

## Young people: an essential resource for intercultural education.

all different  
all equal

Although intercultural education must take place within society as a whole, there is little doubt that intercultural education is centered on the system of relations of children and young people. We justify this priority because they will be, to a great extent, the future citizens of intercultural societies. They are also an important channel of communication to adults and can help their elder relations, for example, to see the necessity for change. Having said that it is clear that there are also important messages here for adult education.

Intercultural education with children and young people works in two major ways:

- to help them gain the capacity to recognise inequality, injustice, racism, stereotypes and prejudices
- to give them the knowledge and the abilities which will help them to challenge and to try to change these mechanisms whenever they have to face them in society

Educational approaches both within and outside schools are tremendously important. How we refer to these approaches depends a lot on context. And it is also “true” that one can find more formal methods in out-of-school education, (a lecture, an input, written exercises...) just as more informal methods can also be found in schools, (working in project groups, using the local environment...). When we wrote this Education Pack in 1994-95, we were used to differentiate between formal and informal education – it was relatively rare to talk of “non-formal education/learning”. The debate has moved on, to the extent that the European Youth Forum recently issued a policy paper called “Youth organisations as non-formal educators – recognising our role” (November 2003). Informal education is now more often referred to when talking about non-planned learning situations: in the family, on a bus, talking with friends. Still, for this edition we have chosen to leave the terminology as it was. You might find it refreshing!

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Challenges facing educational systems today and the need for complementarity between formal and non-formal education are outlined in the **Compass** chapter on **Education**.

## Two Ways of Travelling:

### 1. Formal intercultural education

Formal intercultural education includes academic programmes and initiatives that are developed within and from the school.

School is, after the family, a principal agent of socialisation through which children get not only an academic education, but they also learn much of their own cultural code. This cultural code needs to be the one that is open to other cultures, religions and lifestyles. Therefore, without the active support of the school, efforts to introduce intercultural education are bound to see diminished results, if not outright failure. It

is for these reasons that we include some thoughts about this area even though this education pack is meant for use mainly in informal education.

Intercultural education demands from the school an important process of opening and renewal, matching curricula to the reality of multicultural societies. Schools are basing their work increasingly on the principle that all are equal. Now intercultural education asks the school additionally to acknowledge and respect cultural differences between individuals.

*In general the school should make efforts to:*

- try to create equal social and educational opportunities for children from minority cultural groups
- raise awareness of cultural differences as a way to oppose discrimination
- defend and develop cultural pluralism in society
- help children to deal constructively with conflicts, by illuminating different interests and searching for common goals.

The school's role as an agent of intercultural education is double: towards minority groups and cultures and towards majority groups and cultures.

### **Towards minority groups and cultures**

The school's role as a means of welcome, socialisation and inclusion to children from minority groups is irreplaceable.

In this case, intercultural education should develop programmes designed to fulfill the basic needs of minority groups in establishing and gaining recognition for themselves within society.

These programmes are based in mainstream culture but are open to change and should allow children to understand gradually the cultural code of mainstream society and to gain the abilities and instruments for personal autonomy and self-confidence within that society.

*This last aspect should include:*

- knowing something about your surroundings and the human relations within it
- an understanding of the culture-specific idea of time
- an understanding of economic relations, especially of those on which employment and survival of people depend knowledge about your close environment and of associations outside the school which might be helpful to you
- an understanding of the political system and how to use it

### **Towards majority groups and cultures**

Children and young people from majority groups need to learn how to live together with others in a positive, creative way.

It is necessary to introduce intercultural elements into the school curricula that:

- reject an ethnocentric view of culture or the idea that it may be possible to establish a hierarchy of different cultures
- take into consideration - with objectivity and respect - the characteristics of the different cultures cohabiting within a specific area
- open up the school children's view of the world, this is particularly important in places where there are few minorities

### **And the school itself?**

At the same time it is clear that the school must rethink its own position. All too often it transmits and reinforces negative stereotypes about other groups and cultures. There needs to be constructive communication about how the school is run between all those involved in the educational process: teachers, children, parents, administrators, local authorities, institutions. A variety of crucial structural measures need to be implemented if intercultural education is to work in and around the classroom. Good will is not enough and action is needed. There are many examples of good practice around Europe, here are a couple of recommendations:

- Intercultural education should be one of the key factors in training for all teachers; one way for this to have a real, personal impact on teachers would be for them to spend time working in another culture, with the tools to understand what is happening within themselves - they would then be better equipped to help their pupils learn to practise active tolerance,
- Text books and other teaching materials need to be reviewed taking others as a starting point, so that school children can learn to accept as “normal” different viewpoints and perspectives - how do history textbooks from different countries describe the Battle of Waterloo? Which country or region of the world is placed at the centre of maps used in geography lessons?

The difficulties involved in implementing such changes within school systems are enormous, but so are the gains to be made. Here is not the place to go further into the arguments. If you wish to find out more then consult the book by Antonio Perotti **The Case for Intercultural Education**, which gives a brilliant overview of experience gained by the Council of Europe in co-operation with educationalists into the 1990's. Have a look too at chapter 5 of **Compass** and its section on **Education**.

## **2. Informal Intercultural Education**

The objectives of informal intercultural education coincide with those of formal intercultural education. The differences between these means of intercultural education lie mainly in the providers and the working methods. Depending on the educational and political traditions with which you identify, you may prefer to describe these processes in informal education as “intercultural learning”. This is an important point to make, because it refers to one of the basic principles guiding our approach in this pack. We see young people as the subject of their own learning, discovering themselves how to make sense of their world and devise strategies for living peacefully within it.

Informal educators work with young people in youth clubs, in youth organisations and movements, in youth information and guidance centres, in free time activities after school; on the streets; during international youth exchanges; in hostels for young people and the young unemployed; across the whole geographical and socio-economic spectrum of Europe. Many of them are volunteers, giving freely of their time because of the importance they attach to such work. Even this list does not cover the whole spectrum of those involved in organising informal youth activities. Indeed, among the most effective providers are young people themselves educating each other. [This approach, known as peer education, is dealt with more specifically in **DOMINO** a publication also produced within the “all different - all equal” campaign.] All of these situations and more provide possibilities for informal intercultural education.

Informal education has several important features which distinguish it from formal education:

- Informal education is voluntary, it does not have the obligatory character of school which sometimes leads pupils to reject approaches or subjects which are a part of the curriculum
- Providers of informal education have to make greater efforts to sustain the interest of participants as the commercial world is very clever in providing attractive alternatives
- In informal education there is a closer relationship with participants, and this makes communication easier (if at times more stressful!)
- The contents are adapted with the participants to their reality and needs
- There is freer choice in the setting of objectives and in matching them with relevant activities
- The active and participative methodology applied in informal education makes for greater participation.

In many respects, of course, informal education could not exist without the presence of formal education and there is much room to improve the compatibility between the two. It may be possible for you to adapt activities contained in Part B for use in schools, but we have directed our energies at their use in informal education with young people. Here we look closer at the bases for these activities.

## **Working With Young People – A Continuous Process**

No matter their age, people who come face to face with the challenges and problems of multicultural society cannot jump straight from ignorance to critical consciousness and action. This may only be carried out through an intercultural education process, informal in this case, alongside which it is possible to carry out a variety of activities and initiatives.

Intercultural education has to enable young people to discover the origins and mechanisms of racism, intolerance, xenophobia and anti-semitism. Personal discovery can lead to collective action and it is up to us to facilitate this process. Political and eco-