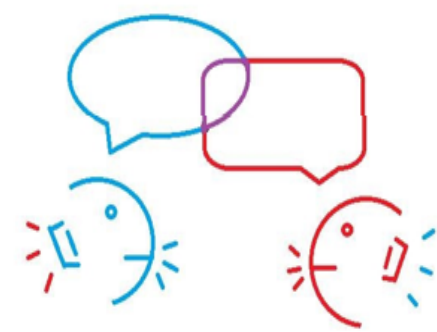# Narrating teachers' intercultural capital in Greece

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INTRODUCTION

In a global interconnected world intercultural capital is an asset for teachers who deal with different cultural backgrounds. It paves the way for significant (inter)personal and social benefits as well as intercultural awareness. Intercultural capital can serve as a framework for analyzing the relationship between educational background, cultural patterns and cultural responsiveness. An enhanced intercultural capital may lead to choices with greater benefit for personal and professional development of the teacher, thus, leading to the prevention of social exclusion and ethnocentric thinking.

Recent data suggests that Greek teachers are unprepared for managing multicultural classrooms, especially as xenophobic marches continue. The purpose of this project is to examine the life experiences of selected Greek teachers and the development of their intercultural capital that may transform their educational and social responsiveness towards diversity. The methodology adopted here is life-history which allows the researcher to explore teachers' realization of their intercultural capital.

A key research issue is the role of the family and the professional environment in forming the intercultural capital of the teacher.

INTERCULTURAL CAPITAL: THE CONTEXT

Population mobility in the context of globalization has inevitably transformed students' cultural composition. This leads to the question whether Greek teachers have the ability to communicate and coexist within a multifaceted and multicultural society with individuals who are carriers of other worldviews and perceptions, other ways of thinking and living. In other words, it is a question of whether teachers are interculturally competent to manage multicultural classes (Arvanitis, 2011).

Intercultural competence is a key component that each individual should develop to achieve, promote and sustain democratic societies. According to Deardoff (2011), intercultural competence is described in terms of attitudes, skills and knowledge, which aim at the effective and appropriate treatment of intercultural situations. In this project, the nature of intercultural competence and its inextricable link with intercultural capital in the promotion and acceptance of diversity are examined.

Drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory on cultural capital (knowledge and experience that serve as assets) and social capital (networks of relationships and influence), intercultural capital includes intercultural experiences, skills, and competencies (Pöllmann, 2013). Intercultural capital assumes the skills to successfully interact with cultural *others*. These skills form a necessary prerequisite for intercultural dialogue and learning. Studies showed that intercultural capital can explain differences and gaps between education, lifestyles, cultural beliefs and social status (DiMaggio, 1987; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Lareau, 1987; Cookson & Persell, 1985; de Graaf, 1986; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996). In fact, research has shown that intercultural capital influences individual political stances (Lamont, 1987; DiMaggio, 1996) and religious beliefs. Recent research has shown that intercultural capital can serve as a predictor of educational success (Nuñez, 2009).

Overall, intercultural capital can be realized through four interrelated factors: (Individual Characteristics/Practice, Familial Capital Resources, Fields of Struggle over (Symbolic) Power and Group Memberships) that form the intercultural capital of teachers.
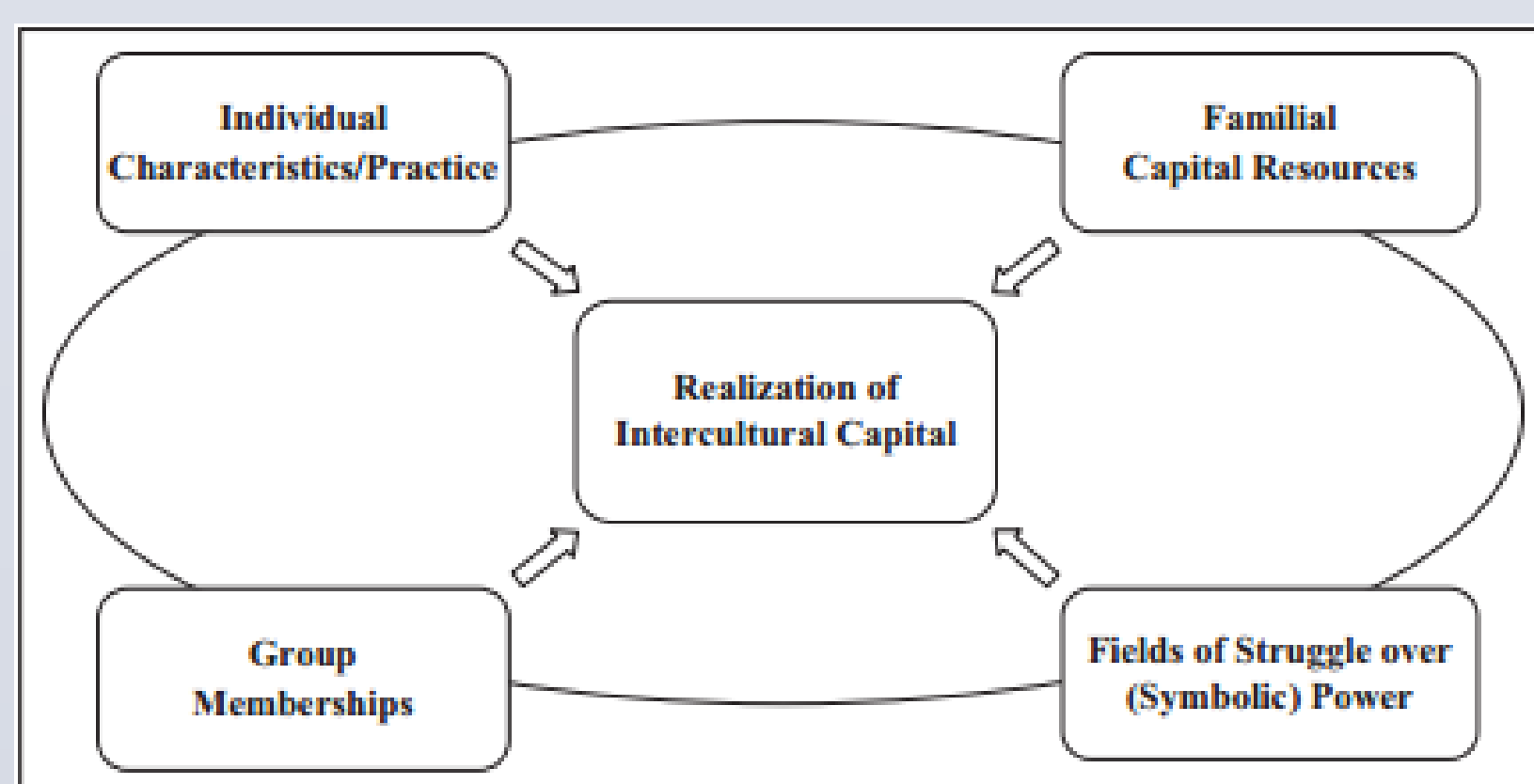

Figure 1. The realization of intercultural capital as the product of four interrelated factors (Pöllmann, 2013:3).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this project is to study how teachers form their teanderstandings of intercultural capital and which of the factors described above are detected in its construction. Stories and storytelling practices are assumed to be closely tied to human social formations. Thus, narrative analysis is adopted to examine whether enhanced intercultural capital implies high family involvement or well-built professional status/networks of teachers in Greece. Teachers' life histories showcase the factors that have influenced the construction and consolidation of their intercultural capital and shape their practice in a multicultural school environment. Research objectives are focussed on: a) the factors that shape intercultural capital; b) the influence of the "primary" family habitus and the "secondary" professional habitus in teachers' intercultural capital.

In this project, two teacher narratives are presented to describe the factors that shape intercultural experiences, relationships and rationalities between and betwixt (different) cultures as well as skills and competencies towards a successful interaction with cultural *others*.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Extensive narrative analysis of two teacher life histories implies that intercultural capital is basically formed by individual teacher characteristics (e.g. gender, age, educational background and skills). Specifically, the first teacher was a man in his late 50s, coming from a seaside town and having completed the basic education without any further training. The other teacher was a female in her late 40s, coming from a mountainous city, well-educated with further training. Due to her continuous education, she seemed more flexible to deal with diversity. When they were asked how would they react in an incident of social exclusion of a student because of his origin, the man replied that he would interfere if it happened in his classroom, otherwise he would inform the principal. The female teacher replied that she would sort this situation immediately and inform the parents of the children.

The second important factor that was identified in both narratives was the role of the family. Family background, morals, values and upbringing played a key role in teachers' learning pathways and life orientations. Both teachers grew up in a supportive and affluent family environment. A major difference was found in their perception of ethnic, racial and religious diversity. It seems that due to maternal influence, the male teacher had adopted an ethnocentric view. On the other hand, the female teacher developed a strong sense of social inclusion and equity because of her father's atheist beliefs which often led her family to marginalization.

As far as the social integration of both teachers' is concerned, a major difference came from their gender roles. The male teacher had daily participation in groups with friends, volunteering in NGO associations during weekends and frequent presentations in professional networks and events (meetings, conferences, exhibitions). On the other hand, the female teacher, due to the fact that she is a mother of three under-aged children, she participated occasionally in groups with friends and more often with those that they were co-workers. Even though both teachers were married with children, the social life of the woman was strongly affected.

The fourth factor, namely the symbolic "power" or "power" that exists primarily within marginalized or hierarchically structured groups, was partly identified through narratives. Preliminary data suggests that where "hierarchies" exist, teachers felt that they are not accepted and often defrauded by members of the ruling group. Notably, the male teacher pointed out that due to his origin from a small town was treated differently by his school principal; a fact that affected their communication.

These findings suggest that intercultural capital can be shaped mainly by individual characteristics, social integration, power and family. It seems that it can influence teachers' attitudes towards accepting the *other* and lead to a change in attitudes, especially those that come from a supportive and non-ethnocentric family environment. A finding that needs further research and stands out is the role of the gender in the construction of the intercultural capital.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Overall, intercultural capital is capable of acting as a communication channel for the teacher in different linguistic, cultural and social contexts, contributing decisively to the development of skills necessary for living in a global society (Pöllmann, 2013). Teachers who can draw on a rich cultural heritage that comes from a supportive family environment are more likely to accumulate highly valuable and widely transferable varieties of intercultural capital and benefit from their accumulation, by others who cannot enjoy such privileges. However, a basic parameter is the social integration that includes the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes that one must have in order to be able to respond to a modern multicultural context. The concept of intercultural capital explicitly implies intercultural communication skills, abilities and sensitivities.

If intercultural capital affects teacher intercultural competence, then it is an important asset for better integration and inclusion of differences. Enhanced intercultural capital means choices with greater benefit to individual development and prevention of social exclusion.

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