



Panel Session Note 5: Tackling Discrimination

Time: November 16, 09:15-10:45

Room: Strangersalen (1st floor)

Moderator:

Ulrike-Wolff-Jontofsohn, Senior Researcher, Freie Universität Berlin, CoE and EWC expert, Germany

Speakers:

Ana STOJKOVIC, Teacher, Primary School “Stanimir Veljkovic Zele”, Serbia

Maria VLACHAKI, Principal, 23rd Primary “School of Kalamaria”, Greece

Mirela HOXHA, Teacher, Secondary school “Kushrimi i Iiris”, Albania

Input & reflections on topic & school practices by Michalis KAKOS, Reader in Education, Leeds Beckett University, United Kingdom

Rapporteur:

Rapporteur: Natia NATSVLISHVILI, Lead Expert, National Center for Teacher Professional Development, EPAN member and Campaign Steering Group member, Georgia

Language: English

Background:

Tackling discrimination is one of the six themes of the CoE Campaign “Free to Speak, Safe to Learn - Democratic Schools for All”:

“Discrimination is a human rights violation which can have a damaging effect on all learners, especially those who are targeted. Schools can tackle discrimination by promoting democracy, respect for human rights and citizenship. To ensure that all students’ needs are met equally, schools need to prioritize language and cultural competences, multiperspectivity in history and gender equality. In this way, students can acquire competences for democratic culture, to fulfil their potential in school as well as in society” (CoE Campaign leaflet)

Good practices and initiatives by school representatives, as submitted, please find below.

**Primary school “Stanimir Veljkovic Zele”, Serbia
“Share” by Ana Stojkovic, teacher**

Located in an underdeveloped rural part of the south-east Serbia with a high unemployment and poverty rate which strongly affect our school life, our school has turned a challenge into a mission to successfully overcome the sensitive issues our community faces. A great number of our pupils come from disadvantaged families. One third of all our pupils are of Roma nationality, often associated with weak academic achievements and a high dropout rate.

These issues may sometimes pose challenges for pupils. Joining the *Share* project and exchanging practices with other schools helped us learning how to prevent and recognize unwanted behavior and how to promote common values of tolerance, mutual respect, empathy, equal opportunities, gender equality and non-discrimination, which is our main priority.

Different „awareness-raising,, activities which actively engage our entire community (teachers, pupils and their parents, local government representatives, cultural centre, sports organizations) and enhance the sense of belonging have become regular practice in our school.

Some of these activities include additional support for pupils with learning difficulties. As well as work of a pedagogical assistant for social inclusion of Roma to promote the importance of schooling among this population, help them stay within the education system and keep them motivated to finish their schooling. Our Roma pupils are also provided with the opportunity to learn about their language and culture from an appointed Roma teacher and to present their customs to other pupils at our school.

We also cooperate with a humanitarian organization. Various charity activities, workshops for parents and pupils, fairs and exhibitions to promote healthy lifestyles and the environment protection are some of the usual activities conducted.

Skype meetings with pupils from other countries and taking part in the *Let`s end poverty* project started on the Microsoft platform *Skype in the classroom*, are activities that help our pupils learn about other cultures and help them become aware that we are all global citizens.

Every year we celebrate important dates such as The International Day for Tolerance on 16 November and The International Roma Day on 8 April when parents are invited to support their children at school performances. Then, the overall school atmosphere of equality, tolerance and non-discrimination is most noticeable, which makes us all very proud.

The most important result we have achieved is a significant decrease in the number of drop outs from our school in the past few years as well as the increase in the number of pupils of Roma nationality we have managed to motivate to finish their primary education.

Our primary goal has always been to treat every child equal, no matter their background and to provide all our pupils with equal opportunities to fulfill their potentials. We are on a mission of making them good citizens able to continue building the world of tolerance and acceptance, free of all kinds of violence and discrimination, which we can achieve only with the strong support of the whole community.

If we have succeeded to provide a good example to other schools, it means that with the right support, enthusiasm and effort no mission is impossible.

Primary school of Kalamaria, Greece

“A school without walls: Co-creating an open and sustainable learning community” by Maria Vlachaki, principal

For the first time last year we accepted in our primary school, refugee children because of the war in Syria. Native children weren't acquainted with the ethnocultural “other”.

Our important challenges were to confront:

- Prejudice and stereotypes of students and their parents about the abilities of refugee children according to a "deficit" approach.
- Low expectations of some colleagues and their lack of knowledge in intercultural, human rights and citizenship education.
- The knowledge centered curriculum and the lack of time for critical thinking and self-reflection.

Our project comprised educational activities which aimed to prevent discrimination and to support the inclusion of refugee pupils in our school community.

Specifically, we created peer groups for cooperation and interaction among native and pupils with different descent. Native pupils took the initiative to familiarize refugee children with school life, the rules, the rights and responsibilities. It is worth mentioning that most of the refugee children didn't have any previous school experience in their own country because of the war.

In addition, we promoted communication and self-expression through the support of a network of mediators, both adults and elder pupils, who knew the languages spoken by refugee children. So we were better able to make refugee children's voice heard. At the same time, native children found out similarities among the Greek and the Arabic language. A lexicon with basic common phrases was made by pupils.

The daily school program was enriched with cross-curriculum activities which promoted the use of all children's cultural capital and the development of different skills. In our oral history project, children collected family stories which depicted the different past as well as connections of both refugee and native children. Greek society was multicultural due to different migration and refugee movements throughout the ages. A school archive of culture was created. Furthermore, children made a movie by synthesizing different life stories.

In addition, we applied cooperative teaching strategies such as action research and teams working in projects, which developed a sense of belonging to the community. The participation of children's relatives and other members of the local society was fostered. Learning process at school became more “open” based on dialogue and the interaction of different aspects. Diversity proved to be an important benefit. Respectively, social prejudices against the “other” were discussed and provoked.

Communication and critical reflection were developed among teachers in relation to their practices and the educational material they could use. Special meetings were organized and as a result the school program enriched with subjects and activities which promoted values such as equality and justice. Peer evaluation in relation to teachers' practices was applied.

Also, our school regulation was developed based on the values of mutual respect and collaboration. A collection of special educational material and sources on intercultural, human rights and citizenship education was created at school.

Notable changes were made such as a participatory school culture, the development of an open learning community, the systematic use of dialogical strategies and contexts, the promotion of human rights such as equality, justice and reciprocal respect.

This project is continuing, and we aim to develop a network with other schools by using new technologies to interchange educational experiences, promote communication and reciprocal communication and respect and support the idea of a school without walls.

Secondary school "Kushtrimi i Lirise" Durres/ Albania
"An Ongoing story" by Mirela Hoxha, teacher

Education system in Albania is inclusive. Therefore the well-being and progress of every students in our small school is our primary goal. We actively promote positive attitudes and mutual respect between groups and communities, different from each other. We believe that improving the quality of education for the most vulnerable groups of pupils raises standards across the whole school. We have achieved that standard. But we strongly want to maintain that standard high, and that was the reason why we choose to work on the issue of "Tackling discrimination".

Participants of this project were students, parents and teachers. We all actively promoted equality and diversity through the curriculum, by creating an environment which reflected respect for all. We implemented an annual program in 3 periods.

We used a range of teaching strategies that ensured we meet the needs of all students.

We taught about difference and diversity and the impact of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination through citizenship and across the curriculum.

We used materials and resources that reflected the diversity of the school, population and local community in terms of race, gender and disability, avoiding stereotyping. By including the contribution of different cultures to world history we promoted positive images of people.

All teaching and support staff promoted an inclusive and collaborative ethos in their classrooms. They challenged prejudice and discrimination dealing fairly and professionally with any prejudice-related incidents that occurred.

Parents assisted schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children. They volunteered to support students and school. They were also involved with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities. They were part in school decisions and activities through school councils as well.

We all are aware that schools can play a key role in reducing discrimination and so act as agents of change. Still, schools face challenges when implementing their teaching strategies. The main challenges that teachers in our school have experienced are the lack of qualified assistant teachers for disabled and special need children, developing an Individual Education Programme (IEP) due to our lack of knowledge and understanding the way IEP should be developed. These challenges were improved by personal training and teachers of our school became supportive assistant teachers for their colleagues.

This project strengthened the collaboration between teacher –students –parents. It clearly demonstrated the power of partnering between students, staff and community to tackle discrimination.

Our challenge as educators is whether we walk the walk. Our students are witnessing our collaboration. So, we need to show our students that we value the ideas, opinions and contributions of those we work alongside in every way. The more we collaborate with each other, the more we collaborate with school community, the more likely we are going to succeed in tackling discrimination. If we desire a society of peace, we must teach our students to be free to speak and make sure they are safe to learn.