



Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches  
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## DIALOGUE SEMINAR

### *Quality education in an intercultural environment*

**Monday, 15 December 2008, Brussels**

#### **Conclusions by Peter Schreiner, President of the Intereuropean Commission on Church and School**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share with you some conclusions of the theme and the discussion today. Please allow me to present not a comprehensive summary of the presentations and discussion but to share with you some of my personal conclusions.

It was a rich exchange from different perspectives on policy, practice and research concerning quality in education in an intercultural environment with a special emphasis on migration and education. These are important areas providing challenges and opportunities for the education systems of the EU member countries. More exchange and dialogue is needed.

I would like to introduce four points as personal conclusions: one is a more philosophical and general one; and three are more specific. Some of the headings are inspired by the introduction of Commissioner Ján Figel this morning.

#### **1) Shift of Perspectives**

What we need in our discussion on educational issues on a European level is a shift of perspectives from an "either/or thinking" to a "both/and thinking." This is to underline the importance of exchange about issues in education on the European level. However, the main responsibility for education lies with the member states. The EU has a supporting competence of in education that includes exchange about transnational problems and challenges. This has been often confirmed during recent years. We need to link this European debate with the national and local level. I appreciated Commissioner Figel's statement at a CoGREE Conference in 2005 in Berlin, when he stated, "We are Europe", to underline the need for shared responsibilities on the different levels in creating conditions for living together in Europe. There is a growing interconnectedness of the different

levels that have to be taken into account. This means that we should not delegate responsibility for quality education to politicians or administrators but we should see our own responsibility, what our contribution could be, and how the different perspectives could complement and not substitute each other. This includes also the challenge to think about the concept of “we and they” regarding migrants in our society. The role of the Churches is to welcome the other, to confirm through their teaching and acting the dignity of each human being. This has specific implications also for education.

## 2) **There is a need to improve conditions concerning quality education for all**

The Green Paper on “Migration & Mobility: Challenges and opportunities for EU education systems” is a valuable tool to encourage a needed discussion about justice and discrimination in education. The good examples that have been introduced today during our seminar have clearly underlined the need to work against any segregation in education and to promote integrated schooling. The Protestant comprehensive school in Gelsenkirchen-Bismarck provides a good example for this perspective and confirms that this aim is not just an issue of the curricula but of the whole school. For example, the way in which space and buildings are organised plays a crucial role for the effects of the school.

The legal framework concerning the right of education for all exists as expressed in the Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960) where governments are asked “to formulate, develop and apply a national policy tending to promote equality of opportunity and of treatment. No discrimination in access to or quality of education....” In other words, the legal framework is not the problem but current practice in many contexts is lagging behind this legal basis.

What is needed to provide quality education for all is, among other issues:

- Creation of a safe space in teaching and learning so that every pupil can develop a feeling of belonging to the learning community.
- Dialogical teaching which seems to motivate pupils more than a transmission approach where the teacher transmits knowledge to the pupils in a classical way.
- Intercultural education, which is of high importance in increasingly multicultural and multireligious contexts.
- A change of perspectives towards intercultural education in the training and in-service training of teachers.

One of the main topics for the coming European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009 is **Education for creativity and innovation**. Why do we not take this seriously, especially when it comes to schooling of migrant children? We need creative and innovative theory and practice in this area.

## 3) **Keep on**

Education should be a permanent point on the agenda of the open, transparent and sustainable dialogue between the EU and the religious communities. If education matters, if education is the key for dealing with many problems and dynamics of society, for living together in an intercultural Europe, then we need to have education on the European agenda. I am very much aware of the principle of subsidiarity, especially in the field of education, and I do not want to make a problem out of this valid principle, but the national view is no longer sufficient when it comes to

sustainable concepts in education. We need interplay and a policy-mix of the different levels. Education cannot solve all the existing problems but it can play a crucial role.

Education is a human right also for migrants. And, here comes a special concern of the Churches who argue against a trend to treat migrants as commodities or as problem-makers. Migrants are human beings, created in the image of God. I am grateful for Jim Cassin from Ireland for his intervention when he underlined the need for a fight against the myth that host countries were victims of migration. Rather their economies were benefitting from exploitation of migrants to a high degree.

#### 4) **There is a need for practical commitments**

I come back to my first point of the interconnectedness of the different levels. A major concern of the Green Paper is to influence and encourage discussion and changes on the national, regional and local level. It may be seen as a wish for a trickle-down effect of the raised issues and proposals. The distribution of good examples in the field of education for and with migrants might help, as well as dealing with these issues through the open method of cooperation. What we especially need is methods to overcome the bottlenecks between the different levels. It is one thing to distribute an excellent policy document worked out on the European level; it is another task to implement proposed practical measures on the national or local level.

We dealt with the question: how to deal with differences. One can neglect them, or confirm them. I am encouraged by a proposal of a colleague who emphasised that there is need of “dancing with difference”, especially in the field of education. If you dance, you have to carefully listen to the tone. You have to see how your partner in the dance act reacts and how you can move along with each other.

As a final remark, let me highlight three points for further activities:

1. Exchange about good examples;
2. Continued dialogue and use of the open method of cooperation;
3. Support of research on good examples.

Thank you very much for your attention.