



# Diversity, Communication and Coexistence

VOL. 1: SOCIAL ISSUES

*Edited by Susana Gonçalves*

Exedra Journal, Special issue 2011





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Social Issues (Vol.1)  
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## Foreword: Diversity, Communication and Coexistence

Susana Gonçalves

This special edition of the Exedra Journal is dedicated to diversity and issues of communication and coexistence in today's societies. A number of international contributions has been collected, including research, essays, case studies and reports of school and community development projects.

Authors from Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Netherland, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the USA provide us with a variety of thought-provoking reflections to contribute to the debate on diversity and help guide educational practices, both in formal and non-formal contexts, like school or social education. All together, the contributions gathered for this volume are also relevant reading for those interested in the policies of Education and social management.

This special edition of the Exedra Journal on 'Diversity, Communication and Coexistence' is divided into two volumes, the first one dedicated to Social Issues and the second to Educational Issues. The first volume is divided in three parts.

Part 1, *Narratives of Coexistence*, deals with educational, social and political processes that affect coexistence. Political approaches to diversity in society (and to immigrants and ethnic minorities) have a tremendous impact in school and education, as the example from Denmark (article by Tore Bernt Sørensen) shows. Linguistic differences are central to understanding issues of national identity and international cooperation.

In his article, Jakub Zouhar speaks of the linguistic situation in the present Czech Republic and some of the attitudes behind government educational policy, so contributing an example of the problems faced by small language groups and countries which necessitates the population's acquisition of other languages to further commerce, culture and mobility of its citizens. Would a common language based on a multicultural contemporary lexicon solve part of the problem? Learning languages promotes understanding and tolerance. This aspect is relevant for the development of basic skills regarding internationalization and promotion of plurilingualism in Europe.

As societies become more multicultural, knowledge of other cultures is gradually more necessary, not only in teaching-learning processes but also in daily life. Would it be something to include in citizen's and pupils' education? The article by Eric Cattelain sustains that it is possible to construct an instrumental lexicon for the global citizen. Drawing upon the work of many distinguished linguists, the author outlines a unique approach called "Indefinition" that deals with semantics across linguistic and cultural

lines; this approach with its application under LexisPlanet®, an intercultural lexicon for the world.

Part 2, *The turmoil of illegal immigration*, includes three examples of undocumented massive immigrant flows still a burning (political and social) issue for receiving and sending countries. African Maghreb and sub-Saharan immigration to Europe (through Spain, namely Ceuta and Melilla), Asian and Middle East immigration through Patras in Greece and undocumented immigration (namely from Mexico) to Arizona are cases presented in the contributions by Virgílio Gonzalez, Julia Spinthourakis & P. Antonopoulou and William Davey, respectively.

These cases are only a few examples of the massive tragedy of millions of peoples in those Asian, African and south American countries fustigated by poverty, tyranny, disease and misery. Together, these examples should take us to a more humanist view of the social and psychological aspects behind illegal immigration.

Part 3, *Psychological borders of coexistence*, includes two articles. Focused on the tensions of coexistence, namely under the scope of imperial invasions, the paper contributed by Māra Vidnere tells us about a very hard historical situation: soviet imperialism and its effects on deported imperial Latvian citizens to forced labor camps in Siberia. The third article is an essay by Wolfgang Berg where the author deconstructs “culturalist” notions in favor of the complexities that exist in the citizens of modern society. He defines and explores the concepts of “diversity, culture and transculturality” in a systematic and reasoned way, giving examples of how these concepts actually work and manifest themselves among people in the real world.

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The second volume of this special edition on ‘Diversity, Communication and Coexistence’ is about Educational Issues. It corresponds to part 4 of the edition, including eight articles. Part 4, *Fostering the intercultural agenda*, is dedicated to the report of a number of examples of intercultural practices, both in formal and informal education, both face to face and virtual. This set of articles deals with different aspects of interculturalism in language, religion, national identity and cultural learning as a means to promote peaceful and enriching intercultural coexistence.

First, Ulla Lundgren informs us about a Trans-Atlantic intercultural university project involving American and Swedish students, giving us a nice example of university cooperation at the level of curriculum teaching and learning. The article looks at the cognitive as well as the affective sides of *intercultural competence* (IC) through the joint study of fictional texts and the comments and reflections triggered by the participant’s encounter with different readings.

Sebastián Fernández, Miguel Vigil and Maria del Mar Gómez devote their article to coexistence in schools and present a questionnaire for the evaluation of coexistence in educational contexts of cultural diversity. The questionnaire takes into consideration the complexity of converging factors that affect relations between members of the educational community. The research on which the questionnaire is based is summarized in this article, so contributing to better understanding of the issues in presence.

Michalinos Zenbylas reports on experimental school integration between Greek and Turkish students on the Island of Cyprus. This case study reveals that alienation between the two groups runs along ethnic, religious, political and social lines, for these groups, cohabitation was a bold attempt that yielded some interesting results, focusing mainly on the types of concessions that need to be made by students and teachers alike.

The articles by Ineke Braak–van Kasteel and by Danny Felsteiner & Koen Braak both report Dutch based project of international cooperation through art and music aiming to promote community welfare and education in the Middle East. These community based projects have proven to lessen tensions and foster understanding in conflictively diverse communities and to build bridges between school and culture, families and culture and the home and outside community.

Clive Billighan and Peter Driver are both focused in school projects in the city of Leicester, UK. Clive Billigham reports an initiative taken in Northern England toward breaking down barriers not only in the schools, but in using the schools as centres of outreach, reconciliation and cohesion for the community at large. The procedure and activities that brought together diverse communities (students, parents and teachers) are outlined and detailed feedback is given. Peter Driver deals with a project of school “twinning” for the sake of intercultural learning and community cohesion. Here, activities were planned with a view to involving whole families in the educational process, stimulating more parental involvement with their children’s education and adult interest in life-long learning. Both cases are success stories in the search for activities to promote intercultural understanding and cohesion.

Finally, the article by Maria José Molina Garcia is focused on the first levels of the education system and tells us about the importance of children’s literature in multicultural and plurilingual contexts. The article explores the many beneficial facets of how literature can be used for intercultural education providing us with a list of informative websites and publications.

This set of research, essays and case studies present some aspects of the complex pursuit of harmonious coexistence in a context of social diversity. I hope this special issue, given its international facet and the multiple approaches taken by the authors

will contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon and also for the interested audience, namely those committed to Education be it for the purpose of research, project development, definition of policies or direct teaching, so that better educational strategies, measures and policies can be envisaged and put into practice.