

Education and Migration

policies and practices for integration and inclusion

A staff development seminar in cooperation with the NESSE network of experts

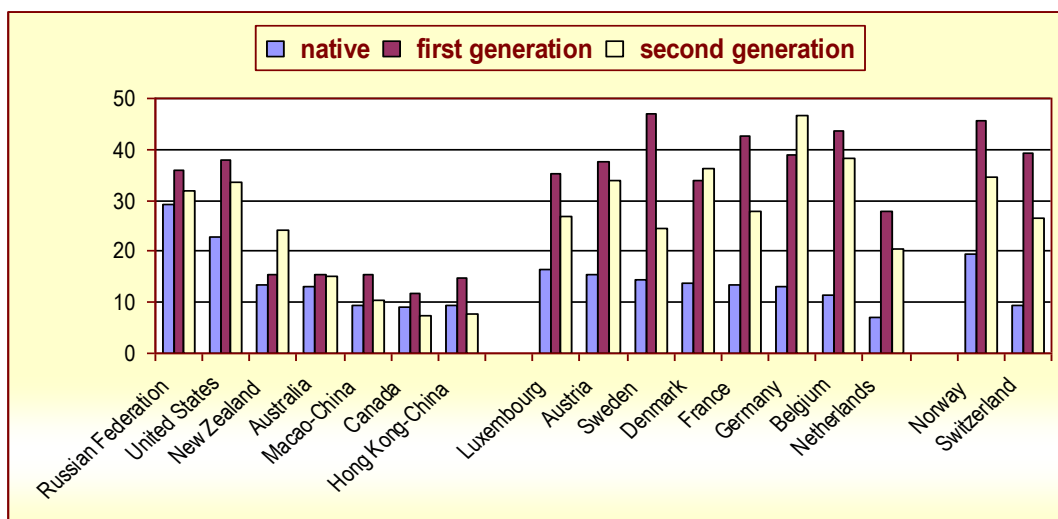
This was the fourth of a series of Commission staff development seminars on social aspects of education and training organised by DG EAC and delivered by members of the [NESSE network of experts](#). In this seminar, [Professor Ides Nicaise](#) from the University of Leuven (BE) discussed migration and its multiple relationships with, and effects on, education and training systems. The seminar left little doubt that European Commission has a crucial role to play in the fight against discrimination within and through education.

A smooth integration of immigrants in European societies is a key contemporary challenge for the EU. With increasing migration into and within an already quite culturally differentiated EU, there is an urgent need for more knowledge sharing on the nature and effectiveness of cultural and social integration processes. **Education and training can play a vital role in this process** and there are important benefits to be gained from sharing knowledge about successes and failures to date.

In his introduction, **Professor Nicaise** projected a table (building on PISA 2003 statistics) which showed a glaring gap in numeracy between native students and first and second generation

immigrants at age 15. Whatever the reason may be (differences in language barriers, differences in socio-economic profile of immigrants, cultural barriers etc.), said Prof. Nicaise, "the gap is much larger in European countries than in other parts of the world". He argued that whereas second-generation immigrants have closed the gap to a large extent in a country like Sweden, their position has hardly improved, or indeed deteriorated in other countries (e.g. Denmark, Germany).

Table 1. % underachievers in numeracy (level 1 or below) by migration status in PISA 2003.



The speaker noted that several theories compete in explaining the educational performance gap between native students and those from immigrant backgrounds: he mentioned the theory of Murray and Herrnstein (who refer to biological / genetic factors) and the cultural deficit theory of Lewis and Loury. Jungbluth and Hirtt, he said, emphasise socio-economic deprivation as a key factor while Berry and Bourhis focus on problems of cultural integration. He noted that several theories of discrimination coexist (Becker's "taste" model, Krueger's "power" model, Akerlof's model of social customs, Arrow's theory of "statistical discrimination", and the "biased screening" model launched by Borjas and Goldberg).

The speaker focused his presentation on the two main opponent theories: the socio-economic deprivation hypothesis and the cultural integration hypothesis.

Professor Nicaise explained that **according to the deprivation hypothesis**, immigrant students just face the same problems as native students with a similar socioeconomic status: it is mainly **poverty** that explains their educational disadvantage.



For example, he said, Hirtt (2006) showed that half of the Turkish and Moroccan mothers in Flanders had no more than a primary education diploma; as regards fathers, he found that the unemployment rate among fathers of second-generation students was about twice the rate among first-generation fathers (47% in the former group as against 26% in the latter). Such deprivation, said the speaker, affects the human, material and social inputs that parents can invest into their children. After correcting for social background characteristics, the ethnic gap in education performance had disappeared in the French Community, not in the Flemish Community. However, in the 2003 PISA study, correcting for socioeconomic background did not reduce the observed gap to a very large extent (OECD 2006).

The cultural integration hypothesis, said Professor Nicaise, initially focussed on the attitudes of immigrants towards their own "home" culture and the culture of the host country. The "bilateral acculturation model", proposed by Berry (1990) and amended by Bourhis e.a. (1997) takes into account attitudes of both the immigrant and the host communities and focuses on interactions, without stigmatising any culture as such. Moreover, said the speaker, these authors state that acculturation patterns characterised as *assimilation* or *individualism* need not be problematic if both parties share the same attitudes. Tensions arise mainly as a consequence of divergent attitudes between the parties. Moreover, the patterns of relationships may well differ within the same country, across immigrants from different origins, or across time. In other words, he concluded, the bilateral acculturation model is more "neutral" and flexible than other cultural theories of ethnic disadvantage.

In the context of education, said the speaker, issues such as the language policy of schools, the treatment of other religions, family education patterns and gender roles are probably among the most sensitive and main catalysts of acculturation problems. Whenever a school attempts to enforce the use of the national language in the canteen or schoolyard (often with the best intention of fostering language acquisition), this may be perceived by immigrant youth and their parents as a sign of contempt, argued Professor Nicaise. Schools urging parents to speak the national language with their children may be seen as interfering in the privacy of families. They may unconsciously interfere with patterns of authority and affect emotional relationships between different members of a family. Christian schools in some countries, said professor Nicaise, may in fact discourage Muslim applicants by emphasising their religious profile. Even non-denominational schools, he said, may be perceived as discriminatory by banning religious symbols such as the headscarf. Western values of

individualism, self-determination, entrepreneurship may clash with more collectivist values or hierarchical relationships in other cultures.

For professor Nicaise, it goes without saying that **such tensions affect the well-being of immigrant children at school and raise feelings of distrust on the part of their families.** This may explain why immigrant parents prefer to keep their toddlers at home rather than sending them to kindergarten. Teenagers may at worst get disconnected from their family as well as from school, ending up in a sphere of anomy and early drop out, said the speaker. Other symptoms of acculturation problems include segregated school choice, tensions between parents and schools, behavioural problems or underachievement.

According to the expert, **the deprivation and integration hypotheses lead to different (though complementary) policy priorities.** In the former case, said Professor Nicaise, priority will be given to compensatory measures such as preschool programmes, multiservice schools, financial or material support and educational priority funding. Believers of the integration theory will prefer to invest in strategies aimed at fostering communication and integration: school de-segregation strategies, home-school liaison services, intercultural education, mother tongue education and intercultural teacher training.

Some conclusions

1. ***First versus second generation:*** the striking differences between countries may be attributed to the different socioeconomic profile of successive cohorts of immigrants, the linguistic proximity between home and host language, the success of integration policies, etc. Little evidence is available about the relative importance of different explanations.
2. ***Language policy:*** "language and content integrated learning" (CLIL - sometimes also called "mother tongue education" is seen as

more effective at kindergarten and primary school level. This is because children develop their cognitive skills more smoothly once they master their mother tongue sufficiently. Once their cognitive development has "taken off", schools can gradually shift to teaching in the second language. However, CLIL presupposes (a) that – just for reasons of affordability - the ethnic composition of a school population be sufficiently homogeneous, and (b) that teachers mastering the mother tongue of ethnic minorities be available. CLIL strategies have failed in many cases where these conditions were not fulfilled.

3. ***Discrimination:*** The dividing line between problematic acculturation and discrimination is a very thin one. The European Commission has an important role to play in the fight against discrimination within education. For this purpose, it is desirable to understand the motives for discrimination and to adopt a variety of intervention strategies, ranging from teacher training to legal or juridical measures.
4. ***De-segregation:*** the picture differs greatly between countries – e.g. between the US and EU Member States. In the US, free school choice (through voucher systems or otherwise) seems to be an appropriate solution, in a context of strong residential segregation and under-resourcing of public schools. In many European countries, free school choice has exacerbated school segregation. For the speaker, de-segregation policy in EU countries should probably concentrate on equalising the quality of education and preventing selective admission rules on the part of schools.

Selected references suggested by the speaker

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