

# Critical Discourse Analysis of Multiculturalism and Intercultural Education Policies in the Republic of Cyprus

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## Abstract

*This paper engages in critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the underlying philosophical and ideological assumptions about multiculturalism and intercultural education in some recent manifestations of educational policy in the Republic of Cyprus. It begins with an overview of CDA and its usefulness in educational policy analysis followed by a brief history of intercultural education in the Greek-Cypriot educational system. Sociopolitical and textual aspects of the chosen policy documents are then analysed which focus on the following questions: (1) What ideological assumptions are made about multiculturalism and intercultural education by Greek-Cypriot educational authorities, and what are the implications of those assumptions for the education of non-indigenous children; (2) How do the chosen policy documents construct culture and diversity and in what ways do those constructions establish and sustain certain power asymmetries? The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of this analysis for policymaking on intercultural education in the Republic of Cyprus and other multicultural settings.*

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, intercultural education, educational policy, critical discourse analysis

## Introduction

Discourses of multiculturalism and multicultural education have been the battleground of fierce debates in many societies during the last three decades. These debates focus on the questions of *unity* and *diversity* (Banks, 2007). On one hand, critics of multicultural education (e.g. Ravitch, 1990; Schlesinger, 1991) claim that the implementation of multicultural education reforms intensifies divisions and threatens national and social unity, while proponents of multicultural educational reforms (e.g. Nieto, 1999; Duarte and Smith, 2000; Gutmann, 2004) suggest that common values may be the result of repression of diversity and thus assimilation and that monocultural ideological perspectives should be resisted. These opposing views on unity and diversity have given rise to different strands of multiculturalism such as conservative, liberal, pluralist and critical multiculturalism (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997). These strands espouse different ideals about what should be included and excluded in certain discourses, policies and practices around multiculturalism. While seemingly neutral and transparent, often espousing the

international imperative of positive recognition of difference and culture, discourses of multicultural education often convey vested political and ideological interests (Giroux, 1993; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997). The analysis of discourses of multiculturalism that appear in official policy documents is particularly important for understanding the core assumptions informing policymaking on multicultural education.

This article critically examines how *intercultural education*,<sup>1</sup> *multiculturalism*, *difference* and *culture*, are positioned through discourse in certain manifestations of educational policy by Greek-Cypriot educational authorities. These constructs are chosen as a focus of this analysis because they constitute some of the crucial concepts in discourses of intercultural education. Given the scope of educational policy analysis, there is no attempt to represent its full complexity. The course chosen here is merely representative of some recent manifestations of educational policy – mainly through circulars sent to primary schools, because circulars represent a major way of communicating policies directly to teachers – for the purpose of enhancing our ability to provide alternative readings of policy texts. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995; Weiss and Wodak, 2003), The language of educational policy documents is analysed in relation to power and ideology, i.e. the examination of how the aforementioned basic constructs and categorisations in these documents constitute acts of power which give rise to particular forms of inclusion and exclusion of social groups and identities, and depend on assumptions about naturalised realities. De-naturalising these taken-for-granted assumptions and the underlying hegemonic ideologies is a key task of CDA and this is precisely the reason why this approach is appropriate for the purpose of this article.

In the first section of the article, CDA and its usefulness in educational policy analysis is described, and then a brief history of intercultural education in the Greek-Cypriot educational system is provided. The sociopolitical and textual aspects of the chosen policy documents are later analysed. More specifically, the aim of this analysis is to answer the following questions: (1) What ideological assumptions are made about multiculturalism and intercultural education by Greek-Cypriot educational authorities, and what are the implications of those assumptions for the education of non-indigenous children; (2) How do the chosen policy documents construct culture and diversity and in what ways do those constructions establish and sustain certain power asymmetries? The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of this analysis for policymaking on intercultural education in the Republic of Cyprus and other multicultural settings.

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1 'Intercultural education' is a preferred term used by the Council of Europe and most European countries (see Papamichael, 2008) by comparison to 'multicultural education' used in Britain and the US. In the discourse of the Republic of Cyprus 'intercultural education' is mostly used and therefore this is the term employed throughout this article. On a more general level, 'inter-cultural' implies a stress on communication across cultures, whereas 'multi-cultural' refers to their mere existence.

### Policy as Discourse: The Use of CDA to Critically Analyse Educational Policy

The notion of policy-as-discourse (Ball, 1993) – a major idea in which this article is grounded – suggests that policies are essentially texts that reflect underlying ideologies and philosophical assumptions. In other words, policies do not exist in a vacuum but are embedded in particular discourses that are situated in social and political frames; these frames delineate the possible interpretations and enactments of policymaking. Critical discourse analysis (CDA), then, is an approach by which texts (and therefore policies) are analysed to make transparent their underlying ideologies and philosophical assumptions (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997).

CDA gives particular attention to power relations through examining the relationships between the micropolitics of texts (e.g. discursive textual features such as words, syntax and conceptual categories) and the macropolitical social and cultural structures within which discourses form and operate (Fairclough, 1992; Luke, 2002). As Fairclough (1995) explains:

“[CDA] ... sets out to make visible through analysis, and to criticize, connections between properties of texts and social processes and relations (ideologies, power relations) which are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts, and whose effectiveness depends upon this opacity” (p. 97).

Therefore, CDA makes ideologies and power relations more visible by questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions about social institutions and the society. The acts of naming and categorising, for example, that are necessary to all language usage, are essentially acts of power which delineate what is ‘normal’ from what is considered ‘deviant’. Thus anything ‘different’ is equated with anomaly through normative assumptions that demarcate the same from the different.

CDA focuses, then, on what language *does* in the world, that is, how language functions to establish particular realities, social relationships and systems of knowledge and belief (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). Language use is defined as social practice and consequently, discourse is not simply a representation of the world but a means of “constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64). Policy documents, for example, such as circulars sent to teachers, are immersed in discourses and discursive relations. Inherent in these policy documents are ideological positions that serve the interests of authorities and mobilise meaning in the service of hegemonic groups (Thompson, 1990). CDA provides indications of which voices and discourses are included and which may be excluded, thus being absent (Fairclough, 2003). Clearly, the process of immersion in discourses is not politically and ideologically neutral (Luke, 2002); therefore, any attempt to denaturalise the taken-for-granted frame of discourse and dismantle the relations of domination – by interrogating, contesting and reinscribing naturalised assumptions – is also a political task, albeit one that has the potential to interrupt hegemonic ideologies and given symbolic systems and create openings for change (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1997). Recent approaches to policy analysis in education have begun to explore the possibilities of CDA to examine policymaking as an arena of struggle over meaning (Taylor, 2004). As Taylor points out,

there has been relatively little published work on policy analysis in education which specifically uses CDA (*ibid*). However, this kind of approach is particularly appropriate for critical policy analysis in education, “because it allows a detailed investigation of the relationship of language to other social processes, and of how language *works* within power relations” (*ibid*, p. 436, original emphasis). In the context of this article, then, CDA can be used as a means to understand how multicultural discourses, as embedded in policy documents, are implicated in relations of power. Such an analysis will explore the ways in which power constitutes specific hegemonies that mark non-indigenous children in the Republic of Cyprus as different, as deficient, or as objects of exclusion and marginalisation.

For example, it would be valuable to expose the ways that these policy documents represent non-indigenous children as ‘other-language’ [*alloglossa*] children, that is, as individuals whose mothertongue is other than Greek. Drawing on Foucault, Popkewitz and Brennan (1998) discuss the implications of this representation for the subjectivisation of children, explaining that the power of discourses to name, depict and describe, create particular systems of comparing and normalising children as ‘different.’ It is important, therefore, to situate the analysis of textual features within the larger social and political context of education and the society. For instance, in relation to intercultural education policy in the Republic of Cyprus, it is interesting to examine how multiculturalism is constructed through claims that are rooted in the service of particular ideologies about immigration and cultural difference. In short, the CDA framework provides insights into the macropolitical structures of the social world and how particular discourses are constituted within these structures.

### **Intercultural Education in the Greek-Cypriot Educational System**

Cyprus has traditionally been a country of out-migration throughout the twentieth century; however, migration of labour to the Republic of Cyprus started in the 1990s as a result of the relatively quick economic boom that has turned Cyprus into a host country for immigration and migrant workers (Spyrou, 2009; Trimikliniotis and Demetriou, 2009). Immigration has particularly grown over the last few years, consisting of immigrants and labour workers from East Asia, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and the Middle East; there has also been some internal movement of Turkish Cypriots from the north to the south part of Cyprus, especially after the partial lift of restrictions in movement in 2003. Of the current inhabitants 13.7% are non-indigenous Cypriots, that is, persons not born in Cyprus, including registered migrants and their children plus naturalised Cypriots (Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus, 2006). The changing profile of the population in the Republic of Cyprus has affected the schools and the educational system. The Greek-Cypriot educational system has always been monocultural – as a result of the historical segregation of the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot educational systems – thus immigration has brought major changes to the profile of Greek-Cypriot schools. While in the school year 1995-1996, the percentage of “non-indigenous” students was 4.41%, in 2007-2008

this percentage rose to 77% (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2007a). There are now some schools where “non-indigenous” children constitute the large majority (80-90%) of the school population; as a result, there is a growing number of multicultural schools.

The concept of “intercultural education” is relatively new to Greek-Cypriot schools and society (Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou, 2007). The first serious attempt to implement it took place in 2002 (F: 7.1.191/3, 29 October 2002), when the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus sent a long circular to public (primary) schools (under the title ‘Intercultural Education’) and explained the government policy on this matter.<sup>2</sup> The policy focused on two things: first, the provision of measures for language support, that is, the teaching of Greek as a second language to non-indigenous students; and second, the provision of measures for facilitating the smooth integration of non-indigenous students (or ‘other-language’ children, as they were called in the document) in the Greek-Cypriot educational system and society.

However, the Commission for Educational Reform (2004) – which was appointed by the government – expressed concerns about the narrowly ethnocentric and culturally monolithic Greek-Cypriot educational system and argued that this basically ignored multiculturalism. The measures and policies suggested and implemented were considered inadequate by the Commission, because they primarily targeted non-indigenous students and their ‘language deficiency’ in Greek, while neglecting wider issues of nationalism, racism and intolerance; the Commission considered intercultural education for all students to be a necessary response to these issues. Also, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI, 2006) emphasised the lack of thorough understanding of and genuine sensitivity to human rights by many teachers. Other studies by researchers in the Republic of Cyprus stress that the philosophy behind educational practices on intercultural education is mostly grounded in the notion of assimilation, and that the educational system views the diversity of non-indigenous children as a form of deficiency that needs to be treated quickly so that these children can be assimilated to the mainstream society (Angelides *et al.*, 2004; Papamichael, 2008; Zembylas and Iasonos, in press).

The current model of intercultural education being implemented in Greek-Cypriot primary schools (the focus of interest in this article) is a mainstreaming programme in which language learners attend classrooms with indigenous Greek-speaking children. There are a number of schools that have become part of a Zone of Educational Priority (ZEP) (following the example of the French Zones Educatif Priorité, and less of Educational Action Zones in England). ZEP networks include schools with high numbers of non-indigenous students but this is not the rule; there are a number of other schools in Cyprus with high numbers of non-indigenous students that

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2 This was preceded by a booklet authored by Roussou and Hadjiyianni-Yiangou (2001) and published by the Primary Education Programme Development Service, which, however, does not outline the official policy by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus but describes the state of intercultural education in Greek-Cypriot education (Hadjiyianni-Yiangou, personal communication, 23 February 2009).

are not in a ZEP network. ZEP schools receive additional help – such as extra hours for assisting non-indigenous students to learn the language.

It is also important to point out that although the official policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture is against segregation of non-indigenous children, there is a trend towards segregation in schools with a high concentration of migrants, minorities and Greek Cypriots from poorer backgrounds (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou, 2009). Parallel to the growing number of these students, most of those schools at the same time see a significant reduction of white, middle-class Greek-Cypriot students. This is the so-called 'white flight.' Although there is increasing evidence of racial prejudice against minorities, the Ministry of Education and Culture supports that there is no research or proper figures indicating racist incidents in schools (Trimikliniotis, 2008). In their study, Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou (2007) acknowledge that their semi-structured questionnaire with teachers and the interviews with parents and children pointed to racist incidents; non-indigenous children were targeted mostly because of the manner in which they dressed, the financial difficulties of their families and their skin colour. In a recent ethnographic study that lasted for two years, the author's own research team also documented many racist incidents in which Roma and Turkish-Cypriot students were systematically marginalised by the majority (Zembylas, in press a, in press b). In general, existing research in schools shows that Greek-Cypriot teachers are ill-prepared to deal with the challenge of multicultural education (Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou, 2007; Papamichael, 2008; Trimikliniotis, 2004; Zembylas and Iasonos, in press).

### Overview of Dataset

In terms of the social and political aspects of my analysis, the social practices relevant to this article are located in the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus, the site for the production of the policy texts to be analysed. The particular documents chosen were the following:

- 22 circulars (relevant to intercultural education and the teaching of Greek to 'other-language' children) sent to schools by the Primary Education Directorate between 2002 and 2008, including three relevant circulars concerning the annual objectives of the Ministry of Education and Culture between 2006-2007 and 2008-2009;<sup>3</sup>
- the Strategic Planning of the Ministry of Education and Culture published in December 2007 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2007b); and,

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3 The circulars analysed are listed in the Bibliography under Primary Sources. The information provided at the end of this article includes their protocol file number, publication date, and title.

For purposes of translation reliability and accuracy in the quotes from the Greek circular documents, the extracts used in this article were initially translated to English both by the author and by a professional translator. These extracts were then translated back to Greek and checked for reliability and accuracy. The process continued until an inter-rater agreement was reached.

- the Council of Ministers' Decision No. 67598 (30 July 2008) entitled 'Measures for the Smooth Integration of Other-Language Students' that adopts the so called 'intercultural approach' as the official policy of the government and approves specific measures for the "smooth integration of other-language students"; this Decision complements an earlier Decision (No. 59550, 25 February 2004) about the provision of Greek language instruction to 'other-language' children, dividing them into two categories (beginners and non-beginners).<sup>4</sup>

The particular policy documents are chosen for two reasons: first, because circulars provide a major means of communicating policymaking decisions directly to teachers – especially in the absence of an official policy on the matter, as has been the case with intercultural education in the Republic of Cyprus for several years until the delineation of this policy in a Decision of the Council of Ministers (July 2008); and, second, because the Strategic Planning of 2007 outlines the major vision and policy intentions of the Ministry of Education and Culture in future years.<sup>5</sup> Overall, it may be argued that these particular documents reflect the government's philosophy and policy on intercultural education in the Greek-Cypriot educational system.

In terms of the textual features of this analysis, it is accomplished through an examination of several elements. First, the texts belong to a particular *genre*. The policy documents that are analysed here fall into the genre of government policy statements, drawing from a variety of discourses such as education, law, and science. The circulars are addressed to teachers, the Strategic Planning is addressed to teachers, administrators, parents, education organisations and generally all those interested in Cypriot education, and the Decision No. 67598 is addressed to government education bureaucrats. Second, the texts position themselves in accessible and authoritative ways. They are structured with short paragraphs that contain mainly factual assertions or imperative directions. The style of the text appears objective and neutral, especially through the use of third-person and the inclusion of numbers, figures, and tables. Also, the circulars, in particular, often shift from the use of first person plural 'we' (to establish a sense of identity between the authors and the readers) to the second-person 'you' to provide particular directions to teachers and administrators.

Another key aspect of discourse in these documents is the selection of particular words and phrases. The lexical choices of the texts analysed establish or perpetuate particular everyday

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4 Given that the Decision 67598 of the Council of Ministers (30 July 2008) is outlined in circular F: 7.1191/10 (28 August 2008) and the phraseology in the two documents is exactly the same, all citations made in this article will use the circular as a reference source, because all circulars (after 2003) are publicly available. See at the following site: [<http://www.schools.ac.cy/dde/circular/allcircular/ShowAllcircularTablePage.aspx>].

5 The 2004 document of the Commission for Educational Reform is not analysed here because it constitutes a *proposal/manifesto* authored by an independent committee and not an *official policy document* by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus. Some of the 2004 proposals are 'translated' into official policies and are included in the 2007 Strategic Planning of the Ministry of Education and Culture; therefore, the latter is the chosen document for analysis.

ideologies and popular language use in the ways some groups are conceptualised. One example is the word 'other-language' [*alloglossoi*] children. This word is used throughout the texts reviewed but sometimes it is interchanged with the words 'alien' [*allodapoi*], 'foreigners' [*xenoi*] and 'foreign-language' [*xenoglossoi*]. All these words are not ideologically neutral lexical choices but reveal implicit ideological assumptions and knowledge/power relationships. It is interesting to note that the word 'other-language' does not appear in any other multicultural or language discourses in the international literature; instead, the words 'bilingual', 'foreign-language', or 'second-language' are utilised. The word 'other-language' connotes a very different referent that is grounded on the hegemonic language in the Republic of Cyprus (i.e. Greek) and the clear delineation about the 'other' (languages). This particular lexical choice indicates, as it will be shown soon in more detail, that there are particular ideological forces at work in semantics, and these forces – that is, the prevalence of the dominant language in all aspects of school and everyday life and the requirement that those who do not speak Greek should do so – reinforce ideological interests. Overall, the textual features of the policy documents that are analysed here communicate a sense of objectivity, clarity and truth thus predisposing readers to accept the claims made (e.g. see Spivak [1987] on the notion of the other as opposite rather than 'just' foreigner).

Thematically, the presentation of the policy documents reviewed here includes three major categories in response to the focus questions stated in the introduction. The first two categories include extracts from documents conceptualising the philosophy and ideology of the Greek-Cypriot educational system regarding multiculturalism and intercultural education as well as the implications for educating non-indigenous children, especially in relation to the notion of acquiring intercultural skills or competencies. The final category includes extracts revealing the constructions about culture and diversity and the ways those constructions establish and sustain certain power asymmetries.

## Analysis

### *Conceptualising Multiculturalism*

As a subject topic, multiculturalism has been initially framed in negative and rather bleak ways, although more recently it is described in a more factual manner, as an unavoidable reality of contemporary societies. For example, in circular F: 71.191/3 (29 October 2002), the longest one ever sent on the topic of intercultural education and the policy adopted by the Ministry of Education and Culture (hereafter 'Ministry'), multiculturalism is conceptualised as follows:

"It is known that in the last few years, in addition to its serious political problem, Cyprus is in the whirlwind of serious socio-economic developments. During the last decade, the Cypriot society, which until recently had a relatively homogeneous composition with basically Greek-Orthodox population, experiences intensely the consequences of the massive arrival of alien workers and fellow Greek-Pontians from the former USSR. Among the consequences [of this massive arrival] is also the continuing growth of the number of other-language children enrolled in our schools" (p. 1).

In this extract, there are clear distinctions made between 'us' (the Greek Cypriots whose Greek-Orthodox identity is threatened by this massive arrival of aliens) and 'them' ('other-language' and 'alien' individuals). Such distinctions are fundamental in most circulars reviewed and articulate the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, mainstream and marginalised, normalised and deviant.

In the next paragraph of the aforementioned circular, it is explicitly clarified that the demands created by these recent events constitute a "problem" (*ibid.*) that leads to the development of the Programme entitled 'Intercultural Education.' This Programme, as it is stated, concerns "the formation of an action plan about the education of other-language children" (*ibid.*). Notwithstanding the welcoming development of acknowledging for the first time the need for intercultural education in Cyprus, the issue is framed right from the beginning as a *problem*, rather than an opportunity. Specifically, this 'problem' concerns the children who do not speak the dominant language (i.e. Greek) and seems to have nothing to do with the majority population. As it is stated, the Ministry's efforts are focused on "the smooth integration of these children into the Cypriot educational system" (a phrase that is repeatedly used in numerous subsequent circulars). Moreover, it is noted that "the basic goal is to offer supporting and differentiating programs of Greek language learning so that the children of expatriates and aliens can communicate more effectively with their environment" (*ibid.*). In other words, the focus is on developing effective communication skills to 'other-language' children. In addition to this focus, as it is further elaborated, an ongoing "intention" of the Ministry of Education and Culture is "the protection of the freedoms and rights of all members of the Cypriot society from racist discrimination and social exclusion" (*ibid.*). The latter statement makes a rather vague and rhetorical claim about protecting individual rights, yet there is no further explanation of what this means or implies, especially in terms of the existing social and political structures that cause social exclusion and discrimination in the first place.

The above extracts are structured in the form of *problem*→*solution*, that is, the problem is the presence of aliens and other-language children, and the solution is to teach those children Greek language skills so that they can communicate with the majority. In other words, not only the terrain of the school curriculum remains essentially unchanged, but also the situation is defined in terms of the *language deficit* of non-indigenous children. The deficit theory is grounded on the notion that students from minority backgrounds have difficulties and eventually fail in school because of the supposedly lower culture they bring with them (Banks, 1994). Coincidentally, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus seems to subscribe to this (heavily criticised) theory because, as it is stated in the Strategic Planning, "It is nowadays acceptable that school progress, the success or failure of students is indebted upon a large degree on their social and educational background, since the educational capital they inherit from their parents differs from one social class to another" (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2007b, p. 72). Although partly correct, this statement tells half of the story and fails to acknowledge that this 'deficit' is not really a deficit but an issue of power relationships (May, 1999). The dominant culture plays a hegemonic role and essentially delegitimises the knowledge brought by children of minority backgrounds

such as their language and culture (Nieto, 1999). That is, the entire philosophy and practice of intercultural education in the Greek-Cypriot educational system is built upon the difficulty of non-indigenous children to speak Greek. Both in this circular and in those that follow in subsequent years, there is rare, if any reference, to multiculturalism as an event that concerns the majority such as the majority's responsibilities to play a part in incorporating the contributions of other cultural meanings and identities or revaluing its own complicities in unequal social and political structures.

Subsequent circulars refer to multiculturalism through a series of strong declarative statements/assertions that simply go only as far as acknowledging that multiculturalism forces a general first-person plural 'we' to adopt to the new realities by acquiring relevant *individual* skills of intercultural communication. For example, in circular F: 71.05.20 (28 August 2007) it is stated: "The radical social changes that are observed in our days, the modern way of life, the need for continuous moving and communication with other people and mainly the new European environment, impose on all of us the need to adopt such principles and acquire such skills ..." (p. 1). Once again, the issue is framed in individual terms and evades the matter of collective responsibilities or existing structural inequalities. There is also a sense of urgency coupled with some unwillingness set up by the use of "impose" as a consequence of the fact that "Cyprus, although it always was at the crossroad of different cultures and despite that it always had elements of a multicultural society, experiences nowadays an unprecedented presence of foreigners, workers, visitors, even permanent residents" (*ibid.*). Multiculturalism is represented here as an inevitable change that essentially *forces* the country to respond to the "unprecedented" number of foreigners, and this response basically demands the acquisition of intercultural skills or competences by everyone.

The notion of intercultural skills or competencies provokes conflicting reactions in the field of intercultural education (e.g. see Valentin, 2006; Wubbels *et al.*, 2006). Skills or competencies are a set of normative statements that are negotiated within relations of power and therefore the discourse on intercultural skills or competencies is not neutral. The increasing reliance on discourses of competencies promoted by various institutions has been linked to neo-liberal policy agendas that aim to control outputs through controlling individuals, while putting aside conveniently the institutional processes of maintaining unequal structural relations (Spring, 2008). The emphasis, then, is misplaced and the 'problem' is misconstrued, if multiculturalism is simply defined as a matter of acquiring individual language or intercultural skills and competencies. As seen from the extracts presented here, the Ministry's philosophy oscillates back and forth between two positions: on the one hand, there is the issue of multiculturalism as a recent social phenomenon that is invoked to the supposedly 'homogeneous' society of Cyprus (Gregoriou, 2004); on the other hand, this description of multiculturalism is framed in individual/psychological and interpersonal terms and sets aside "the re-appreciation of our historical ethnic diversity and ethnic divides" (*ibid.*, p. 245) and therefore ignores the role of power inequalities and social injustices. The emphasis is on *managing* multiculturalism through addressing the need for

the 'right' skills in dealing with multiculturalism, rather than on embracing multiculturalism and critically reconceptualising existing policy provisions. In circular F: 4.3.03/3 (6 October 2008), there is even a stronger reference revealing this managerial perspective of controlling individuals by highlighting "the serious psychoemotional problems that these children [immigrant children and children of asylum seekers] often face" and lead them "to show aggressive, pathetic or other disconcerting behaviour" (p. 1), thus solidifying an approach that is grounded in disregarding the socio-political aspects of multiculturalism and views the issue in individual terms.

### *Ideological Assumptions about Intercultural Education*

In circular F: 71.191/10 (28 August 2008, p. 1), it is stated that the Ministry of Education and Culture "adopts" what it calls the "intercultural approach" as "the basic dimension of its [Ministry's] educational policy, because it considers this as the most effective educational strategy that can contribute to mutual acceptance, the cultivation of a climate of trust and the abolition of negative stereotypes and prejudices among students". The term *intercultural approach* is initially outlined in the Strategic Planning of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2007b, pp. 68-72), then adopted by the Council of Ministers on 30 July 2008 and further explained in circular F: 71.191/10 (28 August 2008). This term is a buzz word in the international literature on intercultural education, yet it has no uniform meaning and is often used for political/symbolic purposes to impress stakeholders and the public (Banks, 2007; Troyna, 1994). A critical discourse analysis of the policy documents reviewed here suggests that there are competing discourses about the ideological meaning and the policy implications of the particular intercultural approach in Cyprus; namely, there are conservative, pluralist and a few scattered liberal multiculturalist views (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997) interwoven around the notion of intercultural education, implying lack of conceptual clarity and often contradictory ideological dispositions.

Reflecting the approach of conservative multiculturalism (*ibid.*), there are numerous indications, for example, that place emphasis on the dominant (Greek) culture and its language. Although it is explicitly stated that the Ministry's efforts are not focused on the "assimilation" of 'other-language' children (see F: 71.191/3, 29 October 2002, p. 1), the state's ideology is framed in monolingual and monocultural terms and there is no space provided for building upon a child's mother tongue. Previous studies have already shown the monocultural and ethnocentric character of educational policies, school curricula and teacher practices in Cyprus (Bryant, 2004; Zembylas, 2008; Zembylas and Karahasan, 2006). The present analysis of the reviewed policy documents confirms and further builds on some of these findings. Evidence of the monolingual and monocultural emphasis is shown as follows:

- The prevalence of 'us' and 'them' distinctions in essentialist ways (see next section) focus on the Other and what 'other-language' children *need* to do, while depreciating that

intercultural education is about all of us and what the majority should do to reflect on social injustices and the marginalisation of minorities in society (Banks, 2007; Nieto, 1999). The reference to “the addition of intercultural elements in the new curriculum programs and school textbooks” (F: 71.19.1/10, 28 August 2008, p. 3) betrays the state’s “additive” approach that is based on the hegemonic group’s knowledge and identity.

- The emphasis of intercultural education in the Republic of Cyprus on “the language inadequacy or/and language problems of other-language children” (F: 71.191/3, 29 October 2002, p. 6), without taking into consideration their existing cultural and language capital and the potential of bilingualism and bilingual education is deeply problematic (see Cummins, 1993, 1996, 1997). In contrast to what international research on bilingualism has shown for other countries, first language education in the Greek-Cypriot educational system is not recognised as an important basis for identity building as well as for second language acquisition. The adoption of new recent measures (e.g. the accelerated instruction of Greek language; the in-service training of teachers on the teaching of Greek as a second/foreign language; the publication of a Guide to welcome ‘other-language’ students etc.) simply aim at further “acceleration and smooth integration of other-language students into the school system and the society of Cyprus” (F: 71.191/10, 28 August 2008, p. 1) thus constructing other-language children as deficient students.
- The taken-for-granted assumptions that “the education provided to children and youth is grounded in our Greek heritage” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2007b, p. 2), “the Greek-Cypriot education will continue to be Greek education because it will cultivate the Greek language, the traditions and the particular cultural traits that characterize us as Greek Cypriots” (F: 71.0521, 27 August 2008, p. 1), and “the duty of public education [is] to help all children understand the official language and know the Greek culture” (F: 71.194, 8 August 2006, p. 2), provide further evidence about the monocultural approach that is followed, which essentially views ‘different’ children as inferior and with lower abilities because they lack language skills and cultural knowledge of the dominant group. The ultimate goal of this approach is the assimilation of diversity into the normative culture, despite rhetorical proclamations to the contrary (for more on this argument see Tiedt and Tiedt, 2002).

Pluralist discourses of multiculturalism (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997) are also evident in the documents reviewed, focusing on grandiose claims about respecting and accepting cultural difference and diversity. Diversity and cultural heritage are celebrated in several circulars, but once again, power relations and structural inequalities are not acknowledged or challenged in any way. There is, instead, a naïve and simplistic celebration of diversity – what has been called by some as “boutique multiculturalism” (Fish, 1997) – and consequently, issues of equality or prejudice are diminished to a matter of good intentions (i.e. as an individual rather than a social issue).

For instance, there are references to “recognizing diversity and the multiculturalism of the

student population, as well as individual needs” (F: 71.05.21, 27 August 2008, p. 1), and “a school system/education that respects difference [and] pluralism (cultural, linguistic, religious) ...” (*ibid*). Circulars F: 71.05.21 (27 August 2008) and F: 71.194 (8 August 2006) also refer to the recognition of “the particular cultural characteristics and the particular character [of ethnic communities in Cyprus]” (p. 1) and the “particular cultural characteristics of alien students” (p. 2), respectively. Finally, in circular F: 71.05.20 (28 August 2007), the general goal and the specific objectives of the European Year on Intercultural Dialogue are analysed (as those are defined by the European Parliament and the European Council). Specifically, these goals and objectives include several pluralist references such as the “coexistence of different cultural identities and beliefs” (p. 2), and “the contribution of different cultures and expressions of cultural diversity” (p. 3). The Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus suggests various educational activities that acknowledge cultural diversity such as organising cultural festivals and dances and the study of values or institutions from various countries so that the cultural differences are clearly exposed. All the aforementioned extracts focus on a superficial recognition of plural identities and cultures, while the structural roots of inequality that lead to racism and social exclusion remain unchallenged.

Finally, in the reviewed policy texts there are a few references that draw attention to liberal views of multiculturalism (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997). Such liberal views are emphasised through notions of equality, for example in circular F: 71.05.19 (18 July 2006), “the equality of opportunities for access, participation, success, and in-school ‘treatment’”, in circular F: 71.05.21 (27 August 2008), and the ecumenical dimension of human experiences in the Strategic Planning. However, as it is pointed out by several scholars in the field of intercultural education, the uncritical emphasis on similarities can lead to cultural invisibility (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997; Sleeter and McLaren, 1995) because existing social, economic and political inequalities are attributed to the absence of social and educational opportunities; thus, liberal multiculturalist views emphasise positive ideals – particularly, equality and freedom (Duarte and Smith, 2000). The following statement in circular F: 71.05.21 (27 August 2008, p. 2) does precisely that:

“Principles that emanate from contemporary intercultural approaches are the cultivation of the possibility to put ourselves in the others’ position and see the world through their perspective, solidarity, intercultural respect, the axioms of equality of cultures and the provision of equal opportunities. [...] It is also imperative that educational programs remain focused on the eternal values of equality, freedom, democracy, peace, dignity and justice”.

All in all, the competing discourses of conservative, plural and liberal multiculturalism and intercultural education in the policy documents reviewed highlight the ambivalence and conceptual instability that is present in these texts. This discursive and linguistic ambivalence has implications for how policy texts are read and implemented by teachers and administrators. This ambivalence is further evidenced in the constructions about culture and diversity, as shown in the last category.

### *Constructions about Culture and Diversity*

In the policy documents reviewed, *culture* is inscribed as a signifier of *difference*: “two ethnic communities [in Cyprus] that have their origins, history, particular cultural characteristics and particular character” (F: 71.05.21, 27 August 2008, p. 1); “the needs of other-language children are not only limited to learning the language of the host country, but also expand to other issues, particularly to issues relevant to the social and cultural support of these students” (F: 71.191/3, 29 October 2002, p. 3); “while we will retain and develop our ethnic and local culture, we can also co-exist and collaborate harmonically with people from other cultural traditions” (F: 71.05.20, 28 August 2007, p. 1). These statements and other similar ones that have been pointed out earlier reveal the notion of cultures as stable social entities and difference as a particular marker for ethnic communities and cultural groups. All of the reviewed policy documents utilise the terms ‘other-language’ [*alloglossos*] and ‘ethnic’ [*ethnikos*] as synonyms for cultural diversity.

The inscription of “accepting other-language children and difference in general” (F: 71.191/3, 29 October 2002, p. 9) begs the question, “difference in reference to what?” As shown in the previous two categories, Greek language and culture are the points of comparison for defining ‘difference’, on which the central distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is based. Against the dominant Greek language and culture, others are made visible as deficient, not normal. Despite the rhetoric of “equality of cultures” (F: 71.05.21, 27 August 2008, p. 2) purporting the axiom that cultures are different but equal, the policy documents reviewed – especially those that describe measures to support other-language students by dividing them into different categories based on their knowledge of Greek language (e.g. F: 71.191/10, 21 January 2008) – deploy the construct of culture as a marker of difference with hierarchical value.

Another point for gauging difference from the norm is inscribed through the reification and essentialisation of ‘culture’ in reductionist terms. Culture and cultural identity, then, are presented as monolithic and reified characteristics that are attributed to groups of people, who are identified by those reified characteristics. In addition to the earlier examples about the “particular cultural characteristics” of each ethnic community, there are several other extracts in which culture is conceptualised as untouched by change in contemporary societies. For instance, in circular F: 71.05.20 (28 August 2007, pp. 1-2) it is stated that,

“[F]oreign-language and alien students are called on to live in the Cypriot cultural environment without selling out their own cultural heritage. Indigenous students and teachers have naturally an obligation to highlight and enrich our culture and offer foreign students the capabilities to know its essential elements so that they can understand us and live comfortably on our island. Simultaneously, they [indigenous students and teachers] should have the sensitivity to offer the students that are hosted capabilities and opportunities so that they can present also aspects of their own culture”.

In the above extract, there is an underlying assumption that “foreign” students will always be “foreign”, thus not belonging in the mainstream Greek-Cypriot culture that has essential elements

and remains unchanged by “foreigners.” The conceptualisation of culture as a category defined by essential traits that are unchanged is also viewed through the description of the Ministry’s understanding of intercultural dialogue. Here is an extract from the paragraph that follows the previous one:

“It is emphasized that intercultural dialogue does not mean in any case refusal, concealing or repression of elements of one’s cultural identity. [...] With intercultural dialogue neither the few, the immigrants and the members of minorities are culturally repressed, nor of course is the majority called on to be discoloured [*apochromatistoun*] culturally.” (*ibid.*, p. 2)

The above examples are explicit in their understanding of culture as a static entity that can be appealed to and responded to within an educational policy that recognises cultural difference (cf. McDonough, 2008). This form of glorification of essentialism stresses cultural differences while taking them out of their social, political and economic contexts, and thus structural inequalities remain once more unchallenged. What is further interesting, however, is that teachers are called on to teach this decontextualised reification of culture and cultural traits through a number of statements that express their obligation to do so.

For example, according to circular F: 71.191/3 (29 October 2002, p. 9), teachers “should be concerned” about:

- encouraging other-language children to ... highlight their cultural identity [...]
- acting so that children feel proud about their cultural heritage but also have respect for others
- presenting – through the programmes they develop – the positive influences of all ethnic groups toward the improvement of human race.
- selecting teaching material which presents a positive view of multicultural society, [and] helps children strengthen their self-confidence, regardless of race, ethnic origin or class [...]

Bullet points are often reader directive, indicating a superficial perspective that ignores power relations.<sup>6</sup> Circular F: 71.05.20 contains a similar bullet list (28 August 2007, p. 4):

- Projects should be undertaken and relevant conclusions should be extracted about the life, the habits, the contribution, and the needs of immigrants living in the vicinity of the school or the expatriates living in foreign countries [...]
- At student conferences and other events, the customs, religious beliefs of different communities and peoples should be presented, if possible, through an authentic way by members of different groups in a safe climate of seriousness, respect and acceptance.

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<sup>6</sup> Bullet points are a strategy of exercising power in the sense that they are used mostly to ‘instruct’, as for example in recommendations at the end of reports. In light of requirements that bullet points are concise, there is no serious engagement with the complexities of the claims made and thus the power relations involved are put aside or ignored (Fairclough, 2003).

Even though several circulars include stipulations regarding possible activities that teachers could do to promote intercultural education, these ideas depoliticise culture and difference by construing these notions solely in essentialist and reified ways. Finally, the simplistic culturalist assumption is made that these activities will project “the culture and civilization of other-language children and the easier acceptance of those children by indigenous children and their parents, as well as the fighting against xenophobia and possible racist trends” (F: 71.191/3, 29 October 2002, p. 10).

## Conclusion

This article has examined the educational policy on intercultural education in the Republic of Cyprus, as this is expressed through circulars sent to teachers between the years 2002-2008, the Strategic Planning of 2007, and the Decision by the Council of Ministers on 30 July 2008. By analysing these three important sources of policies, it was possible to trace competing discourses of intercultural education in the policy implementation process that lead to a lack of conceptual clarity embedded in these documents. While the majority of constructions on intercultural education are grounded in conservative multiculturalist ideas and essentialist positions about culture and difference (the dominant discourse), there are also liberal and pluralist views, possibly as a result of the Republic of Cyprus’ membership in the European Union and the demands for infusing more liberal/pluralist perspectives. These perspectives (along with critical multicultural views) constitute the marginalised discourses, that is, those ideas that are placed in the margins of the social and educational agenda in the Republic of Cyprus. The various documents analysed shifted between competing discourses, on the one hand presenting Cyprus as a Greek culture embedded in Greek values and goals, and on the other, a country that respects all cultures as equal and accommodates all differences in its educational system. While conservative multiculturalism constitutes the hegemonic ideological version, these policy documents reveal a conceptual instability by embodying contested versions of intercultural education in the Greek-Cypriot educational system.

However, within the grand narrative of conservative multiculturalism, it is still possible to trace marginalised references to critical multiculturalist views, that is, ideas that begin to recognise aspects of social inequalities and their implications. One such reference is buried in the middle of several conservative views in circular F: 71.191/3 (29 October 2002) and proclaims that the Ministry of Education and Culture “hopes to function as a future compass with which teachers and the society in general will be able to resist those situations that reproduce social, economic, educational and cultural inequalities” (p. 3). Even the vision of developing “a democratic school that integrates and does not exclude” (F: 71.05.21, 27 August 2008, p. 1) leaves traces of a subtle critical multiculturalist perspective that avoids essentialism and understands culture, difference and multiculturalism as parts of the discourse of power and inequality. Although these minor references are far from revealing any sustained critical multicultural philosophy, the significance of such *discursive shifts* (Taylor, 2004) is important because such traces provide *small openings*

(Zembylas, 2007, 2008) to recognise the discursive construction of power relations and their implications. By tracing these discursive shifts and the openings they provide, we as educators and participants in these discourses can begin to advocate intercultural education policies and practices appropriate to critical democratic demands in contemporary society (McDonough, 2008).

The educational implications of understanding and critically analysing the language of policy are, then, an important consideration. Arguably, possibilities for a different conceptualisation of intercultural education in the Greek-Cypriot educational system exist only when power relations and discursive construction in these documents are interrogated and ultimately interrupted. Whether this interrogation can produce a qualitatively different kind of discourse, one that will not attribute deficiencies to non-indigenous children, is difficult to foresee. Yet it seems clear that a *transfigurative* kind of multicultural discourse is needed (*ibid.*) in the Republic of Cyprus, that is, a discourse that would allow for re-inscription of constructs such as multiculturalism, intercultural education, culture and difference, allowing them to be understood in critical democratic ways in an increasingly complex society. This transfigurative multiculturalist discourse must be devised as something fundamentally different to the competing and rather fragmentary multiculturalist ideals present in the policy documents analysed here. Although it is difficult to outline exactly how to do this, especially in conjunction with the lack of systematic empirical research in this area, it is apparent that the point of departure must be the task of *corrupting* current discourses to create the conceptual space in which alternatives can be posed and tested (Park, 2005). Critical discourse analysis, then, can provide spaces for strategic discursive interventions and alternative constructions of power in dominant discourses of policy documents (Luke, 2002).

However, CDA has also limitations that should be considered. First, one cannot know the effects of policy texts without empirical research (Fairclough, 2003; Taylor, 2004); therefore, it is important to test policies empirically and analyse their results in conjunction with discourse analyses. It is worthwhile mentioning that recent empirical research conducted in four multicultural schools by the author confirms the implications of the power relations inscribed in the policy documents analysed here (see Zembylas, in press a, in press b). Moreover, it has been identified that the cultural identities and differences are relationally defined and institutionally maintained through exclusionary educational practices tied to monocultural identifications. Second, the critical and emancipatory potentials of CDA alone cannot bring transformation unless the structural and material grounds of oppression and exclusion are challenged (Luke, 2002). Therefore, Luke argues, critical discourse analysts need to embrace the political nature of this work and move “beyond ideology” (*ibid.*, p. 98), that is, work at multiple levels (micropolitical and macropolitical) to provide affirmative uses of discourse; in other words, it is important to create openings, both in practice and in policy texts, that make productive uses of power while recognising the materiality of oppression.

In light of the above discussion, the critical and emancipatory potentials of CDA need to be made known to teachers, administrators and policymakers in Cyprus and other multicultural settings. In this way, it is hoped that teachers, administrators and policymakers will be enabled to

adopt critical reflexive praxis in reading and interpreting policy texts (Giroux, 1993). This kind of reflexivity is important in the policymaking process and can have significant contributions in undermining dominant discourses and practices, as it shown in another use of CDA as a tool to interrogate inclusive educational policies in Cyprus (see Liasidou, 2008). The taken-for-granted boundaries about 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in policy texts need to be constantly critiqued and transgressed, if the goal is to develop new *pedagogies of difference* (Tryfonas, 2003) that rearticulate intercultural education policies and practices on the basis of critical democratic values.

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