

Project – Democratic Culture in Action – Democratic Competences in the Digital Era

Open Education Centre

Bulgaria: Review of the situation in Formal and Non-formal education

1. Formal education – curriculum review

a. Are there CDC reflected in curriculum?

The framework of competencies for democratic culture has been basically unknown in Bulgaria when the new Law of Education has been elaborated and the new standards of civic, environmental, intercultural education, health education have been elaborated in the first half of 2016.

We analyzed the standards – most of it are based on the competency approach .This is valid especially for the new elaborated standards of civic education, environmental education, intercultural education, health education. Now we expect to see programs based on these competences but this is going to happen with the beginning of the new school year.

We did analyze the existing standards and especially the standards in so called social studies – and there is no mentioning of digital competency. In the curriculum the competences for democratic culture could be found in Civic Education, Philosophy, History curricula. The big debate whether to have Civic Education – as a single subject or to use a cross curriculum approach has been solved by the beginning of 2000 in favor of the latter.

Therefore we have Civic Education standards elaborated in 1999 and reframed in 2016 and in the curriculum we have “Man and Society” subject (from 1st to 4th grade) and “Personality and Society” (for 12th grade). There is no Civic Education in the crucial for the social development age 12-15 years or in the middle school.

With the new Law of Education (June, 2016) have been elaborated as well standards for Intercultural Education, Environmental Education and Health Education but these subjects could be only elective. There are no standards for Human Rights, Global Education.

The crosscurricular approach in fact means that the students are not going through a basic Civic Education.

There are Civic Education Olympics based on the project approach but competitions of this kind do include only an insignificant number of students.

The conclusion is that the competences for democratic culture or civic competences are not developed in a consistent way.

The new Law of Education doesn't change significantly the existent situation.

The Project approach is something which has very strong influence for the development of democratic culture competencies. If this approach was limited by the funding from foreign sources in the Nineties, with the accession to the European union there was an access to significant amount of resources for the development of projects at school level in the field of broadly understood civic education (intercultural education, human rights, community development, global education, sustainable development). If in the 90's most of the projects have been realized by NGO's now the majority of the projects are realized by the schools itself and they involve about 20-30% of the students. The project approach develops competencies not only in traditional way (co-operative learning and practice, problem solving, critical thinking and analysis and cet.) but as well is based often on online communication and practicing.

Is there a special focus on CDC in on-line space?

Up to now in a contrast with the development of the ICT and its use in formal and non-formal education there is no analysis on CDC in on-line space. There are initiatives and programs on safety in the net ("Safe Internet" initiative, "Day of Safe Net" initiative, Center for Safe Internet, "To counter the language of Hate!" and cet.) but they are more instrumental and behavior oriented and are not trying to change the focus on development of competences for democratic culture as a basic [recondition for a safe or informed behavior online.

2.Are teachers looking for tools to booster pupils' and students' competencies?

The crosscurricular approach means that all the teachers should be trained in civic education, human rights education, problem solving, conflict resolution and cet. In order to be able to incorporate elements or contents of civics in their subject teaching. Because this had never taken place the crosscurricular approach doesn't work and most of the teachers still do their job as subject specialists.

Officially the teachers' opinion about the social (civic) standards and the key social and civic competences is in consistence with the data from other European countries. Most of the teachers do consider these competences as an essential component of the curriculum:

"The structured approach to the development of social and civic competences of students in school should start from the age of": 6-8 years - 75% of the teachers answer "yes"

"I think that social and civic competences should be taught in all subjects" - 83% of the teachers answer positively.

In fact these responses reflect the educational practice in Bulgaria where Civic education has not been introduced as a separate subject and where has been officially promoted interdisciplinary approach. But we have to have in mind that interdisciplinary approach to civics means that most of the teachers feel free from responsibility to teach civic competences and a

reluctant to change their teaching programs and ways of teaching and to integrate civic elements in it.

As well there is a great consent that what does today's educational community about why and how we should teach students critical thinking and through the media.

“The use of media for teaching critical thinking skills can and should be applied in the teaching of almost all subjects”. - 95% of the teachers do answer positively. As well there is a consent, that media education is important, but only 27% of the teachers agree, “that teachers of all grades and in all subjects already have the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, training and support to develop critical thinking skills for and through media”.

Teachers training. For this situation is mainly responsible the existent system of pre-service and in-service teachers training.

Pre-service teachers training usually only in Civic Education is done initially at national level in universities. The problem is that because of cross curricular approach and therefore no need for teachers who could be employed only as civic education teachers, the higher education institutions do not open Civics as a specialty and the existing Civic education courses are of several tens of lessons and therefore not comprehensive and do not prepare future teachers for their job.

In-service training is influenced as well by the fact that Civic Education is not a substantial part of the curriculum. Therefore there are not enough training courses, they are usually short ones and are not the first choice or do not have enough added value for the teachers. Most of the training in Civics and related subject fields are realized by the NGO's usually under non-formal education programs. Only now is started an unified program for in-service teachers training with equal in rights training providers (state institutions, academic institutions, private providers, NGO's). With the elaboration of national standards for intercultural education, environmental education, health education and with the existing opportunity to have as optional subjects as well global education, Human rights education and Education for sustainable development we could expect more space for social studies in-service training.

3. In new Law of education passed in 2016 there is mentioning of media literacy. The Article 77 of the Law of Education mentions digital competence as a key competence (along with learning competence, social and civic competences, cultural competence, sustainable development and healthy way of life competence) but as possible subject areas are enumerated global education, civic education, intercultural education, environmental education and there is no mentioning of media literacy (nor social media literacy).

Media and information literacy includes: critical thinking and reflection of media and information systems- assessment of information and media content; reflection on the political and economic influence on media; knowledge and realization of media rights such as the right to use and to get disconnected from the net; right to privacy; right to use information, media and digital technologies for personal and social purposes- including self-expression, for intercultural

and interreligious dialogue, right to use media for learning, work, leisure, the competence for creating content and information products and to use ICT in this process

In none of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) official documents there are special texts for the necessity of media and information literacy. The European texts concerning the introduction of media literacy at school are not included in the Ministry documents. There is no document of the MES where digital competency is defined (visual and information literacy; digital and media literacy; intercultural literacy; interactive communication; co-operative skills; adaptivity and management of complexity; personal, social and civic responsibility). There is no official definition or name for media education. Often it is thought that media literacy means digital culture and competency which are only components of media literacy.

There is no legislation which does recommend media literacy to become part of general education curriculum. The schools are relatively well equipped technologically but there are not programs concerning media literacy.

In the curricula as well there are no specialized programs for media literacy. There is information technologies subject starting from 3rd grade up to 10th grade for all schools. But practically this is exclusively computer education.

The existing documents concerning digital literacy are:

1. National Strategy for introducing ICT in Bulgarian schools 2012
2. National programme “Information and communication technologies at school -2013
3. National program “Digital Bulgaria 2015”

Most of the researchers active in the field do accept the European definition of media literacy „the competence to use media, to understand and to assess critically the different aspects of media and media content in order to realize communication in different contexts.

One of the biggest educational conferences in 2013 was “Against the crisis in the educational system” and was devoted to media and digital literacy.

In Bulgaria media literacy is part of university based courses. In general education the existence of programs depends on the initiative of some teachers in different educational projects mainly financed by EU, CoE and different other initiatives.

There are several NGO’s which are involved in these problems are: the Center for Media Development, “Media with Human face” foundation, Media Democracy

To conclude:

In public space no one asks the question what is to be a literate person in digital era (the idea of basic literacy is moving toward knowledge of several foreign languages; scientific literacy;

economic literacy; technological literacy; visual literacy – abilities to interpret, use, create images video materials, intercultural literacy, global literacy – knowledge of global problems and trends an global interdependencies).

As much as we could check there is neither an ongoing neither single analyses of the democratic culture of the young people in the net. But this is true for the whole process where civic and democracy competences are perceived as something which could be developed and accomplished outside of the real context of the young people – the digital world. There is no research on democratic culture in the net. And we hope that our project will be a first small step in this direction.