



THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PROMOTING EUROPEAN FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

Report

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by MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen, Chair of the Interest Group, Gina Ebner, EAEA Secretary General and Audrey Frith, Lifelong Learning Platform (EUCIS-LLL) Director

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PRESS RELEASE



WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

How to effectively foster active citizenship and encourage participation in democratic processes through education? How should we transform our educational system to ensure “schools” become democratic institutions? How to tackle radicalisation? What are the ways to strengthen teacher/trainer competences in teaching and assessing civic and social competences? What is the role of non-formal (adult) education and partnerships with civil society?

Europe desperately needs a new democratic impetus. It must today face the challenge of migration; yesterday of radicalisation; the year before of massive abstention in EU Parliament elections. In all scenarios, its fundamental values are at stake, those same values on which rests its ideal of peace and democracy. We share memories of the past; what promises can we expect of the future?

As a response to some of the burning issues Europe is currently experiencing, EU Education Ministers unanimously adopted the Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. If the topic is back on the agenda, the challenge remains to keep it there, while striving to ensure it includes all ages in society, from young children to retired people, be they learners or teachers, with inclusiveness and social cohesion in mind.

Convinced that progress will come from joining forces, civil society organisations and Members of the European Parliament met in the frame of the Lifelong Learning Interest Group on 22 September 2015 to share and learn from each other on their common belief that education is the key to unlocking the stalemate in which citizenship finds itself.

WELCOME WORDS

The second meeting of the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning was opened by the partners representing the European Parliament and civil society organisations.



MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen
EPP, Finland
Chair of the Lifelong Learning Interest Group

Sirpa Pietikainen thanked the Lifelong Learning Platform and EAEA for organising this second meeting of the Interest Group, at a moment in time when Europe must decide whether or not it will give a reality to the values it is based on.

The refugee crisis “so brutally and critically underlines what we are talking about, that no one even needs to ask what it actually means. But if we wish to move forward, **we must be able to determine what are our values, define them and develop them through education and debate** to make them accessible to all,” said Sirpa Pietikäinen in her opening words.

Europe today must handle a great diversity of people, while at the same time, dealing with radicalisation, such as illustrated in Paris and Copenhagen attacks, but also in electoral results, with rising populist and nationalist parties. To **deal with the present and prepare for the future, we must remember the past**, and pursue our efforts to avoid repeating the mistakes that led our nations to grow into dictatorships.

A civilised society cannot function unless it is supported by three equally important pillars: **democracy, economic stability and welfare, and education**. Education is one of the keystones to ensure the sustainable and peaceful development our societies. Related to contemporary citizenship issues, **ethical knowledge** more specifically should constitute the core competence. This means first of all, being aware that you have values; then, understanding one’s own values, but also the values of others, and therefore, how to handle the value difference.

A dual production shared between “me” and “the other”, it would in a sense be a shift from moralism to morals. **Education to ethical knowledge**, one that helps individuals construct and establish their own identity and understandings, must therefore be **born in dialogue**, focusing on what we agree rather than disagree on. But becoming aware of these values is a long process, which makes lifelong learning and a holistic vision of education even more relevant.

And yet many challenges still lie ahead of us, as recent events reveal the ethical discrepancy between Europeans, States and citizens.

MEP Pietikäinen concluded her introduction reminding the audience of the questions we must ask ourselves in pursuing our efforts and seeking efficiency: do we need to create more intense networks between institutions and stakeholders? How may we improve curricula design? If we are many to believe educational policies should be the object of deeper integration, the question remains how much we are willing to invest. ♦



Audrey Frith
Lifelong Learning Platform Director

Success will come from collaboration. That is the underlying reason for launching the Interest Group, explained LLLPlatform Director Audrey Frith.

The idea when launching the Interest Group was to “foster the social and civic dimensions of education. This hope on our side has now spread, albeit thanks to the sad events we know of”, explained the Lifelong Learning Platform Director, Audrey Frith.

The civic dimension of education has now become a priority within the European Commission workplan (Education and Training 2020 New Priorities for 2015-2020). Many initiatives are now being taken by EU institutions. However, it is important not to forget that many grassroots

initiatives are already happening across Europe. “It is therefore crucial that we coordinate our actions and learn from each other”, she said, in order to be as efficient as possible and improve the situation.

Indeed, youth organisations, adult educators, history teachers... and many more, work on the same topic but from different approaches. Bringing together these diverse perspectives would represent a huge opportunity to develop an overarching and loud response to the challenges we are faced with. ♦

Gina Ebner explained the concern of adult education stakeholders such as EAEA, worried that adult education might be marginalised in a lifelong learning strategy that would look mainly at employment and skills. EAEA therefore decided to join the initiative that reinstalls a dialogue with the institution that has traditionally always been supportive, that is the European Parliament.

On the one hand, “there is now a strong commitment to lifelong learning in the draft Joint Report recently published. Nevertheless, we think we still need to look out for that particular part of learners that are adults”, introduced Gina Ebner. The Paris Declaration for instance almost solely targets children and young people in the frame of their formal education. When it opens to adults, it is via their quality of family member and in the realm of informal education. So “if this declaration nonetheless constitutes a milestone in European education, it is deficient in the sense that education is much broader: **not only should it take into account non-formal and informal learning too, but should also include adults in both teaching and learning, beyond mere skill acquirement.**”

The handling of the refugee crisis is pertinent in this respect, “revealing the wide range of challenges which will involve a wide range of people in a wide range of forms”, she said. If one of the first steps will be granting access of children to education, “we will be confronted with the same issue regarding adult migrants. But during this period, European populations will also take part in a form of learning, as they will need to learn how to integrate these new arrivals in order to peacefully reach a societal equilibrium.”

“One of our intentions with this interest group is therefore to know how we can establish a lifelong learning strategy that takes into



Gina Ebner
EAEA Secretary General

account the extensive group of learners and gives education perspective, bringing notions such as citizenship, tolerance or respect in the curricula, and not only focusing on development in the work frame and up-skilling, but also about well-being in general.” ♦

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

Teaching citizenship cannot be conceptualised without a wider reflection on the nature and qualities of education as a whole, both in content and method. John Hamer's keynote speech emphasised how pedagogy should raise awareness of "big ideas" while personalising issues.



John Hamer,
Advisor and Consultant
on History and
Citizenship Education
for the Council of
Europe

"As former history teacher, I will start with the field I am most familiar with. You used to teach history because you needed to know about the past: history should be taught because history should be taught. I no longer believe that." Indeed, John Hamer stressed that when we include history in the curriculum, we need to look at it from the perspective of how it is going to impact people on how they live, how it may explain and help them develop certain ideas, values and so on. Quoting Paul Valery, he reminded the audience that "history is the most dangerous product which the chemistry of the intellect has ever evolved because it renders nations bitter, arrogant, unbearable and vain" (Paul Valery, *Regards sur le Monde actuel*, 1945).

History needs to fulfil other purposes than simply deliver facts about the past. This is particularly relevant when trying to understand citizenship, because one of the best ways to apprehend it is precisely through the prism of the past. The topic of democratic citizenship thus commands a wider reflection on education as a whole.

One of the first issues is that we tend to look at an educational system or structure in isolation. So the first and fundamental element is to **develop joined up thinking**, in order to achieve coherence – albeit total coherence is a chimera. Otherwise, tensions will pull against each other.

Secondly, how far do the unintended consequences of our actions affect what we do? How much and how far do we do in testing and examining what we say we are about? For instance, if the aim of an organisation is to promote **democratic citizenship, how far does the organisation's ethos in itself contribute to reaching that aim?** On a larger scale, how does **critical thinking** come into national examination or assessment?

"History is the most dangerous product which the chemistry of the intellect has ever evolved because it renders nations bitter, arrogant, unbearable and vain".

In promoting democratic citizenship, several elements need to be put together: structure, organisation and ethos, curriculum content, including the "hidden curriculum", pedagogy, classroom practice, assessment and examination.

On curriculum content, one of the first questions that is raised in light of contemporary challenges, is to know whether or not we place too much emphasis on national history and identity. If the values we wish to promote are tolerance and respect, should we not give a greater space to learning the history of the "other"? And since those are examples of ideas we wish to transmit, should the curriculum not be centred around **"big ideas"**? We might thus take distance from division born from details, and more importantly for what concerns citizenship, familiarise students to the underlying concepts from which then emerge the guiding principles of our societies.

"We need to put the emphasis on creative thinking".

"An education that serves society and community life should help the learner develop empathetic understanding and acknowledge multiple identities."

After curriculum content comes **pedagogy**, i.e. the way in which content is transmitted to and received by the learner. Pedagogy is both rational and affective. On the rational level and using the example of enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, pedagogy would be successful if it resulted in the learner acquiring a **multi-level perspective**, employing a range of cognitive skills, understanding the nature of historical evidence, being able to interrogate competing historical narratives and deconstructing stereotypes. But this rationality must go **hand-in-hand with its affective counter-part**. Indeed, an education that serves society and community life should help the learner develop empathetic understanding and acknowledge multiple identities, values and behaviours by combating manipulated public histories and/or societal myths, working on collective memory(ies), and personalising issues. "This last element of pedagogy became very clear to me when working with Northern Irish pupils", he said, recounting a personal experience. "The school system had successfully helped them develop an accurate critical thinking, except when asked to discuss events having taken place in their own communities."

In order to reach this goal, **pedagogy should largely rest on cooperative learning, teamwork; it should encourage the use of arts, as a way of emotionally engaging students;** and the use of interactive tools. And finally, we should be able to **assess attitudes and values**, in order to evaluate how efficient our methods are, what should be changed, and also to spotlight the unexpected success of the wrong methods. What we are not expecting could be what is most successful. ♦



EXCHANGING IDEAS

The second part of the Interest Group meeting allowed participants to voice a certain number of concerns about citizenship, how it unfolds in many dimensions of our lives, and therefore, how educating to citizenship cannot be limited to formal education nor national criteria. There are many reasons to stay hopeful in light of the numerous and positive initiatives out there.

Mobility to support intercultural dialogue

Mobility was at the heart of the debate, as means to experience interculturality and reveal the multiple identities an individual can have.

"I came back from my Erasmus year with a severe case of Erasmus syndrome! One by which you come back to the place you grew up in after having spent a year abroad, but in which you don't feel as much at ease because you've benefited from an experience that has changed you," said Stefan Jahnke from the European University Foundation. "The impact is huge, because by moving you get the opportunity to hear a different message, you develop critical thinking of your direct environment, of the world, but also of yourself. People become part of a group, from which it might be difficult to separate. Mobility can break the negative effects of that. It's a huge opportunity for people and society to open up, which should therefore become a natural step in curricula, not only restricted to students and the higher education sector."

The effect of mobility on enhancing the feeling of belonging to multiple communities contributes to build up citizenship, especially European such as in the case of Erasmus. Erasmus also shows open-mindedness is not only acquired in classrooms, but influenced by much happening outside the curricula.

"Mobility needs to be physical. The virtual mobility offered by our modern digitalised world isn't enough. We see that: it certainly doesn't stop radicalisation of young people."

Informal learning as vector for civic ownership at local level

"Formal education has a role in fostering citizenship education, of course in content, but also in its internal organisation," said Eszter Salamon, Member of the Lifelong Learning Platform Steering Committee and EPA President. The role of schools is obvious, so long as they follow an "inclusive school strategy," said Anne Charrière from *effe*. There are examples of schools in "disadvantaged" neighbourhoods that adopt this model and show excellent results of integration and in ethical knowledge. For what concerns the specific topic of fundamental values, they could become laboratories for what we mean and hope to achieve when we speak of "inclusive societies".

"Unfortunately, we miss opportunities within educational institutions to foster participation," continued Eszter Salamon. "For instance, children could be asked to participate in creating the school menu. This would have two advantages: first, they would understand that they have to participate if they want to have an impact; second, they would understand why it is important to do it. This is a concrete way to teach and learn active citizenship at a small and perceptible scale. We can also hope it would extend to parents, grand-parents, the people supporting the child."

Joyce Black from NIACE supported this observation. "We are talking about democratic citizenship education at school, but school is a very small percent of our life. Children grow up in communities that start with their families and then stretch out. We cannot promote active citizenship in isolation. We need to work with existing communities. We need family learning - children learning with their parents, together. We need civil society organisations to work with faith groups. We need partnerships. We all have a responsibility. And isn't this the idea behind lifelong learning?"

"It's not about reinventing the wheel as the practice is already out there".

"We cannot promote active citizenship in isolation."

Rounding up the circle with coherent policy-making

The different examples and situations presented show the manifold aspects of citizenship, calling for a comprehensive and holistic approach. Indeed, pointed MEP Julie Ward (S&D, UK), main rapporteur on "The role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values" report, "what we are talking about, values, identity, citizenship, is at the core of everything. But how do we demonstrate this? How do we understand and accept our multiple identities, and then spread this understanding?" Education has not a potential but a crucial role to play in ensuring coherence. But it will call for a change in mindset.

MEP Roberta Mentsola (EPP, MT) underlined how "we tend to focus on what's wrong with our society, from a terrorism point of view, from an immigration point of view, without understanding that we can counter the narrative used by populists via education. We need more transversal policy making in our national governments. Inclusion starts at the most basic levels of society."

"Practice is there but policy seems to just be replicating in all directions, be it at national, European and even international level with the UNESCO for instance, when the aim is the same," said Jonathan Even-Zohar from EUROCLIO. "The difficulty is that so much has already been done, that it's not about reinventing the wheel as the practice is already out there and has been for a very long time," supported Julie Ward. Partnerships with civil society organisations already active in the field is one of the keys to unlock the rusty system that more than ever, needs oil to get the mechanic working again. ♦



PRESS RELEASE

GIVING A NEW IMPETUS TO CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Brussels - 25 September. "The potential role of education and lifelong learning in safeguarding EU fundamental values" was the topic of the second Interest Group on Lifelong Learning meeting that took place in Brussels on 22nd of September 2015, in the framework of its 2015-6 focus "Inclusive education for inclusive societies".

The current refugee crisis was the backbone of the meeting. MEP Sirpa Pietikainen (EPP, FI), Chair of the Interest Group kicked-off the meeting by reminding the audience that "a civilised society functions on three equally important pillars: **democracy, education, economic stability and welfare.**" Education can help refugees learn the local language and culture, but also plays a role in facilitating local's understanding of who the refugees are, what their status means, what it means for the society to welcome new inhabitants, and counter the currently fast spreading hatred rhetoric. "We need to counter the narrative used by populists: education has a role to play there" stressed MEP Roberta Metsola (EPP, MT).

There is a strong need to support citizens in developing their "**critical and creative thinking**" thanks to citizenship education and "another way of teaching history" said John Hamer, renown expert on history education. "We need to demonstrate that education and in particular developing people's critical thinking is an essential part of the answer to the crisis," said MEP Julie Ward (S&D, UK), Vice-Chair of the Interest Group. We should aim at a long-term transformational strategy. We cannot support active citizenship and democratic adherence if educational institutions themselves do not become **democratic and inclusive** and if we do not implement more **collaborative learning methods**. Participants discussed that this type of learning ought to take place in early years at school but also in later life. Gina Ebner, Secretary General of EAEA, underlined that "there are opportunities at a later stage in life to change around, to learn."

The key challenge for civil society is to really contribute to **changing mentalities** and turning our educational institutions into **community learning places**. "Civil society organisations should push together for a participatory governance of educational institutions and reinforce the capacity of educators to teach and assess social and civic competences. Policy support actions in Erasmus+ should be strengthened to support this shift", said Audrey Frith, Director of the Lifelong Learning Platform (EUCIS-LLL). Participants stressed **the need not to reinvent the wheel** as civil society organisations are already very active in the field of citizenship education. "**Partnerships with civil society** are the best way to achieve this; the practice is already out there and has been for a very long time" confirmed MEP Julie Ward (S&D, UK).

In addition to the Interest Group Chair Sirpa Pietikainen (EPP, FI) and Vice Chair Julie Ward (S&D, UK), Aleksandra Pilka, assistant to Krystyna Lybacka (S&D, PL), Milan Zver (EPP, SI), Roberta Metsola (EPP, MT) were present in this second meeting. Apart from the Lifelong Learning Platform and EAEA, more than 20 civil society organisations were also present.



Initiated by EAEA and EUCIS-LLL together with a number of MEPs, the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning brings together civil society representatives and MEPs to discuss key issues connected to lifelong learning with strong emphasis on adult education.

An important reason to form the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning is the new European Commission and its priorities. We stand for a comprehensive and trans-sectorial lifelong learning approach, and want to stress that education is not only about employment, but is linked to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and much more. The interest group works as a «watchdog» to what the European Union is doing.

The focus of 2015-2016 is «Inclusive education for inclusive societies». The group aims to fight inequalities and discrimination in education in order to reach the Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 headline targets and contribute to the EU growth strategy this way.

Visit our website
<http://www.lll-interestgroup.eu/>

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