

What are the barriers, challenges and opportunities ?

The barriers mentioned in the groups are many : those associated with financial and human resources, and a lack of time and priority (intercultural education is looked upon as something light and vague, something extra) – more so probably in secondary school than in primary school.

There are linguistic barriers : it was mentioned as a positive sign by the representative from Italy that many young Italians have started to learn Arabic in order to overcome the language barrier.

There is a lack of school autonomy and motivation among teachers. Some teachers say that there is no need for intercultural education, because their community is so homogeneous – overlooking of course the fact that the students are living in a pluralistic and globalised world. Overlooking also the fact that they live in a community with local cultural differences, may be even local cultural conflicts that are hidden.

One group discussed the particular challenges related to the private sector of education. The country-specific examples demonstrated that there is a great divergence as to whether or not states have a say in curriculum content in private schools.

The challenges and opportunities are many. Some mentioned that thanks to the Internet we have access to the whole world. Some mentioned the Eurobase as a good example of information about schools, and teaching materials and strategies.

Recommendations

There were many recommendations from the groups. I will just mention a few concerning the compendium of good practices which the Council of Europe intends to develop:

- governments need to support with policies and resources the search for examples of good practice for the compendium;
- those who compile the compendium should seek examples from as many nations as possible;
- the compendium should include examples of how schools have worked through conflicts arising from religious diversity, with an emphasis on such ideas as “emotional literacy”;
- the compendium should include models of change for government ministries and government processes, illustrating how dialogue, inclusive consultation and “moving towards agreements” can build partnerships for the religious dimension of intercultural education.

In presenting the examples, attention should be given to their multi-applicability in many different curriculum contexts and national systems. An example of RE in one country may still be useful in Citizenship or History in another country.

Final remarks

Some of the representatives from the ministries of education stated that they had been encouraged by the conference to put more emphasis on including and strengthening the religious dimension of intercultural education in curricula, textbooks and teacher training. Concrete examples of this were to be found in Moldova, Romania and Luxembourg. One participant (from Luxembourg) said that: “After this conference I will no longer speak of intercultural education without mentioning the religious dimension!”

It should be remembered that the religious dimension of intercultural education is not just about Europe. It is about making a global community – and it should therefore include the Euro-Arab dialogue.

Finally, let us remind ourselves of the focus of our attention: namely, for whom are we doing this work? We are doing it for the child. And the child today is the adult of tomorrow – the politician of tomorrow, the church leader of tomorrow. We have to give the child hope – the hope of a brighter future. The logo of this hotel – Soria Moria – is the child that is looking into the future, seeing the fairy-tale castle. This child is quite sure that he one day will reach the bright castle. Our greatest sin as teachers, parents and grand-

parents would be to destroy that hope, by telling the child that our experience tells us that there is no castle there. There is a castle there – and it always will be there, although it will look a little different when you see it close up.

The child who has been to a school with intercultural education will look into the eyes of the teacher and quote George Bernard Shaw: “You see things and you say ‘Why?’ But I dream things that never were and I say ‘Why not?’”