

NECE – Networking European Citizenship Education

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN TERMS OF EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP (EDC)



European Workshop Vienna, 14–15 October 2005

The above conference provided a forum for experts, practitioners and policy makers to meet at a European Workshop in order to discuss their experiences, achievements and challenges in Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) in formal and non-formal education with particular reference to methods of quality assurance and to provide opportunities to evaluate the application of the “Tool for Quality Assurance of Education for Democratic Citizenship in Schools”¹ designed by the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the Centre for Educational Policy Studies.

The key issues and objectives of the workshop were to:

1. exchange experiences, share achievements and discuss challenges concerning school development, quality assurance and standards in EDC
2. draw conclusions from the presented tools
3. stimulate a broader process for promoting quality assurance (QA) in EDC and developing relevant quality standards and tools

After registration and lunch participants were welcomed to the conference workshop by Sigrid Steininger of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, Austria and Petra Grüne, Federal Agency for Civic Education, Germany, the joint organisers of the conference workshop and they set the context and outlined the key questions to consider for the event, namely:

- national similarities and differences
- major challenges for evaluation
- items for the further (research) agenda

This was followed by introductions to all the participants where individuals were especially asked to identify and note their expectations and interests before the opening presentation from Florian Wenzel from the Centre for Applied Policy Research (C.A.P) in Germany on Participatory Evaluation of Civic Education. He likened the process of evaluation to a journey between promise and despair where the risk of expressing everything in numbers might result in the beauty and complexity of human experience being lost or sacrificed. Drawing upon the dimensions of civic education, which focussed first on concepts and facts, then on reflection and irritation and finally, autonomy, he described how evaluation had been adapted to reflect a participatory approach. He identified this as a political process in which participation was important but not sufficient and then indicated how it needed to move beyond this to appreciation.

He outlined six stages of methodological process from the integration of the stakeholders, including the recognition of current strengths and resources, developing common visions, designing goals and indicators, planning, running and evaluating projects to putting

¹ Download: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001408/140827e.pdf>

together an evaluation report which would be both appreciative and future oriented in motivating for change. This presentation was refreshing and positive in outlining the way in which quality assurance could reflect the principles of EDC by combining assessment with organisational development and empowering stakeholders in their daily professional work.

This was followed by a thought-provoking discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of measuring quality in terms of numbers i.e. quantitatively as opposed to qualitatively and in the end there seemed to be some consensus about adopting a balanced approach, which took into account the purpose of the evaluation.

After tea we were treated to two specific examples of quality assurance, standards and evaluation from the contrasting national perspectives of Germany and England. The first was presented by Anja Besand, Faculty of Education, Ludwigsburg, Germany in which she highlighted current issues facing German educationalists and the perceived difference in models of EDC between the Council of Europe and the German experience, where the former tended to favour a social participatory approach distinct from the latter which seemed to emphasise more liberal individual point of view. This was clearly illustrated in terms of European statements which stressed the preparation of individuals and communities for civic and political participation, valuing cultural and social diversity in contrast to the German competence framework which focussed on the ability of individuals to judge and act politically, demonstrating intellectual as opposed to social skills or attitudes and encouraging the development of self-confidence.

The English perspective was presented by Scott Harrison, a Subject Specialist Adviser for Citizenship and an HMI / Ofsted inspector who provided a detailed account of the historical background in terms of the National Curriculum and then outlined the procedures and criteria used to make judgements. He explained the way in which citizenship was defined and inspected as a subject against indicators 1, 2 & 3, which was somewhat narrower than the whole school model of EDC, covering framework indicators 4, 5 & 6 on ethos, relationships, leadership and management. Given the absence of a tradition of civic or political education in England, substantial progress had been made, although in one in five schools citizenship education was still unsatisfactory and he felt that inspection had operated as a lever for change in focussing on provision and providing training and guidance for inspectors to pose questions and apply grade criteria on a four point scale.

After these very different perspectives there was an in-depth discussion which generated a great deal of exchange and raised issues about language and definitions, for example, the differences between “competence” and “skills” or “willingness” and “ability” as well as the concept of community. To a certain extent this tended to focus on the German experience but then returned to wider issues around quality assurance in terms of input, process and output and the philosophical rationale underpinning the centralised processes of quality control manifested in the English model, attracting both criticism and recognition for its fitness to purpose.

The afternoon sessions concluded by indicating areas to be addressed in the next sessions on the following day and the opportunity for continuing informal networking and discussions over dinner at a typical Viennese “Heuriger” Kitzweger where a variety of home-made, authentic dishes and local wine were provided as a satisfying conclusion to a stimulating and provocative first day of the European Workshop.

The next day began with statements from Janez Krek of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and Vedrana Spajić Vrkaš of the University of Zagreb, Croatia, both of whom had been actively involved in authoring the “Tool for Quality Assurance of Education for Democratic Citizenship in Schools”¹. Janez Krek stressed the importance of quality assurance by illustrating the way EDC it had operated in Slovenia with schools conducting citizenship education for which the curriculum aims had been pre-set and defined, while the content was left to teachers, recognising their professional autonomy. What the QA tool had shown was that teachers were using their professional autonomy not to teach EDC because of its ideological overtones and the consequences of this were reflected in a table he displayed, showing the attitudes of individuals towards “others”. A large proportion of these were very negative which indicated the extent of the problem that needed to be tackled by EDC in Slovenia. In the light of this, he concluded that quality assurance of EDC was essential to foster political literacy, improve the school climate, stimulate teachers to work in a positive manner and to evaluate what they were doing as well as to raise awareness of the responsibilities for state support.

Vedrana Spajić Vrkaš traced the background of events leading to the production of the quality assurance tool and reminded participants of the change in focus from quality control to quality assurance. She stressed the need for common ground and consensus in order to guide future practice at local, national, European and even global / international levels. The introduction of EDC would act as a means of integrating educational change in Europe, requiring teacher training to think holistically towards reconciling the notions of education in the service of the economy with education in the service of the individual and society with EDC as the key to lifelong learning in the context of an information society. Some studies had shown that students’ knowledge of democracy was superficial; that there were no distinctions between ‘old’ and ‘new’ democracies; that higher scores in knowledge did not necessarily mean higher scores in engagement and that there was a growing mistrust in government institutions, political parties and MPs, all of which pointed to the gap between policy and practice as a result of a lack of political will combined with low level administrative competence. This meant that urgent attention would need to be given to strategic planning and EDC pack on Key Issues, Democratic Government, Teacher Training and QA provided the tool by which this might be achieved.

The discussion following these statements recognised evaluation as a process, central to the practice and participation of teachers with implications for teacher training, including the development of instruments and skills for analysing the results of evaluation. Questions were raised about what could be done for schools now as it was not possible for them to wait for the development of European standards, but more important for them to identify possible content, materials and subjects which might develop further opportunities for the study of citizenship.

Points were also mentioned about differentiation between assessment and evaluation and how these might be brought together. It was noted that self-evaluation was contrary to the inspection process but also that contacts between external evaluators and schools were likely to be based on disagreement before reaching agreement through a long term process of self-evaluation. Whether quality assurance was done independently or through inspection was irrelevant, but it was important to recognise that its purpose was to improve teaching and learning and that the framework indicators which fostered EDC also offered a tool by which self-development might be enhanced.

The status of the tool was clarified as a joint project involving the CoE, UNESCO and the Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS) and it provided opportunities for member states to be involved in agreeing standards which might take different forms from conventions, to frameworks offering advice or to recommendations. The EDC pack would be disseminated and getting feedback on its application would be important.

An extended tea break was arranged to allow workshop participants to reflect on the issues of quality assurance and EDC that had been the topic of the conference and to complete questionnaires before being allocated into smaller groups to consider the following questions, namely:

1. What is needed for further development / implementation of QA in EDC?
2. What contribution could you / your institution make to the further development / implementation of the EDC tool?
3. What would be a good follow-up for this workshop – conference?

The specific outcomes of each group were shared and their points are summarised in the workshop-conference materials, but there were some general conclusions reached, which are mentioned below:

- Consensus about the positive value of the tool as a starting point for quality assurance of EDC
- The necessity of QA for EDC
- Some concrete conceptions for the next steps, for example, translations and lists of terminology
- Dissemination of the tool and making it useful for teachers / stakeholders, either nationally or locally
- Questions were raised about training the trainers and teachers in the QA process
- Further workshops of clarification on indicators or standards
- Dependence for all this on funding meant there was a need to combine the efforts of the EU and CoE
- Quality assurance should always begin with self-evaluation and be process-orientated.

In concluding the workshop-conference Sigrid Steininger summed up the positive emphasis that had been on team work and partnership, especially among the organisers of the event and she paid particular tribute to the facilitator of the workshop-conference, Birgit Sauer who had made an important contribution to skilfully managing the programme. Petra Grüne made a point of reminding participants of the forthcoming conference in Berlin from 2–4 December where many of the items identified for further research would be addressed.

On a personal note, I would like to commend the organisers for managing a highly effective, lively and interesting workshop-conference which created space for high level, intellectual discussion combined with respect for all contributions consistent with the ethos of education for democratic citizenship, modelling good practice within an informative, friendly and sociable context.

Well done and very many thanks,

Sue Colquhoun

25 October 2005

