

The Intercultural Dimension in Official European Documents: Research Summary

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Objective

Our objective was to examine official European documents for definitions of an intercultural dimension and how it is addressed in the contexts of intercultural education, citizenship education, and human rights education.

Methodology

We assembled policy documents of the **Council of Europe** in the form of declarations, resolutions, recommendations and key studies of the *Committee of Ministers*, the *Parliamentary Assembly* and the *Congress of European Local and Regional Authorities*. Policy development in the **European Union (EU)** is summarized in a preparatory document for the European Council (Council of the European Union, 2004).

We identified policies on: intercultural education; citizenship (education); and human rights (education). We searched the texts of the policy documents for related keywords, namely: multicultural; diversity; democracy; equality; inequality; peace; justice; race and racism; ethnicity; xenophobia; anti-semitism; islamophobia; tolerance and intolerance; responsibility (responsibilities).

Intercultural Education

For the Council of Europe

- The earliest studies on intercultural education focus on the education of migrant populations and their *integration* into European schools. In the 1980s, it was argued that intercultural education's main task was helping all pupils to 'acquire a positive self-image' (1987a:19); that interculturalism is concerned with characteristics arising from membership of different *cultures* that goes beyond ethnic considerations (1987b:7).
- By the 1990s, policies are more inclusive in approach and raise the issue of relationships between cultural groups (1992).
- Ministers of Education now agree the need for further research to define intercultural education clearly (2003).

For the European Union

- At its 2001 Stockholm meeting, the EU Council of Education paid particular attention to active citizenship and social cohesion. It agreed that overall aims for education include: 'the development of society, in particular by fostering democracy, reducing the disparities and inequities among individuals and groups and promoting cultural diversity'. Consequently 'all citizens should learn skills required in an increasingly international and multicultural society' (2004).

Citizenship

In the Council of Europe's **Committee of Ministers'** documents citizenship education is for:

- *democratic* citizenship, based on the principles of *human rights* (1999a, 2002)
- Education for democratic citizenship may take place in various contexts including the community (2002).
- All of the European source documents view citizenship education as lifelong and participatory learning (e.g. 1999a).

- Education for democratic citizenship prepares young people to live in contexts of cultural diversity (2002)
- Education for citizenship is a multi-dimensional concept. It prepares young people to learn about and *practice* democratic citizenship in a range of contexts, from local to global (2000a)

The documents produced by the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe** emphasise raising awareness of the *responsibilities* of citizens (1999b).

The Congress of European local and regional authorities recognises that settled foreign residents may be excluded from local public life and democratic processes, and urges Member States to work towards integration (2000c)

The Education Council of the **European Union** commits itself to strengthening citizenship and social integration through education in line with the so-called Lisbon process which aims at realising the most competitive knowledge economy in the world while strengthening social cohesion. Future developments will take place within the overall policy framework of *Education and Training 2010*. Member States are encouraged to learn from each other about best practice in citizenship education and to embed education for citizenship and social integration in teacher training programmes (2004).

Identity

There are no specific references to the concept of identity in the **Council of Europe** documents, although issues of identity are addressed with reference to ‘diversity’ in terms of ‘ethnicity, culture, languages and religions’ in European societies. Member States:

- resolved to enter into political and legal commitments for the protection of national minorities in Europe and to pursue a policy for combating racism and intolerance (1993).
- recognise the need to include diverse perspectives in educational policy and practice (2003).
- perceive the management of diversity as problematic (2003).

For the **European Union** the European dimension is fundamental to education. A proposal for a set of key competencies includes ‘interpersonal, intercultural and social competencies, civic competencies, and cultural awareness’. These could serve as a reference point for curriculum development (2004).

Human Rights

- The **Committee of Ministers** recommends that:
‘The understanding and experience of human rights is an important element of the preparation of all young people for life in a democratic and pluralistic society. It is part of social and political education, and it involves intercultural and international understanding’ (1985).
- The **Parliamentary Assembly** stresses human rights education as a means to combat negative attitudes towards minority groups and promote respect for diversity (1997). It specifies the centrality of *human rights* as *democratic values* for all citizens (1999b).
- The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities** (2000b and c) emphasises the rights of foreign residents to participate in local public life.
- In 2002 the Council of Education of the **European Union** agreed that education plays ‘an important role in building up social cohesion, in preventing discrimination, exclusion,

racism and xenophobia and hence in promoting tolerance and the respect for human rights' (2004).

References

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