

**Chapter proposal for *Case Studies in Intercultural Dialogue* to be edited by Nazan Haydari & Prue Holmes**

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**Title:** Towards Post-Intercultural Teacher Education: Analysing ‘Extreme’ Intercultural Dialogue to boost Renewed Interculturality?

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**Abstract:**

This chapter examines the impact of a documentary on elementary and secondary student teachers’ conceptualization of the ‘intercultural’ at a Finnish University. The documentary in question, entitled *Word Class Kids* (2010), was filmed in Israel during the three-week Gaza war (Dec. 2008-January 2009), which opposed Israel and Hamas (the political party that controls the

Gaza Strip). Set in a multicultural elementary school in Tel Aviv (west-central Israel), the documentary follows a class of second-graders and their teacher during a one-year period. The seemingly easy and innocent life of 8-year olds at school becomes entangled with many and varied interpersonal and public clashes, leading to many “identity crises” amongst the children and the teacher and the pupils. I argue that by taking place during a war and in a conflict-prone area, the documentary can serve as an archetypical illustration of ‘extreme’ intercultural dialogue and thus help student teachers reflect on the ‘intercultural’ in a renewed fashion. Adopting a socioconstructivist, anti-essentialist and discourse analytic approach to discourses on the Self and the Other and identity (Gillespie, 2006; Dervin, 2011), my study examines if and how the student teachers ‘read’ the documentary through a post-intercultural lens that was introduced and suggested to them during a course on “multicultural education”. Post-intercultural education rejects culturalist, ahistorical, depoliticized and uncritical approaches to diversities (Dervin, 2012).

## **Towards Post-Intercultural Teacher Education: Analysing “Extreme” Intercultural Dialogue to Boost Renewed Interculturality?**

Fred Dervin

**Key terms:** Finland, Israel, marginalization, teacher education, interculturality

### **Introduction**

The noble and elevating search for amity among people seen as amity between civilizations speedily reduces many-sided human beings into one dimension each and muzzles the variety of involvements that have provided rich and diverse grounds for cross-border interactions over many centuries, including the arts, literature, science, mathematics, games, trade, politics, and other arenas of shared human interest.

(Sen, 2006, p. 12)

The ‘intercultural’ is now omnipresent in most departments of teacher education worldwide and can be implemented under the guise of, amongst others, multicultural, transcultural, global and/or development education. The position it holds in teacher education is often dependent on departmental and staff engagement and on how seriously they take the issue of diversities in education (duration of courses, theoretical and methodological orientations, etc.). Furthermore how the ‘intercultural’ is conceptualized and taught also depends on staff training and macro-/micro-political aspirations. The context of this study is that of Finnish education. Famed worldwide for its ‘miraculous’ educational system, Finland is rarely talked about for its dealing with diversities in education. Actually, from Finns themselves or the ‘pedagogical tourists’ who visit the country to witness the ‘Miracle’, oftentimes the stereotypical idea that Finland is a

‘monocultural’ country is rehearsed. This simple and essentialist idea, suggesting that Finns are “robot-like” (Abu-Lughod, 1991) and which misses on the “cross-border interactions” mentioned by Sen above, has some repercussion on the way intercultural and multicultural educations are implemented in teacher education.

In this chapter I am interested in the impact of a course on “multicultural education” given to a group of ‘local’ and international student teachers studying to become Newly Qualified Teachers at a Finnish university. The course, taught in English, like the rest of the programme, lasted for a very short period of time (8 hours), even though the students were going to work in so-called ‘multicultural’ environments at the end of their studies. ‘Multicultural’ refers here to either international schools or to schools with a majority of migrant children. I taught the course myself and decided that since only 8 hours would be devoted to the issue of interculturality, the course would have to help the students to learn to develop quickly critical competences towards the many and varied approaches to diversities that are “available on the market” (Dervin, 2012) and make sure that these precious 8 hours would be used to analyse concrete cases. At the beginning of the course, I distributed a questionnaire to check what the students were expecting from the course, and confirming previous studies in other contexts (Dervin, 2008, 2010), most of them wanted to learn how to deal with “migrant children”, that is to say to learn how to behave and react in front of their “cultures”. I had to make sure that they realized quickly that my course would not provide them with easy recipes or “grammars of cultures” (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1986) to help them to become ‘multicultural’ teachers. My approach was very different, being based on a critical, socioconstructivist and anti-essentialist understanding of the ‘intercultural’ which I call *Post-intercultural* (Dervin, 2012).

In what follows, I am presenting the theoretical and methodological principles of the course. My main interest rests on the use of a documentary on ‘extreme’ intercultural dialogue

that I introduced at the end of the course during an extra session to evaluate the students' reactions to the course - rather than their learning, the course having been so short. Set in Israel, the documentary follows a class in a multicultural school in Tel Aviv during the second Gaza War in 2008-2009. Often conflictual, I hypothesize that the documentary would help me to see how the students discuss such a case of "intercultural dialogue" in education and relate it to their future practices.

## **1 Implementing the ‘intercultural’ in teacher education: deculturalizing yet empowering intercultural dialogue**

### **1.1 The end of culture for real?**

According to the sociologist Michel Maffesoli (2009, p. 11), "the confusion of words always leads to the confusion of things". This most certainly applies to the notion of the 'intercultural', which is quite a polysemic, often confused and confusing notion (Aikman, 2012). Following Breidenbach and Nyíri (2009, p. 10), I believe that the "specter of culture (that) is haunting us" has a strong role to play in this phenomenon. The concept is often "misused" (Wikan, 2002, p. 76) in education "for dreadful personal and political ends" (Wikan, ibid.; Andreotti, 2012). Even though Anne Phillips (2010, p. 65) argues that "in popular usages of the term, there is a tendency to call on culture when faced with something we cannot otherwise understand", many researchers such as Kumaravadivelu (2008), A. Holliday (2010) or I. Piller (2011) have demonstrated that research in e.g. language education misuses culture for the same purpose. In anthropology, static models of culture have been put aside for quite a while now as anthropologists are now concentrating on "inconsistencies within cultures" and paying more attention to "situational

contexts in their analysis of symbols” and “the ongoing activities of experiencing actors” (Ewing, 1990: 262). In other words, anthropologists are not interested in collecting “knowledge” about people and their cultures but in examining critically how they (are made to) use ideas of their cultures when they interact with others (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1986; Bensa, 2010).

In a similar vein, an increasing number of voices are being heard in education, promoting an ‘intercultural’ without culture, where “ahistorical, depoliticized and uncritical ethnocentric benevolence” is rejected (Andreotti, 2011, p. 144). As such Hoskins and Sallah (2011, p. 114) explain that the “simplistic focus on culture hides unequal power relations, including poverty, violence, structural inequalities such as racism and the possibilities of multiple identities”. They add that an overemphasis on e.g. national cultures “avoids a discussion of the wider structural forces of ‘capitalism, racism, colonialism and sexism’” (*ibid.*). In his 2001 article, Shi-xu proposes an approach to language education that took such vital elements into account. He criticizes, amongst others, not only the culturalist but also the individualist biases used in analyzing intercultural dialogue: misunderstanding is often at the centre of such analyses and it is the individual or his/her culture that are blamed for the problems. Yet Shi-xu (*ibid.*) rightly suggests that “no individual person, group, nation, culture, region and such like can alone be responsible for anything or achieve maximally possible success”. He continues to explain that we need to look at “the broader social and cultural traditions and to the interaction and relation between these traditions in which the communication takes place” (*ibid.*) to analyse intercultural dialogue. This means that teachers and researchers cannot continue to “deresponsabilize” themselves, a variety of actors and/or their contexts when explaining intercultural dialogue. Kumaravadivelu (2008, p. 53) has clearly showed how e.g. stereotypes about other cultures in L2 education do contribute to relegating others to inferior positions. For instance he criticizes the often used idea that Asian students “show blind obedience to authority; they lack critical thinking skill; and they do not

actively participate in classroom interaction” (*ibid.*). Recently, Holliday (2010) has argued that such comments hide moralistic judgments, even though they may not be presented or even thought of as such. The tendency to put culture at the centre of analysis or of education ignores a recent change in the field of multicultural education, where the notion of intersectionality (many identities interplay in social situations, not just “culture” e.g. in intercultural contexts) is crucial (cf. e.g. Banks, 2008).

## **1.2 Demarginalizing: towards Post-intercultural education?**

For too long, intercultural education has been presented and worked upon as an apolitical, functionalist and politically correct way of “dealing with the Other”. As I asserted in the previous section, critical voices are now urging us to look elsewhere, in the direction of what I call Post-intercultural education. For example Holliday (2011, p. 39) reminds us that “claims to scientific neutrality and objectivity comprise a naïve denial of ideology” in relation to the ‘intercultural’, especially when cultures are described and “partitioned into little boxes of disparate civilizations” (Sen, 2006, p. 24). This requires from e.g. student teachers to develop critical competences or critical literacy (Andreotti, 2011, p. 195) to fight against any form of marginalization and inequality in their classrooms, schools and beyond. In the course presented here, two “models” were worked upon.

The first one is derived from the anthropologists Breidenbach and Nyíri (2009, p. 340). In relation to the use of the word *culture* in intercultural dialogue, they propose to develop a critical ability to put into question “implicit and explicit assumptions” but also to learn to read the “power dynamics” hidden behind cultural claims (*ibid.*). They propose the following questions,

which proved to be very useful to sensitize the students in the course (Breidenbach & Nyíri, 2009, p. 343-345):

What explicit and implicit statements about culture are involved, about which groups?

What are the fault lines along which groups are defined and differentiated?

Are you overlooking important differences within (or across) these groups?

Who is making the statements about culture? Why might they be making them?

On whose behalf are they speaking explicitly or implicitly? What lends them authority to do so?

Why are they able to voice their opinions? Whose voices are not heard?

Are the statements that are being made about culture empowering or oppressing the groups or individuals involved (which ones)?

How free are members of the group to change or decline norms?

Do they open up or shut down options of dissent (or exit) within the group?

What we noticed during the course was that the word *culture* may not always be present in intercultural dialogue but that other similar elements may serve the same purpose, such as the East/West dichotomy; sexual, linguistic, generational, religious identities; social positioning, etc. In any case the questions above can apply, if the word culture is substituted by other elements. That was the case in the documentary used for evaluating their reactions to the course.

The second model is represented by Vanessa Andreotti's actionable postcolonial theory, which has some similarities with the previous model. The scholar (2011, p. 195) proposes

something a bit more engaged that she entitles “critical literacy”. When engaging with or examining a text in education, Andreotti suggests that people (teachers, students, student teachers) start with the following questions: “what (grand narratives) inform the assumptions of the text? What are the implications in terms of power/social relations?”. In terms of pedagogical focus, she recommends an analysis of the connections between knowledge, power and reflexivity (*ibid.*). Moreover, the notion of language is perceived as ambivalent, ideological and as creating reality in her actionable postcolonial theory (*ibid.*). She argues that we need to take into account the fact that meaning is always in the interpretation. Andreotti also claims that the notion of reality does exist but that it cannot be objectively accessible through language (*ibid.*). Finally as far as knowledge is concerned, she contends that it is partial, dynamic, contingent and provisional (*ibid.*).

The two models presented in this section summarize nicely the educational and conceptual bases of Postintercultural education for student teachers and a move from “cultural knowledge” to an awareness and an engagement with different forms of marginalization and inequality.

### **3 Putting demarginilization into practice: a look at a documentary**

The following sections represent an attempt to describe and problematize what was presented in the previous sections by examining the discourses of student teachers on a documentary evidencing ‘extreme’ intercultural dialogue. The data is derived from a focus group (duration: 30 minutes) between student teachers who had followed my course. The focus group was recorded straight after watching the documentary on a multicultural class in Israel. My class had been split into 4 groups (there were 20 students in the entire group, in the chosen group: 6) at the end of the

documentary, and only one group discussion was recorded on a voluntary basis.

The documentary in question, entitled *Word Class Kids* (2010), takes place in Israel. Directed by Israeli Netta Loevy, it was filmed during the three-week Gaza war (Dec. 2008-January 2009), which opposed Israel and Hamas (the political party that controls the Gaza Strip). Set in a multicultural Elementary School in Tel Aviv (west-central Israel), the 54-minute documentary follows a class of second-graders and their teacher during a one-year period. The seemingly easy and innocent life of 8-year olds at school becomes entangled with many and varied interpersonal and public clashes in relation to the war, leading to many “identity crises” amongst the children and between the teacher and the children. Interestingly, while conflict spreads between the children, the documentary shows how the teacher still tries to instill some of the Israeli national(istic) narratives into all the children – regardless of their origins – and help them to become real “Israelis”.

A few words about Israel are needed here. Created in May 1948, the State of Israel has a very diverse population of around 8 million inhabitants (<http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader>). The vast majority of the people is of Jewish descent (75%) and has immigrated to the country after 1948 or are children of so-called “returnees” to the “Homeland” (*aliyah* in Hebrew). Jews or Jewish descendants can easily apply for Israeli citizenship and move to the country. 20% of the population is also composed of Arabs. Immigration to Israel after Independence came from many different parts of the world: the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe and more recently Eastern Europe, Russia and former Soviet countries. Since 1948, well over 3 million people have emigrated to the country. Thousands of Israelis live in certain settlements, amongst others in Palestinian territories: the Gaza Strip (between Egypt and Israel), the Golan Heights (between Israel and Syria), the West Bank (“between” Israel and Jordan), etc. One hears very often about Israel in the news especially because of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflicts which have

sometimes resulted in wars such as the 2006 Lebanon War or the Gaza War of 2008-2009.

Before moving on to the analysis, it is important to bear in mind that, like any text (cf. 2.), the documentary under scrutiny is an intersubjective creation of various situations and in some cases, it appears evident that many of the scenes (especially the heated ones) have been “manipulated” by the director. For example, when a little girl (Christina) from Ashkelon (north of the border with the Gaza Strip) arrives at the school because the city was evacuated, she is shown playing near an ‘Arab’ child (Jalil), attempting to create dialogue, as an introduction to the problems to follow. Later on in the documentary their relations get very heated.

#### **4 Student teachers’ reactions to the documentary: signs of Post-intercultural education?**

##### **4.1 (Un)wanted marginalization in the school: the role of the teacher**

The focus group started straight after the screening of the documentary with a comment on the fact that the Israeli teacher seems to be treating the children differently. A male student explains that “I had a thought... I don’t know maybe it’s too simple I feel like if it was my classroom I feel like I would have the rule that everybody is the same here”. The other students agree with him and start rehearsing some of the scenes that justify their colleague’s opinion: the teacher marginalizes some of the children. All the scenes presented by the students are related to the ‘Arab’ boy, Jalil, who seems to be marginalized (in)directly by the teacher and by some of the children. I concentrate here on the role of the teacher.

During one lesson, the teacher takes on the issue of the ongoing war and asks the children what they think about it. One pupil answers her question:

(Girl 1): I saw on the news that they're running away from their houses.

(Teacher): Was it hard to watch that?

(Girl 1): Yes.

As she utters this last sentence, Jalil gets up and tries to leave the room for no specific reason. The teacher asks him to stay. This is followed by a comment from another girl, who compares the situation with her parents getting divorced. Then Jalil starts fighting with a girl sitting next to him – with whom he has had problems before, as was showed in the documentary. The teacher then decides to separate them and moves the girl but also a boy who was sitting next to Jalil, leaving him alone in a corner of the classroom. As the teacher asks the class “how do you think we can resolve this war?”, the camera shows Jalil on his own.

A few minutes later, a girl suggests a solution to the conflicts between the “Arabs” and Israelis: “we can take the airplane with the remote control put the Arabs in it and send them to Antarctica”. The teacher reacts by asking another question: “to move them somewhere else?”. As no answer is provided to her question, she turns to Jalil and asks: “Jalil what do you think about the war?”. The little boy refuses to answer. She continues: “Do you even know that there’s a war going on? Do you know what’s happening there? (...) Now that’s you have heard about it... Based on what we’re saying now what do you think?”. Jalil remains silent but as recess is announced, he does not need to say anything. The camera shows him a few seconds later on a beanbag, crying.

The student teachers’ reading of this scene is as follows: the teacher does not really mean to marginalize him but she does it indirectly by trying to include him in the discussions and by isolating him physically.

Other acts of identification, triggered by the teacher, were noted by the student teachers as

being marginalizing. These go beyond mere ethnicity, allegiance or cultural difference, as they include family identities and the professional identities of the parents. During their training, the student teachers had been taught to be careful with such questions.

The first example is at the end of an arithmetic lesson. The teacher asks four questions: “Who loves recess? Who loves daddy? (...) Who loves mommy? Who loves themselves?”. The student teachers felt uncomfortable with these questions, especially as one of the girls told the teacher that she didn’t have a dad.

The next ‘marginalizing’ situation noted by the student teachers is related to the parents’ jobs. The teacher launches a discussion in one of the lessons:

(Teacher) who else wants to tell us what job his or her parents have?

(Girl 1) my mom works in high tech

(Boy 1) now she makes sure there are no viruses in the computer

(Girl 2) they are both lawyers

(Teacher) who else wants to tell us?

(Boy 2 - Jalil) an engineer and a doctor

(Teacher) Is your mum a dentist?

(Boy 2 - Jalil) Yes

(Boy 3) Jalil’s mom once took care of my mom’s teeth

Then the teacher leads a discussion around Boy 3’s parents. His family emigrated from the Philippines a few years before the documentary was filmed.

(Teacher) what do your parents do for a living, Alfredo?

(Boy 3) They clean houses

(Boy 3) Do you ever join them?

(Boy 2 – Jalil) I also join my dad at work

(Boy 3) my father sometimes tells me to throw the newspapers on the floor into the trash

(Girl 3) Alfredo's mum what did he say she does?

(Teacher) they clean houses

(Girl 4) my brother's friend she cleans his house.

For the student teachers, this whole discussion is problematic as it can lead to stereotyping and, as they put it, “neo-colonizing discourses” - while the first answers the teacher got from the children were about “valued” jobs (IT specialists, lawyers, doctors...), cleaning could lead to discourses of inferiority:

(Female student teacher 1): you know at the very beginning when the teacher asks what do you do for a living and then all the parents were saying *doctors lawyers* and then Alfredo says *my parents are cleaners* and then the teacher asked that *do you go to clean with your parents?* And then well then the other kids started to say *well sometimes I go to my parents' work place* but then the teacher was not interested in that she was only interested in if whether Alfredo goes to clean with his parents this is terrible for the poor kid.

Only one episode of inclusion is noted by one of the student teachers in the whole documentary. That occurs when the teacher notices that one boy of Chinese origins is left without food at recess. She then asks the children to share their food with him.

The discussion on exclusion, inclusion and marginalization in the focus group is followed by reflections on the possibility of doing otherwise in the Israeli context. One female student teacher explains that she feels it is impossible to treat every one the same in the Israeli context “because for instance the religion is present it is always present”. She adds: “it’s all big part of school... religion and everything is sort of so if you are not a Jew then you are by that sort of separated sort of isolated from the group”. Not a word is uttered by any of the students about marginalization in the Finnish context as they talk about the documentary...

#### **4.2 Identity building in the classroom**

The ideas of identity construction (being personal, national, religious or ethnic) and power politics were very much talked about during my lectures. Many examples of co-constructive acts of identification in education had also been analyzed with the student teachers. For most of them the fact that “national identities are mélange identities, combinations of people that have been conventionally amalgamated under a political heading” (Pieterse, 2004, p. 33) was a new piece of the jigsaw to analyze intercultural dialogue. During the focus group, the students discussed at length how much of what the teacher was doing was meant to contribute to reinforcing the Israeli/Jewish identity of the children:

(Female student teacher 1) what she chooses is to strengthen Jewish identity and culture or whatever it is and you know to play this we and the other, you know us and them

Adding to this point, one male student teacher claims that:

(Male student teacher 2) Yeah I thought definitely there is some nation-building going on it wasn't necessarily the teacher's point of view to do it but she might not have any choice into that she might have to teach these things because they are in the curriculum

This leads to a discussion around the concept of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1992) that had been introduced in the lectures and the dialectics between us and them, and the accompanying potential ethnocentrism. The female student teacher mentioned above argues that:

(Female student teacher 1) and sort of like Israel is some sort of invented country invented nation in a way so you sort of need to very strongly build up the national identity and stuff like that so it is understandable that it is in the curriculum but is it good? I don't think so but...

This illustrates quite well the impact of one aspects of Post-intercultural education that was discussed during the lectures: it is important to look at the broader social context and to relate it to the communication that takes place (cf. Shi-xu, 2001).

In relation to this theme, the student teachers discuss two episodes that they believe were telling of the collective identity building. The first episode they comment on is based on a reading of *Exodus 2:5/6* by the teacher:

(Teacher) The more they tortured the children of Israel the more children they had there was nothing they could do Pharaoh thought there they'll say *enough let's not have any more children. That's enough. It's so hard why should we have more babies should they also suffer? Should they also be slaves?* On that day down to the river went Pharaoh's

daughter to bathe in the Nile there she saw a baby crying she felt sorry for it and said there is a Hebrew child, there is a Jewish child...

(Boy 1) how did she know?

(Teacher) by the crying

(Boy 3 – Jalil) how could she tell... by its crying but you can't tell

(Teacher) I'm continuing they cried differently it sounded different

(Boy 3 – Jalil) But how could she...?

(Teacher) today when we hear a baby it sounds the same, back then they could tell the difference

(Boy 3 – Jalil) ah!

The interaction between the teacher and Jalil is interesting as it shows that the little boy represents the doubter, the critical and destabilizing voice but also the outsider in the constructed identification that the teacher is enacting in front of and for the children. This is the student teachers' reaction to this dialogue:

(Female student teacher 1) but you know if we go back to the teacher and how she reacted cos' they were asking all these questions how did they recognize the baby the crying how do I know if I am a Jew

(Female student teacher 2) yeah she had all these funny answers

(Female student teacher 1) if I am a Jew or not

(Male student teacher 2) yeah yeah and Jalil was one of those asking those questions

(Female student teacher 1) I think that the teacher sort of passed the questions and didn't give any answers to the questions

(Female student teacher 2) except for the baby thing

(Female student teacher 1) yeah by the cry how can you tell if somebody is Jewish and then you can just say I don't know

(Female student teacher 2) maybe she is not allowed to say that?

(Female student teacher 1) maybe she didn't want to be critical?

Again the last two questions show that the students make an attempt to question the context of the documentary – instead of e.g. explaining the teacher's behaviour with generalizing comments about Israelis.

The second narrative takes place during the Jewish holiday (Purim) that celebrates the deliverance of the Jews living in Persia from extermination. The teacher is talking about the “enemies of the Jews”:

(Teacher) when I say enemies of the Jews, who do I mean? The wicked Haman. King Ahasuerus gave him permission to eliminate, to destroy and to kill all the Jews.

(Boy 1) How do they know who's Jewish?

(Teacher) How do you know that you're Jewish?

(Girl 1) because I have a passport (“darkon”)

(Boy 2) in my passport it says where I was born

(Girl 2) My mom was born in Argentina but she's Jewish

(Boy 2) You can tell by the language

(Teacher) But Jalil speaks Hebrew and he's not Jewish

(Girl 2 to Jalil) you're not Jewish? Then what are you? An Arab? A Christian?

(Girl 3) Jalil said he would kill me!

(Girl 4) He said that he's an Arab!

Again the little 'Arab' boy is marginalized by both the teacher ("nicely") and by some girls. The *us and them* dichotomy seems to have reached its climax at this stage. The student teachers are surprised at the lack of intervention from the teacher's side especially when other children utter aggressive words towards the boy. This episode is followed by an interaction between the teacher and Jalil, who again contradicts her:

(Teacher) OK listen we have customs that other people don't have we learned about that in our Torah class I'll give you a hint: the number eight

(Boy 1) By circumcision

(Teacher) when do we do a circumcision?

(Boy 2) on the 8<sup>th</sup> day

(Teacher) Only Jews are circumcised

(Jalil) then why did I get cut?

The student teachers also note the contradiction between these discourses of differentialization and, potentially, of ethnocentrism when they compare this last episode and the following class activity which consists in the entire class singing a song in Hebrew written by Rabbi Akiva, *Love your neighbor your neighbor as yourself*. Finally the students seem to sympathize with the teacher who appears to be "torn between the official curriculum" and her emotions. A female student teacher reminds the group of one of the last scenes of the documentary when the teacher talks to Jalil face-to-face before the end of the year: "I want to tell you that... (she cries) I am a little emotional... may I? It was great having you in my class, you made such an effort and

worked so hard don't stop reading! Ok? Don't stop reading! My beautiful boy keep being a good boy don't be shy raise your hand and work hard just like you know and if you need help you can come to me good luck!". Through analyzing these episodes of identity building led by the teacher, the student teachers demonstrate that they are able to identify hegemonic voices but also voices of dissensus (Andreotti, 2011).

#### **4.3 (Verbal) violence and the children's confused identities**

For the psychologist R.D. Laing (1967, p. 68) "Each person is the other to the others" and thus identities are unstable and not always defined as "we see fit" (Ryan, 1999, p. 46). Identity is a fundamental element in Post-intercultural education (cf. 1.1). For Howarth (2002, p. 24), working on identity can allow the researcher to explain "why and how different people use representations to different ends – to legitimize, to contest, to negate, to transform". In this section, I investigate how the student teachers perceived and "discussed" around the confusion in identification that is noticeable in the children. This is a key element of the documentary that the student teachers note in the focus group, especially as they consider the arrival of the girl (Christina) from Ashkelon. This is how the teacher introduces her to the class:

For 8 years children in the town of Sderot life was not normal not like for you when you come to school there's a bell an you go to class you study and you go to recess no one takes you to the bomb shelters you don't hear sirens in the middle of the day Christina came here from the city of Ashkelon because the schools are closed there they don't send children to school because it's not safe I want Christina to feel as if nothing happened I want her to feel safe and protected

This is actually the only time that the teacher holds a clear-cut discourse of inclusion in the documentary, notes a student teacher. The documentary director seems to be willing to give this new girl a central role in the ‘plot’ when she arrives in the school. She is asked at the beginning if she has a lot of friends in her class in Ashkelon:

(Documentary director?) Christina in your class do you have lots of friends

(Christina) Me? Which class? Here or there? In Ashkelon?

(Jalil) in Ashkelon

(Christina) No, here I have lots more than in Ashkelon

(Jalil) how many do you have in Ahskelon?

(Christina) I only have one in Ashkelon... because everyone says that I’m Russian

As a follow-up to this comment, Jalil mentions that there is another Russian girl in the class. Then suddenly, like a domino effect, many children start mentioning ‘their’ national identities. A differentiation game also ensures:

(Girl 1) I am not an Arab so I won’t be with you (to Jalil) I’m not a Russian so I won’t be with you (to Christina) I’m French so I’ll be with someone French

(Boy 1) what am I?

(Girl 2) I think Guy is French

(Girl 1) *comment ça va? comment ça va?*

One male student teacher comments on the following interaction, which he finds reveals the

children's identity confusions:

(Christina about the Filipino boy) he looks Palestinian to me. Are you Palestinian?

(Filipino boy) who are you asking?

(Christina) you

(Filipino boy) I'm Filipino

(Christina) Filipino? Filipinos are against us in Ashkelon

This time it is misidentification that characterizes the identity game being played by the children. Christina is reassured by another girl who tells her not to worry because "Alfredo is a very nice boy". But then the situation differs when another girl who is fighting with Jalil, "gives him away" as an 'Arab':

(Girl fighting with Jalil) Stop it you! You Arab!

(Christina looking shocked) Oh and Jalil is an Arab!

On several occasions, the new girl from Ashkelon makes remarks on Arabs and mentions the fact that her parents have told her that they cannot be trusted. Talking to the camera after the previous event, she says:

Jalil... he talks like an Arab I don't know it's not for me... The Arabs are against us so it's not allowed... I don't talk to him... I didn't know he was an Arab I should... have known... that... the Arabs are against us.

The sources of these discourses seem to be revealed later on in the documentary when she recounts a visit to the Western Wall in Jerusalem (the mother):

you mustn't get too close to Palestinians yesterday I went to the Western Pole (*Western wall*) and I saw lots of Mussulmen there Mommy told me to hide from them because there are some bad ones that go to the Western Pole bad ones I am not allowed to get to close because they'll see I'm a Jew and they'll know I'm from Ashkelon and they are against me they always take with them guns lots of guns and they can shoot

The little girl's discourses were discussed by the student teachers in the focus group. Instead of 'blaming' her, they try to negotiate the following question: are children aware of what they are saying in such cases?

(Female student teacher 1) but you know the girl who came to the school she was making very clear that we and them and *I don't talk to them* and *we can go...*

(Male student teacher 2) She didn't even think about what she was saying she was just repeating things and laughing and saying those things talking about she didn't seem to connect with anything

(Male student teacher 1) yeah there are things kids don't understand you know it doesn't mean very much to a kid to talk about religion or nationality it is just words that they repeat

(Female student teacher) yeah I am French I am with French so I have no friends and then one boy said *but you know I only have one friend cos' I am Russian* they are trying to learn the meanings of these words I am Arab how the identity forms in the classroom

This discussion could show again that the students are critical of the voices they hear in educational contexts and of the importance of parental, official discourses on the children's constructions of the self and the other. This discussion reminds one of the student teachers of a situation she had experienced herself during her training period in an elementary school. She presents the case, explains what she did and tries to find approval from her colleagues:

(Female student teacher 2) I have a question now I am going to be in a class where there is going to be mostly Finnish and Somalis and Russians and such I was once in a situation when the kids they were 13 years old they were saying *oh he is Russian* or something like that and then I said *I will not have any of that talk in this class* and then I closed the subject immediately. Is this the right thing to do?

The reactions she received from her colleagues are divided. Some confirmed that "you shouldn't allow that", going back to the documentary and criticizing the fact that the teacher (Female student teacher 3) "didn't interfere at all when these kids were living all these racial comments she just let it be". Others suggested a more active attitude: (male student teacher 2) "talking about... making sense of these differences and similarities might be very important because if the kids don't go there they might end up being something very mystical and quite scary".

## Conclusion

This chapter has adopted a co-analytical approach to Post-intercultural education. Blending in my own analyses of a documentary and those of student teachers' at a Finnish university, the study

represents an attempt to put a renewed understanding and analytical stance of intercultural dialogue into practice in both teacher education and research. The analysis shows that the student teachers were able in a 30-minute focus group to relate what they saw in the documentary and what they had explored during a 8-hour intensive course on multicultural education. As such they discussed the central aspect of marginalization in multicultural classrooms in a specific context (Israel) as well as the many and varied confused and confusing identity games taking place in the class. There is some evidence of relating what they had seen in the documentary to the questioning of the social/historical contexts (contextual approach), and of analyzing the power relations in the documentary (political approach). Very little was actually said about the Finnish context of education and hardly any comparison of observed situations in the documentary and situations in Finnish schools. This could be explained by several factors: the instructions they had received, the time limit or the lack of experience in the schools. It is hoped that such a “drop” in their reflection on diversities, power-differences, inequality will allow them to develop the same type of discourses about their experiences in Finnish schools. Of course the context is different, but critical voices on Finnish education have already remarked such phenomena in relation to e.g. migrant children, Romas and potential drop-outs (Riitaoja, forth.). It is also hoped that, as many of the student teachers are themselves foreigners in Finland, Post-intercultural education will help them to deal with situations of inequality and even marginalization in a country where the Other has yet to find her/his place in education...

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