



## WEBINAR SUMMARY

# Solidarity: An ethical imperative for advancing the role of education in migrant and refugee inclusion in Europe

Webinar: Ethics Education to foster intercultural and interfaith learning as a dialogical approach to transform migrant, refugee and host community dynamics

WEDNESDAY, 19 MAY 2021

## SUMMARY:

**Title of the Webinar:** Ethics Education to foster intercultural and interfaith learning as a dialogical approach to transform migrant, refugee and host community dynamics

**Date:** Wednesday, 19 May 2021.

**Moderator:** Ms. Laura Davison, Senior Coordinator, Partnerships and Policy, INEE – Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies

**Objectives of the Webinar:** To build awareness and dialogue on the role of ethics education for children to promote learning to live together among migrant, refugee and host communities in Europe.

## KEY POINTS FROM THE PANELISTS:

**QUESTION:** *Europe has been facing increasing challenges in terms of how migrant, refugee and host communities relate to each other and this has been exacerbated by the global pandemic. What is the role of teacher education in terms of how to live together and the kind of recalibrating that we need to do now that we are facing a global pandemic?*

**Mr. Barry van Driel, Secretary General – International Association for Intercultural Education (IAIE).**

As a whole migrants and refugees are becoming upwardly mobile throughout Europe but not reaching their full potential. While there is generational progress being made, in Europe, migrant and refugee students have higher risk of ESL (Early School Leaving) and NEET (Not in Education or Employment). Due to the

pandemic ESL and school disengagement have further increased. Gender also matters, and while in general in Europe boys tend to do worse than girls in terms of performance in schools, for refugees and migrants it is often the girls who do not perform as well as boys. This calls for attention and different interventions especially at the school level, as well as inputs in teacher's education. Teachers are not equipped well enough to deal with diversity in the classrooms and society, which is shown both by research and identified by teachers themselves. Main challenges have been the lack of background information and training.

Faith and beliefs are often ignored in intercultural education in almost all countries in Europe for many reasons. The solution that is often given, is to develop teachers' competences. However, the problem with the concept of "competences" is, that it sounds like a training with a beginning and an end, but it is important to understand, that developing competences is an ongoing process, a question lifelong learning. Competencies are not something one either has or does not have. Rather, they are built, strengthened and improved. Another issue is that too few teachers are themselves from a migrant or refugee background.

When looking at solutions, we need to go beyond only recognizing the background of migrant and refugee students – these backgrounds need to be activated in the classroom, including language, culture and history. We must empower students, ensuring their histories are told and importantly that they can take an active role in the learning in classrooms. However, teachers tend to be oriented towards their subject area and not know so much how about engaging in peer



learning and empowering students to take active roles in their learning.

Tackling the subtle biases teachers tend to have is another question. Teachers, as everyone, have a certain sense of their culture or religion, which is different from the migrant and refugee students in their classrooms. While teachers themselves might not be aware of these subtle biases, students often are, and they have a major impact on them. Professional development of teachers is needed, including diversity training. Internship trainings for teachers in diverse environments should be encouraged by the training facility and the government.

Additionally, migrant communities need to be better engaged in what happens in the school, too often schools are seen as separate from the community. We need to establish a better connection between formal and non-formal learning, for example through mentoring. We should also look more at what the refugees can themselves bring to the table and focus on the

positive instead of the negative sides. There are many best practices around the world but few policy makers are aware of these practices that really work. How can we better disseminate the best practices that exist?

**QUESTION:** *What opportunities and challenges in building positive relations among children of migrant, refugee and host communities are there from your experience? What are the needs you have identified in terms of learning and well-being? How ethics education can be used to address these needs?*

**Dr. Angeliki Aroni,** Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors in the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, Greece.

Starting with the challenges, one issue is that the dominant school practice is still based upon the values, norms and experiences of the native population. How can a teacher not have these subtle biases, if the whole curriculum is biased

to value the majority culture? The same goes for assessment tests, which in the majority of the cases are completely inappropriate for migrant and refugee populations. In many countries, such as in Greece, we are clustering migrant and refugee students in underperforming school. The technological innovations and digital tools put into the spotlight due to COVID-19 crisis have widened inequalities instead of narrowing them. Especially refugee students do not have the electronic devices or the internet connectivity to be able to attend online education and we do not have enough offline alternatives for them.

Looking at the opportunities, I quote a High School Principal: "Refugee students bring to school wealth and challenge...if these children have been so competent to survive everything they had to, then we have a lot to learn from them".

We need an **asset-based** approach, which highlights what these students **have** in contrast to the often-used deficit-based thinking which always emphasizes what they lack. Migrant and refugee students bring with them a wide array of skills and strengths both to the classroom and communities. Many have navigated multiple countries and schools, and their persistence, perseverance and adaptation skills are striking. Some have demonstrated tremendous resilience, surviving natural disasters, armed conflicts, wars, and refugee camps. They have determination, courage and problem-solving skills. Many speak two, three and sometime as many as four languages.

We know from research and practice that through language acquisition refugee and migrant children acculturate faster than their parents whom they assist in translation, mediation and

other cultural bridging. In school, they support classmates, bridging the gap between teachers and the most recent arrivals. Outside of class, they often work long hours to help support their families or they act as essential caregivers to younger siblings, especially the girls. They can make us appreciate our own life and everything we take for granted.

Ethics education can contribute to socio-emotional learning as it values **being** rather than doing, promoting learners' wellbeing. Especially for refugee students, it can mitigate the psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters by providing a safe and stable learning environment restoring a sense of normalcy, dignity and hope by offering structured, appropriate and supportive activities. Learning to Live Together can contribute to the interfaith dimension of ethics education in a country that is considered largely mono-ethnic, mono-cultural and mono-religious such as Greece. Being aware that this is not an easy task, I call on the words of Odysseas Elytis:

"When you cannot find spring, you make it".

**QUESTION: How can we support a culture of learning to live together through intercultural and interfaith learning?**

**Dr. Panagiotis Foukas, Public School Educator, Greece.**

We should be teaching Philosophy (Ethics) and Religion using theatre techniques. Philosophy provides the tools in reason and self-control. Religion should be taught alongside ethics by placing emphasis on the religion's common ground, such as the struggle for peace, freedom and justice, for the protection of human dignity



and promoting a human rights' culture. All religions pose the same basic existential questions and religion provides a common ground. In order to combine philosophy and religion to create an environment of dialogue and cooperation, teachers need to have faith, love, hope, openness, ecumenical spirit, dynamism, broad cultural interests such as theatre, music, dance, and literature, as all of these are our tools to teach ethics in schools. The students do not necessarily need to hear the words "philosophy" or "ethics", but the teacher should be capable of creating a dialogue in order to promote critical thinking, spirit of openness and tolerance. This creative approach gives the opportunity to witness the other as a fellow human being. We cannot communicate with the other without diversity.

As an example of implementing this in public schools, I start by posing an ethical dilemma and try to get as many varied answers as possible. Sometimes the children work in groups with diversity in terms of nationalities or religious backgrounds. Then I provoke the children into discussion with each other by presenting them

with some ethical or religious perspective, and encourage them to find a moral answer. After a moral answer is found together, I present them with a different philosophical or religious source that tackles a similar issue or that raises a similar moral answer. In this way, we see similar answers being found by people from different backgrounds and religions. With different methods the goal is to make the students realize they are all humans, and any other designation such as their religion or nationality does not change that. On the contrary, diversity enriches us.

Introducing ethics in a religion course does not betray Christian faith, and one of the main mission of the orthodox church is to aid the other in need. Church of Greece operates several shelters form unaccompanied minors through its NGO SYNPRAXIS and the focus is not only on essentials (bed and food), but on education and psychosocial support in order to give these minors a fair chance to become European citizens. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople supports interchristian and interreligious dialogue by organizing forums, symposia, meetings and marches, standing side by side with those in need and those under discrimination.

If we want a world of love and justice, we need to realize that we ought to change ourselves first. If we want to be good Christians, we need to spread the love we receive from them to our fellow humans. We should not forget that the only way to actually meet that, is to act as a vessel of love. This is what solidarity means, it is not an easy choice as it requires personal struggles and sacrifices, but it's a road worth taking as it is full of love, the only way to overcome intolerance and fanaticism. Religious

communities should have as their primal educational duty the pacifying elements of their faith and their will to discuss with those of different faith. This should be promoted in the legislation, in school books, in teaching, adult training and in teachers training.

**QUESTION:** *What are the key elements of ethics education for children that can foster solidarity and learning to live together among children of migrant, refugee and host communities? How can this contribute to foster positive relations between the communities and enhance the education and well-being of children?*

**Ms. Maria Lucia Uribe**, Director – Arigatou International Geneva.

Ethics is about relationships and we are talking about an ethics of care. Ethics Education is an approach in terms of content and form, in how we deliver education and also what it includes, supporting learners to develop ethical reflections and awareness. It's not so much about right or wrong, but understanding the consequences of one's actions on others, themselves and on nature. It helps learners to develop individual and collective responsibilities, to understand their role in the society, and enabling learners to empathize and develop respectful relations with others. This socio-emotional aspect of education and learning to empathise with others who are different is often left out in education. Ethics Education empowers the learner to make ethical decisions in the spirit of freedom and letting the children make the choices. It equips them to reconcile differences with others and work together towards common good.

There is a spiritual and deeply interconnected dimension to Ethics Education. Ubuntu, a term in Zulu language means "I am because you are". This adds to the understanding of Ethics Education; it is not just understanding an issue and trying to resolving it, but the understanding that we hold the life of the other in our hands and we are shaped by the relations with the other. In Arigatou International's Ethics Education approach the child is at the centre. For the learning to take place, we look at the learning environment that is context-sensitive. Who are the children attending, what are the majority-minority dynamics, what is their background, their needs and what do they bring to the classroom? We need to create safe learning environments, calling children by their name, allowing them to have a safe space to learn and be who they are and express their religion and culture. We need to use participatory and collaborative learning, creating spaces to play, use case studies and stories for learning, and to learn with the other not only about the other.

We can see certain transformations happening when we talk about Ethics Education. Critical-thinking and that children learn to think on the consequences on their actions and the information they receive is a very important aspect, whereas critical consciousness comes from the realisation of one's privileges or the lack of them. Self-driven learning is learning that is not imposed, but needs to be internalised by the child themselves by providing spaces to imagine possibilities for a different world. It has to lead to collective action, so that in the end children and young people can work together. While this requires role-modelling from us educators, we also need to model vulnerabilities – we don't have all the answers but we build

knowledge together with the children, moving away from vertical to horizontal relations.

We want to create a sense of interconnectedness with one another through Ethics Education. The ethical demand leads us to respond to the situations that affect others not because of sympathy but because of the simple fact that life depends on one other and we are interconnected. We hold the life of others in our hands and our actions affect us all. This is the ethics of care and Ethics Education that we want to transmit as a requisite to learning to live together. We need education of the mind and heart that leads to working together in solidarity. Education today needs to be conceived as an ethical demand and foster in children and youth the awareness of the ethical dimension of our interactions and relations with others.

## INPUTS FROM BREAK-OUT GROUP DISCUSSION

**Question 1: What sort of an educator is needed to facilitate transformative learning among children from refugee, migrant and host communities? What competencies do they need? What are the training needs for supporting educators fulfill this role?**

- We need to learn to see the needs of the students, be sensitive to the needs of children from refugee, migrant and host communities and really listen to them
- The educator should be motivated, give hope and positive reflections, support with the transition to the host country, and create a safe environment for learning



- The facilitator needs to be openminded to work with refugee children, and willing to learn from the children, their culture and religion
- Teachers must have awareness of cultural diversity and act accordingly, accepting differences among the students
- Important competencies are motivation, overcoming stereotypes and empathy
- We need to become aware of our own biases and subtle stereotypes that impact the students, we must accept that we have them and have the willingness to learn and change
- It is important for a teacher to be aware that he/she is a role model
- The facilitator has to remember they are dealing with children, who have come a very difficult way from another country
- Whole School Approach: all teachers need to have competencies to work in a

multicultural environment, not just those working directly with refugees

- Strengthening the knowledge of multiculturalism
- Critical pedagogy as a tool, knowing what kind of tools we have and need to empower children
- Having the awareness that to be a teacher is to be a student eternally
- Political rhetoric in each country affects the perceptions of teachers, the local community etc.
- Teaching about diversity through diversity

**Question 2: How can educators adapt pedagogical practices that can help create safe and transformative learning environments for inter-faith and intercultural learning among children from refugee, migrant and host communities?**

- Teachers need to have emotional intelligence as a competence and the courage apply this knowledge, to be provocative to move children into discussions and challenge children into conversations
- Creating dialogue and a safe environment so children feel confident enough to share. There are many techniques that can be used from theater to posing questions, or through games and movies.
- How to also create a safe environment for the teachers to feel confident and at ease when teaching ethics?

- Discussing about the needs of the teachers, through experience not only know about them
- Looking at how good and possible the different pedagogical approaches are in practice, understanding that they are not only for the refugee and migrant students, but also for the teachers' benefit, giving solutions to the main challenges teachers face in schools such as discipline, students' interest, their concentration, informing teachers that methods to create safe and transformative learning environments is an answer for the most difficult teaching problems – it is for themselves
- Ethics and religion are to be dealt within the educational context, as part of equal learning opportunities
- Ethics goes through all the subjects taught in school and it is about everyone in the school as a way of coexisting
- Refugee and migrant issues can seem as a "theoretical threat" for teachers, we need to help teachers understand that refugees and migrants are equal students
- How to address the issue of religious diversity and the religious identity of migrant and refugees? E.g., sharing about history can open up some of these questions, but there is fear from parents
- Developing practical methodologies for teacher training to internalize the pedagogy what ethics is and means in the context they teach in, to put themselves in the place of children and the diverse other



- Using dilemmas can help create good discussions and to place oneself in the place of the other
- Involving the community and parents, creating dialogues with them about diversity, the challenge is that it is difficult to engage the parents that are not interested
- Engaging the parents through their children, e.g., kids pose questions
- Transformative pedagogy increases the participation of children and their interest
- There are existing legal frameworks that support interreligious and intercultural education in schools
- Teachers need to nurture themselves, develop competencies, understand diversity and find common ground
- Teacher training colleges should include the aspect of diversity and refugees and migrants
- Introducing policies that encourage and promote bringing ethics into education and provide an environment conducive for applying it
- Ethics issues is not an issue of the subject, it is about how the school works
- Teachers have to overcome the taboo of dealing with ethics and religion

**Question 3: What are the ways in which children from refugee, migrant and host communities can work together on collective actions that can transform the relationships between their communities? How can we support them?**

- Children can come together through activities and through play, for example through cultural programs in which the students participate, help produce transformations in the relationship between the children
- Sport competitions amongst the children, religious congregation, activities that children from different religions can join together
- Art activities, visits to museums and other group activities
- Importance of play in forging relations and as a chance to mix and get to know other children
- Example of Sri Lanka (post war context), where children from two ethnic groups are open and respect the others, and want to learn different languages → Students need to be motivated and supported by teachers to bring them together
- Ethics education is important and is missing, this is necessary for bringing children together
- Ethical behavior should start from home – a holistic cycle of support
- Support children through not only through school but the family and wider family, different roles of parents, connection with

grandparents and wider family support, teachers, social workers etc.

- Parents council/associations should exist and support children
- Informal and non-formal education can significantly contribute to ethics education programs
- Roles of faith communities is important, ethics is embedded in all religions

**FINAL DISCUSSION**

- We place a lot of expectations on teachers, but do not give them enough support, mentoring and training
- How do reach out better to the teachers who are not likeminded, who do not want to change their ways or become more interculturally competent? How to bring them into the dialogue? → one solution is to bring the conversation to the school level
- Another challenge is the teachers' lack of time to attend trainings and engage in discussions after working hours on their own time
- Being "smart", introducing things subtle way through the window and not the door, by think of different ways to bring these topics to teachers → e.g., instead of the title "intercultural education" let's use "solving your main educational problems in three steps", or when talking about religion, introducing it though "how to deal with differences that your students have?"

- Success stories and showing the impact and transformation brought by children will inspire others, collecting more success stories to showcase
- Many activities are “for” children, let’s have children in the forefront running projects as active agents of change, Even organizing child-led projects for refugees and migrants, this perception needs to be changed of working **for** the other, not **with** the other → we want to see more projects working together, the perception of inclusion that we move from doing for the other to doing together.
- People’s lack of commitment is a challenge. Refugee students have met with many adversities, they need encouragement and support in order to commit themselves in the learning process and in trusting people again, but the example they get from the adults is their inability to commit, not in personal relationships nor in professional relationships
- The new narratives that the children can create is a way of having an impact in their parents and communities
- Whole School Approach in which the communities engage can have a snowball effect and challenge the stereotypes and fear of bringing religion and religious identities in the classroom
- Children and young people can be leading initiatives and campaigns that tackles hatespeech and discrimination especially using different social media platforms.

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[ethicseducationforchildren.org/solidarity/](https://ethicseducationforchildren.org/solidarity/)