

Intercultural Mentoring tools to support migrant integration at school (INTO)

COMENIUS Multilateral projects

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Abstract

Within the scope of European policies and to combat educational disadvantages for migrant children, numerous actions have been taken to improve the position of migrant children in education. In secondary education the emphasis lies on diversification of the offered teaching methods and extra guidance of the pupils. Some schools in Europe have set up measures to increase the continuity of the educational support in terms of migrant pupil inclusion and orientation. Despite these measures, dropout rates are still high among migrant youth and compared to their native peers a disproportionately large number attend the lowest levels of secondary school after completing primary school. The disappointing results of regular guidance are partly the reason for the development of more innovative forms of guidance.

The project aims to promote strategies and methods that help students with a migrant background at risk of ESL to maintain their motivation through the development, testing and validation of an Intercultural Mentoring Programme based on the empowered peer education methodology.

The Intercultural mentor profile will be adapted to different European contexts, developed in collaboration with at least 100 school staff members (headmaster and secondary school teachers from 5 different European countries) and tested with at least 50 students with a migrant background trained as Intercultural Mentors.

The impact of the project will be sustained thanks to its outcomes:

- (i) Didactic Kit: conceived as self-teaching materials will contain the training framework to directly implement the model of intervention in secondary schools system;
- (ii) Guideline Handbook: support the future implementation of training courses – by other education organizations and secondary school,
- (iii) Project website: it will include not only the results and materials of the project (handbooks, e-learning platform, reports, etc.) but will also include updated information on young migrants.

Keywords: *Mentoring, Intercultural, Methodology, Education, Secondary Schools*

1 INTRODUCTION

According to the European statistics (Eurostat) and those of Member States because of a stream of “migrant students” the great gap of school performance between “migrant students” and “ native students” holds steady (for example native students scored 40points more than their migrant classmates according to Pisa table). National and European research highlight a *disadvantaged position* of students from migrant background: negative marks, high rate of students being held back, concentration only on few subjects, school drop-out and absenteeism (For further information please read the research: *Education at a Glance 2012, OECD Indicators*). The main reasons which lie on this condition are closely related to a socio-economic and cultural context of the family. Indeed, families are often unable to support the student in his/her studies or homework assignment, help sons and daughters to choose the best option for their scholastic careers, and endorse motivation and project. The *target group* are definitely preteens and adolescent immigrants (over 14), and the most critical moment is the delicate transition from middle school to high school. Undoubtedly it is a “crucial” *phase* for scholastic careers of each student, when several critical factors come out. For instance, in Italy the first year of high school 38% of foreign students failed and another 10% dropped out ((Miur-ISMU, *Alunni con cittadinanza non italiana. Verso l'adolescenza, Rapporto nazionale*, Roma-Milano, 2012).

Meanwhile, the educational institution must carry out its function as an formative figure guaranteeing equal opportunities to everyone, especially during this period of economic crisis. Therefore, the progressive reduction of economic resources should push the school system to find new and sustainable solutions. There is so much to learn from an intercultural “resilience” which is able to turn troubles into strong points. The educational institution is not aware of having within valuable resources which can help the school performance of students, especially those who having more difficulties.

We figured out, thanks to experimental methods from other schools of European countries, the Mentor figure is that has reached more success – based on mentoring methodology. Mentors guide and support learning paths of their disadvantaged classmates at school and out of school. It means an “inclusive” approach to teaching and learning which satisfies all students’ expectations, especially for those who come from more hostile environment. Unfortunately, the “hospitable classmate” role is a resource still little known and regulated by school (as it is said by the European research of Eurydice, *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe*, Bruxelles, 2009), that must find its own “institutionalized position” at school: a proposal that is still waiting for an appropriate definition both in methodology subjects and approaches. In particular we need to specify precise tasks and conditions of this planning proposal: both to people who will be involved in this Intercultural Mentoring activities (young immigrants, youth who need to improve

their school performance paying attention especially during the “phase” from middle school to high school), and to people who will carry out the role of Mentor (older classmates, experts or foreign students). The idea is to place side-by-side foreign young people –considering that this is the more vulnerable target - with older “Welcome Buddy” figure, who helps, supports, stimulates and gives advice. It is a right method since it is an available (both inside and outside of schools through the national engagement) and convenient resource. In addition, there are other advantages for all people involved: families, schools and especially for people who “are guided” and those who “guide”. The “older buddy” is like a “star” that orients and helps foreign student towards the academic integration, improving their school performance, learning and reducing the school drop-out. This Mentor role can be carried out by older and more qualified youth. They can be native, but it would be better still if a mentor was foreign in order to pay more attention to migrant youth or migrants’ children who are the main characters in this project, making them become active citizens (according to the European research “International Education in Schools”, by Cristina Allemann-Ghionda required by the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament, in June 2008).

Thanks to the Intercultural Mentoring the “older welcome buddy” and students have the possibility to improve their skills and capacities getting stronger in their relationships at the same time. Frequent mentor meetings, managed by coordinator/teacher, are formative moments since the experience of the Mentoring and opinions can be exchanged. Carrying out Mentoring tasks helps these young people to gain skills and capacities necessary for a personal growth and becoming active citizen. Moreover, Mentoring creates a better social climate within the class or group, thanks to the introduction of new and better pedagogical methodologies which facilitate a more efficient management of the class.

Teachers’ Training plays a crucial role in this project permitting them to use this resource in a properly way. Indeed, promoting this project each school will be aware of the Intercultural Mentoring importance, using it as a routine and stable tool, that is the main goal of the project. Therefore we need to define the intervention models, submit them to testing and spread them at European level.

Up to date, all partner subjects of this project have realized significant experiences in this topic. In particular the relevant triennial Italian experience (realized in Turin, Milan, Bologna, Arezzo schools) through the Intercultural Mentor figure (an older immigrant mate) in 3 eighth grade of the middle school and 1 ninth grade (first year of high school). This experience permitted to elaborate and test: process, actions and tools. (Centro COME, *ScuolaFacendo. Sostenere le scelte scolastiche, accompagnare i passaggi delle ragazze e dei ragazzi stranieri*, Milano, 2012; G. Favaro, *Figure di prossimità. I tutor stranieri accompagnano il cammino d’integrazione*).

2 PARTNERSHIP

The INTERMENTOR Consortium rationale is to combine partners with research capacities in the field of education and school integration (P3, P5, P6) with partners which owns capacities to reach schools and teachers in order to test and adopt tools and methodologies offered by the project (P2) with partner assuring the vastest diffusion of project outputs thanks to the relevant network he is part of (P1, P4, P6).

To carry out this work a partnership needs to satisfy the following requirements:

- 1) To have experience that is relevant for content development and teacher and pupils training;
- 2) To have appropriate technical skills to develop the contents and to apply the community experiences;
- 3) To have contact and/or experience working with schools, families, groups at risk of exclusion, social agents;
- 4) Skills appropriate to carry out the dissemination and exploitation to the project target groups.
- 5) Skills and experience in European project management.

Each partner will assume the coordination of at least one WP, in accordance to each partner skills, as shown below. All partners will be involved in all WP and cooperate actively with WP coordinators in defining concrete methodologies and in implementing activities at national levels.

The complementary skills of the consortium give as result a well-balanced partnership, distributed as follows:

P1 OXFAM Italia (OIT) – (WP1 Coordination): This institution will be the leader of the project. OIT has advanced skills in managing strategic partnerships and alliances, vast experience in coordination and participation in immigrant-related European projects. This partner is a non-governmental organization with experience with collectives at risk of exclusion.

P2 Oxfam Italia Intercultura (OII) – (WP3, WP4). Oxfam Italy Interculture is Oxfam Italy's social cooperative, founded in 2010. Its history is linked to Oxfam Italy's vast experience on the issues of immigration and integration. OII inherits a strong link working both locally and nationally through partnerships with public authorities and agencies, voluntary and no-profit organizations, educational authorities and universities. OII main goals is the integration of people from such groups into schools. Its direct link with schools, capacity to implement various activities with teachers and pupils. Successful intervention within disadvantages groups (including immigrants) and coordination and participation in immigrant-related projects. Development of training contents for teaching staff and direct and privileged contact with immigrant communities and participation in immigrant-related national programs.

P3 Universidad de Salamanca (USAL) – (WP2 - WP9 Coordination). It has research experience in areas such as content development, training of trainers, formal and informal learning programs application, social learning application, etc. In addition they were coordinators in EU immigrants related projects so they have the experience and results of that specific project. research skills and experience in carrying out need analysis and country context profile, in related European projects.

P4 - CARDET – (WP7, WP8) Coordination: direct and privileged contact with teachers, educators and policy making in the field of education. They have experience and knowledge about real necessities of learning institutions and the interaction problems between them and the learning stakeholders. Coordination of Project Website due to its expertise in developing web portal and in dealing with ICT tools (www.migrationnetwork.org).

P5 - University of Social Sciences in Lodz (WP5 Coordination). This partner is an higher education Polish institution with training experience at different levels (specially teacher training and higher education), activities and a huge experience in EU project management.

P6 - University of Southampton (WP6 Coordination): Thanks to the vast network of teachers, educators and policy making in the field of education, this partner has the potential of reaching multiple stakeholders and spread project contents on vast scale.

3 OBJETIVES AND RESULTS

The main objective of the project is to promote strategies and methods that help students with a migrant background at risk of ESL to maintain their motivation through the development and promotion of “Intercultural Mentoring”.

INTERMENTOR intends to achieve the following specific objectives:

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- (I) Apply in Italy, Spain, UK, Cyprus and Poland the *Intercultural Mentor Profile*, an empowered peer education model of stimulating young people sense of initiative and motivating students with migrant backgrounds to fulfill their educational potential;
- (II) Develop, test and implement training and didactic materials aimed at innovating schools education system through an intercultural mentoring programme based on the centrality of young people, especially immigrants;
- (III) Implement five pilot training courses for secondary school teachers in order to promote their professional development and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning in multicultural contexts, enhancing the inclusion of pupils with a migrant background.

This project brings together key experts from the fields of education, civil society and research institutions to review best practices and achievements of peer education in this field, as well as to enable dissemination of learning from this process through the development of an in-service training course for teachers, and of a resource pack with a curriculum modules for use with young people in schools.

The project aims to become an educational test to build an interdependence between the field of intercultural education and active citizenship ensuring real opportunities for educational achievement and socio-cultural integration of foreign pupils in secondary schools.

The project partners will produce:

- a) An in-service training course for teachers from the perspective of teaching / learning life-skills, key competencies: during this course, conducted with an action research methodology, teachers of different subjects will set up a new model of intervention within their schools;
- b) An informal training course for students with a migrant background to become an Intercultural Mentor;
- c) A series of original educational material (*Guideline Handbook, Didactic Kit*) for wider implementation of the mentoring programme across the European school education system;
- d) A project website developed through the project activities that will act as ongoing networks and forums to maintain the active engagement of the various stakeholders during and beyond the life of the project i.e. education providers, pupils, civil society organization, and local authorities.

The above mentioned material will be produced on the basis of an accurate need analysis on integration of migrant students highlighting assets and liabilities in each participating country and using these results for the content adaptation. This process will be carry out under the scientific supervision of the Scientific Committee. The teachers participating at the training courses in 5 countries will be active actors of the testing phase: they will produce the original educational materials, under the coordination of an expert with the scientific supervision of researchers.

The project provides the exchange of best practices among partners in the schools integration field. Especially we will strengthen teachers observation skills in order to be able to support students during the choice of their future studies (orientation phase), but also to be able to monitor the school social environment and to intervene promptly in case of negative indicators in terms of school transition between lower and upper secondary school.

Partners will address their action to change described situation by undertaking the following steps:

- (i) actively working on the need analysis of each participating country relating to integration of migrant students (WP2), assessing methodologies and tools to create the Training Courses for teachers and mentors and the Intercultural Mentor Profile;
- (ii) using the results of WP2 in the product development task of WP3. Training contents and materials will be adapted in accordance with the structural factors (national partner context) and the cultural conditions to which teaching staff in Europe are subjected; It will also been taken into special consideration the best practices identified and national partner context;
- (iii) implementing the pilot training courses in 5 different national context . This will allow the testing and validation of the training contents developed under WP3;
- (iv) participating in the product validation phase, by collaborating in the definition of improvement areas for the pilot training course and contributing in the preparation of the final version of each tools. The accomplishment of the above mentioned tasks will provide training contents and materials fully applicable and plainly capable of supporting training courses.

4 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

With the support of the Lifelong Learning Program of the European Union. Project Reference: 540440-LLP-1-2013-1-IT-COMENIUS-CMP. This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication only reflects the views of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.