

## Schools for the 21st Century



### 1. How can schools be organised in such a way as to provide all students with the full range of key competences?

The people in a classroom, including the educator, form a micro-cosmos of society-at-large. The social interaction between the students, as well as between the teacher and the students, needs to be seen as a resource, a training ground for the future. In order to maximise the potential contribution of the school as “social laboratory”, the resource of young people needs to be recognised and guided. This will enhance the learning environment in the classroom, develop skills for the present and the future, and ensure that social cohesion is strengthened.

In order to achieve this, a paradigm shift is necessary in the theory of classroom learning, consisting of two crucial concepts that will assist in creating a more transversal approach to education. While these concepts are not yet universally accepted in the Union’s schools, they have already been tested and applied by some more progressive educators<sup>1</sup>.

The first of these two concepts is that young people need to be seen as active participants in the learning process. Youth are already citizens (not just future citizens), who can create opportunities for social cohesion within the wider community. Seeing the students not simply as receptacles of knowledge, but empowering them as peer facilitators will prepare them for tasks they will face later in life. Peer education is a great tool for youth influencing other youth, but it also has a snow ball effect on the adults and social sectors surrounding youth. Young people can develop projects that have a direct impact on wider social conditions – if they are given encouragement and opportunity by the adults in their environment.

Secondly, we must think of education as an entire system that includes but is not limited to the teacher-student relationship. It includes the formal curriculum and required teaching standards, as well as the organisation of time, democratic school governance, the aesthetic environment, some financial autonomy, monitoring and evaluation systems, on-going staff development, the relationship with NGOs, public authorities, parents and other members of the school community, and possibilities to develop interdisciplinary and social activism projects.

With these two concepts in mind, CEJI has developed its School Community Approach to the A CLASSROOM OF DIFFERENCE™ Programme across 5 EU countries: *A long-term view to school development that involves the various actors of the school community in order to create a positive learning environment that respects diversity and where all pupils can succeed.*

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<sup>1</sup> See CEJI’s recently published *Guidelines for Policy-Makers on Citizenship Education for Diversity* (hereafter: *Guidelines*), produced with a Socrates Grant earlier this year, available in English and French; <http://www.ceji.org/acodden/ced.php>.



However, recognizing that the school is a community in itself, but also that it is part of a larger community, or at least has the potential to be as was the case historically, CEJI is developing a new COMMUNITY OF DIFFERENCE Approach that brings together local stakeholders, including students and teachers from various schools, but also public authorities, social workers, business owners and others, for a process of diversity training, needs analysis and action planning. This method makes citizenship education not just a matter of the classroom, but reinforces it outside through partnerships with other stakeholders, helping to involve local interests with the upbringing of local young citizens.

## **2. How can schools equip young people with the competences and motivation to make learning a lifelong activity?**

The incorporation of peer-to-peer education breaks down perceived barriers in the learning mentality of the students. They become empowered to educate others, and will begin to understand that education is not a matter of simple hierarchical transmission but that learning takes place in many settings. By responding to the individual needs and talents of each student through a variety of teaching methods, combined with project-based learning opportunities, students are more likely to “discover” their own talents, passions and objectives for personal and professional development. This is the best motivation of all for lifelong learning, with the skills necessary to create and exploit learning opportunities developed in parallel.

## **4. How can school systems best respond to the need to promote equity, to respond to cultural diversity and to reduce early school leaving?**

Living productively and peacefully within the reality of diversity requires:

- Self-awareness of one’s own identity, belongings, values, perspectives and prejudices;
- Skills to communicate interculturally, cooperate effectively, decrease the impact of prejudices on behaviours and confront discrimination (individually and systemically).<sup>2</sup>

From these requirements, clear skills need to be developed, as well as tools to teach these skills to students. This demands a change in outlook on the part of the schools, as well as of the school systems and the governments supervising and funding these schools. A recent study across 5 EU countries shows that “where citizenship and/or diversity education holds the status of a compulsory national curriculum subject, there are clear advantages in terms of i) infrastructure development (teacher education, monitoring agencies, resources development) and ii) depth and co-ordination of cross-curricular work. Yet mandatory requirements must be balanced with flexibility, creativity to take innovative initiatives and involving other civil society actors such as NGOs.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, school systems need to re-evaluate their policies and practices to address indirect discrimination and promote positive actions that ensure equity in terms of opportunities and potential results for all pupils. For example, recruitment policies for school staff could be reviewed in order to provide more positive role models from ethnic minorities in the teachers’ corps.

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<sup>2</sup> *Guidelines*, p. 10

<sup>3</sup> *Guidelines*, p. 12

The impact of cultural assumptions and unconscious prejudices on pupils' achievement cannot be underestimated. For this reason, anti-prejudice training for school staff is also recommended.



**5. If schools are to respond to each pupil's individual learning needs, what can be done as regards curricula, school organisation and the roles of teachers?**

Peer education and project-focused learning complement and strengthen the learning environment, while leaving ample space for students to develop the skills they need as engaged citizens. Methods of cooperative learning need to be developed and implemented on a wider scale, empowering students to learn with other students, teachers to learn with their colleagues, and of course, students and teachers to learn, and act, together. This creates the possibility to involve other school staff as well, and to reach out to the wider community in which the school is based. Examples of these kinds of learning do exist, and need to be studied and promoted, in order for these changes to be accepted and implemented in the best manner possible. Of course, such methods have implications on the organisation of school time, the role of teachers and the definition of curricular objectives.

**6. How can school communities help to prepare young people to be responsible citizens, in line with fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity?**

By creating more democratic school governance structures, stimulating a positive attitude to lifelong learning, and recognising and enhancing the cohesion of the school community, schools can help students become active citizens within society and respectful of diversity. To achieve this, CEJI has formulated ten key principles for citizenship education for diversity in Europe<sup>4</sup>.

1. Foster respect for and appreciation of differences, and opposition to discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social origin, physical or mental condition, and on other grounds;
2. Facilitate the development of students' self-confidence and competence to learn, participate and develop their potential as whole individuals;
3. Provide an environment that is inclusive and respectful of diversity and human rights for all;
4. Establish a process of communication and decision-making that encourages the participation of the various stakeholders in the school community (students, teachers, parents, non-teaching staff and management);
5. Establish clear policies, programmes and pedagogical practice to address and prevent discrimination, exclusion, violence and bullying;
6. Empower students to analyse social problems, identify potential solutions and be capable to act appropriately;
7. Foster knowledge and experience of different cultures as well as an understanding of multiple perspectives on historical and contemporary events;
8. Foster experience and understanding of systems of governance, including local, regional, national and transnational decision-making structures and provide opportunities to learn how social, cultural and political change can occur;
9. Provide a variety of positive role models reflecting the socio-cultural diversity of the student population;
10. Make use of participatory pedagogies that include knowledge, critical analysis, co-operation and intercultural skills for action to further respectful diversity.

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<sup>4</sup> *Guidelines*, p. 13



## **7. How can school staff be trained and supported to meet the challenges they face?**

Curricular changes may be met with resistance from teachers and can be difficult to institutionalise in schools. This is not only because these changes represent a major innovation, but also because citizenship and diversity education are subjects of a different kind that offer a (healthy) challenge to the traditional school hierarchy. Personal experiences of cooperative and project-based learning by school staff in their own initial and continued teacher training will do much to convince them of its value as well as create competencies to use the methods.

## **8. How can school communities best receive the leadership and motivation they need to succeed? How can they be empowered to develop in response to changing needs and demands?**

Few, if any, studies have been done that examine whether so-called ‘soft skills’ such as citizenship are important to improve the students’ learning capacity. Considering however, that this assumption is prevalent amongst experts in the fields involved, funding to test this assumption is necessary, and will, if proven right, strengthen support for citizenship and diversity education as an agent of positive change. Particular attention should be given to projects in which schools have indeed modified their way of working to incorporate cooperative learning.

Regarding the role of European institutions, it is clear that European support for change can impart an impetus that is currently lacking, as well as help national bodies and governments in the development of a common starting point.

- While education remains firmly within the competence of the EU Member States, the Union’s institutions can provide guidelines and bring together national experts from all fields involved, facilitating the exchange of experiences and showcasing existing programmes.
- The EU can create expert networks for those responsible for the Member States’ reform programmes.
- The EU can support comparative research, examining the impact of diversity and citizenship education programmes, and showing the long-term effects on cohesion as well as the immediate outcomes in terms of learning capacity and the educational atmosphere.
- The EU can financially support successful projects, both in schools and in civil society.
- We also urge the European Commission to implement stronger measures to prepare teachers as well as pupils, helping them to learn, teach, and be active, productive citizens, cognisant of the mosaic that makes up today’s Europe, living to the full the common values of the European Union.

***CEJI – a Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe stands with individuals and organisations of all religions, cultures and backgrounds to promote a diverse and inclusive Europe. Our activities include delivering diversity education, facilitating and contributing to networks, advocacy at a European level, enhancing inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue and facilitating Jewish participation.***

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