THE PROCESS OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN A CENTRALIZED AND HOMOGENEOUS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

Cyprus educational system which as of now could be described as homogeneous, centralized, and bureaucratic is going through a totally new experience since "foreign language speaking" students are enrolled in public school classrooms. The high degree of homogeneity that existed so far has been dramatically decreasing the last few years. Individuals with different cultures, nationalities, languages, and religions enter the country for various reasons. The above changes are reflected in the country's school system as well. The study examines the current situation within the Cyprus educational system regarding the issue of multiculturalism. The formal, theoretical, and institutional framework of the multicultural education in Cyprus as it is included in the wider educational policy, and the implementation of the official philosophical outline are examined, interpreted and discussed. On the other hand, the informal theoretical framework of the multicultural education in Cyprus is examined, which includes things done based on teachers' own will, effort, stimulus, and initiative, as well as based on their assumptions and beliefs.
Key words: *centralized, homogeneous educational system; multiculturalism; multicultural education; formal and informal theoretical framework.*

Introduction

Cyprus educational system until recently maintained the characteristics of a firmly structured organization, a highly centralized and bureaucratic system with the authority distributed top-down, and with a subject matter-driven curricula, clearly designed for a homogeneous population (Christodoulou, 2005). This system is currently undergoing a totally new experience since "foreign language speaking" students (definition used by the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture), such as students from Georgia, Russia, Ukraina, Romania, Philippines, Belarus, are enrolled in the public school classrooms. The changes in the configuration of Cyprus society resulted, the last few years, to the dramatic decrease of the homogeneity that existed so far. Individuals with different cultures, nationalities, languages, and religions are coming to Cyprus for various reasons, for example as a work force, as refugees holding political asylum, and as immigrants. These changes are reflected in the school system of the country as well.

A society composed of more than one ethnic group (Smolicz, 1996) can be broadly characterized as multicultural. Often multiculturalism is defined as more than just the ac-

ceptance of the presence of diverse racial, cultural, economic and social groups; it refers to peoples' philosophy for, and attitude toward, people of different race, ethnicity, geographical origin, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, economic class and age. In this sense, human differences are recognized, respected, appreciated and celebrated within a multicultural environment (Nikolaou, 2000). Although, the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) through annual reports, newsletters (circulars) and announcements stresses the necessity of addressing the concept of multiculturalism within school activities, there is no clear-cut policy yet to govern this issue. As per the annual reports, the Ministry focuses predominantly on the issue of language. Apparently, any emphasis on the protection of the freedom and the rights of "foreign language speaking" (FLS) people as well as the development of respect among individuals within the school environment nor on preserving "foreign language speaking" people's culture, religion, language, and, in general, their identity is not explicated. Having in mind the above, it is doubtful if multiculturalism and multicultural education are effectively applied in the educational system of Cyprus. Additionally, the number of FLS students is radically increasing in schools creating an unknown situation for the majority of the educators given the aforementioned homogeneity of the Cyprus educational system in terms of culture, religion and ethnicity.

Research Purpose and Focus

We examine multicultural education in the Cyprus educational system, focusing on primary education. Particularly, on the one hand we examine, interpret, and discuss the formal, theoretical, and institutional framework of multicultural education in Cyprus, as it is included in the wider educational policy, as well as the implementation of the official philosophical outline. On the other hand, we examine the informal theoretical framework of the multicultural education in Cyprus, including what is done apart from what is officially declared, based on teachers' own will, effort, stimulus, and initiative, as well as assumptions and beliefs held pertaining to what is wrong and right, appropriate and less appropriate, and how things should be like.

Theoretical Framework

Multiculturalism

Nonetheless, "multiculturalism," which is the outcome of pluralism, covers a vast area and it has a broad meaning, since many different interpretations can be given and approaches can be adopted regarding the coexistence of groups. In general, a society composed of more than one ethnic group can be broadly characterized as multicultural. In such a society, a variety of relationships can exist between the majority and the minorities (Smolicz, 1996). The dominancy of one or another group, and the context and dynamic of their coexistence in a society is made profound through the shared values evolved, the preservation of ethnic core values, and the degree of consensus or coercion by which a society is governed (Smolicz, 1996). Yet, usually, the overarching framework is defined by the dominant group, which evolves into a main framework of values to also lead the minorities, being exemplified along their own core values. The multicultural model emphasizes the need for the creation of a framework, educational and social, within which every civilization can exist and develop without the risk of losing its unity and cohesion (Panayiotopoulos & Nicolaidou, 2007).

However, there are many challenges that accompany efforts to accept multiculturalism and teach within such context. On the one hand there are challenges faced in the classroom as there are the microcultural values of the different ethnic groups represented in the classroom

and the macrocultural values of the wider society that a teacher needs to infiltrate into the development, experiencing and interpretation of knowledge and skills (Mushi, 2004). On the other hand there are challenges regarding perceptions of "culture." It is argued that the concept of culture is no longer appropriate for describing cultural diversity, nor can cultures be understood as independent entities, but need to be contextualized in terms of social, political and communication-based realities, due to the complexity of interethnic/interracial relations and cross-cultural exchange (Abdallah-Pretxeile, 2006). There is need to recognize the flexible and constantly changing nature of cultures, and that cultural traces are more important than cultural structures.

Interculturalism

In our society, researchers and others have come to recognize multiculturalism as more than just the acceptance of the presence of diverse racial, cultural, economic and social groups, but rather as peoples' philosophy for, and attitude toward, people of different race, ethnicity, geographical origin, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, economic class, and age, which are all human differences that must be recognized, respected, appreciated and celebrated within a shared environment (Nikolaou, 2000). Deriving from the vast and broad area of multiculturalism, interculturalism (see also the concept introduced by Cornwell & Stoddard, 1994) is used to denote not just the coexistence of ethnic cultures within an overarching framework, but also the kind of interaction and mutual transactions that need to occur between and among groups so that they all benefit from pluralism in the society. Within such framework, and being prompted to think beyond one's cultural framework as interculturalism denotes (Lee, 2005), differences are authentically celebrated, and become a mutual benefit for all. Simultaneously, there is space for human nature to be explored, and for humanitarian feelings to be embellished, as people start recognising similarities among them rather than only differences, and cultural heritages are maintained and preserved.

Within this context intercultural education helps people develop competences necessary to live and survive in a multicultural world. Intercultural education basically concerns the development of intercultural skills (Jokikokko, 2005), such as intercultural communication, interaction across groups, and the ability to mediate across cultures through the promotion of understanding and authentic interactions between groups and the development of intercultural competence (Eisenchlas & Trevaskes, 2007). Through this education people become able to recognize differences and support personal and academic growth of the individuals, as at the same time each becomes able to communicate with, and respects diverse groups of people, and seeks to learn from them. The four principal pillars of the intercultural model (see Essinger, 1990) include education for the development of an empathic attitude towards differences, solidarity for the cultivation of a notion that goes beyond race and nation state and creation of a universal family, intercultural respect through mutual learning among indigenous and non-indigenous citizens and self-awareness against the 'creation' of a 'chauvinistic' way of thinking.

Curriculum, Teaching, and Intercultural Education

Although the term intercultural directly refers to culture, intercultural education goes along with terms such as democratic education, differentiated teaching and curricula, culturally relevant teaching, co-creating the curriculum, and student-centered teaching, since all these approaches share a common philosophy toward the development of the full potential of each student. Teaching must be differentiated not just because there are cultural differences, but because there are all sort of differences, such as different learning styles, developmental

level, socioeconomic background, and wide variety of student life experiences. Cultural differences only add an extra load to the already possessed differences. However, if teaching was authentically democratic and culturally relevant, the task to teach interculturally in a multicultural society would have been easier.

Discussing about the way multiculturalism becomes a pedagogical issue in institutions of higher learning, it is argued that justice negotiated between different cultural groups in a pluralistic society informed by democratic principles, must also be reflected in curriculum design within a multicultural framework (Lee, 2005). Such curriculum must target the enhancement of critical thinking. In a highly politicized way in which diversity is incorporated into curriculum reform in many multicultural states, diversifying the curriculum should target the enhancement of social justice and critical thinking. Critical thinking assists individuals to move beyond embracing diversity for diversity's sake, recognizing that it can enhance communication among diverse individuals and groups, which then attributes great value to diversity. Infusing critical thinking skills into the curriculum is the essential component of an intercultural curriculum versus a multicultural one, which helps teachers move beyond the canon debate and its politics, focusing instead on the more fundamental task of fostering intercultural thinking (Lee, 2005). An intercultural citizen is someone who exhibits a range of positive personal attitudes towards diversity, rather than just supporting the principles of a multicultural state: "It is someone who is curious rather than fearful about other peoples and cultures; … who is open to learning about other ways of life, and willing to consider how issues look from other people's point of view… [and] who feels comfortable interacting with people from other backgrounds…" (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 157).

Interculturalism in the curriculum should enhance intercultural thinking, a concept that should be approached as a critical perspective rather than a subject matter (Lee, 2005), as well as intercultural sensitivity, and moral cultivation through an education that teaches critical thinking skills. Since intercultural pedagogy should be importantly about how we teach rather than what we teach, to incorporate interculturalism in teaching should mean more than just the introduction of new courses, but it should also entail new ways of teaching existing courses. Also, interculturalism in teaching should not be about covering multiple cultures, but rather about working through a dialogue between cultures, and the focus should then be on the dialogue itself rather than on the multiplicity of voices for the sake of inclusivity. Students should be able to carry out a critical dialogue with others, regardless of who they are, which is a task not reduced within the walls of a class but it is part of an ongoing dialogue due to the infinite voices that exist (Lee, 2005).

Teaching should be perceived as a moral obligation rather than a political mission. Multiculturalism should be perceived as a way of critical thinking through intercultural dialogue, rather than as a way to redress social and political injustices through the microcosm of the classroom (Lee, 2005). "Interculturalizing" the curriculum is a dimension that connects to its internationalization (for a definition see Knight, 2003). Many theorists agree that curriculum and instruction must be modified to reflect the fact that knowledge is socially constructed so that education becomes more effective and democratic (King, 2004).

Policy and Multiculturalism

Educational policy, in order to foster interculturalism, needs to focus on inclusiveness, so that education becomes fully inclusive, rather than focusing on competition, selection, and exclusion. Also, there is need to modify an existing approach at school level to better address the dynamic and complex nature of intercultural understanding and exchange, despite the difficulties encountered by teachers when teaching about the host society and its culture (Sato, 2007). Further, teacher training needs to start from the university and move away from the

traditional operating assumption that a society is homogeneous (Garcia & Lopez, 2007). It is emphasized that to implement changes, professional development of teachers is necessary rather than just changing the syllabi (Baranović, Jokić, & Doolan, 2007). Enrolment into a single intercultural issues course is not enough to prepare teachers to cope with cultural diversity in the school and classroom. Certain changes in the philosophy underlying any training material, seen from an interdisciplinary perspective, and the permeation of the contents of subject areas with topics related to cultural diversity are needed mostly. Educational approaches, curriculum planning, teacher organization and teaching methodology all need to change and be introduced from the very beginning of the teacher training trajectory. Developing positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusion is suggested to guide new educational approaches, innovation, implementation of increasingly committed and complex projects and educational experiences. Friendship among people must be encouraged and the school culture to foster equal opportunities for all groups, as well as respect for plurality within a democratic framework of decisions and spaces, and dialogue and communication among all groups (Sales & García López, 1997).

Multiculturalism has been described as the key educational issue of our times (Kalantzis & Cope, 1992). Mainstream schooling (Cummins, 1989; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994), educational policy (Nieto, 2000), and programming in colleges and universities (Ball, Berkowitz, & Mzamane, 1998; Oliver, 1999) are being preoccupied with issues of diversity. Yet, how to teach multicultural education and for what purpose is still a big issue in the research literature (Cochran-Smith, 2000, 2001), although it is suggested that it is necessary to prepare multiculturally competent teachers (Gay, 2000; Wallace, 2000) who can meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations to achieve social justice (Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Sleeter, 1996).

Context of the Study

The Cypriot Educational System

Cyprus is the third biggest island in the Mediterranean sea, situated in the crossroads of three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa (Eteokleous & Ierodiakonou, 2005; Vrasidas, 2002). It covers a total of 9,250 sq km, of which 3,355 sq km of which 5895 sq km are under Greek-Cypriot authority. The population of the island is less than a million, specifically 792,604 (July 2008 estimate). The main ethnic group consists of 77% Greek-Cypriots, 18% of Turkish-Cypriots and 5% of other ethnicities. Along the same lines, the main religion group in the island is the Greek-Orthodox (78%); 18% is Muslim and 4% other religions including Maronite and Armenian Apostolic (The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency, 2009).

All the above characteristics of the Cypriot society played a decisive role in defining the approach adopted by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC). More specifically, the MOEC follows a centralized and homogeneous approach to managing schools (Hadjithoma & Eteokleous, 2007). As Hadjithoma (2007) points out "…the major administrative and managerial role is undertaken by the central government and the policies are centrally developed" (p.31) .The MOEC is responsible for formulating policy plans, which are then examined by the Planning Bureau and approved finally by the Council of Ministers. Given the above, curriculum driven practice, content/textbook -oriented activities, teacher evaluation through the inspectorate system, lack of time, pressure to cover the curriculum, lack of freedom, bureaucratic procedures are some of the characteristics of educators' work in such educational system. Finally, teachers are "restricted" in applying innovative and progressive approaches in their teaching practices (Hadjithoma, 2007; Hadjithoma & Eteokleous, 2007).

The above contextual characteristics of Cyprus Educational System are expected to highly influence and restrict the implementation of multicultural education in teachers' daily practice (classroom level) as well as in school and policy level.

Multicultural Education and the Official Position of MOEC

The Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) referred to the issue of Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education for the first time in the 2004 Annual Report. Specifically, under the title "Multicultural Education", under the section of Primary education, the actions related to multiculturalism are explained. The focus appear to be on the issue of language and specifically to enhance "foreign language speaking" students Greek proficiency level. In the subsequent three Annual Reports; 2005, 2006, and 2007; the description of aims and purposes regarding ME were the same as the 2004 Annual Report. In each annual report, the rate of elementary "foreign language speaking" students that attended primary schools in Cyprus, was adjusted accordingly. The 2008 Annual Report has not yet been published by the MOEC. Besides the Annual Reports, the MOEC through newsletters and announcements since 2004 aimed to communicate the importance of Multiculturalism and ME in the Cypriot educational System. It is worth mentioning that there is no policy developed to govern Multicultural Education application in schools. Researchers report as a paradox the fact that there is limited research around the issue of ME although Cyprus has been influenced by many cultures in the past (Panayiotopoulos & Nicolaidou, 2007).

Research Methodology

Research Characteristics

The current research work applied a qualitative approach in an effort to understand the experiences of other people and the meaning they make out of that experience (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2003). This approach seemed ideal to underpin this research study, since it is concerned with understanding human behaviour from the participant's own frame of reference (Collis and Hussey, 2003). The qualitative approach enabled the researchers to examine in-depth the opinions, views, perceptions and experiences of the participants related to multiculturalism and ME, the formal institutional framework, the educational policy and the informal theoretical framework of ME in Cyprus.

Data Collection Instruments and Participants

Document analysis conducted (Gee, 2005) through the examination of annual reports, newsletters, and announcements issued from 2004-2008 by the Ministry of Education and Culture were used to examine the formal institutional framework, and the educational policy that guides multicultural education in Cyprus. Additionally, in depth interviews were conducted with two government officials and two employees of the Pedagogical Institute (PI). The government official and the two PI employees provided the "official" perspective of the situation instead of the "practical field" perspective given by the teachers. More specifically, the interviews with the government employees complemented the document analysis in examining the formal theoretical institutional framework and the educational policy that guides multicultural education in Cyprus. Snowball sampling (Delamont, 1992) was used to select the employees whose position provided them the knowledge and experience to address the study's research questions. The information gathered from these meetings was used to develop the interview protocols used.

The research population consisted of Greek-Cypriot primary school teachers, and was selected based on two criteria: their experience with FLS students (teachers who teach or have taught FLS students) and their willingness to participate in the interview. Thus, the participants were selected using purposive sampling (Cresswell, 2003; Delamont, 1992), based on the above criteria. A total of seven in-depth, face to face interviews was conducted, in two schools, in two different cities/ regions of the island.

This approach assisted in the construction of semi-structured, open-ended questions that encouraged the participants to use their own terminology to describe their experiences and perceptions on the sensitive and complex subject under investigation (Kvale, 1996; Ritchie and Lewis (2003). The interview template was prepared in December 2007 and interviews were carried out in January – February 2008. Each interview was completed within one hour, on average, and was structured around four broad categories: demographics about teachers and students, teacher personal views on multiculturalism and ME, as well as the application of ME within the classroom environment. To analyze the data collected, a general analytical procedure was applied. This procedure was used in an attempt to manage, control, summarize and code the data, since it emphasizes methodological rigor and systemic processes. More specifically, the interviews were transcribed based on the questions included in the interview protocol, followed by identified emerged themes. The researchers summarized and categorized the emerged themes identified from the interviews in a table (Collis & Hussey, 2003). To address teachers' anonymity, pseudonyms are used in the Results section.

Results of Research

Demographics

Teachers' and School's Description

The research sample consisted of seven elementary school teachers whose native language was Greek. All of them, besides one, were fluent in English. All of them predominantly conducted their graduate studies abroad. One of them had a second bachelor, through which he examined issues related to multiculturalism. Another participant teacher was a doctoral student. All of them held a Bachelor Degree in Education.

As aforementioned, two schools were selected. To preserve the anonymity of the two schools we refer to them as School A and B. The criterion used to select the two schools was the number of FLS students enrolled. More specifically, based on the data given from the MOEC, in School A, 80%, and in school B more than 50% of the students enrolled were FLS students. The students were categorized in four groups: 1) those that both parents are Greek-Cypriots, 2) those that their father is Greek-Cypriot but have foreigner mother, 3) those that both parents are foreigners – from the same country and 4) those that both parents are foreigners from different countries. In both schools, the minority was the group that both parents were Greek-Cypriots. FLS students were coming from various countries from Europe, Asia, and Middle East. In addition to the above, the two schools followed a similar approach regarding the FLS students: a bilingual teacher visited the school every day and helped FLS students earn Greek and in their school lessons. At the beginning of every new academic year, the FLS students of all ages/ classes are listed, besides the 1st grade students. The teacher of each class in collaboration with the bilingual teacher examined the students and categorized them in three groups based on two criteria 1) Greek language proficiency level, and 2) familiarity with Cyprus society. Every day, for one school period, each group attended the FLS classroom; where the bilingual teacher helped the students. Each of the teachers that had FLS students in their classrooms selected those who needed help and support and worked with

them on an individual basis (application of supportive teaching), on average 2-3 extra school periods per week. The above is self-initiated by the teachers, during their own free time in school. As mentioned by the teachers, in School B, the induction class approach was not followed, despite the fact that in some schools in another city the approach of induction class" is applied.

It appeared that none of the participants had official training on ME, neither did they hold diplomas in multiculturalism, ME or other related subject. All of them reported attending small-scale seminars or two-day conferences organized by educational or political organizations. As they agreed, almost all seminars attended were very general and abstract. Some other reported attendance in classes in which they dealt with issues of multiculturalism, such as diversity but none of them had attended a class focusing entirely on multiculturalism or ME.

Some of them mentioned that any exposure they had on multiculturalism was self-initiated in order to be enabled to tackle the problems they daily faced, and that it was acquired through their own experiences. For example, studying abroad and having friends from abroad gave them the opportunity to get in touch with other cultural groups. Additionally, it helped them develop respect and tolerance towards people from other countries, with different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Formal Framework regarding Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education

The current status, or in other words the "official" or field perspective regarding multicultural education in Cyprus has been explored based on two different sources: 1) the annual reports and newsletters issued by the MOEC and 2) discussion with government official and Pedagogical Institute representatives.

Ministry Annual Reports

Four annual reports, from 2004 to 2007, issued by the MOEC were examined. All four annual reports (each of them more than one hundred pages) in less than one page under the title "Multicultural Education", under the section of Primary education, explain the MOEC actions related to multiculturalism. Sadly, it was observed that for the past four years the section related to ME was the same. Specifically, the description of purposes and aims remained the same, an indication that there weren't any improvements or actions towards the subject under investigation. The only things changed in the document were 1) the rate of elementary "foreign language speaking" students that attended primary schools in Cyprus, and 2) paraphrase of words and phrases. The focus was only on the issue of language and the protection of freedom and the rights of "foreign language speaking" people. It did not give emphasis on developing 'respect' among the school environment as well as maintaining / preserving FLS people's culture, religion, language, and in general their identity. There was no clear-cut policy to govern the issue of multiculturalism. It is worth mentioning that MOEC's emphasizing goal for the academic year 2007-2008 was multiculturalism.

Zones of Educational Priority

A new concept in Cyprus Educational system, The Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP) has been established since 2004. The Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP) revealed relevance to multiculturalism in two ways. First, ZEP appeared to be part of the ME framework. More specifically, the MOEC 2007 annual report described ZEP as follows:

"The areas that are characterised as Zones of Educational Priority are those which are economically and socially deprived. The particular kindergarten/s, the primary school/s as well as the neighbouring gymnasium/s of each district form a network and all stakeholders are working closely to develop joint programs for the socialization of pupils… The effectiveness of the measures adopted within the program of Multicultural Education" (MOEC annual report, 2007, p.35).

Secondly, the schools that have been assigned as ZEP had an increased number of FLS students. So there was a confusion between schools that belong to ZEP and multicultural schools (that have an increased in the number of "foreign language speaking" students compared to other schools in Cyprus).

ZEP appeared to be part of the ME program and the ZEP schools had also increased number of "foreign language speaking" students. In February 2008, the Minister of Councils announced ZEP schools' expansion in order to further address issues such as social inequality, and equal opportunities. Schools assigned as ZEP were functioning in two regions as of now. Given the recent decision, schools in one more region of the island were called ZEP. Additionally, more support, and empowerment was provided to these schools, extra personnel (i.e. educational psychologists, interpreters, and a team responsible for ZEP Schools management and operation were formed at the MOEC. Finally, the PI organized in November 2008 an intensive pilot training course for secondary Greek Language/ Literature teachers on how to teach Greek as a second language to FLS students. Some material had been established and instructional material was developed and used based on the Greek system.

Interviews with Officials

As mentioned above, the second source used to identify the current status, regarding ME in Cyprus was the government official and the PI representative. All four of them reported:1) the need for in-service teachers' professional development training and 2) that there is no official policy from the MOEC to govern multiculturalism and ME in Cyprus.

One of the Pedagogical Institute representatives, mentioned that there is "…no research examining the current situation in Cyprus regarding FLS students; rather there are some findings based on non-academic research that reveal the need of applying the concept of multiculturalism in our schools". She elaborated by saying that the above need is identified through the increased numbers of FLS students in our schools every year. She mentioned three schools in Cyprus, in three different cities of the island, in which there were many FLS students. She recommended interviewing 1) a PI representative who had been involved in the training provided to in-service educators, and 2) two Ministry of Education employees that would be able to provide insights regarding the official policy. It was reported that teachers are in need of training: they should be trained on how to ease students' induction in Cyprus society and school system and how to teach Greek as a second language to the FLS students.

The second employee, with whom a meeting was scheduled, was a government official, an educational psychologists. He mainly focused on explaining about ZEP and their relevance with FLS and multiculturalism. Along the same lines, he mentioned that ME is successfully integrated within ZEP schools. He finally reported that there is no structured, unified, legislated educational policy by the MOEC. The need for professional development training was addressed as a response to the current non-sporadic, non-systematic and non-holistic training.

The third person which we have discussed multiculturalism in Cyprus, was a MOEC employee. He gave us statistical data regarding the elementary schools in Cyprus and the

numbers of FLS students by region. He also addressed the need for in-service educators' professional development training. Specifically, he said that teachers need to be given the theoretical background of multiculturalism and ME, and that what they mostly need is practical in-classroom applications. He strongly believed that it is important that teachers are trained on how to behave and act in a heterogeneous classroom environment. He also mentioned that there is a variety of books published in Greece that can be used in schools having a large number of FLS students.

Finally, it has been discussed by the interviewees that at the end of July 2008, the Council of Minister has approved new actions to promote and support the induction of FLS students in Cyprus school system and society. The first action includes the approval of a pilot program of intensive Greek language courses in Secondary Education. The pilot program was implemented in 16 schools where there was an increased number of FLS students. The second action was the development of an induction guide for FLS newcomer students. The guide was translated in 8 languages and would be delivered to the FLS students and their families. Finally, teachers training on issues related to ME would take place. The MOEC along with the above actions, and in collaboration with the PI declared that its goal was to develop an inclusive, democratic school that incorporates and integrates.

Informal Framework regarding Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education

The informal theoretical framework of multicultural education in Cyprus has been examined. This framework includes things done based on teachers' own will, effort, stimulus, and initiative, as well as based on their assumptions and beliefs. It has been explored through in-depth interviews with the primary school teachers.

Defining Intercultural Education - Teachers' Understanding

All of the participants defined multiculturalism as the coming together of various civilizations. At the sound of the question what multiculturalism and interculturalism is, they were stumbling and after taking a few seconds to think about it they were starting to talk about it, being hesitant in the beginning and feeling more confident as they were progressing in the conversation. Words and phrases they used included the contact with various civilizations and cultures, religions, and traditions emphasizing the need to find a balance in order to coexist and progress (Rena). To accept the others, which are people from other countries, and feel that they are equal to you, Anna mentioned. They also reported the need to function in an environment without discrimination, with respect towards other's identity, and toward individuals in general with any kind of different characteristics they may posses. It is the blending of the differences of each one of us to a creative whole that works and corresponds to the school's goals and personal goals (Niki). Yet, they also discussed about the fact that we are all different, having personal distinct characteristics rather than just cultural, social and so on, thus "possessing any kind of different characteristics," as simultaneously we are all the same, sharing the same human nature. Everybody, regardless of nationality, should have equal educational opportunities, whereas respect of others and appreciation of diversity should be towards everybody, toward our fellow people, rather than just toward people with different cultural and ethnical characteristics (Niki). She also went a step further to clarify that we all have differences among us: The definition by itself shows that there is a distinction among the students. However, students' concerns, needs, and problems are the same and they are not a result of students' different nationalities - we do consider students' different nationalities as the source of the problem - but that's not the case (Niki). As another teacher said "it is the meeting and the marriage of various cultures. It is not a process of cultural assimilation, but

rather of exchange" (Lucy). She also discussed the role of education in this process: Through education this matching should be taught and the culture and cultural traits that each student carries along to be exemplified, enhanced, and promoted (Lucy). As she said, our differences need to be promoted, shown off and celebrated for the mutual benefit of all, both from mainstream and minority cultures. Also Lucy discussed a contradiction which is responsible for the creation of a gap and a process of assimilation: On the one hand, foreigners want to assimilate in the Cyprus culture due to the lack of interaction with their own culture and the continuous interaction with our own culture, whereas, on the other hand, Cypriots do not feel this need because they are in their own context (Lucy).

Some of the teachers referred to their personal experiences as an important pillar to function better in a multicultural environment. As they explained, their own personal experiences made them open to "others." Anna, for example, grew up in a Turkish-Cypriot neighborhood. As a grownup she had various experiences abroad. Particularly during her studies abroad she had roommates and friends, and she met people from other cultures and religions. Due to these experiences, she had developed positive attitudes toward the "other," and as a teacher now, it is easier for her to accept "other" students. She felt that children who grew up in an environment where they interacted with "other" children were lucky and in an advantageous position comparing to children who did not have such experiences.

Also, the deeds of many of the teachers exemplified that this openness toward "others" worked toward advancing them as persons, as they lived by what they were preaching. Anna, approached all people as equal. She was more interested in identifying the things that bring people, together, rather than those that keep them apart. She approached people from other countries as a source of information and knowledge, rather than as a danger or something unimportant and inferior; through this process she had learned a lot. Anna, admittedly felt that she was improved as a person due to this process. Rena, too, tried to promote interculturalism in her life. She liked meeting people from other countries, since she could learn new things from them; she also developed respect towards other people.

They all referred to the role of teachers, schools, teaching the gains and the challenges. "It is my choice to be for the next academic year in the same school. On the one hand, I complain but there are a lot of great moments. Anna emphasized that it is really important for the educators to value multiculturalism and ME, and to be able to communicate its value and importance to their students. Every educator should try and make peace with oneself regarding multiculturalism, ME and related subjects. The educators need to accept the FLS students and to communicate the appropriate messages to them.

Intercultural Education is not just about the Language

As a reaction to the emphasis given by the MOEC exclusively on language learning as the major part of intercultural education two teachers spelled out clearly that IE is not just about language learning, and particularly about the acquisition of the language of the dominant group. Lucy argued that language acquisition should not be the only goal. Intercultural education is not just about learning a language, which is only a piece of the whole culture (although an important piece). Yet, language learning is important as it is the mean to achieve the other curriculum goals. Also the marriage of the cultures and the social inclusion is also very important. Further, Rena discussed the importance of finding balance among the various different characteristics of the students. Also, teachers must be careful so that they do not overvalue multiculturalism in schools, nor should they give too much emphasis to the "other" students neglecting Greek-Cypriot students. The teacher has a really difficult role to play and more responsibilities since the classrooms are not homogeneous in terms of language, culture and religion.

Differentiated Teaching

All teachers argued that they need to be teaching in a way that takes in mind the different characteristics of students. Differentiated teaching should not be adopted due to cultural differences only, but because there are all kinds of differences within individuals. For example, there are many weak Cypriot students, for whom teaching needs to be differentiated as well. Rena discussed the need for the development of various creative exercises to meet different student ability levels, and because of the various levels of language proficiency. Further, she said that there should be different expectations from each student, to check the progress of each student comparing to oneself rather than to others, and having regular conversations with the parents. Also, she suggested that teachers should try to enhance students' language vocabulary level, using pictures and texts with graphic illustrations.

Anna mentioned that teachers should carry with the students various discussions in the classroom. The goal is to communicate the message to the students that we are all human beings, sharing similar problems, worries, and thoughts; to investigate our similarities and differences, and respect our differences. Classroom discussions that are away from books and the curriculum are extremely important. Emotional intelligence should be emphasized and applied in the classroom, in order to develop students' self-confidence and to make them feel good about themselves. It is totally up to the teacher to approach the heterogeneity of the students positively, and be seen as a positive element of the classroom. The role of the teacher is extremely important to develop a team spirit in the classroom within a collaborative environment, where students are being approached as equals to each other. Anna felt responsible for developing this attitude to her students as well, and felt that united they could solve the problems they faced. In regards to differentiated teaching, she argued that the teacher should try to pull out the "good" traits of each student. She was getting opportunities to get to know the countries, the cultures and the customs of her FLS students. She approached each student as a different case, not because they were from another country, and of course not in comparison to other students, but in comparison to themselves and how they progressed. She used pictures, pantomime as teaching methods as well as theatre to dramatize the concepts they were dealing with. She used to differentiate the tests to meet the skills not only of FLS students, but also the weak Greek-Cypriot students.

George also employed differentiated teaching. He used to give extra teaching hours to a group of FSL students. He promoted personalized learning, and was monitoring the progress of each student in comparison to oneself, rather than to others. There was delay in covering the curriculum, of course, yet this was okay for him as he was more interested in quality rather than quantity. Differentiated teaching applied for weak Greek-Cypriot students besides FSL students.

Andy followed a different teaching approach. He developed a friendly, differentiated environment for all students; he did not want the FLS students to be or feel neglected. He allowed students to speak their mother language in classroom. He wanted everyone, both students and himself, to freely speak and express their opinion in the classroom, to mention elements from their own culture and civilization. In this way, each of them revealed their identity, and there was a brainstorming of experiences. George was being critical and he wondered about the following: How do we approach the concept of ME in the Cypriot system? Shall we continue using the old-fashioned curriculum? The system and the society marginalize the schools that have increased number of FLS students, creating ghetto-like environments? Lucy was also a kind of critical: "Because we do not want to make foreigners just like us, Cypriots, we need to have the appropriate books, curricula, teaching material, teachers that

fit into our school's framework and its needs. Thus, there can exist a particular curriculum which allows flexibility so that it can be implemented according to particular contexts.

Discussion

One of the findings of the study was about the ability of the teacher participants to define ME and IE. Despite the fact that the participant teachers hadn't received any formal training in IE they understood its essence, as a result of their own life experiences or their classroom experience and they worked hard to implement it and promote it.

The findings revealed on the one hand that the teachers' unawareness of a unique, single definition for ME and IE reflected flexibility and the continuing quest for understanding what multiculturalism and interculturalism are, what they mean, to whom and how they should be done. Also, energies were focused on the essence of the case rather than to defining notions and creating discriminations. On the other hand, it illustrates lack of training with teachers being unable to articulate the difference between the terms multiculturalism and interculturalism, using them interchangeably or without clarifying each time to which term they were referring. Not being able to draw the distinction between ME and IE may lead teachers to non-deliberately choose and promote IE or recognize its value. However, it was clear that all participant teachers directed their energies into stimulating and favoring a process of exchange rather than assimilation. At least three teachers attributed importance to the coming together of people in order to progress, live peacefully and let the differences turn into a creative whole.

The major issue at stake, as evidenced from the data, was lack of policy to guide the issue of ME and IE. From this deficiency a number of major problems were induced such as the adapting of "quick-fix" approaches, the generation by MOEC of sweeping statements which reduced the major issue of IE into a short paragraph within annual reports, and the favoring of some schools over others by giving them authority to decide what it should be done in their own school's particular case. Yet, this authority eventually turned back as boomerang on the teachers, the students, and the school which gave incentives to other schools to underestimate these favoring schools, promoting segregation among them. Such schools, instead of being finger pointed should have been examples to follow for all the good work being done and the spirit devoted in the school and the community. Segregation also led to the pigeonholing of students due to their assumed cultural differences (Zhao, 2007). Also, there was the fear of standards and end-of-the-year evaluations (Christodoulou, 2005) mandated by the MOEC and conducted by the Ministry inspectors, and which essentially relied merely on skills and knowledge acquired. Nevertheless an advantage of this shortage of policy was the flexibility it gave teachers and students to act and experiment within a system that was loose and allowed for some innovation.

Final Words and Suggestions

We suggest that in order to form educational policy about IE, Cyprus can learn from the examples of other countries ensuring interethnic/interracial relations and cross-cultural exchange (Abdallah-Pretxeile, 2006), and preservation of personal and cultural traits and core values of all students. In other countries, including various European countries such as Germany, Italy, Norway, and the UK (Garcea, 1996; Engelbert, 2004; Bolten, 2001; Payne, 2002), the phenomenon of multiculturalism has been going on for a long time, maybe even before the middle of the twentieth century, thus they can become examples for us to learn. Although in the literature it is argued that Cyprus has always been a multicultural society, we somewhat challenge this statement, since, basically, there were homogeneous groups coexist-

ing independently, thus, each community maintained segregated homogeneous group schools. Even though the island has two main communities, the Greek-Cypriot making up 77% of the population and the Turkish-Cypriot making up 18% of the population[1], the political problem kept the two communities apart thus creating homogeneous entities (Christodoulou, 2005). Historically, Greek Cypriots had been influenced by various other cultural groups (Panayio-topoulos & Nicolaidou, 2007) whose cultural characteristics were incorporated in those of Greek Cypriots. Yet, now that a solution to the Cyprus political problem is urgently sought, and because of the growing number of the FLS students at schools, there is a real challenge to develop an educational system that accepts all students regardless of differences, ensuring the preservation of the personality and values of each one. This can be done by emphasizing intercultural dialogue and education. It is not adequate to continue adopting a "quick-fix" approach or "on-a-requested-basis" approach. There is need to approach the issue in a systematic and organized way so that essential issues are addressed (Nieto, 2000).

Another issue is the synopsis of discussion of IE within a brief paragraph in the MOEC annual reports for education. These reports seem to be fixed statements on the importance of IE, unmodified from year to year. Research and evidence based arguments regarding decision making, implementation, and outcomes of IE and suggestions for what needs to be done further are absent. Seemingly the lack of policy presents IE as a static issue without reports on progress, research data, and analysis of goals, issues, and challenges, and the way they are being faced. There is need for evidence based decision making and for research which captures the real situation not just in numerical data, but also in interpretive narrative data. The centrality of the system and lack of schools' autonomy is contributing to the current situation as also it has been presented in the context of the study section.

Overall, there is some looseness of the educational system, which basically results from the lack of policy alongside the centrality of the educational system. On the one hand this lack of policy is good, but ineffective on the other hand. It is good because it allows flexibility and experimentation from teachers and students. However, within a context which lacks policy or with things happening outside of some policy, this flexibility becomes inefficient and insufficient for at least three reasons: first, the provision of funding to some schools becomes discrimination against them and stimulates underestimation from other schools. This also contributes to careless wasting of money rather than to school or classroom teaching improvement. Second, when the time comes for the evaluation of teachers it does not matter why they haven't covered the curriculum, but only that they haven't covered it. Third, financial support although it is an important step, it seems insufficient and ineffective to guide teachers' actions and requests within the broader non-existing policy. We argue that the development of educational policy for IE is a demand.

Assimilation, separatism, transitional multiculturalism, and residual multiculturalism (Smolicz, 1996) are not appropriate models based on which to form an educational policy. Rather we need an intercultural model that is in accord with the core values theory (Smolicz, 1981), respecting and maintaining certain cultural core elements which make up the heartland and identification values of its members. Multicultural education should be an education for freedom (Parekh, 1986) and the ability to help transform a world lived in common with others (Greene, 1988).

Additionally, we suggest that particular emphasis is paid on teacher training on issues of ME or IE. It is left on teachers' sensitivity and judgment to act on ways that will benefit all students in a context where there is no official policy, support, and true flexibility. So, there is not an overarching policy that supports teachers' philosophies on the issue, but on the contrary teachers are left alone to assume what they need to be doing based on their own theories and instinct. There is need for both pre-service and the in-service teacher training.

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[1] According to the census carried out by the Republic of Cyprus in 1960

Having this in mind, universities need to start including in their teacher education programs (Ball, Berkowitz, & Mzamane, 1998; Oliver, 1999), courses on ME and IE. Yet, simply adding courses in the syllabus will not be adequate; the important thing is that IE becomes an important element of the broader philosophy of the program of study: it must be addressed in an interdisciplinary way and involve the development of intercultural skills throughout all courses. Further, we suggest that teacher mentorship becomes an important aspect of IE, setting up a team of teacher-mentors who are experienced in IE.

Grouping FLS students to induction classes is another suggestion to be seriously taken into consideration. FLS students' appropriate preparation was mentioned as problem and as need at the same time. Through induction the FLS students would acquire important skills and knowledge to be able to function in the particular grade level they are supposed to be enrolled. The induction classes should include language learning and skills acquisition (i.e. in Mathematics) and then be able to enroll to a grade, after assuring that they have acquired the needed skills-level-competencies. It is important to ensure a similar starting point for all students in order not to disrupt the regular attendance. This outcome is induced from teachers' complaints and frustration as they have to work with different levels of students in a way that individualized teaching and learning becomes a really tough, problematic, and insufficient procedure. Smooth induction of the FLS students in the classroom and the school environment will be achieved, and it is also anticipated that the various problems appeared due to the different level of students will be addressed.

The entire system seems not to have realized the need and importance of multiculturalism and IE. It has been observed that devaluation of the schools that are characterized as multicultural settings takes place. Unfortunately, the schools, the students and all the work being done within these multicultural settings are being underestimated by other teachers and schools. They do not see all the learning that is happening and the dynamics created in such schools. They do not seem to realize that the students enrolled in such schools are privileged since those multicultural settings represent the society they will leave in as they grow old.

Working in a multicultural school, help teachers value their own work and profession given the difficulties and the challenges they daily face. It is revealed that the essence and the value of teaching are more obvious in these schools than elsewhere. The promotion and application of IE nowadays is even crucial given the economic crisis and its consequences which may develop negative feelings among majority and minority groups. Thus, there is a necessity to develop intercultural feelings and skills to avoid also a multicultural crisis.

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