



★ NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

European Conference

**Closing the empowerment gap through citizenship education  
How to address educationally disadvantaged groups**

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**Report**

**Workshop 7  
Learning Environments – Vocational Training**

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**Input:**

Tony Breslin, Breslin Public Policy Ltd. (UK)

**Project Presentations:**

"VOICE" presented by Elena A. Begant, Centre for Citizenship Education (Slovenia)

"14 plus" presented by Oliver Steinke, Organisation for the Economic Development of Skilled Trades SMEs (LGH) in North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany)

**Moderation:**

Bryony Hoskins, University of Southampton (UK)

**Figures – Dates – Moods**

Participants of the first session came from Germany and Scotland representing universities, a Black and Ethnic Minority Organization and a European network for Democracy and Human Rights Education. Number of participants: three.

Participants of the second session came amongst others from Germany, Czech Republic, Austria and Poland representing educational organizations, teachers involved in vocational training and students. Number of participants: approx. fifteen.

The moderator, Bryony Hoskins from the University of Southampton facilitated an interacting discussion. Participants and presenters both engaged vividly in a constructive atmosphere. Questions and remarks were given continuously while one was still provided with a clear structure of workshop contents. There was no official round of feedback but personal discussion after each session.



## Content

If we would start to look at citizenship education from a vocational training's perspective, we would learn that it is necessary to re-evaluate how certain competences are valued in our education systems. This is one of the main results of Workshop 7 at the NECE conference in Warsaw, which was dedicated to 'Learning Environment – vocational training'.

Notions of Initial Vocational Education & Training (IVET) and Continuous Vocational Education & Training (CVET) are quite different across Europe. In her introduction Ms. Hoskins gave an overview of different characteristics and types such as market led or apprenticeship based, continental school, egalitarian school based or within the system of general education. Ms. Hoskins invited participants to add models of vocational training from Eastern European countries.

Despite of varying concepts a study presented by Ms. Hoskins suggests a general tendency concerning citizenship education in vocational training: students pursuing vocational training are most likely to show little participation in voting and alternative forms of political activity. As Ms. Hoskins pointed out citizenship education and related competences are hardly part of the curricular. Her findings are based on data of a four-country-survey that compared the competences of students who passed vocational training and general education.

### Central questions

Against this background Ms. Hoskins defined the following questions for the workshop:

- What citizenship education is happening right now in IVET in your countries?
- How could citizenship education in IVET be improved?
- How can IVET or CVET help disadvantaged groups?

(The questions were not expanded by the participants.)

### 'Look through the window'-Programmes

Tony Breslin is a London-based public policy analyst specialising in education, participation and the third sector. In his workshop input he set up the bigger picture of educational disadvantages in the field of vocational training.

More precisely Mr Breslin suggested we should rather speak of 'default curriculum' than of 'vocational training', which he considers as 'look through the window-programmes' designed for those not doing well in school. 'We teach pre-vocational education or even sub-vocational education' said Mr Breslin arguing that current curricula wouldn't qualify for any real jobs. This low status ascribed to vocational training mostly affects those young people already considered as most disadvantaged. Personal effectiveness programmes on the other hand tend to be accessed by already advantaged groups.

Mr Breslin called for professionalizing vocational training. Pursuing a training in Health and Social Care shouldn't stop you from possibly becoming a Doctor of Medicine. "My notion is that anything could be studied to any degree," Mr Breslin commented calling for less elitism in dealing with practical skills and against the division of *either* 'good with hands' or 'good with brains'. Basic competences like speaking in public, presentation, fundamental knowledge of politics, economics and law should be part of every curriculum no matter what the further career track looks like.

Mr Breslin mentioned three steps for enhancement of a better vocational training, all aiming at employers: first of all to convince employers that citizenship education is good business. 'Big companies are spending so much money on training their senior staff in citizenship competences', Mr Breslin said. They wouldn't risk anything, if such training was already provided for junior staff. Secondly, to incentivise employers, especially small businesses to take action and thirdly, to utilize and popularise human relations and quality assurance tools.

### **‘Deeper than manipulating knowledge’**

Elena Alenka Begant is a practitioner and an expert in Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE) working at the Center for Citizenship Education in Maribor. At the workshop she presented ‘VOICE. Developing Citizens’, a multinational pedagogical research project in Austria, Estonia, Germany, Slovenia and Turkey.

The main findings of ‘VOICE’ indicate that teachers across these countries lack adequate teaching materials concerning citizenship education. They also expressed that they would need more in-service training as well as better teaching environments.

In Slovenia students of vocational schools mainly belong to ‘vulnerable groups’ that come from disadvantaged rural and lower working-class families including Roma, Kosovo Albanian, Bosnian and Serb minorities as well as drop-out students from other schools. In most cases students’ parents had pursued vocational training too.

VOICE aims at developing problem-based learning/teaching modules that help students in vocational training develop their social, cultural, civic and digital competences like how-to find information, how-to communicate with employers and learning-to-learn-skills. The project claims for an approach combining elements of citizenship education and vocational training. “This is going deeper than manipulating knowledge”, Ms Begant said.

One could use such personal competences as a citizen as well as at the workplace, one of the participants commented.

### **‘Starting in Vocational Schools is too late’**

Oliver Steinke is an employee of the Organisation for the Economic Development of Skilled Trades SMEs in the German Federal State of North-Rhine Westphalia, representing a possible model for an entrepreneurial perspective at the workshop.

Mr Steinke introduced “14plus”, a project that combines democracy learning, citizenship education and occupational training in 21 schools cooperating with 11 regional skilled trades/vocational training centres. The project currently involves 3300 students starting in 7th grade. “We need to start before students are channelled into different branches of the education system,” Mr. Steinke explained the project’s approach. Currently all German school types except grammar schools are participating. However after the first year of the project grammar schools uttered interest to take part too. Mr. Steinke underlined the project’s aim to guarantee continuity in working with students. The project’s duration is four years.

‘14 plus’ takes place in a region of abandoned coalmines. 80 percent of the students who are taking part are migrants or come from migrant families. Nevertheless the project doesn’t single out their ‘target group’. All students of a class follow the same modules. Social workers moderating the learning modules are bilingual Turkish-German, which also serves as a foundation of trust. Working language is German but trainers can help out in Turkish whenever necessary.

Throughout the discussion one participant pointed out that companies gave only one out of the project’s nine million Euro budget. The rest was provided by state money or from EU funds. ‘Can we use the labour market argument in arguing for citizenship education?’ another participant wondered.

## Findings

In a final discussion the main findings of the workshop were gathered by Ms Hoskins and a participant who was chosen as a presenter for the final workshop session. The workshops groups of session 1 and 2 formulated the following concluding points:

### Session 1

- 1) Importance of competences based approach including attitudes and values for all and to share a common language;
- 2) Higher status for vocational training not separating vocational and academic curriculum;
- 3) Developing joined approach employers, EU and national state funding, unemployment trainings, citizenship education;
- 4) The above three will support both democratic and economic outcomes in society.

### Session 2

- 1) Skills developed by VET are vital – to be more competences-based with enriched understanding of competences – values of EDC should be at heart;
- 2) Skills competences shared – agenda of Corporate Social Responsibility – one means to link EC;
- 3) All young people should have access – broad curriculum start citizen education as soon as possible - way before channelling in academic and other branches of education.

The working group concluded that in fact all young people should have access to and would benefit from a broader curriculum no matter what the individual professional future looks like. This could be mitigating the inequality between practical and theoretical knowledge and the division of citizenship competences across Europe.