



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



Dialogue & Argumentation
for Cultural Literacy Learning
in Schools



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CLARIFYING CULTURE-RELATED CONCEPTS IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION POLICIES

Education policies are crucial means to enhance peaceful co-existence in a culturally diverse Europe. Culture is, however, a challenging policy topic as general references to it may raise a question of 'what and whose culture' the policies are addressing. Based on the DIALLS project's concept analysis of the EU's and the Council of Europe's education policy documents, we recommend reducing their ambiguity by being explicit and precise with regard to the culture-related concepts contained within them. Target audience: Authors of future European education policies.

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CONTEXT OF ANALYSIS

The DIALLS project develops and researches the practices of cultural literacy to enhance intercultural dialogue in schools. The project started in 2018 with a concept analysis of education policy documentation to find out how culture-related concepts are used in them. This policy brief is based on this analysis and includes recommendations on how the conceptual language in European education policy documentation could be developed.

Our analysis was motivated by the UNESCO Survey on Intercultural Dialogue (2018) that emphasises adopting education policies that incorporate intercultural dialogue principles and develop closer ties between education and culture. These principles and ties have become increasingly important in today's European societies that have rapidly changed through cultural diversification and the recognition and greater acceptance of difference in its many forms. Policy language on the intercultural dialogue between people with different backgrounds faces new challenges in Europe where diversity itself is broad, multidimensional and fluid and where different positions – whether cultural, ethnic, national, social, religious, linguistic, etc. – intersect.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

In this policy brief, we focus on the part of our research that dealt with the EU's and the Council of Europe's education policy documentation. The EU documents were selected from the EUR-Lex database from the section 'Summaries of EU Legislation' under categories of 'Education, training, youth, sport' and 'Education and training' (48) and the Council of Europe's documents from its home page that deals with education under a link 'resources' and 'official texts' (19). The examination of the data was conducted as a qualitative concept analysis extended with a quantification of the

analysed concepts. The aim of the analysis was to explore how selected culture-related concepts which are important for intercultural dialogue and cultural literacy were used and what kinds of meanings were given to them in policy language. The analysis also explored how these concepts were discussed implicitly through other utterances. The 13 analysed concepts were: culture, cultural heritage, identity, values, participation, social responsibility, citizenship, inclusion, tolerance, empathy, and multiculturalism. Moreover, the concepts of intercultural dialogue and cultural literacy were explored.

The analysis revealed how the European education policy documentation seeks to guide policy-makers and administrative institutions and actors in the field of education through broad and ambiguous concepts that are open to different kinds of interpretations and whose meanings vary in policy language. In the documents, 'culture' is related to numerous themes and topics and various differences between people are discussed as 'cultural'. It often remains unclear what and whose culture the documents are discussing and what kinds of phenomena can be perceived as cultural.

The documents explicitly refer to intercultural dialogue several times. It is, however, more often implicitly dealt with by emphasising cooperation and communication between people with different backgrounds, active participation in societies or values, such as respect for others and tolerance. In these emphases, the idea of dialogue could be left in the background. It often remains unclear what kinds of diversities are addressed in intercultural dialogue.

The European education policy documentation explicitly refers to empathy only a few times even though empathy has been considered in the research literature as a core element of intercultural dialogue. The documents did not use the concept of cultural literacy.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the EU's and the Council of Europe's education policy documentation, we have formulated four recommendations:

1. We recommend that the European education policies more explicitly emphasise intercultural dialogue. In them, cultural literacy could be used as a conceptual tool to address and as a practical means to implement learning in a dialogic interaction between people.
2. It is important to reduce the ambiguity of policies by being explicit and precise with the culture-related concepts, such as culture, heritage, and identity, and their context-specific meanings.
3. Intercultural dialogue can address a broad variety of differences. We suggest approaching diversity not only as referring to differences in national culture, ethnicity, religion or language but also as explicitly including differences evoked by history, class, gender, sexual orientation, indigenusness and worldviews. It is a key to emphasise *dialogue* in intercultural dialogue.
4. It is important that European education policies recognise the existing power structures between the underprivileged and privileged, such as minorities, refugees or immigrants and majority cultures or the recipient countries. The discussion on equality, equal access, non-discrimination or inclusion of disadvantaged groups often remain non-specific in the documents. Instead of generalisations, we recommend that the documents set out in detail the contexts of equality, access and discrimination when they relate to specific groups.
5. We recommend to address empathy as one of the key elements of intercultural dialogue.

AUTHORS

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Find more information and DIALLS publications from the project's home page: www.dialls2020.eu