

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, 28 September – 9 October 2009

Working Session 2 : 'Fundamental Freedoms'

Contribution of the Council of Europe

Intercultural and inter-religious dialogue through education

- In order to consolidate its longstanding work in the field of intercultural education and, at the same time, to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue through education, the Steering Committee for Education of the Council of Europe implemented from 2002 - 2006 the project "The challenge of intercultural education today: religious diversity and dialogue in Europe" . The project's objective was to raise the awareness of decision makers and teaching staff of the implications of the religious dimension of intercultural education, and to identify good practice, new methods and approaches of intercultural education, both in school and out-of-school education.

A Reference Book, "Religious diversity and intercultural education: a reference book for schools" (ISBN 978-92-871-6223-6), published in 2006, is one of the main outcomes of the project. Its purpose is to help teachers and other education practitioners to address religious diversity based on respect for human rights. The various methods and practices presented in this book focus on the development of intercultural competence in the case of pupils with widely differing social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Intercultural competence presupposes other specific competences such as sensitivity to cultural facts and sources of human diversity; ability to communicate and enter into dialogue; skills required for learning to live together such as teamwork, cooperative learning, empathic communication, peaceful conflict resolution and confidence building. It also entails capacity to explore symbols and deal with sensitive and controversial issues, and critical thinking and individual deliberation.

The Reference Book addresses intercultural education at three levels: at the level of education policies, in the form of clear-cut education aims; at the level of institutions, through democratic governance, student participation, open learning settings and inclusive policies, and at teaching-staff level, through the methods proposed in the book.

Unlike traditional approaches to intercultural education, promoted in the '80s, the methods described in the Reference Book do not focus on the link between the dominant culture (e.g. dominant religion) and minority cultures (e.g. minority religions),

but instead on learning to live together. The reference is no longer the community and the differences between several cultural communities but on how common issues can be resolved together through e.g joint projects.

The project also entailed the preparation of a legal instrument focusing on the recognition of religious diversity in European education systems. As a result, the Committee of Ministers adopted in 2008 [Recommendation CM / Rec \(2008\) 12 on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education](#) (ISBN 978-92-871-6594-7). This policy recommendation defines the perspective from which religions and non-religious convictions are to be taken into account in a framework of intercultural education, while setting out a number of principles, objectives and teaching and learning methods. The Recommendation can be used as a reference by policy makers, curricula designers, trainers and teachers in their everyday work to develop competences for intercultural dialogue and understanding and to remove obstacles that prevent appropriate treatment of religious diversity and non religious convictions in school settings.

Contact: Mr Villano Qiriazzi (villano.qiriazzi@coe.int)
http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_co-operation/education/Intercultural_education/Intro.asp#TopOfPage

- In 2008 and 2009, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe organised two meetings entitled “Exchanges on the religious dimension of intercultural education”. These exchanges - which were not intended to be a platform for inter-faith dialogue as such - were designed as an exchange forum to discuss the possible contribution of the religious communities and other components of civil society to the implementation of the Council of Europe’s fundamental values. The 2008 exchange was organised on an experimental basis on the theme “Teaching religious and convictional facts: a tool for acquiring knowledge about religions and beliefs in education; a contribution to education for democratic citizenship, human rights and intercultural dialogue” (Strasbourg, 8 April 2008). The second exchange, organised on the same theme (Strasbourg, 29-30 June 2009), focused on the legal framework of the Council of Europe (see [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2008\)12](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education) and the use of various tools developed by the Council of Europe (see “[Religious diversity and intercultural education: a reference book for schools](#)” , “[Policies and practices for teaching sociocultural diversity - Concepts, principles and challenges in teacher education](#)”, and the “[White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue : Living together as equals in dignity](#)” adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2008).

For further information, please consult the [web site of the Committee of Ministers](#)

Contact :
Mr Villano Qiriazzi (villano.qiriazzi@coe.int)
Mr Pierre Masson (pierre.masson@coe.int)