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**Intercultural education: managing diversity,
strengthening democracy**

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**Intercultural Education in the 21st century:
learning to live together**

PIETER BATELAAN

What are we talking about?

All societies are diverse in terms of culture, gender, age, social situation, geographical origin, interests, beliefs, physical and intellectual characteristics, etc. There are differences between individuals and differences between groups.

Societies deal with these differences in different ways.

We can distinguish at least three models of dealing with diversity:

1. Segregation / Apartheid: separation of groups, which implies inequality of rights and status (e.g. racial separation as was the case in South Africa). Apartheid sometimes leads to exclusion and extermination (e.g. the Holocaust);
2. Denial of differences (see for instance the attitude towards victims of the Holocaust in the former Soviet Union), erasing differences (policies towards villagers in Romania during the Ceaucescu regime), there is one ideal, everybody is the same, which implies equal rights (except the right to be different);
3. The democratic model is based on democratic standards, which imply the right to be different and equal rights to participate. The democratic model is inclusive, but it also implies dilemmas, particularly where certain cultural values are not in accordance with the democratic standards of equality, for instance with respect to gender or religious differences. Inclusiveness, living and working together is not self evident, it has to be learned. As a result of the attacks on New York and Washington DC on 11 September 2001, policy makers, including the Council of Europe¹, and other people working in social institutions such as schools, have become more acutely aware of societal conflicts and controversies that relate to the co-existence of diverse value orientations. Multiculturalism implies far more than “celebrating diversity”, it also implies dealing with conflicts and dilemmas within the framework of democracy. That has to be learned and that is exactly why education is so important to develop and maintain a democratic culture.

Education to promote democratic standards implies *intercultural education* as one of its main consequences. Such standards have been laid down in the national constitutions of the member states of the Council of Europe and in international agreements and conventions².

¹ The Secretary General of the Council of Europe proposed: “action to promote a better understanding between cultural and/or religious communities through school education, on the basis of shared principles of ethics and democratic citizenship” (Report of the Secretary General on Terrorism, SG/Inf(2001)35: [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Secretary_general/Documents/Informations_documents/2001/SGInf\(2001\)35E.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Secretary_general/Documents/Informations_documents/2001/SGInf(2001)35E.asp))

² See for an overview of these international agreements: Pieter Batelaan & Fons Coomans: *The International Basis for Intercultural Education Including Anti-racist and Human Rights Education*. Hilversum: IAIE in co-operation with UNESCO (International Bureau of Education) and the Council of Europe (2nd edition 1999).

The term “intercultural education” covers two characteristics of education that is appropriate in democratic multicultural societies: (1) “inclusion and participation”, on the one hand, and (2) “learning to live together”³, on the other hand.

1. Inclusion and participation

Democracy is characterised by pluralism (doing justice to diversity) and the provision of equal access. Diversity and inequality are two sides of the same coin.

Within a democratic framework there are repercussions for both policy makers (governments) and professionals in schools and classrooms.

The challenge for *politicians* (particularly policy and decision makers in the realm of education) is: how to ensure that the different *groups* in society (such as indigenous minorities, immigrants and their descendants, groups at risk such as children from socially deprived groups, women (particularly from families with traditional family values), etc. can participate in and benefit from the educational and cultural infrastructure.

The challenge for the *professionals* (teachers, school leaders) is to ensure that *each individual* gets the opportunity to learn what she/he has to and wants to learn in order to be able to participate in the economic, cultural, social and political realms of the society. In other words: education should contribute to a policy of inclusion, which has – at the levels of the school⁴ and the classroom-consequences for the organisation and the content of learning processes. At the classroom level, equity refers to equal access to interaction in the learning process and to the materials available in the classroom. Providing this access is one of the main responsibilities of the teacher. It requires specific competencies, as we will explore further in the paragraph, about the role of the teacher. It also requires that the school provides certain conditions.

2. Learning to live together

At the level of objectives for learning, the main goal of intercultural education is “learning to live together”. Our societies are diverse in terms of identities, cultures and interests. Because the diversity we find in present day Europe can make it difficult to live together, Europeans must learn new coping strategies in the realms of family, school, community and society. Learning to live together is eventually aimed at shared citizenship at the local, national and global level: although we are different we need to share a feeling of belonging to a wider community based on mutual respect and a shared belief that “dialogue” is indispensable.

In order to participate in dialogues, partners should have:

- experienced that dialogue is meaningful in order to obtain results and/or to solve problems;

³ See Jacques Delors, et al: *Learning: the Treasure Within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century*. Paris, UNESCO, 1996.

⁴ When I use the word *school*, I refer to all types of educational institutions, from kindergarten to universities and adult education. I also use the word *students* for the learners in these various institutions.

- experienced that the quality of the dialogue depends on the ability to look at issues from different perspectives, as well as openness and respect for the contributions of the various partners;
- learned the basic communication skills of listening and talking;
- experienced that it is important to have knowledge about the content of the dialogue;
- experienced that respect is a prerequisite for success in any dialogue.

“Together” refers to both groups and individuals. Learning to live together, therefore, refers to learning to live together as individuals and as representatives of groups. Learning to live together implies also respect for diversity and equity.

Respect for diversity includes tolerance, but also openness to the specific qualities of the “other”, for instance her/his intellectual capacities. Dealing with diversity is not confined to different cultural backgrounds, but to all aspects of an individual: including gender, talents, interests, skills and knowledge, etc. It would be an artificial exercise to separate cultural differences from other differences (social, intellectual, gender, etc.) in teaching respect.

Table 1 shows the implications of both characteristics of intercultural education.

Table 1 Areas of Intercultural Education

Inclusion / participation	Learning to live together
<i>Which implies:</i> Equal opportunity policies Equal access Cultural and linguistic rights Special care for groups / individuals at risk Validation of specific skills and knowledge Cultural responsiveness	<i>Which implies:</i> Tolerance / anti-discrimination / anti-racism Human rights education Education for citizenship A reflective, critical attitude Conflict management Dealing with controversial issues

Most of the literature and research on “intercultural education”⁵ pertains to one or more of these implications. The same applies to policies: countries that have only recently realised that their population is becoming more and more diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture, languages, religions and other value orientations (or countries that have only recently recognised the rights of indigenous minority groups), will tend to emphasise language policies that are aimed at equal opportunities and equal access. The attempt is to bring disadvantaged groups up to par with the majority. Countries that have a longer tradition of immigration will realise that learning the language of the school is only one part of a larger strategy to integrate minority students into the school system. They will also take into account the need of “learning to live together” in their multicultural societies, particularly with respect to issues of racism and discrimination.

Before we will have a closer look at the policies needed to develop and implement intercultural education, we need to have a look at what it means at the level of the classroom (the perspective of the teacher) and at the level of the school as an organisation.

⁵ See for instance the international academic journal *Intercultural Education*.

The perspective of the teacher

Within the *classroom*, the main instruments of education are the curriculum and interactive processes that have to be organised by the teacher. In the table below we list the various characteristics of intercultural education at the classroom level:

Table 2: Intercultural education at the classroom level

	1. Content	2. Interaction
1. Diversity	1.1.1. The curriculum reflects the reality of multicultural society. 1.1.2. The curriculum deals with issues of pluralism, which include religious pluralism. 1.1.3. The curriculum presents reality from different perspectives.	1.2.1. The teacher provides opportunities for communication and co-operation in heterogeneous groups. 1.2.2. The teacher provides opportunities to use the knowledge and skills of each individual student, including language skills.
2. Equity	2.1.1. The curriculum deals with issues of tolerance, human rights, racism, and discrimination. 2.1.2. The curriculum includes the issue of different and shared values, which are often controversial.	2.2.1. The teacher makes sure that all students have equal access to the interaction and to the materials. 2.2.2. The teacher validates different skills and knowledge equally.

As far as politicians are concerned with this level, policies – until recently – have been mainly aimed at the curriculum, although issues of religion and controversial issues with respect to values and social relations are still under-represented in the various curriculum guidelines. It is to be expected that the current Council of Europe project “Intercultural education and the challenge of religious diversity and dialogue” will provide new materials and methods to tackle these issues.

However, learning does not only take place through processing content, but also through experiences. One example to make this clear: students can hardly be expected to learn to become democratic citizens through undemocratic teaching procedures. What we also know is that people learn to understand through interaction, discussion, and application of knowledge. A new role of the teacher as facilitator, observer, manager, and evaluator of learning processes (instead of provider of information) is nowadays promoted by educational authorities, researchers, teacher educators, and school managers. The emphasis on interaction in intercultural education is completely in line with this new professional identity of teachers. “Learning to live together” implies learning to learn together, to talk together, preparing for intercultural dialogue, and to work together. Co-operative learning in which all students participate, and which does justice to the students’ different skills, is crucial to achieving the goals of intercultural education. Co-operative learning in the framework of intercultural education implies a specific strategy in order to ensure that each pupil participates and that the various skills and talents are valued equally. This strategy is based on the principles of Complex Instruction⁶ and Howard Gardner’s concept of “multiple intelligences”⁷.

⁶ Complex Instruction is a strategy for working in heterogeneous groups developed at Stanford University and adapted to the European contexts in a EU Comenius project (CLIP). It is widely implemented in Flanders, Latvia, Sweden, Finland, Denmark; also some schools in Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Ireland have experience with this methodology.

⁷ See for instance Howard Gardner: *The disciplined mind*, New York, Penguin Books, 1999.

The new role of the teacher has consequences for teacher education and further professional development. Recommendation R (84) 18⁸ of the Committee of Ministers already proffers many standards for teacher training. Implementing new educational strategies to achieve the goals of “learning to live together” implies that teachers should have the professional competency to:

- organise co-operative learning in classrooms in such a way that all students participate and can be held accountable for their contributions;
- identify and validate the various skills and knowledge that students bring into the classroom;
- encourage students and deal with status issues in the classroom;
- discuss controversial issues based on respect for diversity within the framework of human rights principles.

The perspective of the school

Educational policy (and research) are ultimately aimed at school development: improving quality in terms of relevance, effectiveness and organisation. There is always a tension between the priorities of schools (making sure that as many students as possible succeed), the interests of society (making sure that students get the qualifications needed to participate in economic, cultural and political areas of a democratic and changing society), and the interests of researchers (who develop and want to implement new learning strategies and technologies).

We identified two areas of intercultural education: dealing with diversity (inclusion and participation) and learning to live together. It is in schools' interest to prioritise the former, whereas the pressure to implement the latter will mainly come from the society. However, students learn in schools, not in the offices of those who discuss educational policies. The only way to successfully implement innovations that start from the interests of the society, therefore, is to include them in school development processes, and to be aware of the implications of the innovation for the various areas of school development.

In order to make it possible for teachers to implement strategies pertaining to providing equity and learning to live together, school policies, which also include the relations with parents and the community, are of crucial importance. Article 4 of Recommendation R (85) 7⁹ already refers to an appropriate climate of the school: “Democracy is best learned in a democratic setting where participation is encouraged and views can be expressed openly, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, and where there is fairness and justice.”

Since schools are becoming more independent and less bureaucratic, there is a need for a clear school policy. The implementation of intercultural education, needed because of demographic changes, cannot be separated from other developments such as the implementation of ICT, citizenship education, quality control, etc. It needs

⁸ Recommendation (84) 18 on the training of teachers in education for intercultural understanding notably in a context of migrations.

⁹ Recommendation (85) 7 of the Committee of Ministers on teaching and learning about Human Rights in schools.

to be an integrated part of school development. In the following grid we have identified the various relevant areas of school development.

Table 3: Areas of school development

	Classroom	School	Community	Policy ¹⁰
Culture ¹¹	1.1	2.1	3.1	4.1
Goals	1.2	2.2	3.2	4.2
Content	1.3	2.3	3.3	4.3
Organisation	1.4	2.4	3.4	4.4

The process of school development is cyclical. Classroom activities may lead to clarity about goals and vice versa. Discussions with the community may lead to ways of organising learning processes, etc. The input that is obtained through discussions with colleagues from other schools (in conferences, but also in exchange programmes, both international and local) as well as through in-service training is also important, particularly when it is combined with curriculum development. Traditionally, for most developments the initiative is taken at political level. For instance, just to mention a few new developments in education:

- decentralisation belongs to developments in culture: giving schools more autonomy, making them less bureaucratic, more entrepreneurial. It is a measure under 4.1;
- giving schools a role in the process of learning democracy is a new goal. It is a measure under 4.2;
- introducing new subjects such as citizenship education or technology education is a measure under 4.3;
- changing the student-teacher ratio is a measure under 4.4.

All these measures have their consequences for the various areas of school development.

Schools may also take initiatives in order to meet the specific needs of the community in which they are operating. These initiatives should not be discouraged by bureaucracy.

¹⁰ The 4th column can be adapted to the context in which this grid is used. For instance, in other situations it refers to research: the grid then becomes an instrument that either helps to decide what research is relevant for a school, or to reflect upon the relevance of research for the various areas of school development. It is also possible to add columns, for instance “teacher skills needed”.

¹¹ Culture refers to the general atmosphere in classrooms, the school, in the relation with the community (which implies that the school or the university identifies the community they serve and their societal responsibility, another term that could be used here is “stakeholders”: who are they, how are they related to the primary processes within the institution?). Principles of good governance such as openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence are examples of “cultural” characteristics, that have to be carried out into goals, content and organisation.

The perspective of policy and decision makers

From the perspective of the relevant political authorities, the starting point for analysis is what is defined as the purposes of education, which are translated into policy goals and responsibilities.

With respect to the theme of this Standing Conference of Ministers of Education, intercultural education, many of the goals are mentioned in the reference document by Cesar Birzea¹².

Ministers have a responsibility with respect to the curriculum, the governance and management of educational institutions, and the education and training of teachers. The areas that are relevant for intercultural education are (1) dealing with diversity and providing equity, (2) learning to live together, and (3) quality. Areas of concern for this Standing Conference are (a) the curriculum, (b) governance and management, and (c) teacher education and training.

Table 4: areas of policy development

	Dealing with diversity	Learning to live together	Quality assurance
Curriculum	1.1	2.1	3.1
Governance and management	1.2	2.2	3.2
Teacher education and training	1.3	2.3	3.3

Measures (to be) taken by governments include generally:

- Legislation;
- Providing means;
- Encouraging developments in schools (by giving information, facilitating contacts, incentives, etc.).

The analysis of the goals of intercultural education at the various levels (classroom, school, political decision making) leads to measures to be taken at political level in order to implement these goals. The issues that are raised are not specific for individual countries. What is specific is the historical, social and cultural context. Learning to live together implies other communities and relations between communities in the various countries. For instance, in countries such as Sweden and Germany these relations include those between the autochthonous population and "immigrants". In countries such as Britain, France, and the Netherlands these relations also include descendants from former colonies. In the Baltic countries we find large groups who are descendants of former occupiers. In the Balkans we find various indigenous nationalities, each with their own perspectives on history. However, within all these different contexts the challenge for both politicians and professionals working in the area of education is that all those different groups and individuals have to learn to live together.

¹² César Bîrzéa: *Learning Democracy: Education policies within the Council of Europe*. MED 21-4.

Because of the variety of educational legislation and traditions in the various member states, we have drafted the suggestions for measures to be taken mainly in terms of “encouragement”. Except for what has already been agreed upon in international agreements (conventions), we do not intend to interfere in national legislation processes.

Measures to be taken by policy and decision makers are only meaningful and can only be implemented if it is clear what the consequences are for school development, and ultimately for classroom practice and teachers’ competencies.

In the list of measures to be taken by governments in order to implement intercultural education, we have also identified the areas of school development that are most affected by these measures. The numbers in brackets refer to the areas of school development identified in Table 3.

Measures to be taken by governments in order to implement intercultural education into schools and classrooms:

1. Curriculum

1.1. Dealing with diversity

- Inform schools and institutes for teacher education about the existing international agreements pertaining to intercultural education and encourage them to implement these agreements in their respective curricula (2.2, 1.2);
- encourage schools to provide diverse learning opportunities to meet the various needs, interests, abilities and cultural and linguistic knowledge of their students (1.4, 2.4, 1.1);
- encourage schools to make sure that all students experience the curriculum as meaningful, reflecting the various realities (2.3, 1.3, 2.1, 1.1).

1.2. Learning to live together

- Encourage schools to make sure that the curriculum reflects the diversity of the society and that it is based on principles of non-discrimination and pluralism (2.3, 1.3);
- encourage schools to develop critical attitudes towards textbooks and educational electronic materials, including how minority (religious) groups and minority viewpoints are treated (2.1, 2.3, 1.3);
- encourage schools to develop strategies for teaching from multicultural, multireligious and global perspectives (1.3, 2.3);
- encourage schools to develop critical attitudes towards the media with respect to stereotypes, biased information, and propaganda (2.1, 2.3, 1.1, 1.3);
- encourage schools to create situations in which students can *experience* the meaning of democracy, the importance of dialogue, the value of different abilities, intelligences and cultural and religious legacies (1.4, 2.4, 1.3, 2.3);
- encourage schools to provide opportunities for learning to live and work together, ensuring the participation of all students (1.4, 2.4);
- encourage schools to promote understanding cultural differences in relation to a meaningful context; to promote learning from differences, looking at realities from different perspectives (1.3, 2.3);
- encourage schools to include into the curriculum the social skills and competencies necessary for participation in a democratic society, e.g. the capacity to take part in a public debate, resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner, to know how to build coalitions and to co-operate, how to communicate and sustain a dialogue, how to take responsible decisions, how to develop a critical mind and critical thinking skills (1.3, 2.3, 1.4);
- value intercultural encounters and experiential learning through non-formal education (e.g. exchanges, visits, e-mail and Internet, projects, early practice of democratic lifestyles) (2.4, 1.4, 3.4).

1.3. Quality

- Encourage schools to include the way schools deal with issues of diversity and the provision of equity in the quality standards for both public and private schools (2.2, 2.3);
- encourage schools to discuss the purposes of education, to draft their own mission and goals, and to include in this discussion issues of equity, diversity, and learning to live together (2.1, 2.2, 3.2, 2.4);
- encourage schools to evaluate the relevance of their curricular activities with respect to the competencies needed to participate in a global and diverse society (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 1.2, 1.3).

2. Governance and management

2.1. Dealing with diversity

- Encourage schools to develop and implement policies with respect to (religious and cultural) diversity starting from the principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4);
- encourage the development of a school-based curriculum, capable of taking into account local needs and conditions as well as cultural characteristics (2.2, 3.2, 2.3, 3.3, 3.4);
- encourage the development of a school wide language policy that should be practised by all teachers in all subject areas (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4);
- empower stakeholders to identify, prevent and eliminate institutional discrimination as well as the hidden forms of prejudice or marginalization (2.1, 3.1, 2.2, 3.2).

2.2. Learning to live together

- Promote culturally responsive governance and management that goes beyond adding a multicultural flavour to the formal curriculum; (2.1, 2.3);
- involve ethnic-minority parents in school activities and collective decision-making (e.g. as full and equal members of school boards, as volunteer resources for outdoor activities, as mentors or tutors, as guest speakers or resource persons) (2.1, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4);
- encourage the clarification of values and communication, team-building, dialogue and mutual understanding to increase cohesiveness and self-reliance of educational institutions; organise schools and universities as “learning communities” (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4);
- promote integrated, mixed and heterogeneous settings to reduce the social distance between students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (2.4, 3.4);
- encourage schools to create mediation teams of students in order to address conflicts (2.2, 1.2, 2.3, 2.4);

- encourage schools and authorities to take all necessary measures to create a safe learning environment (2.1, 2.2, 2.4).

2.3. Quality

- Encourage schools to make explicit what “quality” actually means in terms of performance and products of the school (2.2, 1.2);
- encourage schools to evaluate their activities in order to improve the relevance and the quality of their activities (2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4);
- include the way schools deal with issues of diversity and the provision of equity in the quality standards for both public and private schools (2.2, 1.2);
- include hidden curriculum, school ethos, organisational culture and school life as criteria for quality indicators; add democracy-learning goals in university and school self-evaluation schemes (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4);
- provide the means for quality assurance (which includes issues of diversity and learning to live together) based on self-evaluation and external assistance (2.3, 2.4).

3. Teacher education and training

3.1. Dealing with diversity

Encourage the development and organisation of in-service teacher training programmes, in particular to develop:

- conceptual knowledge pertaining to equity and equal opportunities to participate in classroom activities (1.3, 2.3, 3.3);
- strategies to organise co-operative learning processes which ensure the participation of all children, particularly children who are otherwise marginalized (1.4, 2.4);
- strategies to deal with status issues (1.1, 1.3, 1.4);
- strategies to deal with gender issues (1.1, 1.3, 1.4);
- strategies to develop language skills in the various subject areas (1.3, 1.4, 2.3, 2.4, 3.3, 3.4).

3.2. Learning to live together

Encourage the development and organisation of in-service teacher training programmes, in particular to develop:

- Conceptual knowledge pertaining to (social, cultural, religious and linguistic) diversity, integration, identity, intercultural education (1.3, 2.3, 3.3);
- strategies to deal with resistance towards dialogue and co-operation (1.3, 1.4, 2.3, 2.4, 3.3, 3.4);

- strategies to deal with prejudices (1.3, 1.4);
- strategies to communicate with communities, including parents with various religious and cultural backgrounds (1.3, 2.3, 2.4, 3.3, 3.4);
- strategies to deal with controversial issues in classrooms (1.3, 1.4, 2.3, 2.4, 3.3, 3.4);
- strategies to deal with incidents such as bullying, exclusion, and violence (1.3, 1.4, 2.3, 2.4, 3.3, 3.4).

3.3. Quality

- Enable schools and teachers to act effectively in pursuit of educational quality, simultaneously and emphatically insist that schools and teachers are held accountable for their performance (2.1, 1.3, 1.4, 2.3, 2.4);
- encourage schools, school districts and local authorities to organise opportunities for teachers to be educated to become teacher trainers and supervisors in their own schools and school districts or regions (2.4, 3.4);
- give priority to reflective teacher and self-development practice as a condition of quality assurance in education (1.1, 2.1, 1.4, 2.4);
- make sure that teachers are prepared for new professional commitments such as those of observers, evaluators, mediators, counsellors, managers, team members, etc. (1.1, 2.1, 1.3, 1.4, 2.3, 2.4).