

A community participation model: Turkish-Dutch Education Foundation (Stichting Turks Onderwijs Nederland)

I am a representative of Turkish-Dutch Education Foundation with its 40,000 members in the Netherlands. We are active in 20 cities in the Netherlands. There are 167 voluntary workers and 30 paid teachers who work for our Foundation. Board of directors consists of 5 scientists working at different Dutch universities. We established our Foundation 3 years ago due to pressing educational problems among Turkish immigrant children.

The following are a limited list of reasons for our existence:

- 1) Incredibly high school drop-outs among Turkish students
- 2) Implicit and explicit discrimination in the schools
- 3) Increasing resistance of employers against immigrant youngsters
- 4) Abolishing mother tongue education in the primary schools

European Union's "unity in diversity" principle becomes increasingly obsolete in the Netherlands. Exclusion of certain groups, primarily Turkish and Moroccan immigrants, increases the concerns. Open and blunt racist remarks of certain political groups against immigrants find its way in the Dutch media every single day. We cannot talk about positive self-esteem and healthy emotional development for any child growing up in this negative social sphere. Dutch policy makers want social cohesion and unity in the society, which is understandable; however, the means they use to achieve social cohesion lead to deeper divisions in the society. Existence of 'black and white schools' sounds like South African apartheid practice. In Amsterdam, there is even one school which has two different gates, one for immigrant students, and another for native Dutch students.

Dutch policy makers have to find real solutions for increasing school drop-outs among Turkish youngsters. 25% of all Turkish secondary students leave their schools without a diploma. Those who graduate have huge problems finding a workplace to do their apprenticeship. Without this training, they cannot complete their education. If they complete their education, they are faced with discrimination in the job market. On the basis of their ethnicity and skin colour, they are not even invited for job interviews. The politicians accept this as a social fact but not much is done to find real solutions.

European Union and European Council accept the importance of mother tongue education for all migrant children. The United Nations, UNESCO, and European Council have various declarations on the matter. In spite of these well-defined measures, the Dutch government has abolished mother tongue education. Large bulk of research findings show that mother tongue education is crucial for socio-emotional, cognitive, and language development of children. In spite of these linguistic and cognitive benefits, Dutch policy abolished mother tongue education. Knowing the importance of mother tongue education, and parental involvement in education, our Foundation organizes mother tongue education in the schools where children attend. We co-operate with the school directors to achieve the best results. We also co-operate

with the Ministry of Education. We have been in close contact with the Minister Maria van der Hoeven. She supports our activities but we want a closer institutional co-operation to find solutions for pressing problems.

If Dutch policy makers do not find structural solutions for mother tongue education, it will fall in the hands of some radical religious and marginal political groups, which will be very negative both for the Dutch society and for Turkish immigrant children.

There are state-funded organisations that aim at establishing contact with the parents and state institutions but these organisations do not have any real contact with the target population. Dutch policy makers need to consider working in close co-operation with real NGO's such as our Foundation. Only through structured and well-defined frameworks, we can achieve the integration and full participation of Turkish immigrants. Only by finding real solutions for educational problems, we can achieve social cohesion and prosperity.