

## **Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region**

The curriculum that has been developed in Croatia is an excellent example of a curriculum designed to catalyse dialogue between students who are members of diverse ethnic groups. It provides many opportunities for critical engagement with alternative cultural perspectives and as such allows for the broadening of horizons and for exploration of a number of ways of living the 'good life'. The curriculum actively encourages openness to diversity.

This curriculum acknowledges that human beings are culturally embedded, that is, that we are shaped by the communities in which we develop. However it also recognises that we are interdependent, sharing, for example, responsibility for the environment in which we live. Whilst an exploration of difference is a necessary and important part of this curriculum an equal emphasis should be placed on what we can achieve *together*. In such a way there can be recognition also of our common humanity through our agreement on common values such as tolerance, respect and equality. It is good to see a curriculum firmly rooted in agreed and common values and indeed many of these values resonate clearly with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which provides an excellent basis for this kind of educational initiative.

This curriculum views cultural diversity as a positive reality, in a similar way to Bhikhu Parekh's reconceptualisation of multiculturalism in his 2006 book 'Rethinking Multiculturalism'. Also, after Parekh, this curriculum actively encourages interaction between cultural groups, as opposed to the building of boundaries and subsequent ethnic ghettoisation. Indeed Parekh suggests that no cultural group is of itself complete and that it is in the dialogue between cultures that we 'glimpse humanity'. This curriculum should provide opportunities for children to explore not only distinctive cultures but the places where those cultures intersect. This will involve a recognition that culture is not static or fixed, but rather that it evolves over time and as a result of intercultural encounters. Such encounters may not just be with majority groups in society but also with minority cultural groups and teachers will need to ensure that such minority groups are also represented in the curriculum.

The curriculum has clear educational goals with regards to knowledge, skills and attitudes. It may be helpful to rearticulate these in terms of learning objectives, that is, what the students will be able to do as a result of studying the curriculum. This articulation would aid with the development of a clear assessment policy for the curriculum. There is good evidence of progression within the subject area and this could perhaps be mapped diagrammatically for clarity.

The pedagogies to be utilised include active learning strategies that allow for independent exploration and investigations of topics by the students. It is innovative and creative to see students of different age groups encourage to work together on projects. Such pedagogies will undoubtedly influence and encourage greater involvement in democratic processes in the schools for the students and are to be praised. In addition the exploration

of sometimes controversial subjects such as identity and religion require the use of clear ground rules in the classroom in order to establish a safe space in which difference can be explored. Such ground rules can include 'no put downs', 'one person to speak at a time' and 'treat each other with respect'.

It is an excellent idea to suggest that teachers keep reflective journals with regards to the new curriculum and opportunities to share these reflections should be encouraged, recognising that this is a new venture and there is much to learn from our mistakes as well as our successes.

I would like to congratulate you all on this exciting curriculum project and look forward to hearing more about its implementation.

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