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**Dialogue & Argumentation
for Cultural Literacy Learning
in Schools**

Policy Briefing

Developing Education Policies in Europe to Enhance Cultural Literacy

Executive Summary

Europe needs education policies that seek to advance intercultural dialogue in a way which reflects the super-diversity of today's Europe, support respect for diversity and difference, and enable the growth of young people's identities. The DIALLS project seeks to respond to these needs by developing the concept and idea of cultural literacy and creating a Cultural Literacy Learning Programme for young people. For DIALLS, cultural literacy means a social practice that is inherently dialogic and based on learning and gaining knowledge through empathetic, tolerant and inclusive interaction with others. DIALLS' qualitative content and concept analysis of European and national education policy documentation has revealed that cultural interactions are often narrowly framed ignoring dialogue as a process of learning and empathy as its core disposition. Based on our analysis, we recommend that education policymakers be more precise and specific with culture-related concepts and better reflect increasing pluralism in Europe. We recommend that cultural literacy is used as a conceptual and practical means in education policy documentation to deal with differences and cultural interactions.





The need for cultural literacy in today's Europe

As a part of a globalized world, 21st century Europe has faced various challenges, ranging from climate change to humanitarian tragedies, from political upheaval and extremist attacks to social adversities within, at and beyond its borders. Simultaneously, most European societies have changed rapidly through cultural diversification and the recognition of and greater acceptance of difference in its many forms.

European societies have commonly recognized that the diversification of societies is enriching yet at the same time, challenging if the interaction of different peoples, cultures and individuals is not based on mutual understanding and respect. Therefore, various political actors in Europe, such as national governments, the Council of Europe and the European Union, have promoted intercultural dialogue as a policy to enhance “an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and

What is cultural literacy?

The concept of cultural literacy has been discussed in academia since the 1980s. In this early scholarly literature (e.g., Hirsch 1989; Hirsch, Kett & Trefil 1993) as well as in common understanding, cultural literacy is often narrowly perceived as knowledge of culture gained through the exploration of cultural products, such as literature and art, and learning canonical cultural and historical facts and narratives. This normative notion of cultural literacy conveys it as a monologic one-way transmission of cultural knowledge and as something removed from interactive everyday living and a constantly transforming multicultural reality (Maine, Cook & Lähdesmäki, forthcoming).

Moving beyond the narrow and normative understanding of the concept, DIALLS defines cultural literacy as a social practice (cf. Street 1984) that is inherently dialogic and based on learning and gaining knowledge through empathetic, tolerant and inclusive interaction with others. Thus, cultural literacy is the process of engaging with cultures, the disposition to do so, and the co-creation and expression of cultural identities and values (Maine, Cook & Lähdesmäki, forthcoming).

In our view, being culturally literate is about individual's competences and skills to encounter cultural differences and to elaborate one's own identity in a respectful social interaction with other people. Being culturally literate requires understanding that people may hold differing views but it also presupposes our own metacognitive awareness of how our cultural affiliations influences our responses and feelings towards others. DIALLS's core hypothesis is that the development of young people's dialogue and argumentation skills will increase their cultural literacy competences.



linguistic backgrounds and heritage” (Council of Europe 2008, 10–11). Implementing intercultural dialogue needs new means in today's super-diversified (Vertovec 2007) societies in which diversity itself is broad, multidimensional and fluid (Vertovec 2007; Blommaert & Rampton 2011) and in which different positions – whether cultural, ethnic, national, social, religious, linguistic, etc. – intersect.

As the European Commission's Horizon 2020 call Understanding Europe – Promoting the European Public and Cultural Space (EC 2017a, 84) states: “The resilience and cohesion of European societies are strongly conditioned by beliefs and identities, as well as by collective representations and constructions of past and present realities and expectations about the future.” Education and education policies are a key to increasing resilience and cohesion in Europe. Current education policies in Europe commonly have, however, a narrow and normative notion on



how to implement this in practice. The narrowness is characterized in education policies by ignoring the possibility of cultural interaction as a means to develop individual identities. This is demonstrated in the European Commission's recent communication *Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture* (EC 2017b) that introduces the concept of working jointly towards a European Education Area yet does not even mention intercultural dialogue.

Europe needs education policies that seek to advance intercultural dialogue in a way which reflects the super-diverse reality of today's Europe, supports respect for diversity and difference, and enables the growth of young people's identities. The UNESCO Survey on Intercultural Dialogue (2018) offers relevant findings and suggestions to achieve this. It suggests that "[i]ntercultural dialogue should play a significant, recognized role in education institutions and systems, and be coupled with adequate pedagogical approaches" and that there should be "the development of closer ties between education and culture, especially through joint projects" (ibid., 36). Moreover, the survey recommends the adoption of "education policies that incorporate intercultural dialogue principles" (ibid., 39).

The DIALLS project has developed the concept "cultural literacy" and a learning programme related to it as a new means to advance intercultural dialogue in a super-diversified Europe.

The DIALLS project: developing cultural literacy learning

The DIALLS project addresses the role of formal education in shaping the knowledge, skills and competences needed for effective cultural literacy learning through working with teachers in different educational settings (pre-primary, primary and secondary). The project co-creates with teachers cross-curricular dialogic resources and activities that seek to advance intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding and respect among young people. The project includes ten partner universities from Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and UK.

The DIALLS project has three core objectives:

- to examine cultural literacy in formal education through the teaching of dialogue and argumentation as a means to understand the plurality of European identities and cultures. This will be achieved through the creation and implementation of the Cultural Literacy Learning Programme that seeks to promote tolerance, inclusion and empathy as core cultural literacy dispositions.
- to provide comprehensive guidance on the development of cultural literacy in schools through the creation and evaluation of a scale of progression for cultural literacy learning.
- to promote the emergence of young people's cultural identities in a pupil-authored Manifesto for cultural literacy and in a Virtual Gallery of their cultural artefacts created as a part of the Cultural Literacy Learning Programme.

The Cultural Literacy Learning Programme includes 15 sessions in which classroom discussions are stimulated by wordless picturebooks and films produced in and around Europe. DIALLS has selected 45 wordless picturebooks and films to use in





the Programme as well as creating a broader bibliography of 145 wordless picturebooks and films that a) correspond to an increasingly multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual social landscape of places, people and ways of living in Europe, as well as b) promoting DIALLS' core dispositions of tolerance, inclusion and empathy. Details of these texts as well as an introduction to their contents are available in the publications section of the DIALLS website (www.dialls2020.eu/publications).

DIALLS policy analysis

Questions, methods, data

The DIALLS project started with an in-depth examination of education policy documentation. The analysis sought to:

- identify key themes and priorities that the current policy documentation brings to the fore in enhancing intercultural dialogue.
- reveal how the current educational policy documentation deals with cultural identities and heritages in Europe.
- perceive the meanings, uses and interdependence of their core culture-related concepts.



The analysis of the European level policy documentation focused on the European Union and the Council of Europe. The European Union's documents were selected from the EUR-Lex database from the section 'Summaries of EU Legislation' under the 'Education, training, youth, sport' and 'Education and training' (total 48). The Council of Europe's documents were selected from the Council's website that deals with education under a link 'resources' and 'official texts' (total 20). The national level policy documentation included the National Education Law (or Act) and the National Curriculum (or Curriculum Frameworks) or National Guidelines and/or additional documents that were seen as relevant for analysis (total 39) from Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and UK.

The examination of the policy documentation was conducted as a qualitative content and concept analysis extended with a quantification of the analysed concepts.

Core results

The European level documents did not use the concept of cultural literacy. In this documentation, intercultural dialogue was commonly connected to improving cooperation, communication, mobility and employment prospects through learning foreign languages and being familiar with different cultures in European countries. Moreover, intercultural dialogue was related to the skills of interacting with people from migrant backgrounds in multicultural environments. European policy documentation commonly promoted intercultural dialogue as a policy goal. However, it rarely explicitly sought to promote it through learning and gaining knowledge from empathetic, tolerant and inclusive interaction with others or through training and strengthening competences and skills to encounter cultural differences and elaborate one's own identity in a respectful social interaction with other people.



The national level policy documentation rarely referred to intercultural dialogue or interculturalism as an education policy goal (these terms are used in Finnish, Portuguese and Cypriot documents). Multiculturalism or multicultural environments were more common concepts in the documents, being used in Lithuanian, Finnish, Portuguese and Israeli documents. These concepts were

referred to without a deeper explanation: intercultural dialogue was mainly used in the sense of an ability to communicate, cooperate and interact in a peaceful and solidary manner with different kinds of people, while multiculturalism was described in the documents as a reality of cultural diversity in today's societies to which young people should be familiarised. Cultural literacy was referred to in the Finnish documents as was a broader concept of sociocultural literacy in Lithuanian and Portuguese documents. These concepts were not, however, clearly defined.

The European education policy documentation commonly dealt with cultural heritage as a shared asset and as a set of common values, ideas and principles in Europe. Knowledge gained from cultural heritage was seen as enabling the understanding of the continent's cultural and linguistic diversity. This diversity encompassed different national, regional and local heritages in Europe. Cultural heritage was also connected in the European documents to the concept of identity that was commonly dealt with as a formation of a personal identity stemming from a cultural inheritance in Europe. This inheritance was seen as forming an important basis for an open attitude towards and respect for diversity.



In the national documents, the concepts of identity and young people's identity formation were commonly related to a static notion of national values, national heritage and national history. The documents rarely transcended the national framework or sought to deal with what it means to be European in today's super-diversified Europe.

The discourse in education policy documents utilized a broad variety of interrelated concepts, ideas and values that are crucial for intercultural dialogue, as well as for cultural literacy. These concepts include e.g., participation, citizenship, diversity, culture, inclusion, identity and tolerance. It was concerning to find that both the European and national documentation referred to empathy only a few times (in total in 4 documents). Our analysis revealed how the education policy documentation seeks to guide education administration and teachers through extremely broad and ambiguous concepts, such as identity, culture and heritage, whose meanings varied even within a same document.

As a result of the analysis, we were able to form four core stances (fig. 1) for promoting and practising cultural literacy and making sense of Europe (DIALLS 2018).

Recommendations

Based on our analysis of European and national education policy documentation:

1. **We recommend that policymakers reduce the ambiguity of policies by being explicit and precise with the concepts used in them.** Our analysis revealed that concepts tend to have a variety of different meanings even within the same document. This ambiguity was evident in particular in the usage of the concepts of culture, identity, diversity and citizenship.
2. We recommend that policymakers pay attention to the **meaning of culture** in the documents:
 - First, instead of understanding culture as a static and normative entity that should be taught and transmitted to the young people, culture should be approached as **constantly transforming and fluid collective action** (and therefore as a social construction) **based on interaction** between diverse people (Otten 2003; Abdallah-Pretceille 2006);
 - Second, **factual knowledge of culture and heritage should not be used as a key element for cultural interaction** as it may lead to the perception of people as stable representatives of their national culture, religion or ethnic origin. This kind of perception may lead to cultural stereotyping and categorizing that prevents people being seen as individuals, and may therefore even lead to prejudice (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006; Portera 2008);
 - Third, education policies should take into account that the increasing cultural pluralism and hybridity in Europe, global cultural flows, and the current movement of people within and across state-borders call into **question the role of normative cultural narratives** in education.
3. We recommend that policymakers pay attention to the **meaning of identity** in the documents:
 - First, identity should be approached not only in national, regional, ethnic or religious terms, as was commonly done in national education policy documentation, but also as at an individual or personal level;
 - Second, both individual and collective identities should be approached as **plural, multi-layered, processual and transforming**;
 - Third, the concept of identity in the documents should better reflect super-diversity in today's Europe. Different kinds of identities and identity formation should be addressed in a non-exclusive manner and the **formation of identities needs to be re-thought in relation to what it means to be European.**
4. We recommend that policymakers pay attention to the **meaning of diversity** in the documents:
 - First, diversity should be approached not only as referring to differences in national culture, ethnicity, religion or language but also as including (cultural) differences evoked by history, class, gender, sexual orientation, indigenoussness and political views. Similarly, the notion of **intercultural dialogue should address a broad variety of differences** (Lähdesmäki & Wagener 2015a);

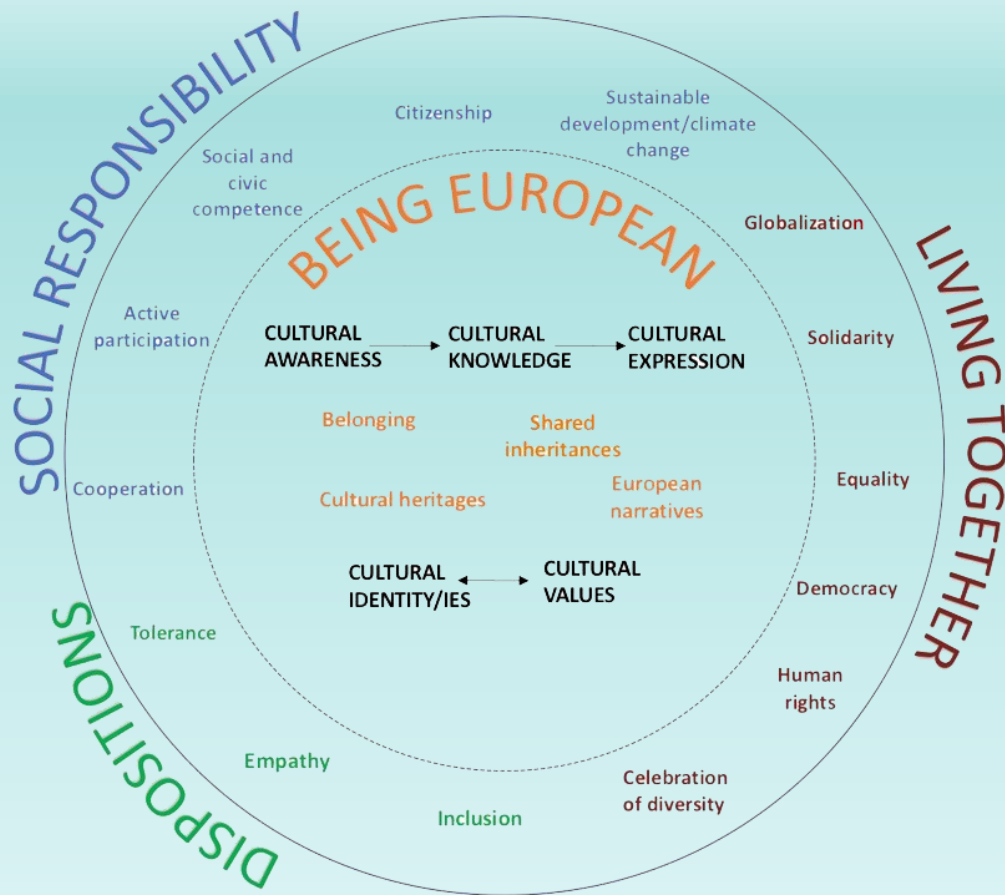




- Second, a **simplistic distinction between the ‘national’ and the ‘inter/transnational’** should be avoided and these dimensions should be considered as fluid, transforming and complex in today’s globalized world.
5. We recommend that policymakers **pay attention to the variety of meanings of citizenship** set out in national policy documents. The documents should seek to harmonise the formation of active, democratic, non-discriminative, local, national and global citizenship. Moreover, we also recommend that the formation of citizenship should be more closely related to the sense of European citizenship.
6. Education policies should deal more broadly with participation in society and the meanings of citizenship. We recommend that **social responsibility** is emphasised as part of citizenship education.
7. We recommend that the education policies more clearly **emphasise intercultural dialogue**:
 - **Cultural literacy should be used as a conceptual and practical means to deal with cultural interaction.** Cultural literacy is not about teaching and learning knowledge of different cultures but learning from a dialogic interaction with others who may be different from us. Education policies should address the core dispositions of cultural literacy: tolerance, inclusion and empathy.
8. The education policies commonly seek to increase inclusion or integration in societies. It is important that the policies **recognise the power structures** between minorities, refugees or immigrants and majority cultures or the recipient countries. In the EU documents, the emphasis on the unity of an imagined ‘us’ may create a symbolic border between those who conform to it and those who do not. Instead of unity, we recommend to emphasise dialogue.
9. As the diversity in today’s Europe is complex and super-diversified, the goals of ‘equal access’ or ‘non-discrimination’ contained in policy documents are vague and non-specific. Instead of generalisations, we recommend that the **documents set out in detail the problems of access and discrimination** as they relate to specific groups (Lähdesmäki & Wagener 2015a; Lähdesmäki et al. 2015b).
10. Policymakers should explicitly **acknowledge** that European education policy documents are “problem-based”, i.e. they are commonly created as a response to some specific concern or debate. We recommend that policymakers set out in their policy documents the concerns and debates behind their proposed policies.
11. We also recommend that education policy documents **are targeted at a broader audience** and that the policies are **better implemented** at the grass-roots level in schools.
12. The DIALLS project is at the interface between cultural heritage and education. We recommend that the European Commission **advances connections** between cultural heritage and education and strengthens its research funding in the Horizon Europe Programme for investigating these connections.



Figure 1: Cultural Analysis Framework (CAF)



The DIALLS Cultural Analysis Framework (CAF) Wheel crystallizes the key concepts for promoting and practising cultural literacy and making sense of Europe.

Source: DIALLS 2018, *Cultural Analysis Framework*

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