Chapter 1

An Introduction to Dialogue for Intercultural Understanding: Placing Cultural Literacy at the Heart of Learning

Fiona Maine and Maria Vrikki

1.1 The DIALLS Project Aims and Overview

This book is a result of an extensive, ambitious and wide-ranging pan-European project focusing on the development of children and young people's cultural literacy and what it means to be European in the twenty-first century, prioritizing intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. The book explores themes underpinning this unique interdisciplinary project, drawing together scholars from cultural studies, civics education and linguistics, psychologists, socio-cultural literacy researchers, teacher educators and digital learning experts. This chapter sets the context for the book by introducing the DIALLS project (Dialogue and Argumentation for cultural Literacy Learning in Schools) and its core aims and themes. It sets the tone of interdisciplinarity and its importance for an educational future where issues of living together, social responsibility and sustainable development transcend traditional categories of learning. DIALLS is seen as an opportunity for a synthesis of thinking, but our book allows each author to explore the goals of the project from their own interdisciplinary angle.

The three-year long DIALLS project has included ten partners from countries in and around Europe. The project was developed in response to a call from the European Commission (EC) Horizon 2020 scheme to gain a greater understanding of cultural literacy as a non-normative concept covering relevant culture-related knowledge, skills and competences and how young people in particular acquire it. The call argued that,

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Cultural diversity is one of Europe's most valuable assets and European educational and cultural systems need to cater for diversity and enable all citizens to build the skills and competences needed for effective inter-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. The challenge is about understanding how young people make sense of Europe and its differing cultures. The influences on young people are wide ranging including formal education, family and cultural background and media. (European Commission 2017, 89)

The EC challenge was to create a project that could address how children and young people might develop the knowledge, skills and competencies needed for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

The DIALLS project has met this challenge by working with teachers in different educational settings (pre-primary, primary and secondary) to create cross-curricular resources and activities. A Cultural Literacy Learning Programme (CLLP) was developed to teach children dialogue and argumentation as core skills needed for meaningful interactions where cultural values, identities and heritages could be explored in authentic discussions. The program, developed by teachers and researchers working together across several European countries, drew on Cultural Texts from Europe as stimuli for classroom discussion. One innovation of the project was that these were short films and texts that contained no words, so not only could they be used across all countries with no translation, but their non-verbal nature potentiated rich dialogues as children worked together to explore their meanings. This co-construction gave authentic opportunities for students to practice their skills of dialogue and argumentation to explore their ideas and move beyond interpretations of the text into rich, philosophical discussions about living together and social responsibility. In a further innovation and to enable intercultural dialogue in action, the project developed an online platform as a tool for engagement across classes.

1.2 Reconceptualizing Cultural Literacy

The DIALLS project centralizes co-constructive dialogue as a main cultural literacy value, with the aim of promoting tolerance, empathy and inclusion as key dispositions underpinning it. This aim has been achieved through teaching children in schools from a young age to engage together in discussions in the CLLP where they may have differing viewpoints or perspectives, to enable a growing awareness of their own cultural identities, and those of others.

As a term, Cultural Literacy has traditionally been used to describe knowledge about a list of significant cultural facts. Hirsch, who coined the phrase in 1988, even created a list of 5000 cultural items that 'Every American should know'. Whilst there has been significant debate about what should be on the list, few authors have challenged the notion of having a list in the first place, a problem that we address in the project. DIALLS moves beyond a concept of cultural literacy as being about knowledge of culture (through exploration of literature and art for example) into a consideration of the disposition to explore different interpretations of it. Thus, DIALLS reconceptualizes *cultural literacy* as a social practice that is inherently dialogic and

based on learning and gaining knowledge through empathetic, tolerant and inclusive interaction with others (Maine et al. 2019). In other words, for our project we see cultural literacy as at the heart of intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. The concept of ‘literacy’ itself has changed over time, from normative expectations about reading and writing print, into concepts about ‘social practice’ (Street 1984) and ‘reading the world’ (Freire and Macedo 1987). This view of literacy embraces multi-modality, a key feature of the DIALLS project as children are supported not only to co-construct meaning from visual and moving image texts but represent their responses through artwork in multiple non-verbal modes. For example, in one of the CLLP lessons, young children (five and six year-olds) created soundscapes for busy market scenes, in another lesson eight and nine year-olds responded to themes of inclusion by creating physical tableaux of themselves enacting inclusive behaviors.

We apply this evolution to the term ‘cultural literacy’ as we consider it to be ‘dialogic’ and by that we turn to Buber and his theories to explain how individuals view the world, their place in it and their relationship with it. Buber (1958) describes two positions in relation to a world view. An ‘I-it’ relationship views that world and its people as ‘other’ to the self. This position sets individuals as just that—a distinction between oneself and everyone else. However, he also describes an ‘I-Thou’ mode of being, that instead focuses on relationships. Through this an intersubjectivity is created, as ‘we’ exist together and our experience is present and mutual. ‘My *Thou* affects me, as I affect it’ Buber (1958, 12) argues. Through this lens, culture is a fluid and ‘dynamic co-construction, lived in the present and not solely rooted in the past’ (Maine et al 2019, 389).

In the European Network of Cultural Literacy in Europe, cultural literacy is described as:

an attitude to the social and cultural phenomena that shape and fill our existence – bodies of knowledge, fields of social action, individuals or groups, and of course cultural artefacts, including texts – which views them as being essentially *readable*. This legibility is defined by the key concepts of textuality, rhetoricity, fictionality and historicity ... which are understood as properties both of the phenomena themselves and of our ways of investigating them. (Segal 2014, 3)

Crucially this European definition uses ‘attitude’ as an indicator rather than just considering knowledge about culture only. It is more liberal, more open to global problems, cultural innovations and inventions, and critical skills. It works with the fields of cultural memory, migration and translation, electronic textuality, biopolitics and the body.

From this position, the underpinning dispositions of tolerance, empathy and inclusion take on particular significance and these three dispositions are key to Buber’s concept of genuine dialogue (Shady and Larson 2010). We consider these dispositions together. Tolerance is at the center of the 2014 UNESCO report on Learning to Live Together, and more than merely ‘putting up with’ alternative views we view it as an by “an absence of prejudice, racism or ethnocentrism” (Rapp and Freitag 2015, 1033) and a capacity “to maintain ongoing relationships of negotiation, compromise, and mutuality” (Creppel 2008, 351). However, following Shady and Larson’s interpretation of Buber’s work (2010) we recognize that tolerance might still present

more of an ‘I-It’ perspective (1947) and so look to empathy and inclusion as deeper commitments to living together. Buber (1957) takes an interesting perspective on the issue of empathy. He argues that in empathizing with other viewpoints, it is crucial that one’s own position is not lost (1957), and he turns to the concept of inclusion to promote ‘genuine dialogue’ ‘where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them’ (1947, 22).

1.3 Dialogue and Argumentation in DIALLS

Dialogue in DIALLS then pertains to a wider concept of engagement with cultures, values, heritages and identities of both self and other people. This engagement opens up a ‘dialogic space’ where an ‘I-Thou’ relationship builds towards acceptance of multiple viewpoints. Wegerif writes:

People always have irreducibly different perspectives on the world because we have different bodies and histories. Even when we think that we agree about concepts we inevitably understand those concepts differently. This is not to suggest that achieving ‘common ground’ is not important in dialogues but that it is one moment in a larger flow of meaning that is more fundamentally described as the tension between different perspectives held together in proximity around a dialogic gap. If there is no gap then there is no dialogue and if there is no dialogue then there is no meaning. (Wegerif 2011, 182)

Dialogue means more than this in DIALLS and we embrace dialogue and argumentation as involving key skills that young people can learn to enable them to talk together across their diversity. These skills include listening carefully, building on and being sensitive to each other’s viewpoints, critiquing perspectives thoughtfully and thinking about shared values and ideas. Careful positioning of ideas, respectful disagreements and acknowledgements of changes of mind are all part of participating in a pluralistic society and the CLLP lessons focus on two types of learning objective in parallel: to learn how to engage meaningfully in genuine dialogue and to discuss themes around living together, social responsibility and sustainable development.

1.4 An Interdisciplinary Project

We follow the principles of genuine dialogue espoused in the make-up of our project itself. We are interdisciplinary researchers and each chapter of our book explores a theme that is common to the project; we celebrate our interdisciplinarity by exploring these themes through different lenses.

The chapters in the book start with broader reflections on how education policy has embraced the notion of ‘intercultural dialogue’ and realized core concepts within different curricula, in addition to examining citizenship education and cultural

literacy and their place in schools. In Chapter 2, researchers from Portugal start us off by asking whether and how educational research has changed its conception of “intercultural” in the face of the current fluid cultural realities around the world and the need for a continuously adapting and adaptive education. To address the question, they conducted a systematic review of empirical research with the goal to reveal the most predominant objectives, methods, contents, and risks that teaching and learning interculturality has faced in the last two decades. They end with recommendations regarding the most predominant current mandates of contemporary educational systems struggling with the challenges of globalization and inclusion.

In Chapter 3, Lithuanian researchers explore how the concept of Social Responsibility develops in educational research discourse and how it relates to the concepts of Citizenship and Cultural literacy. All of these concepts are defined and reflected in the contemporary research literature considering the challenging world issues such as multiculturalism, inclusion, climate change and they are discussed in consideration within a framework of Cultural Literacy Analysis framework developed as part of the DIALLS project. In the empirical part of the chapter the authors present, analyse and compare research data on how some of the interrelated concepts are reflected in different national education policy documentation. Finally, the chapter ends with the conclusions from the theoretical and empirical data, which are strongly conditioned by the research: Social Responsibility serves as a key ground stone for cultural literacy learning.

In Chapter 4, our Finnish colleagues look more closely at how intercultural dialogue has been defined as a policy and practice in policy discourses and research literature since the establishment of the concept in the Council of Europe’s White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008). Besides agreeing with its importance, recent research includes criticism of its implicit meanings and uses in policy discourses, as well as its implementation in practice. They summarize this criticism and discuss what kind of challenges scholars have identified from policy discourses and the implementation of intercultural dialogue. The chapter ends by discussing how art may function as an arena and instrument to overcome some of these challenges.

In Chapter 5 colleagues from Cambridge look closely at Cultural Texts in the project and how collaborative meanings can be made as teachers and children engage together in reading wordless picturebooks. Whilst similar in their wordlessness, the reading pathways of these narratives can vary considerably, offering different affordances for the oral co-construction of narratives. Case studies of children engaging together with their teachers are presented to illustrate how teachers can mediate these texts and support children in their dialogic co-construction. The chapter explores how the themes underpinning cultural literacy as defined in the DIALLS project can be realized in talk and through talk with young children. The data demonstrate how the language modelled by teachers and their careful guidance allows independent sense-making and enables collaborative co-construction.

The book stays with the Cultural Texts as researchers from Cyprus investigate some of the texts that were used in the DIALLS project in Chapter 6. The authors present several creative ways to analyze and teach the theme of “diversity”, as this is approached in various ways across age groups (i.e. pre-primary, primary and

secondary education). The wordless picturebooks that are comparatively examined both in terms of illustration and teaching are *Saturday* by Sasjua Halfmouw, *To the Market* by Noëlle Smit.

Chapter 7 investigates the potential of digital tools to support children's development skills around dialogue and argumentation and how these can ensure challenge and extension of ideas. Researchers from France and Israel describe the process of designing the 'DIALLS platform', a new Internet-based platform for supporting cultural literacy and understanding of European values based on collaborative and teacher-led reflection on wordless texts. They present the multistage process adopted for the designing of the platform. Firstly, a systematic and critical review of existing tools supporting the co-creation and sharing of cultural resources (e.g., multimodal texts, images, videos) was undertaken. Secondly, several co-design workshops with researchers, teachers and students were conducted aimed at contextualizing and further specifying the functionalities of the existing tools. Thirdly, multiple usability studies where teachers in five European countries tested different versions of the platform as well as the set of blended online pedagogical scenarios were organized. To conclude, the complexities and challenges involved in the development of an online platform aimed at supporting the objectives of a large European research project in Education are discussed.

Chapter 8, written by members of the teams in Israel and France, presents a theoretical overview of historical and philosophical approaches to moral development. Then, it introduces the researchers' methodology, which focuses on a microgenetic approach for analysis meant to examine two aspects of moral development existing in the DIALLS framework: dialogue on ethics (DoE) and ethics of dialogue (EoD). This methodology lends itself to the settings in DIALLS, as teachers direct the children to interact and create a dialogue following the textless narratives they are presented with. These discussions include both talking about certain values that appear in those narratives and conceptualizing them, and the children's conduct towards each other within the interaction, executing—or not—moral/ethical values expressed in the interaction. The researchers' approach is presented through an illustrative example taken from a DIALLS lesson at an Israeli primary school.

Chapter 9 stays with themes of social interaction, written by researchers from Münster, Germany, and France. Here, a hypothesis is developed about how social relations influence how students argue with each other. Building on findings about how relations develop in small student groups, the researchers focus on perceived psychological safety as an antecedent of sophisticated argumentation. Feeling safe and valued should benefit risk-taking, in the sense that students should be more willing to contribute diverse, and maybe unusual, perspectives. However, strong social cohesion could also lead groups to converge too readily on simple, non-challenging ideas. After building a theoretical model, the authors operationalize central communicational dimensions: social aspects such as supportive behavior and facework, and cognitive aspects such as deepening and broadening. Excerpts from discussions recorded in a German classroom serve as examples for variations on these dimensions. Finally, the chapter describes how the multi-lingual discussion

corpus and additional data gathered during the DIALLS project will enable testing this hypothesis.

Moving from students to their teachers, authors from Cyprus and England discuss in Chapter 10 the importance of offering a teacher professional development (PD) program in DIALLS in order to support teachers in the implementation of the CLLP. Focusing on the PD offered in Cyprus and Cambridge, the authors explore how theories of effective teacher professional learning were incorporated in the development of the PD. It then proceeds to discuss how teachers were supported in promoting dialogue and argumentation with their students. The chapter ends by presenting teacher reflection data on the PD and its benefits.

We stay with teachers in Chapter 11 as researchers from Berlin, Germany, consider communities of practice for teachers. With respect to the sustainable impact of educational programs, teachers need to be able to deal with the open educational resources of a program efficiently and appropriately. The chapter outlines how digital collaboration among teachers who are aiming to work with the open educational resources of DIALLS in their classrooms may support them in (1) using the materials and (2) building a long-lasting 'community of practice'. As part of an ongoing community of practice, teachers can share their own knowledge and experiences as a basis of their professional development. In this sense, the exchange of support and feedback also may give future teachers the opportunity to become confident and self-determined in teaching cultural literacy with the materials of DIALLS. In the chapter, the advantages and challenges of engaging in digital communities are discussed by considering the specific affordances of DIALLS.

1.5 An International Project in the Time of COVID 19

Normally, the specific time and place of a project is placed in the background of writings about it, yet the unprecedented crisis that the world found itself in during the Spring of 2020 inevitably had an impact on DIALLS and our engagement with teachers in and across countries. Initially planned innovations to engage children in actual intercultural dialogues through our designed platform were impeded by the closures of schools and then stringent social distancing measures on their return. As this book goes to press, schools are still in turmoil with a generation of children and young people affected by the pandemic and resultant societal actions. As children gradually return to school after months of being socially distant from their peers, the importance of a project like DIALLS is significant. If the goals of the project are to listen to and learn about and from each other, then the skills to enable this need to be centralized.

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