

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Luxembourg case study report 2 Intercultural Mediators for Refugee Children

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The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

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Intercultural Mediators for Refugee Children

In 1999, the Ministry of Education hired a schooling coordinator of refugee children, as well as 5 intercultural mediators speaking Serbo-Croatian, Albanian and Russian. They play a part in schools, on teachers' request (translations, particular help when new pupils arrive or regular help in classes, etc.). From 2004 calendar year, the possibility to extend this measure to Portuguese, Cape Verdean or others mediators has been planned in the State budget.

Rationale and Aims

The integration of foreign children who didn't begin their education in Luxembourg raises specific problems. The intercultural mediation dates back to 1999, constituting at that time a solution to the massive arrival of asylum-seekers, coming mainly from the Balkans (intercultural mediators speaking Albanian and Serbo-Croatian). At first meant to be temporary, the demand for intercultural mediation is now continuous and spreads to several languages: Albanian, Cape Verdean, Chinese, Italian, Persian, Portuguese, Russian or Serbo-Croatian.

The setting up of intercultural mediators fulfils several objectives:

- The intercultural mediator facilitates the communication between the school and foreign families.
- They are trained to be the mediator between people from different communities.
- They can help to settle some situations of cultural misunderstanding
- They give some information on the scholar system in Luxembourg and from the pupil's country of origin.

Description, Implementation

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training freely puts at the disposal of the actors on the scholar system (teachers, school officials, psychosocial departments, town council, parents and pupils) and for questions relating to schooling and parents, on telephone or written demand, the intercultural mediators department. The majority of intercultural mediators come from the country of origin of the people newly arrived in Luxembourg.

The mediator should listen to people; see to the good understanding between the interlocutors and encourage people to speak; help partners to find altogether a solution; to remain neutral and impartial and respect confidentiality.

The occasions where you can call for an intercultural mediator are numerous: briefing for parents; individual meeting between teachers, pupils and parents for school enrolment; translation of school document such as information letters for parents; assistance during psychological tests; if possible: assistance in class (on teachers request) extracurricular activities (also during summer holidays).

The mediator intervenes to help filling the "School Passport" for children of asylum-seekers. Made by the Ministry of Education, this small portfolio in French, Serbo-Croatian and Albanian, provides information on schooling and languages learnt in the country of origin, also linguistic learning and school progress performed in Luxembourg. If there is a change of school or a return to the country of origin, it can come along the school report to give some information on the schooling in Luxembourg.

Evaluations, Outcomes

Everything said by teachers, school officials and parents confirm the efficiency of mediation to inform parents, for children mainstreaming, to settle misunderstanding between parents and school, etc. In 2006, this measure has been highlighted in the annual report of the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia as an example of good practice.

References

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