



People are crossing the ancient Stone Bridge in Skopje. It divides the Orthodox, mainly Macedonian part of the city from the old Ottoman part, where most ethnic Albanians live.

'Bridges are powerful symbols. They connect, but also emphasize a state of separation. During peacetime it connects, in wartime it divides.'

PARALLEL LIVES

A study on inter-ethnic integration in
Macedonian education

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Abstract

Samenvatting – Het onderwijs in Macedonië is zeer gesegreerd op basis van etnisch-linguïstische criteria. Aangezien het nationale onderwijsbeleid (Strategie voor Geïntegreerd Onderwijs) aanstuurt op meer interetnische integratie in scholen, was het doel van dit onderzoek om te onderzoeken in hoeverre het dit daadwerkelijk ook uitvoerbaar lijkt in het huidige Macedonische onderwijssysteem. De kwalitatieve methode van dit onderzoek bestond uit semigestructureerd interviews (N = 36) met relevante spelers in het onderwijsveld: leraren, studenten van de Macedonische lerarenopleiding (vergelijkbaar met de PABO) en Mozaik Alumni (tieners die in hun jonge jaren deel uitmaakten van een multiculturele peuterspeelzaal). De resultaten geven aan dat de rol van taal geïdentificeerd kan worden als een obstakel, gezien het feit dat de realisatie van geïntegreerd onderwijs de op taal gebaseerde scheiding, in elk geval deels, zal moeten aantasten. Ten tweede laten de resultaten van dit onderzoek zien dat de twee belangrijkste etnische gemeenschappen – Macedoniërs en Albanen – een gescheiden leven leiden en dat sociale cohesie laag lijkt. Ook dit maakt de weg niet vrij om te werken aan geïntegreerd onderwijs, aangezien het succes hiervan afhankelijk is van goede etnische relaties en een intrinsieke motivatie om naar integratie toe te werken. Wat betreft de manier waarop kinderen en jongeren worden beschouwd als een factor in het werken naar integratie, kan op basis van de resultaten gesteld worden dat het als noodzakelijk wordt gezien dat zij worden betrokken bij integratie, en bovendien beschrijven jongeren zichzelf ook als deel van ‘de generatie van verandering’. Een algehele conclusie van dit onderzoek is dat het niet uitvoerbaar lijkt om in het huidige formele onderwijssysteem toe te werken naar interetnische integratie. Gezien dit onderzoek een verrassend positieve houding heeft gevonden ten opzichte van de mogelijke rol van de non-formele educatiesector, wordt verder onderzoek aangeraden naar de mogelijkheden en effecten op dit gebied.

Abstract – Macedonian education is highly segregated on ethno-linguistic criteria. However, since the national educational policy (Strategy for Integrated Education) aims to work towards more inter-ethnic integration in schools, the aim of the present research was to determine to which extent it seems feasible to work towards inter-ethnic integration within the current education system. The qualitative method of this study consisted of semi-structured interviews (N = 36) with key-players in the field of Macedonian education: teachers, pedagogical students (future teachers) and Mozaik Alumni (teenagers who attended a multicultural kindergarten). Results show that the role of language can be identified as an obstacle, since realizing integrated education would have to at least partly break down this linguistic division, with all consequences. Secondly, results on indicate that the two most predominant ethnic communities – Macedonians and Albanians – live ‘parallel lives’ and social cohesion seems low, which does not create a clear pathway to realize integrated education, since its success is dependent on good ethnic relations and an intrinsic motivation of all citizens to work towards integration. Concerning the ways children and young people are perceived as a factor in working towards inter-ethnic integration, results show that they it is seen imperative that children and young people get involved, and moreover, they also view themselves as responsible actors of ‘the generation of change’. An overall conclusion of this study is that it does not seem feasible to work towards inter-ethnic integration within the current formal education system. However, since this study found a surprisingly positive attitude towards the role of non-formal education, further research on its possibilities and effects is recommended.

Key words: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, ethnic relations, integrated education, qualitative research

Literature study

Introduction to the context of Macedonia

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (hereafter referred to as Macedonia) must have seemed an odd and exceptional place when it inspired Western imagination to borrow its name for a mixed salad. The relatively small Western Balkan country emerged as an independent country more than twenty years ago, after the collapse of the Yugoslav federation in 1991. Nevertheless, it still has to deal with the pronounced diversity of its population (Janev, 2011). The last completed census was conducted by the Macedonian State Statistical Office [MSSO] in 2002, and showed that the *salade macédoine* consists of one quarter ethnic Albanians, two-thirds ethnic Macedonians, equal sprinklings of Serbs, Bulgarians and Roma, and a substantial serving of Turks. Add to that a seasoning of intense religious diversity - one-third Muslims, two-thirds Macedonian Orthodox, and a dash of Albanian Catholics - and suddenly you understand why the term 'macédoine' is synonymous with complicated mixture (MSSO, 2002; Kaplan, 2006). Macedonia was one of the few republics being able to steer itself clear of the bloody conflicts during the collapse of the former Yugoslavia. However, one of the main outstanding social consequences of the surrounding conflicts was the large number of refugees and internally displaced persons they created. As a result of these displacements, the multi-cultural territories of the Balkan lands lost their authentic structures.

An important aspect of concern about alienation between communities living together under one state is the potential lack of social cohesion. An absence of social cohesion may manifest itself in destructive ways, impeding economic development and lessening the quality of life (Green & Janmaat in Ewell, 2013). Not only do Macedonians and Albanians¹ often not intermarry, they do not generally work or socialize together. They read different newspapers, listen to different radio stations and watch different TV programs. While most Albanians speak Macedonian to a degree, Macedonians often do not speak Albanian. Mutual perceptions are frequently vocalized as prejudices based on stereotypes and hostility (Brunnbauer, 2002). According to these and other indicators, social cohesion is very low in Macedonia.

The existing issues between the ethnic Albanian minority and the Macedonian state worsened in early 2001. Clashes between Albanian militants and Macedonian security forces near the border of Kosovo started an ethnic conflict, bringing Macedonia on the verge of a civil war and contributing to further ethnic polarization (Pont, 2005; Ripiloski, 2013). The international community, European Union [EU] and North Atlantic Treaty Organization

¹ For the purpose of this paper, the term Albanian shall be used when referring to a citizen of Macedonia of Albanian ethnical origin.

[NATO], intervened to end the crisis. On 13 August 2001 the armed conflict ended with the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which is seen as a key instrument to rebuilding mutual trust among the different ethnic communities. It provided greater democratization of politics at the local level and increased participation of minority parties in the political process. This being said, the international community has consistently been asking the central government of Macedonia to be more responsive to the demands of the Albanian minorities.

Education after the Ohrid Framework Agreement

Although there is no longer ongoing military conflict, Macedonia has not reached the stage of total peace yet. The Ohrid Framework Agreement succeeded in offering Albanians a stake in the political system and more rights in the fields of language and education. However, education policy in Macedonia is still one of the most controversial policy issues. (Koneska, 2012). One of the most important concerns was the issue of identity and the right of the ethnic Albanians to retain and express their culture by speaking and learning in their mother-tongue, which eventually pushed the government towards finding a solution of the problem of higher education in Albanian. In 1997 it proposed a law on languages of instruction at the Pedagogical Faculty, which allowed for Albanian-language instruction in Skopje, where teachers for primary and secondary schools were to be trained. The opposition launched massive protests against the law and brought thousands of students and citizens to the streets, chanting slogans of ethnic hatred and intolerance. One can understand that education remains a highly contentious issue between Macedonian and Albanian political elites.

While problems concerning higher education faded out, struggles with primary and secondary schools increased. After the introduction of the Ohrid Framework, political decentralization and the increased authority of local government in many areas (including education) was introduced. Local councils and mayors became responsible for managing primary and secondary schools in their municipality, as well as for resolving all problems in this area. Ethnically mixed municipalities therefore faced serious problems in running and managing secondary schools. In those municipalities in which an ethnic minority of greater than 20 percent uses a specific language, children and students of this ethnicity have the right to receive education in that specific language in primary and secondary school. Nevertheless, this resulted in a further division of Macedonian and Albanian students, as both groups received education separately in their own language. In addition, students did not like to participate in classes with members of the other nationalities. Ethnic violence between high school students in Struga in 2008 and 2009 resulted in a separation of the students into

different ‘ethnic shifts’. In many cases, this meant that schools adopted a strict shift-system where different ethnic groups use the same school premises at different times of the day. Inevitably, this further reduced the contact among students of different ethnic backgrounds (Barbieri, Vrgova & Bliznakovski, 2013). Decentralizing education politics therefore did not lead to improved inter-ethnic relations at the local level. Instead, it even created problems that exceeded the authority of the local government and furthered segregation in Macedonian schools. Until today there is a serious division of Albanian and Macedonian students and teachers, in primary- as well as secondary school (Atanasov, 2003; United States Institute of Peace, 2004; Myhrvold, 2005; Van Esch, 2013).

[Working on inter-ethnic issues: internal and external key players](#)

Discussed trends reveal underlying problems of implementing education reforms in Macedonia. The European Commission has continuously pointed out that, although the right to education in each community’s mother-tongue is enacted, there continue to be problems of integration between youth at local schools. Incidents of violence and hatred still occur (Koneska, 2012). The international community, in particular the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE], had earlier experience with peacebuilding initiatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and had seen public education’s potential to either inflame or dispel ethnic tensions. However, the main international reform instruments in Macedonia did not focus on reforms in public education. This may indicate both a lack of awareness of long-term peace-building strategies or a reluctance to intervene more directly in a state education system (Ewell, 2013). Multi-ethnic policies in Macedonian public education have barely encouraged social cohesion yet. Nevertheless, the role of education in post-conflict peace building has garnered some attention in the recent years.

The non-involvement by the EU in this field was partly filled by other external actors, such as the OSCE, which continued to support ethnic integration through education. Following the ethnic incidents in several high schools in Macedonia, the OSCE and the Ministry of Education devised a Strategy for Integrated Education in 2009. The basic principle of integrated education is not to separate students to avoid conflict, but rather trying to combine the two aspects, societal cohesion and the right of the children to preserve and develop their own culture and identity. By providing such a safe space for children, they can interact and learn from each other (Milcev, 2013).

Towards integrated education: the Mozaik model

In an intercultural learning environment, teachers aim to promote an education that challenges power relations and promotes social change. Cultural boundaries overlap to create a third space, within which locals and immigrants share a hybrid cultural identity (Zembylas and Iasonos, 2010). If applied correctly then, intercultural education could play a role in fostering inter-ethnic communication, breaking down stereotypes, explaining the value of diversity and gain understanding of human rights and values. On the contrary, a segregated education system that reinforces social differences, stereotypes and prejudices can exacerbate tension and even promote conflict. Agreements over education issues in Macedonia therefore indicate a wider trend towards reconciliation between ethnicities at the societal level (Koneska, 2012).

Some efforts had been made to improve inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia by focusing on children. For example by the Centre For Common Ground [CCG], the Macedonian local establishment of Search For Common Ground [SFCG]. In 1998, CCG established bilingual, bilingual Macedonian-Albanian groups within public kindergartens in Macedonia (United States Institute for Peace, 2004). Bilingual education had not been an option in Macedonia until the inception of this program (Tankersley, 2001). In 2014, the Mozaik program was operating with thirteen groups in ten different municipalities in Macedonia (Anger et al, 2010). In the groups there is a Macedonian and an Albanian (or Turkish, or Serbian) teacher, with children of each language group at stake. It is not the purpose that children fully learn the other language, but more that they get exposed to the it and pick up words and phrases (Anger, van 't Rood & Gestakovska, 2010). Additionally, the Mozaik model consists of workshops for parents and additional trainings for Mozaik teachers, with themes as conflict resolution and stereotypes. CCG organizes trainings for 'classic' kindergarten and primary school teachers as well, to familiarize them with the Mozaik method (Naskova, 2014). For the same reasons, CCG organizes training at a number of Pedagogical Faculties in Macedonia: to familiarize future teachers with the Mozaik model and to sensitize them for teaching in ethnically diverse classrooms.

The Mozaik approach can be classified as Hornberger's (1991) 'maintenance model of bilingual education', meaning that it supports the right of minorities to sustain their mother-tongue language while gaining literacy in the dominant language. Also, the Mozaik model is consistent with the Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954), stating that successful contact between two ethnic groups needs to be structured in such a way that equal status is given to both. If this does not occur, existing stereotypes about the superiority and inferiority of the groups will remain, and subsequent hostility will persist.

Research on intercultural education in South-Eastern Europe

According to Gropas & Triandafyllidou (2011), transformations in the educational field are underway across Europe. Additionally, the academic community is being challenged to engage in a wider debate on the subject, and to redefine the objectives, methods and approaches of educational policy in the context of changing societies. As for the South-Eastern part of Europe in specific, intercultural education developed rather recently. A significant amount of qualitative studies about Greek and Cypriot intercultural education emerged in the recent years. Although every country has its specific features, the Greek region and Macedonia partly have a shared cultural history and could possibly benefit from each other's academic knowledge. The Republic of Cyprus has become more multicultural during the last decade, owing to increasing numbers of non-Cypriots moving to Cyprus. This situation has changed the social environment since the population of the island has traditionally been primarily of Greek and Turkish origin. Inevitably, schools have been influenced by the demographic changes. The admission of many 'different' children into schools has brought problems such as racism, ethnocentrism, bullying, and the marginalization of many children to the surface (Angelides, Stylianou & Leigh, 2004).

Panayiotopoulos & Nicolaidou's (2007) observed that these non-indigenous children are in serious need of psychosocial support, since views expressed by teachers, parents and pupils revealed that educational practice still treats the diversity of non-indigenous pupils as a type of deficiency. Also Partasi (2011) focused on the way pupils experience and understand studying in multicultural primary schools in Cyprus. Though attempted to compare Cypriots and non-Cypriots' experiences of multiculturalism, her research revealed more similarities than differences. All children perceived themselves as part of the diversity and felt that they had a lot to give and gain from it. An increase in cultural diversity complicates the mechanisms that shape individuals' lives and experiences. As in many other post-conflict societies, such as Macedonia, the study suggests that peacebuilding education needs to be conceptualized, if majority and non-majority members are to be respected.

Policy processes in changing educational systems

Several actors in Macedonia have been attempting to promote the implementation of new educational measures and policies. In 2004, the Macedonian Ministry of Education and Science presented its National Strategy for the Development of Education. It consisted a framework for carrying out the activities of the Ministry of Education and Science in the

period from 2005 to 2015. The National Strategy identified the reinforcement of ethnic and cultural co-operation as one of the challenges still to be met in the education system, and it stressed that integration should start at pre-school age (Ministry of Education and Science, 2004). Additionally, the Ministry of Education and Science together with the OSCE developed the Strategy for Integrated Education in 2009. It stressed on policy measures that needed to be carried out, in order to avoid further segregation along ethnic lines in schools. One of the strands aims at integration by increasing the mutual knowledge of each other's languages among students and adults, and thus raising the level of communication between persons belonging to different communities. The topic of teachers' qualifications was addressed as well: the proposed measures entailed a future teacher training with regards to inter-ethnic issues. For the first time in national policy reports, pre-school education was mentioned for strengthening inter-ethnic relations (Ministry of Education and Science, 2010).

Spasovski, Ballazhi & Friedman (2010) studied these inputs, processes and outcomes of pre-service and in-service teacher preparation in Macedonia. The study suggests a broad consensus that both pre- and in-service teacher preparation for integrated education in Macedonia are generally inadequate. Discussions with teachers revealed a dominant opinion that pre-service education (pedagogical studies) gives them only general knowledge on the content to be transmitted to students, with all other competences developed more or less independently during their working experience. However, excellence in culturally responsive teaching can only become a collective tradition when the contexts in which teachers teach are able to support and sustain it (Klingner et al, 2005).

This is in line with the classical theory of Bronfenbrenner (1989). His socio-ecological model can be generally understood as a depiction of four dimensions of a child's surrounding that influence its behavior, and are influenced by the child in return. The first system (microsystem) relates to the direct environment of the child. It refers to individuals the child interacts with face to face, such as: parents, siblings, peers and teachers. The second system (mesosystem) includes the child's neighborhood, school and home. The third system (exosystem) refers to elements the child cannot influence directly, such as: the local government, parent's workplace and local industry. The last system (macrosystem) is that of the dominant beliefs and ideologies upheld by the society wherein the child exists (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). This model can be applied to the Macedonian educational strategy as well. Policy decisions about ethnic equality affect national school policy, which affects school board decisions, which change the school setting and teacher practices, and eventually affect the child's interactions with peers (Van Esch, 2013). This theory on the relationship between

children and society supports Klingner et al's (2005) statement that, in order to be engaged in the transformation of an educational system, it requires changes in fundamental assumptions, practices and relationships, both within and between school systems and the outside world.

Klingner et al (2005) analyzed the dynamics of educational systems, and state that their characteristics have a life and dynamic of their own that resists change. Policy decisions are made by a few individuals at the top of a hierarchical pyramid of workers, and are conveyed to the workers or practitioners who, in turn, convey them to families and students. Thus, teachers receive rather than construct policy, which helps to explain why classroom and school practices may seem so uncontrollable. Educational systems try to maintain equilibrium in order to sustain familiar, and therefore predictable, routines and practices. The key to reform in such systems is the coherence across and within several levels. Instead of determining how to 'fix' the 'deficits' of students who are segregated, Klingner et al (2005) promote the support of multiple stakeholders in the creation of an environment that allows change. To be fruitful, efforts to transform into a more intercultural learning environment must cut across three interrelated domains: policies, practices, and people.

Over all, it may be clear that the implementation of intercultural education in Macedonia holds many challenges, and the diversity of its student population is merely one.

Method

As aforementioned, the field of intercultural education in Macedonia is somewhat understudied. Drawn from studies in surrounding regions with similar ethnic developments, suggestions for further research have been made. The need to evaluate a country's current state of intercultural education is said to be imperative, in order to better understand the needs of ethnic minorities and the majority population (Panayiotopoulos & Nicolaidou, 2007). More specifically, it has been argued that further research should take into account variables currently obstructing the implementation of a true intercultural model. Therefore, the current research was designed to at least partly fill these gaps of knowledge, and its purpose is to explore evaluations of intercultural education among relevant key players in Macedonia.

A way to grasp those constructing variables was found in Klingner et al (2005), as they argue that efforts to implement intercultural education cut across three domains: policies, practices, and people. Adjusted to the purpose of this study, they resulted in three groups of stakeholders to be the subject of this research. However, because of the limited time and resources of the researcher, 'policy' level administrators were excluded from the research

sample in advance. **'Policy'** stakeholders are administrators. According to Klingner et al (2005) they have power at a federal, state, district or school level in a way that they can influence funding, resources, curriculum or other aspects of schooling,. Example of such are principals, directors, deans, policy makers and school coordinators. The **'practice'** level is used to describe the procedures, models or strategies devised by educators for the purpose of maximizing learning outcomes. Therefore, stakeholders at this level are teachers and professors in pre-school, primary and high school and university. **'People'** of course include all those in the broad system, but in this study the focus will be at the subject of education: Mozaik Alumni (teenagers who were involved in intercultural education) and pedagogical students (future teachers) who are going to work in the field of education themselves.

Research questions

Following from the theories and data mentioned in the literature study, a central research question was designed for this study: *what are evaluations from a policy, practice and people level concerning intercultural education in Macedonia?* Additional sub-questions are:

- What challenges do administrators face in implementing intercultural education measures?
- What are in-service teachers' evaluations of intercultural education and what challenges do they face in teaching in a multi-ethnic environment?
- What are pedagogical students' evaluations of intercultural teaching and how do they feel about their preparation for it?
- How do teenagers think about intercultural education and how do they reflect on having attended intercultural pre-schools in their early childhood?

Methodology

Because the purpose of the current research is to explore evaluations of intercultural education in Macedonia on different levels, a qualitative research strategy was chosen. This study fits with an inductive approach rather than testing current theories, as is the objective of quantitative research. This explains why the current research focusses on qualitative data: views, feelings and thoughts of the involved stakeholders on the level of policies, practices and people. The research was therefore based on a cross-sectional design, which involves the collection of data on more than one case, at a single point in time. A potential limitation of cross-sectional research design is that it can be difficult to attribute causation due to the lack of a randomized control group (De Vaus, 2001). However, since this is an exploratory study,

is not concerned with testing hypotheses, measuring the exact change over time or establishing causal relationships. The study is rather interested in exploring current practice and its related issues.

Besides the collection and analysis of the aforementioned literature study, a qualitative data collection method was used. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 36 participants, of which 24 were individual interviews and 6 double (in pairs). 2 interviews were excluded from the sample because of issues with their validity and usefulness (see Appendix A). Thus, a valuable sample of 34 participants remained. During 10 interviews, a translator was present due to language barriers. 22 interviews were based in Skopje, 4 in Štip, 3 in Debar, 2 in Struga, 2 in Gostivar and 1 in Bitola (see figure 1).

To facilitate discussion, the interviewer used open-ended questions based on the collected literature. A topic guide, as found in Appendix B, was used to direct the flow of the interviews. The structure of the interview was different for each of the subgroups but generally was as follows: as an introduction, participants were firstly asked to explain how they experience the multiculturalism of Macedonia in their daily lives. To create a sense of comfortableness, they were then invited to talk about their experiences regarding multi-ethnicity



Figure 1: Interview locations

in their professional life or at school, how it influences their (future) work environment, how they feel about the current segregation of students and what challenges they face while dealing with multi-ethnicity in the field of education. Finally, the participants were asked to comment on and what they would like to see for their country to happen in the future. The topic list underwent some minor changes during the interview period of March-April 2015.

The interviews of all 34 participants were audiotaped and fully transcribed. All the transcripts were anonymized, and informed consent was obtained prior to every interview. Moreover, parents of all Mozaik Alumni under the age of 18 were (through CCG) asked for their permission, and informed about the role of the researcher, the interview and its topics.

Research sample and procedures

The sample of the present study consisted of 34 participants, which are 11 teachers, 12 pedagogical students and 11 Mozaik Alumni. The participants were sampled through convenience- and snowball sampling, with the support of the CCG in Skopje. Additionally, some contacts were obtained through the personal network of the researcher. After the 28 semi-structured interviews, theoretical saturation was believed to have been reached.

Of all the participants, 16 are male (47%) and 18 are female (53%). Furthermore, the total sample of 34 participants consists of 20 people who ethnically consider themselves as Macedonian (58.8%), whereas 13 people (38.3%) were Albanian. One participant (2.9%) was originally from Belgium. No remarkable intergroup statistics were found, except for the fact that of all 13 Albanian participants, 7 (53.8%) were pedagogical students (see Appendix A).

The mean age for the sampled teachers is 41 years (range 24-60), for the pedagogical students 24 years (range 20-41) and for the Mozaik Alumni 17 years (range 15-19). Among the sampled pedagogical students was a 'rare case' because one student was 41 years old. If this student is excluded for this calculation, the mean age of the sampled pedagogical students would be 22 years (range 20-23).

Data analysis

During the analysis of the obtained data, a grounded theory approach was used. The inductive nature of the grounded theory approach is fitting because it aims to generate theory out of data, instead of testing an already existing hypothesis. Through the repetitious process of conducting semi-structured interviews and the transcription of those interviews, the discovery of new concepts was stimulated. Open-, axial- and selective coding resulted in a framework from which relationships between categories could be explored, in such a way that hypotheses about those connections emerged (see Appendix C). To illustrate these patterns of association visibly, several graphics and figures were designed (Appendix D). The core categories were used to order the results section of this study as well.

Limitations

All research suffers from limitations in a certain degree, and this study is no exception. However, by acknowledging limitations and reflecting upon them, suggestions can be made about how they could be overcome through future research.

The political and economic situation of Macedonia is highly instable. During the research period of February-April 2015 political tensions were slowly building up and finally

exploded because of a big hacking scandal, which revealed corruption at the highest levels of the government. The tape recordings that moved the massive protests appear to show abuse of power, electoral fraud and a cover-up of a murder. In the meantime, on May 9-10 the ethnically mixed city of Kumanovo has been destroyed. Police neutralized one of the most dangerous terrorist group – said to be ethnic Albanians from Kosovo – while taking the lives of 8 police policemen and 14 attackers. However, the opposition and international media have voiced up suspicions that what happened in Kumano have been an attempt to distract the public from the crisis by orchestrating ethnic unrest. On May 17, circa 60.000 people rallied in Skopje against the prime minister's administration. Ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, supported by the leader of the opposition, called again for him to resign.

A big part of Macedonian citizens have lost their faith in their county, the government and a bright future. These strong feelings of distrust and disappointment deeply affected the process of this research. Although the researcher was at all times honest and transparent about its involvement at CCG and the purpose of this study, feelings of distrust towards the researcher were present. Ethnic relations in Macedonia are more than ever a sensitive topic again. The fact that all interviews had to be audiotaped did not help in creating a 'safe' environment, given the ongoing hacking scandal. Two principals did not allow the researcher to have a private interview with 'their' teachers, and made sure they were present in the same room during the duration of the interview. Mistrust, fear and suspicions have – without a doubt – affected the credibility of this study.

Languages barriers were a bigger obstacle than expected. As there was no funding for professional interpreters, the help of a colleague, a friend or a previously interviewed participant was often the only option to accept. This affected the quality of the data and the heterogeneity of the sample, since those who were unable to speak in English were sometimes excluded from this research (when there was no possible interpreter present). While interviewing 6 Albanian pedagogical students, an (Albanian speaking) Mozaik Alumni was able to help out with translations. The fact that this person was also young and spoke the same (minority) language, probably created the sense of trust and open-ness that the researcher was aiming at. Thus, a suggestion for future researchers exploring these topics in Macedonia would be to use an interpreter who is trustworthy and can relate to the participants.

At the same time, those who were good English speakers were most often Mozaik Alumni. This could be assigned to the possibility that their parents are likely to have a relatively high social-economic status. Their parents already had a 'progressive' way of thinking years ago, when they had the possibilities and resources to send their kids to the new

Mozaik kindergartens. The indication of a higher social-economic status was also found in the fact that Mozaik Alumni were often in private schools and having extra English lessons. Although this is not at all an average situation for Macedonian teenagers, it does not make their interview data less valuable. After all, these participants are more likely to receive high level education, which might give them more possibilities to have an actual influence on the Macedonian society of the future.

The study was designed to gather information and evaluations about intercultural education, a concept which most of the participant never heard of. In-service teachers were often not experienced in teaching to ethnically mixed classes – which of course proves the level of segregation in the Macedonian education system – and were therefore not able to reflect on their intercultural teaching skills. Furthermore, participants were often unable to reflect upon their previous education or were connecting assumptions that the researcher did not feel comfortable with. When asked if teachers felt prepared in this sense, they would sometimes answer: ‘Yes, I was prepared, because now I don’t have any problems’ or ‘Yes, my school supports me in this! They bought me a printer last week!’. Pedagogical students often never had any valuable practical experience in teaching, not even in their last years of studying. The researcher was not aware of this curricula, which was an obstacle for data collection, because the students had no previous experiences to reflect upon.

Finally, the original questions of this study were likely to provoke socially-desirable answers. Perhaps the participants also did not always feel free to be honest about their attitude towards the trainings and workshops they received from CCG about multicultural education, because of the researcher’s involvement with CCG. Almost every pedagogical student underlined the worth of talking about multi-ethnicity during their studies. However, when another workshop was planned, a big number of participants did not show up in class. This gives hints that the original research questions provoked socially-desirable answers.

It may be clear that the original research questions of this study proved extremely difficult to answer, because the aforementioned limitations were big obstacles in collecting the appropriate data. The operationalization of the concepts in this study deserved more time and attention in its achievability. One can only hope that the acknowledgement of these limitations will be an inspiration for future researchers in the region to overcome these issues. For the purpose of interpreting the results of this study, an alternative set of research questions was designed. This is a common process of grounded theory methodology. As Willig (2013) states, the researcher is able to focus the research question more narrowly as the research

progresses. When theoretical saturation is achieved, the initial research question can have changed almost beyond recognition. Thus, the alternative research questions of this study are: to which extent does it seem feasible in Macedonia to work towards inter-ethnic integration within the current education system?

- What is the role of language in creating an integrated learning environment?
- How do current ethnic relations create a pathway to realize the ‘Strategy for Integrated Education’?
- In which ways are children and young people perceived as a factor in working towards inter-ethnic integration?

Results

Language as a social construct

Inevitably, the role of language was discovered to play a big role in the experience of living in the multiethnic state that Macedonia is. A very frequently brought up topic was the notion that – as Brunnbauer (2002) already stated – almost all Albanians know the Macedonian language, at least till some extent, but not the other way around. Participants indicate that it is very rare to find a Macedonian citizen speaking Albanian. This is not very surprising, among others because it is obligated for Albanian children to study Macedonian language in primary and high school, and not the other way around. However, the focus of this study led to a deeper understanding of the social implications of this observation, instead of wanting to grasp possible reasons for it. Two types of views towards the notion that almost all Albanians know the Macedonian language – but not the other way around – were identified. First of all a more positive one, that viewed the fact that almost all Albanians know Macedonian as a reason why they are able to communicate with each other. Second, a more negative view towards this construct, implicating that it creates feelings of inequality. Take, for example, these participants’ passages, describing how they feel there is less of a communication obstacle – or not even an obstacle at all – because most Albanians know the Macedonian language:

I think that [language] is not a problem because most of the parents speak Macedonian here, despite they are Albanian or Turkish. They know our native language, Macedonian. We don't speak Albanian and Turkish here but we are trying to understand them. (P02: kindergarten teacher, female, Macedonian)

Language has never been an issue. Most of the Albanians know the Macedonian language so there is not a communication problem between us. (P34: Mozaik Alumni, male, Macedonian)

Thus, although participants partly identified it as a bonding factor, some perceived it more as a bridging factor that most Albanians speak the Macedonian language but not the other way around. Results indicate that it created feelings of inequality, where – especially Albanian – participants felt as if the situation is not complete fair.

Language also may be a reason [of ethnic tensions] because... if I should learn Macedonian, he should learn Albanian too. I mean, we [Albanians] are like 40%, maybe 50% [of the population]. (...) To tell you the truth, I feel very good if I hear a Macedonian talk in Albanian to me. It feels as if he respects me, that he is learning my language, as I am learning his. (P33: Mozaik Alumni, male, Albanian)

And I think that, for Macedonian children, it would be good to have at least a subject about the Albanian language because... since we learn Macedonian from the first grade, it would only be fair for Macedonians also to study our language a bit. (P31: pedagogical student, female, Albanian)

These feelings of inequality – and even suggestions of having Macedonians study the Albanian language in the future – were found mainly among the Albanian participants. However, also Macedonian participants stated that they felt as if ‘it is a shame’ that they often do not know much about the other language. Both cases connect to Allport’s (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory, which states that successful contact between two different ethnic groups needs to be structured in such a way as to give equal status to both groups, otherwise the hostility will persist. Although this section focusses on the languages of both groups, its results give hints that this equal status has not been completely realized.

Segregation of Macedonian education

The data of this study at least partly unveiled the complexity of Macedonia’s current segregated education system. Although all participants recognized and confirmed the existence of concepts like ‘going to separate schools’ and ‘having different shifts’, distinctions have to be made. There are primary and high schools where the everyday

language is Macedonian, as well as schools where the language is Albanian. These schools are often referred to as ‘Macedonian’ or ‘Albanian’ schools. Parents are not obligated to send their child to the school of their ethnicity. There are also situations where both Macedonian- and Albanian speaking children go to the same school building, but have different shifts or separated classrooms. It was sometimes mentioned by participants that those shift systems were created because of the lack of space in school buildings. Private high schools are often either in Macedonian or in English. Ethnically mixed classrooms are therefore most likely to exist at all in the private education sector. However, while taking into account the distinctions between aforementioned forms of segregation, it can be stated that education in Macedonian is indeed highly segregated on ethno-linguistic criteria, as Atanasov (2003), United States Institute of Peace (2004), Myhrvold, (2005) and Van Esch (2013) also argued. In order to answer research questions about the current education system correctly, the phenomena of segregation in general and the participants’ attitudes towards it had to be given attention in this section. The data showed a clear overall negative attitude towards this segregation in general. The vast majority of participants reacted negatively when the topic was brought up:

Unfortunately [education is segregated]. I don't think it's a good idea but mostly they have separate shifts indeed. (P11: university professor, female, Macedonian)

I think it's not so good to be so separated. We have to be one. (P18: pedagogical student, female, Albanian)

Most of the participants had some thought about why the segregated education is existent in Macedonia. A big part of them shared that they thought language is the biggest reason why the ethnicities are segregated in schools. The fact that the children speak different languages, made the segregation seem logical:

It's easier to separate them. (...) Yes, it has this practical side... it's easier to separate them because of the language. (P20: high school teacher, female, Macedonian)

Also I think that language plays a key factor in this. Even though Albanians know Macedonian language... everyone wants to learn in their own mother-tongue. (P31: pedagogical student, female, Albanian)

The latter quotation does not only agree with the idea of language being one of the biggest factors of segregation, it also touches the issue of mother-tongue education. Especially when referring to the Albanian community, it was often perceived as a positive thing that parents have the right and the opportunity to let their children study in their own mother-tongue.

Extremely opposite opinions about the perceived effects of ethnically segregating children in school were present. On the one hand, participants felt as if separating the students would avoid inter-ethnic conflicts in schools, like ones that happened in the past. Although most participants never witnessed or joined such student fights, they heard or read about them. However on the contrary, some participants stated that they feel as if the segregation in schools is polarizing the ethnicities even more, which promotes conflict, in the same way as Koneska (2012) described the negative effects of a segregated education system:

So [segregation] is there because there will be less fights and stuff like that. (P19: Mozaik Alumni, female, Macedonian)

When [students] are separated by shifts, there can be other issues between them... Because they don't know each other very well, they don't see each other very often, they're not communicating... That led to a lot of fights and arguments between the Macedonians and the Albanians. (P23: Mozaik Alumni, male, Macedonian)

Thus, however an overall negative attitude towards segregation in Macedonian education was found, participants also indicated some elements of it which they perceived more positively. For example the fact that because of this system, parents maintain the right to let their children study in their mother-tongue. Also, some participants believe that segregating the students will avoid ethnical conflicts.

Inter-ethnic contact

Participants were asked about their experiences with living in Macedonia, focusing on its multiculturalism. A lot of them stated to have positive experiences with, for example, growing up in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood, to have fine relations with other ethnicities, or even to have inter-ethnic friendships. These findings are signs that the participants of this study have positive inter-ethnic relations and that social cohesion rates might be higher than Brunnbauer (2002) made believe, since he argued that Macedonian and Albanian people generally do not socialize with each other:

I also have different friends: Turkish, Macedonian and Albanian friends. I'm multicultural [laughs]. (P18: pedagogical student, female, Albanian)

A factor that can explain a light variation in answers – a small number of participants had negative experiences with growing up in a multi-ethnic environment – could be that some state that the quality of ethnic relations is dependent on the city you live in. After all, each city has its own ethnic composition. Especially in Debar and other cities in west-Macedonia (bordering Albania) there seems to be a different atmosphere than in, for example, Skopje:

My friends from other cities say that Macedonians and Albanians should fight. But I say: no, come to Debar and see what happens here with the Macedonians and Albanians. (...) In other cities they say: 'We are Macedonians, and they are Albanians'. But here it's not like this. We are all together. (P14, Mozaik Alumni, Macedonian).

However, although the aforementioned results show a lot of positive aspects of current inter-ethnic contact in Macedonia, also some important negative factors were found. Participants' stories indicate that the aftermath of the conflict in 2001 is still very present, and that stereotypes and prejudices are deeply imbedded in Macedonian society. Not surprisingly, politics also seem to have their share in maintaining those negative feelings and thought about other ethnicities, which again contribute to the worsening of ethnic relations.

I think these [tensions] come from the politics and from [the children's] parents. And of course the parents are influenced by the politics again. So, as the children grow up, hearing around them that Albanians are bad... that is how this antagonism is made. (P11: university professor, female, Macedonian)

There is no problem with the children, but the families, the situation and the stereotypes and prejudices are still in them. That's why I said that it's hard to make them send their children to a mixed class. The conflict was in 2001 (...) but still, there is a reflection of it. (P07: pedagogical student, male, Macedonian)

These factors of a history of conflict and ongoing stereotypes are likely to be contributing to one other finding – even though participants may not have been aware of that. Participants

hint that, even when inter-ethnic friendships are established, they often stay superficial and that the contact mostly occurs ‘only when they need to’.

Most of my friends are Macedonian but also I have Serbian friends, Albanian friends... Friends from Bosnia. But my close friends are Macedonian. It doesn't mean that I have some stereotypes or prejudices against them, but... the most people in our country are Macedonian so, that's it. (P02: kindergarten teacher, female, Macedonian)

In daily life, there is not much hanging out together. It's rare to find really close inter-ethnic friendships. (...) I feel it all the time. If not at work, I see it on my way to work in the bus. It is 30 minute long ride and you see every nationality. But there is a divide. It's a parallel life. Most of my neighbours are Macedonian. Across the river is the Albanian part of the city. Communities live a parallel life, not like it's integrated. (P20: high school teacher, female, Macedonian)

Therefore, stereotypes and prejudices seem to weigh ‘heavier’ than, for example, stating to have fine inter-ethnic communication. These results thus indicate that the reality of inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia is that ethnic communities live ‘parallel lives’.

Possible roles of education (in fostering inter-ethnic relations)

Since the focus of this study is to explore integration in Macedonian education, participants were asked about related topics. The vast majority of them hold very positive attitudes towards ethnically mixed classrooms. Generally, participants of this study believe it is of great importance that children nowadays get to talk – or be taught – about issues of multi-ethnicity in their country. Mixing classrooms ethnically and making ethnic relations a topic of discussion are believed to be factors that could contribute significantly to the bettering of ethnic relations in Macedonia. Participants thus not only seem to understand but also support the goals of integrated education as described in the Strategy for Integrated Education:

So if they are mixed in the shifts, maybe they will communicate and see each other more, and they will realize that not all the people in one ethnic group are the same, there are good and bad people, et cetera. (P23: Mozaik Alumni, male, Macedonian)

I see it as positive if they are mixed because after that, the Macedonian and Albanian group won't fight with each other, because they have spent 4 years together. How is it possible that they fight after this? (P16: university professor, male, Macedonian)

Concerning the finding that a lot of participants stress the importance of talking with children about Macedonia's multi-ethnicity, it was often stated that the participants themselves never had such education in their childhood. They sometimes felt as if their previous teachers were not very well able to deal with multi-ethnic issues, which could be drawn as a conclusion from Spasovski, Ballazhi & Friedman (2010) as well, since they argued that teacher preparation programs for integrated education in Macedonia are generally inadequate. Not surprisingly, participants perceived this inadequacy negatively:

They should talk and focus more on this topic when the kids are in primary school because (...) in primary school, a child can learn the most about these kind of views and thinking. That is why, even though when I was in primary school we didn't talk about these things, they should focus more on talking about it nowadays, to have a different and better way of thinking. (P29: pedagogical student, female, Albanian)

Moreover, because most participants state they view the role of teachers in fostering inter-ethnic contact as very big, a lot of participants think it is important that pedagogical students nowadays receive some kind of preparation in how to deal with multiethnic issues, or how to make it a topic in their future classrooms:

There should be attention to it (...). They should be motivated to teach themselves, if they are aware of the situation, to change the situation when they become teachers. They can make projects and everything... (P24: Mozaik Alumni, male, Albanian)

They have to teach the children that they can't be hateful and say hateful things. I think that the universities should have... well, not really classes but to have a person that would come to teach them about how they should educate the children about [these topics]. (P21: Mozaik Alumni, female, Macedonian)

When participants were asked to reflect upon the age from which it would be appropriate to integrate children and to talk about multi-ethnic issues, almost all of them stated that they

think it would be a good thing to talk about this with children from the youngest age. It was often mentioned that it would be the most important to involve young children because they were said to be like a *tabula rasa*: still free from stereotypes, prejudices or feelings of hate. None of the participants felt as if kindergarten age would be too young for this, and the vast majority of them had a positive reaction to the Mozaik model when they were introduced to it:

I think that, when children are integrated from the youngest age they will learn another language and another culture. This will help them in the future to have a better developed personality and... [this Mozaik model] has a lot more pro's than con's.
(P30: pedagogical student, male, Albanian)

Thus, most participants were very positive about integrated education and identified the aforementioned possible roles in which education could contribute to foster inter-ethnic relations in the future. However, the results of this study found some obstacles as well, which were said to make it very hard to actually realize a concept as integrated education. Most importantly, some participants stressed that it would be hard to have parents agree with mixed classes if they were perceiving integration negatively. An example could be the following:

I'm teaching the kids Macedonian language [in an Albanian school]. There have been parents that came to me and said: 'Do you want to make a Macedonian out of my child?'. That guy will never send his child to a mixed classroom. There is no readiness in the society for fully integrated classrooms. (...) From politics to religion, nobody really cares about making this happen. (P20: high school teacher, female, Macedonian)

Not only is part of the participants hesitant about the motivation of parents – and Macedonian society in general – to send their child to ethnically mixed classrooms. Language was identified as a possible obstacle as well, because certain conditions (such as extra teachers) should be met to make bilingual education possible. Furthermore, it was argued that it would be hard to even create a lesson or a small subject about multiculturalism in the current education system, because curricula are strictly set up by the state, focusing on subject teaching, and teachers are expected to follow these curricula.

However, in this light, a very positive attitude and faith was discovered in the section of non-formal education. Participants often described social (out-of-school) projects and the work of (peace-building) youth organizations and NGO's as effective ways to foster inter-

ethnic contact among young people, especially when activities emphasize on socializing different ethnicities through a joint activity where language is no barrier, such as sports:

I think the most important thing to do is to make projects that have Macedonian and Albanian [children] both participating, and to make friendships between them. (P24: Mozaik Alumni, male, Albanian)

I think social projects are a better way to get this kind of idea to children than at school. Because in schools they have other subjects. These projects are the ideal thing to exercise this idea. (P34: Mozaik Alumni, male, Macedonian)

Thus, although various possible roles of education in fostering inter-ethnic relation were identified, obstacles were found that could significantly interfere with the realization of it. Concerning integrated education, participants seem to have most faith in the field of non-formal education. However, it has been mentioned that the same obstacles – mainly money and motivation – could be applicable in this field as well.

Integration as a 'work in progress'

Although specifically integration in Macedonian education is the core focus of this study, participants were also asked about their feelings towards inter-ethnic integration in general. They often stressed that it should be good to integrate members of different ethnicities more. In order for this to happen, 'openness', 'tolerance' and 'respect' were identified as the most important values a person should inhibit:

I think that it's better if they have more places where Macedonians and Albanians can meet, talk, to exchange experiences, you know... to talk about some problems, so we find one language. To find one... way to think about problems. Not to be on different sides. The language that we speak it not the problem, it's the language that we think. (P14: Mozaik Alumni, male, Macedonian)

We should live close to each other, to know each other, to meet. Only if we understand each other and our needs, we will know how we can [live together]. Otherwise there is no chance of living together, there will always be someone who feels frustrated because he's different in some way. (P25: pedagogical student, male, Macedonian)

Concerning working towards ethnic integration, children and young people are seen as an important factor by the majority of the participants. They often stated that they think it is good for children to have friends from different ethnicities, and that they should be socialized with each other from a young age. These were often found as key elements of the process of integration, most likely because participants assumed that children would remember their early experiences with peers from different ethnicities, and continue in this way. Although the results of this study can only partly confirm this assumption, there were some clear indicators that young people rely on their inter-ethnic childhood experiences indeed, together with the fact that most Mozaik Alumni are involved in a special network with meetings and events:

I can remember [going to Mozaik kindergarten], and I have them on Facebook, Instagram and everything. (P19: Mozaik Alumni, female, Macedonian)

In high school I was in a lot of projects, multicultural projects. I made good friendships... I still meet with some of them, even though the project was 2 years ago. (P33, Mozaik Alumni, male, Albanian)

Most participants thus hold open attitudes towards inter-ethnic integration, and a common theme of conversation was that – especially the older generation – experiences some kind of change nowadays. They feel as if there is more attention for the topic of peacebuilding, fostering inter-ethnic contact and working towards integration, compared to years before. Perhaps this could be explained by the rapid interference of national and international NGO's, such as the OSCE and UNICEF, especially after the conflict in 2001:

I see this [change] as a reflection of the political situation. Maybe because Albanians are fighting for more rights now. That is on the table, it's a part of everyday life. That has an influence on parents, and an influence on children. They're watching it on the TV every day so it's a logical situation at this moment. It cannot be like 30 years ago, because then nobody spoke about that. (P25: pedagogical student, male, Macedonian)

Comparing to the past, [teachers] were not much educated to work in a multicultural context. Those topics were not really provided at the universities. I don't know, maybe we didn't have a chance to learn about this. (P09: kindergarten teacher, female, Albanian)

Not only do participants experience some kind of change, referring to the attention given to the topic of inter-ethnic integration, but also another special focus towards children and young people was found. They perceive themselves as a ‘generation of change’:

The older generation was manipulated more, they were damaged more with this hateful thinking. I think that my generation is the generation that will tell the children and students how to act in a better way, that they should learn from their past generations' mistakes. (P30: pedagogical student, male, Albanian)

As we [Mozaik Alumni] get older, we can help more with this project. We can change things. The state considers us as adults and we can start to change. So now, we should participate even more. (P26: Mozaik Alumni, male, Albanian)

The role that children and young people attribute to themselves might be an indicator of the fact that they feel responsible for bettering the state of Macedonia in some way. This is especially interesting in relation to the Albanian participants of this study, since Partasi (2011) could argue that they might experience struggle to find their own ethnic identity in Macedonia, and are caught in a conflict between home and peer culture, as she found in her study on the experience non-Cypriot pupils in Greek-Cypriot schools. These aspects of a ‘lost identity’ were not found among the young Albanian participants of this study, they rather felt part of both communities:

I feel myself Albanian, because I am Albanian. But I'm a part of Macedonian culture too, because I live here, I have Macedonian friends... I celebrate Easter with them. I'm a part of it. (P26: Mozaik Alumni, male, Albanian)

Although it was not the focus of this study, these findings slightly indicate that – despite all differences and obstacles in fostering inter-ethnic contact – there seems to be one aspect of a common ground: young peoples’ feelings that they can make a change for the future together.

Politics and economics

According to the participants of this study, Macedonian politics and economics are closely connected to each other, and imbedded in everyday life. Very often, the leading powers of the state were perceived negatively and described as corrupt. As a results, participants stated,

Macedonia's economy is now in a bad state, already for a long time. Unemployment rates are high, salaries are low. Participants often felt angry and blamed politicians for the impoverishment of their country. It was not for nothing that on May 17 of 2015, circa 60.000 people rallied in Skopje against the prime minister's administration, calling for resignation:

Politicians brought this situation till here. When we don't enter in politics, we might be good friends. (...) I hate this system right now. I had a friend for 15 years and one day something happened, I asked him something about 'his party' and he never talked to me anymore. We have problems right now and the politicians brought this situation. (...) I don't know what will happen. (P26: Mozaik Alumni, male, Albanian)

In the education system there is no cultural problem. In our society, a cultural problem is created by politicians. I think that between people, students, children, parents, there is no cultural problem: they live together, they have the same activities. I think it's not a problem in our society. We have problems about... how politicians think. (P03: kindergarten teacher, female, Macedonian)

So not only does the instable political and economic situation of Macedonia seem to create feelings of distrust towards the government and hopelessness towards a brighter future. Their power mechanisms clearly effect the participants' thinking about ethnic relations and education, often making them feel powerless to make changes; like a university professor wanting to organize cultural events but feeling blocked by the higher levels on the hierarchical ladder. Results show that a fair amount of participants are sure that politicians are deliberately trying to 'bang the ethnic drum' in order to assure their seat at the parliament:

I would like this country not to be corrupted. It's always like this... always when the friendships between Macedonians and Albanians is starting to get better, there is one thing or one movement of the government that destroys it. They do it just to keep their selves over there. Because they know that, if we are living together in peace, they wouldn't be there in the government. (P33, Mozaik Alumni, male, Albanian)

These negative views about a corrupted but extremely powerful government, the reality of living in a country with poor economic conditions and, established feelings of distrust, hopelessness and powerlessness seem to have a complex coherence of its own.

Conclusions and discussion

Although originally this study focused on evaluations concerning intercultural education in Macedonia from a policy, practice and people level, unforeseen circumstances during the process of this research resulted in an alternative research question: to which extent does it seem feasible in Macedonia to work towards inter-ethnic integration within the current education system? Although the current national educational policy, Strategy for Integrated Education, argues that it aims to work towards more inter-ethnic integration in schools, and although participants of this study are generally very positive about this idea – while fully understanding and supporting its goals – this study states that it seems to be unrealistic to believe this can be fully realized in the current state of the formal educational system in Macedonia. Therefore, it does not seem feasible, which answers the research question. Several findings espouse this theory, which will be discussed on the basis of sub questions.

What is the role of language in creating an integrated learning environment?

Although already argued by Brunnbauer (2002), most Albanians seem to speak a great deal of Macedonian, while it is rare to find a Macedonian being able to speak any Albanian at all. This is of course not surprising since Macedonian is the nation's official language. However, two social implications of this observation have been found in this study. First, some participants – from both ethnicities – state that the communication problems are not a big issue, exactly because of the positive fact that most Albanians do speak Macedonian. Second, a more negative view towards this construct was found, implicating that it creates feelings of inequality. This study therefore give hints that an equal status – which is argued by Allport (1954) to be imperative in order to establish successful inter-group contact – has not been completely realized. Macedonian education is still highly segregated on ethno-linguistic criteria. To make bilingual education possible would require economic resources, such as money for extra teachers and bilingual school materials, which are not present today. On the other hand, to have education only in Macedonian language will probably provoke protests because the Albanian community have fought for their right to have mother-tongue education available for their children a long time ago. Working towards bilingual education could feel as an attack on this right – further tensioning an already sensitive topic. Since creating an integrated learning environment would have to at least partly break down this linguistic division, the role of language can be identified as an obstacle.

How do current ethnic relations create a pathway to realize the 'Strategy for Integrated Education'? Results of this study shows that a lot of participants have positive experiences with, for example, growing up in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood, fine relations

with other ethnicities, or even to have inter-ethnic friendships. However, also some signs of less positive contact were found. Results indicate that the aftermath of the conflict in 2001 is still very present, and that stereotypes and prejudices are deeply imbedded in Macedonian society. These are likely factors to be contributing to one other finding; that, when inter-ethnic relations are occurring, they often stay superficial and that the contact mostly happens ‘only when they need to’. Thus, however both positive and negative aspects of inter-ethnic contacts were found in this study, its general statement is that the reality of inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia is that ethnic communities live ‘parallel lives’ and inter-ethnic social cohesion is low, as was also argued by Brunnbauer (2002). Though logically none of the participants seem to like the ongoing ethnic tensions, one could still ask if the majority of Macedonian people is actually ready and willing to integrate actively with ‘the others’. This does not create a clear pathway to realize the ‘Strategy for Integrated Education’, since the successfulness of it is highly dependent of good ethnic relations and an intrinsic motivation of all citizens to work towards integration, which – right now – does not seem to be the case.

In which ways are children and young people perceived as a factor in working towards inter-ethnic integration? Children and young people are seen as an important factor by the majority of the participants, concerning working towards inter-ethnic integration. They often stated that they think it is good for children to have friends from different ethnicities, and that they should be socialized with each other from a young age. According to the participants, children are less likely to demonstrate negative behavior towards other ethnicities if they have grown up with inter-ethnic friendships. This study can only partly confirm this assumption, since it indeed found some indicators that young people rely on their inter-ethnic childhood experiences. Interestingly, part of the young participants of this study perceive themselves as a ‘generation of change’ and in some way responsible for bettering the social state of Macedonia. This study suggest that – despite all differences and obstacles in fostering inter-ethnic contact – there seems to be one aspect of a common ground: young peoples’ feelings that they can make a change for the future together. So not only is it perceived as a key element of the process of integration that children and young people get involved, they also view themselves as responsible actors or ‘change agents’.

Thus, although for aforementioned reasons seems to be unrealistic to believe in fully integrated education to be realized within the current education system in Macedonia, this study found a surprisingly positive attitude towards the role of non-formal education. Participants talk positively about in- and out-of-school projects that stimulate inter-ethnic contact between children, as well as NGO’s and youth organizations that facilitate this kind of

activities. To stimulate friendships between children of different ethnicities – outside the traditional, crusted education system – is believed to be an effective way to reduce ethnic tensions in the future, because it has the possibilities to break down the existing stereotypes and prejudices. It seems as if non-formal education has new potential – or at least support – in realizing more positive inter-ethnic contacts from a young age. It would thus be a highly valuable recommendation for further research to explore possibilities to invest in non-formal rather than formal education, as it comes to promoting inter-ethnic contact, preferably through the measurement of the effects of such social interventions with a longitudinal design.

Stating that it does not seem feasible in Macedonia to work towards inter-ethnic integration within the current education system is consistent with theory of Klingner et al (2005), which claims that the characteristics of traditional educational systems have life and dynamic of their own that resists change. Indeed, the participating teachers of this study seem to receive rather than construct policy at all, which helps to explain why school practices may seem so uncontrollable. Those policy decisions are made by a few individuals at the top of a political hierarchical pyramid, which mostly happen to be the politicians of a government which is again under fire because of its suspected corruption. It seems to be that, even if teachers wanted to change something, there is no context around them to even try. The already wretched economic state of the country and high unemployment rates create an environment in which teachers are not likely to speak up to the higher levels about changes they would like to see. Additionally, there are little economic resources to build upon when a teacher or a school would like to invest in promoting inter-ethnic contact in schools. Klinger et al (2005) state that the key to reform in such systems is the coherence across and within several levels. This study suggest that this kind of coherence is not present in Macedonia – contributing to its final conclusion that it does not seem feasible to work towards inter-ethnic integration within the current education system.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Participant information

Code	Date of interview	Category	Place	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Duration of interview (minutes)	Presence of translator
01	24-2-2015	Pedagogical student (enrolled in Mozaik training)	Bitola	Male	23	Macedonian	40	No
02	11-3-2015	Kindergarten teacher (working with diversity program)	Skopje	Female	31	Macedonian	25	Yes
03	12-3-2015	Kindergarten teacher (Mozaik) from Debar	Skopje	Female	40	Macedonian	30	No
04	17-3-2015	University professor (his class enrolled in Mozaik training) of Faculty of Pedagogy	Štip	Male	38	Macedonian	30	No
05	17-3-2015	Pedagogical student (enrolled in Mozaik training)	Štip	Female	22	Macedonian	35	Yes
06	19-3-2015	University teacher (exchange, non-native, working in state university, no Mozaik-programs)	Skopje	Female	24	Belgium	50	No
	19-3-2015 ²	Advisor of the Bureau for the Development of Education	Skopje	Female		Macedonian	50	Yes
07	24-3-2015	Pedagogical student	Štip	Male	21	Macedonian	30 (duo)	Yes
08	24-3-2015	Pedagogical student	Štip	Female	22	Macedonian	30 (duo)	Yes
09	25-3-2015	Kindergarten teacher (Mozaik)	Struga	Female	43	Albanian	50 (duo)	Yes
10	25-3-2015	Kindergarten teacher (Mozaik)	Struga	Female	37	Macedonian	50 (duo)	Yes
11	26-3-2015	University professor of Faculty of Philology	Skopje	Female	51	Macedonian	40	No
12	27-3-2015	Secondary school teacher of English Language	Debar	Female	29	Albanian	25	No
13	27-3-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Debar	Female	16	Macedonian	25	No
14	27-3-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Debar	Male	18	Macedonian	40	No
15	30-3-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Skopje	Male	16	Albanian	35	No
16	31-3-2015	University professor of Faculty of Philology	Skopje	Male	60	Macedonian	35	Yes

² Interview was excluded from data analysis because the participant did not fit into the sample population ('policy level')

17	31-3-2015	University professor of Faculty of Philology	Skopje	Female	49	Macedonian	20	No
18	1-4-2015	Pedagogical student	Skopje	Female	23	Albanian	20	No
19	1-4-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Skopje	Female	15	Macedonian	30	No
20	2-4-2015	Secondary school teacher in Albanian school	Skopje	Female	48	Macedonian	55	Yes
21	3-4-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Skopje	Female	15	Macedonian	40	Yes
22	6-4-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Gostivar	Male	18	Macedonian	35 (duo)	No
23	6-4-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Gostivar	Male	17	Macedonian	35 (duo)	No
24	8-4-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Skopje	Male	19	Albanian	40	No
	9-4-2015 ³	Pedagogical student	Skopje	Female	27	Turkish/ Albanian	10	No
25	9-4-2015	Pedagogical student	Skopje	Male	41	Macedonian	35	No
26	15-4-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Skopje	Male	19	Albanian	40	No
27	16-4-2015	Pedagogical student	Skopje	Male	22	Albanian	55 (duo)	Yes
28	16-4-2015	Pedagogical student	Skopje	Male	23	Albanian	55 (duo)	Yes
29	16-4-2015	Pedagogical student	Skopje	Female	23	Albanian	45 (duo)	Yes
30	16-4-2015	Pedagogical student	Skopje	Male	22	Albanian	45 (duo)	Yes
31	16-4-2015	Pedagogical student	Skopje	Female	20	Albanian	40 (duo)	Yes
32	16-4-2015	Pedagogical student	Skopje	Female	20	Albanian	40 (duo)	Yes
33	16-4-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Skopje	Male	19	Albanian	30	No
34	16-4-2015	Mozaik Alumni	Skopje	Male	17	Macedonian	30	No

³ Interview was excluded from data analysis because the participant's level of English speaking was very poor. Because of this, the data was considered incomplete and unreliable.

Appendix B: Interview guidelines

Interview guideline: teachers and professors

- Can you tell me a little bit about your work environment? What kind of classes do you teach and for how long have you been working as a teacher already?
- You are living in a multi-cultural country. Can you tell me how you experience this ethnic diversity in your day-to-day life?
- How about your professional life? How does it influence your working environment?
- Currently, there is a strategy of the government to promote the integrated education. What do you think of the current segregation of Macedonian and Albanian students? And what do you think about the process of creating more integrated education?
- What do you think about addressing multiculturalism from a pre-school age (Mozaik)?
- What are the challenges you face in teaching a diverse classroom?
- Do you feel as if your own education prepared you enough for teaching in a multicultural environment?
- What kinds of intercultural teaching elements would you like to apply / do you already apply in your classroom?
- Could you describe the policies and procedures that your school has to help you deal with this diversity?
- If you could give your school a suggestion for further development of intercultural education, what would it be?
- What do you think of the role of parents?

Interview guideline: pedagogical students

- You are living in a multi-cultural country. Can you tell me how you experience this ethnic diversity in your day-to-day life?
- What do you remember of learning about ethnic diversity when you were in primary/high school?
- What do you think of the role of teachers and parents in this? Do you think they should educate children about this topic in a specific way?
- Can you tell me about your current experience in teaching? Have you been teaching in ethnically diverse classrooms and if so, what was it like for you?
- Do you feel as if your current courses in university are preparing you to teach in a multicultural environment?
- What do you think about addressing multiculturalism from a pre-school education?
- What do you think of the fact that future teachers like you are being taught about multicultural pre-school education (through the projects from CCG)?


Interview guideline: Mozaik Alumni

- You are living in a multi-cultural country. Can you tell me how you experience this ethnic diversity in your day-to-day life?
- In Macedonian schools, Macedonian and Albanian kids often have separate classrooms. What do you think of this?
- Do you think it is useful to teach children about the different languages, cultures and religion in Macedonia? Why?
- What do you think will be a good way for children to create awareness of the diversity, and to know more about each other's cultures?
- Do you think that the teachers you had were open to diversity? Were there issues and if so, how did they deal with them?

- What do you remember from being in a Mozaik class?
- Do you have friends from this Mozaik group that you are still in touch with?
- Do you like the idea that you were in an intercultural kindergarten?
- What do you think about being together/playing/talking with children from the other ethnic group?
- How do you think that being in a Mozaik kindergarten influenced you?
- Do you have the feeling that you deal with multicultural issues (for example having stereotypes) differently than your friends?
- How are you engaged in the Alumni network (online/through CCG or OFFS activities)?
- Would you like to further develop and participate in the network activities?

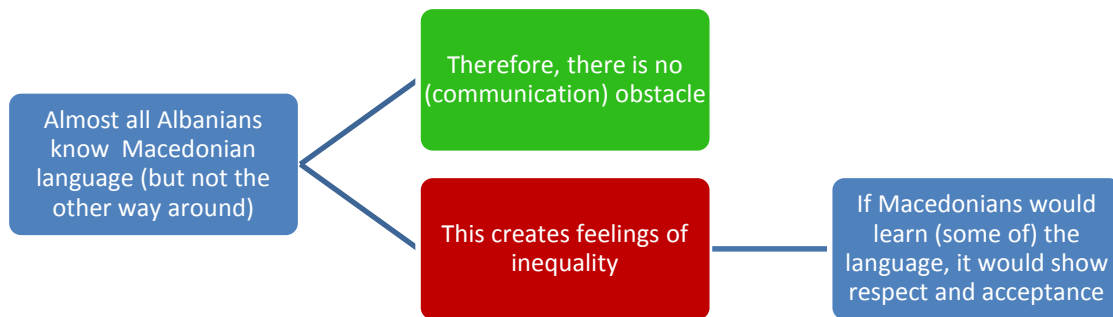
Appendix C: Coding Framework

- [-]  **Current segregation in Macedonian education**
 - Indifference
 - Role of language in segregation
 - Segregation avoids conflicts in schools
 - Segregation because of parents
 - Segregation because people want to study in their mother-tongue
 - Segregation is because of limited space in schools
 - Segregation is polarizing ethnicities (even more)
 - Segregations because of politics
 - Student conflicts/fights
 - The segregation in schools is not good
 - The segregation is good
- [-]  **Integration as a work in progress**
 - Ethnic relations are (getting) better
 - Ethnic tensions are getting worse
 - Generation of change
 - Having an open/tolerant attitude/respect
 - Is it good for children to have friends from different ethnicities
 - It should be good to integrate the ethnicities (more)
 - Macedonian/Balkan people perceive 'change' as a negative thing
 - There is more attention for the topic
 - Thoughts/wishes for the future
 - Young people 'Generation of change'
- [-]  **Inter-ethnic contact**
 - 2001 conflict/conflicts in the past
 - Albanians can be more aggressive/less educated
 - Ethnic relations are dependent on each city/region
 - Growing up/living in a multicultural neighborhood
 - Having friends/communicating well with other ethnicities
 - I don't feel ethnic tensions/there are no problems
 - Living parallel lives
 - Role of parents
 - Role of religion
 - Stereotypes
 - The ethnicities don't want to mix
 - There are not a lot of (close) friendships between the ethnicities
 - When you are young, you don't have to be involved
- [-]  **Language in society**
 - About Macedonians learning the Albanian language
 - Albanians know Macedonian language but not the other way around
 - It's good for Albanian people/children to know both languages
 - Language is an obstacle to get close(r)/causes a gap
 - Language is not an issue because Albanians know Macedonian language
- [-]  **Mozaik**
 - Being familiar with the model
 - Expanding the Mozaik model (to secondary or high school)
 - Feeling any different than friends (who did not go to Mozaik)
 - Influence of Mozaik on alumni
 - Involvement in Mozaik alumni Network
 - Keeping up/forgetting the other language
 - Kids from Mozaik staying in touch with their peers
 - Positive attitude towards Mozaik
 - Remembering Mozaik
 - Sceptical or negative towards Mozaik
 - Transition from Mozaik to 'normal' school and its influences
 - Willingness to be more involved in network

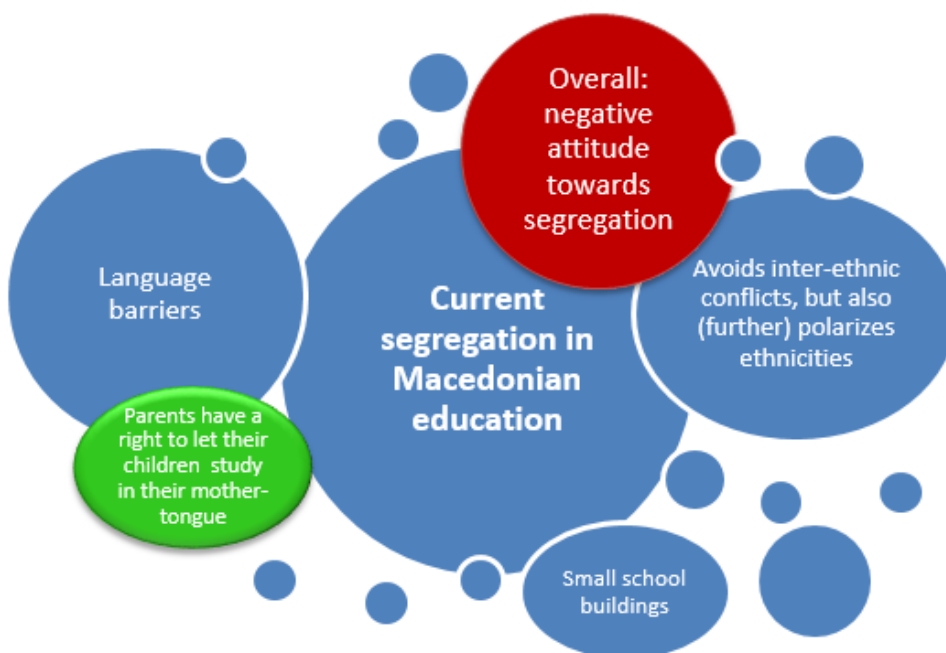
-   **Pedagogical students' perspectives**
 - Experience in teaching (as a pedagogical student)
 - I feel prepared (by my university) to deal with multiculturalism
 - I like/think it is good the trainings/projects about multiculturalism
 - I think there should be more attention for the topic of multiculturalism
 - I would like to work in a multicultural environment in the future
 - Positive experience with mixed classes
 - When I will be a teacher, I'd like to contribute in this sense
 - You will learn through experience how to deal with multiculturalism in class
-   **Politics and economics**
 - Role of politics
 - The economical situation of Macedonia
-   **Possible roles of education (in fostering inter-ethnic relations)**
 - I didn't learn/speak about multiculturalism in school (much)
 - Mixed classes (attitudes)
 - Non-formal education
 - Pedagogical students should be prepared for dealing with multiculturalism
 - Teachers are not dealing with multicultural issues well
 - Teaching children (more) in school about multiculturalism
 - The role of teachers is very big
 - There is no(t a lot) time/space to teach about multiculturalism in school
 - To create mixed classes is very hard/unrealistic
 - To start at a young age with teaching/integrating
-   **Teachers' perspectives**
 - I don't know if my school is open to these topics
 - I feel prepared by my education
 - I see no difference in children, I teach them equally
 - In my school, there is a project (or more) on the topic of multiculturalism
 - Support from school/principal
 - There are challenges in teaching (cultural/ethnic issues)
 - There are no challenges/problems in teaching in a multicultural environment
 - There are some challenges, but not very big/important
 - You learn (a lot or more) from practical experience

Appendix D: Illustrative figures of results

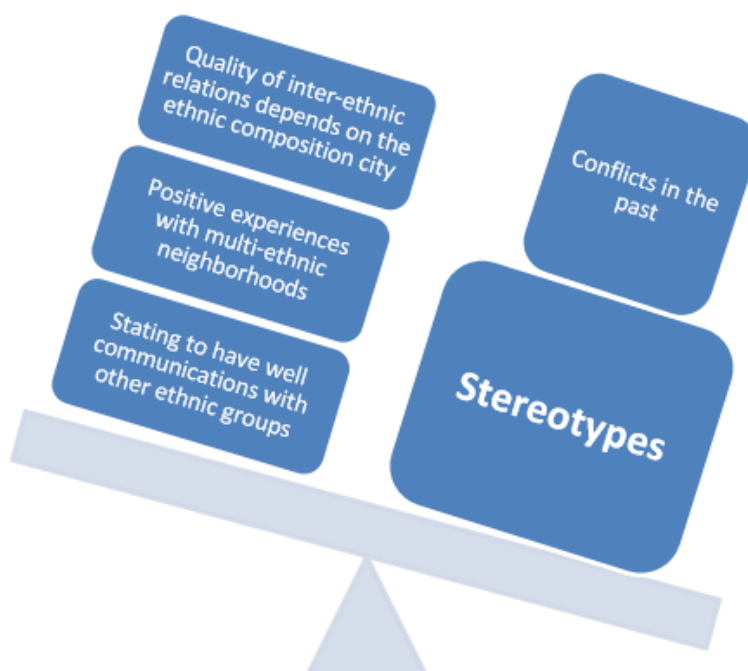
Language as a social construct



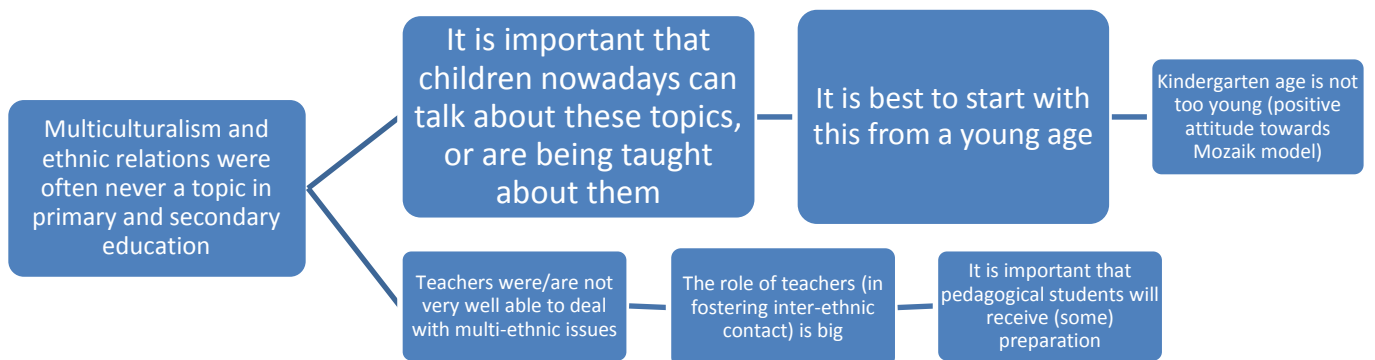
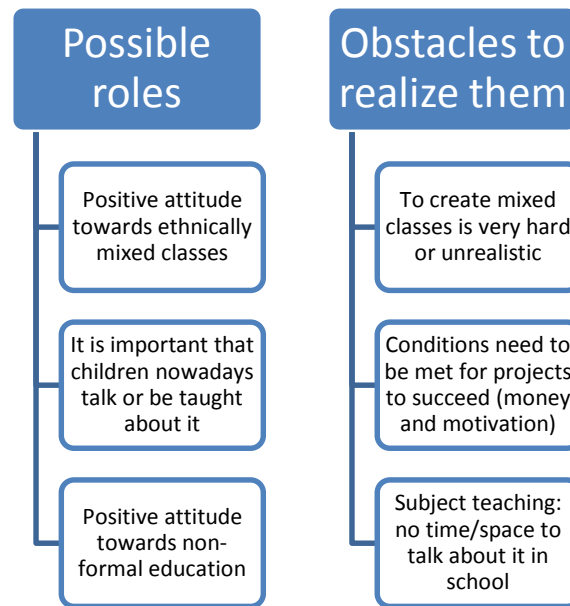
Segregation of Macedonian education



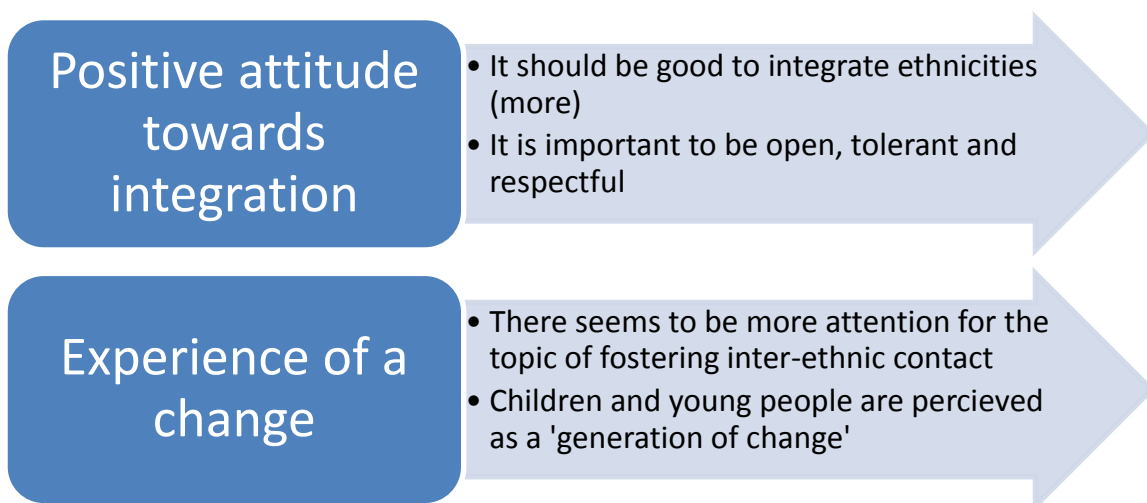
Inter-ethnic contact



Possible roles of education (in fostering inter-ethnic relations)



Integration as a 'work in progress'



Children are seen as an important factor in working towards integration

- It is good for children to have friends from different ethnicities
- Children should be socialized from a young age

Politics and economics

