

Session code: 5-3-A203**Title:** Managing social and cultural diversity in Flemish primary schools**Contributer/s:** Stijn Suijs

Abstract : Since 1991 the concept of 'intercultural education' has become part of the Flemish governmental school policy. In the course of following policy programs schools with a certain amount of pupils originating from ethnic minority backgrounds or meeting (contested) criteria of disadvantage could apply for extra support when implementing initiatives of intercultural education. As the commonly held interpretation of the "freedom of education" in Belgium restricts the impact of government policy, the meaning of 'intercultural education' was delegated to the autonomy of the local school practice (mediated by their federations).

Introduced as a practice of dealing with migrant pupils in the classroom, with a strong focus on knowledge transmission about ethnic differences, the concept of intercultural education only slowly developed towards a broader definition. Nowadays it is broadly accepted to define intercultural education as "learning to manage social and cultural diversity in an active and efficient manner" whereas 'diversity' also refers to similarities. Still the concept leaves room for very different interpretations, ranging from 'differentiation' in order to meet universal criteria of school success to the active use of the existing intercultural competence of children in order to promote open ending learning.

The Centre of Intercultural Education (University Of Ghent) conducted 4 qualitative studies on concepts-in-use and practices of intercultural education in 50 primary schools spread around the Flemish community (including Dutch speaking schools in Brussels). This Centre adopts a pragmatic approach concerning human beings-in-the-world, pointing to the importance of context-relatedness and situatedness, embedded in an ethnographic tradition. The transfer of this approach (fully applied in the first study) to evaluation research (3 following studies), requiring more general statements, causes fruitful methodological and conceptual tensions. Along the presentation of the main results of the 4 conducted studies, we will focus on following questions:

- How to maintain a dynamic perspective (stressing context-related diversity) to intercultural education in recommendations and measuring overall 'good' practice? Among which lines is a comparison possible?
- What is the relation between intercultural education and different approaches to the 'quality of education' and the measurement of 'school success' (if any)?
- Does ethnic segregation inhibit intercultural learning?
- Should we consider the facilitation of intercultural education among pupils themselves or should we only concentrate on teacher behaviour?