

Education Newsletter



Editorial

Children at the heart of our education systems

What better place to discuss intercultural education and the role of education in building a more humane and inclusive Europe than Istanbul, a city which is at the crossroads of cultures, which bridges two continents, a European metropolis with an oriental flair.

The central message took from this conference is that education must be at the centre of how our societies address the challenges of an increasingly globalised and open world which needs to be built on foundations of equity, multiculturalism, and respect for and understanding of difference. How we educate our children tells us more about the society we want than any number of declarations or policy statements. What children and young people do in school, their experience of how we go about the daily business of living and working together, teaches us far more about what we value in society than any number of text books or lessons. Where schools view their pupils as partners, where democracy is something they "do" rather than they talk about, and where all pupils are valued, our education systems make democracy happen.

Promoting and defending democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law is the core mission of the Council of Europe. A more humane and inclusive Europe is one which places these values at the centre of its law-making and practice. However, these values must be nurtured over a learning process starting in early childhood, in which the family, the broader social environment and both formal and non formal education play crucial roles.

That is why the 22nd Session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education was so important. It provided Ministers with an opportunity to reflect on the kinds of education policies and implementing measures which see children as the subject rather than the object of rights, and respects their rights regardless of origin or identity. Ministers were unequivocal in their resolve to ensure that values of inclusion and tolerance are at the centre of their education systems and that children are seen as crucial partners in the process of policy implementation.



from left to right: The Minister of Education of Turkey, Hüseyin Çelik, the Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Maud de Boer-Buquicchio

Maud de Boer-Buquicchio
Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

"Diversity and heterogeneity need to be seen positively. Intensive intellectual exchange is vital in order to promote better understanding of Islam. Intolerance and hate lose their power if there is an open and transparent debate about difference."

Mr Hugo Quaderer, Minister of Education, Liechtenstein

Education policies to the fore in supporting children's rights and building inclusive societies

The decision to devote the programme of the 22nd Session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education to the role of education in building a more humane and inclusive Europe represents a desire to look, in a very practical way, at how education systems are reflective of and help advance the Council of Europe's core values of democracy, human rights and rule of law. In addressing the twin themes of children's rights and inclusive education policies for social cohesion in a multicultural Europe, and by focusing on the complex issue of policy implementation, the ministers' priority was to use policy to facilitate change. Effective policy implementation should create schools where the child is seen as a subject of rights, where there is a culture and practice of democracy, greater respect for every individual, and recognition of the enrichment which cultural and social difference brings to society.



Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

The context of reform which is a reality in many European countries, and the increased awareness of the need to promote dialogue within society and between cultures, gives a particular importance to this discussion. The key challenge for

policy makers is to review together, and learn from the ways in which policies that create change can be most efficiently implemented within education systems.



Children's rights

Children's rights are increasingly a major priority area in societies which are characterised by cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. Education policies need to ensure that these rights are seen as a priority in the policy-making process and that education promotes tolerance of diversity and social inclusion.

Efficient policy responses require the involvement of all who play a crucial role in the education of young people in developing the teaching materials and methodologies which are necessary if children are to understand their rights. Parents and other key stakeholders inside and outside the school play key roles in constructing learning environments which help children to understand their rights and their role in society as fully participating citizens.

However, teaching children about their rights is not enough. The emphasis must be on practice of rights

and learning by doing in democratically governed schools where children are seen as full partners in the decision-making processes which concern their welfare.

The experience of many of the countries at the conference teaches us the importance of ensuring that children's rights are fully supported by concrete measures to ensure quality and equality within the school. Specific measures are required in order to prevent discrimination on gender, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, or disability grounds. Social minorities also need special protection within systems. There are many interesting examples of best practice in peer education of families from such groups which support their engagement with the education system. These should be more widely disseminated.

"With increasing evidence of a re-emerging intolerance in some European countries we are more than ever reminded of the key role of education. Our reflection needs to be focused on the future and how we can promote sustainable living on our own continent."

Mr Alain Mouchoux, NGO Grouping
"Education and Culture"

Social cohesion in a multicultural Europe

As in the promotion of children's rights, concerted measures, premised on the concepts of partnership, and a lifelong learning perspective, are also important in developing and

"The Committee on Culture, Science and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly will be very supportive of the work of the European Ministers of Education in showing the vision and commitment needed to build a more humane and inclusive Europe"

Ms Anne Brasseur, Committee on Culture, Science and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly

implementing effective strategies to promote intercultural education and inclusion within education systems. Schools need to be responsive to the needs of the whole range of their pupils, particularly those who are



Dolmabahçe Mosque on the Bosphorus

vulnerable, and may be in danger of dropping out of the system completely. Partnerships between schools and the broader community, particularly other welfare services and agencies, can play a key role in developing successful responses to these needs.

For policy makers, the challenge is to develop policies which not only promote social cohesion, inclusion, and equity, but enable



The Minister of Education of Turkey and Dr Ibrahim Özdemir, General Director for External Relations, Ministry of Education with the Council of Europe team in charge of the Conference

all young people to achieve their full potential at an individual level, and socially, as citizens of democratic societies.

Appropriate curricular policies, supported by teaching materials designed to prevent exclusion, are a key part of the response. There are many examples of projects involving the major stakeholders within schools and in the wider community to develop inclusive responses to these challenges. Effective generalisation of such projects can play a crucial role in informing policy development and effecting change in schools.

When addressing the issues of children's rights and the building of inclusive educational environments, ministers were particularly forceful in recognising the key role of teachers as mediators of the values of

"Areas such as the rights of the child, the right of everyone to respect and dignity are seen as increasingly important. They underpin major policy areas which will be addressed in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and the political work which is underway in the Parliamentary Assembly, the Public Authorities and the Intergovernmental Authority."

Mr Fiorenzo Stolfi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of San Marino, chairman of the Committee of Ministers (November 2006 - May 2007)

tolerance and openness to diversity, and in ensuring the practice of inclusion and democracy within schools. The implication for policy makers is that teachers need continued structured support to enable them to develop their capacity to respond to the ever-changing realities they face in helping to create effective learning communities.



Kuleli Askeri Lisesi, Istanbul

Declaration



We, the European Ministers of Education of the 49 states that have signed the European Cultural Convention (ETS No. 18), meeting in Istanbul on the occasion of the 22nd session of our standing conference, hereby adopt the present declaration [and...]:

10. undertake to:

10.1. devise appropriate policies in order to put into practice the Action Plan of the 3rd Summit, "aimed at ensuring access to education for all young people across Europe, improving its quality", ensuring that they are successful in their educational careers and promoting intercultural learning, education for democratic citizenship and human rights in a lifelong learning perspective;

10.2. implement measures in order to ensure access to quality education for all, within a society that is more humane and more just for all its members;

10.3. promote programmes for inclusive education together with other relevant players in order to promote the active involvement and civic commitment of all members of society and thus prevent educational disadvantage;

10.4. give particular consideration to children's rights in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the relevant legal instruments of the Council of Europe in framing education policies;

10.5. address, through the education programme of the Council of Europe, the full range of purposes of education:

- preparation for the labour market;
- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- personal development;
- development and maintenance of a broad knowledge base;

11. **invite** the Committee of Ministers to acknowledge the crucial role that education plays in the pursuit of the aims and core values of the Council of Europe: human rights, democracy and the rule of law and to this end, maintain the necessary resources for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of its education programmes;

12. **invite** the Committee of Ministers to instruct the Steering Committee for Education (CDED) to continue its work as set out in the appended resolutions and pay special attention to the following:

12.1. analysing and developing key competences for democratic culture and social cohesion, such as citizenship competence, intercultural competence, plurilingual competence, social commitment, a solidarity-based outlook and multiperspectivity;

12.2. developing concrete measures for inclusive education, in particular for the socially and culturally excluded;

12.3. stimulating reflection on the right to education, taking into account the provisions and implementation of existing legal instruments;

12.4. pursuing co-operation in this field with the European Union, by taking part in the practical action to be carried out in 2008 as part of European Year of Intercultural Dialogue;

12.5. further developing or strengthening co-operation in the education field with other sectors in the Council of Europe, in particular the Steering Committee on the Media and new Communication Services (CDMC), the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity, and with other institutions and organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, in particular the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Organization for Security and Co-

operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO);

12.6. contributing to the "Alliance of Civilisations" initiative, launched in 2005 by the Secretary General of the United Nations, in order to help implement the recommendations in the education field set out in Chapter VII of the report drafted by its High-Level Group (November 2006);

13. **invite** the Committee of Ministers to instruct the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research to:

13.1. work to imbue the European Higher Education Area with a holistic vision encompassing the key objectives of higher education and the values of the Council of Europe;

13.2. emphasise in this vision the values and functions of higher education in modern society as well as the ability of higher education and its graduates to address major issues, such as sustainability, democratic culture, social inclusion and intercultural dialogue;

13.3. explore further the role and responsibility of public authorities as well as of universities and of staff and students in making this vision of higher education a reality;

14. **take note** with satisfaction of the Norwegian initiative to set up a resource centre on democratic citizenship and intercultural education, working in close liaison with the Education Directorate of the Council of Europe and contributing to its programme, particularly as concerns relevant teacher training activities;

15. **express** their gratitude to the Turkish authorities for their hospitality on the occasion of the 22nd session of their standing conference;

16. **warmly thank** Slovenia for its offer to organise their next session.

