

## ICTIME PROJECT, AN EXPERIENCE ON THE FIELD OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION USING MEDIA

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**Abstract.** This paper presents a successful experience in the field of intercultural education that promotes ICT and media: the ICTime project. In the project were involved teams from four European countries (Portugal – the coordinator country, Latvia, Poland and Romania as members). The project was held during a period of three years, from October 2006 to September 2009. The activities realized in this project were diverse, ranging from investigations and development of good practices to European contests and seminars. The main results of the project consist in developing good practices regarding the integration of ICT and media in the intercultural education. Materials, methodological and pedagogical strategies of using digital media in intercultural education developed in the context of the project were made available during the organized courses and on the project web site, represent the base of the integration of intercultural and media education.

**Keywords:** intercultural education; media education; multimedia in education; project management.

### 1. Introduction

We live in a global society that creates a culturally challenging educational environment in the EU. In this context, there is a need for methodological and pedagogical strategies of intercultural education that are congruent with local experiences and also with European space that explores the comparative view on various common and cross-cultural issues.

The purpose of the article is to present the results of the project ICTime (**ICT** as a Tool in the Intercultural and Media Education), held during a period of three years, from October 2006 to September 2009. The ICTime project aimed to enrich the intercultural education by using digital media at schools. Digital technologies can lead to inventive and effective solutions for contemporary social and cultural challenges in education. Media is part of young people's everyday life and thus the use of digital media in education provides more motivation and focuses on students' interests and daily life. We discuss intercultural education using a constructivist framework that is the core of the learner-centred approach and that implies students' active engagement in their own learning. Such approach provides a learning experience that improves the intercultural educational practice and also supports and empowers both national and European community.

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## 2. The current situation regarding intercultural and media education in countries participating at ICTime project

Media education and intercultural education are generally seen as separate disciplines in the documents of the Ministries of Education or in the school practice from Latvia, Portugal, Poland and Romania. In the following we discuss some aspects of intercultural and media education.

### 2.1. Intercultural education

In the context of globalization the intercultural education represents a necessity that aims "to form people who are capable of appreciating different cultures, which live together in a multicultural society, who accept to evolve in interaction with these cultures so that this variety becomes a positive element, enriching the cultural, social and economic life of the environment" (*Comité sur l'école québécoise et les communautés culturelles*, 1985).

Intercultural education involves great efforts for strengthening the instruction and development of the targeted individuals or groups using:

- a knowledge system regarding culture in general and one's own culture and other cultures in particular, regarding the impact of culture on individual or group behavior, regarding the appropriate communication and behavior in the context of interactions with others, the suitable attitudes toward others and regarding the psychosocial mechanisms and political factors that can give rise to racial manifestations etc.
- a set of skills that are needed in order to effectively communicate and interact with individuals from different cultures;
- a critical reflection capacity used for one's own behavior and also for the behavior of other people;
- the awareness of the own culture and of the cultural differences;
- a set of values and attitudes regarding the interaction with others, regarding the promotion of tolerance and solidarity within people coming from different culture;
- a kit of practices and modes of action and effective intervention in cases of discrimination and intolerance in order to promote and value cultural differences.

The aim of these efforts is to develop individuals or groups possessing a better capacity of integration in a multicultural and multilinguistic society and who are capable of social interaction "which creates identities and human Communion" (Ouellet, 1991, p.29-30; Kerzil & Vinsonneau, 2004, p. 109).

The IAIE - an international network of educational professionals involved in the development and implementation of intercultural education - considers that intercultural education is carried out by: clear educational policies for schools, based on the principles of human rights in educational institutions; the provision of opportunities for communication and co-operation amongst heterogeneous groups; the recognition of the value of knowledge and skills and of contributions of all students to the learning process; criteria for elaborating an accessible core curriculum; criteria for achieving and assessing the interactions within the classroom; promotion of the multilingualism (Batelaan & Coomans, 1999).

Batelaan (apud Ciolan, 2000, p. 28) identifies the proper conditions for a successful achievement of the intercultural education:

- creating a balance between the various purposes of education (regarding qualification purposes, cultural, social and personal development purposes);
- providing communication and cooperation opportunities in heterogeneous groups;
- providing equal chances for participating at the interactions which take place in the classroom;
- the reflection in the school curriculum of the realities that are specific to a multicultural society (a curriculum which is not centered on ethnocentrism but on globalization);

- the presentation of the information from different perspectives, in order to stimulate the critical thinking and the awareness of the diversity etc.

INTER Project (2002) specifies what intercultural education is not: isolated celebrations (“Intercultural week”, “Gastronomic Day”, “Peace Day” and so on), just learning about the characteristics of certain groups as “others”, so as to “get to know them better”; having recipes to solve conflicts or to address so called differently labeled groups; mixing students having from different backgrounds without promoting positive relationships or other wider aims.

## 2.2. Media education

Media education is the process through which the students’ media literacy is developed. Media literacy has many definitions: “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a variety of forms” (Kubey, 1997); a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the media to interpret the meaning of the message we encounter” (Potter, 2005). A person with media literacy ability should be able “to decode, evaluate, analyze, and produce both print and electronic media” (Aufderheide, Firestone, 1993). A media literate person should have the following skills: breaking down a message into meaningful elements; judging the value of an element by comparing it with a given standard; determining which elements are similar and which are different based on given criteria; interfering a pattern across a small set of elements, then generalizing the pattern to all elements in the set; using general principles to explain particular cases; assembling elements into new structures; creating a brief description to present the essence of a message (Adams & Hamm, 2001).

Media Education aims to develop critical thinking, critical understanding and active participation (Buckingham, 2003).

Duncan has presented in 1989 two approaches of media education.

- The inquiry model. This model is “a structured framework” that helps students to stimulate open questioning and encourages them to be intellectually curious about the media. Students should think about the author and target audience of a message, should identify the meaning and the purpose of it. This model is appropriate especially for the introduction of media literacy activities in the classroom.
- The model based on critical teaching strategies. This model requires that students make important critical choices. They should select the most important information from a message; they should think about other information, which has left out; they should motivate their thinking.

In media education the teacher should create situations in which students can make their own judgment, can develop the ability to analyze those judgments and can assume the responsibility about their thinking. (Masterman, 1985)

Media education should not degenerate into accumulation of facts, knowledge and information about media; should not consist on practical work without precise purpose, only to keep students occupied; should not involve reproduction of teacher’s ideas by the students (Masterman, 1985).

Finally, it is important to discriminate between media education and media studies. Media studies deals with the content, history and effects of various media. It focuses on the critique of artistic styles, on the study of the production and of the social impact.

## 2.3. Initial situation about intercultural and media educations in countries involved in the project

The countries involved in the project have different ethnic and cultural circumstances and different experiences regarding intercultural and media education. The interest for media and intercultural education is reflected by the results of researches carried during 2006-2008 in the project countries.

**Latvia** is a country with 8 important minorities. Latvians represent 58.9% of the total number of population. The most important minority is the Russian (28.4% of total number of population). Less represented are Byelorussians (3.8%), Ukrainians (2.5%) and Poles (2.4%). Other minorities having less than two percent are Lithuanians and Jews. (Inhabitants Register of Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, August 2006).

In Latvia there are more than 200 schools for minorities and several centres that support bilingual teaching in schools, financed by municipalities. The Latvian system of education covers three types of schools: Latvian language schools; Russian or bilingual schools carrying out minority education programs and other minority or bilingual schools. Bilingual education was promoted by the University of Latvia, Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology who developed in 1998 the conceptions and good practices in the field of Bilingual education. 11 years later, in September 2009, the Latvian Ministry of Education and Sciences has implemented four models of bilingual education in schools.

**Poland** is a monolingual and monocultural country, national minorities representing, according to the 2005 Census, between 3% and 4% of the Polish population. In Poland there are three different types of school systems and one inter-school program that facilitate education of national minorities. The three types of school systems are: schools in a minority language, bilingual schools, and schools with additional study of a minority language. When a low number of students from each school are interested in studying a particular language, inter-school groups are organized for them by the schools in question. In the schools where the instruction is conducted in the language of a minority, geography and history of the country of origin are also taught. The study of all subjects is carried out in the language of the minority group, with the exception of the Polish language, Polish literature and the history of Poland. In bilingual schools Polish and another language are taught, splitting equally the time between the two languages.

There are three main problems that schools with minority language education encounter: the lack of textbooks, the lack of qualified teachers, and the lack of appropriate facilities. The Ministry of Education has provided in the past financing to minority schools but these actions led to protests from the local Polish population so now both books and teachers are most often imported from those countries where the language of instruction is spoken. Teachers' exchanges with those countries, as well as special training in instruction, have been undertaken in an attempt to remedy the situation. In the 2001-2002 school year, minority-language instruction was available in 620 schools and provided for 41,905 students.

**Portugal** currently has a population of approximately 10 500 000 persons. In the past Portugal's population was remarkably homogeneous and had been so for all of its history. This lack of ethnic variety helped it to become the first unified nation-state in Western Europe. For centuries, Portugal had virtually no ethnic, tribal, racial, religious, or cultural minorities. Almost all Portuguese spoke the national language, almost all were Roman Catholic and almost all identified with Portuguese culture and the nation of Portugal. Although Portugal lacked socially significant ethnic differences, some regional differences existed. The north was generally more conservative and Catholic than the south that was said to be less "tainted" by Moorish or Islamic influences. Regional dances, dress, festivals, and customs had once been very distinctive, but modern communication and transportation had opened up and connected formerly closed regions and produced a greater homogeneity.

Portugal has a sizeable Roma population, perhaps as many as 50,000. Despite the government efforts to integrate them into the larger society, the Roma remain an isolated group, semi-nomadic, earning their living by begging, fortune telling, handicrafts, and trading.

Until today Portugal has experienced a long and continued history of being a country of departure for emigrants. People from the former colonies (namely Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, S. Tomé, Guinée, Timor, parts of India and Macau in China) have, in the last two to three decades, migrated to Portugal. More recently, a great number of Slavs, especially Ukrainians, and Brazilians are also migrating to Portugal. There is also a small Chinese minority. At the end of the 20th century it also became a host country.

Portugal has benefited in recent decades from the presence of such immigrants who have helped to accelerate the process of development, which our country is enjoying. However, it is also important to underline the enrichment gained from both the cultural and religious diversity introduced by immigrant communities since *cultural diversity is one of the sources of development, understood not simply as economic growth, but also as a means of access to a satisfactory intellectual, affective,*

*moral and spiritual existence*. Since 1996, Portuguese society has developed a more consistent and coordinated policy to welcome and integrate the immigrants.

Portuguese educational policies interpret intercultural education as geared towards the integration of the immigrants. Portugal is one of the few countries, which explicitly states strategies to prepare teachers to deal with a multicultural reality. This includes developing a critical attitude and different methodological approaches through stimulating innovation, investigation and self-learning. The main objective of intercultural education in Portugal is ensuring social cohesion by developing knowledge and respect for different cultures and encouraging a critical assessment of stereotypical representations, as well as by teaching immigrants Portuguese as a second language in order to accommodate them with the school system.

Since 2001, the school curricula have been reorganized including thereafter “Education for Citizenship” as a transversal area of education, replacing the former “Social and Personal Education”. As a specific strategy, three new compulsory subjects were introduced in the national curriculum for primary education: Project Work, Study Methods and Civic Education. The latter is meant to prepare responsible, active and critical citizens, by promoting their active participation in class, school and community life. It is also worth mentioning that documents addressing pre-school education in particular are very rich in terms of concepts and ideas relating to intercultural education and democratic and citizenship education. However, national syllabi in the secondary school give more emphasis to intercultural education mainly in specific subjects such as foreign languages, geography, history and art. Finally, as stated above, it is to be noticed that the main feature of active citizenship in schools remains, according to national legislation, mostly focused on their democratic organisation.

The use of technologies in the classrooms is a central topic for educational policies in Portugal and so, in the last years, an increasing volume of public funds was invested in the equipment of all public schools with computers, interactive boards and Internet access.

**Romania** is a country with 21,698,181 inhabitants, very rich in minorities: 20 national minorities representing 10.5 % of the population of the country, 15 religious minorities representing 13.3% of the population and many spoken languages (the 2002 Census).

In Romania there are four *ethnic minorities* that are statistically important: the Hungarians (6.6%), the Roma (2.5%), the German and the Ukrainian, each making up for 0.3% of the Romanian population. If the large minorities, as Hungarians and Germans, have strong awareness of their national identity and a highly organised political representation, the Roma have to cope with social problems, prejudices and discrimination, while the small minorities try hard to preserve their cultural identities.

According to the Education Law, in Romania there are three types of educational institutions for minority students (Population Census, 1992):

- Education institutions (2,732 schools) that train / instruct in the mother tongue for Hungarian, Czech, Croatian, German, Serbian and Ukrainian minorities;
- Education institutions with partial training in the mother tongue (5 schools), characteristic to the Croatian, Turk and Tartar minorities;
- Romanian education institutions (3,870 schools) where students study in Romanian, but can study also one of the following languages: Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Italian, Roma, Polish, Czech, Croatian, German, Hungarian, Serbian, Slovak, Turk, Tartar, Ukrainian;

At university level there are universities where the teaching language is Hungarian or German; or there are study lines using minorities' languages. This is, for instance, the case of the Babeş-Bolyai University where there are study lines in Hungarian, German and, recently, Romani. These study lines interact at all levels. Universities propose modules of courses (intercultural communication, intercultural dialogue, intercultural learning) addressed to in-service teachers and social actors involved in the educational activities dedicated to minorities, especially to Roma communities.

In Romania, intercultural education has been introduced in the school curricula from 2008/2009 school year. Media education can be found in the curricula only on the university level and this discipline is

addressed to pre-service or in-service teachers. There is no any reference in the Romanian curricula for realizing intercultural education and media education on a transdisciplinary way, how is being suggested in the European documents.

In conclusion, in Romania the preoccupation for training in media education is poor, always reduced to the use of media for the presentation purposes.

### **3. Project development**

#### **3.1. Partnership and target groups**

The project team is made of four institutions: Rui Grácio Teachers Training Center, in Seixal, Portugal (coordinator); Universitatea Babes-Bolyai, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania; Osrodek Edukacji I. Zastosowan Komputerow, in Warsaw, Poland; and Daugavpils Universitate, in Daugavpils, Latvia.

The project was addressed to teachers and other school educational staff in order to support them in improving their teaching competencies and professional practices in the field of intercultural education and ICT. The target group in this project was represented by the teachers interested in broadening their comprehension and experience in intercultural diversity within their immediate educational environments and developing their skills of using digital media in intercultural education. Indirect target groups are primary and secondary school students; teacher trainers and educational authorities and policy makers. The materials developed during the project are freely available on the project website, anybody interested could profit from the project results.

#### **3.2. Project activities and results**

The activities of the project were oriented in the following directions:

##### **a) Surveys and theoretical investigation.**

In Romania a preliminary survey was conducted about teachers' and pupils' interest for intercultural education (Ciascai & Marchis, 2007a). 36 teachers answered the questionnaire for teachers. 27 teachers consider intercultural education very interested, their reasons can be grouped in two categories: reasons as is the willing to learn more about other cultures, and the need to solve those problems in classroom, which arise from the present of different cultures. The most important keywords which, refers to intercultural education, selected by the teachers are: tolerance, acceptance, knowledge. The questionnaire for pupils was answered by 172 high school pupils from different ethnic and religious groups. 143 students are interested to develop their intercultural competencies. The most important keywords selected by the pupils were mutual respect, acceptance, cooperation, equal opportunities, and understanding.

A survey on teachers' opinion regarding intercultural education and the use of media in education respectively about media education was conducted in the school year 2006-2007 in all partner countries (Belousa et. al, 2009). In this survey 267 subjects have participated: 90 from Latvia, 57 from Poland, 50 from Portugal, 67 from Romania. Subjects were asked to respond at 22 items. We highlight here the most important questions for the project topic. In the respondents' opinion, the main tasks of a teacher in intercultural education implementation are: to create an educational environment in which every child should feel accepted and safe (82%); to encourage open and tolerant attitude one to another (77%); to encourage children in trying to understand their own culture as part of other cultures (65%); to shape positive attitudes regarding other cultures and to instruct pupils how to support, how to cooperate and how to live together with other societies (64%). Regarding the proper age for developing intercultural skills, 56% of the respondents consider that the more early the developing intercultural skills begin, the more efficient the approach is. The teachers declared that they use frequently multimedia means and aids, mostly when they present a new material (63% of the teachers), when pupils are involved in different projects and project activities (49%) or when pupils work individually (39%). We can notice that for a considerable number of domains there are obvious similarities among the answers given by the Portuguese and the Romanian on one hand, and by the Latvians and Polish on the other hand.

An investigation on the situation of intercultural and media education in the participating countries were made between 2006-2009. This investigation focuses on the legislative frame, the curricula of the involved countries regarding the presence of intercultural and media education, on the existing theoretical guidelines and methodology, and the practical experiences in schools. This investigation put in evidence the interest accorded by the policy makers for the promotion in each country of human rights, for avoiding racial, cultural and religious discrimination and for adapting national legislations to the European ones.

**b) Creating teaching and learning materials.** During the project a *methodology of integrating digital media in intercultural education* was developed. Intercultural education activities were developed. The focus was on the use of digital media during these activities. In the following we present some methodological considerations about the integration of media in intercultural education activities. For example, photos could express intercultural issues, and variant activities could be planned using them (Ciascai & Marchis, 2007b; Ciascai & Marchis, 2008; Marchis, Ciascai & Saial, 2008). Another media, which can be used in intercultural education, is film (Marchis, Ciascai & Saial, 2008; Ciascai & Marchis, 2009). In the case of films, for the intercultural education purposes it is important to create or to interpret a message, to correctly integrate the film in the learning activity instead of developing technical ICT skills. It is also very important, that in activities involving film not only interpretation of a film is integrated, but also the creation of a film (Marchis, Ciascai & Costa, 2008). Computer could also be used during intercultural activities (Ciascai & Marchis, 2009; Ciascai, Fóris-Ferenczi, Marchis & Szállassy, 2009) having different purposes: documentation, communication, presentation and creation of complex media message. Also, examples of activities integrating intercultural education in different schools subjects were developed. Intercultural education using media could be easily integrated in Arts classes (Borges, Chaves, Costa & Sá Pereira, 2009) based on the fact that art reflects in various ways the interactions between different cultures, thus it is suitable for introducing interculturality. Another important school subject, which could put in evidence past and present (inter)cultural interactions, is History (Bolovan, 2009; Costa, Saial, Castro & Pita, 2009). Even Mathematics classes could deal with intercultural issues; for example teaching measurement units gives the opportunity to speak about different cultures and interaction between them (Magdas, 2009). Interdisciplinary activities could be related to intercultural education: while teaching symmetry mosaics and other artworks from different countries could be useful, these artworks give the possibility to speak about the cultures from where they come from, to compare the patterns from different cultures, and to observe interactions between these cultures (Marchis, 2009). These examples could serve to understand the characteristics of the intercultural approaches developed in the context of the ICTime project activities.

**c) Course “Digital media in intercultural education”.** The course is based on three interrelated issues: (1) didactics and methodology of using digital media; (2) technologies of making digital media; (3) intercultural issues that characterize the current European educational situation. The main purpose of the course is to show to teachers how to integrate digital media in intercultural education. Parts of the course were tested in all of the partner countries and handouts for these parts were written in all of the partner countries’ languages. Methodology books, which could be used during the course, are available in English (Ciascai & Marchis, 2009), Romanian (Ciascai & Marchis, 2007b; Ciascai & Marchis, 2008b), and Hungarian (Ciascai & Marchis, 2009; Ciascai, Fóris-Ferenczi, Marchis & Szállassy, 2009).

**d) Activities for students.** During the project two European photo contests, workshops for pupils, and school visits were organized.

The photo contests were addressed to students and had intercultural topic. The photo contest from 2007 had the topic “Living Together“, and it was addressed to pupils from 10 to 19, in two age groups (10-14 and 15-19). This contest had a great success, 178 pupils from 15 European countries have participated. The contest from 2008, with theme “Intercultural dialogue” had some modifications to the previous contest. First of all the range of media was extended, photos and videos were accepted to this contest. The second change was regarding the age of the participants; the age range was extended to 10-25, in two age groups (10-14 and 15-25). 93 students from 10 countries were participated. For the

video contest only two videos with low quality were sent, this shows that pupils are not prepared to edit short films. Another observation is based on the photos sent: many of them didn't have a real intercultural message or didn't put in evidence the intercultural message. This shows, that pupils are not well prepared in intercultural issues. These two conclusions underline the importance of the project. The best photos sent to the photo competition were used by the project team members to develop methodologies for using photos in intercultural education.

Another activity organized for pupils is a workshop with 52 school students from 5 schools in Cluj-Napoca. During this workshop 8 activities were organized by the partner countries: "Intercultural influence in Portuguese language", "Politeness in various cultures", "Interculturality", "Intercultural influence in Portuguese music and dance", "Intercultural influence in Portuguese History", "Intercultural influence in Portuguese Art – traditional painting". Pupils were very interested in learning about other cultures.

It is also important to mention that during every project meetings schools visits were organized. These meetings gave the opportunity for the project partners to take a look inside the other countries educational system, to discuss about intercultural issues and learn about the school's experiences in the intercultural field, to disseminate the project and find out about other projects in which the schools are involved.

**e) Learning activities for the project teams' members.** In every project the learning of the project team members is important. Thus during the project learning activities were organized. As most of the communication was made through the Moodle platform, a course of using Moodle was included in the project meeting plan in Portugal, 2007. Reading photos was an important issue in the project, as the Latvian team organized a course on this topic via videoconference in 2007. In Romania a course on taking and manipulating photos was made in the same year. A course of editing movies with Movie Maker was implemented during the project meeting in Poland in 2008; then this knowledge was used in editing the Dracula film. This movie gave the opportunity to try the production of the film from planning, filming (at the Bran castle in 2007), taking interviews, to editing the final product.

Informal learning of the persons' involved in the project is also an outcome. By implementing the project, all the participants gain knowledge on intercultural education and/or media education, as the team members confess it:

*"I learned a lot about intercultural and media literacy as I worked with students in workshops where intercultural and media literacy activities were integrated. I was involved in development of research methodology about intercultural and media issues in teacher education and it was an important experience for me to understand the role of the mentioned literacies in education" (A., Latvia);*

*"We have learned how to coordinate intercultural programs. The subject of intercultural and media education is very important to me because I have students from different parts of the world and I have to motivate them to share their culture with the others in order to bring them a new conscience and, at the same time, to exchange with them our traditions" (M., Portugal)*

The project meetings were also a way to learn about other cultures, to discuss intercultural issues, and to develop intercultural competencies:

*"I've noticed that people from different cultural societies in Europe are practically similar to each other. This similarity can be seen in their daily routine, in the way of solving problems, and in the methods of organizing their free time" (K., Poland);*

*"We are much more similar than different; we are equal from the human aspect and different from the aspect of culture." (I., Latvia)*

*"I had learnt that cultural time is a very flexible concept. I had perceived time as a physical unit before" (E., Poland).*



### 3.3. Innovation aspects of the ICTime project

This project considered that digital technologies could be used in order to contribute to innovative solutions for current social and cultural challenges in education. The project promotes the extensive use of digital media (visual, audio, multimedia) to support intercultural and media education. Digital media was regarded as an initiator of social processes, personal involvement and motivation, emphasizing the constitutive role of one's openness to diversity, cooperation, creation and exploration in a culturally rich educational environment.

This project also emphasized that the use of digital media in the intercultural education introduces new possibilities of active, creative and meaningful learning that can also lead both students and teachers to more responsible engagement in a wider multicultural community. In this way the transition from education with media to media education has been made.

#### Conclusion

The ICTime project was a valuable experience for all participants: project team members and persons from the target group involved in the project. The purpose of the project was to efficiently use digital media in intercultural education, based on the consideration that intercultural interactions and media are both present in our everyday life. The activities during the project were very various both on national and international level; they included national surveys, workshops, teacher training courses, school visits, intercultural activities for students, international photo and video contests, and project dissemination. This diversity of the activities gave the opportunity for the project team to elaborate a kit of best practices, which use media in intercultural education in a constructive and efficient way. In the same time the project activities and results assured the context to identify new research and development directions, for example the methodology of integration of intercultural and media education.

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