

Pathways to cultural rapprochement in schools: becoming a global teacher through the use of the “Educational Cultural Convergence” (ECCO) model

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Article history	<p>The authors propose a pathway to cultural rapprochement through “educational cultural convergence” (ECCO) which was described conceptually in a previous study (McKeown & Diboll, 2011) and present for discussion an ECCO model for use by teachers. The model is intended for practical use in classroom environments to assess existing “cultural gaps” and to assist teachers with social inclusion (McKeown & Kurt, 2011). It is meant to support teachers in their efforts to develop intercultural competence with, and between, students which transgresses a current cultural identity and assists in creating a viable new one. Rather than teaching citizenship or social interdependence as a stand-alone curriculum, the ECCO model is intended for independent teacher use. The authors demonstrate the development and potentiality of the model where students learn by doing and manifest their learning through what they produce, with an appreciation of the contributions of various perspectives. A significant aspect of this mutuality is cross-cultural communication (Giles, 1979) which increases positive inter-cultural relations, minimizes the creation of “out-groups”, and ensures that the teacher is part of the “in-group”. Through the process of exposure to ‘otherness’ and diversity, ECCO promotes the process of intercultural dialogue, and the development of educators with a global perspective.</p>
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Background

Building on the development of “educational cultural convergence” (Diboll & McKeown, 2011; McKeown & Kurt, 2011), the authors demonstrate the practicalization of the ECCO concept as a pathway to cultural rapprochement as a working model of social inclusion for teachers in classrooms specifically targeted at those European classrooms whose outreach includes significant immigrant populations of non-European ethnicity. The intention, to use the ECCO model in Turkish schools, will be discussed at a later point in this paper.

The ECCO model is based on an assumption that intercultural citizenship gives symbolic power, which proceeds political power, and further, that intercultural competence is a way to address cultural anxiety. “Cultural Rapprochement” is referential to the *2010 International Year of the Rapprochement of Cultures* (UNESCO, 2010a) celebrated world-wide through the activities of the United Nations. The central aim of the year was “the fostering of cultural diversity and its corollary, dialogue” (UNESCO, 2010b). There are four major themes of cultural rapprochement: (i) promoting reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity”; (ii) building a framework for commonly shared values; (iii) the building of intercultural competencies; and (iv) fostering dialogue for sustainable development (2010b). The ECCO model directly addresses these

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themes of rapprochement.

Educational Cultural Convergence, Cultural Diversity, and Intercultural Dialogue

Educational Cultural Convergence (ECCO) can be summarized as a multi-dimensional process “emphasizing the teacher's role in facilitating optimal cultural convergence within the community of learning practice involving both 'wider society' linguistic, cultural and social factors and the evolving cultural context that is specific to each learning encounter or each specific community of learners” (McKeown & Diboll, 2011: 47). Cultural diversity is intended quite simply as what is to be shared in order to be a member of the culture, and intercultural dialogue is the process of exposure to other-ness.

The impetus for a practicalization of an ECCO model originates from three sources. The first as indicated in a previous study (McKeown & Kurt, 2011) is a response to educators who wanted to move a cultural dialogue forward in the classroom environment (see EUCU Network, 2011) more independently. The second is based on the authors' combined professional experience and collegial interactions with educators in state-sector K-12 schools, and educational reform initiatives, in Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Turkey, Scotland and Canada, where they discovered that cultural competence was an essential aspect of classroom harmonious relations.

The third is found in the *Charter of Fundamental Human Rights of the European Union* (EU-2007/C 303/01) adopted by EU Member States in 2007, wherein the proposition that “the peoples of Europe are resolved to share a peaceful future based on common values” is definitively stated. The EU is concerned with contributing “to the preservation and to the development of these common values while respecting the diversity of cultures and traditions” (*Charter*: Preamble 1). *The Charter* elucidates further, “conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the European Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law” and “places the individual at the heart of its activities, by establishing the citizenship of the Union and by creating an area of freedom, security and justice” (*Charter*: Preamble 1).

Given such a clear mandate, there are various enterprises currently dedicated to fostering a climate of intercultural dialogue. The European Union Children's Universities (EUCU.net, 2011) initiative is one such example of the way in which EU States are striving to offer an inclusive environment. Another example is Human Rights Education Associates (HREAa, 2012), an international non-governmental organization that supports human rights learning, the development of educational materials and programming, and community-building through on-line technologies. HREA is dedicated to quality education and training to promote understanding, attitudes and actions to protect human rights, and to foster the development of peaceable, free and just communities (HREAa, 2012). However, what we deemed as still necessary and currently lacking, was a tool for classroom teachers to use toward the same end.

Review of related literature

Conceptually, ECCO is derived from three areas: sociolinguistics and Communication Theory; educational reform; and, Cross-cultural Communication.

Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (“CAT”; 1978, 1991) provides a starting point for ECCO and is described in a previous study (Diboll & McKeown, 2011). Educational reform literature is taken particularly from reports and data associated with the Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD, 2005; Çinoğlu, 2009), with issues related to the changing demographics of teachers and learners globally, and with data compiled from the Program

of International Student Assessment – PISA (OECD, 2010).

Educational reform - the core engine of change

Education develops the capacities and potential of the individual so as to prepare that individual to be successful in a specific society or culture. From this perspective, education is serving primarily an individual development function. However, education simultaneously enhances society at large through the development of human capital.

In terms of the model, teaching is not only a means to an end but an end in itself: it is the purposeful direction and management of the learning process. Teaching is not only delivering knowledge or skills to students it is the process of providing opportunities for students to produce relatively permanent change through their engagement in experiences provided by the teacher.

Given this century's democratization of knowledge, there is a concurrent change in teaching via the liberation of information that is based on access to vast amounts of available information and data. Globally, a variety of e-tools and social media provide multi-modal learning experiences for learners. Certainly, increased participatory access to knowledge has made learning more relevant to learners and created an expanding schoolhouse where informal learning may have an equal or greater impact than was traditionally found within the formal schoolhouse. Furthermore, teaching is altering radically. Knowledge and information are keys to social inclusion and productivity and a key resource of economic growth. The teacher today is coming to be more and more considered as a co-learner, a creator of knowledge, and as a change agent.

Linguistic Convergence

Linguistic convergence is a key factor in effective and positive cross-cultural communication. Sociolinguist Howard Giles points out that “convergent communicative acts reduce interpersonal differences” creating an atmosphere conducive to co-operation across cultures and language groups, while “divergent” acts in which “speakers accentuate speech and non-verbal differences”, can be used as a defensive mechanism to reinforce an “us and them” dichotomy that inhibits effective communication (1991, 7-9). The emphasis on communication is significant when we consider that classroom teachers are on the front-line for changing attitudes, using positive models and creating activities for students that demonstrate intercultural dialogue in the most ordinary of classroom lessons and circumstances.

Cultural convergence

Giles and Smith (1979) cite a number of factors that influence the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication: “similarity attraction”, “the more similar are attitudes and beliefs are to certain others, the more likely it is we will be attracted to them” (47); the “social exchange” process, “the rewards attending a convergent act, that is an increase in attraction or approval” (48); “causal attribution”, where “we interpret other people’s behaviour, and evaluate persons in themselves, in terms of the motivations and intentions that we attribute as the cause of their behavior” (50); “intergroup distinctiveness”, wherein members of different groups, when they are in contact “compare themselves on dimensions that are important to them” (52). Building positive inter-cultural relations and effective communication depends on aligning these factors to achieve “optimal convergence” leading to positive inter-evaluation (53-4). Wenger (1998) considers communities of practice to be groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

In this sense, classrooms are cross-cultural communities of practice, in each of which a unique social meaning is constructed in the interactions between students and teacher, and, perhaps more

significantly, between the learners themselves. The use of sensitive, relevant curriculum materials can have a positive impact on this reciprocal development. EU teachers have access to teaching materials through the Council of Europe, in particular, from the Human Rights and Service-Learning: *Lesson Plans and Projects* (HREAb, 2007) and, of course, these resources are available online to any interested party.

Method – ECCO design

The paucity of literature on a model similar to “educational cultural convergence” and a lack of corresponding frameworks to use for intercultural dialogue provided a starting point to begin an exploration. We wanted to find related frameworks that could possibly serve as a tool for teachers’ developing cultural competency and that could be used quickly and easily in a classroom environment with immediate applicability, without excessive preparation or extensive curriculum development. Our intention was to place the teacher at the center of this change in practice wherein the teacher would make knowledge-sharing a priority, and in the process encourage a shift in a teacher-learner cultural perspective. In this way, a teacher might more successfully expand cultural learning with benefit specific to a particular set of learners and within the exact social milieu of a particular classroom. We believe that situated cultural learning can change the individual and the context simultaneously (Fullan, 2001: 126) based on the premise that “what is gained as a group must be shared as a group” (2001:132). Knowledge is people and information becomes knowledge only when it takes on a social life (Brown & Duguid, 2000).

Given this situated social/cultural learning and a constructivist perspective, we looked for possible models in use at the present time. Foremost amongst various options was found in the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP-IBO, 2012). We particularly focused on the trans-disciplinary matrix whereby the learner constructs meaning from a variety of experiences based on an interaction between inquiry, attitudes, skills and action. The PYP trans-disciplinary inquiry is structured on six organizing themes. First, “who we are”, that is, the nature of the self, beliefs and values, community culture, and what it means to be human. Next is situational, “where we are in time and place” that addresses personal histories, local and global perspectives, homes and journeys, migrations and explorations, along with the contributions of individual and civilizations. The third theme “how we express ourselves” examines the ways in which we discover and express ideas, feelings, beliefs, and values through language and the arts. Fourth, “how we organize ourselves” is a look into human systems and communities, the world of work, its nature and its value. “How we share the planet” deals with rights and responsibilities in sharing finite resources with other people and with other living things, and communities and relationships within and between them. The sixth organizing theme is “how the work works”, an exploration into the physical world and science and technology.

Our intention is at the teacher is able to assess cultural gaps, or in other words, to find ways that are available to empower a teacher to make the attitudes and attributes of a hidden curriculum explicit. This process we liken to the use of the “Johari Window” (Ingham & Luft, 1955), a simple tool used to improve self-awareness, and mutual understanding between individuals. The Johari Window can also be used to assess and improve a group's relationship with other groups. The tool is especially relevant to the development of ECCO due to its emphasis on behaviour, empathy, cooperation, inter-group development and interpersonal development. The tool is embedded in the model.

Attitudes are explicitly stated in the PYP (appreciation, commitment, confidence, cooperation, creativity, curiosity, empathy, enthusiasm, independence, integrity, respect, and tolerance), as are their respective descriptors (accepting responsibility; respecting others, cooperating; resolving conflict; group decision making; and, adapting a variety of group roles). Additionally, aspects of

PYP communication skills (non-verbal communication) and self-management skills (codes of behavior and informed choice), we considered to be of potential benefit to teachers who do not have access to the IB frameworks and who are not trained as PYP educators. What was noteworthy for ECCO inclusion was that the PYP trans-disciplinary matrix culminates in action which both enhances learning and provides service.

Through a mix of cognitive and affective aspects, ECCO is a dialogical process that incorporates teacher responsiveness, modeling, and active listening. Cranton (1996) describes the dialogical process as collaborative learning, where individuals interact to better understand themselves, each other, and their social world. In this type of group learning, meaning-making is shared and the group collectively constructs new knowledge. To make this aspect more practical, we turned to a group development model (Blanchard, 2004a; 2004b) to locate more specific techniques that a teacher could adapt to the needs of individual students and classroom situations. We specifically wanted to incorporate aspects of “four leadership styles” (directing, coaching, supporting and delegating) (Blanchard, *et al.*, 2004a) along with the four identified stages of group development (“storming” - orientation, “forming” - dissatisfaction, “performing” - integration, and “norming” – “production”) (Blanchard, *et al.*, 2004b). It is our belief that by incorporating the above sources, that the proposed ECCO model can provide a suitable and appropriate start for a teacher to develop cultural competency and inter-cultural dialogue without a theoretical under-pinning and without an extensive background knowledge of the model that were included in the above-described design process.

The ECCO model and intended use

In the ECCO model, reciprocal learning is essential: students are responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping other students to learn. The goal is to create an atmosphere of achievement with shared goals. Students are encouraged to use their own unique backgrounds, experience and language within the elements of co-operative learning (Kagan,1993).

Rather than teaching cooperation or social interdependence as concepts, students manifest this learning through what they produce and come to appreciate the contributions of various perspectives and cultural backgrounds, recognizing that group members share a common outcome.



Figure 1. The ECCO Model

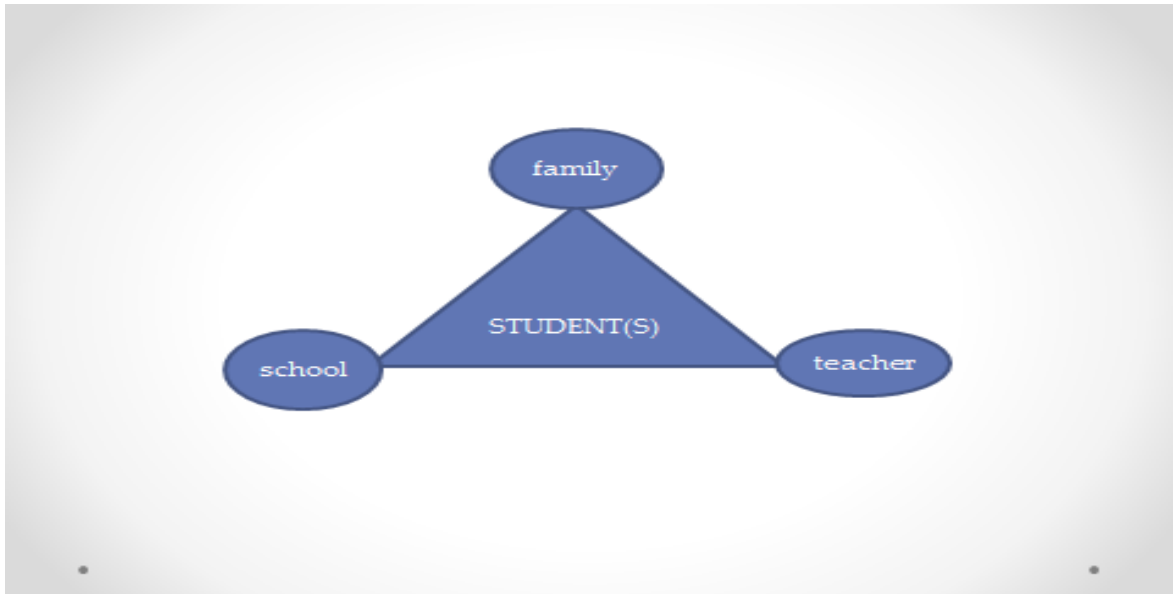


Figure 2. The student world

The student is situated at the center of the model, bounded in their world often by both the existing possibilities and constraints of family, school and the teacher within the classroom.

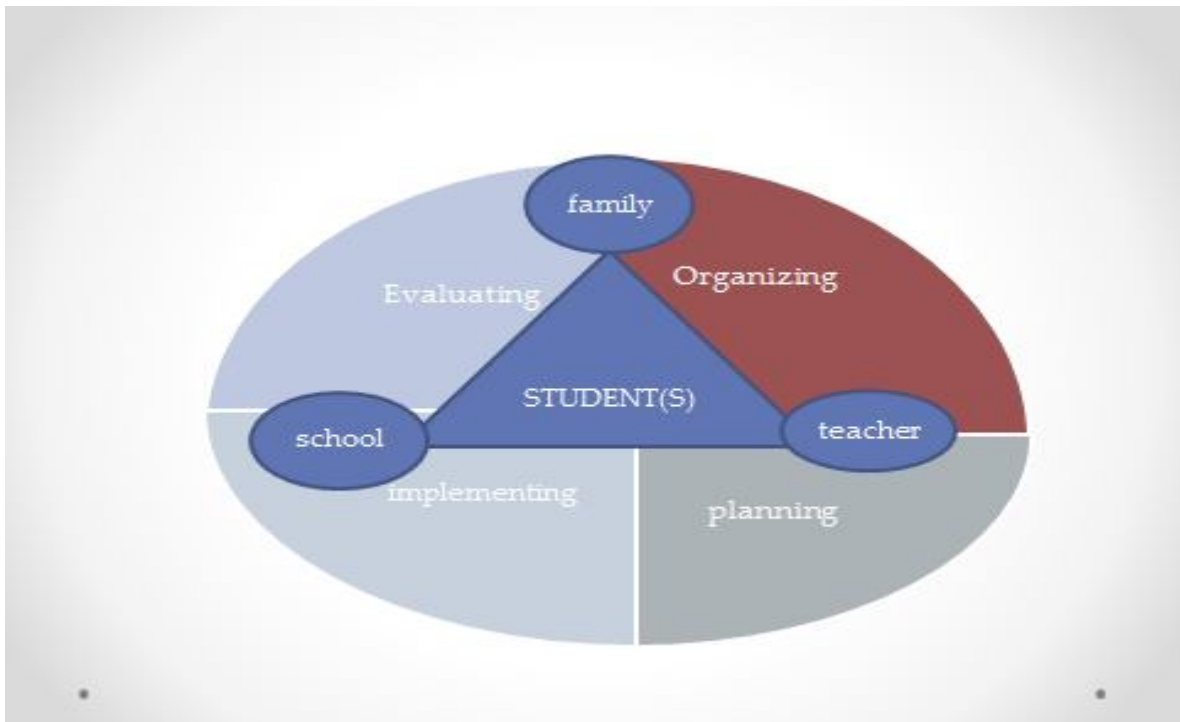


Figure 3. The curriculum cycle and the classroom environment

We understand in practical terms that the curriculum adapts to changing circumstances, and that no single stakeholder may lay claim to it. Furthermore, given that teachers and students live in a world that doesn't belong exclusively to any group in particular, we argue that there exists the capacity to shift from one environment to another without betraying one's loyalties; and, that it is possible to

adopt a position of holding multiple identities simultaneously. The teacher works in a cycle that allows for a dynamic process of evaluating, organizing, implementing and planning.

I. Evaluation

The teacher evaluates the context of the learner environment much like the process used to conduct action research. Evaluation actually begins the process in which teachers assess “cultural gaps” in the class between learner and learner, or between teacher and learner. Students experience informal modes of education via social networking, cultural organizations, and the media and these are not always tangible to the teacher, hence the “gap”. Often within school environments, there is an emphasis on formal schooling and with it a lack of acknowledgement of the multiple learning spaces available through a hidden curriculum, and through the transmission of local and indigenous knowledge and values. Families can provide a basis for values and attitudes that remain considerably outside the intended norms and curriculum of state-sector schools. This part of the ECCO model, much like the Johari Window, is meant to recognize and uncover sources of informal student education, and to expose and include them as part of a cultural dialogue.

II. Organizing

To add more substantive ideas and put them into action with suitable activities and discussion, the classroom teacher needs to locate resources and activities that meet learner needs. Available online to teachers are links from EU sites with lessons ready for classroom use (HREAc, 2004). With appropriate materials, teachers can create a welcoming classroom environment, access prior knowledge of their learners, and plan a direction for classroom integration. Incorporating elements of Cooperative Learning is particularly useful when organizing learning activities. These include interpersonal skills, group decisions and processing, face-to-face interactions, group decision-making, positive interdependence, personal and group accountability (Kagan, 1993). This part of the model is meant to initiate the teacher into the process of finding suitable materials to encourage cross-cultural dialogue. Determining the level of group development is another aspect conducted at this stage.

III. Planning

The teacher sets appropriate content goals throughout the subject areas of the curriculum searching for cultural clichés and stereotypes whether within resources or student behaviours. Planning for intercultural competence means that the teacher learns to recognize cultural in-groups, and introduces behaviors that address attitudes of empathy, respect and appreciation.

IV. Implementing

The teacher monitors the process between students and self-checks teacher behaviours that either inhibit or promote dialogue. There are many additional resources for the classroom teacher available online (HREAc, 2004). Sustained use of the model we maintain will lower isolation, encourage participation and build community through shared practice (McKeown, 2009).

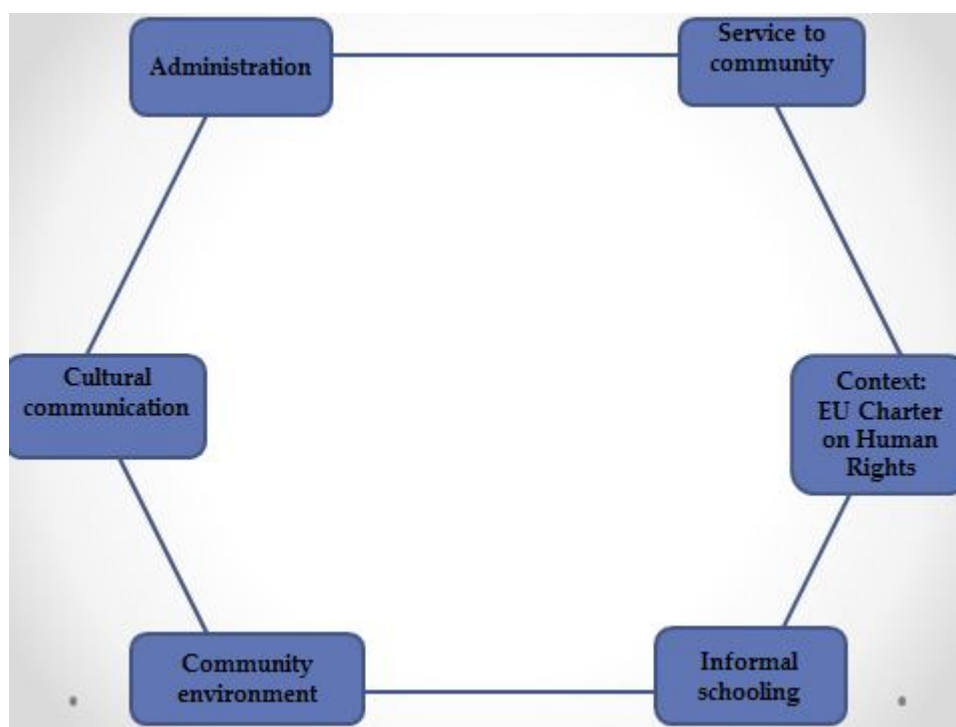


Figure 4. The school and community context

The six context elements in Figure Four above include administration, cultural communication, community environment, informal schooling, the *Charter of Fundamental Human Rights of the European Union*, and service to community. Each may have a significant effect on the teaching and learning environment, or in combination. It is crucial that the teacher gains an awareness of these factors practical interactions with the school community and by gaining a thorough knowledge of the learners.

Informal schooling includes aspects that touch students' daily lives such as social networking, cultural organizations, and the media. Cultural communication refers to instances where messages about the value and efficacy of formal schooling are shared and modeled at home, both with peers and in the wider community. These may include aspects of access to (and value of) education, social mobility, and socio-economic background. A pertinent example is the *EU Charter of Fundamental Human Rights*, a recent document which may not be familiar to all constituent communities.

School administration and the wider municipal administrative sector play a significant role in the direction in which schools and cities are headed. These environments may influence the ways in which the ECCO model can be applied. Given recent events in various cities of Europe where there has been rioting and social upheaval, there is evidence of an awakening spirit of entitlement and participatory citizenship. Of course, the unfortunate violent acts against particular ethnic and religious groups seen in other cities across Europe are a painful reminder of the negative direction in which individuals can proceed, with disastrous consequences.

It is the interaction of the above six elements that contribute to a lively cultural dialogue if approached sensitively through, for example, journals, anecdotes, surveys, and class discussions. It ought to be remembered that the ECCO model is intended as a pathway, not as a roadmap; although that development is a possibility, and a continuing dialogue which the authors would welcome enthusiastically.

Discussion

While we have outlined the development of the ECCO model, primarily from the point of view of potential use in European classrooms with diverse student populations, the intention is for the model to be effectively used also in Turkey to promote intercultural dialogue, cultural awareness, and to avoid the use of stereotypes. Our aim is to put ECCO into practice, simply and without additional curriculum support; in classrooms that are either homogeneous or heterogeneous. It is through an implementation period that the utility and efficacy of ECCO will be more clearly demonstrated as a tool for practical use, particularly in Turkish classrooms.

The proposed next stage of our investigation is to pilot the use of ECCO with selected teachers in state-sector Anatolian schools to determine the ease with which it can be used, and the benefits it may bring to both teacher and learner, and the change in teacher practice it encourages and if that change moves a class toward the development of shared community and shared practice. Our particular interest is in reaching those classrooms that would be otherwise without this type of support, and to illustrate clearly both the availability and accessibility of an ECCO model. To this end, we whole-heartedly invite educators to participate in this endeavor whether in European schools or in Turkey, or elsewhere. The ongoing study will gather data evidence from both teachers and learners.

We have questions, lots of questions, on the ECCO journey that we plan to answer within a larger frame of reference. How will ECCO support other areas of pedagogy development within classrooms aiming to integrate curriculum areas? To what extent can ECCO lead to further aspects of cultural rapprochement? Will teachers need further detailed support or will the model serve as an adequate starting point for assessing cultural gaps? Will the simplicity of the ECCO model be a hindrance or serve as a benefit to educators? We eagerly await input from other researchers

As teachers and learners adapt to changing environments in a globalized world, our firmly held belief is that ECCO is a very encouraging pathway forward wherein learners and teachers mutually adjust an individualized perspective to a more broadly encompassing set of beliefs wherein they may be able to hold disparate points of view congruently. In this reconstructing of cultural identity, both learner and teacher demonstrate mutual acceptance. ECCO is a contributing step from a “live and let live” attitude of tolerance, to a progressive leap indicated in the proverb, “live and learn”. It is through the experience and interaction of learners, and learners with teachers, that simultaneously-held multiple identities can fuel a positive learning change within an individual, a class and a school.

Conclusions

The ECCO model is intended as a process by which both students and tutors are encouraged to accept, to respect, to find mutual benefit, and thereby avoid the use of stereotypes. The goal is to successfully manage interactions with cultural “others”. That is, to talk explicitly about even that which is normally taken for granted and unstated, and in so doing, to avoid cultural clichés and expose existing cultural gaps.

ECCO is a dialogical process that makes the unknown known, and in the process builds a community of shared practice. ECCO is recognition and acknowledgement of the multiple learning spaces available to learners. Students are responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping other students to learn, thereby creating an atmosphere of achievement. Students use their own unique background, experience and language within elements of cooperative learning.

Rather than teaching cooperation or social interdependence as concepts, students manifest this

learning through what they produce and come to appreciate the contributions of various perspectives and cultural backgrounds, recognizing that group members share a common outcome.

In conclusion, the ECCO model for classroom allows teachers to access a realistic and practical pathway to intercultural competence and assists them in creating create a space for intercultural dialogue that is context specific and may lead to revised cultural identity, that is simultaneous, multiple and reflective for the learner and which can enable the teacher expand their world-view. Through the use of the model, teachers may uncover stereotypes and break down cultural clichés and in so doing, lower isolation and encourage participation, thereby building community through shared practice. The authors encourage other educators to join in the ECCO dialogue as part of a wider cultural interaction.

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