



INTERCULTURAL CITIES POLICY BRIEFS

Urban policies for intercultural education

While in many countries local authorities do not have competence over the educational content, and sometimes over the recruitment of teachers, there are many actions they can take to foster the role of schools as intercultural spaces. This is an important element of local strategies for diversity and inclusion.

The Council of Europe and its partner cities have developed an intercultural approach to diversity and inclusion (including migrant integration) which enables cities to reap the benefits and minimise the risks related to migration and cultural diversity. Its key elements are:

- Creating spaces and opportunities for deep interaction and co-creation between people of different cultural origins and backgrounds to build trust and realise the creative potential of diversity;
- Power sharing – involving people of diverse origins in decision-making in urban institutions - political, educational, social, economic, cultural;
- Fostering intercultural competence in public, private and civil society organisations;
- Embracing cultural pluralism and multiple identities through leadership discourse and urban pedagogy actions;
- Managing conflict positively, busting stereotypes and engaging in a debate about the impact and potential of diversity for local development;

In the field of education, the intercultural approach focuses on schools as diverse, culturally competent, intercultural spaces, and as vectors of learning and practicing cultural reciprocity, pluralism and citizenship.

1. Schools as spaces for intercultural learning and interaction

- Cities should, foster inclusive education, in particular by managing the diversity of pupils across schools so as to avoid ethically/culturally segregated schools. They should also ensure that the cultural diversity among teachers corresponds to that of the community. “White and middle class flight” and low educational results can be addressed by making diverse schools places of educational excellence.

The Rütli school in Berlin Neukölln had become notorious all over Germany in 2006, when the national press had reported a general climate of insecurity and very low educational achievement. An ambitious

and unique reform was undertaken, merging academic and vocational tracks together into a single, continuous path that keeps together pupils from the age of 6 till 15. The school campus hosts various facilities and agencies and provides a broad cultural offer for pupils and adults, in particular parents. The action of educators, teachers and counselors is coordinated to provide the best possible level of support for parents, children and young people, who are also invited to participate in the educational decisions and school life in general. Cultural diversity and multilingualism are treated as positive opportunities and are nurtured. Intercultural mediators play a bridging role between school and parents. The new system has been approved by 90% of the teachers, and the others had the liberty to go and work in a different school. The Rütli school is today rather trendy among teachers, because many apply to work there.

- Adequate resources should be provided to schools, in accordance with the proportion of non-native speaker pupils, for additional educational support. It is also essential to encourage the networking between Principals and teachers from different schools to enable peer learning and the mainstreaming of good practice.
- In order to encourage schools to become genuine intercultural communities, it is essential to encourage the involvement of parents of diverse backgrounds in school boards and governing bodies, as well as in the planning and organisation of educational projects and events.
- Pedagogical methods which encourage collaborative learning as opposed to competition have been found to be much more helpful for supporting learners of migrant backgrounds in building social capital, and in building trust and mutual respect between children of different backgrounds.

Oslo is anxious to avoid the emergence of “ghetto” schools and there is little evidence to suggest they are a growing phenomenon, although a certain amount of ‘white flight’ is reported. The city believes its most effective tool is to make schools in areas of high cultural diversity more attractive than those in homogeneous areas by offering high quality staff and facilities. Therefore many of the schools in the poorer and most diverse eastern part of Oslo are in the highest rank of the city’s schools.

The Gamlebyen Skole openly demonstrates its pride with the diversity of their pupils by exhibiting various cultural artefacts and decorative art objects, as well as books from different countries, helping students of migrant background to find a connection between school and home, and raise the cultural awareness of all students.

A project in Reggio Emilia engaged “second generation” immigrants to support foreign adolescents, their families, and their schools to address poor academic achievement. Second generation immigrant college students to work as tutors throughout the whole school year. They can also offer intercultural mediation services to the school and the families and so, although indirectly, they support parenting. In the course of the project, the second generation tutors are given the necessary assistance and aid so that the help they offer to their peers who are more likely to drop out and/or relegated to the fringes of

society can become a structured, long-lasting and repeatable experience¹. In the long run, the initiative should focus on mainstream tutors' diversity, beyond the "second generation".

In Manchester, a city-wide "schools alliance" was launched in 2012, as a response to a more fragmented education system (as a result of successive government policies that have taken control of some state schools away from local authorities). Its slogan is "cooperation, collaboration and reciprocity". One element of this is the Early Years New Model, a strategy for identifying children whose family life might not adequately prepare them for school—and a programme of activities to correct this. It is intended to halve the proportion of children who are not school ready within the next ten years.²

2. Parents as partners

Educators should consider parents³, including those with migrant background, as allies in creating favourable conditions for learning. Schools should take active steps to overcome the obstacles to the participation of parents of migrant background in the educational process (eg. language difficulties, lack of awareness and experience and even fear from relating to the school as an institution, unavailability for scheduled meetings etc.). Schools respecting parents as partners not only helps to achieve the educational goals but also reinforces the parental authority, which is important in terms of pupils' overall development as accomplished and responsible citizens. In order to enable educators to communicate effectively with parents of different backgrounds, teachers' intercultural competence should be enhanced.

Good practice examples in this respect include providing information in an accessible and non-threatening format (eg a closed letter may seem too challenging to people who may have a history of difficulties with authorities, some schools send open post cards to invite to parents' meetings); reaching out to parents via women's groups, arts groups or faith groups, as many migrant parents may be intimidated or insufficiently motivated to attend meetings in the school (they eventually will if the first contacts with the educators are positive). Meetings (formal or convivial) can be organised with parents to help educators understand the different concepts of the family, gender roles, the place of education and the relative weight of cultural and socio-economic factors in the life of migrant families. Intercultural festive occasions also help build connections between educators and parents and between parents themselves.

At the back-to-school festival in a school London Lewisham, the pupils perform music and drama. The families of all the students are invited - in this way the school staff can easily identify the families that do not take part in the school events, which may amount to a tell-tale sign of sociocultural disadvantage. A dedicated staff inside the school reaches out to the families who do not show up at these events and identifies themes and topics that could be the area of interest of specific workshops aimed at providing parents with information on the school and the system of education, and also aimed at helping them motivate their children to continue their education⁴.

¹ Quoted in « Guidelines : school approaches to family empowerment », results from the SAFE project (Reggio Emilia, Lewisham, Torino, Arrezzo, Fondazione Mondinsieme, 2014

² <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/white-working-class-overview-20140616.pdf>, page 25

³ The term « parent » is used throughout the text to facilitate reading, but it is understood that the principles apply equally to legal guardians other than parents.

⁴ Quoted in « Guidelines : school approaches to family empowerment », results from the SAFE project (Reggio Emilia, Lewisham, Torino, Arrezzo, Fondazione Mondinsieme, 2014

A very successful project in Geneva has proven (through evidence from university research on its results) that parent's involvement in process of learning in read in their own language, favours the acquisition of literacy in French. In the context of the Sac d'histoires (bag of stories) programme, children can bring a collection of bilingual books, CDs, DVDs and other media which they share with their parents, who are then given a much greater stake and involvement in their child's progress at school and improve their own language skills.

3. Fostering intercultural competence

Cities and schools should help educators and pupils build intercultural competence and the understanding of diversity and its impact on society. This can be done through including intercultural competence development as an angle in mainstream curriculum subjects: languages, history, civic education etc. can be a starting point but all subjects should be concerned. This should be supplemented by specific activities focusing on diversity and living together, carried out within or outside the school schedule. Specialist intercultural organisations which exist in many cities, such as Mondinsieme foundation (Reggio Emilia), La maison des passages (Lyon), the Multicultural centre (Botkyrka) or Doras Lumni (Limerick) can be involved in designing and delivering activities.

In a London Lewisham High school students are trained to work as facilitators and mediators or "language brokers". The school maintains a network of around 35 bilingual students (in a school of 900 students) who take a 4-weeks course (4/5 sessions, focused on practical tasks and supervision) to be trained as linguistic mediators whom the school can resort to whenever communication with parents with limited English proficiency is necessary and when it is time to welcome the incoming freshmen, so the school no longer needs external mediators⁵.

In Parla, Spain, a project by the International Cooperation and Intercultural Department and is implemented in 10 Secondary Schools (8 public and 2 private). It involves 3 sessions with each school group using participatory methodology to: foster intercultural mixing and interaction, educate in attitudes and values of equality, solidarity and inclusion; prevent attitudes of discrimination, racism and xenophobia. A team of 4 interdisciplinary instructors (students from different faculties) work in each school that implements and evaluate the project. Upon completion of the educational sessions, volunteers are invited to join a Network of Volunteers for Intercultural coexistence to continue the work in their schools.

In Oslo all future teachers follow classed in intercultural competence.

4. Schools as a bridge between family and community

Schools are organically connected to the local community and reflect its degree of cohesion or divides. They can deliberately participate in shaping the pluralist identity of the city or neighbourhood, for

⁵ idem

instance by organising debates on topical issues or intercultural dilemmas, or open days where pupils can showcase their skills and achievements.

In Berlin Neukölln pupils from the Music school have run several projects about Intercultural Neukölln, visiting diverse cultural institutions and spaces and depicting their vision of Neukölln as a diverse and creative place through a carnival float, music and dance creations.

In Turin in 8 different precincts there are 40 school yards, of which 8 are open to the public out of hours (City Council resolution of 2012). The method of shared planning involves the students. Teachers worked as facilitators. Parents contributed to the consultation phase. The high rate of migrant families among the participants characterises this project as distinctly cross-cultural⁶.

In Lyon, a project was set up at Jean Giono primary school at the request of the headmaster and teachers, who were having to deal with conflicts between pupils. In their analysis, these were due to a large extent to conflict between untold family history and the complex colonial history of France. The work carried out in the final class workshop was based on themes such as: objects and their symbolic role; fairy tales and oral transmission; voyages: across the world; the history of my family; France, a country of many cultures; France, a country of many colours; Today's France; Tomorrow's France; What does it mean to be French?... The pupils were invited to consider what made them think about not only their own culture but also the culture of others, and this constituted the originality and the value of the project. When all these discoveries had been shared, they led to a show where "everyone mixes, rubs shoulders and invites their classmates to discover and get to know one another better". Following the different workshops conducted by La Maison des Passages, the educational team at Jean Giono primary school noted a distinct improvement in relations between the pupils.

More on intercultural urban policies: www.coe.int/interculturalcities

⁶ idem