnerable when using it as the mode of communication. Many feel that they cannot express their thoughts in a sophisticated way, that they feel ‘simple’ or even ‘stupid’ or ‘silly’ as they search for the ‘proper way’ of expressing their thoughts in a language that is not theirs, particularly when native English speakers are present. Given that the latter may have had little experience of being in a linguistic minority, they sometimes tend to be insensitive to the fact that language skills are not just linguistic, but also social, and that language is a vehicle and indicator of power in communicative processes. At the same time, more cosmopolitan native English speakers may feel uncomfortable with the linguistic privileges they ‘naturally’ enjoy in international meetings, and are acutely aware of the fact that others may perceive them as ‘colonising’ or ‘dominating’ a forum that in principle should be equitable and democratic. Non-native speakers end up frustrated and vulnerable in this English-speaking space, where meanings shift on what feels, for many, like a slippery and treacherous slope, and where one’s intentions and ideas are redefined while one looks helplessly on. It is not surprising, therefore, that many critical incidents spoke of the hegemony of English in a multi-cultural setting as a form of ‘symbolic violence’, while acknowledging that alternatives were not easy to come by.

(c) *The use of technology.* The extent to which communication, interaction and group dynamics, such as building up trust, can take place adequately through digital forms of communication is debatable (see Palomba, 2006). The task is made even more complex because the level of skills in using different kind of technologies typically varies between different members of a group, with those who are most skilled tending to give more importance to the value of ICT for learning purposes. Those who are less skilled end up feeling both incompetent, and possibly also guilty as the unarticulated assumption is that they should put more effort in developing the required skills to reach the level of the other members of the group. Technology in fact quickly became one of the focal themes for the CROSSLIFE team, with one sub-group examining the way ICT can support, or serves as an obstacle to, cross-cultural collaborative teaching and learning.

(d) *Feelings of inadequacy.* Feelings of inadequacy can be felt by some when certain communications media are used, whether these are ICT-related, or, as noted earlier, language-related. Here, members of a group may inadvertently use their superior knowledge and skills in working in this medium to wield power in the group – or may be perceived by others as doing so. Those whose knowledge and skills are less developed end up feeling inadequate and even vulnerable. Language skills and technical competences are differently developed and being obliged to (or hindered from) acquiring and using them in a collaborative academic enterprise may evoke feelings of being inferior or superior and of being powerful or powerless – all of which are very likely to cause feelings of frustration. The negotiations and the choices for one or the other media is always interwoven with power relations.

The implications are:

- The differences in traditions in what constitutes academic work need to be acknowledged and integrated in CROSSLIFE's way of doing academic work collaboratively. It might imply that partners need to have a shared understanding of the role of documents and texts and the related expectations among the group members. This relates to both the way CROSSLIFE partners communicate with each other, and how communication with and between students is organised and their performance is assessed.
- It might also mean that we value (and accredit) students not just for their written production, but also for other aspects of 'performativity' (e.g., visual, audio, multimedia products) that may lead to creative and innovative insights about a topic.

- It may also be necessary to have some critical reflection and debate on the way certain media of communication ‘frame’ our conversations, and how they distribute control and power within the group. While ICT or English language on the one hand are often considered to be tools that empower communication, on the other hand those who feel they have not mastered such tools feel disempowered and rendered vulnerable and insecure in a group.
- While there are issues with preferred modes of communication (which can also have some cultural grounding, but which also relate to age or other personal situations), it may also be that resistance to ICT or struggling with the English language as a medium for communication may reflect other concerns, such as lack of clarity around goals, a lack of motivation to engage in open communication or even a ‘hidden strategy’ of resistance against the tasks.
- In relation to the use of English, which for many is a second or even a third language, there needs to be a greater realisation of the fact that language skills are both social and linguistic. It is therefore vital that the group creates a ‘safe’ and inclusive environment that encourages lecturers and students to feel as comfortable as possible when expressing themselves in a foreign language. It also seems important that the issue of English as the language of communication in the group is made the focus of explicit deliberation, so that project partners and students become more aware of the social dynamics and processes inherent in language issues.

Tensions and challenges around the notion of ‘academic traditions’

A project often provides a particular academic environment in which partners are expected to work. The ‘rules’ of the academic ‘game’ may be set by the fact that leaders of the project are, for instance, largely embedded in a particular academic discipline or because many (but not all) of the participants share a similar background. As we have noted in the first part of this paper, academic and professional cultures such as sociology, education or economics are ensconced in specific ways of valuing knowledge, in legitimising particular research methodologies and epistemologies, in approaching issues from specific angles, and in approving particular behaviour codes and conventions in the teaching-learning setting. Often, too, academic and professional cultures have their own organisational cultures, ways of going about things and of getting things done. In addition, there are shared discourses and similar stances toward several aspects of the project. Partners who are outside of this main academic community or ‘tribe’

might feel 'apart' unless the group takes it upon itself to make the issue of knowledge and disciplinary cultures an object of discussion and reflection. They may feel marginalised or inferior because they do not share the knowledge and language that the members of the leading discipline have.

The implications are:

- As with the other issues raised, it is clearly important to bring to the surface the ways in which our approach to the material that constitutes the project is steeped in ways of being that are embedded in academic traditions and disciplinary conventions.
- It is probably helpful to define some material that is to constitute the shared knowledge of the group. This foundation can be enriched by further readings suggested by members of the different academic disciplines represented in the group.

Issues related to different roles in the group

Group members typically have different roles. The role of the chair or moderator of a session, for instance, is a critical one in any group process. Many of the challenges for cross-cultural collaboration, as described above, converge in ways that have to be managed by the chair, even though he or she shares that responsibility with partners. Other roles are distributed among various members, and these, once established, tend to limit the range of an individual's behaviour in that context, and become interwoven with that actor's self-perception as well as with the perception that others have of him or her. These role specifications can be understood as the group's collective expectations from one another. The initial phase of group-building in which these roles are established plays an important part in influencing individual behaviour as well as the ways in which individuals represent themselves in the group. This 'positioning' process is shaped by national and disciplinary cultures, and mediated through factors such as age, gender and/or academic status, for instance. These elements and factors combine together in ways that suggest and legitimise different roles, and tend to give different weight to arguments that individuals make. As these roles congeal and become stable, they offer a different scope for acting and expressing oneself in particular ways, and of being heard by others in particular ways too.

It is dynamics such as these that make the moderator's task deeply challenging, and even more so in a cross-cultural environment. The chair has to facilitate group processes in relation to two goals, which are not always complementary: one goal relates to the personal dynamics between members, the other to the attainment of

project outcomes. In leading a group session, the chair assumes a certain degree of responsibility for the ‘success’ of the proceedings. Individuals exercise that responsibility in different ways. However, despite such diversity in ‘management’ style, one and all need specific competences, especially in finding the right balance between group dynamics and the project tasks. That balance is even more challenging to achieve given that the demands and dynamics of task-oriented activities (i.e., focusing on outcomes) may clash with person-oriented activities (i.e., focusing on process). The former, for instance, requires a different time-discipline and logic to the latter.

As a chair one has to attend to relations with and between individual members as well as the group as a whole. That has implications for her/his own role. S/he has to balance three ‘roles’ at one and the same time: (i) being a member of the group as all the other members and contribute by articulating a personal point of view; (ii) being in different personal relationships with the other members of the group; and (iii) being ‘in charge’ to attend to and organise the group process. These three roles may come into conflict with each other. Additionally these roles are interpreted differently according to the cultural background, gender and personal style of the individual.

In principle, the moderator or the chair should be both process- and goal-oriented, should ensure clarity and responsibility, should respect and support individual group members, and should strive to find the right balance between acting as a chair and attending to her or his own specific project-related interests. These *desiderata* are challenging at any time, but in cross-cultural collaborative contexts, that challenge becomes more acute.

The implications are:

- The role of the chair, together with the group’s expectation of him or her, should be established as clearly as possible by the whole group. Moderators should then define their role within that framework, with revolving chairpersonship ensuring that differences in style, gender and cultural backgrounds enrich both process and outcome.
- Implicit role expectations could be made explicit, becoming part of the process of negotiating group procedure and protocol.
- The group should be aware of the way rigid role definitions that take place in the team-building process limit the scope of an individual’s action and behaviour, and that social learning can be facilitated when members feel they can move beyond ascribed or adopted roles in order to experiment with new forms of practice.

- Chairing skills should be targeted as a goal, particularly when cross-cultural collaborative teams are involved. Such skills can be collectively learnt through providing structured opportunities for reflection.

Concluding comment

Awareness of the ways in which individuals and groups differ is not necessarily an obstacle to communication. Indeed, such awareness can bridge the differences not by encouraging everybody to be the same, or for the project to degenerate into ‘group think’, but rather to be enriched by the variety of knowledges, traditions, values and perceptions that we bring to the task. Heightened awareness of the way cultures and languages ‘talk through us’ can lead to better self-understanding, and more satisfying and constructive communication with others and could prevent us at the same time from seeing cultures as monolithic blocs or black boxes. The more we recognise diversity, the less likely are we to fall into the trap of understanding the other via ‘a grid of familiar typifications’, which lead ‘the other as other to remain unnoticed’ (Gurevitch, 1988; cited by Akkerman et al., 2006, p. 482). The more we treat the other as ‘strange’ and ‘new’, that is the more we treat the otherness of the other not as something to overcome, but something to be augmented, the more likely it is that ‘boundary-crossing dialogues turn into a meaning-generating venture’ (Akkerman et al., 2006, p. 483).

At the same time, for communication to succeed, there needs to be a constant search for what can be referred to as ‘touchstone discourse’ (Walker, 1988), that is some common space or ground, a common ‘language’ which makes interaction and mutual understanding possible. As with the use of English, however, the driving force behind this search for a *lingua franca* is not the hope that we will ever arrive at a stable state of equilibrium, but rather the constant awareness that power is inevitably implicated in all aspects of communication, and that making it visible is one way of democratising human relationships.

This striving for common ground while simultaneously celebrating, affirming and even augmenting diversity nevertheless gives rise to a number of tensions that are felt whenever two people ‘meet’, but are possibly more acute in cross-cultural contexts. These tension fields require academics and students to walk the tightrope between:

- Attributing meaning to the notion of ‘culture’ ...
... *without falling into the trap of stereotyping others and being stereotyped by others.*

- Being a unique individual ...
... while belonging to a collective (such as nations, disciplines, genders, generations, professions, research method ‘camps’, political backgrounds, social classes, families, and so on) that influences our behaviour, feelings, perceptions and thinking.
- Allowing the group process to question our identity, given that this is a powerful way of enabling social learning ...
... while at the same time being aware of the limits of this process in an academic and research-driven context, given that this is not a therapy setting.
- Building up trust as the basis of collaboration ...
... even if the group members have come together in a more or less haphazard, accidental manner, and have to interact in a situation where specific outcomes have to be produced within a given time.

Issues such as these are not specific to cross-cultural collaborative projects. However, the latter kind of setting possibly raises and foregrounds these concerns in a more striking manner. The challenge is for individuals committed to ‘speaking’ across cultures to find their own way in locating themselves and in acting in ways that enable social learning, for the benefit of their own development and of the group(s) they belong to.

Notes

1. The pathway does not in itself lead to a degree, but organises learning within an ECTS (European Credit Transfer Scheme) framework in order to enhance the possibility of incorporation of credits earned during the CROSSLIFE project within the post-graduate degree programmes at universities participating in the project. For further information about CROSSLIFE see:<http://www.peda.net/veraja/uta/vetculture/crosslife>
2. Three workshops were held in all (one in London, another in Tampere, and a third in Malta).
3. There are examples of such a focus in international literature (e.g., Wang et al., 2005), but to our knowledge, few examples focusing on the issue as it plays itself out in EU-funded projects (for two notable exceptions, see Akkerman et al. [2006] and Tartas & Müller Mirza [2007]. Both papers focus primarily, though not exclusively, on the psychological dimensions of collaboration).
4. The members of the group included one academic from Australia, three from Finland, two from Malta, two from Switzerland and two from the UK. Some had worked together on previous projects, while others were new to each other. A total of 14 critical incidents and reflections on these incidents were submitted by nine members of the group. Our task as authors was to provide a theoretical context, to synthesise the reflections made by group members, and to draw out and pull together the various reflections made in ways that might prove useful to teachers and learners involved in cross-cultural educational settings.

5. While we find Snow's (1969) identification of three broad academic cultures – namely cultures of humanities, sciences, and the culture which contains elements of both humanities and sciences (such as sociology and psychology) – unnecessarily polarising, that early characterisation does alert us to important distinctions that have, since then, been explicated in more nuanced terms by the likes of Biglan (1973) who focused on the epistemological aspects of disciplines (hence a continuum between hard to soft sciences, and between pure to applied sciences), and Kolb (1981) who focused on styles of intellectual inquiry (hence a continuum between abstract and concrete reflective, and abstract and concrete active).
6. CROSSLIFE partners also developed pedagogical material in order to help students address some of the process-oriented issues related to cross-cultural collaboration, including the impact of national, gender and disciplinary cultures. A case in point is a set of reflective questions that students were invited to focus on, addressing challenges in working through the medium of English, and in trying to cross 'cultural' borders marked by one's country of origin, gender and academic discipline. In this way, aspects of intercultural communication – including implicit ones such as social roles, values, behaviour, politeness, body language, status symbols, mutual expectations, sense of humour – could be addressed if students and tutors felt that they wanted to reflect on them.

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ASSESSMENT OF THE ENGLISH REMEDIAL PROGRAMME AT A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN LEBANON

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Abstract – *This study investigates whether remedial courses in a private university in Lebanon affect the enrolment decisions of pre-admission students. This study also investigates the effectiveness of the remedial English courses on subsequent English and academic performance. Findings revealed that a large number of remedial placements discouraged students from enrolling in the university. It was also found that remedial courses were not effective in providing better performance on general academic subjects. This study is significant because remedial programmes at universities in Lebanon and the Middle East have been rarely assessed in terms of goals and general academic objectives. With the open admission policies in the majority of private universities in Lebanon, the quality of discussion on the effect of remediation at universities in Lebanon and the Middle East is almost non-existent. This paper provides a benchmark for a forum of discussion and further study to the effectiveness of general and remedial programmes in the Middle East.*

Introduction

Remedial programmes in higher education is coursework taken to fill or to compensate for what has been not learned, mislearned or not learned altogether (Bettinger & Long, 2005). The general and accepted goal of remedial programmes is to increase preparation of students with poor mathematics, English skills or other subjects prior to taking courses necessary to meet university graduation requirements.

Disenchantment with university placement into remedial courses has been a source of controversy among faculty, policy makers, students and a financial burden on parents. Inter-university discussion among faculty about the scope, need and objectives of remedial or placement courses has raised important questions about what remedial programmes are doing to improve student academic performance (Mazzeo, 2002). Many parents see remediation as paying for the same education twice and draw much contention about the nature of the programmes and their role in preparing students for future academic success.

In the international higher educational arena little is known about remedial programmes in private universities. Certainly, academics universally have identified specific knowledge and skills required to be successful in a college or university. For instance, academics consider as a 'rule' that English and mathematics are gatekeeper courses for enrolment in regular programmes, and that students who are successful in disciplines such as history, geography, arts and languages are also successful in the English language. Similarly, those successful in science, logic and engineering are successful in mathematics.

The nature of remedial programmes in the Middle East and in Lebanon is different from that of North American and Western programmes for reasons that have historical reference. Missionaries established the Lebanese educational system in the post-colonial period. These newly established schools were run by religious establishments such as French-Catholic orders and then taken up by Christian Maronite Lebanese orders (Bashour, 1997) and later developed into institutes of higher learning – the most notable establishment being Saint Joseph University.

A large number of schools still follow the French system in the language of instruction in the fields of science and mathematics. Many students who wish to obtain an American education, in an American-based university, go through an entrance examination established along American standards in the English language. Students are placed in English remedial courses because they shift from the French-based school system – as French is the background and learned language in schools after Arabic – to English, which is the medium of instruction at American style universities. In addition, there may be some disconnection or mismatch between what secondary schools consider college preparatory courses in mathematics and English, and what the colleges themselves set as admission standards.

Students seeking a university degree may choose one university over another based on remedial course requirements. For universities it becomes a way to choose and design – as they currently do – their own remedial programmes according to what falls within the scope of their strategic development for growth. There have been no unified policies on admissions, entrance examinations, placement criteria and standardisation of university remedial courses in Lebanon and other places around the world. These conditions are somewhat the same in the US (Breland et al., 2002). The conventional practice is that students generally take entrance examinations or the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) with their secondary school grade point average and other criteria to judge whether they are eligible for admission and/or placement in a remedial programme. Otherwise, they enrol into the regular programme. Many universities around the world, specifically in Europe, do not require students to go through remedial programmes. Those who do not qualify for admission are channelled to enrol in technical colleges or are rejected all together. However, with the open admission

policy and enterprising international higher education system, universities now seek students rather than students seek universities. This 'reversal supply-demand approach' has made many universities agile and sensitive to student needs in terms of the curriculum and programmes. Thus a review of remedial programmes has become a key aspect in the self-assessment that all universities go through for accreditation and strategic development.

Policy issues

Universities tend to have their own admission policies or decisions on remediation. These policy issues are tied to the culture of the university. In rigid, authoritarian and bureaucratic organisational cultures, leadership tends to persuade others and potentially to advance policies that serve particular interests (McNay, 1995). According to Stone (1989), policy makers construct implicit models of causation of the problem and its solution. They provide the scenario, which is one-dimensional; they lay the problem and then offer its solution (Hoffman, 1995; Hatch, 1998). Eventually issues are settled through inter-university rules and regulations. In essence, in the absence of consensually based agreement and empirically validated objectives, unilaterally drawn policy decisions for remedial programmes seek to achieve a skill level that enables students to transfer into the regular curriculum (Bers, 1987).

There is some reason to believe that the majority of the private institutes of higher education in Lebanon offer remedial courses and compete for students with below standards in acknowledgement that they enrol students who require remediation in order to reach quality standards. Namely, the nature of private universities enterprise promotes remediation to cover 'enrolees overhead costs'. It is logical to suggest that universities in Lebanon and the Middle East boost their reputation through enrolment rates, with the logical consequences that these students complete their university with the highest grade point average, and graduate with a standard level to allow them to continue in graduate school and find occupational success.

Literature perspectives

Remedial programmes in US colleges indicate success in degree attainment due to placement in college support programmes (McCabe, 2000; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Students in remedial programmes are more likely to persist in college in comparison to those who were not required to take such courses (Bettinger &

Long, 2005). Similarly, Schoenecker, Bollman & Evens (1998) found that enrollees who did not complete the recommended remedial courses were less apt to continue with the programme of study. On the other hand, Saxon & Boylan (2001) reported that a high number of remedial courses are linked to a higher leaver rate. In the same study, those who completed the remedial courses had slightly higher grades and non-significant core curricular English courses compared to those who did not go through the remedial program. Johnson & Kuennen (2004) have shown that students who took remedial courses before enrolment in the regular programme performed better on these courses than those who took the courses concurrently. But others, like Richardson, Fisk & Okun (1983), argue that remediation does not advance students into college academic programmes; students who have to take a number of remedial courses get discouraged from continuing or dropout all together. At the same time, students who complete a long list of remedial courses tend to be more motivated and succeed in the regular programme of study. Richardson, Fisk & Okun (1983) also argue that students who enrol in regular courses without the remedial prerequisites often force faculty to water-down the curriculum so as to accommodate for low-track achievers.

Research has drawn the pros and cons of remedial programmes, but still policy or rationale based on empirical evidence is lacking in the field. In the absence of rigorous evaluation studies on the effectiveness and consequence of remedial programmes, one can say considerably little about what they 'really' accomplish.

Notwithstanding this, evaluative studies have not received enough attention from private universities in Lebanon, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The authors, in fact, are not aware of one study that evaluates 'pre-university programmes' in Lebanon. Even in the US, research about the effectiveness of remedial education programmes has typically been sporadic, under funded and inconclusive (Bers, 1987). For instance, a study of 116 two- and four-year colleges and universities revealed that only a small percentage conducted any systematic evaluation of their remedial education programmes (Weissman, Bulakowski & Jumisco, 1997). Studies as early as four decades ago found that while mathematics remedial courses did not improve college mathematical abilities through regular college course work (Ottley, 1968), English remedial courses did not fulfil the intended objective (Lawson, 1959). More recently, Zhai & Skerl (2001) concluded from a comprehensive study on the effectiveness of remedial English courses at a four-year institute in the US that such course are effective in that they increase the success in regular English courses and subsequently in the retention and increase in graduation rates. Keeping in mind that there is no empirically based evaluation studies that provide models to identify and examine the success of remedial programmes, it is currently questionable as to what makes the best remedial programme.

The study

Study objectives

One of the major goals of this study was to consider whether placement in remedial courses bolsters higher enrolment rates or reduces it. We also wanted to examine whether remedial courses impact subsequent academic attainment in English and the general academic performance. These questions are worth studying because of the atypical conditions that provide the sustained rationale for the remedial programmes in Lebanon and other parts of the Middle East.

In our survey of research studies we were not able to find a single study that evaluates remedial programmes at universities in the Middle East. With the continued expansion of the higher educational system, this study provides a possible benchmark in the evaluation of remedial universities programmes in the Middle East, Mediterranean, and Lebanon in particular.

The specific research questions of our study were: (i) to what extents do the assigned English remedial courses hinder students from enrolling at the university? (ii) to what extent are the English remedial courses effective in preparing students for their required college English courses? and (iii) do the English remedial courses generally translate into a better overall academic performance?

Case study

This study was carried out in a university established in 1987; its structure is based on the American-credit system of education and it has seven faculties. These are: Humanities; Sciences; Engineering; Architecture and Art; Political Sciences and Public Administration; Business Administration and Economics; and Nursing. In 1988, the university accommodated 350 students mostly enrolled in undergraduate majors. Since the 1990s, the university has witnessed growth in the number of students. This encouraged the university administration to branch out to other regions in Lebanon. At present, the university has over 5000 students, mostly enrolled in undergraduate majors, with the majority registered in the Faculty of Business Administration and Economics. During the 2006-2007 academic year, however, the university's road map for strategic development attempted a comprehensive self-assessment study of the different aspects of the university programmes. The intention was to critically examine the university's performance and curricular effectiveness.

English remedial courses

Assignment to remedial courses is based on a placement test score. The Admissions Office, together with the faculties, determines the placement to remedial programmes according to the English entrance examination scores. The English placement examination determines whether students are placed in 0-level English remedial courses, the 100-level English remedial courses or in the standard programme. The English placement examinations decide each student’s level placement in English remedial courses. Students are placed in three types of English remedial courses. The placement examination cut-off score for the first 0-level English course is between 400-499; for the second 105-level or 109-level English course it is between 500 and 599; and for the third 107-level or 110-level English course it is between 600 and 699 (see Table 1 for further clarification). Students must earn a grade of C or better in order to pass from the 0-level remedial course to the 100-level remedial courses. Usually students take two remedial courses before moving on to the university general requirements in English. If a student passes the 0-level course, he or she takes additional remedial courses or continues in the regular curriculum, depending on the grade obtained.

TABLE 1: The structure of English remedial courses placement

Placement Examination Scores		Major	
		Non-Science and Engineering Programmes	Science and Engineering Programmes
O-Level	400-499	ENL: 002: Intensive English	ENL: 002: Intensive English
	100-Level	500-599	ENL: 105: Freshman English I
600-699		ENL: 107: Freshman English II	ENL: 110: Freshman English for Science II

The bulk of students placed in remedial courses are entering sophomores of the university. Typically, Lebanese high school students finish the baccalaureate diploma that is similar to the French baccalaureate, the thirteenth grade in high school, or the advanced placement status in American high schools. It is also comparable to the 'Advanced Level' course that British students complete and equivalent to the international baccalaureate. All students take two college level composition courses as part of their general educational requirements in the regular university curriculum. The first of the two courses (i.e., major) are used in this study.

Methodology

To ensure reasonably informative comparisons, control or comparison groups were established and used in the analysis of the data. In the first analysis, we used two groups – those enrolled and those who did not enrol. In the second analysis, four sub-groups – representing students with zero, one, two or three remedial courses – were crossed with the level of performance on the first English course in the regular programme and their cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA). Lastly, based on the average grades on the remedial courses, three cohort groups were classified as low achievers, middle achievers and high achievers, and were crossed with the first English course and cumulative GPA.

The method in this study compares enrollees with non-enrolees, and those who took zero, one, two or three remedial courses on first English courses and GPA. In particular, the data consisted of student remedial grades, first English course grade and cumulative GPA from 2000-2001 to 2005-2006 academic years. Data were accrued for students' entrance examination scores, the 0-level courses, the 100-level courses and the first English course, and the Grade Point Averages were accrued from 2001 to 2006. Data pertaining to the non-enrolees included their English entrance examination scores and the type and number of remedial courses that were required. The data set was facilitated by the university's Administrative Computer Centre, and was organised in a spreadsheet file.

Statistics

A chi-square statistic was used to compare student enrolment status between those who took zero, one, two or three remedial courses. A correlation analysis was performed to determine the level of association between the entrance examination scores, remedial grades, grade on their first English course and the

overall cumulative GPA. *T*-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to detect course performance differences on regular college level English and cumulative GPA with those with remedial courses.

Results

The first analysis determined whether placement in remedial courses is related to the level of non-enrolment. A count was calculated for the number of students in remedial courses crossed with enrolment status (i.e., whether they enrolled or did not enrol at the university).

TABLE 2: Frequencies and percentages for enrolees and non-enrolees in remedial English

Enrolment Status	Statistics	Number of Remedial Courses				Total
		0	1	2	3	
Not Enrolled	Count	150	469	637	469	1725
	Row Percentage	8.7%	27.2%	36.9%	27.2%	100.0%
	Column Percentage	15.9%	16.0%	18.2%	39.2%	20.1%
	Percentage of Total	1.7%	5.5%	7.4%	5.5%	20.1%
Enrolled	Count	795	2469	2872	726	6862
	Row Percentage	11.6%	36.0%	41.9%	10.6%	100.0%
	Column Percentage	84.1%	84.0%	81.8%	60.8%	79.9%
	Percentage of Total	9.3%	28.8%	33.4%	8.5%	79.9%
Total	Count	945	2938	3509	1195	8587
	Row Percentage	11.0%	34.2%	40.9%	13.9%	100.0%
	Column Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Percentage of Total	11.0%	34.2%	40.9%	13.9%	100.0%

Table 2 reports the percentages of the non-enrollee and enrollee classifications. The column percentages showed differences between those who enrolled and those who did not. The results indicate a significant difference between those who enrolled and those who did not enrol ($\chi^2 [3, 8587] = 323.02, p < .0001$). In essence, a higher percentage of non-enrollees were assigned three remedial courses in comparison to those who enrolled. Those placed in one remedial course were more likely to enrol (36%) than not enrol at the university. We reclassified those placed in one or more remedial course and compared them with those who had no remedial course to take. These two classifications were crossed with those who were enrolled or who did not enrol. A significant higher number of students who enrolled had one or more remedial course compared to those who did not enrol ($\chi^2 [1, 8587] = 11.75, p < .001$).

The second analysis determined whether there was a relation between remedial course grades, first English course grades and cumulative GPA. Table 3 presents the correlation matrix. A significant and high positive correlation appeared for the average remedial grade and first English course. In addition, there appeared a high correlation between the remedial course grades and the cumulative GPA, a low correlation between the entrance examination scores and the first English course, and a low correlation between the entrance examination scores and the average grade on remedial courses.

TABLE 3: Correlation analyses

Scores	Cumulative GPA	First English Course	Entrance Examination Scores
First English Course	.43** (N = 6518)		
Entrance Examination	.25* (N = 6786)	.23* (N = 6475)	
Average of the Remedial Course(s)	.46** (N = 6055)	.92** (N = 5859)	.24* (N = 6012)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

The third analysis determined the impact of those who had no remedial course requirement with those who had one or more remedial English courses on student grades in their first English course and cumulative GPA. In order to get an accurate assessment of the impact of remedial English courses, a cohort of enrolled students was used in the analysis. A significant mean difference was found, with a higher mean for those who have not taken a remedial course on the first English course ($t = 18.86$, $df = 6528$, $p < .001$) or their cumulative GPA ($t = 10.71$, $df = 6847$, $p < .001$). The means are reported in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Means on remedial and non-remedial courses by grades on the first English course and cumulative GPA

Courses	Remedial Status					
	At least one remedial taken			No remedial taken		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
First English Course	1.85	0.81	5859	2.48	0.86	671
Grade Point Average	2.49	0.63	5701	2.86	0.65	748

To investigate whether the number of remedial courses directly impact performance in the first English and their cumulative GPA, we created three cohort groups – those who enrolled into one, two and three remedial courses – that were crossed with the first English course and the cumulative GPA (see Table 5). A high and significant difference was found on the first English course ($F [2, 5856] = 43.34$, $p < .001$). On the first English course, a post-hoc analysis between the three groups showed differences between those who took one and three remedial courses and those who took two and three remedial courses, with higher mean for those who took three remedial courses than those who took two or one and higher mean for those who took one remedial course compared to two.

On the cumulative GPA, a significant difference was found ($F [2, 6052] = 25.88$, $p < .001$). The post-hoc analysis reports a significant difference between all the groups, with higher means for those who took two remedial courses than those who took one or three.

In general, the results indicate that the more English remedial courses students take the better the student performance on regular academic courses as determined by GPA.

TABLE 5: Means on the first English course and cumulative GPA by number of remedial(s)

Courses	Number of Remedial Courses								
	One Remedial English			Two Remedial English			Three Remedial English		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
First English Course	1.82	0.96	2396	1.81	0.73	2587	2.09	0.49	876
Grade Point Average	2.59	0.69	2214	2.46	0.61	2765	2.31	0.52	722

The high correlations found between the average remedial grade and the first English course and between the average remedial grade and the cumulative GPA indicate that a relation may exist between the course content of both remedial courses and the first English course. When comparing these results to those who did not take remedial courses, the latter group had a higher first English course mean as well as a higher cumulative GPA. We created three cohort groups: (i) low achievers – those who received a grade lower than a ‘C’ on the remedial course(s); (ii) middle achievers – those who received a grade between ‘C’ and ‘B’, both included, on the remedial course(s); and (iii) high achievers – those who received a grade higher than ‘B’ on the remedial course(s). For those who took two remedial courses, an average was obtained for the two remedial courses and then a separate one-way ANOVA was run on the cumulative GPA and on the first English course. Table 6 reports the means and the *F*-ratios.

A Scheffe’ post-hoc analysis showed a significant difference between all combinatorial groups, with higher means for those who were high achievers, followed by the middle achievers, and lastly by the low achievers. The results indicate that high achievers had the highest cumulative GPA and grade on the first English course. Conversely, those who were low achievers on the remedial courses had the lowest grades on the first English course and the cumulative GPA.

Discussion

Different universities have different criteria for admission and placements in remedial courses. Normative practice within institutions of higher education has academic policy makers and academics that decide on the remedial placement of newly admitted students. For instance, in this case study, the university leadership

TABLE 6: The ANOVA results on the three remedial grade levels

Courses	Redemial Grade Level	Statistics			
		<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	F
First English Course	Low Achievers	2851	1.27	0.68	3490.72** (2, 5858)
	Middle Achievers	2812	2.34	0.39	
	High Achievers	196	3.39	0.25	
Cumulative GPA	Low Achievers	2804	2.28	0.58	484.857** (2, 5698)
	Middle Achievers	2437	2.58	0.60	
	High Achievers	460	3.11	0.87	

** $p < .001$

decided to remove all mathematics remedial courses for those entering fields such as the Humanities, Arts and Design and reduced mathematics remedial courses to one course for all other programmes. The faculties and departments offering remedial courses are also likely to influence the type of remedial courses given, the remedial policy, as well as the entrance examination placements. After all, a large cadre of the faculty teaches remedial courses. The costs and benefits of remedial programmes are calculations that the leadership makes to sustain and advance a particular policy proposal for or against remedial programmes. Certainly, underachievement often draws policy makers to make decisions about college preparatory courses and the continuation of these programmes. For example, weak entrance examination scores, low academic standards and/or poor communication and articulation in English language across secondary and post-secondary systems are prime motivators for the continuation of remedial education programmes, albeit with little regard for the evaluation and assessment of the programmes themselves (Mazzeo, 2002).

There is little consensus and understanding of what remedial education is doing in higher education, whom it serves, who provides it, how much it costs, and its effectiveness. None of Lebanon's universities meet or agree on remedial standards. Consequently, this lack of fundamental information and imprecision of consent provides grounds and need for a forum of discussion and a direction toward a standardised remedial policy, and a disseminative programme for parents and pre-admission university students (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). With the growth of American-style universities in the Arab world and the Mediterranean region (Zoepf, 2006), universities and general pre-college English requirements

can be criticised for the lack of rigorous follow-up studies and formative and summative evaluations of programmes. In the absence of such evaluative and operative studies, one cannot establish what these programmes actually accomplish.

The main findings of this study suggest that students assigned three remedial courses are discouraged from enrolment into a private university in Lebanon. The findings show a significant chi-square difference between those with a higher number of remedial courses who did not enrol in comparison to those who enrolled. Another important finding is that grades on the remedial courses are associated with the cumulative GPA and the first English course grade. The close relation between student achievement on remedial and other courses provides validity to the similar content of the remedial courses and the regular course content. Finally, the major finding of this study indicates that there is an underlying factor that cuts across all remedial and academic subjects: academic achievement emerges as the main causal dimension of performance in academic and regular English subjects.

Academic achievement is the main surrogate variable and a complex aspect of academic performance, retention and, eventually, occupational success. Thus, weak remedial students will remain weak in other academic subjects. Conversely, successful students in remedial courses continue to succeed in other academic subjects. English and mathematics remediation cannot therefore be the panacea to a much more fundamental problem in student academic performance. It may be that remediation may be required because students lack the fundamental prerequisite learning skills. University remediation programmes would then be greatly enhanced should learning and study skills methods become part of these programmes. Even with the growing pressure within universities from faculties that experience a lack of writing abilities among students, there is a need to find a solution to the 'lack of' academic skills that raise key issues, and even questions, about the basic assumptions behind remedial and developmental education practices. While it is very clear that the less able and the less prepared students are more likely to be placed in remedial programmes, in spite of their placement in such programmes they are still less likely to succeed and persist academically (Bettinger & Long, 2005).

A final question involves the dynamics of raising standards and eliminating remedial courses. As mentioned earlier, the university in this case study has taken steps to reorganise these courses, namely by integrating remedial courses with regular programmes. For other American-style and the growing number of universities in Lebanon and the Middle East, a number of questions remain: What will happen to remedial policies if enrolment declines? Will they 'water-down' the curriculum as to integrate remedial courses in the regular programme or will they

eliminate remedial programmes altogether? Will parents, students and administrators press to roll back these policies? Our own subjective estimates suggest that leadership in private universities is sensitive to enrolment projections and the overall demand for higher education. With the ever-expanding higher education systems in Lebanon, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East, the debate will remain as to how to maintain a balance in academic standards and expand access through open admission policy.

Limitations and recommendations

Our research focused on whether English remedial courses improve students' performance in English courses and university course subjects. It is questionable as to whether success on remedial English prepares students for the regular programmes. In this study we assessed the remedial English courses. However, remedial programmes also cover mathematics, thus making it essential that further work would need to integrate mathematics remedial courses in the formative assessment process. In this study we established achievement as a surrogate factor of performance in remedial and academic course work. This implies that a variety of abilities (e.g., quantitative, problem-solving, logical or abstract abilities) are related to achievement and would be as important as language factors. Thus, further study would have to look at general ability components such as logical, spatial and kinesthetic (see Gardner, 1983) or even intra- or inter-personal abilities as measures of performance and possible measures of achievement. It is suggested that future research prompts the types of abilities within each academic programme and an in-depth study of the educational objectives of each academic programme of study for specialised remedial programmes.

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HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION: A COMPARISON OF MOTHER TONGUE TEXTBOOKS IN TURKEY AND FRANCE

CANAN ASLAN

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Abstract – *Textbooks are major instructional tools playing an important role in education at all grades. The purpose of this study is to compare the level of allocation of human rights issues – rights, freedom, democracy, justice, tolerance and peace – in mother tongue textbooks in Turkey and France. For this aim, ten mother tongue textbooks from both countries were examined. Content analysis method was used to analyse the textbooks. As a result, it was observed that human rights issues are included more in Turkish textbooks when compared to French textbooks. It was found that in the textbooks of both countries the ‘rights’ subcategory is included the most while the ‘justice’ subcategory is included the least. While the intensity scores of the ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ subcategories were listed toward the very end in the textbooks of both countries, the ‘democracy’ subcategory occupies more places in French textbooks whereas the ‘freedom’ subcategory occupies more places in Turkish textbooks. Besides, the intensity scores for the subcategories of ‘rights’, ‘peace’ and ‘tolerance’ hold the first three places in the mother tongue textbooks of both countries.*

Introduction

The topic of human rights increasingly attracts the attention of the general public in the world (Donnelly, 1989; Akilloğlu, 1995; Buergental, 1995; Çeçen, 1995; Gemalmaz, 2001; Reisoglu, 2001). The term ‘human rights’ implies all the ideal rights that are required to be granted to everyone theoretically at a certain age. When human rights are considered, what comes to mind mostly are the rights that are ‘required’ and the rights under the ‘objectives to be reached’ statements (Kapani, 1981, p. 14). However, today, most of the human rights are contained by positive law and guaranteed with material sanctions (Mumcu, 1994).

Whether human rights can exist and bear a practical value depends on people’s awareness and practise of those rights, and their protection and improvement of those rights. This can be ensured with education in human rights field. Human rights education can be defined as ‘education offered in order to arouse awareness for the cognition, protection, use and improvement of human rights, and for

respect of these rights by everyone in a general sense and by students within the ambience of formal education' (Gülmez, 2001, p. 49).

The most crucial point in human rights education is definitely to transform the knowledge acquired in this field into behaviour. The process to realise this begins with the offering of human rights education *via* a content that is suitable for the person's level. The presence of specialised lessons that will teach human rights systematically and methodically is required. But this is not enough since this field is so comprehensive that it cannot be contained simply in such lessons. Actually, one of the objectives of general education is to give information required for life and ensure the intellectual and moral development of the student with courses in social fields (Vandenberg, 1984).

In order to ensure sustainability in human rights education, the human rights topic should be given place in other courses that are found in the curriculum such as history, geography, sociology, psychology, literature and philosophy (UNESCO, 1969, 1987; also Gülmez, 1998; Karaman-Kepenekci, 2000). The Council of Europe (see Annex of Recommendation No. R(85)7) has suggested that when adolescents' learn about fields that are of abstract quality – such as human rights – courses such as history, geography, social sciences, religious and moral education, language, literature and economics could be made use of.

Textbooks and their place in human rights education

A textbook is the fundamental tool that allows the teacher to use his/her position in a better way and to offer what he/she would like to teach in a more systematic manner; it also allows the student to revise what the teacher explains anywhere, at any time and at any speed. The textbook is prepared or chosen in relation to the teaching of a certain course and it is recommended as the fundamental resource for teachers and students in a certain school, grade and course upon examination of specific criteria. Today, textbooks are undergoing a radical change with respect to form, content and method (Garner et al., 1986; Oguzkan, 1993; Aycan et al., 2001; Gérard, 2003; Ceyhan & Yigit, 2004; Karaman-Kepenekci, 2005).

Textbooks are but one piece of the education puzzle that needs to be reviewed and critiqued (Giannangelo & Kaplan, 1992) and delineate what behavioural objectives can be covered in the course. This can include recommending the structure of the setting in which these objectives are to be achieved. It is a compact, economical, practical device for storing a huge amount of visual stimuli (Baykal, 2004).

At present, although textbooks are not the sole available teaching tool, as a result of the influence of technological developments, they are still the first

and the most important tool used in lessons (Coskun, 1996). According to a UNESCO project, textbooks provide the main resource for teachers, enabling them to animate the curricula and give life to the subjects taught in the classroom (UNESCO, 2007a). In recent decades, UNESCO has developed activities aimed at textbook revision as textbooks are seen as a key component for improving the quality of education and as one of its main strategies in promoting dialogue among and between nations and peoples, and a better knowledge and appreciation of their different cultures, as well as respect for, and acceptance of, cultural diversity (King, 2004). Revision of the school textbooks, or of the teaching materials in a wider sense, is the primary objective of UNESCO.

Today, while resources used in reaching information are greatly diversified, textbooks still play an important role in the development of forms of thinking and mentalities. Textbooks should support the preservation and continuation of cultural traditions, shaping of the identity sensation, realisation of linguistic resemblance and preservation of the national bond by offering the same contents to the entire youth population, using the same language and disseminating the same system of values, and the same historical, literary and even religious references (UNESCO, 2007b).

There is literature that examines the importance of textbooks in human rights education (Power & Allison, 2000; Tibbits, 2002; Kirisika, 2003). A number of studies were conducted to investigate the contribution of some of these textbooks (e.g., of history, social studies etc.) in human rights and citizenship education. For example, Karaman-Kepenekci (1999) examined the level of allocation of the citizenship and human rights issues in 16 Turkish high school textbooks. She found that intensity score of citizenship and human rights issues were higher in the religion, sociology and philosophy high school textbooks than in the other textbooks analysed. In another study, Karaman-Kepenekci (2003) analysed the level of human rights and responsibility issues in three life studies textbooks and four social studies textbooks used in Turkish primary schools. This study concluded that the intensity scores of human rights issues were higher than those of the responsibility issues in these textbooks.

The History Foundation (2003) carried out a project entitled *Promoting Human Rights in Primary and Secondary School Textbooks* in partnership with the Human Rights Committee of the Turkish Academy of Sciences and in collaboration with the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey. This project proposed the re-writing of textbooks so that future citizens would be more aware of the underlying issues.

The United Nations Association of the United States (see Sewall, 2002) carried out a study entitled *Textbooks and the United Nations*. This study revealed that

information about United Nations was almost non-existent in some textbooks in American schools and, where present, was often unclear and superficial. Sewall (2002), the author of the report, explains that the United Nations and its agencies are misunderstood, and that textbooks do not clear up this misunderstanding: the information they provide is often arcane and sketchy.

The place of mother tongue textbooks in human rights education

Turkish language courses are of vital importance in formal education in Turkey. Their main objectives are to teach the mother tongue in the most complete manner, to create awareness with respect to the mother tongue, and to bring up democratic and sensitive individuals with well-developed understanding/ expression skills. In recent years, many studies have examined Turkish textbooks in relation to human rights education as well as linguistics (Polat, 1991; Baysal, 1996; Coskun, 1996; Yörükoglu, 1996; Esen & Bağlı, 2002; Bora, 2003; Ceylan-Tarba, 2003; Çotuksöken, 2003; Gemalmaz, 2003; Tanrıöver, 2003; Timur & Bağlı, 2003; Karaman-Kepenekci, 2005; Aslan, 2006). French textbooks in France and in French schools – with their use of rich texts and contents – have similar objectives and they are considered as the basic teaching course (Programmes de 2002, 2004; Camenisch & Serge, 2006; Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique, 2007; Humanité, 2007).

When mother tongue textbooks, the priority of which is to improve the language and communication skills of individuals, are prepared carefully, they may become one of the most significant tools in offering human rights education. Human rights-related poems, memoirs, diaries, anecdotes, novels and works that speak of struggles to obtain rights and freedom at various times and places may be included in these books. One can also make use of works related to children's and adolescents' rights (Karaman-Kepenekci, 2000). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and texts of international contracts on human rights may be analysed, and then students may be asked to write their own universal declarations on human rights and children's rights (UNESCO, 1969).

The texts selected for use in mother tongue textbooks can play an important role in the implementation of human rights education. Literary texts, with their versatile nature that comes from their contents, educate people in terms of sensitivity. A person with educated feelings manages to comprehend what is felt and, as a result, understands the meaning of humanitarianism and equality. One can also offer an indirect human rights education to students by including works of foreign writers and artists. It is important in mother tongue teaching that students meet with different writers, and thus with different styles (tastes). The

fine feelings acquired through sensitivity education provide the person with the skills to go into details, to comprehend humans and the world (Binyazar, 1996).

Texts that question the violation of human rights should be included in textbooks to be then submitted to students' review and assessment. For instance, students may be asked to empathise with the protagonists in those texts and interpret the situation within the context of human rights. Extracts from newspapers and magazines that recount real and dramatic stories about human rights may be included in textbooks or students may be asked to find such articles. These acquired texts then may be exhibited in classroom literature corners or school notice boards for the benefit of other students (Sever, Kaya & Aslan, 2006).

Comprehension questions may be used to highlight the importance of human rights and citizenship. The textbook may include questions and activities that allow students to share in class their own or their relatives' experiences in connection with violation of human rights. The questions should create environments where different opinions can be expressed with composure; they should trigger critical thinking by the child, particularly on human rights (Aslan & Polat, 2007). The prepared questions should be directed toward the objectives of human rights education, such as expressing oneself, generating authentic thoughts, developing positive relationships, etc. For an effective human rights education, preliminary textbook exercises may include thought provoking and analysis-requiring questions developed by the authors to assist teachers in preparing students for the lesson (Çayır, 2003).

Visual stimulants – such as comic strips, pictures and photos about human rights – may be included in the books and students may be asked to talk about their messages. Text content-related pictures, photographs, illustrations or cartoons by foreign artists might also be included in the books. According to Sever (2007), interpretation of a cartoon from different points of view, and the analysis and expression of its contents from different perspectives prepare natural settings for the formation and acquisition of a democratic culture in an educational environment. They enable students to perceive the fact that people may generate different thoughts on the same or various life situations. For this reason, the visual features of mother tongue textbooks should not be undervalued.

In order to determine the contribution of mother tongue courses in human rights, the level of allocation of topics related to human rights in the textbooks of these courses should be examined. In Turkey, the new primary education curriculum was adopted in 2004. In line with this, the curricula of all the courses, including that of the Turkish language course, taught at elementary level were changed and the new curriculum was implemented at the beginning of the 2005-2006 scholastic year. With regard to France, the textbooks that were prepared in accordance with the new primary education curriculum have been in use since

2002. The Turkish language textbooks prepared according to the new primary education curriculum have still not been examined in terms of their human rights component. Neither has this aspect of these books been compared to that of other mother tongue textbooks used in other countries.

Objective of the study

The general objective of this study is to make a comparison between the mother tongue textbooks in Turkey and France in terms of their level of allocation to human rights issues.

Method

Selection of textbooks

In Turkey, compulsory education consists of primary education, which spreads over eight years to cover ages 6-14; the first five years being the first level and the next three years being the second level (see <http://www.meb.gov.tr>). In France, compulsory education covers the education of children between the ages of 6-16; the first five years of compulsory education are called the primary education level (see Ministère de l' Education Nationale, 2006).

In the study, ten mother tongue textbooks recommended by the Turkish and French Ministries of Education for use by students in the first five years of primary education level were selected for the purpose of examination. These textbooks (five Turkish and five French) are listed in Appendix A.

Data analysis

Textbooks have been analysed through 'content analysis', a qualitative research method frequently used in this type of study. The main purpose in content analysis is to attain concepts and connections, which can serve to explain the collected data (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2005).

Procedures

The first things to determine in content analysis are the subcategories of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For the present analysis we made use of the subcategories previously defined by Karaman-Kepeneci (1999). These were:

Rights: Authorities and benefits recognised and protected by law. Rights are divided into civil, political and social rights.

Freedom: Non-existence of constraints and compulsion; having the power of doing anything that is allowed by independence, sovereignty and law.

Democracy: Administration of a country by the public, where the majorities in power reflect public popular vote (i.e., power is administered through representatives elected through a free and fair election system by the public).

Justice: Being fair, punishing the guilty, and making sure that administrators act in accordance with the law, honesty and conflict resolution.

Tolerance: Showing tolerance, respect and liking toward others (including those of different origin), not applying force or pressure, and ability to compromise and forgive.

Peace: Orderly and peaceful living, brotherhood, social integrity, safe environment, conflict resolution, and non-existence of anarchy, assault, disorder or tension.

To determine the inter-rater reliability of the content areas, two subcategories and a textbook were randomly chosen (namely the ‘Rights’ and ‘Tolerance’ subcategories and ‘Turkish Textbook 4’) and coded by the co-authors of the paper. An average of 87.5% consistency was noted, implying a good inter-rater reliability (Hall & Houten, 1983). All the reading and comprehension texts, including poems, in the textbooks (i.e., a total of 144 texts in Turkish textbooks and a total of 281 texts in French textbooks) were examined. In other words, we did not use sampling while examining the textbooks. On the other hand, the table of contents, chronology, questions, bibliography, glossary, prepositions, pictures, and photos were excluded.

‘Sentence’ has been chosen as the unit of analysis while analysing textbooks. We determined the frequency of occurrence of the designated subcategories in each sentence. At this stage, the sentences with words matching the subcategories, or explaining designated subcategories, or sentences directly conveying the meaning were taken into consideration. The weight of each aspect was valued as a point. In order to find out the total number of words in the texts, the words in all the texts in the books were counted one by one. The values of subcategories in the textbooks have been indicated in the tables as frequency, percentage and intensity values.

For each textbook, the subcategory percentage and the subcategory intensity score were obtained using the formulas given below:

$$\text{Subcategory percentage} = \frac{\text{subcategory frequency}}{\text{total frequency of all subcategories}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Subcategory intensity score} = \frac{\text{subcategory frequency}}{\text{total word number of the texts}} \times 1000$$

The intensity scores of all subcategories were multiplied by 1000 because the resulting figures while calculating the intensity scores were too small, and dealing with small figures causes difficulty while interpreting. In other words, the multiplication by 1000 was a matter of convenience.

Findings

Analysis of Turkish textbooks

The first grade Turkish Textbook 1 (TTB 1) is made up of four themes and 16 texts. The second grade Turkish Textbook 2 (TT 2), the third grade Turkish Textbook 3 (TT 3), the fourth grade Turkish Textbook 4 (TT 4) and the fifth grade Turkish Textbook 5 (TT 5) are each made up of eight themes and 32 texts. The titles of some of the themes in Turkish textbooks are as follows: ‘Individual and Society’, ‘Production, Consumption and Productivity’, ‘Health and Environment’, ‘Imagination’, ‘Games and Sports’, ‘Our Values’ and ‘Educational and Social Activities’.

When looking at the dissemination of the subcategories of human rights, it can be seen from Table 1 that in TTB 1 the subcategories of ‘Peace’ (60.4) and ‘Rights’ (49.3) have the highest intensity scores. These are followed by the subcategory of ‘Tolerance’ (13.6). The lowest intensity scores in this textbook belong to the subcategories of ‘Freedom’ (7.0), ‘Democracy’ (5.5) and ‘Justice’ (4.5) – all three having quite close ratios.

In TTB 2, the subcategory with the highest intensity score is ‘Rights’ (77.3). The subcategory of ‘Rights’ is followed by the subcategories of ‘Peace’ (19.1) and ‘Tolerance’ (11.5). The lowest intensity scores in this textbook belong to the subcategories of ‘Democracy’ (4.4), ‘Freedom’ (2.2) and ‘Justice’ (0.2).

In TTB 3, the subcategory with the highest intensity score is ‘Rights’ (41.9). The subcategory of ‘Rights’ is followed by the subcategories of ‘Peace’ (34.2) and ‘Tolerance’ (16.4). The lowest intensity scores in this textbook belong to the subcategories of ‘Democracy’ (4.4), ‘Freedom’ (3.0) and ‘Justice’ (1.7) – again all three having quite close ratios.

TABLE 1: Dissemination of all the categories in Turkish textbooks according to frequency (f), percentage (%) and intensity score (IS)

SUBCATEGORIES		TURKISH TEXTBOOKS					
		TTB 1 (1,988)*	TTB 2 (6,587)*	TTB 3 (8,091)*	TTB 4 (10,401)*	TTB 5 (9,903)*	TOTAL
Rights	f	98	509	339	994	828	2768
	%	35.1	67.4	41.2	57.8	65.9	57.3
	IS	49.3	77.3	41.9	95.6	83.6	347.7
Freedom	f	14	14	24	79	56	187
	%	5.0	1.9	2.9	4.6	4.5	3.9
	IS	7.0	2.2	3.0	7.6	5.7	25.5
Democracy	f	11	29	36	87	37	200
	%	3.9	3.8	4.4	5.1	2.9	4.1
	IS	5.5	4.4	4.4	8.4	3.7	26.4
Justice	f	9	1	14	45	8	77
	%	3.2	0.1	1.7	2.6	0.6	1.6
	IS	4.5	0.2	1.7	4.3	0.8	11.5
Tolerance	f	27	76	133	159	80	475
	%	9.7	10.1	16.2	9.2	6.4	9.8
	IS	13.6	11.5	16.4	15.3	8.1	64.9
Peace	f	120	126	277	356	248	1127
	%	43.0	16.7	33.7	20.7	19.7	23.3
	IS	60.4	19.1	34.2	34.2	25.0	172.9
TOTAL	f	279	755	823	1720	1257	4834
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100
	IS	140.3	114.7	101.6	165.4	126.9	648.9

* Total number of words in textbook

In TTB 4, the subcategory with the highest intensity score is ‘Rights’ (95.6). The subcategory of ‘Rights’ is followed by the subcategories of ‘Peace’ (34.2) and ‘Tolerance’ (15.3). The lowest intensity scores in this textbook belong once again to the subcategories of ‘Democracy’ (8.4), ‘Freedom’ (7.6) and ‘Justice’ (4.3).

In TTB 5, the subcategory with the highest intensity score is ‘Rights’ (83.6). The subcategory of ‘Rights’ is followed by the subcategories of ‘Peace’ (25.0) and ‘Tolerance’ (8.1). In line with the findings for the other four textbooks, the lowest intensity scores in this textbook belong to the subcategories of ‘Freedom’ (5.7), ‘Democracy’ (3.7) and ‘Justice’ (0.8).

The statements below, quoted from the Turkish Textbooks, can be given as examples of the ‘Rights’ subcategory:

‘Children, if you encounter a producer or a vendor-related problem with the products you have purchased, call 175 Consumer’s Line ... A responsible consumer is the one who seeks remedy. Never abstain from seeking remedy ... ’ (TTB 4, p. 62)

‘ ... Student: Why do women not have the right to be elected? Why cannot they become members of parliament?
Atatürk asked: What is the main right and duty of a citizen?
Student: The main right is to vote, the main duty is military service.’
(TTB 5, p. 41)

The statements below, again quoted from the Turkish Textbooks, can be given as examples of the ‘Rights’ and ‘Democracy’ subcategories:

‘ ... That is, where there is democracy, people have rights. Old or young, poor or rich, women or men, everyone can think, express and do whatever he/she wants to ... ’ (TTB 2, p. 107)

‘ ... In democracies, people have to respect others’ rights when using their own rights. They cannot violate others’ rights ... ’ (TTB 2, p. 108)

The statements below, quoted from the Turkish Textbooks, can be given as examples of the ‘Rights’ and ‘Justice’ subcategories:

‘ ... Well done, my girl! You did not do us wrong. Just like you, people should always respect each other’s rights ... ’ (TTB 4, p. 19)

‘O Sinan, chief architect Sinan! You have done the right, fairest thing. That is what I would expect from you.’ (TTB 5, p. 79)

The statements below, quoted from the Turkish Textbooks, can be given as examples of the ‘Peace’ subcategory:

‘ ... He initiated the Turkish War of Independence against the enemies who occupied our country. This war, of which he was the commander-in-chief, resulted in victory ... ’ (TTB 2, p. 27)

‘ ... Friends, peace is essential in this world; peace at home, peace in the world! Follow every call for peace ... ’ (TTB 4, p. 31)

‘ ... Look, we have not lived through a war. But we learn some things about the war in the movies we watch at the cinema, and on television ... That is not what real war is like ... ’ (TTB 4, p. 26)

‘ ... Secure life is to know that we can eat when we are hungry and to sleep in our beds comfortably. It is to be in peace ... ’ (TTB 5, p. 112)

The poem quoted below, from one of the Turkish Textbooks, can be given as an example of the ‘Tolerance’ subcategory:

‘Tolerance,
Be tactful, with a smile on your face;
Do not aggrieve anyone with bitter words.
Hoping that you have nice days ahead,
That is how each citizen should be; tolerant.’ (TTB 4, p. 16)

The statements below, quoted from the Turkish Textbooks, can be given as examples of the ‘Freedom’ subcategory:

‘ ... He always worked for the freedom of the nation ... ’ (TTB 2, p. 26)

‘It was not easy to come to this point, children. It was not easy to reach the commonwealth, and our independence ... ’ (TTB 4, p. 26)

‘ ...We all knew that the most important thing for human kind is freedom and independence ... ’ (TTB 4, p. 29)

Analysis of French textbooks

French Textbook 1 (CP) consists of four units and 60 texts; French Textbook 2 (CE 1) consists of 12 units and 38 texts; French Textbook 3 (CE 2) consists of six units and 68 texts; French Textbook 4 (CM 1) consists of six units and 22 texts; and French Textbook 5 (CM 2) consists of six themes and 93 texts. The titles of some of these units are as follows: ‘Welcome to CP’, ‘Day by Day’ and ‘From Invention to Invention’ (CP); ‘Mystery and Peanuts’, ‘Fany and her Dream’, ‘Plants Living in Wetland Environments’, ‘On the Saint-Malo Beach’ and ‘Bread

for Friends' (CE 1); 'Grammar', 'Conjugation', 'Orthography', 'Vocabulary' and 'Reading' (CE 2); 'Monsters and Stories', 'Detective Stories', 'Various Stories' and 'Stories of Metamorphosis' (CM 1); and 'Grammar', 'Vocabulary' and 'Text Grammar' (CM 2).

When the dissemination of the subcategories is considered, it can be seen from Table 2 that the 'Rights' subcategory (69.0) has the highest intensity score in CP. This subcategory is followed by the subcategories of 'Peace' (19.2), 'Tolerance' (13.8) and 'Democracy' (13.6). The lowest intensity scores in this textbook belong to the subcategories of 'Freedom' (3.6) and 'Justice' (1.0) – both scoring very lowly.

In CE 1, the subcategory with the highest intensity score is 'Rights' (50.8). This subcategory is followed by the subcategories of 'Peace' (21.5) and 'Tolerance' (10.8). The lowest intensity scores in this textbook belong to the subcategories of 'Freedom' (5.5), 'Democracy' (2.8) and 'Justice' (2.3).

In CE 2, the subcategories with the highest intensity scores are 'Rights' (46.6) and 'Peace' (20.9). These subcategories are followed – quite at a distance – by the subcategories of 'Tolerance' (7.1), 'Democracy' (6.7), 'Freedom' (5.5) and 'Justice' (2.4).

In CM 1, the subcategories with the highest intensity scores are 'Rights' (33.3) and 'Peace' (25.6). These two are followed by the subcategories of 'Democracy' (11.3), 'Tolerance' (9.9), 'Freedom' (2.2) and 'Justice' (1.7).

In CM 2, the subcategories with the highest intensity scores are 'Rights' (52.2) and 'Peace' (26.6). These are followed at some distance by the subcategories of 'Freedom' (6.8), 'Tolerance' (6.5), 'Democracy' (4.7) and 'Justice' (1.9).

The statements below, quoted from the French Textbooks, can be given as examples of the 'Rights' subcategory:

'You have just one right, and that is the right to remain silent ... When her father told her so, her grandmother remained silent with displeasure. It was not surprising since children did not have the right to speak during meals.' (CM 2, p. 130)

'Until 1848, only very wealthy people had this right (the right to vote) ... It was necessary to pay taxes to be able to vote. France is the first country that granted the right to vote to all its male citizens over 21 ... but only to males. It was considered that instead of dealing with politics, women had other duties. They waited until 1945.' (CM 2, p. 213)

'In the Middle Ages, the king granted some city states the right to organise their own commune lives such as fighting against fire, ensuring the security of the residents, maintaining and illuminating the streets, establishing a market ... That is how the first communes arose ...' (CM 2, p. 72)

TABLE 2: Dissemination of all the categories in French textbooks according to frequency (f), percentage (%) and intensity score (IS)

SUBCATEGORIES		FRENCH TEXTBOOKS					
		CP (5,013)*	CE 1 (6,870)*	CE 2 (11,638)*	CM 1 (8,078)*	CM 2 (7,890)*	TOTAL
Rights	f	346	349	542	269	412	1918
	%	57.5	54.2	52.2	39.6	52.9	51.3
	IS	69.0	50.8	46.6	33.3	52.2	251.9
Freedom	f	18	38	64	18	54	192
	%	3.0	5.9	6.2	2.7	6.9	5.1
	IS	3.6	5.5	5.5	2.2	6.8	23.6
Democracy	f	68	19	78	91	37	293
	%	11.3	3.0	7.5	13.4	4.7	7.8
	IS	13.6	2.8	6.7	11.3	4.7	39.1
Justice	f	5	16	28	14	15	78
	%	0.8	2.5	2.7	2.1	1.9	2.1
	IS	1.0	2.3	2.4	1.7	1.9	9.3
Tolerance	f	69	74	83	80	51	357
	%	11.5	11.5	8.0	11.8	6.5	9.5
	IS	13.8	10.8	7.1	9.9	6.6	48.1
Peace	f	96	148	243	207	210	904
	%	15.9	23.0	23.4	30.5	27.0	24.2
	IS	19.2	21.5	20.9	25.6	26.6	113.8
TOTAL	f	602	644	1038	679	779	3742
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100
	IS	120.2	93.7	89.2	84.0	98.7	485.8

* Total number of words in textbook

The statements below, quoted from the French Textbooks, can be given as examples of the ‘Tolerance’ subcategory:

‘Bread, a type of food found in many parts of the world: in North America, Europe ... In those places, bread is the symbol of unity and cooperation among people. A friend is someone with whom you share your bread. Friendship is strengthened with this basic gesture: To split your bread to eat together’ (CE 1, p. 164)

‘Tolerance helps to establish friendship. Everyone is different at school as in anywhere else. Why do we cast them out and make fun of them? We surely do not have to love everyone. But everyone has the right to live on earth honourably, and without being treated contemptuously and suffering wrong. Being tolerant means respecting others, and the way they live and think. It is to see the things that bring us closer more than those that distinguish us from each other.’ (CP, p. 165)

The statements below, quoted from the French Textbooks, can be given as examples of the ‘Peace’ and ‘Freedom’ subcategories:

‘Once upon a time, a kingdom in China was facing the danger of a civil war and a foreign war. The King had a wise man brought to his palace and asked him to bring reconciliation and peace back to his kingdom.’ (CM 2, p. 132)

‘Verdun War caused such pain that it is one of the most commonly known and most murderous battles of the First World War ... More than 300,000 French and as many Germans lost their lives in that war.’ (CM 2, p. 125)

‘Our understanding of war is different than that of the Indians. They consider war not as the combat between two nations to gain the respect of other nations; instead, a regular display of their own warriors’ courage is in question. That is, for them a war consists primarily of small raids.’ (CM 2, p. 32)

‘When the savage man and women take shelter in the cave and light a fire, the savage animals get round to see what is going on. The dog, the horse and the cow traded in their freedom for some food they were offered.’ (CM 1, p. 154)

The statements below, quoted from the French Textbooks, can be given as examples of the ‘Freedom’ and ‘Democracy’ subcategories:

‘We are in 1794. It is late in the Revolution. In all villages in France, a Liberty tree is being planted as the symbol of the new Republic.’ (CM 2, p. 24)

‘Thank you Prince! You gave me back my old physical fitness and freedom.’ (CM 1, p. 141)

Comparison between the Turkish and French textbooks

When the sum of the dissemination of all subcategories are considered, it is observed that the human rights issue is more frequently mentioned in Turkish textbooks (648.9) than in French textbooks (485.8). When a comparison among all course textbooks is made, one notes that the human rights issue is mentioned most frequently in TTB 4 (165.4), TTB 1 (140.3), TTB 5 (126.9) and CP (120.2).

When the subcategories are considered separately, it can be observed that in both French textbooks and Turkish textbooks, the ‘Rights’ subcategory attains the highest position with regard to intensity score. In both countries, this subcategory is followed by the ‘Peace’ and ‘Tolerance’ subcategories. The ‘Democracy’ subcategory is more intense in French textbooks than it is in Turkish textbooks. It can also be observed that the ‘Rights’, ‘Peace’, ‘Freedom’ and ‘Tolerance’ subcategories are given more prominence in Turkish textbooks. Another striking finding is the fact that the ‘Justice’ subcategory is the least present, and at an almost equal rate, in the textbooks of both countries.

Discussion

In this comparative study, the first thing to note is that human rights education is given more prominence in Turkish textbooks than in French textbooks. This largely results from the understanding adopted by the new primary education curriculum and the subsequent obligation to prepare textbooks that take this curriculum into consideration (Ceyhan & Yigit, 2004). In the new primary education curriculum – which was piloted during the 2004-2005 scholastic year and then implemented at the first level of all the primary education schools in Turkey during the following scholastic year – the inclusion in each textbook of the human rights topic as an intermediary discipline was accepted as a principle. One reason for this may be the lack of a discipline on human rights education and related textbooks in the first five years of primary education in Turkey. In other words, the human rights education topic is interspersed in educational curricula and, thus, in textbooks. This situation is explained in the introduction to the new primary education curriculum:

'Curricula attach importance to the improved awareness regarding human rights. Personal inviolability, which is accepted as the essential human right within the philosophical and practical context, takes free-thinking rights, rights for the security of rights, social and economic rights and political rights into consideration. Besides, the curricula do not allow for discrimination against differences such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, nation, origins, political views, social class and physical/mental health states of persons.' (Ministry of National Education, 2005, p. 29)

The most important reason for the lesser inclusion of human rights education in French textbooks may be that human rights education is offered directly in the 'Living Together' courses taught for half an hour each week in the first and second grades; in 'Collective Life' courses taught again for half an hour each week and in 'Civic Education' courses taught for one-and-a-half hours each week in the third, fourth and fifth grades. This means that in French schools, out of a total of 26 hours per week, human rights education is allocated half an hour in the first and second grades and two hours in the third, fourth and fifth grades.

Civic education is the other major area of education at this level. It is during the last years of primary school that a pupil truly learns how to build relationships of mutual respect and thoughtful cooperation with his or her friends and teachers. This leads to an initial awareness of civic values. During regular meetings in the timetable (one hour every fortnight), this type of education tries to inculcate the habit of envisaging the problems posed by living together. In these courses, the primary objective is not the acquisition of knowledge, but the application of learned behaviour. This course has to enable the integration of each student to the classroom and school environment, and the realisation of character development and freedom. Besides, it orients the student to think about abstract problems that come up in school life. This would ensure that students have a clearer consciousness about personal freedom, the pressures of social life and the verification of common values. Through the use of the acquired knowledge, this course encourages the child to expand his/her views of other communities, communes, nations, Europe and the rest of the world. In this course, concepts such as citizenship duties, commonwealth and commitment, rights, authority, legality, justice and democracy are also accentuated. Civic education is not only offered in a single one-hour lesson, but in all fields of school life.

As a melting pot for equal opportunity, school fulfils this role even more so when it builds a shared common culture; this means, first of all, acquiring an essential preliminary common store of knowledge. That is, the mastery of the basic skills of reading, writing and counting – a simple yet demanding priority

which, further down the line, enables college to fulfil its role. The school, as the melting pot for the elaboration of responsible and united citizenship, must encourage the building of shared values by making these values known, understood and practised.

In fact, the underlying guideline behind 'Living Together' is to accompany the child in his/her gradual acceptance of living with other persons and its restrictions, as well as building up his/her personality. In 'Living Together' courses, students begin to accept the evaluation of their own behaviours from the points of view of their friends or in a more general sense. They discover that the constraints of living together are the warranty of their own freedom. They learn to reject violence; to prevent conflicts and disagreements and to fight against the problems confronted in daily life; to approve themselves and others; to respect the rules, others and common life; to interact and communicate with their friends and with adults; to take part in group activities and to take the first step toward citizenship.

It was observed that in both countries, the 'Rights' subcategory was included the most textbooks (except TTB 1). A study conducted by Karaman-Kepenekci (1999), in which she examined high school textbooks, reached a similar conclusion. Along the lines of the present study, in Karaman-Kepenekci's study, the intensity score of the 'Rights' subcategory in Turkish language and literature textbooks was found to be much higher than those of the other subcategories.

The intensity score of the 'Democracy' subcategory comes toward the bottom end in the textbooks of both countries (except in CM 1). This makes it more important for the teacher to discuss at appropriate times in mother tongue courses, which have an artistic dimension as well as a social dimension, what democratic government is. In other words, when texts related to this category are being studied, the significance of democracy, what democratic values mean and the advantages that democratic governments bring to people can be discussed with the assistance of the teacher. In French textbooks, for instance, when the texts 'The Action of the Sage' (CM 2, p. 132), 'I am Writing a Historical Document' (CM 2, p. 24), 'The Prince and The Noble Girls' (CM 1, p. 141) and 'Right to Vote' (CM 2, p. 213) are being studied, the teacher may spend more time on the 'Democracy' subcategory. In Turkish textbooks, especially in TTB 2 (p. 105), when the story 'Democracy is Everywhere' is being studied, the significance of democracy and of living with democratic beliefs at home, at school and at work may be emphasised. By doing so, even though democracy holds a relatively small place in textbooks, one ensures the internalisation of the democracy topic by students.

It emerged from this study that the 'Democracy' subcategory is slightly more intense in French textbooks than it is in Turkish textbooks. This finding may be related to the French Revolution in 1789, when the French citizens rose in rebellion against the oppressive feudal system. This event set the social ground of

democratic life in literary texts, including textbooks. The social and literary impact of this revolution, which paved the way for fundamental concepts such as freedom and democracy, is well known (Kapani, 1981). In most of the textbooks, the protagonists include a prince, princess, king and queen – the underlying implication however is the ‘Democracy’ subcategory. In addition to such stories, the French textbooks include short texts that directly assist students to understand the concept of democracy and its importance.

Although the ‘Freedom’ subcategory does not hold a prominent place in the textbooks of both countries, it is included more in Turkish textbooks. This Turkish prevalence results from the frequent mentioning in all Turkish textbooks, except in TTB 1, of the freedom topic in texts with an ‘Atatürk’ theme which recall the Turkish struggle for independence¹. It can thus be seen that the relative frequent mentioning of the ‘Freedom’ subcategory in Turkish textbooks can be explained with the historical facts that the Turks lived through.

Another striking finding is the fact that ‘Justice’ is the least included subcategory in both Turkish and French textbooks. This result is not consistent with Karaman-Kepenekci’s (1999) high school study, involving Turkish language and literature textbooks, which reported higher levels of inclusion for this subcategory. Still, mother tongue textbooks, in which mostly literary texts are found, may offer nice opportunities for human rights education by including examples of justice-related works from the Turkish and world literature. Although the textbooks examined in this study pay only minimal attention to the ‘Justice’ subcategory, a mother tongue teacher who believes in the importance of justice in society can do much to rectify this seemingly, at least at first, disadvantageous situation. For instance, when studying texts included in this ‘forgotten’ subcategory (e.g., ‘Gift’ [TTB 4, p. 17] and ‘Getting the Best and the Most Favourable’ [TTB 5, p. 77] in Turkish textbooks, and ‘Hameln’ [CE 1, p. 93] and ‘The Musicians of Bremen’ [CE 1, p. 161] in French textbooks), more time can be dedicated and, furthermore, a genuine discussion environment may be created using real-life related events or texts from other books. Students need to realise that, even though their textbooks seem to give little importance to the ‘Justice’ subcategory, it still constitutes a fundamental step in human rights education. Students may be further helped to learn about this subcategory by making use of different tools, such as, role playing, question-answer methods and cartoons (Sever, 2007), pictures, newspaper articles, poems, memoirs, diaries, anecdotes and novels (Binyazar, 1996; Karaman-Kepenekci, 2000). Another possibility would be to ask students questions that will make think, question, criticise, solve problems presented in class, generate authentic thoughts and develop positive relations especially about the ‘Justice’ subcategory (Çayır, 2003; Aslan & Polat, 2007).

It is also worth pointing out that the intensity scores of the ‘Rights’, ‘Peace’ and ‘Tolerance’ subcategories hold the first three ranks in all the textbooks, except in CM 1 and CM 2. The fact that the ‘Peace’ and ‘Tolerance’ subcategories hold the second and third ranks in most textbooks, apart from being an indication of their generally high intensity scores, results from the sufficient inclusion of subjects such as humanitarianism, tolerating and respecting diversity, peace, friendship, tolerance, solidarity and cooperation in the selected textbooks.

The ‘Peace’ subcategory is included more in Turkish textbooks than it is in French textbooks. This can be explained with the inclusion in Turkish textbooks of texts that reflect positive opinions of Atatürk and of the peace protagonists in literary texts within the ‘Atatürk’ theme. In fact, Turkish textbooks frequently quote Atatürk’s ‘Peace at home, peace in the world’ statement and also very frequently emphasise that peace is very important for people, society and the world we live in.

Note

1. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the hands of the World War I allies, and the subsequent plans for its partition, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a Turkish army officer, established a provisional government in Ankara and subsequently defeated the forces sent by the allies. His successful military campaigns led to the liberation of the country and to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.

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APPENDIX A

The Textbooks used in this Study

Turkish Textbooks

1. Erol, A., Bingöl-Özger, M., Yalçın. Ç. S., Demiroglu, R., Irmak, A., & Ceylan, M. (2006) *Primary School Turkish Textbook 1* (in Turkish). Istanbul: Kelebek Matbaacılık.
2. Coskun, O., Emecen, M., Yurt, M., Dedeoglu-Okuyucu, S., & Arhan, S. (2006) *Primary School Turkish Textbook 2* (in Turkish). Istanbul: Ihlas Gazetecilik AS.
3. Ardanuç, K., Çökmez, A., Küçüktepe, B., & Toprak, G. (2006) *Primary School Turkish Textbook 3* (in Turkish). Ankara: Cem Web Ofset.
4. Çanakcı, H., Yardımcı, S., Yetimoglu, E. B., Tasdemir, K., & Özyaykut, S. (2006) *Primary School Turkish Textbook 4* (in Turkish). Istanbul: Star Medya Yayıncılık AS.
5. Gören, N., Yener, Z., Ildeniz, A., Aksal, H. S., & Sarıöz, N. (2006) *Primary School Turkish Textbook 5* (in Turkish). Ankara: Pelin Ofset.

French Textbooks

1. Camo, M., & Pla, R. (2006) *Je Lis avec Dagobert, CP*. Paris: Hachette Livre.
2. Assuied, R., Buselli, D., & Ragot, A. M. (2006) *Parcours, Maîtrise de la Langue, CE 1*. Paris: Hatier.
3. Lucas, J. L., & Lucas, J. C. (2005) *A Portée de Mots, CE 2*. Paris: Hachette Livre.
4. Schöttke, M. (2006) *Facettes Littérature / Ecriture Observation Réfléchie de la Langue, CM 1*. Paris: Hatier.
5. Léon, R. (2005) *Français Des Outils, pour Dire, Lire et Ecrire, CM 2*. Paris: Hachette Livre.

WORKSHOP REPORT

IMPLEMENTING UNGEI IN THE MENA REGION

RONALD G. SULTANA

Introduction

The Girls' Education Initiative (GEI) is one of the main flagships of UNICEF, and it is fitting that the first publication in the Learning Series on educational innovation in the MENA region – an initiative of the UNICEF Regional Office in Amman – focused on one country's achievements in implementing GEI. The study *The Girls' Education Initiative in Egypt* (see Sultana, 2008) was launched in Cairo on 26 February 2008 in the presence of several local dignitaries and educators, girls who had benefited from the initiative, as well as guests from UNICEF country offices from several states and territories in the region. While paying homage to Egypt's exemplary efforts, UNICEF's Regional director, Ms Sigrid Kaag, acknowledged that much is being done by the region to close the gender gap in access to schooling. Statistics suggest, however, that the battle to ensure gender parity is far from over, and that countries in the region have much to learn from each other in their attempt to understand and combat gender-based inequality.

It is with this in mind that UNICEF education officers and representatives from Ministries of Education from eight states and territories in the region met on the day following the launch to present an update of the progress they are achieving in addressing the gender gap in their own countries. Media representatives from the region were also present in order to become better acquainted with the gender challenge for education systems, and to relay some of the main conclusions to a wider audience.

There are, of course, significant differences in contexts that make the struggle for gender equity particularly challenging for some. Four of the countries/territories represented at the meeting (Algeria, Iraq, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and South Sudan) are marked by recent or continuing conflict, which has made access to schooling for girls more challenging. Other countries, such as Lebanon and Tunisia, have made giant strides in ensuring equality of access and in some cases of outcomes, largely due to an early history of legislative measures that ensured women's rights. This is in contrast to Iraq and Yemen, for instance, where progress has been halting and slow, and where some of the achievements have been eaten away as promising initiatives lost their momentum and support.

Despite these significant differences, it is nevertheless useful to focus on all eight countries and territories in order to tease out approaches and strategies that help us understand and tackle the gender gap. This comparative exercise should help in providing inspiration and insight to the region and beyond.

Barriers to enrolment

The barriers to the enrolment of girls in schools are similar across all the contexts represented at the workshop. It is also clear that they are multifaceted and often intertwined. Some of these barriers are based on material circumstances, while others are more cultural in nature, though in reality both material and cultural issues come together in ways that reinforce each other to keep girls out of school.

Poverty is a leading cause, pushing parents to choose sons over daughters when they cannot afford to send all their offspring to school due to the direct (tuition and fees) or indirect costs (i.e., cost of clothing, shoes, stationery, personal expenses allowances and other requirements, as well as ‘opportunity costs’ that represent loss of potential family revenue). This is the case with Egypt, for instance, which, under economic pressure to exercise fiscal restraint, introduced a fee for public schooling in an attempt at cost-recovery. While small, the fee has acted as a deterrent for poor families, especially since these tend to have several school-age children.

Closely linked to the issue of poverty is the lack of employment opportunities for women in several of the countries in the region. This reinforces the notion that rates-of-return for investment in education are low for the individual and their families alike. In Egypt, for instance, basic education is seen by many poor families to be not only costly, but also as yielding weak, if not negative, labour market returns. Similarly, in Algeria young female university graduates are expected to return to their rural origins, but here they find it difficult if not impossible to gain employment, leading to questions about the value of education. Across the region – including in Tunisia, for instance – high graduate unemployment is challenging hitherto accepted notions that education leads to social and economic mobility, eroding community confidence in schooling which, in some cases, is in danger of being seen as a costly investment with few returns, particularly for girls.

Decreasing national wealth can have its toll on educational services, with cuts in school-building programmes, for instance, resulting in girls having to walk unsafe distances to get to a classroom. This is especially true in those cases where distances between villages and hamlets are significant, such as in Egypt

and Yemen, for instance. Families tend to be especially protective toward daughters, restricting their movement in order to avoid unsupervised contact with men, especially when the community they belong to is in conflict with others. This is the case with Algeria and Iraq, though some of the remote hamlets in Egypt, where blood feuds between communities are not uncommon, have also refused to send girls to distant schools, fearing for their safety. It is well known that girls tend to bear the heavier brunt when their communities are embroiled in conflict or other forms of emergencies. Gender inequality is exacerbated, social norms break down, domestic violence surges, and girls and women often have to carry the heaviest burden of day-to-day family life during crises. In South Sudan, the gender gap not surprisingly rose to an all-time high during the war and its immediate aftermath.

Culturally sanctioned gender roles are another leading cause of gender inequities in access to schooling. These often entrap girls in roles that exclude them from school, such as when they are obliged to help out in household chores, or to enter the child labour force. Several countries in the region noted that such culturally embedded attitudes are strongest in the rural areas, where girls are expected to avoid contact with men, especially when they reach puberty. This is even true of countries such as Lebanon, where girls in urban centres not only have guaranteed access to schooling at all levels, but have in fact overtaken their male counterparts when it comes to successful outcomes in examinations. The situation for the girls in some of the more remote, rural areas is quite different.

Entrenched cultural traditions can also serve to channel girls into early motherhood, leading to early school-leaving and to the reproduction of illiteracy: in a self-feeding vicious circle, uneducated girls are less likely to have the power to negotiate relationships, and therefore to delay sex, and to have safe sex. Children whose mothers have no education are more than twice as likely to be out of school as children whose mothers have some education. Adult female illiteracy is in fact a major problem even in those countries that have attained gender parity, so that efforts such as those exercised by Lebanon in order to provide literacy classes for women in rural areas can be greatly beneficial to the cause of girls' education. In some of the countries in the region, such as in Yemen, for instance, and in remote and rural hamlets in Egypt and Algeria, girls may be forced by their families into early marriage for cultural and economic reasons – as early as at age 12 and sometimes before – thereby losing out on formal education, on their income-generating potential, and their ability to make informed decisions about their lives. Tunisia stands out in the region as having promulgated legislation that does not permit marriage before the age of 18.

A further set of reasons to explain why girls fail to have access to formal education, or why they drop out soon after they start attending class, revolves

around the notion of ‘girl-friendly’ schooling. In many cases, the curricula in use often fail to connect with girls’ experiences or ways of knowing, with textbooks representing urban lifestyles that do not reflect rural realities. Teachers use dull and dreary pedagogies that lead to disaffected learners who lose all motivation to attend. Schools are often girl-repulsive in other ways too, such as when they do not have separate sanitation facilities, for instance, or when male teachers and classmates harass, bully or even abuse female pupils.

The case of Lebanon highlights the fact that even when gender parity in participation rates is formally attained, the struggle for equity is not over. Even if girls are doing better than boys at school at all levels, with 51% of university students being female, there is still a big gap when it comes to gender representation in social, political and economic affairs. Women are practically absent from parliament, and there are still discriminatory civil and religious laws and precepts in force that work against the interests of women, in some cases severely curtailing citizenship rights. While an increasing number of women can be found in faculties of science, mathematics, medicine, law and business, the majority are still enrolled in the social sciences and courses leading to the nurturing professions, which tend to be seen as predominantly feminine occupations and which offer lower economic returns. The main input of Lebanese women remains in the informal economy, a sector that affords little if any protection against exploitative working conditions. Such trends are also visible in other countries in the region.

Strategies to overcome the gender gap

The participants at the workshop also gave an account of some of the strategies they are using in order to address and overcome the gender gap. There are similarities here that suggest a convergence around policies that can be usefully applied in – and adapted to – different contexts in the region, and in some cases beyond. The potential of these strategies depends on a number of factors, including, for instance, the strength of civil society, the support of local and international donors to kick start initiatives, and the availability of seed bed models that provide legitimacy and credibility to alternative schooling practices, such as one-classroom or community schools.

Egypt stands out in the region as the country that has woven together a range of interrelated initiatives in ways that facilitate access to schooling for girls, particularly for those living in remote and rural areas in some of its poorest governorates. Faced with a gender gap of over 15% in some cases, a joint NCCM (National Council for Childhood and Motherhood) and UNICEF initiative

embarked on a project that drew on Ministry of Education and national and international donor support in order to build one-classroom schools in seven governorates, providing quality education to primary age girls that have hitherto, due to poverty, ignorance, prejudice, early marriage, fear or some other reason, been kept away from formal learning.

These schools are built in villages and hamlets, as close as possible to the girls' residences, thus overcoming many of the reasons that deprive girls of education. The schools are built after intense community mobilisation and participation, in order to ensure that they are not seen as an alien implant, but rather as an expression of the community's own resolve to provide education to their daughters. The schedule of these girl-friendly schools allows girls to carry out their morning chores at home before going to class, in this way addressing some other concerns of those who tie girls too closely and too narrowly to the household economy.

The schools are also special in that, unlike government schools, they are completely free – parents do not have to pay a tuition fee, nor do they have to subsidise the costs for stationery or other educational resources. In addition, the initiative creates employment opportunities for young women: girls are taught by female facilitators, who hail from the same hamlet or from the mother village. The classrooms have only girls, and when they do accept boys, girls have to enjoy at least 75% majority. This too goes a long way in persuading parents to let their girls go. The fact that girls are fed at school, and take home with them rations for the whole family can break down any remaining resistance. Most importantly, these schools do not compromise on quality when it comes to the educational experiences they offer: GEI schools in Egypt privilege active and joyful learning in the context of multi-grade classrooms, where children are encouraged to express themselves through all sorts of ways, and to be creative and self-directed in their approach to learning.

Other countries present at the workshop reported using similar if less comprehensive strategies, in some cases coming up with pioneering ideas that hold a great deal of promise. We can represent the strategies and initiatives under five main headings:

1. Firstly are those sets of strategies that have **promulgated laws** to ensure that gender rights are respected within a comprehensive legal framework that guarantees citizenship rights. Tunisia's case is particularly instructive in this regard: while not being unique in having such laws, it is exceptional in its success in implementing them. Here the focus is on every citizen's right to education, with three tools being employed to ensure that such rights are respected. These are: (i) free education; (ii) obligation (with fines being

imposed on parents who do not send their children to school); and (iii) equal opportunities for all. Over the years, Tunisia has put its educational ‘infrastructure’ in place in order to ensure that such laws are implemented. Schools have to be built close to communities, and never more than three kilometres away. As noted earlier, marriage is not permitted before age 18, while children cannot be employed before age 15. There is thus a cumulative effect, with legal provisions comprehensively and strategically integrated together in ways that provide a climate conducive to girls’ participation in schooling. Tunisia has also been careful to ensure sufficient budgetary allocations for education, so that policies can be operationalised. Despite the political restrictions and limitations that it is constrained to work under, Palestine too has given a great deal of attention to gender issues in education, and has made important steps forward in formalising its commitments by integrating UNGEI in its five-year sector plan.

2. A second set of strategies that workshop participants reported concerns the increasing attention being given to the collection of **sound empirical data** that help a country understand the extent and nature of the challenge in relation to girls’ access to schooling. Data in many countries in the region are unreliable and rarely timely or transparent, limiting their usefulness to the policy-making community. A case in point is Egypt, where the existence of several hamlets was not even known by the governorates who were, in principle, responsible for them, and who therefore were not aware of the number of girls who were not attending schools. Such a challenge was only overcome due to household surveys carried out by voluntary task forces who were close enough to the communities to be able to collect information about out-of-school girls by knocking at each door in every hamlet. Other countries, such as Yemen, may have basic data, but this is not always gender-disaggregated, thus limiting its usefulness.

Clearly, the issue of comprehensive and disaggregated data is very important in order to gauge the extent of the problem, and to see what some of the underlying causes might be. The topography of the challenge in Yemen is revealed, for instance, when one considers the fact that female literacy rates are 59.5% in urban areas, but plunge to less than half – 24.3% – in rural areas. In South Sudan, any strategy to address girls’ education has to take into account the significant regional differences that the statistics point out to, with some communities having twice the number of out-of-school girls than others. A sound Education Management Information System (EMIS) – such as the one developed in Palestine, for instance (see Sultana, 2002) – can be invaluable in

generating the indicators needed to verify whether gender (and other forms of) equity is being attained and sustained over time. Such an EMIS would provide indicators regarding such crucial issues as enrolment rates, repetition and transition rates, drop-out rates and so on, thus ensuring targeted monitoring and evidence-based policy prioritisation. It is thanks to the ready availability of statistics that Palestine could carry out a study to review existing measures and indicators on gender parity in education and how to translate the key strategies for scaling up girls' education into specific actions that are applicable and relevant to the local context and open to replication and generalisation. A number of countries in the region – such as Iraq, for instance – expressed the need for an information system that could guide efforts in supporting access to schooling for girls. Others – such as Tunisia and Lebanon – have made important strides forward in this regard, and have a great deal of experience to share with neighbouring countries.

3. Thirdly, some countries have developed **advocacy programmes** to ensure that policy-makers and communities become more aware of the importance of girls' education. Yemen, for instance, has adopted a multi-sectoral approach, with the High Council of Motherhood and Childhood, several Ministries, NGOs, and the media joining forces in order to raise awareness. This alliance building has also included an Artists' Forum, while entrepreneurs have launched a Business Partnership for Girls' Education. School social workers have received training in girls' education issues. At governorate level, Girls' Education Co-Ordination Councils ensure that the different initiatives and input come together in ways that enhance their effectiveness. Some innovative but simple and inexpensive consciousness-raising strategies are being implemented, such as the printing of messages supporting girls' education on utility bills. South Sudan has also developed smart and innovative advocacy strategies to encourage girls' enrolment in education. The PAGE campaign (Promotion and Advocacy for Girls' Education) has brought together women's groups, youth groups, and a whole range of opinion leaders to co-ordinate community dialogue in favour of gender-friendly social change. Particularly promising is the GEM strategy (Girls' Education Movement), which uses child-to-child methodology in order for girls to persuade other girls to start attending school. There are GEM clubs in ten states in South Sudan, with the experience showing that children are ready to listen to each other and to act as mentors for each other. The country is also making good use of the media, with children's radio programmes promoting the 'Go to School Initiative', supported by government and UNICEF alike. Gender as an issue has been mainstreamed in teacher training courses, in order to ensure that all teachers

are aware of the challenges that girl-friendly schooling represents. Curricula – and in some cases textbooks – have been modified so that they are more gender-sensitive.

4. Fourthly, countries represented at the regional workshop described efforts to **modify the school offer** in ways that encourage and facilitate girls' attendance. In Yemen, double shift schooling gives girls the opportunity to do their household chores without having to choose between family demands and education. In Egypt, schools are sensitive to the locale's cultures and needs, and operate on a flexible schedule in response to community economic and seasonal rhythms, allowing girls to accompany their mothers on market days, and during harvest time. Many are making efforts to introduce as many girl-friendly school aspects as possible. These range from having girls' only classrooms (as in Egypt and Yemen), or classrooms where girls are in a majority (as in Egypt), to having female teachers and administrators. In Yemen, special incentives have been put into place to attract female contract teachers, and to develop school administrative styles that are more girl-friendly. Other countries/territories (such as Egypt, South Sudan) are making a difference by offering separate bathroom facilities for girls – a simple yet effective way of ensuring parental support to the schooling of their daughters. The schooling offer for girls is made more attractive to parents when, as in Egypt and Yemen, school fees are waived, and when, as in Egypt and South Sudan, food is provided for students when they attend classes. In Egypt, a World Food Programme (WFP) service is in place to also supply food rations to those families that send their girls to school on a regular basis. South Sudan has roped in NGO support to offer scholarships to girls so that they can continue with their education beyond primary schooling, and has been especially innovative in providing second-chance education through Alternative Learning Programmes to over-age girls who missed out on their basic education. Iraq too has opted for an Accelerated Learning model for out-of-school girls who failed to get primary education due to the prevailing situation in the country. A six-year programme has been compressed into three years, and is already being delivered to 18,000 students, opening up the pathway to secondary schooling. Fifty thousand students – most of whom are girls – are being targeted by this project. Other innovative ways of repackaging the school offer in order to make education more accessible to girls is through the use of supplementary learning materials, a strategy that Iraq learnt from Palestine's use of simple but effective distance learning strategies to ensure that children remained engaged in education in conflict-ridden Hebron during the second *Intifada* (see Sultana 2003; also Sultana, 2006).

5. Fifthly, all the countries spoke about the need to develop joint strategies with a whole **range of partners** in order to chalk up greater successes in attracting and keeping girls in schools. These partnerships typically include local NGOs, community volunteer groups, national and international donors, the UN family (especially WFP, UNDP, UNCHR, UNRWA, ILO), and various representatives from civil society. A key issue and challenge here is to ensure that the partners do come together in ways that ensure that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Several of the countries present emphasised the importance of having national networks and alliances to avoid fragmented efforts, and of having an integrated approach pulling all initiatives together to avoid overlap, to ensure efficiency, and to enhance sustainability in the scaling up phase. Yemen, for instance, established a Girls' Education Sector in 2005, with a view to ensuring coherence in strategy development. In November 2006, UNICEF and UNESCO offices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, together with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, created a task force to start the process of integrating UNGEI into the Palestinian education system. The Task force also includes the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Women's Research and Documentation Centre, and the Palestinian National Commission for Education, Culture and Science.

Interestingly enough, while some countries – like Iraq – emphasised the negative role that can be played by religious factions in reinforcing stereotypical attitudes toward girls, others noted that religion could be an emancipatory force that could and indeed should be used to facilitate girls' access to schooling. It was pointed out, for instance, that in the case of the lead religion in the region, Islam, there is a clear obligation to give an education to one and all, and that education is formally acknowledged as a process that should support individual growth from the cradle to the grave. In Yemen, mosques and religious men, such as sheikhs and imams, have an important role to play in relation to girls' education due to their influential role in the communities they serve. Parents – particularly those in rural areas – are more readily convinced if the messages about girls' right to education are given by religious leaders. In recognition of this, a training programme is being offered to imams, in collaboration with the Al Waqf Ministry, in order to ensure that their influence can shape community's attitudes in ways that work in favour of girls' interests.

Remaining challenges

A key issue that emerged from the discussions among the workshop participants relates to the **sustainability of gains** made in ensuring girls' access to schooling. One of the success stories in the region in this regard is Tunisia, a country that has managed to maintain its commitment to gender equity since it gained independence more than four decades ago. Here, however, neo-liberal agendas are becoming increasingly attractive, with an increasing tendency for the state to restrict its hitherto generous education budget, and to encourage private sector investment. International experience with such a strategy tells us that increasing the share of private ownership of the formal education sector can, in some cases, lead to excellent schools for a minority, and 'sink schools' for the majority, with the poorer and less privileged social and gender groups losing out. Sustainability is also difficult when investment in schooling fails to give economic and social returns to individuals, their families and their communities. In Algeria, for instance, the correlation between education and economic growth, the distribution of incomes and the reduction of poverty is weak, especially for women. Twenty-four percent of unemployed persons are females, while the corresponding figure for males is 12.5%. Furthermore, 20.5% of unemployed with secondary level education are female, while only 6% are males. Yemen's positive discrimination policy to ensure an employment quota for women is a wise acknowledgement of the fact that educational gains have to be translated into increased economic opportunities for women. Failure to achieve this can lead to situations as those experienced in South Sudan, where women are almost invisible in both government and private employment, leading to a serious lack of role models for girls.

For those countries that have attained gender parity or are well on their way to doing so – such as Algeria, Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia among others – the challenge has shifted from a preoccupation with access to a concern about quality education for all. In some cases, the concern for quality education for all seems to have dislodged the attention somewhat toward another dimension of gender equity, namely the under-performance of boys compared to girls. Algeria, Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia were among the countries that provided some evidence to underscore the fact that boys, when compared to females from their own age cohort, are more likely to repeat a class, to take up jobs when they attend secondary schooling, to drop out of school, and to perform less successfully in examinations at all levels, including baccalaureate and higher education.

Here, the Child-Friendly School (CFS) framework can serve as a useful normative target, guiding programming and resource allocation, including training. For individual schools and communities it can be both a goal and a tool

for improving quality through self-assessment, school development planning and management, as well as a way of mobilising the community around education and child rights. One of the strengths of the CFS framework, which was referred to by several of the workshop participants, is that it comprehensively addresses a whole range of issues raised in the discussion (including links between schools and the community, emphasis on joyful and effective learning, and care and protection of learners) without losing sight of the fact that gender issues should not just be a transversal theme, but need to be focused on specifically at all levels of the system.

The struggle for gender equity in the region is clearly multifaceted and often vibrant, engaging a whole range of innovative strategies within and outside of schools. Some important gains have been registered – and the publication on the GEI in Egypt bears testimony to that. It is clear, though, that much remains to be done. Achievements have to be consolidated and sustained over time. Every step forward that is successfully taken reveals new challenges that have to be overcome. In facing up to these, a regional dimension can add value to the efforts of individual countries, not least by facilitating the sharing of examples of successful practice, which may have relevance to different if overlapping contexts. In pursuing and persevering in this struggle, the region has to keep its eyes firmly fixed on one of the most worthy of all causes: the preservation and enhancement of the dignity of the girl child.

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CONFERENCE REPORT

THIRD MESCE CONFERENCE IN MALTA

MJES EDITORIAL BOARD

The third conference of the Mediterranean Society of Comparative Education (MESCE) took place at the New Dolmen Hotel, Qawra, Malta, from 11-13 May 2008. Over hundred-and-thirty educational researchers from various parts of the Mediterranean and beyond participated at the conference¹.

There were two broad conference themes at the Malta conference, namely, 'Intercultural Dialogue Within and Across Nations' and 'Education in the Mediterranean'. Papers selected revolved around such themes as: 'Education in the Mediterranean', 'North-South, South-North, East-West, West-East Relations in Education', 'Migration – Inward and Outward (Diaspora)', 'Post-colonial Education', 'Religion and Education', 'Multi-ethnicity and Education', 'Interethnic Education', 'Intercultural Dialogue Within and Across Nations' and 'Education for Sustainability in the Mediterranean and Beyond'.

The keynote speakers were: Ronald Sultana (founding and current editor of the *Mediterranean Journal of Education Studies* and director of the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research) and Isabelle Calleja from the University of Malta, Zelia Gregoriou from the University of Cyprus, Andre' Elias Mazawi from the University of British Columbia (Canada), Paolo Landri from the University of Naples Federico II (Italy), and Mark Ginsburg (co-editor of *Comparative Education Review*) from the Academy for Educational Development (USA). Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo from the University of Malta were the convenors.

The conference was officially opened by the University of Malta's Pro-Rector, Professor Alfred Vella who underlined the appropriateness of Malta as the venue for this conference given that 'The country has a history which reflects the cultural hybridity that characterizes this region. Our language is very much a reflection of this, being a derivative of Arabic with a strong influx of romance words'. He expressed the hope that the Malta meeting of the Mediterranean Society of Comparative Education would showcase some of the valuable educational research that is taking place in the Region. 'Hopefully this will continue to place education high on the priority list of international institutions within and outside the region'. He also hopes that 'this research will give the Mediterranean region greater visibility in the comparative education literature on a par with such regions as Latin America and East Asia'. Adila Kreso, from the University of Sarajevo

(Bosnia and Herzegovina), addressed the opening session as outgoing MESCE President. In her address, Professor Kreso underlined the most significant activities and developments during her term as President, particularly the organisation of the World Congress of Comparative Education at her home university in the Bosnian capital. MESCE served as the host regional organisation for this world congress. It will serve as the co-operating regional society for the second time running when the congress takes place in Istanbul in 2010 organised by the Turkish Comparative Education Society. Giovanni Pampanini, who launched MESCE at its first meeting in Catania in 2004, provided one of the speeches at the conference's official opening session. Dottore Pampanini underlined some of the themes the society could take up in the forthcoming years.

The first keynote speech, delivered on the conference's second day (the first in which parallel sessions as well as keynote plenary sessions were held) was by Ronald Sultana, Professor of Comparative Education and Sociology of Education at the University of Malta. His talk considered some of the promises and challenges in doing comparative education in the Mediterranean region and argued that comparative education goes – or should go – beyond the positivist concern with comparing 'like with like'. Rather, he argued, it is more about finding a standpoint from where educational and related social phenomena can be seen from a different perspective, generating a deeper understanding of dynamics, as well as fresh insights. Professor Sultana feels that the adoption of a Mediterranean lens facilitates this process, though there are distinctive challenges that arise. Building on 15 years experience in carrying out and coordinating comparative education projects in the region, Sultana outlined both the promise and pitfalls of the endeavour, and proposed an agenda for future research.

The second keynote speaker was the Palestinian scholar, André Elias Mazawi, from the University of British Columbia in Canada. Addressing the issue of 'Whither an Arab "Knowledge Society"? Regionalism, Nation-States and Educational Research for Development', Professor Mazawi provided a critical discussion of the intersection between notions of a 'knowledge society' and 'development' in the Arab region. He tackled the notion of development in relation to configurations of power – national, regional and global – over 'the backdrop of struggles which occur over what is defined as knowledge and what is valued as development'. Professor Mazawi unpacked these power configurations for educational policies and school reforms implemented, from 1990 onward, across the Arab region in the wake of the Gulf war. He then argued in favour of building 'an Arab knowledge society' to 'clarify how competing development agendas are politically constructed and enacted, and why educational development emerged

into a contentious and contested terrain'. He concluded by drawing out the ramifications of these multi-layered dynamics and arguing 'for a re-positioning and re-focusing of educational research in the Arab region, with particular attention to educational research as a leverage for local, regional and global intercultural engagements'.

Paolo Landri, from the Institute of Research on Population and Social Policies at the National Research Council in Italy (CNR-IRPPS) and contract professor at the University of Naples Federico II, was the third keynote speaker on the second day. He analysed the role of educational policies within the framework of the southern welfare state model. He provided an empirical analysis of the educational policies in four countries that adopt the southern welfare model, namely Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy, and do so within the 'perspective of *lifelong learning policy* and the realization of the wider Lisbon strategy'. The speaker identified some common characteristics of these countries and some differences in their institutional models, and then explored some of the reasons for these difficulties. Due consideration was given to the influence of socio-economic and territorial inequalities. He finally dwelt on the 'institutional isomorphism' caused by the European lifelong learning policy.

Zelia Gregoriou, from the University of Cyprus, provided the fourth keynote talk: 'Blinding the Intercultural Gaze: From the "Culture of the Other" to the Thick Interpretation of Educational Processes of Othering'. She discussed the conceptual conflation of 'Other' as an ethical term with 'other' as a cultural (essentialist) category in intercultural education. Particular references are made to the orientalist pre-occupation with migrant students as 'natives' (potential objects of study, recognition, representation) and autochthonous students as self-reflecting subjects. Professor Gregoriou argued that many EU member states 'seem to have anchored their vision of intercultural migrant education in, first, the recognition *of* the cultures which the migrants 'bring' with them and, second, the recognition of the European values *by* migrants'. She argued that both autochthonous students and school cultures were exempt from such an approach. She described an attempt to apply Geertz's 'thick interpretation' to an analysis of critical events occurring in classrooms 'hosting' migrant students. 'Instead of re-framing "others" as objects of ethnographic desire, thick interpretation focuses on processes of othering and the intensifications of borders which take place as racialised hierarchies and norms of excellence become disturbed'.

The conference's fifth keynote talk, delivered on the conference's third and final day, was by Mark Ginsburg of the US based Academy for Educational Development. The talk focused on 'Global Discourses and Educational Reform in Egypt: The Case of Active-Learning Pedagogies'. Professor Ginsburg provided an analysis of 'the global discourses (words and practices) that helped to place

notions of constructivism and active-learning pedagogies on the international education reform agenda, particularly since 1990'. He examined the interaction of these discourses with initiatives, for educational reform in Egypt, engaged in by Egyptian education officials and educators at the time the research was carried out. He argued 'that comparative and international educators need to interrogate the variety of discourses operating at both the local/national and global levels as well as to examine the complex interactions that occur across these levels'.

The sixth keynote talk was delivered on the final afternoon of the conference just before its conclusion. The speaker was Isabelle Calleja from the University of Malta's Department of International Relations. Her talk focused on Cyprus and the topic of 'Education and the Teaching of History in the Light of Encouraging Conflict Resolution on the hitherto Divided Island'. Looking at the different interpretations of history in Cyprus, Dr Calleja examined how the literature has affected the way history had been taught in the North and South of the Island. She highlighted two approaches: 'An earlier one where in the long period of the geopolitical transformation of Cyprus, education served the national, political and ideological division of the island and stressed ethnic differences, and images of the other as the enemy'. The second referred to 'a later and more contemporary phase, which attempts to use the teaching of history as a tool to further reconciliation and understanding across the geographical and cultural divide of the green line'. The speaker argued that the changing demands of both domestic and external interests determined these approaches in so far as the writing and teaching of history are concerned.

The third MESCE conference drew participation from numerous countries. There were Algerian, American, Bosnian, Croatian, Cypriot, English, Estonian, Finnish, Greek, Italian, Palestinian, Maltese, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Turkish participants. A new MESCE executive committee was elected at this conference, with the two conference convenors, Peter Mayo and Carmel Borg, now occupying the roles of President and Secretary General respectively. Ronald Sultana was also appointed by the executive board as Honorary Member of MESCE. Morocco was chosen as the venue for the next conference.

Note

1. The full programme could be accessed at: <http://www.educ.um.edu.mt/mesce/cprogramme.html>

BOOK REVIEW

Carmel Cefai (2008) *Promoting Resilience in the Classroom: A Guide for Developing Pupils' Emotional and Cognitive Skills*, London, Jessica Kingsley, 175 pp., ISBN: 9871843105657.

One of the important principles that has been highlighted in more recent research in the human sciences is that the way one perceives or interprets one's experience has a greater impact on people than the factual experience itself. And so researchers in various fields have been trying to reconstruct human experience in an optimistic frame that supports the flourishing of human life and endeavour.

This has also happened in the area of research on the development of children and youth faced with a series of adversities, from deprived and poor families and communities to abusive treatment and traumatic experiences. Several longitudinal studies have shown that the majority of youth, even from disadvantaged situations, actually 'do somehow manage to make decent lives for themselves' (Benard, 2004, p. 7). This has given rise to the idea of moving away from a negative focus on deficit or 'risk' factors that lead to failure to the more positive focus on 'protective' factors that lead to *resilience*.

This is the background for the recent book written by Carmel Cefai on *Promoting Resilience in the Classroom*. Part 1 of the three parts of the book carries the idea forward to that of 'resilience for all':

'Factors which benefit children in adversity, such as caring and supportive relationships, an accessible and meaningful curriculum, and active participation in the classroom, have been found to benefit normally developing children as well ... On the other hand ... the fundamental systems that generally foster competence in the classroom, such as caring classroom relationships, positive academic beliefs and high expectations, operate in adverse circumstances as well, protecting the child or counteracting the threats to development ...' (pp. 24-25)

This book is meant for education practitioners. It notes that success in the face of adversity is supported through the interaction of three main categories of protective factors, namely 'the dispositional attributes of the individual (social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose); the family, particularly in the early years; and external support systems such as the school' (p. 22). However, the focus of the whole book is on the fact that 'schools are one of the few institutions available to all children and young people, (and thus) they are ideally placed to reach vulnerable pupils' (p. 23).

Cefai explicitly emphasises the impact of school context in contrast to the individual student's attributes: 'Educational resilience in this book is construed as a dynamic, contextual phenomenon rather than a fixed individual characteristic' (p. 26). This stance is maintained throughout the book through a profuse citation of examples of classroom contexts that support healthy individual learning and development rather than on the strengths of individual students.

Classroom processes are at the centre of this book: the author proposes the development of a 'caring, inclusive, pro-social, learning-centred community' as the main resilience-enhancing context. And this is not mere talk. The book is based on evidence collected by the author during his doctoral research in what he termed a naturalistic study of classrooms in Malta. He observed a number of classrooms in primary schools from different parts of Malta over an extended period of participant observation. Moreover, these classes had been chosen from a larger sample as examples of good practice characterised by pupil pro-social behaviour, autonomy and problem solving processes, and motivation and engagement in classroom activities. The accounts described in the book were thus the fruit of a blend of theory and practice.

The findings of the study are reported in Part 2 of the book with four central chapters focusing successively on: (i) caring teacher-pupil relationships; (ii) caring and supportive peer relationships; (iii) collaborative learning; and (iv) empowerment of children to make their own choices and take responsibility for their own learning. Here teachers can find a wealth of accounts of positive experiences of primary teachers which can support their current good practice or stimulate improvement toward more healthy classrooms. The following illustrations are taken from each of the four chapters:

We like her because she is always joking with us ... explains everything so that we can understand ... When I make a mistake she does not shout at me ... Even if we are many pupils, the teacher still takes care of us. (A pupil in Ms Maria's class)

It is a norm in my class that when somebody is finished with his or her work, s/he asks his/her peers if they need any help ... In this way they get used to consider the needs of others. (Ms Sunta)

In Ms Bernie's classroom it was possible for all pupils to get recognition for their effort and success. ... All pupils had their strengths and skills and they were provided with opportunities to exercise and use these assets while gaining recognition for their accomplishments and improvement. Besides academic skills, these included drama, singing, art, dancing, football, woodwork, computer drawings, story telling and sharing knowledge in one area or another. (Author's observation)

I like to work in groups because it is like you are building something, one knows something, another something else ... and also because in a group you share and help others and you feel happy helping and doing group work. (A pupil in Ms Gertrude's class)

Apart from quotations, there are 14 'case studies' or accounts of good practice spread throughout the book, such as 'Dudu the collaborative centipede', which provide ideas on how to enhance the resilience in the classroom. In addition, Cefai also draws on the relevant literature to give suggestions – conveniently provided in 19 separate boxes, again spread throughout the book – for enhancing the classroom context, such as 'The caring teacher's framework'. The book is concluded with a practical chapter dedicated to action-research planning for improvement of classroom resilience. It also has questions for reflection and references for further reading for each chapter. Indeed, the major strength of the book lies in its practical application to the classroom context.

This book has proposed an innovative view on classroom practice for teachers that embraces a wide holistic perspective on children's experience in school, emphasising support for the development of social and emotional competence as important dimensions to bolster children's resilience and learning. It is a practical answer to the concerns about issues of children's disaffection with schooling and the development of children's emotional intelligence. It should serve as a valuable resource to schools in their efforts to enhance the healthy development and resilience of their pupils, particularly the more vulnerable ones, and to promote more positive behaviour and active engagement in the classroom.

This book is also a good example of the blending of theory and practice. While being firmly based on current thinking and research around human resilience, it is very close to classroom realities. This is along the lines of the series of publications to which the book belongs, namely the 'Innovative learning for all' series edited by Paul Cooper, but adds a Maltese flavour to the caring and educational resilience literature.

Reference

Benard, B. (2004) *Resiliency: What we have Learned*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

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Notes for Contributors

The *MJES* publishes original contributions in the field of education that focus on Mediterranean countries and the diaspora of Mediterranean people worldwide. To ensure the highest standards all submitted articles are scrutinised by at least two independent referees before being accepted for publication. Prospective authors are advised to contact the editor before submitting their manuscript. Published papers become the copyright of the journal.

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