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Citizenship education for diversity

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This article aims to identify solid grounds for equality and diversity to be effective and functional throughout society. These fundamentals start with education. It provides an analysis of the system changes needed to ensure more equal access to and opportunities in education in Europe, in particular for ethnic and religious minorities.

'An inclusive and democratic Europe in which people can enjoy their full potential with all their diversity'

This is the vision of [CEJI-A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe](#), a European NGO which has been developing diversity education programmes across Europe for the last 20 years. We feel it is important to strive for a positive vision while at the same time confronting the obstacles to achieve it, such as racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia and gender-based discrimination.

International migration is having a great impact on diversity within nations and within Europe today. The political, social and cultural dynamics surrounding migration, embedded within historical factors such as colonization, create a situation in which there are structurally or culturally advantaged (privileged/empowered) or disadvantaged (marginalized) groups. They may be marginalized due to their skin colour, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, or citizenship status. The quest for equality and social justice by and for such groups is the main driving force behind the increasing recognition of diversity [1].



One of the privileges of dominant group status is the luxury to simply see oneself as an individual. Those in subordinate groups, however, can never fully escape being defined by their social group memberships. This does not mean that all members of a particular social group will necessarily define themselves in exactly the same way. There is an ongoing, changing tension between individual and group identity(ies) that takes place within historical and contextual phenomena [2].

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Giving respect to the diversity within individuals and amongst social groups affirms the equality of human rights. It also provides recognition of the others with whom social space is shared, with whom common norms need to be negotiated, and with whom we learn, work and live as neighbours.

Recognition of diversity does not imply a more elaborate stratification amongst social groups, but rather it creates more connections between people across their differences, for example, as parents. This allows people to recognize their own and others' unique potential as individuals with all their diversity. This allows people to appreciate the full humanity of another, not only under a one-dimensional label of "migrant" or "Muslim" or "Jew".

Living productively and peacefully within the reality of diversity requires:

- Self-awareness of one's own identity, belongings, values, perspectives and prejudices;
- Skills to communicate interculturally, cooperate effectively, think critically, and decrease the impact of prejudices on behaviours and confront discrimination (individually and systemically).

Schools and school systems have an enormous role and responsibility to play in developing these skills and self-awareness. "Education is at the heart of both personal and community development; its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full and to realize our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and the achievement of our personal aims... Its achievement, though long and difficult, will be an essential contribution to the search for a more just world, a better world to live in." [3]

This sense of personal responsibility for ourselves and our environments is absolutely essential to achieving a world that cherishes the values of equality, diversity and participation. It is necessary for those who come from more advantaged backgrounds to use their privileges responsibly, and for those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds to be truly empowered to self-determine their own lives.



For this to occur, however, there must be a trans-sectoral approach to systemic, institutional and cultural change so that processes of economic and social segregation are interrupted, such as ghettoization, unequal treatment by police, employment and housing discrimination, to name just a few. School systems need to clearly assess the inequalities of access and success which exist within them and engage in a long-term plan that addresses all of the following factors:

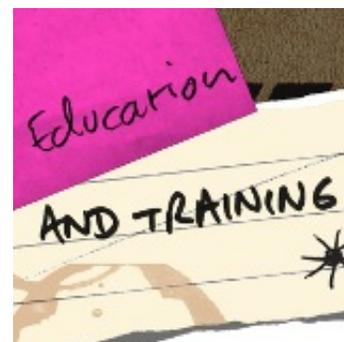
- Management, teacher and staff prejudices as well as prejudices commonly held by students and parents
- Logistical (time, resources) obstacles to new and creative initiatives
- Pedagogical strategies that are mutually reinforcing a clear set of values, including cross-curricular learning objectives, in-school and out-of-school projects, special events, and subject status of courses such as citizenship and human rights
- Democratic governance that demonstrates participatory methods to students and parents
- Monitoring strategies and agencies (inspection systems, vetting of materials, research, public examinations) to assess qualitative and quantitative school achievement
- Barriers to parental involvement and sense of responsibility for their children's enjoyment and achievement in school
- Community relations between schools, NGOs, local authorities, social workers and the neighbourhoods which they serve

For schools to play a productive role in interrupting the cycle of racism and inequality, we recommend an approach of "Citizenship Education for Diversity" coming from a societal vision based upon the values of equality, diversity, participation and social responsibility.

Ten Key Principles of Citizenship Education for Diversity [4]

Recognising the importance of democratic school governance, the critical value of lifelong learning, and the interdependency of the various members of the school community; in order for students to learn to become active citizens within and respectful of diversity, schools should:

1. Foster respect for an appreciation of differences, and opposition to discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social origin, physical or mental condition and on other bases;
2. Facilitate the development of students' self-confidence and competence to learn, participate and develop their potential as whole individuals;
3. Provide an environment that is inclusive and respectful of diversity and human rights for all;
4. Establish a process of communication and decision-making that encourages the participation of the various stakeholders in the school community (students, teachers, parents, non-teaching staff and management);
5. Establish clear policies, programmes and pedagogical practice to address and prevent discrimination, exclusion, violence and bullying;
6. Empower students to analyse social problems, identify potential solutions and be capable to act appropriately;
7. Foster knowledge and experience of different cultures as well as an understanding of multiple perspectives



on historical and contemporary events;

- 8. Foster experience and understanding of systems of governance, including local, regional, national and transnational decision-making structures and provide opportunities to learn how social, cultural and political change can occur;
- 9. Provide a variety of positive role models reflecting the socio-cultural diversity of the student population;
- 10. Make use of participatory pedagogies that include knowledge, critical analysis, cooperation and intercultural skills for action to further respectful diversity.

Planning systemically is key to long-term change, but so can a positive experience upon entry into a new country or a new school. A welcoming and thoughtful first contact between teacher, student and parents can set the tone for their engagement in their child's education. Teachers can make a few simple considerations that can go a long way in making children and families feel part of their new school community:

- “Are the names of the child and their parents correctly pronounced?”
- “What language(s) does the child speak, and what is his or her level in these language(s)?”
- “How does one say some key phrases in the child's first language, such as a greeting, ‘please/thank you’, ‘join in’, ‘stop’, ‘well done/very good,’ etc?”
- “What is the child's religion, how is it practised, and has this any implications for school and classroom planning?”
- “Will there be specific issues for children concerning food, jewellery, or clothing?”
- “Are there any cultural practices that might affect classroom interaction?”
- “Are there actions which are deemed inappropriate or rude in the child's home culture but which may not cause offence to members of the dominant ethnic group, or vice versa?”

Building an inclusive environment is a commitment which must be infused as a core value and practice in the school environment. Misunderstandings can be avoided, conflicts can be prevented and differences can be leveraged as a resource for personal and collective growth. Schools can provide the building blocks to a lifetime of positive participation and enjoyment of one's right to equality in diversity.

[1] James A. Banks et al, Democracy and Diversity: Principles and Concepts for Educating Citizens in a Global Age, Seattle WA, 2005, p.18.

[2] Maurianne Adams, Lee Ann Bell and Pat Griffin (eds), Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, London, 1997.

[3] From Learning the Treasure Within, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, 1996

[4] Citizenship Education for Diversity: Guidelines and Considerations for Policy Makers and Practitioners, resulting from a study led by CEJI, completed in 2007, with funding from the EU Socrates Accompanying Measures Programme (2006-0375/001-001 S02 81AWC) and the Compagnia di San Paolo.

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