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C U L P E E R

# CULPEER

Cultural and peer-learning approaches for successful integration of disadvantaged youth and refugees at school level

Erasmus+ KA2

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## **Brief guidelines for integration and application of the "CULPEER" approach in schools**

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## Declaration

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## Glossary of terms

### Social exclusion

...It goes far beyond (*poverty*), including deprivation not only from material goods but also from non-material, eventually leading to "social, economic and political marginalisation".<sup>1</sup>

The above mentioned includes:

- poor living conditions (housing, nutrition, clothing)
- poor conditions related to health and difficulties in accessing health care
- obstacles in participating in the public social and/or political life
- obstacles in enjoying cultural activities
- a sense of isolation from a community, both emotionally and psychologically

**Social integration** represents "the process, through which an individual becomes a part of a social system, accepting the values that define the normative order (..) through the conveyance of cultural models and dominant behaviour patterns provided by family school and primary groups"<sup>2</sup>. According to such understandings however, the idea of integration is a concept, which can be related to "assimilation" (which does not entail the mutual exchange), that according to Castle and Miller "can perpetuate the sense of marginalization and conflict"<sup>3</sup>. According to what is stated by the Common Basic Principles for immigrant integration Policy in the EU, integration is "a dynamic" two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States<sup>4</sup>, accompanied by respect for the basic values of the European Union on the one hand and guaranteeing the practice of diverse cultures and religions under the Charter of Fundamental Rights on the other hand.

**Inclusion** adds to the social integration concept a further just relation of mutual influence between the person and the environment.

In Germany "Inclusion" has become the keyword for Integration in schools, related to the UN-Convention on participation of disabled persons in societies.

The German definition: "Inclusive education describes an approach that is essentially based on the appreciation of diversity<sup>5</sup>. In an inclusive education system, people with and without disabilities learn together from the beginning. Homogeneous and therefore separating learning groups are not established. From children's day care centers to schools and colleges, up to further education facilities, no one is excluded from the general education system due to a disability. On the contrary it is the task of the education system to provide particular assistance and support to the individual learners by providing special means and methods. It is not the individual who has to adapt to a particular system, but the system

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<sup>1</sup> G. Paolini, "Youth Exclusion and Lessons from Youth Work; Evidence from Literature and Surveys", Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), European Commission.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/integrazione-sociale\\_%28Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/integrazione-sociale_%28Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali%29/)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.parlarecivile.it/argomenti/immigrazione/integrazione.aspx> "Integrazione (inclusione/esclusione, interazione, assimilazione, multiculturalismo)"

<sup>4</sup> Council of the EU, Press release 14615/04 - [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/82745.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/82745.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://lexikon.stangl.eu/4217/inklusive-padagogik/>

must, in the opposite direction, take into account the needs of all learners and has to adjust approaches if necessary.”

### **Peer-to-peer learning**

Peer-to-peer learning involves individuals of nearly the same age, or bound by a common special interest in the process of sharing experiences and knowledge with one another. It can occur intentionally – through facilitated formal opportunities, such as peer-to-peer learning groups, or unintentionally – through informal and usually accidental learning. The educational approach combines non-formal and informal learning strategies. The peer-to-peer learning occurs amongst peers, in which case the messages are far more easily accepted and assimilated internalized. That makes it a form of learning with more sustainable results.

### **Cultural peer learning (CPL)**

There are 3 typological understandings of cultural peer-to-peer learning that we share within the CULPEER FOR INTEGRATION project:

- an educational approach technique of involving peers in teaching and learning culture-related skills (theatre, music, writing, art, performance, dance, language, circus, acrobatics, e-based art techniques, combined performances)
- involving peers into learning about different cultures and the diversity of cultures.
- involving peers of different cultural backgrounds into learning desired cultural competencies AND intercultural competencies by cultural activities.

### **Short/medium/long term cultural peer learning offers**

Short-term cultural peer learning offers are one or few visits to a certain school – with performance/s and/or workshop/s – which may have no sustainable character.

Medium cultural peer learning offers are prolonged exchanges – including incentive performances, common workshops and presentations of achieved results - with one or more cultural peer learning groups over a school-term or a school year.

Long-term cultural peer learning offers include multiannual, sustainable common work with cultural peer learning groups, often leading to the establishment of new cultural groups and new peer leaders/tutors.

### **Migrant/migration/immigration**

**Immigration** is the international movement of people into a destination country of which they are not natives or where they do not possess citizenship in order to settle or reside there, especially as permanent residents or naturalized citizens, or to take-up employment as a migrant worker or temporarily as a foreign worker.

Children of migrants, whether they migrated with their parents or were born in the host country, are considered to have a **migrant background or migrant history** as it is referred to in Germany.

An **economic migrant**<sup>6</sup> is someone who emigrates from one region to another to seek an improvement in living standards because the living conditions or job opportunities in the migrant's own region are not good.

**Immigrants** or **expatriates** are people who work legally in another country.

### **Target group**

These are the children and youth, who, due to certain reasons, are endangered by isolation or early dropping out of school.

### **A cultural group for peer learning**

These are children and young people, who are organized into a cultural artistic group, which is prepared to conduct peer learning activities. They offer both incentive performances for generating interest and attracting participants, as well as short-term, mid-term and long-term workshops and courses in various artistic fields.

### **Artistic and educational director**

An expert, who can initiate, facilitate, monitor and report cultural peer learning activities – from the selection of the cultural group for peer learning (whether from another continent or from a next-door school) and the formation of the target group (children and youth, endangered by isolation and exclusion), with which the cultural group for peer learning works for the achievement of certain objectives, till the reporting of the achieved results and the facilitation of the interim and/or final performance done by the target group alone or by both groups together.

### **Workshop**

A practical activity, during which the two groups – the cultural group and the target group, which needs to overcome exclusion risks – interact and together implement the artistic activities, which fall into the cultural group's expertise. As a result of the workshop, the target groups develop new competences – both artistic and key competences<sup>7</sup>, as well as other social and soft skills.

## **Introduction**

The problem of *social exclusion* on the school level is quite acute and important for all EU member states, especially in the big cities and urban centres. More and more young students see no perspectives in terms of personal, professions development or social inclusion and confront barriers created within their environment due to a wide array of reasons. According to the EU Social Protection Committee "the social and economic situation of young people in Europe has worsened during the last years" and "young people are

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/economic-migrant>

<sup>7</sup> Key competences are: communication in one's mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, digital skills, literacy, and basic skills in maths and science, as well as horizontal skills such as learning to learn, social and civic responsibility, initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness, and creativity.

among those most severely affected by the crisis". The issue is particularly frequent and serious for those with a migrant background, children of refugees or asylum seekers, as well as for all those who clearly differ from the majority that surrounds them, including Roma and young people with disabilities. The fact that even if after 2013 the risks of exclusion due to poverty have stopped growing for the total population and for the children, but they persist for the youth, should be sufficiently disturbing.

Many of the young people facing exclusion risks do not find access to the educational systems, either by formal or informal channels, or easily drop out. The majority of the orthodox pedagogical approaches fail to reach this group and make a difference for their lives and their future – social, cultural, professional.

Positive examples of the project Children's Culture Caravan and other even purely local (within one school only<sup>8</sup>) activities with cultural approaches and peer-to-peer learning concepts demonstrate that methods of this nature are more suitable for accessing the hard to reach target groups we mentioned above and provide support for their social integration. The cultural and artistic rather than purely cognitive approach, in combination with meetings with cultural groups for peer learning, create an easier access for these target groups to solutions to their social and integration problems by means of concrete experiences and socio-cultural exchanges with other young people concerned.

The combination of cultural approaches and peer-to-peer learning methods open up new possibilities for targeting social integration problems both on a political and decision-making level, as well as on a basic, ground level by initiating and demonstrating the effects of a socio-cultural dialogue among participants who have the greatest chance to influence each other. Using music, artistic and drama projects, students facing exclusion and disintegration are motivated to deal with their social situation and think about ways and possibilities to change it.

Every individual is experiencing learning on a daily basis. Whether at school, during breaks, at work, during leisure time, while interacting with family members, friends or other people, an individual constantly engages in facing, analysing, dealing with, resolving various situations, which means that he/she improves and acquires additional skills outside the formal learning processes, sometimes without even being conscious of this fact.

The competences obtained via informal and non-formal learning are significant in many ways and often more important, relevant and useful in various life situations than the knowledge obtained via structured formal learning. This has already been recognized also by the European Education System that is systematically developing in the direction of obtaining "learning competences" rather than just "accumulating knowledge". The scope of unintentionally gained experiences (another term for "informal learning") has until recently been considered as too immense to be doctrinally acceptable. However the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) system adoption is an obvious proof that these can already be defended, documented and included into one's CV and set of competences, for future use during the professional life.

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<sup>8</sup> The singing and dancing clubs organized and led by talented children in the Hamburg "Fritz Schumacher" school for example.

## **Expected outcomes**

As stated in the glossary of terms, peer-to-peer learning involves individuals of nearly the same age, or bound by a common special interest in the process of sharing experiences and knowledge with one another intentionally – through facilitated formal opportunities, such as cultural groups for peer learning - or unintentionally – through informal and usually accidental learning.

Some of the most distinct benefits of peer-to-peer learning, which need to be accepted and considered, even if the cultural peer learning approach and the formal educational system are to a great extent contradicting, include:

1. Peer-to-peer learning requires students to work together and develop collaboration skills. This gives them practice in planning, teamworking and makes them a part of a learning community, which depends and relies on their involvement and in which they have a stake.
2. When the authority of the teacher is left in the background and is not leading the process or setting the objectives, increased possibilities for students to engage in reflection and exploration of ideas surface before them. The realization of these possibilities depends on the ways, in which peer-to-peer learning is established and on the context, in which it operates.
3. Students gain more practice in communicating in the subject area, because they are able to articulate their understanding and receive feedback have by peers as well as learn from experiencing different roles and viewpoints.
4. Peer-to-peer learning is about a group of students taking collective responsibility for identifying their learning needs and planning how to address those. In itself this is a crucial learn-how-to-learn skill and at the same time a practical experience of the interaction, another ability which will need to be mastered for future employment. Learning to collaborate with others to reach mutual goals is a necessary prerequisite for achieving individual and group success in the framework of the relational complexity in contemporary advanced society.

The cultural peer learning includes non-formal and informal methods, successfully combining the advantages of both. Cultural peer learning has clear short-term objectives, accompanied by the acquisition of an array of unintentional long-term competences.

This can easily be showcased with a simple circus workshop: a group of children present a circus show, followed by a peer-to-peer workshop to teach the audience some of the most interesting and feasible skills. The non-formal learning objective is for the children in the audience to acquire some basic abilities, which they are motivated to do with 1) the perception of the fact the other peer is capable of using the skills; 2) the absence of a clearly defined and - more importantly - to-be-graded task; 3) the involvement in a broader team or group of peers; 4) the shifting away from formal environment.

At the same time, the auditory children are subjects to unintentional, informal learning: their social skills are put into an actual peer-test (they have to engage with unknown peers; and learn a skills under other peers' influence), overcome a possible language or cultural barrier (if the peers are from different cultural backgrounds), find new ways of self-expression through developed interest in the activity. One can benefit further from the experience if he/she encourages the children to create their own cultural group (such as an own circus show). In this case the children plausibly gain valuable entrepreneurship, team-work, self-management skills.



### **Benefits - why is cultural peer learning necessary?**

The cultural peer learning adds extra flexibility and value to other peer learning approaches and is particularly beneficial for disadvantaged learners/pupils by facilitating a low-level-entrance to the learning processes for them. Not only does it create opportunities for students to discuss various issues, but it also enriches the students' emotional intelligence for an improved understanding of the cultural background of their peers and thus – an improved understanding of the grounds and motivations for their actions, which is crucial for a successful integration and inclusion process.

In those cases when the cultural groups for peer learning are from different cultural backgrounds and with a language barrier to overcome, the children participating get another perspective and new interest in the others' culture and language, which has a strong potential to empower children with migrant background and to foster their social inclusion. The latter (members of circus, theatre, acrobatic or other groups) understand from experience how interesting and charismatic their culture could seem to the people of the host country, to which they are migrants. To go even further, cultural peer learning can be used for destroying stereotypes within a society, starting from its student groups. When peers with different cultural backgrounds are actively engaged in common activities, all of them need to reconsider their own prejudices and the paradigms they are influenced by.

The cultural peer learning creates a transfer and generation of emotional and soft skills and involves children in an interaction characterized by the so-called "reciprocal vulnerability", which encourages peers to take an active role.

Cultural peer learning fosters talents and competencies of the students, which in daily school life are often not known and registered. It is the contrary to normal school approach to deal with deficits.

## **1. Reasons for exclusion and groups facing exclusion in the partner countries**

Isolation from peers and fellow-students is a really complex problem, created by a number of interrelated reasons, which as we already mentioned, might be of personal nature (health reasons, personal tragedy, etc.), might be related to the educational process itself (bullying at school, low or unsatisfactory achievements) or might be rooted into a poor socioeconomic status. As a result of all this, children drop out of the educational system and later on fall into social and economic isolation.

Teachers must always be alert in order to manage to identify in a timely manner the signs of a child being pushed away or isolated. Positive indications about this are: ***hardships in learning the school material, low self-assessment, nasty or cheeky behavior, absence from school, family problems, communication problems or conflicts with teachers and fellow-students.*** When moving to a new school or class, it is quite possible for the child to have problems fitting in, finding new friends or keeping the school order.

At the roots of inclusive education lies the idea that the personality of each student should be accepted and his/her education should be organized in a way allowing maximum satisfaction of his/her needs. The inclusion of disadvantaged students is a complex process

depends on the individual characteristics, needs of the child in focus, the group it is joining and the teachers who are teaching it<sup>9</sup>.

The individual approach on behalf of the teachers can neutralize to a great extent the risks of isolation of the children and to support their easier integration. If the children fail to receive on time the human, pedagogical and psychological help they need, their problems at school will become greater and the gap between them and the other students, wider. However, the possibilities of having teachers carrying out individual work with the students at risk of exclusion and dropping out, are limited due to the lack of educational staff.

The efficiency of the work done on identification and counteraction to the process of isolation and early school leaving is also often hindered by the lack of specialized knowledge and competences for working with seriously vulnerable groups. Among the frequently observed gaps in the vocational preparation of teachers, can also be mentioned the lack of real, day-to-day based concern and support for acceptance and understanding of others.

School education level is in our focus, because it plays a crucial role in the development of young people in their years of growth, both psychologically and physiologically. School represents the place where integration is a fundamental requirement for didactic success and social well-being. Lately, due to the greater presence of children and young people coming from different backgrounds, the EU states are becoming more and more open to using and experimenting with informal didactic approaches, based on peer-learning. The adoption of such approaches promotes “the empowerment of cognitive and social skills of people who are to face the growing complexity and relations of school and work in the global society; the learning of solidarity, of mutual support and the positive acceptance of others”<sup>10</sup>.

The long version of the Guidelines developed under this project, includes specifics about the reasons for early school leaving and exclusion in the different partner countries. Here we are giving just a summary of the common and/or unique categories of exclusion reasons:

- **Economic reasons and unemployment**

Unemployment, low income and living standard as well as poverty place a great number of children in conditions leading to an increased risk of early school leaving. As a result of the financial and economic hardships, the children are forced to help their families, which leads to disrupting their participation in the educational process.

Troubles and hardships of economic nature place the children in complex situations in their homes. In their attempts to solve the poverty problem, families often migrate, which leads to switching schools. Thus the children lose interest and motivation for education, which ultimately leads to their early school leaving. Dropping out due to a necessity to help the household in the everyday activities or to raise other family members is also a barrier considered as economic in its nature<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Successful socialization of students with special education needs. At: *Virtual center for inclusive education* [online] [05.04.2017]. Accessible from: <http://priobshti.se/article/ot-specialisti/uspeshna-socializaciya-na-uchenici-sus-specialni-obrazovatelni-potrebnosti>

<sup>10</sup> <http://web.unitn.it/files/download/8701/quad57.pdf> “Educazione interculturale e modello cooperativo: teoria e pratica della educazione tra pari.”

<sup>11</sup> Project Prevention of early school leaving in Bulgaria. UNICEF. [Checked on 17.03.2017]. Accessible from: <https://www.unicef.bg/public/files/press/12.pdf>

#### - **Social reasons**

These are related to parental lack of interest, arguments, conflicts, tension and crises in the family, negative influence by the home environment, functional illiteracy or low education of the parents, single parent families, children raised by grandparents, children and students at risk of antisocial or abusive behavior, which is against the law, home violence, disregard of the children's right to choice, imposing harsh punishments.

There is a considerable connection between the low educational results of the children in school and the socio-economic status of their families. Informal groups and friends' environment could also play a considerable role for the premature school leaving of children and young people.

#### - **Educational reasons**

Educational reasons encompass a wide span of problems: hardships in comprehension of the educational content, weaknesses in the methodology of teaching and the organization of the educational process. The educational reasons are related also to the assessment approaches, the teachers' qualifications, the studying habits, the resistance of participants in the educational process and the lack of motivation and the quality of the textbooks. The great number of absences, the lack of a sufficiently effective system to control the way of leading and reporting of the students, the lack of discipline, the aggression and violence in school, the low educational results are also a part of educational reasons.

The relations in the kindergarten and school, the underdeveloped professional orientation and consultation, the inappropriate choice of school and the unattractiveness of vocational education are also among the most important educational reasons for early school leaving. The potential of teachers, pedagogical counselors and school psychologists for supporting and providing psychological and pedagogical help to the students for prevention of early school leaving is also underused or used inefficiently.

The disproportionate rate between teachers and children in kindergarten increases the risk of their early school leaving as well.

A great part of the children whose mother tongue is not the official language of the country they live in, face hardships in the educational process, which lead to their social exclusion by the educational community.

#### - **Ethno-cultural reasons**

The ethno-cultural variety in the contemporary EU educational system manifests itself in the specific ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic dimensions. The strongly affecting intra-group norms and the pressure of the ethno-cultural traditions among the vulnerable ethnic communities predefine the specific reasons for early school leaving: lack of educational motivation, low level of readiness for school, lack of motivation of the parents for their children to access education.

#### **The Roma<sup>12</sup> (specifically mentioned by BG, IT & SL)**

In the case of Bulgaria, which is a country that still fails to attract immigrants with long-term settlement intentions, according to a *research on the topic "Reasons for school leaving"*,

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<sup>12</sup> Check out point 2.1 Groups that are usually facing exclusion: Roma

conducted in 2006 by Vitosha Research, the issue with early school leaving is more severe among the Roma children. This is particularly visible in those settlements, which are inhabited mainly by Roma, usually isolated in ghettos and neighborhoods. In settlements where the Roma are better integrated and do not live in isolation, the problems with early school leaving are less acute.

In Italy there is also a profound resistance and repulsion of the Roma people ethnicity, which causes huge problems for their successful inclusion.

Slovenian Roma communities are highly marginalized and live in separate establishments, often without proper infrastructure; many do not finish basic primary schooling and are not able to find employment.

The families of Roma early school leavers rarely rely on regular income for their households. Often their income comes from seasonal or temporary employment, social support and family support for children. The importance of employment for the early school leaving for this ethnic group is further aggravated by the size of the household and the number of children in it. The children of poor large families with many children are mostly endangered by early school leaving. In Roma families, that are notoriously big, it is often the parents who decide, which child is going to attend school and which is not.

The parents' education is also an important factor, which to a great extent defines the duration of education of the Roma and other children - the children of parents with higher education stay longer in school.

Another element, specific of the Roma community, that constitutes a reason for early school leaving, are the marriages at a very early age, which turn girls into wives at the age of 13-14 and they stop attending school.

**Other minorities and foreign (or alien) ethnicities<sup>13</sup>/cultures/origins (immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers<sup>14</sup>, children with migrant background, returnees<sup>15</sup>) (GR + IT + DE + SL)**

When it comes to not speaking the local language or coming from a country that is perceived as one that is "culturally inferior" by the so called host peers, exclusion can happen quite easily, even if the preconditions to go to school for youth of foreign country citizenship, are exactly the same as for those of host country citizenship.

In Germany for example a background of migration even of grandparents from Turkey, Italy, Palestine or other countries from the southern part of Europe and the Near East, strengthens that situation. Although there was a huge discussion about an intercultural clash in Germany, there is weak interest in integration especially within the Turkish community; the reasons of their problems are never perceived as an intercultural question but are only reduced to the social situation - a situation, which is mainly determined by a big lack of prospects and a missing appreciation of their cultural backgrounds and talents.

Since 2014, the EU societies<sup>16</sup> are facing another challenge: the integration of the refugees from all over the world. Even if only because of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, the young refugees at an age of 6 up to 16 years old, have to be integrated into some

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<sup>13</sup> Check out point 2.1 Groups that are usually facing exclusion: Ethnic minorities in the long version of the Guidelines.

<sup>14</sup> Check out point 2.1 Groups that are usually facing exclusion: Refugees, Immigrants & Asylum Seekers in the long version of the Guidelines.

<sup>15</sup> Check out point 2.1 Groups that are usually facing exclusion: Returnees in the long version of the Guidelines.

<sup>16</sup> From among the countries involved in the CULPEER project.

educational system. Besides the question how to find enough school places for such a big number of new pupils, there are also not enough teachers, social workers and other assistants for a successful integration into the school system – and consequently - into the hosting society.

A system focusing on the use of language and based on working with deficits instead of strengthening the potential and talents of the young students, is not able to handle a lot of different languages in one class, different cultural backgrounds, and on top of that: the bad experience of the young people during their fleeing, often resulting in trauma(s), which could manifest itself one day.

- **Reasons connected with the health status, disabilities<sup>17</sup> (mentioned by BG & GR)**

Within the context of the policies for development of inclusive education continues the trend for integrating the children with special educational needs within the ordinary schools. The risks of early school leaving in this regard are connected with insufficient level of preparation of the kindergartens and schools for including these children. Here are included all the factors of material base, educational environment, human and financial resources, which do not match the requirements of application of the principles of inclusive education.

A considerable problem concerning the research of educational challenges for children with special educational needs is the deficit of exact data about the number of those attending and not attending school.

- **Other reasons**

Italian colleagues mention **age**; the opportunities for a successfully integration decrease with aging, becoming critical in adolescence.

Slovenian colleagues mention particularly **low self-esteem**.

Specific for Slovenia - another often socially excluded group are migrants from former Yugoslav countries. Based on a publication from 2007<sup>18</sup>, exploring the integration processes of people coming from countries of the former Yugoslav Republic, the group faced social exclusion by co-workers and directors in the workplace in 40,9% of cases and by the majority population - in 34,4% of cases. However, the results of the research show that in the recent years intolerance to migrants from former Yugoslav countries diminishes.

Living in **rural and difficult to access areas** – such as islands, mountainous areas and border areas – also impose challenges to the local population and could create conditions for isolation.

Even if it was mentioned in only one of the developed national reports, **drug abuse** is definitely a common plague of contemporary societies, which does impose not just exclusion, but life-threatening dangers.

**Institutional reasons:** an insufficiently coordinated approach between the various services and specialists on a national, regional and school level for dealing with the problem of early school leaving; the insufficiently effective control of management and functioning of the

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<sup>17</sup> Check out point 2.1 Groups that are usually facing exclusion: Special Needs & Disabilities in the long version of the Guidelines.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.inv.si/DocDir/Publikacije-PDF/2007/KNJIGA.pdf>

policies for inclusion, in keeping and reintegrating of children and students in the educational system – are mentioned specifically for Bulgaria.

Some other **critical points concerning school integration from the teachers' perspective** could be:

- related to the interaction between the student & the teacher: The lack of knowledge regarding the culture of the student's country of origin, needs or background from the teacher's side in combination with the fact that part of the educational material is ethnocentric or not inclusive may constitute obstacles for the youth's smooth integration.
- the number of foreign students in the class who do not speak the national language compared to those who do (foreign and local) is also quite important for the teamwork process and integration.
- related to the interaction between the student & peers. Biased misconceptions of the other students regarding the country of origin, religion, culture or medical state may lead to exclusion and even bullying.
- related to interconnected religious and gender issues, especially concerning youths, who, due to religious beliefs, have different opinions concerning the role of women in society.
- related to low self-esteem and self-image of the student, which is usually manifested via attention deficit, difficulties in preparing homework, nervousness, stress.

Among the listed solutions in order for the teachers/educators to become better supported and more confident in dealing with integration processes of students from different vulnerable groups, can be listed the following:

- More knowledge from this area through seminars and workshops
- Resources (financial, infrastructure)
- More time for addressing such challenges, because the teachers are over occupied with teaching, participating in competitions, projects, etc. They offer extra help to pupils who need it only because these children stop working and their results worsen. When a situation arises, the teachers have to address it immediately and respond to it.
- A collection of methods and ideas for implementing other ways of teaching.

Among the other suggested actions are talks in learning groups, individual support, work in small groups, training and workshops on intercultural competences, coaching, team of consultants, special support programmes, using peer tutoring<sup>19</sup>, sharing about self-issues and cultural background, promoting meetings for sharing cultural backgrounds and mutual exchange, personalized learning programmes.

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<sup>19</sup> Check out “Fritz Schumacher” school in Hamburg, which has introduced a mentoring programme, via which older refugee/migrant students help out younger ones both with their scientific studies, as well as with everyday practicalities and families relations.

## 2. Why it is important to have inclusive education and how CPLA can help

The necessity to develop and adopt educational tools that will contribute to Competences for Democratic Culture<sup>20</sup> is reflected by the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers of Education where the following points are highlighted:

- the need to introduce the intercultural dimension into the national education policies
- the need to ease the understanding of the European dimension in education by introducing tools fostering the notions of respect of human rights, inter-religious dialogue and euro-arabic dialogue.

Research and case studies have shown that cultural peer learning has a huge impact for a positive self-image of the youths, self-esteem and internal locus of control. Their wisdom on their culture deepens and they become more "excited and curious about learning. They ask more questions"<sup>21</sup>.

The main benefit of cultural peer learning is that it offers youths the opportunity to interact in a constructive way, regardless of their background or abilities. The learning gained from such activities can be used for educational goals while at the same time boosting the notions of solidarity, friendship, democracy and togetherness. "Besides having value as such, enabling and widening social networks of young people and finding like-minded peers give them a sense of belonging, a sense of meaningful activities and resources in form of information"<sup>22</sup>.

Another benefit of cultural peer learning is that it gives the opportunity to youths to discuss about low culture; "that is, everyday culture associated with common people's lives – their hobbies, food, and family"<sup>23</sup>.

Various problematic aspects in the process of inclusion could find a solution thanks to the use of peer-learning, as is explored by UNICEF in the section "Why use peer educators?":

"Qualitative evaluations of school-based peer education have shown that:

- Young people appreciate and are influenced in positive ways by a peer-led intervention if it is well-designed and properly supervised;

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<sup>20</sup> "Final Declaration of the 25th Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education", 2015, Brussels, Council of Europe.

<sup>21</sup> Inclusive Learning-Friendly Environments, "Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments", Bangkok Office, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

<sup>22</sup> M. Peltola, "Youth Work in Finland - Finding Ways for Intercultural Opening", National report for the project "Moving Societies towards Integration, 2010, Helsinki, Finnish Youth Research Network/Finnish Youth Research Society.

<sup>23</sup> G. Sadykova, "Mediating Knowledge through Peer-to-Peer Interaction in a Multicultural Online Learning Environment: A Case Study of International Students in the US", 2014, Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Russian Federation.

- Serving as a peer educator provides a challenging, rewarding opportunity to young people to develop their leadership skills, gain the respect of their peers and improve their own knowledge base and skills. Peer educators often change their own behaviour after becoming a peer educator;
- It can foster fulfilling relationships between teachers and students;
- Peer educators can provide a valuable link to health services;
- Peer educators and adult-led education can (..) complement each other. One study showed that a mixture of classroom-based and peer-led education is more effective than one or the other in isolation. The combined condition showed the greatest gains in information, motivation, behavioural skills and behaviour.”<sup>24</sup>

According to the results from a survey we did under CULPEER, among teachers and educators from the partner countries<sup>25</sup>, European teachers use various approaches for solving problems of isolation, dropping out and early school leaving of disadvantaged youths. These various approaches however rarely include the educational methods of cultural peer learning. For most of the respondents, this method is still unknown (44% of all questionnaire respondents). A percentage of 53% of the interviewed teachers share that the educational institutions they represent have experience with activities aiming in inclusion.

The respondent teachers, for whom cultural peer learning represents an effective and often used approach, share that the greatest advantages of CPL is that it puts the focus on the strong sides and the talents of the child and not on the deficits and the problems. The majority also confirms that CPL can be extremely successful for the development of intercultural and social competences and can help overcome stereotypes much more easily. A big number of respondents also confirm its potential to empower the children to express themselves, to accept and to appreciate the differences.

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<sup>24</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index\\_12078.html](https://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_12078.html)

<sup>25</sup> The complete results from the survey are presented in the long version of the Guidelines.



### 3. How to prepare your school / youth center for the inclusion process – what you need to consider if you want to do inclusive education

Based on the UNESCO's Toolkit for Inclusive Learning<sup>26</sup> and the key-points of the Inclusive Schools Network<sup>27</sup> we can try to summarize the steps that need to be taken in order to introduce CPLA into schools in the following dimensions:

**Mission, Vision & Leadership:** All stakeholders (teachers, parents, administrators and other stakeholders) should be informed, involved and engaged in this change process.

**Teachers' training:** Train teachers in new (inclusive) ways of learning and in noticing change, as well as in differentiating the instruction for the purpose of increasing students' engagement. Keep your teachers informed on current trends and documents and share updates on progress.

**Planning & Teamwork:** Create a plan where all stakeholders may find their place and work together towards a preferred future. Create opportunities for these agents to work together upon set goals by making effective use of school resources, providing academic and behavioral support to all students and respecting diversity.

All these are discussed in parallel and in details, in the practical suggestions and recommendations outlined below.

Even if the educational institutions that decide to undertake **CPLA**, have sufficient experience in working with children and young people facing the risk of exclusion, they should make sure that a whole set of considerations have been dealt with and that each decision is based on careful analysis of the context and situation and the set objectives, prior to initiating such activities

In order for the implementation of culture and peer-to-peer learning approaches to be successful for the integration of children and young people facing exclusion, a number of conditions, requirements and recommendations are discussed in the framework of the following topics:

#### 3.1 Involvement of institutions experienced with working with children and young people at risk of exclusion

It is important to note that the change processes towards inclusion often begins on a small scale and involves overcoming obstacles such as “existing attitudes and values, lack of understanding, lack of necessary skills, limited resources and inappropriate organization”<sup>28</sup>. The schools and NGO, especially those with no CPL experiences, should not discourage themselves and refute the adoption of such innovative approaches. They should simply involve in the process, at least in the beginning, an experienced agency. It is really important that the persons in charge of the target groups are able to assess and select the composition of the cultural groups for peer learning that will be interacting in an appropriate way. Do the children and young people get on well together (gender, age, different migrant

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<sup>26</sup> Inclusive Learning-Friendly Environments, "Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Environments", Bangkok Office, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

<sup>27</sup> <http://inclusiveschools.org/together-we-learn-better-inclusive-schools-benefit-all-children/>

<sup>28</sup> UNESCO Guidelines for inclusion - <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001402/140224e.pdf>

backgrounds)? Does the educational background fit with the proposed nature of the activities (acrobatics, circus, theatre, music, dance, etc.)? Does the composition of the interacting groups allow continuous work or short time offers – with one or several visits with performances and/or workshops?

Appropriate rooms and equipment (stage, sound amplification system, stage lighting, microphones, if necessary) should be available for the activities. It would be good if the workshops take place not only in the schools involved, but also in alternative settings - the premises of youth centers, NGOs, etc. - for the purpose of stepping away from the school's everyday life and emphasizing the cognitive character of the cultural activities. Very helpful can also be potential spaces for outdoor activities (in yards, gardens or a nearby park) and of course the possibility to present joint performances and activities before a wider audience and community. This would open the whole process to parents and neighborhoods, which could become important for the schools themselves.

### **3.2 Choosing the topic of CPLA**

The topic of the cultural peer learning experience should be selected very carefully, because different issues should be addressed by different kinds of artistic activities. For example, a rap group usually addresses problems and topics that are different from those, which are targeted by a theater group. Also dance projects - for example - tend to be attended more by girls, while circus projects are particularly suitable for younger people as an entry activity.

For the composition of the target groups, it is important to consider criteria such as the gender, age, type of background, school and grade level, because mixed target groups can promote discussions and experiences but can also block activities. Large differences in the interests, both in terms of artistic preferences (what kind of music, dance form, drama, etc.), and in terms of issues targeted, could appear. The teaching rhythm in the different schools and grades should also be taken into consideration and be carefully coordinated over the period of the CPLA.

Particularly important is also the consideration of migration and parental background as reasons of (possible?) exclusion, because these could represent possible barriers, set for children and adolescents as restrictions by the family and the traditional set of acceptable cultural and religious attitudes and behaviour. The latter could of course be handled in the artistic discourse context, but a less homogeneous target group could also easily lead to failure.

### **3.3 Gender considerations**

An important result of practical experiences is that a gender-mixed target group can work successfully under specific conditions and fail under other conditions. There is no uniform formula. Although in some cases the participants could promote the direct examination of their own gender role, in other cases they could also block activities and exchange, especially if children and youth in the (pre-)adolescent phase are involved. They do not like to treat certain topics in the presence of or even together with the opposite sex. Sometimes in cases of practicing or even presenting a piece of music, dance or theater, the shyness towards the opposite sex could be so great that any development is hindered and even presentation events may be refused.

Especially for girls it is often easier to carry out activities separately. For girls with Muslim ethnic backgrounds, this is often particularly important. The parents of Muslim girls are very attentive to the social interaction of their daughters.

The issues at this age are not necessarily all that different but the artistic realization often requires a huge "self-opening" and "come out of one's shell and comfort zone". The inhibition of puberty towards the opposite sex is so high that a presentation is often perceived as an exposure. The initiators need to decide whether they want to experiment with mixed target groups or if they want to set up separated boys' and girls' target groups. Mixed groups seem possible particularly in a school setting with fixed theater plays or in cultural institutions where theatre enthusiastic youths participate.

### **3.4 Artistic and educational management**

The responsible facilitators, who are involved in facilitating the CPLA should possess both artistic skills, as well as pedagogical and motivational competences, in order to be able to inspire children and young people from often disadvantaged social backgrounds to take part in the activities. In addition, they should have the ability to develop relationships of trust with children and young people facing exclusion, and if possible have experience in collaborating with them. The specific knowledge of their behaviour, attitudes and expectations is an important basis for appropriate design and implementation of workshops and courses.

### **3.5 Design of services and activities**

The appropriate design of the CPLA activities is also an important factor in the implementation. There are many possibilities, from one-off workshops of one or more days, through on-going activities during a school-term or longer, to regular weekly or monthly fixed days and time, weekend and vacation courses, etc.

One-time and short-term offers should mainly be used to provide incentive, making sense sometimes as an intervention tool for expansion and continuity with steady project cultural peer learning groups. In order for the concept to be implemented in a sustainable manner and with long-term positive effects on the participants, it is recommended that it covers a period of half a school-year with a rather fixed weekly schedule. The regularity and fixed structure usually makes it easier for children and young adolescents to get used to it and engage in the activities and setting, after an introductory period.

A special appeal lies in the inclusion in the courses of final and interim public presentation events. There is usually a kind of shyness and fear of public presentations, but with increasing security in the artistic activities during the course these becomes normal and the challenge and interest in the presentation of the newly-acquired skills become central. A performance in front of classmates, parents, teachers and other interested persons, in Youth Centers or Communal rooms, provides acknowledgement and motivation, as the participants already have experienced such presentations in new and unfamiliar environments.

Central aspects of the offers are, of course, the issues being dealt with through the activation of CPLA; for example whether the children at risk are immigrants, refugees (at this point it is important to be aware of their age, home country, family and reason for fleeing), children with disabilities, with different ethnic origin, etc. The purpose of the concept is to focus on issues such as integration problems, violence, the gender role and more, by non-

cognitive experiences and thus to boost the children and young people's interest for it. However, it is important not to impose the content, but pick a topic which is in the center of the everyday lives of the target groups and then gradually introduce them into new topics. The target groups should not be larger than 10 to 15 participants per artistic coordinator.

### **3.6 Planning and time horizon**

A long-term and detailed planning is a key prerequisite for the success of such activities. For a more permanent type of event during a whole school year, the planning of all essential details (funding, design details, partner schools, and target groups) should be clarified weeks before the end of the previous school year so that the enrolment of the target group and the initial implementation can take place.

The starting point of planning is to clarify the financial resources needed and the funding available. This is relevant even if we are speaking about intra-school CPL – there should be room for practicing and presentations, there should be a responsible and competent adult to turn to in case of need or in case of artistic or practical questions, there should be materials or props or decorations or costumes, when such are needed – all these require funding. The more successful the initiation and continuation of CPL projects and activities are, the more frequent is the appearance of the funding question. It is worth noticing that currently more resources are available for integration projects for young people with an immigrant background and cultural projects for youth. Depending on the country, there may also exist different funding opportunities related to national policies and strategies, concerning schools, as is for example the “Your class” programme in Bulgaria. It is worth to investigate in advance, whether subsidies are available, especially in municipal or regional programmes. Other financing options are foundations and private sponsors, such as shops and businesses in the district or in any other environment. In addition, events could be funded to a lesser extent, through entrance fees.

When such funding is available and the school is planning a more complex CPL, provided by a foreign cultural peer learning group, it will be able to contract an artistic and educational director and to start contacting potential participants. In the case of delays in funding commitments, contacting partners (school director, class teachers) in schools, which usually have only a limited time capacity for such projects, could threaten the feasibility of the project and the partners could lose interest. Moreover, this could lead to a shifting of the beginning of the activities in the school year and the initial stage could be interrupted by holidays, which complicates the continuity of participation and activities in general.

In the next steps the conceptual details (target groups by age, gender, migration background, school type and grade level, artistic direction, type of event, addressing the target groups) between the involved schools and the artistic and educational director should be clarified. As at the end of the school year, teachers are usually busy with the references and conferences, all these questions should be answered at least four weeks in advance.

With the start of the actual project, the enrolment should take place through direct contact with the target group. This is recommended to be implemented through posters, announcements and presentations by or with the teachers, and through presentations in classes and in the playground. The direct targeting of children and young people who are in danger of exclusion makes sense, when an artistic interest is assumed or even known by the teachers and educators. A little later, well before the next school holidays (especially in the season of early autumn holidays) the initial implementation should start.

The incentive events with performances and workshops by young external artists whether they come from another continent - Africa, Asia and South America – or from a next-door school improvisational theatre group, could be carried out in the framework of a summer festival at the end of the previous school year, as a holiday event or after the launch of the new school year. The first incentives are supposed to give motivation to the participants, to discover cultural activities as a form and basis for themselves for facilitating the further enrolment of children and young people. Often such an incentive event successfully contributes to the establishing of a small core target group which, later on, in the early school year, can be extended by further enrolments of other pupils.

Planning, especially in cases when the CPLA steps out of the school environment, should take into consideration the requirements concerning safety of children, police rules, local administrative laws and regulations in the countries and areas where the activities are taking place.

### **3.7 Selection of artists for the incentive events**

When the CPL is going to involve foreign groups, it is important to invite ones that are able to inspire the targeted participants, facing exclusion risks, with their cultural activities. This applies both to the genre, e.g. music, dance, theater, circus acrobatics and performances or other forms, as well as to other specifics of the hosts. For example, a group of young rap musicians will be better addressed to male adolescents; theatre presentations and drama productions to the younger; dance projects can reach youth of all ages; circus and acrobatics - younger children; and mixed cultural peer learning groups inspire girls. We should however not forget that the contrary also could bring excellent results, for example, if you want to discover hidden talents, rap might indeed create a chance for a girl to present her skills. And young men are often able to dance quite well.

The selection of non-European young artists for the kick-off event plays an important role because the performances and workshops with their peers shall motivate the targeted students to use artistic expressions also for dealing with their everyday life, problems and perspectives.

The workshops have a very mobilizing effect. Here the children and young people from youth centers and schools come directly together with the young artists of the same age from African, Asian and Latin American countries and - in a mostly non-verbal and associative manner - exchange with them, learn from them and experience them as role models for their own development.

### **3.8 Advertising and Public Relations**

Especially for the incentive events an intense advertising and public relations strategy in the context of the carrying institution, the schools and the cooperation partners, is necessary.

Here it is also recommended, besides the usual advertising and announcements, to distribute handouts and flyers in homes and shops of the district and in the cooperating schools and other facilities; and in addition to that, to publish supplements in local newspapers. Helpful are also direct announcements of the teachers in the classroom and direct targeting of children, adolescents and parents.

The local media should be included by direct addressing and informing. Reporting in public media has a positive return on the mobilization and involvement of children and adolescents because it confirms the activities and achievements of the target group.

### **3.9 Continuation of the activities and cooperation**

Culture-related activities for the integration of children and young people make sense if they are offered continuously by the youth centers and the cooperating schools in the long run. Individual short-term actions and events should only be used for creating an initial incentive. Medium-oriented activities over a school half-year have more the character of a pilot project and allow the involved parties to develop the conceptual basis and to establish the cooperation.

Sustainable integration success stories can only be expected in the case of regular activities and projects carried out continuously. Only then the culture-based approach can be established in the perception of the target group and the environment, the already experienced children and adolescents will be motivated for intense debates by their artistic activities and new target groups can be integrated into the concept.

For this an appropriate long-term conceptual design of activities and offers is necessary. Regular evaluation of the activities should be planned and done not only by the responsible of the cooperating schools and the artistic and educational coordinators, but also by the children and young people, for example through questionnaires fine-tuned according age and interviews.

The stabilization of the collaborations with schools already involved is also desirable. The stronger the established cooperation, the better the activities and offers adjustment to the school framework and classroom topics and the better their embedding in the school reform approaches, e.g. the concept of the open full-time school. If there has been a previous ad hoc or otherwise supported cooperation, it is usually easier to gain the trust and cooperation of the school management and teachers for such projects and for establishing sustainable cooperation structures.

In order for this activity to be sustained smoothly, cooperation with other cultural institutions, such as music schools, dance projects, theater groups, and circus projects managing the artistic areas, is recommended.

On the basis of an existing, sustainably involved network, the facilitators of cultural peer learning should extend the opportunity to other young professionals and to new schools to get involved, thus not limiting cultural peer learning to a closed circle of accepted individuals and organizations.

## **4. What to expect from the five e-learning modules and the online portal**

The modules that the partners consider important to develop in order to create the necessary preconditions for the successful implementation of CPLA in as many schools and youth/educational centers as possible, are the following:

- Module 1: Introduction into Cultural Peer Learning Approach (CPLA) – definitions, main concepts
- Module 2: CPLA for enhancement of key competences - basic skills such as communication in one's mother tongue, foreign languages, digital skills, literacy, and basic skills in mathematics and science, as well as horizontal skills such as learning to learn, social and civic responsibility, initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness, and creativity
- Module 3: CPLA for integration of disadvantaged youth (combining the previously anticipated “Integration of social and economic disadvantages youth”, “ Integration of pupils with migrant backgrounds, minorities suffering from exclusion” & “Integration of refugee children and youth”)
- Module 4: CPLA for diversity and equal opportunities
- Module 5: Good practices of CPLA across the world.

The access to the modules will be taking place via the project web-site – [www.culpeer.eu](http://www.culpeer.eu).

The online portal CULPEER with Open Educational Resources OER on cultural peer learning will be translated and made available in the languages of the partner countries and in English. It will also provide access to the guidelines and the training modules contents. Access will be public but will be granted upon request, with user names and passwords. All partners will be responsible for organizing and delivering requested pilot courses, on the basis of the developed guidelines and training modules, to interested trainees from across partner and third countries. All developed training material will be available in pdf versions and will be supported by video tutorials, audio and additional reading material in suitable (user and PC friendly) formats, such as jpeg, mpeg, avi, mp3, mp4, doc, pdf.

## 5. Conclusions

There are different approaches for combining peer-to-peer learning with cultural forms of expression and activities in an effective way to improve the integration of socially and economically disadvantaged children and young people, minorities and youth with a migration background. The choice of the method depends on several characteristics of target groups (age, gender, educational, social, economic and ethnic background), level of access to the target groups, cooperation framework (cooperation structure, participating institutions, schools, public administrations etc.), social, economic and financial conditions of the partner organization and country and especially the status and background of the cultural peer learning groups or partners.

Cultural approach, peer-to-peer learning and participation of youth in general are very convenient methods to foster inclusion of disadvantaged people. In line with the fact that not all methods can be equally transferred to different settings, we have to admit that the implementation of the cultural approach of peer-to-peer learning into the educational field is very dependent on the national, regional and local conditions.

Currently, the two major advocated educational approaches are the *core curriculum education* and the *multicultural education*. Neither of these approaches does adequately address the problem of those minority groups who have traditionally not done well in school. The supporters of the core curriculum idea falsely assume that as a result of

instituting a core curriculum, which demands higher standards, all students will perform as expected. On the other hand, multicultural education advocates improperly the design of the programme to focus on cultural differences in content and form. The crucial issue in cultural diversity and learning however lies in the relationship between the minority cultures and the mainstream culture. Minorities, whose cultural frames of reference are contradictory to the mainstream cultural frame, have greater difficulty crossing cultural boundaries at school.

Here, an approach steps in, differing from all other suggestions presented so far, suggesting a combination of peer-to-peer learning methods – youth learning from each other – and cultural activities. In this regard, what cultural peer-to-peer learning brings as assets to the educational system, is the fact that it does not aim in unifying minorities with the prevailing culture – getting the minorities closer to the understanding of the majority – but making the mainstream culture “look through”, become aware and appreciate the different cultures within a friendly environment, making all young participants feel accepted and special, turning outsiders into protagonists, with clearly outlined talents and strengths, and at the same time motivating and inspiring the teachers, and offering tools that are facilitating the process. This approach has already changed the minds of the majority of young people and teachers it has come in contact with – in German, Danish, Austrian, Slovenian and Bulgarian schools within previous initiatives and KiKuKa events - and now it could be brought to the attention of the majority of education administrators and decision makers.