

21st session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, "Intercultural education: managing diversity, strengthening democracy", Athens, Greece, 10-12 November 2003

Declaration by the European Ministers of Education on intercultural education in the new European context

We, the European Ministers of Education of the 48 States Parties to the European Cultural Convention, meeting on the occasion of the 21st session of the Standing Conference in Athens, from 10 to 12 November 2003, adopt the following Declaration:

1. Reiterating, in this symbolic place where it was born, that democracy - the political system common to all our states - is the reference value for both current and future generations;
2. Observing the diversity of our societies in terms of ethnicity, culture, languages, religions and education systems;
3. Having noted the social conflicts and disagreements that may result from the coexistence of different value systems;
4. Wishing to preserve the multicultural nature of European society and to avoid a situation in which globalisation exacerbates the processes of exclusion and marginalisation;
5. Aware of the disturbing persistence in our societies of xenophobic and racist practices, violence and intolerance that sometimes affect education establishments;
6. Recognising that, for over 50 years, the Council of Europe has been working in theory and practice on the development of education for democracy:
 - by applying the fundamental values of the Organisation, in particular human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law;
 - by emphasising the learning of democracy, as one of the objectives of education policy in Europe, particularly since the first Summit of Heads of State and Government (Vienna, October 1993);
 - by capitalising on the wealth of experience gained by the Council of Europe through its priority projects in the education field;
 - by implementing the mandate given to the Council of Europe following the second Summit of Heads of State and Government (Strasbourg, October 1997), which recognised education as a priority for the development of democracy and human rights;
7. Recognising the role of intercultural education and the major contribution of the Council of Europe in maintaining and developing the unity and diversity of our European societies;
8. Reiterate our attachment to the European Cultural Convention as the fundamental text where European cooperation in the education field is concerned, and wish to give practical effect to this statement:
 - by being closely associated with the celebrations in 2004 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Convention's entry into force;

- by backing the principle to study the possibility of drawing up an additional protocol which would update the text of the Convention to take into account the most significant developments that have occurred in the last few decades as well as the future priorities in the field of education;

9. Note with satisfaction the progress and results of the projects and activities currently being carried out by the Council of Europe, particularly:

- the implementation, in the framework of Recommendation (2001)15 of the Committee of Ministers on "Teaching history in the 21st century" of the "Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and for the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity" and the new project on the "European dimension in history teaching", devoted to key dates in the history of the European continent;

- the success achieved by the European Year of Languages and the henceforth annual "European Day of Languages", which each year celebrates linguistic diversity and strengthens intercultural education;

- the launch of the project "the new intercultural challenge to education: religious diversity and dialogue in Europe", which will make a major contribution to the shared goals of mutual understanding, respect, and learning to live together;

- the implementation, in the framework of Recommendation R(2000)4 of the Committee of Ministers of the project on "Education for Roma/Gypsy children", a project that highlights the principles of intercultural education;

- the programme on the strategies and initiatives aimed at learning democracy, pursued in conjunction with higher education institutions, and concerned with the Bologna Process, the Lisbon Convention (drawn up jointly with Unesco), participatory governance, quality assurance and public accountability, under a life-long learning approach;

- the project on "education for democratic citizenship and human rights", a project which should be extended during the "Year of Citizenship through Education" in 2005 and beyond, through the implementation of Recommendation (2002)12 and development of the concept of learning democracy;

10. Call on the Council of Europe :

- to attach greater importance to education in general and, on the strength of its experience in this area, to successfully pursue the aspects of its work programme relating to, amongst others, educational policies, history teaching, language policies and education for democratic citizenship;

- to pursue its co-operation in the field of education for citizenship and democracy on the basis of the fundamental principles of the Organisation;

- to focus its work programme on enhancing the quality of education as a response to the challenges posed by the diversity of our societies by making democracy learning and intercultural education key components of educational reform.

11. Request the Council of Europe, as an organisation with a wealth of experience in the fields of managing diversity, intercultural education and quality education, to tailor its education programme and working methods in order to implement the following strategies and give fresh impetus to these activities by developing a coherent, feasible and integrated action plan;

In this connection, it should:

relaunch conceptual research on intercultural education with a view to adapting terminology and clearly defining the content and context of intercultural education;

help to build understanding of the European dimension of education in the context of globalisation, by introducing respect for human rights and diversity, foundations for managing diversity, openness to other cultures, inter-religious dialogue and "Euro-Arab dialogue";

step up efforts in the area of content of learning methods and teaching aids, in order to provide the member states with examples of educational tools making it possible to take the intercultural dimension of curricula into account;

develop analytical instruments and identify and disseminate examples of good practice emphasising intercultural and pluralist approaches, in school textbooks;

develop programmes aimed at communication and mutual understanding, particularly through language learning and by encouraging awareness raising for the added value of linguistic diversity in multicultural societies;

encourage the member states to introduce the intercultural dimension in their education policies, in order to enable appropriate consideration of dialogue between cultures;

encourage research focusing on social learning and cooperative learning in order to take into account the "learning to live together" and intercultural aspects in all teaching activities;

support initiatives and experiments with democratic governance in schools, particularly through partnership, youth participation and cooperation with communities, parents and civil society;

develop quality assurance instruments inspired by education for democratic citizenship, taking account of the intercultural dimension, and develop quality indicators and tools for self-evaluation and self-focused development for educational establishments;

identify models of good practice in the areas of democratic governance and quality assurance in schools and prepare their potential users to be able to make use of them;

strengthen intercultural education and management of diversity within its programme of in-service training for education staff and encourage member states to contribute to that programme by organising seminars on topics directly linked to the aims of the present Declaration;

devise and promote work methodologies that are suitable to integrate into states' own initial and in-service training programmes the principles of non-discrimination, pluralism and equity;

recognise the potential of ICTs as a tool for promoting intercultural learning in a global context;

develop educational strategies and working methods to prepare teachers to manage the new situations arising in our schools as a result of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, sexism and marginalisation and to resolve conflicts in a non-violent way;

encourage the development of professional competencies for the teaching profession, taking account of skills existing within a team linked to the roles of

learning facilitator, mediator, counsellor, partner and human resources manager;

foster a global approach to institutional life in order to create a community of students, taking account of the hidden curriculum, school atmosphere, a school's organisational ethos and non-formal education;

encourage member states to acknowledge that managing diversity is not a problem in schools alone, but concerns the whole of society, particularly with regard to policies implemented in the social, family and migration fields;

12. Call on the Council of Europe to organise a European Year of Citizenship through Education (2005), which will make it possible to capitalise on and implement the achievements of the Council of Europe in the field of education for democracy;

13. Recognise the specific contribution of the Council of Europe to education for democracy and wish new synergies to be forged between the work of this Organisation and that of its major partners, particularly the European Union, Unesco and the OECD.

14. Give support to existing global processes dedicated to the development of education, such as Education for All (Dakar Action Plan), Quality Lifelong Learning, Education for Sustainable Development (such as the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development), and Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights;

15. Are resolved to make the necessary arrangements to take intercultural education into account as an important component of our education policies; this entails appropriate measures at the levels of curricula, school governance and teacher training.