

SPECIAL ISSUE: 'CHALLENGES OF 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION IN EUROPE'

GUEST EDITORS' NOTE

Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Nowadays, civic education is gaining a new perspective. In today's world, which is full of conflicts, people should develop a sense of responsibility at local and global levels, and become active citizens of their country, continent and the planet as a whole. Still there are plenty of unresolved questions in theory and practice of education.

As it was rightly pointed by Franklin D. Roosevelt, education is central to democratic societies. Educators should develop students' critical thinking skills, promote civic engagement, and demonstrate how democracy should function in bottom-up mode.

The primary aim of the education for democratic citizenship is "by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law" (CoE, 2010).

The world of academia should help schools to become such places where the younger generation is prepared to become active citizens, who respect diversity and human rights. Schools should become spaces for democratic experimentation, including new practices of education for intercultural citizenship in the digital age (see as an excellent source Byram et al, 2016). This book describes a set of projects that combine language and citizenship education and demonstrate how the introduction of subject matter and principles from citizenship education into foreign language education makes language education meaningful by taking it beyond its instrumental function and at the same time extending citizenship education beyond a focus on the national.

But introduction of citizenship education can be explored not only in the field of foreign language education, it can be an integral part of various school subjects. See for example the developments of the ELICIT-Plus project (<http://www.elicitplus.eu>) and its predecessor ELICIT project (www.elicit.eu).

To raise the effectiveness of civic education, it is crucial to combine joint efforts of civil society, public authorities, the media, teachers, students and their families.

This Special Themed Issue of the International Journal for 21st Century Education focuses on the topics related to Challenges of 21st Century Education in Europe, European Citizenship, Migration and Multilingualism. More generally, we are addressing issues related to the major challenges of

21st Century Education in Europe, viewed from different theoretical perspectives and from different geographical viewpoints.

Our first article, written in cooperation by Iris Weber and Richard Kötter is already an exercise in intercultural understanding, as the two authors are based in and are working in two different EU countries: Belgium and the UK, though are both German. After providing an extensive survey of the whys and wherefores of what is commonly referred to as “a democratic deficit”, they give a very detailed and informed description of how knowledge and competences can be fostered by shared experiences of EU politics in situ.

Then with Fabrice Fresse and Lucinda Morgan we cross the Atlantic and discover a virtual platform which develops intercultural dialogue in a highly innovative approach. Funded by the European Commission, this programme, Transatlantic Educators Dialogue, usually known as T.E.D. enables participants to share their views on many a controversial topic, thus building the conditions for better intercultural understanding and inclusive educational practices.

Based on various recent international studies, Bernard Hugonnier’s paper focuses on the organic connection between education and democracy: democracy cannot survive without educated citizens. Being able to understand the media and their hidden messages, being able to develop one’s own judgement and critical thinking are only two of the several competences that modern education must nourish for the sake of Democracy.

In her article, Marie-france Mailhos gives a few examples of how the competences of the responsible citizen can be developed in various subject-matters of the curriculum. Citizenship education is definitely not the reserved domain of political science! The last two articles focus on changes in today’s educational systems to adapt to 21st century requirements. How to prepare our youngsters to face a globalized environment laced with economic competition and the threat of climate warming? Our Russian colleagues, Anatolli Liferoy and Lydia Kostikova study the case of Russian higher education whereas our French colleague, Nelly Guet insists on the need for more autonomy at the level of school management.

Guest Editors,

Irina Golubeva & Marie-France Mailhos

References

- Byram, M., Golubeva, I., Han, H. & Wagner, M. (2016). *From Principles to Practice in Education for Intercultural Citizenship*. Bristol: Multilingual Matter.
- CoE (2010). *Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/9svXXs>.
- ELICIT project*. (European Literacy and Citizenship Education), <http://www.elicitizen.eu>. Project Reference: 510624-LLP-1-2010-1-FR-COMENIUS-CMP. [All resources are available in 10 languages at <http://www.aede-france.org/ELICIT-Project.html>].
- ELICIT-Plus project*. <http://www.elicitplus.eu>. Project Reference: 2014-1-FR01-KA200-002362 Results are available at: <https://goo.gl/waC57a>.