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Published online: 30 Mar 2021.

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Exploring teachers' perceptions and practices of intercultural education in an international school

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ABSTRACT

This article examines teachers' perceptions and experiences of intercultural education. The participants (n = 11) were teachers who work in the Primary Years Programme (PYP) of an International Baccalaureate (IB) school in the Netherlands. The school was chosen as the context for this study due to the emphasis on intercultural understanding in IB education. The data were collected through a closed and open-ended survey in 2019 and complemented by an ethnographical method. The results showed that the teachers mostly drew on cultural-differentialist approaches in their definition of intercultural education. They considered intercultural education to be important for the pupils' future but felt insecure in implementing it. All teachers reported implementing intercultural education in their teaching at least to some extent, however with some limitations. The teachers focused predominantly on national cultures and traditions to address interculturality in class. Despite the overall trend, a few teachers expressed more critical views on interculturality and expanded their perceptions of it to 'small cultures'. The findings of this study speak to the importance of paying attention to pre-service teacher training to provide teachers with tangible tools to implement a type of intercultural education that departs from solely essentialist views of culture.

Introduction

Teachers are increasingly encouraged and expected to integrate more intercultural elements into their teaching practices. However, the ways to do so in practice often remain unclear. Moreover, courses offered to pre- and in-service teachers tend to rely on fairly limited and outdated views of interculturality (Alismail 2016). Indeed, a significant mismatch exists between the research on intercultural communication and the tools offered to practitioners (Gorski 2006). The most known models and toolboxes often draw on essentialist views that revolve around cultural-differentialist approaches (Dervin 2016) which are very limited as they perpetuate stereotypes and do not invite teachers nor pupils to reflect on the knowledge they respectively teach and learn. In contrast, critical

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approaches emphasise reflexivity and address culture as a social construction permeated with power and which 'only exists insofar as it is performed' (Baumann 1996, 11). Despite the prominence of these views within the field of intercultural communication, they have not successfully transferred to the implementation of intercultural education in schools. Similar observations are made by researchers from the field of multicultural education who point to the limited and superficial nature of many multicultural programmes (Gorski 2006; Nieto and Bode 2008).

Motivated by the above discrepancy and the challenges it raises, the present study endeavours to uncover teachers' understanding of intercultural education and examine how they report implementing it in their teaching praxis by using a survey with open- and closed-ended questions. This bottom-up approach is key in outlining which concepts from the field of intercultural communication resonate with teachers' experiences. The present article investigates the above topic among teachers working in the Primary Years Programme (PYP) of an International Baccalaureate (hereafter IB) school because of the salience of interculturality in this context. This study takes a different angle than most previous studies which have focused on pre-service rather than in-service teachers (e.g. Walters, Garii, and Walters 2009; Yurtseven and Altun 2015) and have been conducted in the U.S. rather than in Europe (Agirdag, Merry, and van Houtte 2016). The present article revolves around the following three research questions:

(1) How do teachers define intercultural education[1]?
(2) How do they perceive their level of competence in intercultural education?
(3) How do they report implementing intercultural education in their teaching?

Outlining the purpose and state of intercultural education

Since its emergence as an academic field in the 1960s, multicultural education has been defined as inherently political. Leading scholars from the field agree that the overarching aim of multicultural education is the promotion of social justice (Banks 2002; Nieto and Bode 2008) and have put forward key characteristics underlying this purpose. One of them is the need to take a holistic approach to multicultural education by involving teachers as well as school leaders and policy makers, and considering all aspects of teaching including class content, materials and assessments (Gorski 2006). A second central aspect of multicultural education is its endeavour to be inclusive and tackle social inequalities by actively challenging existing structures of power (Banks 2002). Overall, the field of multicultural education underlines the role played by schools as institutions that can sustain and even reinforce inequalities permeating society, or, on the contrary, challenge them. Researchers have argued that programmes labelled multicultural should aim at the latter (Banks 2002; Gorski 2006; Nieto and Bode 2008). Despite this unanimous

goal and the increasing popularity of multicultural education outside of scholarly discourses, a majority of programmes offer only surface-level multicultural education (Gorski 2006, 2009). The failure to implement holistic changes and difficulty to go past superficial discussions about diversity are the main weaknesses looming over multicultural education (Gorski 2006). Several scholars have provided examples of limited discourses of diversity in education and underlined their connection to the way 'culture' is defined (e.g. Dervin 2016; Kundnani 2004; Ogay and Edelmann 2016).

Following important conceptual shifts throughout the 20th century, different approaches to the notion of 'culture' still co-exist in academia. In the 1970s, scholars working on the topic of intercultural communication defined culture along several social dimensions such as race, class and gender as well as their intersections, while in the 1980s most research consisted of quantitative cross-national comparisons (Moon 1996). This latter approach has been vastly criticised within and outside the field of intercultural communication for normalising dominant representations of national cultures and therefore contributing to biased and essentialist discourses rather than deconstructing them (Piller 2017). Although traditional approaches are still present today, critical views have grown more prominent since the 1990s and shifted the focus onto issues of power and privilege (Halualani, Mendoza, and Drzewiecka 2009). Critical approaches address culture as a discursive construction and interactional resource that is used to support, challenge and contradict existing representations (Hall 1997).

Thus, in many respects, critical views of culture echo the goals outlined by multicultural education. In particular, the following elements stressed by critical intercultural scholarship resonate with the priorities of multicultural education: the *criticism of essentialism* and emphasis on *similarities rather than differences* (e.g. Dervin 2011), the focus on *agency* associated with the use of culture (e.g. Sommier 2018) and on the *historical and structural power relations* that permeate representations of culture (e.g. Holliday 2010). Critical intercultural communication scholars also stress the importance of *reflexivity*, that is, individuals' efforts to reflect on their positionality in society and interpersonal interactions, and on the frames of references they use to assess the social realities they are part of (Byrd Clark and Dervin 2014). The concept of reflexivity is also central to multicultural education scholarship (Gorski 2006). Reflexivity is of value to everyone but, as Jokikokko and Järvelä (2013) point out, it is especially relevant to teachers given the role they play in the production and transmission of knowledge in society.

However, traditional and 'Janusian' views of interculturality still underpin much of the literature and trainings offered to pre- and in-service teachers. The latter refer to discourses that (pretend to) engage with the problematics associated with representations of culture but offer nothing more than stereotypical activities about diversity and 'other' cultures (Dervin 2011). Such discourses are particularly present in education as many teachers are not familiar with critical literature nor equipped to deviate from what mainstream materials and curricula propose. As a result, much of intercultural education remains guided by essentialist views (i.e. the assumption that

cultures are fixed entities that determine people's behaviours, values and communication styles) rather than constructionist ones (i.e. the assumption that culture is constructed through interactions and therefore situational and constantly evolving) (Dervin 2016).

Context of the study

This case study delves into the perceptions of teachers working in the Primary Years Programme (PYP) of an IB school located in the Netherlands. IB is an educational organisation that offers education in four programmes: Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP), Diploma Programme (DP) and Career-related Programme (CP) (International Baccalaureate 2017). The target school offers English-medium education to pupils from all over the world. At the time of the data collection, there were approximately 50 different nationalities among the pupils and around 30 among the staff. One of the researchers worked as a part-time teacher at the school which added an ethnographic element to the study. This provided relevant background and inside information to the researchers. For instance, the researchers were aware of the cultural celebrations at the school and how interculturality was considered on a whole school level. In addition, the school staff had received a two-hour training session on intercultural understanding a few months prior to the start of the data collection which one of the researchers also attended. This was a single training session echoing traditional approaches to intercultural communication and solid views of culture such as the well-known 'cultural iceberg' metaphor.

An IB school was chosen as the context for this study because of the emphasis placed by the IB programme on interculturality as articulated in their mission statement: 'We promote intercultural understanding and respect, not as an alternative to a sense of cultural and national identity, but as an essential part of life in the 21st century' (International Baccalaureate 2020). Not many explicit references are made to interculturality or intercultural communication in the IB documentation. Instead, the phrase 'internationally minded' is emphasised and highlighted as the overarching goal for learners of the IB programme to reach. The IB learner profile breaks this overarching aim down into ten attributes which give pointers as to the way interculturality is defined within the programme (International Baccalaureate 2017). The ten attributes echo those listed by several traditional models of intercultural communication competence such as the ABC model which offers a triumvirate approach focusing on affective, behavioural and cognitive elements (Spitzberg and Changnon 2009). Similar elements can be found between the IB learner profile and ABC model such as the emphasis placed on *respect, open-mindedness, empathy, curiosity, self-knowledge/appreciating one's own culture and personal history, language proficiency, adaptability/resourcefulness/flexibility, social skills* and *decoding skills* (International Baccalaureate 2017; Martin and Nakayama 2015). The IB learner profile also gives some importance to similarities as it sets out to

'develop internationally minded people who recognise their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet' (International Baccalaureate 2017, 2). Nevertheless, most of the IB discourse revolves around the aim to overcome (cultural) differences by gaining knowledge and skills and showing the right attitude, which echoes traditional views of intercultural communication as catalogued in the ABC model. Despite the overlap with the traditional and widespread ABC model, the IB programme also contains elements from critical approaches to intercultural communication. In particular, reflexivity is presented as an important aspect that underpin several of the ten attributes of the IB learner profile. In addition, the IB programme also pays some attention to the way power and privilege are woven into interactions and discourses, which underpins all critical theories of intercultural communication (International Baccalaureate 2017).

Methodology

Data collection and analysis

The data for this study were collected through open- and closed-ended questions distributed to teachers via Qualtrics (see Appendix A). Using online questionnaires enabled us to simultaneously collect mixed data without taking too long of the participants' time. Eleven teachers from the same international school answered these questions pertaining to their definitions of intercultural education, self-perceived intercultural competence and intercultural teaching practices. The school had approximately 50 staff members in the primary section. All the staff members were approached by sending a general email to the school's mailing list twice. Due to the limited response rate, the sample size is not meant to be representative of the staff at this school but rather to provide in-depth insights into the participating teachers' experiences. The participants answered the questionnaire anonymously but provided details about their professional profile which are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. The participants of the study.

Participant	Position	Teaching experience	Age of pupils	Intercultural training
Teacher 1	Class teacher	9 years	8–9	None
Teacher 2	Class teacher/Teacher mentor	17 years	6–7	Cross-cultural language acquisition
Teacher 3	Class teacher	6 years	4–6	None
Teacher 4	Class teacher/Teaching assistant	2,5 years	4–6 & 7–8	None
Teacher 5	Class teacher	13 years	4–6	None
Teacher 6	Class teacher	3 years	8–9	PGCEi certificate
Teacher 7	Class teacher	10 years	8–9	BA and MA level courses
Teacher 8	Class teacher	6 years	8–9	None
Teacher 9	Class teacher	3 years	6–8	None
Teacher 10	Class teacher	7 years	10–11	Sessions on multicultural education
Teacher 11	Learning specialist	3 years	6–10	None

Data from the open-ended questions were analysed by both researchers using thematic analysis (Boeije 2010). All answers were first read through to gain a sense of the data as a whole and to identify patterns, similarities and contradictions among the participants' answers. Following this initial stage, the researchers jointly coded the data into categories such as *national cultures, differences, similarities, languages, celebrations* or *environment*. In addition to traditional steps of thematic analysis, this study also relied on the closed-ended questions to reflect further on the answers given by the teachers, either contrasting or reinforcing them. Furthermore, the ethnographic dimension detailed in the previous section enabled us to contextualise the participants' answers as well as lower the ambiguity inherent to any open-ended answers. That is, one of the researchers was involved with the school for 24 months, regularly visiting it and observing lessons held by several teachers. Thus, the final themes (i.e. *prevalence of essentialist views, focus on differences* and *conceptualisation of culture*) were formed in light of numerous aspects that deepened the analysis: the researchers' initial impressions of the data, codes assigned to the data, the participants' answers to the closed-ended questions, the ethnographic dimension as well as the researchers' knowledge of literature on the topic of intercultural education and competence.

Results

In what follows, we present the findings of the study. We have divided the section into two sub-sections, namely *Defining intercultural education* and *Intercultural education practices*. The identified themes presented above are embedded in these sections. As is typical of qualitative research, the results section outlines the results in relation to the relevant literature, while the final section (i.e. Implications and conclusion) discusses in more details the main findings and the concrete implications that can be drawn from them.

Defining intercultural education: traditional approaches prevail

Most of the participants drew on cultural-differential approaches to define intercultural education. More specifically, they tended to emphasise differences over similarities and express essentialist views. Their answers showed that they understood culture to be an entity existing prior to communication (rather than constructed through it) and which can and should be taught as a way to minimise misunderstandings between people. Moreover, and as illustrated in the following quote, most participants explained intercultural education to be predominantly a way of teaching pupils about different national cultures:

(1) Intercultural education in my opinion is teaching children about other cultures, but also teaching through other cultures. For example, using resources from different countries (different languages) and see what we can learn from them. (Teacher 5)

The teachers' definitions of intercultural education echoed, sometimes word for word, the IB mission statement and the IB learner profiles. The participants placed emphasis on 'respect', 'open-mindedness' or 'international-mindedness' (Teachers 11, 7 and 8, respectively), revealing that many of them had significantly internalised the IB discourse (International Baccalaureate 2017). Since seven of the 11 participants had no prior training in intercultural education (excluding the two-hour training offered by the school), their primary knowledge about interculturality may have indeed come from the IB programme. This speaks for the importance of how organisations define interculturality and how this, in turn, resonates at the individual level. For this reason, intercultural trainings targeted at in-service teachers should take into account the larger structures that may shape teachers' perceptions and practices.

Similar discourses of the IB programme were also used by the participants to point out the benefits of intercultural education, for instance referring to the way it helps 'foster open-mindedness' (Teacher 7) or contributes to 'promoting diversity, understanding and respect of different perspectives and backgrounds' (Teacher 11). Thus, the participants' views of the benefits of intercultural education revolved around the idea that intercultural communication and diversity are mostly about *others*, which further substantiated their differentialist and essentialist understandings of culture. Furthermore, the teachers' answers suggested a certain lack of criticality as regards interculturality. The participants only mentioned isolated challenges to intercultural education and often failed to acknowledge the structural power issues (e.g. racism, gender inequalities, class discrimination) that could impede the ambitious goals of intercultural education they listed. These findings are aligned with previous studies on teachers' perceptions of multicultural/intercultural education which revealed depoliticised and oversimplified views of interculturality (Dervin and Dirba 2006; Gorski 2006).

The participants' views in the present study were embedded in traditional discourse about intercultural communication that focuses on reified views of (national) cultures and overlooks the way individuals engage in interactions from different positions of power (Martin and Nakayama 2015). Disregarding power structures is not only problematic for pupils, but it also puts considerable pressure on teachers who are presented as the ones on whom the success of intercultural education depends. Indeed, the participants mostly discussed the benefits of intercultural education from a macro-level (i.e. ambitious goals) but typically addressed challenges of intercultural education from a micro-level (i.e. the uncertainties they faced).

Notwithstanding the dominance of traditional intercultural views, on a few occasions, some of the participants departed from them and expressed more critical and reflexive views of interculturality. An example of this was Teacher 6 who stated as follows:

(2) Intercultural education is teaching others about ones [sic] beliefs, values and cultures within a context of a topic/lesson. [. . .] how to accept the differences and grow as a person both in terms of knowledge [. . .] and emotionally (how you react to others [sic] beliefs, how you reflect upon your own interactions with others). (Teacher 6)

Overall, teacher 6, who was one of the three participants having received intercultural training at a higher education level (i.e. PGCEi (Postgraduate Certificate of Education (International) certificate), expressed more critical views of interculturality than other participants. It can be interpreted that this training may have developed Teacher 6's views of interculturality. However, this was not the case with all the participants who had followed courses on intercultural communication at the higher education level. For instance, Teacher 7 mostly drew on traditional views despite having received BA and MA level courses on intercultural communication. Discrepancies among these participants hint at the different types of intercultural courses they may have taken. A majority of teacher education programmes indeed build and pass on cultural-differentialist approaches (Alismail 2016). It is also worth noting that a few of the participants with no intercultural courses in higher education sometimes referred to more critical views of interculturality, suggesting that these views corresponded to their actual teaching practices. Related to this, Figure 1 shows that there was some variation as to how competent the participants felt to teach intercultural education. It is noteworthy that although three teachers selected 'much' to represent their degree of competence, no participant chose the highest option (i.e. 'a great deal').

In turn, a few teachers' perceived competence to teach intercultural education was very low. Teacher 9's quote illustrates this:
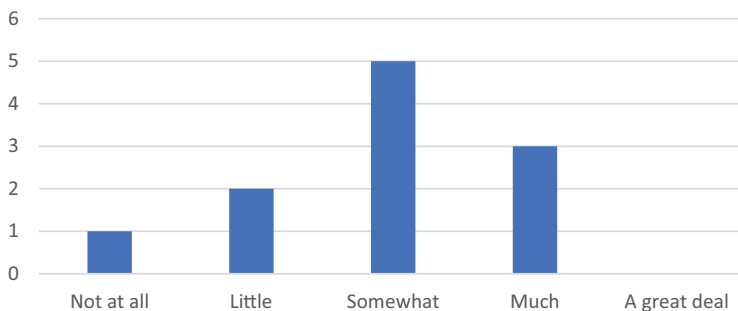
Figure 1. Participants' answers to the question: 'How competent do you feel to teach intercultural education?'.

(3) I don't feel competent teaching about it at all. I feel slightly comfortable integrating it in lessons, but I only know how to integrate language. (Teacher 9)

The lack of competence experienced by some teachers yields implications for pre- and in-service training, an issue which we will discuss in more detail in the section *Implications and conclusion*.

Intercultural education practices: fluctuating between large and 'small' cultures

Ten of the eleven participants felt that intercultural education was either 'somewhat' or 'much' present in their teaching. When explaining what intercultural education consists of, the participants mostly provided examples pertaining to language and traditions. More specifically, many participants mentioned the use of books, music and birthday songs in other languages than English as a means of making their teaching more intercultural. The use of language as a proxy for culture was recurrent in the data and echoes the usual conflation of culture and language in language teaching (Byram 2008). This association might have been especially prominent among the participants in the present study as a lot of emphasis had been placed on fostering pupils' home languages at the case study school. Besides language, traditions such as birthday celebrations, festivals and food habits were also mentioned as examples of intercultural materials. Often teachers referred to national traditions, therefore falling back onto the pitfalls of essentialist and cultural-differentialist approaches:

(4) We all try to learn the customs from our countries, such as not having elbows on the table in France, or not putting chopsticks in rice in Japan. (Teacher 6)

As becomes evident in the above quote, the participants did not critically discuss the examples of intercultural education they provided. They seemed to rely on and perpetuate representations of homogenous national cultures disconnected from the contexts and interactions that shape them. The participants also did not mention whether they ever distinguished between *traditional* and *typical* representations of culture when introducing them in class. Traditional and typical cultural practices are often conflated in ways that sustain stereotypical representations. The former relates to exceptional and performance-like events (e.g. yearly celebrations, festivals, costumes) and the latter to everyday practices. Although typical practices correspond more accurately to people's customs, they nevertheless cannot be generalised and need to be presented as evolving, contextual and constructed through interactions. Although most examples provided by the participants related to languages and traditions, a few of the teachers discussed their endeavours to incorporate interculturality across subjects, as illustrated in the following quote about natural sciences:

(5) When learning about animal habitats, making links to the ones from the places they come from or when we did weather, we kept a constant eye on the weather in their home countries. (Teacher 3)

Generally speaking, the attempt to take a holistic approach to intercultural education can be regarded as a positive trend. However, such effort seemed to be underpinned by the restricted focus on national differences. Quotes 4 and 5 highlight the limits of using national cultures as the default lens for intercultural education as it emphasises differences where similarities could be highlighted instead. Quote 5 also illustrates the risks of perpetuating 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995) by using the nation as the standard scale through which phenomena and experiences are apprehended. Although the majority of examples mentioned by the participants revolved around (differences among) national cultures, a few of the teachers also included examples of 'small cultures' (Holliday 2016). The following quote exemplifies the way culture is understood – and taught – as constructed among people, for instance among relatives:

(6) For birthdays we let the children tell about how they celebrate it at home. (Teacher 5)

Making pupils aware of the 'small cultures' they are part of is an important step to sensitise them to culture being constructed and performed through interpersonal interactions. Contrary to the focus on national cultures that presents pupils with static and pre-existing entities, using 'small cultures' in intercultural education emphasises the social processes constructed through and constructive of discourses of culture (Holliday 1999). The emphasis placed on 'small cultures' entails several benefits for teachers. First, it limits the risks of addressing pupils as tokens of a large culture (e.g. national, ethnic, religious). Second, it diminishes the stress teachers can feel about teaching intercultural education. Indeed, by focusing on small cultures, and therefore adopting a constructionist framework, teachers are no longer expected to teach about culture and cultural differences, but rather how culture and cultural differences are produced in discourse (Piller 2012). This approach, which is grounded in critical intercultural communication and the concept of reflexivity, helps address one of the challenges most regularly mentioned by the participants, as illustrated in the following quote by Teacher 5:

(7) There are so many cultures; I am always afraid I might forget to include one and that the child will feel left out. (Teacher 5)

The above fear voiced by Teacher 5 reveals the participants' understanding of culture (and of intercultural competence) in essentialist terms, that is, the belief that teachers should know about cultures (therefore assuming that they are pre-existing entities which can be identified) and in turn teach pupils about them.

These views create unattainable goals that can increase pressure and uncertainty in teachers, as illustrated by the previous quote.

Although focusing on 'small cultures' enables one to overcome many challenges, not all teachers instantly associate this approach with *intercultural* education. A group discussion among teachers of the target school, which included one of the researchers, well illustrates this. During the conversation, one teacher explained that they did not draw attention to their pupils' nationalities in class nor treated pupils differently on that basis. This approach can be seen as adhering to current views of interculturality by prioritising similarities over differences and deconstructing the automatic association of culture with nation. However, this teacher thought that they were not implementing intercultural education, and that they should pay more attention to it in their teaching by focusing on the different national cultures of the pupils.

Overall, the participants were unanimous about the importance of intercultural education (see Figure 2). In their open-ended answers, they elaborated on the relevance of intercultural education and connected it to internationalisation and globalisation.

Many of the participants talked about the world 'becoming smaller' (Teachers 1, 2, 5, 6, 9) to justify the need for intercultural education. The following quote elucidates in more detail the parallel many of the participants drew between globalisation, migration and intercultural education:

(8) With the increasing rate of migration and the amount of opportunities to travel easily, students will need to interact and collaborate with other people from different cultures throughout their life. Acquiring these competences from a young age will [give] them an advantage. (Teacher 11)

The connection between international exchanges and intercultural education echoes the participants' definition of the latter primarily in terms of national
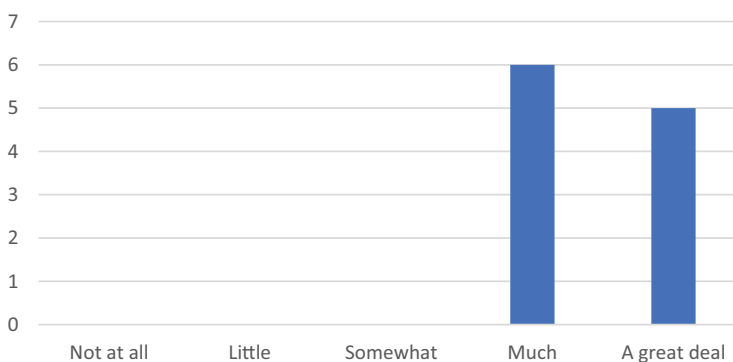
Figure 2. Participants' answers to the question: 'In your opinion, is intercultural education necessary for the pupils' future?'.

differences. The participants' answers also reveal positive views of migration and globalisation, one that hints at the privileged pupils that they work with in IB schools and for the majority of whom international movement is voluntary and associated with (financial and cultural) wealth. Such privileged views of globalisation suggest exclusive (and excluding) views of intercultural education as targeted at those who can afford to travel the world. Scholars have drawn attention to the inequalities underpinning discourses of interculturality. Dervin (2016, 26) for instance discusses the different connotations attached to the term 'diversity' and outcomes when categorising pupils:

> While the concept [diversity] is reserved for certain strata of the population (migrants, ethnic, and religious minorities), representatives of the 'elite' who travel from one place to another, are labelled 'citizens of the world', 'multinationals', or even 'cosmopolitans'. *How often do we hear teachers label a refugee kid as a 'cosmopolitan'? Probably never.*

This quote underlines the necessity of considering intercultural education from an intersectional standpoint. Defining diversity solely through the lens of *international* diversity is too limited to provide inclusive intercultural education that addresses pupils of all backgrounds and status. Intersectionality 'emphasises that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands' (Brah and Phoenix 2004, 76) since they together contribute to construct privileged as well as oppressed subject positions. This framework therefore enables teachers to consider pupils for more than their national backgrounds and instead see them in a more multilayered way.

Implications and conclusion

The teachers in the present study felt intercultural education was important, although some of their teaching practices seemed to reflect somewhat limited views of interculturality. Similar to Hajisoteriou's (2013) study on teachers' experiences of intercultural education in Cyprus, the participants of this study were uncertain about their ability to teach intercultural education. Therefore, the findings underscore the discrepancy between the participants' perceived ability to incorporate interculturality in their teaching and the unanimous importance they attached to intercultural education (see Figures 1 and 2 in the above section). This is especially noteworthy since the teachers worked in a school in which interculturality is emphasised and to some extent embedded in the curriculum. This situation highlights the need to provide constant training for teachers to keep on developing their confidence and intercultural education practices.

The importance of in-service training on interculturality however raises another challenge: how to provide training that is theoretically sound as well as relevant in practice? The umbrella concept of reflexivity can be a powerful resource to

encourage teachers to examine their own practices and positionality (and eventually teach pupils to do the same). Reflexivity focuses on *how* interculturality plays out rather than *what* it is. That is, it encourages teachers to alter *how* they address certain issues rather than solely *what* issues they address, making it possible to take small steps. Implementing small changes only at the teacher-level has been criticised for being too superficial and a form of 'intercultural-washing' (e.g. Agirdag, Merry, and van Houtte 2016; Gorski 2006). However, numerous concrete changes can be implemented across educational practices using reflexivity as a stepping stone (Gorski and Dalton 2019). For instance, reflexivity can contribute towards developing a holistic approach rather than confining interculturality to a few subjects it is arbitrarily linked to (see Sommier and Roiha 2018). Reflexivity also enables one to address different levels within the educational system such as teachers' own practices, teachers' positionality (in school, society, in relation to parents), the school culture, the role of school in society or the type of materials and assessments used (Jokikokko and Järvelä 2013). This holistic approach is central to conduct successful intercultural trainings as those require time and schools in their entirety to be involved (Vertaeghe and Wastijn 2019). Making small changes in teachers' practices through reflexivity is particularly suited for the IB context since its curriculum is designed to foster 'intercultural understanding' and 'international-mindedness' (International Baccalaureate 2017). The IB structure therefore lends itself well to teachers making (small) adjustments to their practices. Nevertheless, the emphasis on reflexivity has benefits for other educational contexts as well since reflecting on one's practices sheds light on the structures that enable them. As a form of meta-analysis, reflexivity makes it possible to move away from what Banks (2002, 30) calls 'contributions' and 'additive' approaches that only sprinkle intercultural elements on top of existing content, and move towards 'transformative' and 'social action' approaches which enforce structural changes.

The emphasis on reflexivity relates to the definition of intercultural communication competence and therefore bears implications for the training of both in- and pre-service teachers. Teacher education programmes are often designed to educate teachers about a wide array of cultures to ensure that they are ready to deal with pupils' different communication styles as well as cultural and academic backgrounds (Alismail 2016). Furthermore, pre-service teachers' intercultural training often revolves around teaching immigrant students (Jokikokko and Järvelä 2013). Similar to culture, intercultural communication competence is therefore targeted at 'others' and understood as something that can be taught, typically using models listing the type of knowledge, skills and attitude one should aspire to (e.g. the ABC model, Spitzberg and Changnon 2009). These traditional views of intercultural competence have been criticised for creating unattainable goals and for not corresponding to the complexity of social realities (Martin and Nakayama 2015). Several researchers have proposed alternatives to the linear understandings of competence by presenting competence as being deeply contextual (and therefore unpredictable) and power-infused

(e.g. Dervin 2016; Yep 2000). Reflexivity is therefore pivotal here as well. Such an approach to intercultural communication competence can however feel too abstract for teachers who need tangible resources to work with. For this reason, Jokikokko and Järvelä (2013) suggest middle grounds between critical and traditional views as they do not see either option to be sufficient by itself. Such compromise further hints at the notion of reflexivity which urges one to critically assess one's knowledge. Rather than dismissing traditional models altogether, incorporating some of them in teacher trainings can be useful. This can help raise teachers' awareness about the limitations of these models while encouraging them to select aspects they believe to be useful, all the while reflecting on this process of knowledge construction.

Although traditional views of intercultural communication dominated the participants' answers, some of the teachers also leaned towards more critical views by mentioning instances of 'small cultures' (Holliday 2016) as well as referring to reflexivity. This indicates that the above concepts may in fact correspond to the participants' experiences and that the gap between theory and practice may only be a matter of translation. It seemed that the concepts of 'small culture' and reflexivity implicitly appealed to some of the participants, which suggests that the same could be true of other concepts if they were presented in a more concrete manner. In a similar vein, Berti (2019) showed how introducing the universal experiences of play to teachers can help them (and consequently their pupils) approach interculturality through the lens of similarities rather than differences.

Finally, the findings of the present study need to be considered in light of the particular context from which they emerged, as brought forth by one of the participants themselves:

(9) It might be good to add that I work at an international school, not a regular public school so I have student [sic] from all over the world. The fact that I work at such a school greatly impacts my above answers. (Teacher 8)

The IB programme, and in particular the school in which the participants worked, placed a great deal of emphasis on fostering intercultural awareness among staff and pupils. The willingness of the participants to take part in this study, their perception of intercultural education as central to the future and the efforts they put in integrating intercultural elements into their teaching (even if often in a limited manner) may be context specific. Teachers working in IB schools may indeed be more interested in and sensitised to intercultural matters than teachers in mainstream schools. Yet, despite the value attached to intercultural education by the school and the programme in which the participants worked, they did not feel fully qualified to teach interculturality nor did they show a clear and up-to-date understanding of what intercultural education encompasses. This underlines the urgency of systematically implementing quality intercultural training for pre- and

in-service teachers. The discrepancy between the support for intercultural education within the school (i.e. limited training offered) and the participants' interest in it, and the limitations of their knowledge and self-perceived competence also raises questions about the situation of teachers working in non-international schools. Contrary to teachers in IB schools, those working in mainstream schools are less likely to be in a professional environment where interculturality is regularly discussed and (even) less money invested in training. Yet, mainstream schools qualify as intercultural contexts as diversity often exists there along many more lines (e.g. socioeconomic status, religion, life style, value system) than in IB schools which tend to welcome pupils of different nationalities but often very similar (privileged) social backgrounds.

In conclusion, the findings of this case study about IB teachers' perceptions and experiences of intercultural education confirm the discrepancy between theory and praxis. That is, the participants mostly referred to essentialist and cultural-differentialist approaches to intercultural communication (competence). The mentioning by some of the participants of more critical views suggests that these resonate with their experiences and could be incorporated into teachers' practices should these be presented in a more tangible manner. In particular, relying on reflexivity is regarded as an important stepping stone to start implementing changes that can bridge the gap between essentialist and critical views, and eventually make meaningful and holistic changes. The present study focused on teachers from one IB school with nationally diverse pupils. In the future, it would be important to expand the research to include other international schools as well as to explore intercultural education also in mainstream schools.

Note

1. Intercultural education and multicultural education are used interchangeably in this article as the researchers consider the nuances of the terms to not affect the arguments made in this study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix A. The survey questions

(1) How many years have you worked in education?
(2) What is your position in the school (e.g. class teacher, subject teacher, specialist etc.)?
(3) How old are your pupils?
(4) Have you ever received training in intercultural issues (e.g. multicultural education, intercultural communication, intercultural competence etc.)? If so, please specify the type of training.
(5) How would you define intercultural education in your own words and what are its aims?
(6) What do you think are the benefits and the challenges of intercultural education at your school?
(7) How much is intercultural education shown in your teaching? (1 = not at all, 2 = little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = much, 5 = a great deal)
(8) Please specify how intercultural education is shown in your teaching (e.g. materials, learning environment, activities, etc.).
(9) How competent do you feel to teach intercultural education? (1 = not at all, 2 = little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = much, 5 = a great deal)
(10) In what areas do you feel competent, and in which aspects would you need more expertise?
(11) In your opinion, is intercultural education necessary for the pupils' future? (1 = not at all, 2 = little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = much, 5 = a great deal)
(12) Please justify your answer and explain why/why not.
(13) Is there anything you would like to add on the topic of intercultural education or about the survey?