Intercultural Initiatives and Practices for Secondary and Adult Education in Greece

KONSTANTINOS SIASSIAKOS
Department of Technology Education and Digital Systems
University of Piraeus
Karaoli & Dimitriou Str. 80, GR-185 34, Piraeus
GREECE

MARIA THEODOSOPOULOU
General Secretariat for Adult Education (GSAE)
Institute for Continuing Adult Education (I.D.E.K.E.)
Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs
417, Acharnon Street, GR-11 43, Athens
GREECE

CONSTANTINOS TSAMADIAS
Assistant Professor
Department of Home Economics and Ecology
Harokopio University of Athens
El. Venizelou Str, Athens 17671
GREECE

Abstract: - The General Secretariat for Adult Education (G.S.A.E.) and its Institute, the Institute for Continuing Adult Education (I.D.E.K.E.), of the Hellenic Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs is responsible for the planning and implementation of programs in the adult education field. Taking into consideration the multicultural environment, the global and local needs it promotes learning projects at a national level and for Greeks abroad. It empowers adult learners by giving priority to the personal development, social inclusion, employment, active citizenship and the development of multiliteracies. This paper presents two good examples of computer supported collaborative learning and discusses intercultural aspects of adult education provided by the General Secretariat for Adult Education in Greece.

Key-Words: - Intercultural Education, Collaborative Learning,

1   Introduction

Multicultural and intercultural education, their implications and practices, are discussed in this paper. Focusing in practices, which promote intercultural dialogue and learning this paper presents two good examples of computer supported collaborative learning and discusses intercultural aspects of adult education provided by the General Secretariat for Adult Education in Greece.

2   Migration

If the world is a village, then it is a vibrant and moving village. The mobility of people for political, economic, social, educational reasons hardly leaves any place uninfluenced. Many countries have known the case of immigration on its both sides. Greece is one of the countries which during the 50's and 60's experienced the migration of people in other European countries, in the United States and in Australia. The expectations, the anguish, the difficulties, the reality were first hand experience for millions of immigrants. In the 90's Greece became the recipient of migrants from neighbouring, former eastern european, african and asian countries. Hosting thousand of immigrants proved to be a difficult but manageable task as far as infrastructure is considered. Terms, like xenophobia, racism, were introduced to raise awareness on discrimination issues.

3 Multicultural Education

The confirmation of the right of people to have equal access to learning takes many forms and refers to many groups. The right of black students in the United States to be educated in the same schools with white students was established in 1954. The respect of the mother language of immigrant families was recognized through bilingual education in the 60's and it was the means to reduce the possibilities of immigrant children to leave school. The state was seen as responsible for helping non English speaking children ameliorate the language problem and participate in educational activities. Bilingual education was enriched with elements about culture and multicultural education was the term to include the learning about cultures different of our own.

The underlying assumption of multicultural education is that 'newcomers' should be given the educational opportunities to adjust to mainstream society. It acknowledges diversity as a reality, but it also assumes the centrality of the prevalent culture. Two approaches have been followed to bring to the adjustment of immigrants to mainstream society. The approach of assimilation is visualized with the metaphor of the society as a melting pot, in which the inadequacy of cultural difference can be 'fixed' by incorporating immigrants to the culture of the host country. The approach of integration would aim at bringing the immigrants to adopt the mainstream culture   without reinforcing them to cultivate the cultural characteristics of their group [12].

The practice of multicultural education showed that cultural pluralism contributed to cultural approach, but was not an equivalent of cultural acceptance. Tolerance to coexistence does not mean there is tolerance to collaboration among the different groups. Incidents of racist violence have shown that recognizing to people the right to diversity is not enough.

4 Intercultural Education

Intercultural education refers to the minority as well as to the majority groups and the responses to difference. It promotes understanding between people, appreciation of local, national and global cultural wealth, promotion of equal opportunities for all people, fighting of stereotypes and discimination against minority groups, whether they are of different national origin, cultural tradition, physical impairment or others. Intercultural education prepares people to learn about the different, meet with the different, interact with the different, collaborate with the different.

Intercultural education is relevant to all people, as in different contexts sometimes we are part of a majority group and some other times we constitute a minority group. It also recognizes that cultural groups have subgroups and people are more than just members of a group. Intercultural education does not guarantee social harmony, but it assures communication among the different groups. Its dialectic nature means there is a dialogue among cultural, ethnic, religious, sex groups and an exchange of ideas and experiences.

Its aims are deeper and broader than those of multicultural education. Broader in the sense that they refer to three aspects: knowledge, attitude and skills [7]. Deeper in the sense that they call for people to reflect on their attitudes, values and actions and accept that reflection is a constant effort. It is meaningful to all the participants of the educational system helping them to be not only reactive, but also proactive [2].

In the cognitive domain it helps people become aware with concepts of human rights, social and economic life. It is through knowing about the 'other' that one learns how to make better use and encompass elements of the 'other' in his own behaviour, set of values, life. By placing the 'other' in the 'family' of our everyday activities, we familiarize ourselves with it and we make it functional, not merely a sociological entity. Key concepts, such as identity, stereotypes, racism, equality, rights, responsible behaviour, citizenship need to be clear to the participants and related to everyday situations [3]. It is critical for the trainees to realise that we all get discriminated and discriminate against others [1]. Intercultural education achieves its goals, when in the mind of the trainees, concepts as those mentioned above, are used not only to better understand the thoughts, attitudes and behaviour of other people but also to analyse their own thoughts, attitudes and behaviour.

More concretely from the perspective of minority groups it can be the knowledge of the language, the economic system of the country the live and work. From the perspective of the majority groups it can be the knowledge of influence and contribution of other cultures. From the perspective of trainers it can be the knowledge of learners' backgrounds, strengths, weaknesses and learning styles. Attitudes refer to the values of democracy, tolerance. The aspect of skills refers to the ability to work with other people, be part of a team, handle conflicts, problem solving, develop the critical sense, have self respect and empathy for other people [13].

Regarding the affective domain intercultural education also promotes acceptance of differences and positive regard to all people [5]. Cultivating empathy for the state and the needs of other people and groups of people, bringing to the foreground trainees' feelings in cases of labeling and discrimination help give to the "other" a face and a heart instead of a box into which they categorise people.

The thread uniting the two directions of intercultural education is action. Trainees need not only recognize stereotypes, discriminating behaviour and their consequences but also take a stand and act upon that knowledge. Knowing the social environment in which one lives is a prerequisite for taking action and contributing to the welfare of the community and the society [8]. They need to realize that big issues as well as every day situations are our opportunities to be responsible persons and citizens in our workplace, family, neighbourhood, community, city, country and in international level. Personal development in intercultural development cannot be complete if not combined with commitment to work on solutions with daily practical issues.

On the other hand the trainer needs also to be aware of his own mentality and behaviour towards the trainees.

It is broadly expected that intercultural educations is applied when a course is attended by trainees belonging to marginalized groups or immigrants. These are the cases where obviously such a direction should be followed. But intercultural education applies to all trainees and can permeate any course [4]. As we all are at risk of being stereotyped and stereotyping others, as we all could benefit from cooperation with other people, as we all can better understand ourselves through others elements of intercultural education should be a dynamic part of every course. Multiple ways, direct or indirect, can be used to incorporate intercultural elements in any course and show how we can make the most of differences among people and even celebrate them [6].

Emphasis is given to diversity, but actually it is similarities which bring people together. It involves past, future and present. It educates people to move beyond stereotypes, not to dwell on one point of the history of other groups of people and colour everything according to a historical event. For example, teaching history in all levels –local, national, European, international- in an intercultural approach can broaden the perspective on looking at peoples' actions. It draws attention to similar phases people go through and how different people solve alike problems.

5 Collaborative Learning, ICT and Intercultural Education

Emerging technologies have posed new challenges to educational practices and necessity for adoption of new pedagogical principles in the newly formed environments. Communication, collaboration and active participation are some of the introduced keywords in the educational procedure. A special category of these technologies are the Computer Supported Collaborative Learning systems which support the collaborative learning as an instructional method of constructivism. The role of peers in these environments magnifies their capacities with reference to dynamically established relationships among the participants and following development of trust feelings and effective problem solving. Collaborative learning through ICT offers many opportunities for continuous communication between trainers and trainees and communication among trainees. Collaboration promotes learning, which energises the learning community and promotes the development of basic skills [10]. The exchange of ideas between trainees help them develop personal skills, as communication, problem solving, flexibility, empathy, democratic values. Two good examples of collaborative learning are presented: and Student Collaborative and Open Learning for European Theatre and Culture (SCOUT) the Collaborative Learning and Training (COLTT).

5.1 Secondary education

A. A European project utilizing the combination of ICT and intercultural education is SCOUT (Student Collaborative and Open Learning for European Theatre and Culture). It aims at broadening the cultural perspectives of young people and promoting reflection on issues of culture, society, sex, identity formation. Students are in a position to learn about cultural tradition of other countries and other eras and teachers help them appreciate the contribution of different cultures and become conscious of their own attitudes and stereotypes about those cultures. Theatrical plays are studied by teachers and students of secondary education and learn about different cultures and traditions. Teachers from different schools agree on a project about theatre and relevant activities and groups of students from those schools collaborate on the technological platform of

SCOUT. It is a way of promoting collaboration between teachers and students and approaching cultural education through other subjects and it is not a theatrical play.

In the SCOUT frame a network platform was developed to facilitate the asynchronous and synchronous communication/collaboration and the upload of educational material about the theatre. The main concept is that schools from different European countries work together on a project related to a theatrical scenario, play or history and publicize the results of their collaboration on the SCOUT platform. A series of activities are produced and uploaded by their teachers. Teachers and students communicate either synchronously (via chat) or asynchronously (via forum, e-mail) each other. The history of theatre is taught through an interactive game. The SCOUT emphasizes on the collaboration among the actors of educational scenarios.

The user starts the game choosing the type of theatre or the theatrical period they want to play. Having made their choice they must pass all the stages successfully. The stages refer to a variety of choices such as theatrical pillars, costumes, masks, writers and known phrases. ICTs are used as an instructional medium and as an example of how different learning objects could be composed together in a theme such as theatre. Likely, the vehicle could be changed to poetry, environmental projects, health education etc.
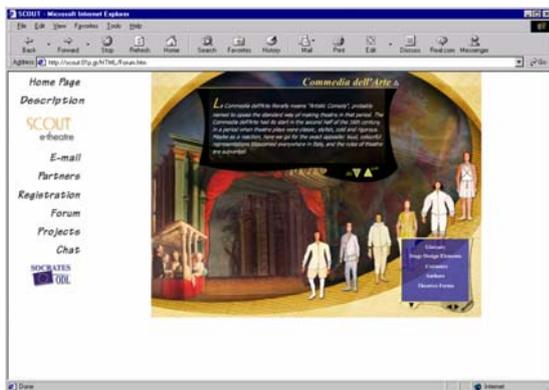

Figure 1. The interactive environment of SCOUT

A sample of the hypermedia courseware can be accessed at the SCOUT web site:
http://scout.01p.gr/HTML/e_theatre.htm

Another possibility of this platform is an interaction game about the history of theatre. Users select among eras and their corresponding forms of theatrical plays, learn about authors, stage design and costumes.

Until now, the results from using the SCOUT environment are encouraging: 36 projects are progressing and schools from a number of countries (Greece, Italy, Sweden, G. Britain, Holland, Turkey, Spain etc.) do engage in them. Unfortunately, in Greek educational reality the project stopped due to the lack of technological support in school classrooms. Greek teachers tried to collaborate with their colleagues from Spain and Great Britain forming learning scenarios and activities inspired by Lorka's act but it didn't work in Greek school classes. Despite the Greek failure to materialize the effort other attempted efforts were much luckier. Students inspired by greek ancient acts and their heroes such as Helectra, Ekavi, Antigoni, etc. to create their own theatrical scenario to put on that play. Thus, students are engaged in authentic learning solving a variety of problems: costumes, masks, scenery, roles, characters, production, funds, kind of theatrical play and history. World web was a means of query and broader research. In that collaboration the students' enthusiasm was great and a number of social issues were enhanced concerning the racism and sexism phenomenon. Finally, the exchanged messages were of great importance while students and teachers moved on.

The most significant issue on SCOUT is that it doesn't only subsume drama and theatre in daily educational practice but it contributes to the collaboration between different cultures which search for a path to be expressed in a multi-cultural world. Collaborated members benefit from this project and all together produce a collective result while mature the idea of respect and mutual acceptance of others regardless of their nationality and religion. Despite its promising contribution, SCOUT requires appropriate technological support and motives in order to be applied.

B. COLTT combines ICT with collaborative learning in order to surpass the limitations of time, space, knowledge, nationality and it can be used in both formal and non formal education. Its main characteristic is learning through simulations in Internet-based environment. Simulations are a pedagogical means to help trainees learn about cooperation and realize issues of the "real" world [9].

Trainees work in groups upon a script their trainers have developed. For the script to be realistic and effective certain parameters have to be defined from the beginning. The simulation should have clear objectives, be consisted of phases with responding tasks and deadlines, which the trainers attend to be carried through. Simulations involve

trainees and trainers from different countries, who communicate through Web-based customized tools, as the TELSI environment, and share ideas, knowledge and experience. Each group of the trainees take over a phase of the simulation, so that the work of each group is linked with the other groups.

The collaboration between tutors and trainees, members of a group and different groups depends upon the communication, which can take three forms: a) asynchronous, b) synchronic, c) dynamic. Tutors can develop their own approach to help trainees complete their part of the simulation intervening and discussing with their trainees about objectives, process, and deadlines. It also has to be sensitive to cultural differences. Communication which is carried in an Internet-based environment is not aided by visual contact and can easily be misinterpreted.

Reflection on behalf of the participants can be achieved through the use of electronic logbooks. The participants can write their objectives, plans of action and adjustments of these plans, the process of learning, the difficulties, the strengths, the evaluation of the plans.

5.2 General Secretariat for Adult Education of the Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs: Programmes with intercultural dimensions

The General Secretariat for Adult Education (G.S.A.E.) and its Institute, the Institute for Continuing Adult Education (I.D.E.K.E.), of the Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is responsible for the planning and implementation of programs in the adult education field. Taking into consideration the multicultural environment, the global and local needs it promotes learning projects at a national level and for Greeks abroad. It empowers adult learners by giving priority to the personal development, social inclusion, employment, active citizenship and the development of multiliteracies. In the educational period 2005-2006 the Adult Education Centres provided courses which were attended by 69.531 citizens. Moving to a more accurate depiction of trainees 1.209 were Roma, 698 immigrants, 137 repatriates, 1199 muslims, 996 foreigners. Among the courses, which are provided by the Adult Education Centres we will present some actions referring to socially vulnerable groups:

■ For the many Roma, who have attended only a part of the elementary school curriculum, there is an educational programme, split in two levels of 50 hours each. The aim of this programme is to inform the participants about the rights in family, the world of work and the civil services. Participants of the programmes also receive counselling support for 50 hours to help them make the most of the educational experience, become aware of their identity and more skilled in claiming their rights. Refugees, repatriates and asylum seekers also receive counseling support for 25 hours with the above aims.

■ A second action targets the socially vulnerable families. One of the basic characteristics of the socially vulnerable families is the underdeveloped skill of language is considered as one of the main reasons for the marginalisation and social exclusion of the person and its entire family, as it regresses the individual development, progress and equal participation to employment and sociocultural milieu. The 'Education and Counselling Support of families of Roma, Muslims, Expatriates and Immigrants' Programme, in collaboration with Parents'Education, provides training to three fields:

a) In the first phase 75 hours will be allocated for the introduction of the basic level of greek language and 25 hours will introduce parents to the greek culture and history. The participants will practice their communication skills and will approach the cultural and historical background of the country;

b) The second phase with duration of 25 hours deals with the relationships between families and schools. It discusses strategies for effective communication, parental involvement in school activities, relationships among classmates, among educators and parents;

c) In the last 25 hours of the programme parents are informed on health education issues of childhood and adolescence, such as hygiene, transmitted diseases, immunizations.

The development of the basic skill of greek language and the counselling support of the parents is expected to contribute to the development of a supportive family environment, which reinforces the student through monitoring his school achievements and helps him at his homework, thus reducing the school failure and dropout, contributes to the psychosocial support of the children and the improvement of the relationships between the family members, helps reduce the risk of social marginalisation and exclusion of students and their families. The programme starts in 2005-6 and 2.250 parents are expected to participate.

Another programme of the G.S.A.E., which runs throughout the country is "Greek as a second language for employed immigrants". Immigrants can attend three levels of greek language each lasting 100 hours. The fourth level lasts 125 hours combines greek language knowledge and information about

greek culture and leads to exams for the certification of adequate knowledge of the language, a certification which is a prerequisite for immigrants to stay for a long period in the country. Through this programme trainees are helped to participate actively in the economic, social and cultural life of the country, reinforce their employability, improve their greek language skills. The multiethnic mosaic of trainees means that the cooperation between them needs to be based upon intercultural understanding. During the first phase of implementation of the programme in 2003-4 1437 immigrants attended the courses, while in 2004-5 the trainees were 1998. Until 2008 it is estimated that 7.152 immigrants will benefit through this programme.

All the above presented programmes are financed by the European Social Fund by 75%.

'Colours', a Grundtvig I project, in which the Institute for Continuing Adult Education along with Italy, the Czech Republic, Germany and Spain is a partner, promotes intercultural dialogue and understanding between people of different cultures. It uses art therapy as a tool to promote cultural dialogue. Through visual art workshops immigrants and people from the local communities work together communicate through painting, sculpture, photography and graphics. Art therapists and cultural mediators it shows how art helps people to communicate, cooperate and interact. In this programme, the Centre for Training of Adult Trainers, under the name 'Plato' aims to provide continuous education and address the needs of adult educators in theoretical background, as well as pedagogical aspects. The strategic goal of bringing closer adult education practices used in the increasing number of educational programmes of the G.S.A.E. referring to socially vulnerable groups and the mainstream adult education courses will be one of the foci of 'Plato'.

Note: Maria Theodosopoulou attended a Grundtvig 3 seminar on Collaborative Learning Teacher Training organized by VOX through a scholarship by the State Scholarship Foundation of Greece (I.K.Y.).

References

[1] All Different-All Equal, Education Pack (1995) European Youth Centre.

[2] Amorim, L. Intercultural Learning: a few awareness tips for US and european fellows and host community foundations. In Community Foundation Transatlantic Fellowship Orientation Session, 2001. European Foundation Centre, 2001.

[3] Brander, P., Oliveira, B., Gomes, R., Ondrácková, J., Keem, E., Surian, A., Lemineur, M.L. and Suslova, O. Kompass Handbuch zur Menschenrechtsbildung für die Schulische und Außerschulische Bildungsarbeit. Berlin: Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte, 2005.

[4] Buldioski, G., Grimaldi, C., Mitter, S., Titley, G. and Wagner, G. Training Essntials T-Kit, no 6. Brussels, Council of Europe, DG IV Directorate of Youth and Sport, 2002.

[5] Cobet-Rhode, A., Schmidt-Behlau, B, and Vidinlioglu, I. Promotion of Civil Dialogue by Developing Intercultural Education. In Dr. H. Hinzen (ed.) *Adult Education Embracing Diversity I: snapshots from Intercultural Education in Europe*. Bonn: IIZ/DVV, 2005.

[6] Domino, European Youth Centre, 1996.

[7] Fischer, V. Intercultural Competence-a Key Competence for Adult Educators. In Dr. H. Hinzen (ed.) *Adult Education Embracing Diversity II: developing strategies for mainstreaming intercultural learning based on needs and experiences*. Bonn: IIZ/DVV, 2005.

[8] Gilbert, A., Haji-Kella, M., Cascao Guedes, M., Raykova, A., Schachinger, C. and Taylor, M. Intercultural Learning T-Kit, no.4. Brussels, Council of Europe, DG IV Directorate of Youth and Sport, 2000.

[9] Husemoen,R. and Steinmetz, A. COLTT. A Handbook on Collaborative Learning in Teacher Training. Kaunas, Technologija, 2006.

[10] Müller-Hartmann, A. "The Role of Tasks in Promoting Intercultural Learning in Electronic Learning Networks", *Language Learning and Technology*, 4(2), 129-147, 2000.

[11] Palaiologou, N., Evangelou, O. Intercultural Education (in greek). Athens: Atrapos 2003.

[12] Tiedt, P. L., Tiedt, I. M. 2002. *Multicultural Teaching: a handbook of activities, information, and resources*. 6th ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

[13] Van Eyken, H., Farcasiu, A., Raeymaeckers, M., Szekely, R. and Wagenhofer, I. 2005. Developing Skills for Efficient Communication with People from Different Cultural Backgrounds. Basic Trainer Competencies. Deurne-Karjaa-Sibiu-Vienna, 2005.