



UNESCO Education Week for Peace and Sustainable Development: The Role of Education

Educating for pluralism in an increasingly diverse world

Secretary General John McNee

March 8th Evening Reception Event – Canadian Museum of History, Ottawa

Check against delivery.

Honourable guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Global Centre for Pluralism is honoured to be hosting this event alongside the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education.

What do we mean by Pluralism? Why is it important? Why we do think it is urgently needed?

The Global Centre for Pluralism believes that living peacefully with diversity in society is an emerging global challenge.

In a new globalized century, there is an urgent need to try to change the conversation about diversity. Rather than a valued resource, this diversity is more often treated as a liability. One of the great global challenges of the 21st century for all societies, whether developed or developing, is to find ways to accommodate and value their diversity.

The Global Centre for Pluralism's mission is to advance comparative analysis, education and dialogue about the choices and actions that lead societies to respect and value human differences.

Le respect des différences humaines peut avoir différentes significations pour différentes personnes. Pour le Centre mondial du pluralisme, le respect de la diversité signifie reconnaître et apprécier les différences humaines pour l'avantage et le bien-être durables de tous.

Dans une société pluraliste, chaque personne devient un membre important de la société - indépendamment des différences ethniques, religieuses ou culturelles.

Le pluralisme est non seulement souhaitable; il est essentiel à la paix et à la prospérité des générations futures.

Lorsque nous échouons à gérer la diversité et que nous laissons la peur de la différence prendre le dessus, cela engendre des politiques et des pratiques d'exclusion qui empêchent la participation entière et équitable de tous les groupes, alimentant ainsi les tensions et les conflits dans le monde entier.

It is not difficult to find an example of this here, in Canada we are only beginning to pick up the pieces from decades of exclusionary policies and practices toward our indigenous communities.

The path towards reconciliation is rooted in the recognition of our wrong-doings and a willingness to learn from them. These steps toward building a more inclusive society are foundational to pluralism.

The education sector plays a critical role in creating positive responses toward diversity over the longer term.

The Global Centre for Pluralism's co-founder, His Highness the Aga Khan, gave a speech this past fall in Toronto upon being awarded the Adrienne Clarkson Prize for Global Citizenship.

He said, “The work of pluralism is always a work in progress. Some of that work will be done in our schools. What I have called the Cosmopolitan Ethic is not something that we are born with, it is something that must be learned. [...] But this process does not simply take care of itself. It requires planning, it requires persistence and ever-fresh thinking. It is work that is never finished.”

Today’s schools need to educate in a manner that prepares learners to live in a pluralistic society – a society which not only accepts or tolerates difference, but actively seeks to understand, value and learn from difference.

Educating for pluralism aims to nurture a disposition, habits of mind and behaviours in learners so that they may actively engage with people who are different from themselves.

Global Citizenship Education provides a great vehicle for developing pluralistic values and behaviour. Through this approach, learners are given many opportunities to explore their own values, engage with diversity, and take part in stimulating cross-cultural dialogue about challenging global issues.

A number of pluralism-related competencies and skills underpin Global Citizenship Education, including self-awareness, open-mindedness, relationship building, ethical decision making and empathy.

If nurtured well, these lifelong skills can help make learners responsible and empathetic members of society who value diversity and contribute actively towards an inclusive society.

This type of education holds the potential to influence society at every level, shaping values, political behaviour and social attitudes over time. Ultimately, the goal is to have these learners working together for the common good.

Dans cet esprit, le Centre mondial du pluralisme travaille de façon concrète à faire avancer le pluralisme à travers l'éducation.

En collaborant avec des organisations internationales réputées telles que l'UNESCO, le Centre participe activement au dialogue politique. Notre but est de nous assurer que le pluralisme fasse partie du discours mondial sur l'éducation.

Le Centre élabore actuellement ses Directives pour l'éducation en faveur du pluralisme et nous espérons que cela devienne une ressource utile pour les leaders de l'éducation du monde entier.

Les Directives soutiendront les éducateurs qui veulent aider leurs élèves à s'engager activement et à travailler avec des personnes différentes d'eux.

Ces directives seront accessibles plus tard en 2017.

Through fora such as this one, UNESCO proves its commitment to engage in critical discussions to ensure that members of the global education community debate, reflect and take further steps to help empower all learners in contributing to a more peaceful, sustainable and inclusive world.

For this, I congratulate you.

Education is challenging work. But, the work you do to help shape young minds is invaluable.

We thank you for your work and for being here tonight.