Intercultural mentoring tools to support migrant integration at school

Lessons learnt and future perspectives

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Project website:  www.interculturalmentoring.eu

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This document represents the final publication of the two-year project INTO: Intercultural Mentoring Tools to support migrant integration at school. The project has been implemented by six European partners, combining their expertise to design and pilot a specific process as a possible response to the problem of early school leaving. The project has addressed, but is not limited to, to secondary school students with a migrant background.

This final publication presents the key elements – the results, challenges, lessons learned and an evaluation – of this Intercultural Mentoring Programme, piloted in five countries: United Kingdom; Spain; Poland; Cyprus; and Italy.

The Publication is addressed to:

- Secondary schools and teachers
- School principals
- Teachers’ organizations
- Teacher training centres
- Decision makers (educational authorities and policy makers)
- Initial teacher training providers
- Youth workers
- Academics focused on innovative pedagogy
- NGOs working with immigrants and intercultural issues.

The aim of the Publication is to:

- Support teachers to explore methods and tools that will motivate young students at secondary schools to engage in the intercultural mentoring programme
- Share positive aspects and results of the intercultural mentoring programme
- Raise awareness of the tested tools and methodologies

The project so far represents a mere drop in the ocean, and it is of vital importance to plan sustainable intercultural mentoring initiatives at schools. Possible transfer projects will be considered in order to reach a wider public and to implement the methodology. Local, national and European authorities need to be involved to ensure the continuance of this initiative.
Introduction to the INTO project

Background

According to European statistics (Eurostat), the gap persists between the school performance of migrant and native students. National and European research highlights the disadvantaged position of students from a migrant background: poor marks; a high proportion of students being kept back behind their year group; a concentration on only a few subjects: early drop-out; and absenteeism (Education at a Glance 2012, OECD Indicators). The most critical moment is the delicate transition from middle school to high school.

The main reasons for this gap relate to the socio-economic and cultural background of the migrant students. Their families are often unable to support their studies, motivate them or endorse projects.

The mentoring model is a possible solution to this problem and it is intended to test this innovative tool in multicultural academic environments. The target group for the project is migrant students, mainly pre-teens and teens. After some successful projects that were piloted in several regions of Italy, Oxfam Italia opted to test and improve this model at European level. To this end, a partnership was set up and a project proposal submitted to the European Union’s Lifelong Learning Programme. In November 2013 the project was launched and the mentoring process tested in UK, Spain, Cyprus, Poland and Italy.

Objective of the INTO project

The INTO project aims to promote strategies and methods to help students with a migrant background at risk of Early School Leaving (ESL) to maintain their motivation through the development of an innovative model of intercultural mentoring.

The mentoring process within INTO

The mentoring model is a fairly flexible education strategy that can be adapted to several contexts (see section on Importance of mentoring in peer education for migrant school students). INTO’s mentoring model aims to reduce early school leaving by improving integration and academic performance in migrant students, especially the newly arrived.

Mentors are mainly youths (13–19 years old) with a migrant background, accompanying younger migrant students (mentees) in their path towards integration and school advancement.

The role of teachers is to supervise and support the mentors in the implementation of the supporting activities. The project provided both teachers and mentors with specific tools and training on how to manage the mentoring process.

After training and under the supervision of the teachers involved, the mentors started to set up the mentoring programme. This needs to be intended as a continuing process made up of specific planned activities and informal relations between the mentors and the mentees. Moreover, the project helps young people to acquire the basic life skills and competences necessary both for school advancement and future employment by encouraging them to be active citizens.

How the project meets EU policies in ESL

The project is intended to contribute to EU policy on reducing early school leaving. The aim of the EU’s proposal, through which the project has been funded, is ‘Reducing early school leaving, improving the learning of students with migrant background and Roma pupils as well as promoting gender equality and inclusive approaches to learning’. According to the EU Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, particular attention should be paid to newly arrived migrant children, as the target group at risk of ESL. The migrant students need an inclusive learning environment that can support their integration and enhance their educational success.

To this end, the project has developed, tested and validated the Intercultural Mentoring Programme based on peer education with the aim of supporting newly arrived migrant students.

The partnership

The partnership is composed of six organizations with significant experience in the main components of the project.

The three academic bodies – University of Southampton, University of Social Sciences in Lodz and University of Salamanca – have relevant expertise in social research and education. Oxfam Intercultura, a cooperative, has long experience in supporting migrant students at school. CARDET, a Cypriot organization, by virtue of its communication expertise in European projects, ensured dissemination of the project results. Oxfam Italia, which coordinated the project, is an NGO with long experience in project managing intercultural environments.

The partnership cooperated successfully and all partners benefitted from this important experience exchange. At the end of the project, the partners are ready to continue to work together in the interests of students at risk of ELS.
Target groups

The target groups of the project are chiefly:

- Students or youths (13–19 years old), mainly with a migrant background, who intend to dedicate their time and energy to supporting young students at risk of ESL (mentors).
- Migrant young students (11–19 years old) at risk of ESL (mentees).

Since the project was piloted in five different countries, the target groups were variously composed according to the specific context. In some countries the mentors were university students or youths from civil society organizations, and in others they were students in their last academic year at the same school as the mentees.
Dropouts among children with immigrant background

Makarova and Herzog (2013) focused on students in Swiss primary schools who are present at school but disengaged in their learning, in what they called ‘hidden drop-out rates’, and found that migrant boys are at higher risk of dropping out of school than migrant girls. They concluded that students’ relationships with teachers are crucial in order to avoid drop-out, especially during the early years of school. Evidence from Spain shows that immigrant students struggle to complete compulsory education and to continue on post-compulsory education more than native students (Merino & García, 2011). Evidence from Finland demonstrates that migrant students are three times more likely to complete compulsory education only at age 24 than the native population (Rinne & Jaervinen, 2011).

Colding et al. (2009) argue that gaps in educational attainment reported amongst immigrant children in Europe affect their integration into the labour market. According to them, family background is directly linked to the learning environment and support at home. They found that migrant students in Denmark are more likely to enrol for vocational secondary education, and similar findings were obtained in Italy by Bertolini et al. (2015). Goldner and Epstein (2014) focused on the relationship between age at arrival and the probability of dropping out from high school in Israel, arguing that younger immigrants can adjust to linguistic and cultural challenges when they migrate at an earlier age. The evidence suggests that policy makers should identify high migrant drop-out rates in upper secondary schools and implement special language programmes for this population in their late teens in order to avoid high-school drop-out (Colding et al., 2009; Goldner & Epstein, 2014).

The intercultural situation in schools

According to Miravet and García (2013), schools that understand diversity as an asset are able to implement equality policies that are developed through a community approach, unlike schools implementing approaches of deficit. According to them, a commitment to equality, respect, autonomy and solidarity should be reflected in every aspect of the school and should imply a change in pedagogical practice. Montero et al. (2012) claim that effective school programmes aimed at increasing students’ sense of belonging need to look at students’ experiences and to change school practices in order to help students to become active and successful participants in society. Sales et al. (2012) argue that although cultural diversity represents a challenge for teachers, it needs to be acknowledged and respected through critical active participation in society. According to Walton et al. (2013), students and teachers need to take a critical approach to cultural diversity and foster intercultural contact. Through an examination of the literature on interculturality, they conclude that intercultural understanding needs to be incorporated as a whole-school approach rather than as an add-on to the curriculum.

Schools supporting students with migrant backgrounds

In the light of this context, schools have a duty to develop environments that are inclusive for all students (Ainscow, 1999; Messiou, 2012). Nieto (2010) argues that multicultural education is about transformation at three different levels: individual, collective and institutional. Banks (1996) identified and described five dimensions that teachers can use in order to guide their work in their efforts to respond to student diversity. These are: content integration, which refers to the extent to which teachers use examples from a variety of cultures; knowledge construction, which focuses on how knowledge is constructed; prejudice reduction, which focuses on students’ racial attitudes and how these can be transformed; and equity pedagogy, which focuses on modifying learning and teaching to facilitate the achievement of students; and an empowering school and social structure. Furthermore, Ramsey (2015) argues that the purpose of multicultural education is to engage children in understanding and challenging the injustices that exist in the world. She also suggests that the goals of multicultural education are for children to develop strong flexible identities, a sense of connection, critical thinking skills, confidence and persistence, and optimism and activism. It could be argued that one of the ways in which the above can be achieved is through the introduction of peer mentoring schemes, such as the one developed by this project.
Importance of mentoring in peer education for school students with migrant backgrounds

Brief definition of mentoring

Over the past few years the educational model of mentoring has been among the most effective methodologies used in secondary schools to intervene in contexts characterized by youth dissatisfaction, early school leaving and poor school performance. First developed in the USA in the 1980s, this approach has now been widely adopted across Europe thanks to its proven effectiveness and advantages both in terms of improved performances of students in difficulty and opportunities to gain concrete experiences of active citizenship within the secondary school context, and its low implementation expense.

In practice, the application of a mentoring approach in the school environment entails young university or secondary school students with specific abilities, competences and experiences taking on the role of mentors to peers or younger students, the ‘mentees’, who are experiencing personal and educational uneasiness. It is crucial that mentor and mentee establish good relationships in order to achieve positive outcomes in the emotional, cognitive and social dimensions. From the point of view of educational/learning processes, mentoring is a pedagogical technique based on ‘cooperative learning’, a method that lends particular importance to active learning, mutuality and shared responsibility among students. This approach fosters knowledge development as well as strengthens emotional and cognitive skills, and these in turn help mentees to improve their learning level.

Through the relationship, dialogue and collaboration, the mentee takes an active role in building his or her own knowledge and triggering learning processes that are effective in terms of academic success.

An interesting application of the educational model of mentoring has been made by the European project Intercultural mentoring tools to support integration at school – INTO (2013–2015) to intervene within multicultural educational contexts characterized by a high level of school drop-out among migrant students. The use of intercultural mentoring in schools promotes strategies and methods to support the full integration and development of learning paths, particularly effective for students with a migrant background at risk of early school leaving and drop-out. The strength of the programme is represented by the involvement and active participation of intercultural mentors. These are young migrant students either from university or the same school with positive academic and integration achievements, who can support younger migrant students experiencing educational uneasiness and difficulties in socialization within and beyond school.

The mentors are properly trained by teachers or an external trainer and, in agreement with the school, can act in different situations and moments: in more formal contexts such as during orientation and welcoming activities organized by the school for newly arrived students; in after-school initiatives such as school tutoring or second language workshops; and in more informal contexts such as before or after class, during school assembly and during cultural events and so on.

The positive outcomes of this type of experience and the reciprocal benefits for mentees, mentors and the whole educational community in the various European contexts encourage a wider application of the intercultural mentoring model in the fight against school drop-out and the promotion of inclusion.

Brief definition of peer education

Despite taking different forms, cooperative learning can be defined as a ‘social mediation’ method that recognizes the interaction and cooperation between students as a key resource in the teaching/learning process, even though moments of individual or competitive type of work are not excluded. Cooperative learning is used particularly to solve complex, challenging and real problems that require a variety of resources and excellent cognitive processes. It goes beyond bringing together a group of children – boys and girls – then instructing them to cooperate.

It is fundamental to facilitate cooperation and the acquisition of necessary skills, which represent the objectives to be reached through an appropriate educational pathway. Similarly to the cognitive objectives, these can be met through the implementation of appropriate educational strategies. Therefore, it is important to agree (possibly together with students) the social skills crucial to carrying out a task and hence to create spiral pathways of development that are complementary to the usual school activities. In particular, these are in two main areas: basic relational skills (getting to know and trust each other; communicating with clarity and precision; accepting and sustaining each other; and conflict resolution) and cooperative skills.

In an educational strategy based on peer education, the duty of the mentor is to provide support and collaboration in the role of an expert, not to transfer content and experiences, as students must acquire these for themselves.

One of the main characteristics of peer education relates to the social skills that must be mastered by the young peer educator.
These skills do not necessarily have to match the level of students’ academic performance. The peer educator should be a student who has demonstrated decision-making and problem-solving skills, critical and creative thinking, empathy and good interpersonal skills, effective communication skills, awareness of his/her own possibilities and limits, emotional control and stress management skills (of both him/herself and others). By working in small groups and cooperating to achieve a common goal with young people from different social and cultural backgrounds as well as different abilities, students learn more about themselves and develop positive attitudes towards diversity. Through a social mediation method, teaching practice is able to combine the cognitive perspective relating to knowledge and notions with the relational perspective relating to attitudes and behaviours, facilitating an exchange of ideas. Peer mentoring is a form of mentoring in which exchange, enrichment and reciprocal encouragement take place between a mentor and a peer mentee, in a way that is different from more traditional inter-generational forms. Thus, the emphasis is not on the experiences of the mentor (evidently similar to those of the mentee) but on the horizontal characteristics of the form of communication used. Despite sharing this element with peer education, peer mentoring differs in terms of its objectives (linked to support and personal development) and educational methods (centred on communication instead of educational content).

Added value of joining those two methods into one methodology

The following are the main benefits for the mentor involved in the peer education process:

• It helps achieve academic goals. Probably the repetition of content that occurs in the relationship with the mentee consolidates and improves the learning process.
• It enhances self-confidence: mentors feel empowered, more effective and able to carry out tasks.
• It contributes to strengthening social skills. The introduction of elements such as cooperation and solidarity improve sensitivity towards other people and awareness of the consequences of different behaviour. It contributes to a culture of mutual support within the class.
• It increases motivation towards schooling. Mentors tend to be more interested in academic activities, and are more active and positive in class.
• It prevents school drop-out, unjustified absence and lateness. Mentors tend to respect school rules more readily.

Benefits to the mentees:

• Faster language learning: thanks to the communication exchange, the mentee acquires verbal repertoire and skills faster.
• Faster and more effective integration when migrant students are supported by one or more mentors.

intercultural mentoring tools to support migrant integration at school
Intercultural support for school students with migrant background – the state of the art

Summary of the needs analysis

The first main activity implemented by the partners was to establish the state of the art in research analysing the context of the countries involved in the project. This was focused on detecting the presence, performance and needs of migrant students in their education systems, as well as the viability of the application of peer mentoring methodology. The main objective was to approach problems such as integration, drop-out, failure and absenteeism in the specific context.

During the first six months of the project, working groups organized by the partner institutions collected information in this field and contacted experts to obtain their professional contribution. The aim was to focus properly on the issue proposed, and to valorize the migrant students’ profile and their performance at school.

The items analysed were as follows:

- Fundamental principles and national policies in educational field, with particular regard to the presence of migrant pupils at school.
- Overview and comparison of national educational systems.
- Main statistics and trends of migrant schooling in compulsory education (general success rate, drop-out rate, absenteeism rate, enrolment in secondary education and vocational training).
- Special measures and best practices in schools to facilitate academic support and intercultural mediation at the level of teacher training and programmes to be implemented with pupils.
- Case study of the benefits of the peer mentoring methodology as a method to support students with a migrant background and at risk of early leaving, to maintain their motivation.

Besides the quantitative data about absenteeism, drop-out, grade retention and success rates, oriented to assess the differences between native pupils and those with a migrant background, the study focused on current policies regarding the integration of migrant students in school systems in particular, and in the society of the host country in general. This was to see what measures are being taken and what other needs have to be considered when helping migrant students improve both school performance and social integration.

The situation in schools

If the analysis focuses only on partner countries, we see that the presence of migrant students in classrooms is not something new. On the contrary, the flow of migrant students has been a constant for nearly twenty years, in some cases even longer.

Probably due to the economic crisis that has affected many European countries, the percentages of migrant students enrolled at compulsory education level in countries like United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and Cyprus is already high and is set to increase again given the recent waves of migration in 2015.

In 2010, 1.5 million of 6.5 million students in UK were classified as being of minority ethnic origin, and 14% of the entire school population was classified as EAL (English as Another Language). In 2006/07, 12% of the population in the Cypriot education system was ‘other language’ students, and in 2014 in Spain and Italy around 9% of students were migrants. Only in Poland is the presence of migrant students low. Over the past few years, the total number of migrant students has been around 4,000, constituting about 0.06% of all students. It is considered that most refugee families treat their stay in the country purely as a stop on their way to Western states.

Both a sudden significant increase in the number of migrant students and a low proportion compared to other countries cause educational systems to appear unprepared to support and integrate this group of students. The consequences are visible in terms of academic results, as the grades obtained by migrant students are much lower. For example, nearly 40% of migrant students in Italy are kept back behind their peers, compared to 10.7% of native students. In Spain, migrant students achieve much lower scores than native students (up to a 40-point difference), it was revealed by the last PISA report.

Another critical aspect is the rate of students continuing study beyond lower secondary education level. A significant number of migrant students find it difficult to pursue their education after that stage. In Italy, for instance, there are high drop-out rates after the first year of high school and a high level of attendance on short training courses considered less demanding. In Spain the situation is similar, and migrant students run double the risk of dropping-out of the educational system during the subsequent two years of compulsory education.

What are the common problems?

The greatest educational barriers are language and communication. Frequently, newly arrived migrant students do not know the language so it is difficult to communicate...
with both them and their family. Another problem is a lack of understanding and familiarity with the education system and the local environment. As Eurydice notes (2013):

- In choice-oriented systems, most desirable schools also compete for the brightest students. Meanwhile, immigrant parents often lack the ‘inside’ knowledge to navigate around the system for their children’s benefit. Due to language barriers, resource constraints, lower levels of education and/or lack of knowledge of the host country’s school system, and thus must fail to enroll their children into the most appropriate schools.

Sometimes teachers show some reluctance and are wary towards the migrant students in their class, in particular because of their lack of specific training and the tools to address the new needs in the classroom.

What are the common solutions to the problems?

Probably the most common solution in all the countries involved in the project is linguistic support, be it a translator or courses in the national language as L2, in order to help the students learn the language of the host society better. In Poland, for instance, a number of schools offer classes in Polish language and culture for migrant students. In Cyprus the Ministry of Education provides relevant materials such as books for teaching Greek as a second language to migrant students, according to data from Eurydice (2009/10). This almost exclusive focus on the language barrier may be seen as a problem in itself, since we need to have a more profound vision of the difference between native and migrant students in order both to make them aware of the differences and at the same time their similarities, and how they can relate to each other in very different aspects of their lives and embrace the other’s cultures and everything this implies.

More complete and documented is the experience of the English education system, in terms of measures promoted at the educational authority level and the methodological approaches at school. To support further the integration of migrant students, schools in the UK have local autonomy to adjust their curricula, textbooks, dress codes and religious holiday observance in line with their school’s demographics. Some schools actively recruit teachers with migrant backgrounds, and intercultural education has been added to the National Curriculum for all students. Peer education and mentoring programmes are widely used in the UK. Thanks to these measures, Eurydice (2009) notes that the UK is one of the few countries with a higher education retention level among migrant than native-born students.

Peer education is also considered best practice in other partner countries. Even if this methodology is not widespread, in some cases the newly arrived migrant student has a peer who helps them to become acquainted with the school and its environment for the first days. However, the use of the methodology is defined as ‘not systematic’ and ‘random’ in Italy; it is used almost only as part of various piloting programmes in the Spanish compulsory education system; it is barely used in the different levels of education in Cyprus, depending on the teacher’s method, activities and teaching goals; and it is not often used as an official method in Poland.

What is missing and needed?

While, in principle, education authorities defend an intercultural integration method, they end up with a more compensatory approach in practice. Unfortunately, this tends to favour the creation of ghettos, something that makes it even harder to integrate these students and their families into the host society. As a result, what is missing is actually a more intercultural practical base from which the educational system can work. The teachers cannot focus attention only on sporadic aspects that differentiate cultures or become involved in specific practices or programmes. They should not take apart a culture and embrace only its most characteristic or prominent aspects, for instance its music, food and monuments, but must treat the issue of migrants at school more comprehensively, involving the rest of the students. In other words, there is a need to see intercultural education as an integral part of the understanding between cultures (both our own and others) and to improve or initiate proper actions in schools to support teachers in their daily activities.

In order to achieve this at school, according to the results of the focus groups held in each partner context, it is crucial:

- To involve teachers and support them both in terms of material and human resources (as teaching assistants, caretakers, etc.).
- To encourage students to take the role of mentors or ‘buddies’.
- To involve students with a migrant background, also their parents and families.
The INTO project as a possible answer to the educational problems of migrant students

Concept of the project

The INTO project has been developed and implemented in response to the problems identified in the previous chapters. Its most important principle is removing barriers encountered by migrant students at school and in their peer environment. The implementation of the peer mentoring methodology would allow for better preparation of:

- Schools as institutions that include students with a migrant background into their educational and teaching environment.
- Teachers able to individualize didactic activities for migrant students.
- Mentors to support their peers from other countries effectively.
- Mentees to swiftly and more effectively adapt and integrate into the new environment.

It should also be mentioned that, besides the impact in the above areas, the INTO project postulates supporting the development of social, interpersonal and especially intercultural skills in all the activity participants. The teachers involved in the project develop their didactic skills relating to working with students from mixed national, ethnic and religious environments. The mentors taking part in the programme improve in empathy, effective communication, efficient learning and knowledge transfer, their motivation for work, defining their strengths and weaknesses, and time management. Migrant students, at whom the INTO project is targeted, receive not only support in solving their everyday problems relating to the language barrier, lack of knowledge of the rules and customs of the given society and overcoming the resulting difficulties at school and among their peers; due to cooperation with their mentors, they also increase their competence in self-reflection, motivation, directing their own development and planning their career path, based on their interests, abilities and preferences.

General description of the INTO peer education methodology

The project methodology specifies detailed rules and procedures for involving the cooperation of students – the mentors and their mentees – as well as defining the basic assumptions for cooperation in the process of preparing the school as an institution, the teaching staff and the students.

When formulating the methodological principles of the INTO project, it was assumed that mentors should be either older students at the same school as the mentees or an external young person (university student or graduate), to accomplish the aims of multicultural peer mentoring fully. They could also be young people external to the school with the willingness and capacity to help mentees. It is acceptable for a mentor to be a university student/volunteer in their first terms of a course, a representative of the university or an NGO involved in the project. Regardless, the work of mentors and the course of their cooperation with the mentees should be systematically and continuously monitored by an appointed teacher. An important element of the INTO methodology is the engagement in the cooperation of the parents and carers of both mentors and those being mentored. The necessity to involve and prepare many different groups of participants for programme content and psychology implies adapting some of the activity implementing the INTO methodology at any given school.

The first stage of the INTO methodology implementation is an introductory seminar presenting the principles, aims and anticipated results of the intercultural peer mentoring programme for the potential participants. It is also necessary to interest and involve in the project various educational organizations and NGOs.

At the next stage, the institutions that decide to undertake the INTO project are obliged to identify andanalyse the profile of a typical migrant student at their institutions. This is because the background, social and economic situation, and typical school problems of students vary not only between countries but also between educational institutions, and even cities, in the same country. The key to the success of the project is obtaining consent and, already at this stage, preparing mentees and their families for participation in the project.

The representatives of the school teaching staff that would decide to participate in the programme will next take part in a cycle of trainings held by external INTO experts. These trainings aim to develop in the participants (mainly teachers) competences related to intercultural education and to prepare them for work with the mentors and their mentees. The training programme consists of five three-hour modules discussing the following subjects: practices and methods used in intercultural education, principles of the intercultural peer mentoring, increasing the effectiveness of the teaching process in the intercultural context, monitoring and assessing the efficiency of intercultural peer mentoring, analysis of the results of the mentoring programme in the institutional context.

In line with the principles and criteria in the training, the representatives of schools and
NGOs participating in the project select students for the role of mentors. It is assumed that mentors have an migrant background (personal or family; second generation; foreign student, etc.). Those who would like to be mentors must develop several specific competences: communicational (active listening and public speaking capacities); social (empathy, ability to build personal relations and positive attitude towards life); and reflection (analytic skills towards self and other students – an ability to summarize and systematize personal experience). The responsibility for preparing them lies with the trained teachers (or others appointed by the school authorities); alternatively, the programme may be implemented by INTO experts.

The training for mentors consists of four 2-hour modules. The subjects discussed during the training are: the importance of individual biographies in the context of peer mentoring; improving key soft skills in the mentor’s work; and the methods, tools and strategies useful in the work of a mentor, such as assessment of activities and gathering the experience related with the work of a mentor.

Proper preparation enables mentors to start work with their appointed mentees. Their task is to introduce the new students into the school environment, explaining the location of different facilities, respecting the rules and procedures at the school, and helping them to understand their rights and responsibilities. In building a direct relationship with their protégés, mentors should use their own experience of migration and integration into a new environment to make it easier for their mentees to locate and adopt their place in the school and with peers. An important mentor function is helping the mentees to build relations with teachers, administration staff and class mates, which is often difficult due to the language and cultural barrier. Finally, an important field of mentors’ activity is supporting their mentees in the process of learning: helping them with their homework; preparing for tests; and working with complex projects (especially those requiring fluency in the language of the given country).

The last element of the INTO methodology to be explained is the evaluation at each stage of programme implementation. Before starting work together, and twice during their direct cooperation, planned evaluation sessions take place for teachers, mentors and mentees. The whole programme implementation over the course of the school year at a given school should also be assessed upon completion. The tools for monitoring and assessment of the programme have been developed and made available in the materials for the project participants, including:

- Toolkit for training for teachers and professional staff dedicated to implementation of the mentoring programme,
- Toolkit for Intercultural Mentors training.

These tools, described in detail further in this document, can be used by programme participants at all stages of implementation.

**Why INTO might be a solution to a school’s needs**

The advantage of the INTO project is that in many countries it fills a gap in the preparation of schools and teachers to act in a society with various cultural and ethnic origins. It focuses on support for students from migrant families that, until recently, was not covered by educational policy in many European countries, resulting in a lack of professional preparation of teachers, school curricula and operational procedures. In this context the INTO project provides real and effective support in the form of a planned cycle of training and toolkits for teachers and mentors. Moreover, the project offers schools a viable solution to the problem of drop-out of migrant students from the educational system. The project also addresses the needs of schools, because it teaches conscious and responsible participation in the culturally and ethnically mixed European society by all the participants – the authorities, teachers,
Intercultural mentoring tools to support migrant integration at school

Parents and students of the schools - that decide to participate in the programme.

Products

In order to implement the mentoring programme, three main products have been developed: Guidelines to implement the mentoring model, a toolkit to run the training for the teachers and other professional staff, and a toolkit for the mentors.

Guidelines to implementing the mentoring model - a brief description

The Guidelines contains key information for people implementing the intercultural peer mentoring programme in schools. It serves as a type of guide to the rules to organizing and running the activities within the programme for the school authorities, teachers, school counsellors and psychologists, and the representatives of NGOs and higher education institutions that decide to participate in the project. It contains theoretical information on the subject of peer mentoring in the context of supporting migrant students and explains methodological aspects of the project's implementation in schools. It presents the key guidelines for choosing and preparing a group of mentors for working with the mentees, and defines the most important areas of support that mentors provide to students entrusted to their care.

Toolkit for training for teachers and professional staff dedicated to implementation of the mentoring programme - a brief description

Conceived to train teachers who intend to be involved in an intercultural mentoring programme, this document addresses the same target group as the Guidelines. However, Toolkit for Teachers consists mainly of practical tips on preparing schools and employees (teachers, counsellors and psychologists) to apply the principles of intracultural peer mentoring to their activities. This Toolkit presents the general didactic and methodological information concerning the course of training process for school employees responsible for programme implementation, as well as the preparation of the mentors, and suggests the exercises, tasks and activities that a trainer should use. At the same time, it is a considerable resource for teachers because its work scenarios, tools and suggestions can be used in their everyday work with students and to improve their own intercultural and multi-cultural skills.

Toolkit for Intercultural Mentors training - a brief description

This toolkit is to train young people for the role of mentors in the INTO programme. For people acting as mentors it concisely presents theoretical subjects relating to the peer mentoring concept, as well as detailed instructions on the training process and work with the mentees. There are suggested exercises, tasks, activities and tools that a trainer/teacher can use with a group of mentors that later can be used by the mentors themselves when working with their mentees.
INTO products in school practice

During the second year of the project’s life, the Intercultural Mentoring Programme was tested in Italian, Cypriot, Spanish, English and Polish secondary schools to verify its effectiveness. The testing served as an opportunity for these schools to share intercultural practices and approaches using a mentoring and peer education approach to improve their pedagogical and organizational processes of inclusion and integration. The aim was to implement the Intercultural Mentoring Programme, adopting it to the problem of drop-out, failure and demotivation of students at risk of exclusion from European secondary schools.

The testing phase started at the beginning of October 2014, at a time when few secondary schools had been selected by the partners, and finished at the end of May 2015.

The programme test was structured into stages, and these have been adapted by the different contexts. The work flow of the process is as follows:

- Organization of a national seminar to promote the INTO project and to identify pilot schools.
- Training for secondary school teachers to encourage the adoption of the Intercultural Mentoring Programme within schools.
- Selection and evaluation of the formative needs of mentees in the pilot schools.
- Selection and training for mentor groups in the pilot schools.
- Planning and implementation of the mentoring actions to be undertaken by mentor groups.
- Evaluation of the testing.

Before starting the testing phase in each country, an opening seminar for schools was organized by each partner. The seminars represented an occasion to recruit pilot schools to the Intercultural Mentoring Programme and enlist teachers and educators for the training course.

Next, each country started its training courses for secondary school teachers. The Oxfam Italia Intercultura experts designed the training course jointly with the team partners, structured as five 3-hour meetings. To deliver the training, each partner made the Guidelines and the Toolkits available for teacher training, as detailed at the beginning of the project. These tools were tested and implemented by trainers and teachers during the training. The trainers encouraged teachers to make suggestions and comments about the educational activities included in the Guidelines and Toolkits to improve them. The total number of participants attending training is 52.

There were various approaches and methodologies used by partners and schools to applying the Intercultural Mentoring Programme, due to the specific and heterogeneous contexts and differences in the educational systems of each country.
According to the Guidelines elaborated by the partners, testing usually followed this process:

- An external trainer (or a partner expert) met the teacher coordinator for the project or the school staff to define together the technical and organizational methodologies of working in the school, and the operation of the mentoring programme.
- With the support of the external expert, the educational staff involved identified the needs of the mentees at the schools and the migrants students interested in becoming mentors.
- Mentors were selected and trained by the teacher coordinators with the support of the external expert, as indicated in the Toolkits.
- Together they planned mentoring activities to try out with the mentees.
- Mentors undertook the mentoring activities.
- Together, the teacher coordinator and educational staff monitored and evaluated the pilot programme.

Of course, this process acted as a general outline that was adopted, adapted or reviewed, depending on the specific requirements and working conditions in the schools.

There were different approaches taken by mentors during their actions: in some cases, mentors worked in groups, for example at social and welcome activities, and in other situations they worked individually or in small groups to support mentees to improve learning processes or personal skills.

The number of times that the mentors met mentees varied from school to school. In some, they met them on a weekly basis during tutor time, whilst in others they met during lessons or after school. In addition, there was variation in what the mentors were allowed to do. The Intercultural Mentoring Programme at schools was focused on different fields of the mentors’ interventions:

- Support for the teaching-learning process. Mentors worked with mentees who expressed a need relating to academic and professional orientation, time scheduling or improving their second language.
- Language support for mentees.
- Welcome activities for newly arrived students.
- Individual activities with students at risk of exclusion.
- Social activities such as a cookery festival to present the culture and tradition of mentors and mentees, or an event against bullying.

In total, the pilot was undertaken in 14 schools, and 68 mentors and 76 mentees were involved.
Results and recommendations

Starting with the experiences in each partners’ country, it is possible to reflect on the effectiveness and the shortcomings of the intercultural mentoring model, and on its potential for implementation.

In general, testing of programme has been a highly positive experience from various point of view:

- Positive for the teachers and schools, because they tested a new approach and methodology of work to counter early school leaving and to prevent social exclusion of students with a migrant background. Furthermore, the model has added value due to its flexibility, and could be used for students with different kinds of problems with integration, whether educational or social. According to the teachers’ evaluation, they appreciated the opportunity to exchange experiences and educational practices to manage intercultural environments and innovate methodologies of work with students with a migrant background.

- Positive for mentees, because they had effective help with their language skills, studying techniques and self-esteem. The mentees found positive benefit from the relationship with the mentors: they felt more included, welcomed and supported.

The impact on the mentees has been an improvement in educational performance and more active participation in school life.

- At the same time, being a mentor has been an important role for youths to enrich and to develop their social, communicative and relational skills and to practise active citizenship. Mentors had a chance to take the initiative and to make important decisions regarding social and educational school activities.

Both mentors and mentees benefitted from the mentoring programme, because they were active protagonists of their personal and social growth.

In each country there were different ways to apply the programme, due to differences in educational environment and educational systems. It has proved the potential of the programme and its great adaptability to the different typologies of contexts and formative needs in schools.

The main key points and recommendations are as follows:

- The Intercultural Mentoring Program is a highly useful tool to improve the school organization and the pedagogical processes of welcome for newly arrived students and to fight the problems of early school leaving; it could also be used to combat different kinds of integration problems at school, not only relating to intercultural aspects;

- It is necessary for teachers formally to approve the Intercultural Mentoring Programme at the beginning of the academic year. The school must recognize the roles of coordinator teachers, educational staff and mentors; at the same time, there should be a personal commitment and engagement by the mentors through a system of formative credit;

- It is necessary to have a ‘strong’ teacher coordinator, recognized and supported within the school, so that the Intercultural Mentoring Programme can be really shared and supported by the head teacher and colleagues. The team of teachers
The pupils who are candidates for the role

• The Intercultural Mentoring Programme is a formative opportunity within schools for all students, migrant or otherwise, to develop citizenship skills, and it is useful in improving the teaching and the process of engagement of students in school life;

• The pupils who are candidates for the role of mentor must be guided and assisted, supported sometimes, because they often have doubts or second thoughts relating to a fear of not being up to the role or, worse, being judged by teachers;

• It is necessary for schools to dedicate financial resources to implementing actions and interventions to support the group of mentees (language workshops for migrant students, and social and informal activities for youths), and for mentor training;

• The Intercultural Mentoring Programme is a formative opportunity within schools for all students, migrant or otherwise, to develop citizenship skills, and it is useful in improving the teaching and the process of engagement of students in school life;

• The pupils who are candidates for the role of mentor must be guided and assisted, supported sometimes, because they often have doubts or second thoughts relating to a fear of not being up to the role or, worse, being judged by teachers;

• It is necessary to implement and apply the mentoring programme for a longer time, so it is beneficial to monitor the real effects and improvements for both schools and students after the pilot;

• To become a mentor is a positive personal growth experience, useful to improve social skills and to apply citizenship competences. It is better if the mentor has a migrant background (not necessarily the same as the mentee). Students felt that this facilitates a better understanding, knowing that the mentors have gone through similar challenges when they first arrived;

• The personal relationship between mentors and mentees is the key to improving motivation and positive self-esteem of the mentees. The mentor becomes an older friend, more aware and with more skills that can help without judging on various occasions (study, peer relations, relationships with teachers...). Teachers involved in the testing were impressed by the speed and degree of intensity of relationships that were established;

• The Intercultural Mentoring Programme is a formative opportunity within schools for all students, migrant and otherwise, to develop citizenship skills and to improve personal academic performance.

A real success of the project was the decision of pilot schools to continue the mentoring programme the following year. They did so by using the group of mentors trained during the project and by applying the programme planned by the teacher coordinator and mentors.

intercultural mentoring tools to support migrant integration at school

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
Conclusion

The INTO project promoted a model that helped secondary schools to innovate their operative, educational and methodological systems to prevent or reduce early leaving among students with a migrant background. The mentoring programme tested by partners and based on the strategy of learning-partnership between young people, foreign or otherwise, aimed to promote integration, inclusion and active citizenship in the multicultural environment of secondary schools. The project provided an opportunity for schools to manage social and cultural diversity in the educational context by means of an intercultural mentor figure.

Benefits for the teachers and schools

- A chance for improvement in the school’s organization and pedagogical processes of welcome for newly arrived students, fighting the problem of early school leaving.
- Becoming familiar with a new pedagogical approach and methodology of working with young people.
- As the model is flexible, it could also be used for students with different kinds of problems with integration, or educational and social problems.

Benefits for mentors

- Development of their social, communicative and relational skills.
- An occasion for practising active citizenship.
- An opportunity to transform earlier, negative immigrant experiences into something positive.

Benefits for mentees

- Effective help to improve their language skills, study techniques and self-esteem.
- An occasion to feel more included, welcomed and supported.
- Improvement in educational performance and a more active participation in school life.
References


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