

## **Teachers' challenges regarding cultural diversity.**

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Consolidated Research Group, ESBRINA “Contemporary Subjectivities and educational environments.” (2009SGR 00503). University of Barcelona.

**Symposium theme:** Teachers’ positioning on changes.

**Key words:** Cultural diversity; teachers' continuing education; teachers' practices.

### **General Description**

This paper presents some findings of the fieldwork of my doctoral thesis “Human Rights Education as a Tool for Social Cohesion” of the Doctoral Program “Education and Society”

The main research question that arises is: Can Human Rights Education be the departure point to work from, with and for the cultural diversity that characterizes our societies?

Human Rights Education has been introduced in our social politics and among them in educational policies which have a relevant role on the consecution of a cohesive society. Education, as a social right that has to be guarantee, facilitates the social change and the promotion of values and attitudes that favor cohesion.

The work of several organizations like United Nations, The Council of Europe or Amnesty international have develop a wide variety of materials regarding human rights education at schools, guides and manuals for teachers, courses, development of competences and compendium of activities.

The questions that arise are:

- How are these policies translated into the school reality?
- How do we teach and how do we learn human rights?
- Which methodologies, materials and activities do we use for teaching human rights?

### **Methodology**

This inquiry was carried out in three different moments. At a first moment I did an analysis of existing reports and documents. In a second, I took some courses on teaching human rights, and finally I accessed a school sensitive to human rights education and with an intercultural community. All this in order to observe how is the work in the daily life of the classroom and to get to know opinions of the teachers, the principal’s team attitudes and students vision.

In this case I am considering the information regarding some of the courses I took in order to have a close experience of the teacher training on human rights. I was trying to get some answers on how

do we teach and learn human rights and I had the opportunity to share with other teachers their worries and concerns.

In this context, I intend to analyze some of the challenges that are presented in the day-to-day practice of teachers regarding cultural diversity in their classrooms. At the same time I consider the way in which they are positioned to respond to these challenges.

The courses analyzed were on different subjects and with different objectives, with several methodologies and resources for learning, they had different evaluation systems and they had different duration, from 20 to 40 hours. Also some of them were distance learning courses.

The professionals who took those courses came from several disciplines (education, political sciences, psychology, languages, visual arts, etc.), they work in different areas (environmental education, special education, development of materials for NGOs, languages, sciences, ethics, etc.) and in different level of education, formal and non-formal and had also different backgrounds and years of experience.

All of them have in common the will to learn, to keep on learning to win more experience and achieve new tools that help them in their daily work in their different realities. They also share the conviction that their behaviors influence beyond its immediate context and they can be change enhancers.

### **Results obtained**

When considering their moment and realities, some of the teachers mention the need to obtain tools to work with a changing population that is on constant movement, they mark the distance between their initial training and what they find in the centers where they develop their teaching every day. These professionals work in schools with students coming from different backgrounds, not only nationalities but also different faiths, culture, life experiences, and rhythms of learning.

Despite being a multicultural society and having a substantial track record in inclusive education and diversity seems that there are still some difficulties on coping with that reality in schools and classrooms. Some of the issues they deal with have to do with prejudices and also with classroom performance. An example is the tendency of the students to make groups according to their place of origin or other affinities, Chinese group or Muslim group among others.

Some of the observations made by the teachers are the lack of respect for the other, loss of values, caring about oneself only and doing what they want to get what they want without considering the other.

They consider that difference and diversity is wealth, because we can learn so much from other cultures, people, situations ... to help us grow as people that conform societies. These societies are also always changing because the political, economic, social and cultural rights will never be the same.

When asked about the challenges they face, some of the ones they mention are:

-Students have to learn that they are different but equal. And also that men and women are equal.  
How to overcome difficulties with coexistence in schools?

- The position of the schools/professionals. Sometimes is hard to tell if they are being tolerant or looking elsewhere. Sometimes they are in contradiction with family traditions and they tend to avoid confrontation.
- Our education is not yet horizontal, we still have a vertical education where the teacher transmits and the student assimilates. How to transform traditional education to give it more coherence, relevance, human values, reflection and questioning, commitment and participation?
- How to transform our society into a more fair, equitable and sustainable one?

In order to respond to those challenges they look for an education model that fosters the feeling of belonging, of solidarity and respect and at the same time participatory mobility. They search for a model of education that develops the students' human potential and gives them the opportunity to transform themselves and their society. An education that allows them to live in harmony with the environment and the community, learning to live together and learning to understand social life to realize positive changes.

Education for a global citizenship seems to contemplate all these aspects and is shown as a possible answer to address the various challenges.

A Global citizenship is a complex challenge, where there is the possibility that the difference coexist in many ways, looking for jointly way of respect, to make possible the growth in equality. It means solidary, cooperative and respectful involvement between individuals, by means of a necessary change of thought and perception, of the world and oneself.

It implies an active participation and social responsibility.

It means to accept human rights as an inherent principle of all human beings. And it also means to promote a culture of peace and to build a fairer world through non-violent conflict resolution.

Global citizenship is the chance that the teachers feel they have to influence in a conscious and responsible way in the construction of a critical and reflective thinking to events that are generated in different contexts of our society.

During the course work the participant teachers developed their proposals of application in educational situations as a part of the evaluation system of the course. Once the proposals were submitted there was a peer review evaluation in addition to the evaluation carried by the teachers. This way, one proposal was read by different participants who also made suggestions in order to have them better developed when applied.

The proposals covered subjects like language, science, attention to diversity, poverty, recycling, responsible consumption, conflict resolution, citizenship and human rights (from concrete lesson plans to school projects), emotional education, social science, peace, tutoring, student participation among others. And some of them could be applied in different subjects.

This shows that global citizenship education is an educative model that can be used in different areas of the curriculum, which allows giving coherence and a social and real sense.

Citizenship is something that keeps on being built every day as in our constant interaction with ourselves, with society, with others, with different cultural structures, social, political ... we build new models, new paradigms.

Anyone from wherever working place they have can contribute to building a fairer reality for all.

The school is undoubtedly the most suitable place to practice and exercise education for global citizenship. We must be partakers of a school that trains free citizens, respectful and judicious, but

especially should be a place for socialization where the students learn to live together, in a peaceful coexistence of different cultures. And we need to involve all stakeholders in the community, parents, students, and teachers.

Finally, when considering these experiences we found some of the ways in which teachers are positioned to these challenges regarding cultural diversity, being those:

- Linking a political compromise to the personal effort.
- They believe in global citizenship, and truly believe that they can influence the world.
- They believe that the other is oneself but different.
- They try to show the students a coherent approach by giving example.
- They keep on training in this area in order to get more knowledge and tools to use in their practices.

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