EDUCATION TO PROMOTE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND SOLIDARITY IN EUROPE

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LLL Week 2015
Investing in Education for Inclusive Societies

More than any other year before, the Lifelong Learning Platform wishes to turn the spotlight on all that makes education one of the most powerful tools we possess to build the inclusive societies that are the basis for democracy and peace.

A new strategy for the EU education policy
The Paris and Copenhagen terrorist attacks have triggered an important turn for EU cooperation in education and training. On the 17th of March 2015, the European Education ministers launched together “a call for renewed efforts to reinforce the teaching and acceptance of (our) common fundamental values and laying the foundations for more inclusive societies through education” (Paris Declaration).

Education has henceforth become a top priority in the EU agenda while shifting its focus point from employability to the formation of democratic, cohesive and learning societies.

Concrete actions were announced in support of the Paris Declaration. As stated in the Draft Joint Report for Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) “New priorities for European cooperation in education and training”, “the follow-up of the Declaration is a key priority in the new work cycle, with concrete measures underpinned by funding from the Erasmus+ programme”. The opening on the 14th of September of a public consultation on EU Citizenship “Share your opinion on our common values, rights and democratic participation” only further demonstrates the new focus of the European Commission on advancing EU citizenship and building inclusive societies.

The 2015 LLL week: embracing a holistic vision of education
The Lifelong Learning Platform strongly welcomes this new approach and through the Lifelong Learning Week wishes to join its strength to promoting education as a means to build inclusive societies. All the main educational levers for the promotion of inclusive societies will be discussed: citizenship education, skills development for professional integration, validation of non-formal and informal learning, the benefits of mobility, digital skills and media literacy, etc.

This comprehensive approach aims to overcome the traditional binary vision of education that opposes those who believe in citizenship education and those who advocate for concentrating on skills development to relaunch economic growth. Adopting a holistic vision of education that includes not only formal education but also non-formal and informal learning and whose rationale is not limited to a single objective but comprehends its multiple facets is not only relevant but necessary in today’s European context. Europe is undermined at once by populist nationalism, religious fundamentalism and economic turmoil, and the global race for innovation and the recent inflow of refugees and migrants are yet additional factors education policies need to grasp. The Lifelong Learning Platform believes that only taking all these factors into account will allow education policies to have a real chance of building inclusive societies.
What will we remember 2015 by? Will it be a year of fear or one of courage? Terrorist attacks, migration waves, electoral outcomes... all have been momentum for Europeans to express their concerns and fight for what they believe in, in good, but also in bad. Citizenship education has been put at the top of the agenda, as Rodrigo Ballester from Commissioner Navracsics’s cabinet later developed. But beyond political declarations, what is happening in the field to overcome the negative trends, asked Joke Van der Leeuw Roord who moderated the debate.

Education is a vast topic, not only in content, but also in time. Qualifications age quickly, said MEP Krystyna Lybacka, revealing the need to help learners develop deeper knowledge and competencies that they will be able to adapt in many fields. But knowledge is not only directed to the labour market. Lifelong learning includes the development of social and intercultural competencies such as personal development, active citizenship, social inclusion. Intercultural education should not be made an option in our curriculum. Lifelong learning is the need to design an education capable of fighting back intolerance, hate and exclusion, reminded MEP Julie Ward (S&D, UK) reminded the audience how much many stakeholders are interested in politics, only not in the classic frameworks. Opening up to methods used in non-formal education, using arts in education, constitute a creative way to channel the diversity in student population, politics, etc. Since culture is not fixed but alive, the way in which we demonstrate, share and discuss our differences will contribute to the pursuit of our common efforts, said Professor Barrett stressed, much is done to provide national authorities with recommendations and guidelines to develop the transversal competencies that will feed a democratic culture. In this line, Ambassador Froysnes called to overcome the negative trends, asked Joke Van der Leeuw Roord who moderated the debate.

Making citizenship and global education, as well as intercultural and interreligious dialogue, priority areas of European Union and national education policies...

Proposition nr. 1, LLLPlatform Manifesto on “Building the future of learning in Europe” 2015
MEP Krystyna Lybacka stressed the importance of education in a lifelong perspective. Although field specific qualifications are crucial, she underlined their rapid obsolescence making deeper and transversal knowledge and competence the ultimate goal of any learning process. Education cannot merely serve as a set of the labour market: personal development, intercultural understanding or social and civic competences are equally important, and key for social inclusion and active citizenship, at the same level as employability. Intercultural education cannot be made an option in a learner’s curriculum. Consequently, raising awareness of and understanding cultural diversity is a question of openness to one another, and therefore calls for constant cooperation between all actors, because in this matter, we are all stakeholders.

According to Rodrigo Ballester, the Paris attacks are the illustration of education’s failure to ensure young French people are equipped with skills and a sense of belonging, especially regarding people with migrant backgrounds. Education should carry both these concerns and not separate values from employability, as one cannot live without the other. The Paris Declaration is thus a momentum in our European perception of education. Its scope rationally involves the collaboration of all European, national, regional and local levels; in terms of content, if the fight against radicalisation is an important element, the declaration should be understood as a broad commitment to promote values, citizenship education, media literacy and social inclusion. However, since the EU only has a support competence in education, its role will be in exchanging and disseminating good practices, establishing concrete objectives in the Education and Training 2020 work programmes, using the channels opened by its funding programmes, such as Erasmus+, without limiting itself to higher education. Mr Ballester insisted on the importance to work hand-in-hand with third countries.

MEP Julie Ward based her intervention on the theory of intercultural learning, according to which it is through the contact with others that you discover who you are. Culture is not fixed but alive. This means dialogue must be the key process for intercultural understanding. Being aware of this liveliness and diversity is what will help us for now and the future. Young people are particularly receptive to this, and contrary to what is often said, they find that they are interested in politics, although their interest is not necessarily expressed in classic forums of democracy. She believes Parliamentarians must open their doors to youth, because if partnerships do exist, they are not engaged to their full potential. Involving young people is a solution to the problem. She then presented the report on Intercultural learning for which she is the rapporteur. This report is the fruit of a close collaboration with many actors, and argues for a positive and integrated approach. It aims to recognise the positive effects of creative thinking, the use of arts and sports, involving a point of view developed by the LLLPlatform. Indeed, opening up to the methods used in non-formal education can prove a creative way to channel the diversity we all represent and must therefore be part of promoting.

Roberto Rufino stated by reminding participants that the question of intolerance is not a recent one. Antisemitism, colonialism or Nazism are examples of how much European history is full of intolerance and racism. A recent study showed that 64% of Italian pupils of primary education have difficulties interacting with people from different origins. This is an illustration of how European schools are still based on a very national model, one followed by students and teachers alike. In addition, much of our surroundings (street names and avenues, art, references...) reinforce this nationalism. Intercultural understanding is an exercise that challenges people intellectually and emotionally. Indeed, many teachers theoretically support cosmopolitanism, but in practice, they are emotionally tied to their national identities. This is amplified by the fact that many are not trained to develop intercultural education. But education, such as Jacques Delors so rightfully pinpointed, is about learning to know, to do, to be and to live together. Delors’ report was published 20 years ago, and yet, so little has happened since then, regrets Mr Rufino, explaining this status quo by the necessity to change one’s mindsets. This change occurs at the same time than the political dialogue and increases the same understanding.

For Pr. Martyn Barrett, a democratic culture is dependent on intercultural dialogue given the diversity of our societies. To ensure this dialogue can take place, projects have been developed, such as the “Competences for Democratic Culture” project. Its key aim is to assist national education systems to enhance intercultural and democratic competence of young people across Europe. It develops a new European framework of reference for the competences young people need to effectively participate in democratic spaces, as a reference for the competences young people need”. The project covers the whole range of formal education, from pre-school to higher education.

Majda Baloji, MEP, recalls the lack of intercultural education in schools, and the importance of ensuring that students are able to reflect about inclusive societies. She stated that inclusive education does not only foster openness to others and freedom of speech, but also empowers students to reflect about inclusive societies. She also presented the IDEAs project, which aimed to promote inclusive education and to support teachers with tools and resources. The project was funded by the European Commission and involved partners from 15 countries. The IDEAs model includes knowledge and skills, but also transversal competences. The project was successful in changing the mindset of teachers and educators, and in promoting inclusive education across Europe.

According to Tibor Navracsics, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, the European Commission has been working to promote inclusive education and to support teachers and educators with tools and resources. The IDEAs project was one of the initiatives that contributed to this goal. The project was successful in changing the mindset of teachers and educators, and in promoting inclusive education across Europe.

The debate ended with a round of applause for the presenters and participants, acknowledging the importance of the issues discussed and the need for continued efforts to promote intercultural education and inclusive societies.
LLLWeek 2015

WHAT IS IT?

The Lifelong Learning Platform, dedicated to lifelong learning policies and projects across the EU, held its 5th LLL Week from 30th November to 4th December 2015 within the European Parliament in Brussels. The idea is to bring together learners and educators, field workers and policy-makers, thinkers and political representatives and give them the opportunity to discuss a broad, long term concept of lifelong learning in depth.

The 2015 week constituted a milestone for several reasons. First, because the LLLPlatform celebrated its 10th Anniversary, which carries with it a certain number of changes, from its name and visual identity to the adoption of a new Manifesto. Second, because 2015 will be remembered as a year during which fundamental values and citizenship were repeatedly challenged, reminding all of the crucial role education has to play in defeating the enemy ideas to social cohesion, tolerance and democracy.

Why a lifelong learning week?

Today, the concept of "lifelong learning" (LLL) is widely used but its meaning differs according to whom is using it. According to the Lifelong Learning Platform, lifelong learning covers education and training across all ages and in all areas of life be it formal, non-formal or informal. It shall enable citizen’s emancipation and full participation in society in its civic, social and economic dimensions.

The idea of organising Lifelong Learning Weeks aims to raise awareness on Lifelong Learning in Europe and to put forward the need to adopt a holistic approach at all levels of decision-making, implementation and evaluation, at a moment when EU cooperation in education and training is rethought (ET2020 strategic Framework mid-term review). Seeing the big picture and achieving comprehensive strategies is especially important so that our citizens are fully equipped with the competences they need for their well-being, their participation in society and their professional integration.

Krystyna Lybacka, LLLWeek2015 patron

The LLL Week has over time become one of our major annual events, thanks to the support of Members of the European Parliament. In 2015, the week was hosted by MEP Krystyna Lybacka (PL, S&D), former Polish Minister of Education and Sports (2001-2004). Mrs Lybacka has been a Member of the European Parliament since 2014. She is a member of the Culture and Education Committee, as well as in the EU-Russia Delegation. MEP Lybacka is also Vice-Chair of the Lifelong Learning Interest Group.

The Lifelong Learning Platform would like to warmly thank Mrs Lybacka’s office for its support in the organisation on the LLLWeek2015, especially Aleksandra Pilka.

The Lifelong Learning Platform (previously EUCIS-LLL) was born in 2005 as a response from civil society organisations to the definition and implementation of a European policy in the field of education and training in the so-called “Open Method of Coordination”.

In 2001 already, several educational networks had come together to share their experience and expertise around a Europe-wide consultation on the EU “Lifelong Learning Memorandum”. This cooperation became systematic when the Platform was established as a permanent organisation in 2005. For 10 years now, the Lifelong Learning Platform has played a key role in structuring and increasing the input of civil society on the “Education and Training 2020” and “Europe 2020” strategies and their predecessors.

The Lifelong Learning Platform was acknowledged by the European Commission in 2008 as a “unique representation” of lifelong learning of the various education and training actors organised at EU level, and in 2011 as “in a unique position to support European networks in education and training to work collectively at European, national and local levels and to contribute to a structured policy dialogue within the open method of coordination in education and training”.

Gathering 39 organisations, the Lifelong Learning Platform is today the most legitimate interlocutor of the EU institutions in the field of lifelong learning, it continuously defends the need to implement a dialogue across educational sectors and between stakeholders and public institutions at all levels, regional, national and European.

About the LLLPlatform

Values

The platform fosters a vision of lifelong learning that promotes equity, social cohesion and active citizenship. It believes that the objectives of education and training should not only be described in terms of employability or economic growth but also as a framework for personal development. It is essential to raise awareness on the fact that lifelong learning should include a large range of learning settings and create more complementarity and continuity between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Vision

The Lifelong Learning Platform promotes a holistic vision of lifelong learning, from cradle to grave, that is not limited to formal education but integrates non-formal and informal learning. By bringing together actors from all sectors and levels of education and training. The platform contributes to an increased flexibility between systems. By encouraging an exchange of knowledge, it aims to build a citizen’s voice on education and training issues but also to propose concrete solutions to make lifelong learning a reality for all.

Objectives

- Pursuing an active dialogue with European Institutions
- Enabling exchanges of best practice, experiences and expertise
- Disseminating information on key issues in the lifelong learning sector