

NECE – Networking European Citizenship Education “EYCE 2005: National Experiences – European Challenges”

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Country Profile II. Belgium

EDC in the Flemish Community, Belgium

a) EDC in the formal education system

The curriculum of the cross-curricular theme ‘Educating for citizenship’ for the Flemish secondary education, introduced gradually in the Flemish education system since the late 90’s, defines citizenship as “*being open to the political, economic, social and cultural life of the society of which one forms a part and being willing to participate in it. Citizenship therefore assumes insight into the four aspects above, as well as into the basic rules which form the basis of our legal order and of our democratic system. One important element of citizenship is contained in human rights and liberties, as laid down in the constitution and in various charters. Citizenship assumes: a) awareness of belonging to a community of citizens with rights and obligations including the ensuing responsibilities and tasks; b) readiness to honour those rights and to comply with those obligations; c) initiative to bear responsibility; d) readiness to acquire attitudes such as tolerance, sense of justice, an eye for general well-being, willingness to cooperate and sense of responsibility.*”

Flemish schools have an obligation of effort towards this cross-curricular curriculum, not an obligation of results as they have towards the more classical subjects.

Besides the curriculum EDC is embedded in other policy areas as well. A decree on participation establishes pupils’ participation in schools. A decree on equal opportunities in education puts in places regulations and structures on various aspects thereof.

For the support of the citizenship curriculum a series of measures have been taken. Some books and brochures with information and suggestions on the curriculum have been published and distributed. The school networks have their pedagogical advisors who provide schools and teachers with training and advice for free. Priority themes for in service teacher training temporarily allowed institutions and NGO’s providing in service teacher training for free. Some NGO’s providing support (educational materials or in service teacher training) for the education system get financial and/or personnel support for projects they submitted. The ‘official’ magazine for teachers provides information and support; the same applies for pupils and for parents. On themes (such as ‘school and democracy’ and ‘global education’) schools can get financial support when setting up projects.

In the implementation of citizenship education a range of difficulties occur. There are the increasing expectations and demands from society towards the education system and its schools. In connection with this, a lack of time/resources for the teacher(s) to devote to this aspect, as well as a lack of time in the classroom seem to play a significant role. Another challenge is the perception, still, by many teachers of their task and of the school’s mission as rather subject-oriented. Also a lack of expertise and experience needed for the implementation of EDC is felt by quite some teachers.

b) EDC in youth work

In youth work no formal policy on citizenship education has been established in Flanders, though policy on youth and youth work encompasses aspects which are of relevance to

EDC: integration of children's rights in all policy areas, an effective and open information policy, attention to diversity and interculturality, youth participation... Besides this initiatives and campaigns on citizenship issues are initiated by youth ngo's, such as the actual campaign "VerdraaiDe Wereld" ("TurnThe Globe"?).

c) EDC in informal adult education

Also in informal adult education there is no formal policy in place, but some impulses are given to EDC in its context. There is a funding system which allows institutes for specialised adult education working on citizenship issues to be funded, which also applies to socio-cultural movements dealing with issues that can be considered as citizenship issues.

d) Observations and comments

- Though by many observers citizenship education is seen as an important element in all educational contexts, no coherent and concerted efforts are made towards implementing it in a more systematic way. This also applies to human rights education.
- As a result of the fragmented funding system (separate funding systems for formal education, youth work, informal adult education, work with special target groups,...) and of the lack of an initiative from the government until now no strong support structure or expert centre for citizenship education (or for human rights education or, ideally, covering both educational fields) has been established. The establishment of such a support structure would add substantially to more vibrant EDC practices in all educational sectors.
- There is a need for a platform where all Flemish ngo's, institutions and initiatives carrying out support for EDC regularly meet, in order to avoid overlap, to create synergies and develop common projects. Such a platform should be cross-sectoral.
- EDC is not on itself a 'sexy' subject or theme in educational settings. Spontaneous interest for EDC is not obvious. In order to be attractive for learners EDC needs to be approached with attractive methods or be embedded in projects, approaches or themes which attract interest or are of more direct relevance for the learners.
- Schools and educational institutes and organisations are approached by an overwhelming diversity of themes and 'educations' (peace education, human rights education, intercultural education, education for sustainable development, global education,...). There is a need for integrated approaches of all these themes.