

REFLECTIONS ON EWC'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE CHARTER ON EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

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Abstract. The political documents and conventions are the cornerstones of Council of Europe's work. The question is: What are the practical implications of this political framework in the field of education for human rights and democratic citizenship? How can the legal provisions be put into action to promote a culture of human rights and democracy in our schools and communities? The answer is directly linked to the issue of the training of education professionals in the field, both in-service and pre-service training. The article reflects upon the contribution of the European Wergeland Centre (EWC) towards building capacity of education professionals, especially on how to develop a democratic culture in the school environment (whole-school approach).

Keywords: education, human rights, democratic citizenship, whole-school approach

Introduction

The political documents and conventions are the cornerstones of Council of Europe's work, the foundations on which to build Europe. On 11 May 2010, the representatives of the 47 Council of Europe (CoE) member states adopted *Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education* (CoE Charter on EDC/HRE). The Charter – which was developed over a period of several years with wide consultations of experts – is an important reference point for all of Europe. The question is: What are the practical implications? How can the provisions of the Charter, a political framework, be put into action to promote a culture of human rights and democracy in schools and communities?

The European Wergeland Centre (EWC)

The European Wergeland Centre (EWC) was established in 2008 in Oslo as a resource centre on education for human rights, democratic citizenship, and

intercultural understanding. Addressing education professionals, the Centre is the result of an initiative between the Norwegian government and the Council of Europe (CoE). The EWC aims at *"Filling the gap between policy and practice, by working more towards and with the grass-root level"*¹⁾.

"The European Wergeland Centre offers a unique opportunity for coherence and harmony between different projects to further intercultural understanding and for real exchanges between practitioners from different horizons" (Education Newsletter, CoE, Autumn 2008).

The establishment of the EWC is linked to the fact that there often is a considerable discrepancy between policies adopted internationally, states' commitments in the field of Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) and Human Rights Education (HRE), and the reality on the ground, in educational institutions²⁾ and local communities in many European countries. Education professionals play a key role in equipping young people with the competences necessary to live and participate in sustainable democratic societies, thus they need special training to do so.

Located in Oslo, the Centre is open to all the 47 member states of the CoE, and the main target groups are teachers, teacher trainers, researchers, decision makers and multipliers within education for intercultural understanding, human rights and democratic citizenship.

From policy to practice: implementing principles of the CoE Charter at the Summer Academies

The CoE Charter emphasises the importance of „not just equipping learners with knowledge, understanding and skills, but also empowering them with the readiness to take action in society in the defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law“³⁾.

The question of „How can the provisions of the CoE Charter be put into action to promote a culture of human rights and democracy in schools and communities?“ is directly linked to the issue of the training of education professionals in the field (both in-service and pre-service training).

In line with its mandate, EWC facilitates interaction, dialogue and exchange among education professionals. It is clear, that fulfilling such a comprehensive mandate needs local partners – and it is one of the principles of the Centre: to develop activities and projects in close cooperation with local partners, responding to the varying contexts and needs.

Among a range of activities, during the last years, the Council of Europe in cooperation with the European Wergeland Centre and the Polish Ministry of National Education and the Polish Centre for Education Development (since 2010); and Ministry of Education and Sports Montenegro and the Bureau for Education Services (since 2012), have developed the Regional Summer Academies on Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education Programme. Built on the principles of the CoE EDC/HRE Charter, they offer continuous training, support

online and local follow-up activities to education professionals and community actors from Eastern and South East Europe (including Bulgaria), Poland and Russia (23 countries in total).

What exactly is the approach behind the Regional Summer Academies? Schools need to be a place where democracy roots and grows, and teachers play a crucial role. But teachers alone cannot make major changes towards creating a democratic school culture. The whole school community must be part of the endeavour. Through the Summer Academies, the CoE, the EWC and the local partners are implementing a model based on a **whole-school approach** that addresses multiple levels of EDC/ HRE work: teachers' competences, classroom, school and the community. This approach encourages the **active participation** of all members of school life and the community in building an inclusive environment, where principles of human rights and democracy can be learned and practised. By bringing together teams of teachers and their school heads, as well as local community actors and higher education institutions to promote democracy and human rights and act as multipliers, a wider impact can be reached.

Following the whole-school approach, an analysis of the school and community situation builds the basis for developing an action plan/local projects to foster democratic processes at school and communities. The educators act as multipliers by working with colleagues and various stakeholders locally. Online follow-up phases on a customised platform are offered to support them in their work, and to facilitate discussions and continuous sharing of experiences.

For more information: www.theewc.org (graphic: model of the Summer Academies).

From the EWC experiences with the Summer Academies, some „lessons“ can be extracted:

Multiplier actions - secondary beneficiaries

Taking a look at the results of the academies, a high number of secondary beneficiaries was reached through projects organized by the participating teams (primary beneficiaries). There is clear evidence, that upon return the teams focused mostly on training and involving their peers such as teachers and school staff (75%). 60% targeted students and parents. By focusing on multipliers' actions, the secondary beneficiaries increase exponentially. The training of parents for EDC/ HRE is reported to be weak in the CoE member states⁴⁾, initiatives such as the Summer Academy could be an important measure in this regard.

Putting educational tools and resources into practice

The Summer Academy training model is designed in line with selected educational tools and resources from the CoE on EDC/ HRE. During the last 3 years, the training model has proven to inform about and promote these tools among educational professionals and community actors, as well as their peers. Most commonly used were the tools providing EDC/ HRE lesson plans and

methods for the classroom⁵⁾, as well as the one providing ideas and guidelines on Democratic School Governance. The mentioned report (5) shows that in most European countries these materials are still not as widely used as intended. Thus, focusing on concrete implementation projects, such as the Academies that are based on the CoE materials is absolutely necessary to increase their outreach and full potential.

EDC/HRE local projects and impact

Thematically, the majority focused in their projects on developing EDC/ HRE competences for learners and teachers (75%), followed by promoting democratic governance of schools, and how to build school/ local community partnerships for promotion of Education for democratic citizenship and human rights. This shows that, when given the choice, to improve the EDC/HRE competences of peers is the main priority of education professionals in order to ensure sustainability and change. Another point is the emphasis on the need to encourage stronger involvement and commitment from a wider range of stakeholders (e.g. higher education institutions engaged in teacher training), to improve the wider local impact of the projects and activities.

Effectiveness of EDC/HRE trainings, some key elements to consider:

The implementation of the CoE Charter is directly linked to the issue of the training of education professionals in the field (both in-service and pre-service training).

Following its mandate, EWC has a special focus on developing capacity building and supporting good local practice in the field of education for democratic citizenship, human rights and intercultural understanding in Europe.

The theoretical model of the Regional Summer Academies is built on research findings that show that to guarantee successful and effective EDC/HRE trainings⁶⁾:

- Capacity building activities need to consistently be delivered in the interactive, experiential, transformative methodologies all agree are crucial for HRE/ EDC:

Methodology is the “how” of the EDC/HRE, but in many courses the gap between the theory and practice is evident. Interactive and participatory methods, emphasis on peer-to peer discussions and exchange are advocated as the “way” to educate in human rights and democratic citizenship, yet many are still unable to translate theory into practice. The participatory methods should be used also when designing the content of the training, including a thorough analysis of the local contexts, asking potential participants about their situations and factors that could promote or impede change. Relevance to the participants’ concrete day- to day challenges and reality is a key to the success of the training. Likewise, materials need to be simple and easy to use and adaptable to the participants’ contexts in order to increase their potential val-

ue. Capacity building activities based on local context analysis, responding to actual needs and able to translate theory into action should be encouraged.

- Comprehensive mechanisms to follow-up participants after the activity is completed:

Many training courses are designed without a proper follow-up plan with adequate resources. These are ongoing processes, and participants' work needs support in order to increase the impact of the training activity. Learning from research experiences, through the tailored-made online tool Share and Connect, the Regional Summer Academies aim to address precisely this issue. Providing a comprehensive follow-up with trainers and tutors accompanying the participants during the whole implementation of the local projects (the main output) has proven very valuable.

- Data of long term impact of the trainings must be gathered for future research:

EDC/HRE is still quite young, and therefore there is limited research and assessment on its long term impact and on changes in learners' attitudes and behaviors. A systematic collection of feedback to improve and assess the whole process is often the weakest element.

As an example, at the Regional Summer Academies the evaluation encompass: a) individual learning process (interplay knowledge, skills, and attitudes); b) quality of the training (starting with baseline date, mid-training and end-training evaluations) and c) impact on participants' professional practice, the school and the work of the organization. The introduction of the learning diaries has proven to be highly appreciated by participants. The data collected in a given year are the bases for improvement for next year's edition of the Academies. Still, since they are relatively young, long term impact assessment studies have not been possible to develop yet.

A participant from the South East Europe Summer Academy 2012, organised in Montenegro, summarized his/her whole learning experience with a concise quote: „...*I came here with an idea, and I leave with a plan*... “. This reflects the “ethos” of what the EWC is trying to do, to help make the journey from words to concrete tangible action in the classrooms, the schools, in the communities. Bring principles and ideals to a reality. Bring change to transform our classrooms, schools and communities into what we want them to be: inclusive, democratic environments where our children can develop to their full potential as human beings.

NOTES

1. Council of Europe Secretary General Terry Davis, 29 May 2009 during the EWC Inauguration event

2. Osler and Starkey 2005, 2010
3. Recommendation CM/Rec (2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education
4. Questionnaire report on the implementation of the CoE EDC/HRE Charter, David Kerr, Citizenship Foundation, UK
5. Living in Democracy, Compass and Compasito
6. Research in Human Rights Education Papers, "Human Rights Training for Adults", Katharine Teleki, HREA Research, Series, August 2007

АНАЛИЗ НА ПРИНОСА НА ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЯ ВЕРГЕЛАНД ЦЕНТЪР КЪМ ПРИЛАГАНЕТО НА ХАРТАТА НА СЪВЕТА НА ЕВРОПА ЗА ОБРАЗОВАНИЕТО ПО ПРАВАТА НА ЧОВЕКА И ДЕМОКРАТИЧНОТО ГРАЖДАНСТВО

Резюме. Политическите документи са крайъгълните камъни на работата на Съвета на Европа. Въпросът е: какви са практическите последици от тези политически рамки за полето на образованието за човешки права и демократично гражданство? Как могат правните основания да бъдат приведени в действие, за да съдействат за формирането на култура по човешките права и демокрацията в нашите училища и общности? Отговорът е пряко свързан с проблема за обучението на специалисти за сферата на образованието както преди, така и по време на упражняването на тяхната професия. Статията представя приноса на Европейския Вергеланд център (EWC) за изграждане на капацитет от такива специалисти и по-специално за това, как да се развива една демократична култура в училищна среда (подход, базиран на училището като цяло).

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