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Competences for Democratic Culture

Glossary of key terms

Competences for Democratic Culture

Glossary

List of terms in alphabetical order

Attitude	Disposition	Multiperspectivity
Citizen	EDC	Non-formal education
Citizenship	Empathy	Plurilingualism
Civic-mindedness	Ethnocentrism	Respect
Competence	Formal education	Responsibility
Critical understanding	HRE	Self-efficacy
Culture	Informal education	Skill
Democracy	Intercultural competence	Tolerance
Democratic culture	Intercultural dialogue	Tolerance of ambiguity
Descriptor	Knowledge	Value

List of terms by category

Content-related terms		Technical terms
Democracy	Culture	Competence
Democratic culture	Intercultural dialogue	Descriptor
Citizen	Intercultural competence	Value
Citizenship	Tolerance of ambiguity	Attitude
Education for democratic citizenship	Empathy	Disposition
Human Rights education	Multiperspectivity	Skill
Civic-mindedness	Ethnocentrism	Knowledge
Self-efficacy	Plurilingualism	Critical understanding
Tolerance		Learning outcome
Respect		Formal education
Responsibility		Non-formal education
		Informal education

Democracy

Democracy is government by the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them (direct democracy) or by their elected agents under a free electoral system (representative democracy).

Pillars of democracy:

- Sovereignty of the people
- Government based upon consent of the governed
- Majority rule
- Minority rights
- Guarantee of basic human rights
- Free and fair elections
- Equality before the law
- Due process of law
- Constitutional limits on government
- Social, economic, and political pluralism, including recognition of independent civil society organisations
- Values of cooperation, fair competition, and compromise.

Current democratic standards go beyond classical representative democracy, where the key role of citizens is to delegate by vote to their representatives the responsibility for elaborating and implementing public policies, to participatory democracy, where public institutions comply with the principles of good governance and citizens have the legitimacy to engage in all phases of the public policy cycle.

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Democratic culture

Democracy is more than the sum of its institutions. A healthy democracy depends in large part on the development of a democratic civic culture.

The term 'democratic culture' emphasises the fact that, while democracy cannot exist without democratic institutions and laws, such institutions and laws cannot work in practice unless they are grounded in a culture of democracy, that is, in democratic values, attitudes and practices shared by citizens and institutions. Among other things, these include a commitment to the rule of law and human rights, a commitment to the public sphere, a conviction that conflicts must be resolved peacefully, acknowledgement of and respect for diversity, a willingness to express one's own opinions, a willingness to listen to the opinions of others, a commitment to decisions being made by majorities, a commitment to the protection of minorities and their rights, and a willingness to engage in dialogue across cultural divides. It also includes concern for the sustainable wellbeing of fellow human beings, as well as for the environment in which we live.

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Citizen

Citizen has two different meanings:

- someone who has the objective legal status of citizenship of a state as defined by the laws and regulations of that state; this status is usually indexed by whether or not that person holds the passport of that state.
- any individual who is affected by the political or civic decision-making of a polity or community and who is able to engage with political and civic processes through one means or another. Not all of those who are citizens in this broad sense of the term are legal citizens. For example, first generation migrants may not have legal citizenship of the country in which they reside; however, even if they are unable to vote in national elections, they are able to participate in political and civic processes through a variety of other means, including community organisations, trade union membership and union politics, and membership of pressure groups (e.g., anti-racist, human rights or environmental organisations).

In the context of competences for democratic culture, the term 'citizens' is used to denote all individuals who are affected by democratic decision-making and who can engage with democratic processes and institutions (rather than to denote only those who hold legal citizenship of a particular state).

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Citizenship

Citizenship has two different meanings:

- Legal status of a person with regards to a state (proved by the passport)
- Exercise of the rights and responsibilities of a citizen in a (participatory) democratic society

A person can be a citizen of a state without involvement in public matters, while a person who is not a citizen (in the legal sense) can demonstrate active citizenship by engaging in various civic activities.

In the context of competences for democratic culture, the term ‘citizenship’ refers to the active engagement of citizens with democratic processes and institutions, exercising their rights and responsibilities.

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Education for Democratic Citizenship

Education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, 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.

As democratic citizenship is not limited to the citizen’s legal status and to the voting right this status implies, education for democratic citizenship includes all aspects of life in a democratic society and is therefore related to a vast range of topics such as sustainable development, participation of people with disabilities in society, gender mainstreaming, prevention of terrorism and many others.

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Human rights education

Education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Human rights education involves three dimensions:

- Learning about human rights, knowledge about human rights, what they are, and how they are safeguarded or protected;
- Learning through human rights, recognising that the context and the way human rights learning is organised and imparted has to be consistent with human rights values (e.g. participation, freedom of thought and expression, etc.) and that in human rights education the process of learning is as important as the content of the learning;
- Learning for human rights, by developing skills, attitudes and values for the learners to apply human rights values in their lives and to take action, alone or with others, for promoting and defending human rights.

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Civic-mindedness

Civic-mindedness is an attitude towards other people, beyond family and friends. It involves a sense of belonging to a group or community, an awareness of other people in the group, an awareness of the effects of one's actions on those people, solidarity with the other members of the group, and a sense of civic duty towards the group. Groups or communities in relation to which civic-mindedness may be expressed include people who live within a particular geographical area (such as a neighbourhood, a town or city, a country, a group of countries such as Europe or Africa, or indeed the world in the case of the 'global community'), ethnic groups, faith groups, leisure groups, or any other kind of social or cultural group to which an individual feels a sense of belonging. Every individual belongs to multiple groups, and an attitude of civic-mindedness may be held towards any number of these.

Democratic societies need community-oriented people, who take an interest in the welfare of the community. Mutual interest and trust, together with shared goals and a variety of resources, result in commitment and involvement. When people have a sense that they have something at stake beyond their immediate individual interest, they become involved in social life. There is a difference between civic-mindedness in a modern democratic society and the "civic duties" imposed by totalitarian regimes (civic-minded people think and act based on their own genuine conviction and decision) or the concern for common good in collectivist societies (civic-minded people do not give up their own interests for the interest of the community but act together with other individuals to address common and general interests).

[Top](#)**Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is an attitude towards the self. It involves a positive belief in one's own ability to undertake the actions which are required to achieve particular goals, and confidence that one can understand issues, select appropriate methods for accomplishing tasks, navigate obstacles and new challenges successfully, influence what happens, and make a difference in the world.

Thus, self-efficacy is associated with feelings of self-confidence in one's own abilities. Low self-efficacy can discourage democratic and intercultural behaviour even when there is a high level of ability, while unrealistically high self-efficacy can lead to frustration and disappointment. An optimal attitude is relatively high self-efficacy coupled to a realistically estimated high level of ability, which encourages individuals to tackle new challenges and enables them to take action on issues of concern. Self-efficacy involves also a feeling of confidence about democratic engagement and undertaking the actions judged to be necessary to achieve democratic goals (including challenging and holding to account those in positions of power and authority when their decisions or actions are judged to be unfair or unjust) and a feeling of confidence about engaging in intercultural dialogue with those who are perceived to have cultural affiliations that differ from one's own.

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Tolerance

The literature on tolerance comes mainly from philosophy, political science and social psychology and refers to tolerance either as a social phenomenon, or as an attitude or individuals. If the focus is on tolerance as an attitude of an individual, there are three main views on tolerance:

1. Tolerance seen as the antonym of intolerance, implying acceptance and openness, is defined as being yourself, without imposing your way on the others.
2. Tolerance seen as a patronising attitude, connected to its Latin etymology: tolerance is most commonly viewed negatively as “putting up with” something we dislike or even hate. This is often associated with the verb “to tolerate”, which implies an unbalanced relationship, from someone who tolerates to another which is tolerated. One of the most famous quotes on tolerance is from Goethe: “Tolerance should really only be a passing attitude: it should lead to appreciation. To tolerate is to offend.”
3. Tolerance can also be seen as a useful insight in dealing with the key issue of reconciling at an individual level the belief in the equal worth and dignity of all human beings and a situation of strong disagreement on values, beliefs or practices. From this perspective, tolerance is seen as “a fair and objective attitude toward those whose opinions and practices differ from one's own based on the commitment to respect human dignity”.

There are three jointly necessary conditions to have tolerance, according to this view:

- a. Precondition: a situation of conflict, questioning or violating the values or norms;
- b. Procedure: a commitment to avoiding any kind of violence, searching for non-violent ways to settle the disagreement or to enduring/bearing the conflict;
- c. Motivation: the decision to search for a nonviolent solution or to put up with the disagreement relies on valuing the rights of the other people and human dignity.

One should not be tolerant in certain situations, there are limits: e.g. we should not tolerate racism. The third approach above, grounded on respect for the dignity of all human beings and for their fundamental equality of human rights is incorporated into the definition given to respect in the model of Competences for Democratic Culture (see below).

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Respect

Respect is an attitude towards someone or something (e.g., a person, a belief, a symbol, a principle, a practice, etc.) where the object of that attitude is judged to have some kind of importance, worth or value which warrants positive regard and esteem. Depending on the nature of the object that is respected, the respect may take on very different forms (cf. respect for a school rule vs. respect for an elder's wisdom vs. respect for nature). One type of respect that is especially important in the context of democratic culture is the respect that is accorded to other people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations or different beliefs, opinions or practices from oneself. Such respect does not require agreement with, adoption of or conversion to that which is respected – it is instead an attitude that involves the positive appreciation of the other and of their differences from the self, while nevertheless recognising and acknowledging the differences which exist. An attitude of respect is required to facilitate both democratic interaction and intercultural dialogue with others.

However, limits do need to be placed on respect – for example, respect should not be accorded to beliefs, opinions, lifestyles or practices which undermine or violate the dignity and human rights of others.

Respect therefore involves:

- i. Positive regard and esteem for someone or something based on the judgement that they have intrinsic importance, worth or value.
- ii. Positive regard and esteem for other people as equal human beings irrespective of their cultural affiliations, beliefs, opinions, lifestyles or practices.
- iii. Positive regard and esteem for the beliefs, opinions, lifestyles and practices adopted by other people, as long as these do not undermine the dignity and human rights of others.

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Responsibility

Responsibility is an attitude towards one's own actions. It involves being reflective about one's actions, forming intentions about how to act in a morally appropriate way, conscientiously performing those actions, and holding oneself accountable for the outcomes of those actions.

Responsibility arises when a person has a moral obligation to act in a particular way and deserves praise or blame for either performing that act or failing to act in that way. Responsibility can require courage insofar as taking a principled stance may entail acting on one's own, taking action against the norms of a community, or challenging a collective decision that is judged to be wrong. Thus, there can sometimes be a tension between civic-mindedness (construed as solidarity with and loyalty towards other people) and moral responsibility. An attitude of responsibility for one's own actions therefore involves making decisions about the actions to take (which in some cases might entail *not* taking action), given the circumstances which apply.

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Culture

Culture is a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO). A distinction may be drawn between material (physical artefacts such as food, clothing, housing, goods, tools, artistic products, etc.), social (language, religion, laws, rules, family structure, labour patterns, folklore, cultural icons, etc.) and subjective (shared knowledge, beliefs, memories, identities, attitudes, values and practices) aspects of culture. This set of cultural resources is distributed across the entire social group with each individual member appropriating and using only a subset of the cultural resources potentially available to them. This explains the variability within each cultural group and may result in contested or blurred group boundaries. Under this view, any social group can have a culture and all cultures are dynamic and constantly change over time as a result of internal and external factors. All people belong to multiple groups and their cultures and participate in different constellations of cultures. Cultural affiliations are also fluid and dynamic, having a strong subjective dimension. Thus, the model of competences for democratic culture makes frequent reference to "people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself" (rather than to, for example, "people from other cultures").

[Top](#)**Intercultural dialogue**

An open exchange of views, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, between individuals or groups who perceive themselves as having different cultural affiliations from each other. It requires the freedom and ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others. Intercultural dialogue fosters constructive engagement across perceived cultural divides, reduces intolerance, prejudice and stereotyping, and contributes to political, social, cultural and economic integration and the cohesion of culturally diverse societies. It fosters equality, human dignity and a sense of common purpose. It aims to develop a deeper understanding of diverse world views and practices, to increase co-operation and participation (or the freedom to make choices), to allow personal growth and transformation, and to promote respect for the other.

Intercultural dialogue can be a difficult process. This is particularly the case when the participants perceive each other as representatives of cultures that have an adversarial relationship with one another (e.g., as a consequence of past or present armed conflict) or when a participant believes that their own cultural group has experienced significant harm (e.g., blatant discrimination, material exploitation or genocide) at the hands of another group to which they perceive their interlocutor as belonging. Under such circumstances, intercultural dialogue can be extremely difficult, requiring a high level of intercultural competence and very considerable emotional and social sensitivity, commitment, perseverance and courage.

[Top](#)**Intercultural competence**

A combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one to:

- understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself
- respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people
- establish positive and constructive relationships with such people

‘Respect’ means that one has positive regard for, appreciates and values the other; ‘appropriate’ means that all participants in the situation are equally satisfied that the interaction occurs within expected cultural norms; and ‘effective’ means that all involved are able to achieve their objectives in the interaction at least in part.

[Top](#)**Tolerance of ambiguity**

Tolerance of ambiguity is an attitude towards situations which are uncertain and subject to multiple conflicting interpretations. People with high tolerance of ambiguity evaluate these kinds of objects, events and situations in a positive manner and deal with them constructively, while people with low tolerance for ambiguity adopt a rigid single perspective on unclear situations and are inflexible in their thinking about the world.

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Empathy

Empathy is the set of skills required to understand and relate to other people's thoughts, beliefs and feelings, and to see the world from other people's perspectives. Empathy involves the ability to step outside one's own psychological frame of reference (i.e., to decentre from one's own perspective) and the ability to imaginatively apprehend and understand the psychological frame of reference and perspective of another person. This skill is fundamental to imagining the cultural affiliations, world-views, beliefs, interests, emotions, wishes and needs of other people.

In the CDC model empathy is therefore seen as a skill, although in the everyday or in scientific discourse there are also other meanings (for example, regarding emotional contagion, where a person 'catches' and shares another person's emotions). Three different forms of empathy are distinguished:

- i. Cognitive perspective-taking – the ability to apprehend and understand the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs of other people.
- ii. Affective perspective-taking – the ability to apprehend and understand the emotions, feelings and needs of other people.
- iii. Sympathy, sometimes called 'compassionate empathy' or 'empathic concern' – the ability to experience feelings of compassion and concern for other people based on the apprehension of their cognitive or affective state or condition, or their material situation or circumstances.

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Multiperspectivity

The analysis and presentation of situations, events, practices, documents, media representations, societies and cultures, taking into account multiple points of view in addition to one's own. Multiperspectivity presupposes:

- recognising that everyone, including the self, holds partial and biased perspectives which are determined by cultural, educational and family background, personal history, personality, and cognitive and affective processes
- acknowledging that other people's perspectives may be just as valid as our own when viewed from their cultural and personal positions
- the willingness and the ability to adopt the psychological point of view of other people in an attempt to see the world as they see it (i.e., the skill of 'perspective-taking', which is an aspect of empathy)

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Ethnocentrism

The view of things in which one's own primary culture is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Also understood as a prejudice expressed by thinking one's own group's ways are superior to others. Three forms of ethnocentrism may be distinguished:

- Denial: The inability or refusal to cognitively understand cultural difference, which leads to ignorant or naive observations about other cultures
- Defence: Recognition of cultural difference coupled to a negative evaluation of variations from one's own culture, with the greater the difference, the more negative the evaluation, and characterised by dualistic us vs. them thinking

- Minimisation of difference: Recognition and acceptance of superficial cultural differences while holding that all human beings are essentially the same, placing an emphasis on the similarity of people and commonality of basic values but defining the basis of that commonality in ethnocentric terms (everyone is essentially like “us”).

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Plurilingualism

The capacity of an individual to use several languages receptively and/or productively, whatever level of competence that they have in each of them.

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Competence

The ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context. This implies selecting, activating, coordinating and organising the relevant set of values, attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills and applying these through behaviour which is appropriate to those situations. In addition to this global and holistic use of the term ‘competence’, the term ‘competences’ is used in the CDC model to refer to the specific individual resources (i.e., the specific values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding) that are mobilised and deployed in the production of competent behaviour.

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Descriptor

A descriptor is a statement describing an observable and assessable behaviour of a learner which demonstrates the attainment or achievement of a certain level of proficiency in relation to a specific competence. Descriptors are positively formulated, and independent of one another.

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Value

A value is a belief about a desirable goal that motivates action and serves as a guiding principle in life across many situations. Values have a normative prescriptive quality about what *should* be done or thought. Values offer standards or criteria for: making evaluations; justifying opinions, attitudes and conduct; planning behaviour and deciding between alternatives; attempting to influence others; and presenting the self to others. Values are linked to affect in that, when they are activated, they are infused with feeling. They also provide structures around which more specific attitudes are organised. They influence attitudes, and assessing people’s values can help to predict their attitudes and their behaviour. People organise their values into hierarchies in terms of their relative importance, and the relative importance of values often changes across the lifespan. At individual psychological level, values are internalized social representations or moral beliefs that people appeal to as the ultimate rationale for their actions. Values are not simply individual traits but social agreements about what is right, good, to be cherished. They are codes or general principles guiding action, not the actions themselves nor specific checklists of what to do and when to do it. Values underlie the sanctions for some behavioural choices and the rewards for others. A value system presents what is expected and hoped for, what is required and what is forbidden.

[Top](#)**Attitude**

An attitude is the overall mental orientation which an individual adopts towards someone or something (e.g., a person, a group, an institution, an issue, an event, a symbol, etc.). Attitudes usually consist of four components: a belief or opinion about the object of the attitude, an emotion or feeling towards the object, an evaluation (either positive or negative) of the object, and a tendency to behave in a particular way towards that object.

Attitudes vary in their strength, that is, in their stability, durability and impact on behaviour. A distinction may be drawn between explicit and implicit attitudes. Explicit attitudes can be consciously accessed and controlled and can be expressed verbally. Implicit attitudes cannot be consciously accessed or controlled and are instead expressed through more subtle or covert behaviours such as facial displays, body language and reaction times. Changes to explicit attitudes may not be reflected in corresponding changes to implicit attitudes. It is possible to hold two or more different attitudes towards the same object on different occasions, to hold ambivalent attitudes, and for explicit and implicit attitudes towards the same object to display contradictory feelings and evaluations.

[Top](#)**Disposition**

A disposition is an enduring organisation of internal psychological factors that is expressed as a stable and consistent tendency to exhibit particular patterns of thinking, feeling or behaving across a broad range of circumstances in the absence of external coercion or extrinsic rewards. Dispositions need to be distinguished from capabilities. For example, people may be able to generate arguments that are opposed to their own position on an issue when they are asked to do so (i.e., they have the capability) but they generally tend not to do so (i.e., they do not have the disposition). Likewise, people might have the knowledge, understanding or skills that are required to engage in a particular kind of behaviour, but lack the disposition to use them. A disposition is therefore a cluster of preferences, attitudes, and intentions, plus a set of capabilities that allow the preferences to become realized in a particular way. Although dispositions are excluded from the set of competences specified by the CDC model, they are treated as being implicit in the definition of competence which underpins the entire model – that is, competence as the mobilisation and deployment of competences through behaviour. If competences are not mobilised and deployed (i.e., if there is no disposition to use them in behaviour), then an individual cannot be deemed to be competent. In other words, having the disposition to use one's competences in behaviour is intrinsic to the very notion of competence – there is no competence without this disposition.

[Top](#)**Skill**

In the context of the CDC model skills are seen as the capacity for carrying out complex, well-organised patterns of either thinking or behaviour in an adaptive manner in order to achieve a particular end or goal.

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Knowledge

Knowledge is the body of articulated information which an individual possesses and is closely connected to the notion of understanding. In education, knowledge is seen as an essential element of curriculum, often referred to as curriculum content, and encompasses the essential elements which humanity accumulated in time and which school is supposed to pass on to new generations in order to advance in the understanding of the world and in the progress of human society.

[Top](#)**Critical understanding**

Critical understanding is a certain way of relating to knowledge and involves reflection, critical analysis of the content of knowledge, of its source, comparing various perspectives on the same topic, connecting newly acquired knowledge with knowledge acquired previously from various sources, situating knowledge in a specific socio-cultural context, relativising its meaning and evaluating different ideas and positions based on a variety of arguments. Critical understanding is proven by the ability not just to reproduce knowledge but to apply it in new contexts and in creative ways.

[Top](#)**Learning outcome**

A learning outcome is a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning.

[Top](#)**Formal education**

Structured education and training system that runs from pre-primary and primary through secondary school and on to university. It takes place, as a rule, at general or vocational educational institutions and leads to certification.

[Top](#)**Non-formal education**

Any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational setting.

[Top](#)**Informal education**

The lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience (family, peer group, neighbours, encounters, library, mass media, online media, work, play, etc.).