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Education for Democratic Citizenship and Social Cohesion

Résumés

Council of Europe. 1999. Report on the brainstorming session on "**Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) and Social Cohesion.**"

http://culture.coe.int/postsummit/citizenship/concepts/erap99_60.htm

This report is a summary of a policy discussion that took place in November 2000 between European officials and academics, which looked at the links between education for democratic citizenship and social cohesion. The meeting was part of the preparations for the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of Education, which was held in Cracow in October 2000 on the theme "Education Policies for Democratic Citizenship and Social Cohesion: Implications and Strategies for Europe."

The document starts by defining social cohesion as an unlimited, multidimensional concept. It is linked to exclusion in the fields of housing, health, social protection and education. Its aim is to mold society into a coherent - but not a homogeneous - whole. In order to achieve this, an answer must be found to the question: What is it that binds people together?

Social cohesion comprises a sense of belonging - to a family, a social group, a neighbourhood, a workplace, or a country. Yet this sense of belonging must not be exclusive. Instead, multiple identities and belonging must be encouraged. Social cohesion also implies the well-being of individuals and of the community, founded on tenets such as the quality, health and permanence of society. In addition to social ties, cohesion must be built upon social justice. Social cohesion also constitutes a process of membership of and contribution to a blueprint for society. As active citizens, individuals must be able to feel responsible and to prosper both in their personal development and in their income and living standards. Although social cohesion is closely linked to employment, it is nonetheless not exclusively dependent on it, because work is no guarantee in itself of social integration. Social ties are built less upon employment than upon active participation - whether paid or not.

As an instrument for social cohesion, education for democratic citizenship helps to turn individuals into responsible citizens engaged in the process of life-long learning. Lessons in responsibility are both external (by way of other people, institutions or society) and internal (as a

result of personal initiative). As well as imparting an awareness of one's duties, such lessons teach about solidarity and about contributing to the welfare of society. The qualities necessary for citizenship and social cohesion include concern for the general good, a capacity for self-management, self-confidence and loyalty. It is important to develop and combine the theoretical, practical and social knowledge necessary to meet the challenge of a society in constant evolution. The individual must therefore be adaptable to circumstances (with a range of skills), while viewing society with a critical eye.

Council of Europe. 1998. "**The Concepts for Education for Democratic Citizenship.**" <http://culture.coe.fr/postsummit/citizenship/concepts/econcepts.intro.htm>

Education for democratic citizenship may be understood to mean all practices and activities designed to help young people and adults participate actively in democratic life, by accepting and exercising their rights and responsibilities in society. The sole purpose of education for democratic citizenship is to strengthen democratic societies by fostering and perpetuating a vibrant democratic culture. It seeks to instill a sense of belonging, a commitment to democratic society, and an awareness of shared fundamental values. It aims to educate individuals about their rights and responsibilities, and to teach people how to put them into practice.

Education for democratic citizenship encompasses various means of learning democratic citizenship, ranging from civic instruction to all the other ways in which participation in society can be learned, practiced and encouraged. It is part of out-of-school, formal and informal education. It is a central concern of schools but also of NGOs, communities and neighbourhoods, local authorities and the media. While giving priority to children and young people, education for democratic citizenship contributes to education in general and consequently involves all age groups throughout their lives.

Heydt, Jean-Marie. 1999. "**Background Study on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Social Cohesion.**" http://culture.coe.int/postsummit/citizenship/concepts/erap99_60.htm

Social cohesion has come to the fore in various writings and discussions as awareness has grown of the differences observed between living conditions, in the broadest sense, among the people who make up the human community. What we call the "social jigsaw puzzle," that is, what makes up the lives of men and women in a social environment, reveals inadequacies in the way its pieces interlock. They no longer fit together smoothly and sometimes cause serious dysfunction that can compromise existing social choices. All these disruptions are directly linked to the effects of the loss of landmarks, the loss of confidence that human beings have in each other and, in this sense, the worlds of politics and institutions are directly implicated since they have for generations provided a frame of reference. Hence, we must urgently set ourselves the goal of finding some way back to social cohesion or constructing it afresh.

Education is, ultimately, the foundation and framework for any prospect of building a social existence, a life in an environment that embraces both our natural surroundings and those created by human beings - architecture, cities, and the entire sociological and economic system on which

we depend; knowledge of the environment and the dangers threatening it; and the significance of economic, political and social choices. We know that the very object of education, the key to our future, is to provide individuals, through a long process of growing-up, with a form of autonomy and independence sufficient for them to be able to make choices and so live in freedom among their fellows. Individuals are expected in some way to be "capable of" managing and responding to current situations (which are sometimes problematic), thanks to their own personal resources, which they have learned to use. Education for citizenship finds a natural extension here, since it must provide young citizens with both cognitive and experiential knowledge of their institutional and social environment. This is one of the reasons why schools also have the task of teaching the rules of communal life, which must be both "instruction and practice."

Education for citizenship is nothing other than the expression of education for popular sovereignty, which, when combined with the requirement of freedom and equality, is the concept of democracy we uphold through our values. Education for democratic citizenship puts the object of this task back in the context of a pluralist parliamentary democracy, based on a balance of rights and responsibilities. This is the purpose of an education that is constructed in a context of the culture of democracy. It is in this spirit that one can, through the development of pedagogical and didactic practice, encourage young people to participate in democratic life. This culture of democracy is "the indispensable counterpart to the creation of the legislative and institutional framework of democratic societies. It is essential to the cohesion of such societies." Educational choices in favour of democratic citizenship will depend on the capacities of future citizens to maintain and develop social cohesion in their environments.

What's New?

The Social Cohesion Network held its first meeting of 2001 as part of its Workshop Series on "What Will Hold Us Together?" The Workshop took place on March 6th in Ottawa. The discussion was on the theme "Co-operatives, Collective Enterprises and Social Cohesion." Upcoming events will be announced at <http://policyresearch.schoolnet.ca/upcoming-e.htm>

On February 22, at a conference in Montreal, Dick Stanley of Canadian Heritage presented an overview of the work conducted in the federal government on social cohesion. The paper was entitled "Holding the Centre: What We Know about Social Cohesion" and was prepared by Strategic Research and Analysis, and the Social Cohesion Network. Copies of the paper can be obtained by contacting sradoc_docras@pch.gc.ca

The Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse du Québec has recently issued a study which reviews the literature on education for democratic citizenship and on the applicability of this concept to human right issues. The study was prepared by Martin Papillon. Copies can be obtained by contacting martinpapillon@hotmail.com