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EDUCATING ON INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE – LIVING TOGETHER IN EUROPE
Education and Culture Committee
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This document is a summary of the report drafted by the “Educating on Intercultural Dialogue – Living Together in Europe” working group of the Education and Culture Committee, Conference of INGOs, drafted under the supervision of Roseline Moreau.

The main resources for this work are:

- *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, Living Together as Equals in Dignity*, Council of Europe, 2008.
- A survey distributed to the INGOs in order to establish a set of responses on the modalities for developing efficient intercultural dialogue.
- *Competences for a Culture of Democracy. Living together as Equals in Democratic and Culturally Diverse Societies*. Council of Europe, April 2016.

PART 1: FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES AND CONCEPTS

Background: The new communication and transport means seem to considerably reduce distance and shrink temporality. Henceforth, in our ever-increasingly multicultural societies, people of different cultures, religions and beliefs interact within the same area. Furthermore, migrations, hastened by current dramatic events, are fostering these new realities. Thus, raising a number of questions:

How can we live together with our differences? How can we establish a society? How can we build something in common with our diversities? How can we establish intercultural dialogue and enable the integration of all in our societies?

Answering these questions implies scrutinising the outlines of the term “intercultural”; over to the Council of Europe which in 1986 defined the word as follows:

“If we attribute to the prefix ‘inter’ its full meaning, the use of the word ‘intercultural’ necessary involves interaction, exchange, eliminating barriers, reciprocity and genuine solidarity. If we recognise the full value of the term ‘culture’, it implies recognising values, lifestyles and the symbolic representations to which human beings - both individuals and societies - refer to when relating with others and in their view of the world.”

This term is defined once again in the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*:

“Intercultural dialogue entails a reflexive disposition, in which one can see oneself from the perspective of others.”

It is therefore not a matter of reasoning in terms of belonging or personal identity; rather, it is about promoting the decentring of perspective, i.e., the capacity to distance oneself with one’s own cultural patterns, one’s biases or one’s representations in order to interact with otherness. As such, diversity, whether with respect to groups or individuals, is a characteristic inherent to any society. These differences in cultures, religions, traditions, etc. require mutual comprehension and communication capacities which are enriching, or otherwise risk an escalation of conflicts, human rights violations or even violent acts.

Drawing on these remarks, a group called “Issues of the Working Group ‘Educating on Intercultural Dialogue - Living Together in Europe’” was constituted: the aim was to highlight the crucial role played by education in establishing intercultural dialogue through its academic and associative dimension. The terminal objective was thus defined:

“Drawing on experiences gathered from the field of intercultural education to establish a set of recommendations and innovative markers for education - formal, non-formal or informal - to contribute to the development of an inclusive society.”

PART 2: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE INGOs

Components of educating on intercultural dialogue:

Setting up intercultural dialogue implies prior policy: access to the law, professional integration, access to housing, right to health, right to education, right to employment, advocating for equal opportunities and access to social services. Families often draw from it the stability that encourages social integration, which constitutes the first crucial step towards participating in intercultural dialogue.

Importance of the pedagogical relationship: trust in social stakeholders (trainers, mediators), encouragement, bolstering self-esteem.

Promoting training situations that favour a non-formal setting rather than a formal one, such as internships, associative events or training actions (occasional sessions).

Promoting “detour pedagogy”: learning can then focus on language, professional integration, project management, inter-religious practices and conflict and dispute management. The pedagogical methods that stimulate activity and participation enhance exchanges between the participants.

Seeking to foster reciprocity: the hosting people and the hosted people meet to exchange knowledge. Meeting fosters the acknowledgement of otherness and a change in perspective.

PART 3: INTERCULTURAL CITIES: ASSETS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

The Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme is a Council of Europe action that was launched in 2008, originally in conjunction with the European Commission: it serves to implement the White Paper on intercultural dialogue. It involves taking the measure of the limits of prior integration models, i.e., assimilationism, whose aim is forcible homogeneity, and multiculturalism, with ensuing communitarism, with inevitable majority – minority conflicts. The ICC project aims to experiment with this third path, that of intercultural dialogue. In 2008, 11 pilot cities participated in the programme; today they are over 100 and extend beyond Europe's borders.

The main observations at municipal level are:

- The cities created specific frameworks (integration council, diversity charter, commissioner for intercultural dialogue) and offered intercultural relations training for municipal executives.
- A specific territorial policy was set up in the neighbourhoods: development of cultural and sport facilities, festivals; establishment of a team of intercultural mediators; development of an associative fabric, and particularly, targeted actions designed for women.

An intercultural approach to life as a citizen initially occurs on a municipal, neighbourhood and association level. Education and the school system have a part to play in a comprehensive policy.

A number of questions arise in connection with interculturality and education:

- Is the school experience helping young people to build cross-cultural relationships or is it reinforcing cultural separation?
- Is intercultural competence part of the school curriculum or is it part of specific extracurricular activities?
- Are school teachers trained in intercultural competence?
- Does the ethnic profile of schools reflect the diversity of the city or is there a trend towards polarisation and monocultural schools? How can such a trend be reversed?
- How can an intercultural school have an influence on its wider community, and in particular, how can it involve multi-ethnic parents in the educational process and contribute to reinforcing the social fabric?

To respond to these questions, 10 proposals were put forward:

- 1) Teaching the mother tongue and striving to provide the hosting parties with the possibility to be introduced to the language and culture of the hosted parties; promoting oral expression.
- 2) Establishing a genuine partnership with parents from cultural minorities: inviting participation in the policies of an institution and school life.
- 3) Creating links with other institutions (twinning), neighbourhood associations and establishments of other denominations (for denominational schools).
- 4) Ensuring the ethnic diversity of the teachers and that they receive intercultural training.
- 5) Promoting intercultural projects, organising cultural visits and outdoor educational projects.

- 6) Ensuring the ethnic intermingling of the pupils.
- 7) Reflecting diversity in the design or interior decoration of a school; integrating visual references from the children's culture of origin.
- 8) In the teaching and the programmes: adopting an intercultural perspective in all disciplines and not only in literature, humanities and history, while drawing on multiple perspectives (multi-perspective approach). Likewise, teaching the religious facts in the history of religions, literature, arts, sociological, etc.
- 9) Encouraging pupils with a migrant background to participate actively in the democratic processes within schools.
- 10) Establishing sponsorship for pupils from ethnic minorities by pupils belonging to the majority.

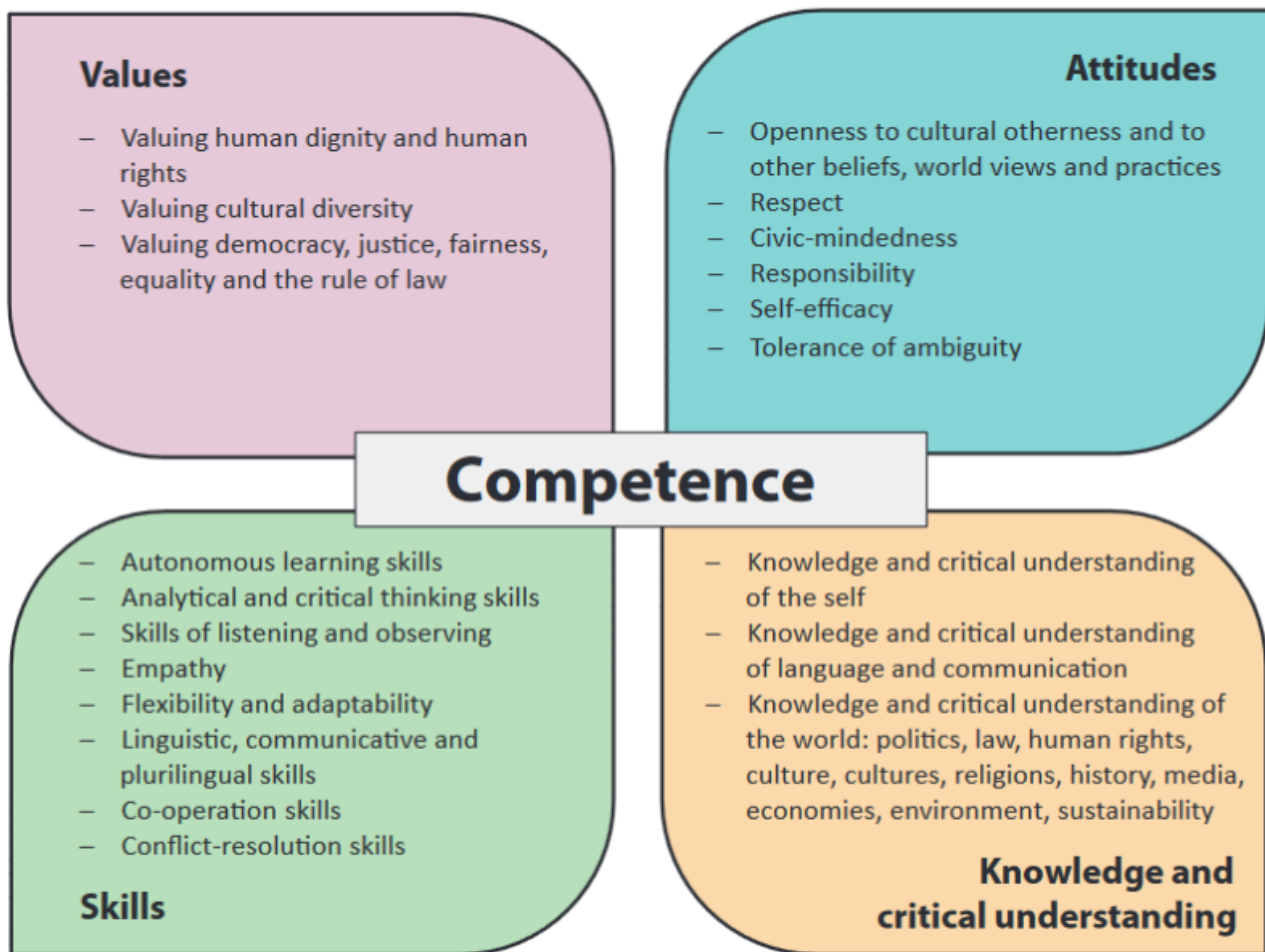
PART 4: EDUCATING ON INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND COMPETENCES FOR A CULTURE OF DEMOCRACY

The central goal of the training and education measures on intercultural dialogue involves the development of dialogue capacities which are vital in our societies characterised by diversity. Pluralism that places units side by side should be avoided, which, at best, enable cohabitation but often leads to exclusion. Intercultural relations are built on reciprocity and acknowledgement, and as such should take into account otherness first.

There is an interdependent relationship between culture and democracy and intercultural dialogue in multicultural societies, as the Council of Europe states in the *Competences for a Culture of Democracy, Living Together as Equals in Democratic and Culturally Diverse Societies* (2016):

“Democratic attitudes are crucial for intercultural dialogue because it is only when individuals regard each other as democratic equals that truly respectful communication and dialogue may take place between them.”

Competences developed in the case of intercultural dialogue are based on listening skills, analytical thinking skills and empathy, an attitude of openness towards others and tolerance of ambiguity when faced with irreconcilable differences in viewpoints. These competences are summarised in the “butterfly” model below:



PART 5: CONCLUSIONS - SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATING ON INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND ENSURING IT REMAINS A PRIORITY

This report highlights four aptitudes and competences to promote:

- 1) Educating on creativity, empathy, expression and listening skills
- 2) Developing a culture of communication
- 3) Training on critical comprehension of others and oneself
- 4) Introduction to democracy

It also emphasises specific recommendations for schools:

- Promoting links with parents
- Exposing the institution to the outside world: initiating partnerships with other institutions, neighbourhood associations, etc.
- Organising ethnic intermingling of the pupils but also of the teachers.
- Organising the environment with an intercultural perspective in mind.
- Educating on interculturality in all disciplines by choosing multiple perspectives in all scholastic learning fields and not only in history.

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