

“All the following factors are key elements in the construction of democratic urban and rural societies: the prosperity and well-being of all human beings, quality of life, respect for human rights, equality of opportunity or equality of access to opportunities, social inclusion, social justice, the opportunity for everyone to take active part in society, the awareness that our local life has a European and global dimension, the predisposition to contribute actively to improving society, sustainable development, etc. One of today’s main challenges is to invite young people and adults to take active part in our democratic societies.”

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It has become more and more challenging for democracies to motivate their citizens to be active and engaged in society and in the political process. People have to face rapid changes in society, produced by global markets and the move towards an ‘information society’. If democratic societies want to survive, they need citizens who participate in political and common processes. Education for active citizenship aims to encourage people to be active and engaged citizens. Ways that can be taken to promote active citizenship successfully have to be developed.

Citizenship education has been part of the national curriculum in the UK since 2002. Areas that are covered in schools include active citizenship, financial education, and ethical and social responsibility. Over the next few years the majority of school-aged children will be involved with citizenship education but the post-16 generation will not be directly addressed.

Therefore, it is important that the group of people who are not directly affected by the new curriculum are not forgotten. Ways of communicating issues around active citizenship that can reach this group have to be developed and used. One way is through community education. Another is the use of ICT and especially the use of the Internet. It can reach people who are in remote locations and who are not attending any formal way of education. On the one hand, the role of ICT is important because of the move towards the information society and the need to prepare people for that, on the other hand ICT offers methods to support and promote active citizenship. The Internet can reach a group of adults that had poor experiences with education in the past and who are not likely to go back to traditional education.

This briefing sheet is based on a research project on citizenship education and the Internet in Germany in 2002. There has been a long tradition of citizenship education in Germany, where since World War II the focus was set on the

democratisation of the German people. The results of the work conducted in Germany are presented below, and extended to cover the area of citizenship education in the UK. There are two main aspects around the use of the Internet for promoting active citizenship:

- The use of ICT in active citizenship education - ways of using electronic media for citizenship education
- The impact of ICT on active citizenship education - media literacy

The use of ICT in active citizenship education

Citizenship education aims to support people to be active and engaged citizens. Three elements should be covered in active citizenship education: cognitive, emotional and pragmatic elements. The cognitive element covers the knowledge of democracy and its structures, the emotional element is about forming a part of society and about feeling where one belongs, the pragmatic element covers the living and practising of democracy. In other words, citizenship education should cover knowing, feeling and doing. To implement these three elements into a curriculum for active citizenship they can be divided between four main areas: 1) educational work, 2) conflict - agreement, 3) rationality - emotionality and 4) tolerance.

Contents of education for active citizenship

1. **Educational work** is a basic element in citizenship education. Its aim is to promote the mature and responsible citizen by providing citizens with the necessary information to make informed decisions. It also includes the promotion of a picture of reality that is free from prejudice. Stereotypes and opinions that are based on ideology should be replaced by evidence. Therefore ideology is the opponent of educational work because it creates a picture of reality that is not based on evidence. Being an educated citizen is to be free to make informed decisions.
2. **Conflict and agreement** are basic aspects of contemporary democracies. On the one hand, agreements are necessary for a constitution, but on the other hand, constructive conflicts

are a sign of a liberal and open society. At first sight, these two principles seem to be contradictory but conflicts are only bearable if they happen within agreements – e.g. laws of a country. It is the role of citizenship education to promote these common agreements but also to enable conflicts on this basis.

3. **Rationality** is a basic principle of educational work. It is about knowing and understanding. But also the **emotional** part of education is of importance. It includes feelings, moods and affects that are of importance in the process of perceiving and assessing situations. Both elements together perform the process of interaction of the individual with their environment. Rationality is vital for analysing situations, but in order to interpret them emotions are necessary as well. Another example of the combination of rationality and emotionality is ‘Emotional Intelligence’ (Goleman), which includes empathy, self-control and self-motivation.
4. **Tolerance** appears to be more and more important in a time of cultural and ethical pluralism. Practising tolerance means to enable a peaceful co-existence of different cultures, religions and ethnic groups as well as of people with different norms, values and lifestyles. If tolerance is seen as a democratic skill it describes the capacity to deal with a variety of lifestyles, cultures and beliefs. Tolerance is the result of a learning process because it has to overcome individual desires, feelings and preferences. Teaching tolerance can happen through building up resources of self-confidence, historical-political awareness and taking-in multiple perspectives.

Using the Internet to educate active citizens

The Internet

The Internet is an infrastructure that combines a number of media and applications: email, newsgroups, IRC (chat), FTP (File Transfer Protocol) and - the best known one – the Worldwide Web (WWW). These applications all offer a variety of ways of using them. The difference between mass-media such as newspaper and television and media of the Internet is that latter ones can also be used for producing content, e.g. participating in email

groups or creating a website. For learning the WWW and email are especially important.

There are some characteristics of the WWW and of email that are of importance regarding learning processes:

- *Multimedia*: if multimedia is used in the right way it can encourage learning processes. The combination of different forms of presentation can stimulate the learning process. A multimedia presentation can also prevent one sense, e.g. sight being overstressed. It can be supportive if information is spread between different senses, for example, between seeing and listening. The WWW offers the opportunity to present information via multi-media that can be perceived with different senses.
- *Interactivity*: this describes the quality of software that allows the user to manipulate and control the process. This quality allows learning that is focused on and directed by the learner. Interactivity also encourages activity and can help prevent a passive learning-process. Hypertext and Hypermedia, which are basic elements of the WWW, allow interactivity.
- *Subject-orientation*: this is the use of the Internet in learning that focuses on the learning subject. Subject-orientation means to set the focus on learning instead of on teaching. It encourages active and explorative learning and the teacher functions as a tutor. Therefore it is especially good for learners who do not need a lot of support or guidance.

Information and learning-offers that are presented via the Internet can be designed in a way that focuses on the subject, is interactive and uses multimedia. The Internet can be used to deliver education for active citizenship:

a) Educational work: the Internet can be used as an information tool. It can be used to gather information about structures, institutions, etc. To support the learning process it is important that the information can be used by the learner and that it can be transformed into knowledge it is important that this process is not only rational but includes emotional aspects. For

example, after looking at a website to gather important information about a topic, the learner can start a discussion via email. Another opportunity is a virtual role-play: the role-play is an action-oriented method that supports the application of individual knowledge. In this way the user is working actively with the information found before and therefore there is a higher chance of successful learning and understanding.

b) Tolerance: To encourage tolerance it is useful to show the important role tolerance plays in our societies instead of only presenting text information. We should try to make tolerance into an experience and not into knowledge. This can be realised via the Internet. For example, video tracks can be shown regarding tolerance and virtual role-plays or email discussion groups can be used in which the individual learner can experience what it means to practise tolerance or, in reverse, what it means to face intolerant behaviour and attitudes.

To create political-historical awareness a combination of text information and role-plays can be one effective way. The improvement of individual self-confidence is a task that cannot be achieved only via the Internet. The interpersonal exchange is vital in such processes. Nevertheless, the Internet can be used as a supporting method in this process, e.g. in (anonymous) discussion groups, role-plays etc.

c) Conflict and agreement: The WWW can be used to present agreements, such as the constitution, laws etc. It is important that this information is presented in an accessible way, otherwise people can feel provoked, rejected and excluded. The Internet offers several opportunities to experience a good practice of conflicts. Email discussion groups and virtual role-plays are examples for practising constructive conflict. The administrator of these groups can function as a judge: if participants do not respect the agreed rules the administrator can warn them and finally dismiss them from the group. Conflict cannot always be prevented and therefore it is important to learn a culture of 'good' conflict (which means a respectful conflict, based on common agreements).

d) Rationality and Emotionality: To achieve a balance between rationality and emotionality it is important to transform opinion into knowledge. An interactive learning programme that offers the user feedback to opinions can support this. Elements of emotional intelligence such as empathy can be supported through virtual role-plays.

Besides using the Internet to deliver learning material for active citizenship, the Internet itself can help develop skills that are required for active citizenship. This is described in the concept of media literacy as defined by the German researcher Baacke. This way of seeing the Internet as a tool for citizenship education might have a huge impact.

The impact of ICT on active citizenship education - media literacy

Media literacy is a central aspect of promoting the educated and active citizen. Media literacy means to enable people to use the opportunities of media. This concept of media literacy does not try to protect citizens from the media but to educate them to use the media in a reflective, sensible and efficient way.

Baacke distinguishes between 4 elements of media literacy: criticism, knowledge, usage and creation of media. The first two elements are referring more to the cognitive and emotional part of media literacy. Criticism of media includes an analytic, reflective and ethical approach, knowledge of media covers information about media and media skills. The latter two elements, usage and creation of media, focus on the pragmatic element: they are about using the media in a receptive and distributing way and about creating new material.

Looking at this approach to media literacy the role in media literacy plays in educating and promoting the active citizen becomes obvious. Vital skills for living in democracies, such as information filtering and analysing and participating, are tackled with media literacy. Media literacy is not only important to keep up to pace with the 'information society' but also to perform as an active and educated citizen. If the Internet is compared with other media that have been used in educating and teaching processes such as books, videos or television, there is one quality that makes a major

difference: the interactivity. The Internet allows and supports interaction. Interactive media are activating and encouraging. Nevertheless, it always depends on how media is used and not on the media itself: the focus has to be set on how desired skills and knowledge can be generated.

Conclusion

The Internet developed into an infrastructure that is now dominating communication in our society. It can be used to promote and educate active citizenship in many ways, although community and adult learning set in local communities still play a vital role. It should not be the aim to replace these settings of education but to explore how the Internet can support such an important area of public interest. The aspect of media literacy should especially not be ignored. Media literacy is not only an important aspect for being prepared for the information society but also important for being an active and educated citizen.

Useful resources

Baacke about media literacy (German). Dieter Baacke. Medienpädagogik. Grundlagen der Medienkommunikation. Niemeyer, Tübingen, 1997

Emotional Intelligence. Why it can matter more than IQ. Daniel Goleman. Bloomsbury, 1996

Citizenship Foundation: www.citfou.org.uk

Citizenship Education: the global dimension: www.citizenship-global.org.uk

Council for Education in World Citizenship (CEWC): www.cewc.org.uk

ETGACE – Education and Training for Governance and Active Citizenship in Europe
www.surrey.ac.uk/Education/ETGACE

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