

Project “How to Become a European Citizen”

The Pedagogical Framework

1. Education for European Citizenship, Education for Democratic Citizenship, and Education for Active Citizenship

Education for European Citizenship pursues its own specific objectives. At the same time, however, it shares the conceptual framework, objectives and didactic methodologies of Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) and of Education for Active Citizenship (EAC), in a more general sense.

Over the last decade, EDC has played a central role in the educational reforms in many European countries. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in its Recommendation to the member states on education for democratic citizenship (Rec(2002)12) pointed out that EDC

- Should be at the heart of the reform and implementation of educational policies.
- Is a factor for innovation in terms of organizing and managing overall education systems, as well as curricula and teaching methods.

Within the initiatives following the detailed programme of follow-up of the Lisbon objectives, the European Commission has started up a reflection on active citizenship and on the construction of indicators of active citizenship and for education for active citizenship. The assumptions underlying these initiatives are specified in various documents as follows:

The European Union project itself requires European citizens who understand and engage with Europe both politically and through civil society. The recent “No” votes to the European constitution and the continuing low levels of turn out for the European parliament elections suggest that not only national and local citizenship are important, but also that European citizenship is required to fulfill the ambitions of a European constitution and a continuing common and peaceful project across Europe. Therefore indicators on citizenship should include a European dimension.

Citizenship education has become a major policy tool to address both the issues of apathy and extremist actions. The learning environments provided by governments (formal and non-formal, for young people and adults) are directed towards facilitating the development of skills, competencies, attitudes, values, beliefs and motivation to engage politically in democratic ways.

Still within a European sphere, Eurydice (in the publication entitled *Citizenship Education at School in Europe*) uses the expression “responsible citizenship”.

The notion of ‘**responsible citizenship**’ raises issues concerned with awareness and knowledge of rights and duties. It is also closely related to civic values such as democracy and human rights, equality, participation, partnership, social cohesion, solidarity, tolerance of diversity and social justice. The concept of ‘responsible citizenship’ is now increasingly widespread, particularly in that a series of relevant recommendations and resolutions promoting the issue have been adopted by the member states of the Council of Europe. The European Commission has also published White Papers and studies on the issue, as a result of which it has become a priority area for many European countries.

The basic principles of education for European citizenship thus find a point of reference in the ones established for EDC and EAC.

2. *Some common basic principles*

Over and beyond the various definitions and various adjective forms given to “education for citizenship”, there is agreement on some common principles establishing the essential features.

The *Draft Common Guidelines on EDC*, adopted at the 20th Session of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe, held in Krakow (Poland, October 2000), established some general principles of EDC, which

- is based on the fundamental principles of human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law;
- refers in particular to rights and responsibilities, empowerment, participation and belonging, and respect for diversity;
- includes all age groups and sectors of society;
- aims to prepare young people and adults for active participation in democratic society, thus strengthening democratic culture;
- is instrumental in the fight against violence, xenophobia, racism, aggressive nationalism and intolerance;
- contributes to social cohesion, social justice and the common good;
- strengthens civil society by helping to make its citizens informed and knowledgeable and endowing them with democratic skills;
- should be differentiated according to national, social, cultural, historical contexts.

3. *The aims of education for democratic citizenship*

As regards the educational aims of education for citizenship, they are established on various levels concerning both the cognitive sphere as well as the affective and value one. They are organised into knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies, attitudes and values. The aforesaid Eurydice study introduces a distinction between political literacy, critical thinking and the development of certain attitudes and values, and active participation.

Citizenship education in the context of the present survey will refer to school education for young people, which seeks to ensure that they become active and responsible citizens capable of contributing to the development and well-being of the society in which they live. While its aims and content may be highly diversified, three key themes are of particular interest. Citizenship education is normally meant to guide pupils towards (a) political literacy, (b) critical thinking and the development of certain attitudes and values and (c) active participation.

These three spheres are later clarified and specified as follows:

The development of **political literacy** may involve:

- learning about social, political and civic institutions, as well as human rights;
- the study of conditions under which people may live harmoniously together, social issues and ongoing social problems;
- teaching young people about national constitutions so that they are better prepared to exercise their rights and responsibilities;
- promoting recognition of the cultural and historical heritage;
- promoting recognition of the cultural and linguistic diversity of society.

The development of **critical thinking** and certain **attitudes and values** may entail:

- acquiring the skills needed to participate actively in public life;
- developing recognition of and respect for oneself and others with a view to achieving greater mutual understanding;
- acquiring social and moral responsibility, including self-confidence, and learning to behave responsibly towards others;
- strengthening a spirit of solidarity;
- the construction of values, with due regard for differing social perspectives and points of view;

- learning to listen and resolve conflicts peacefully;
- learning to contribute to a safe environment;
- developing more effective strategies for fighting racism and xenophobia.

Finally, **active participation** of pupils may be promoted by:

- enabling them to become more involved in the community at large (at international, national, local and school levels);
- offering them practical experience of democracy at school;
- developing their capacity to engage with each other;
- encouraging pupils to develop project initiatives in conjunction with other organisations (such as community associations, public bodies and international organisations), as well as projects involving other communities.

The already cited Recommendation to the member states on education for democratic citizenship (Rec(2002)12) reads:

In order to fulfil the general aims of education for democratic citizenship, the following actions are needed:

- encouraging multidisciplinary approaches and actions combining civic and political education with the teaching of history, philosophy, religions, languages, social sciences and all disciplines having a bearing on ethical, political, social, cultural or philosophical aspects, whether in terms of their actual content or the options or consequences involved for a democratic society;
- combining the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills, and giving priority to those which reflect the fundamental values to which the Council of Europe is particularly attached, notably human rights and the rule of law;
- paying particular attention to the acquisition of the attitudes necessary for life in multicultural societies, which respect differences and are concerned with their environment, which is undergoing rapid and often unforeseeable changes.

Particular attention is devoted to the construction of “competencies”, meant as the ability to use the acquired knowledge and skills in order to deal with and solve problems one meets in social, cultural, associative and political life. In the Council of Europe report on the first phase of the project on education for democratic citizenship, the term “competencies” in EDC is explained as follows:¹

Unlike knowledge, competencies represent a potential, a method of solving unforeseen issues in various contexts. Compared to knowledge, which is more rigid, competencies are open, comprehensive and easily adaptable. In this sense, Chomsky made a distinction between **competence** and **performance**: the former represents the ability to formulate an infinite variety of sentences based on a limited number of elements of language. As for performance, it is competence in action, namely the concrete situation of expressing a linguistic competence.

What we must keep in mind from this example is the capacity to generate practice or performances on the basis of competencies. In other words, the **human potential** consists in a set of competencies that produce practices and actions in a variety of situations. In this case the purpose of education would be to mould the fundamental competencies that produce the visible behaviours, actions and attitudes of the human being.

In the EDC context, the relation competence-performance suggests a major action trend. In fact, there can be no democratic behaviours without a minimal potential of democratic citizenship, i.e. core competencies.

4. The aims of education for European citizenship

The aims for European citizenship lie within the framework of those for education for citizenship in general. They take on their own specificity both in relation to the particular contents of teaching and learning activities (in terms of curricula and knowledge building), and also in relation to the specific European context within which lie the aptitude and behavioural spheres.

For the specific contents, see the already produced materials.

¹ See C. Birzúa, *Education for Democratic Citizenship: A Lifelong Learning Perspective*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe,, p.

5. *The didactic sphere*

Pursuance of the aforesaid objectives and the fact that education for citizenship cannot be identified with one (or more) individual school subjects, on the one hand, and that it calls into question the affective experience that students gain in school life, on the other, are behind the decision to adopt a didactic approach that has been called a “whole school approach” to citizenship education. This approach is clearly defined in the already cited CoE *Recommendation*.

The knowledge, attitudes, values and key competencies, as described above, cannot be truly and effectively acquired without having recourse to diversified educational methods and approaches in a democratic environment.

Such acquisition should be encouraged:

- through active participation of pupils, students, educational staff and parents in democratic management of the learning place, in particular, the educational institution;
- through the promotion of the democratic ethos in educational methods and relationships formed in a learning context;
- by promoting learner-centred methods, including project pedagogics based on adopting a joint, shared objective and fulfilling it in a collective manner, whether such projects are defined by a class, a school, the local, regional, national, European or international community, or by the various civil society organisations involved in education for democratic citizenship (non-governmental organisations, enterprises, professional organisations);
- by promoting research, personal study and initiative;
- by adopting an educational approach closely combining theory and practice;
- by involving learners in the individual and collective assessment of their training, particularly within the aforementioned project-based methods;
- by encouraging exchanges, meetings and partnerships between pupils, students and teachers from different schools so as to improve mutual understanding between individuals;
- by promoting and strengthening education and awareness-raising approaches and methods throughout society, and particularly among pupils and students, that are conducive to a climate of tolerance, and to the respect of cultural and religious diversity;
- by bringing formal, non-formal and informal education closer together;
- by setting up civic partnerships between the school and the family, the community, the workplace and the media.

The combination of interactive and participative teaching-learning activities, the active participation of students in the running of the school, a democratic school ethos and an open and democratic classroom climate all constitute the didactic indication resulting from the studies carried out in the field of education for democratic citizenship and from indications from international organisations that, at European level, have established in this area of education one of the fundamental sectors of reform and innovation of education and training systems.