

Report

Council of Europe Project “Democracy in Action –Democratic Competences in Digital Era”

This document was produced in the context of the project Democratic Competences in the Digital Era, co-funded by the Council of Europe and the European Commission and implemented from December 2016 to September 2017. It is based on the country reviews on how democratic competences and ICT are reflected in educational systems and practices and focus groups on how digital world and its specifics are perceived by educators and young people in participating countries. We used acquired knowledge in interactive workshops dedicated to young people in digital world and news role of educators in this area, built around a new model of competences including the values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding which are needed for citizens to participate actively in a democratic and culturally diverse society and to contribute to developing a democratic culture.

Under the Project have been realized five two day seminars with 150 participants from Sofia, Haskovo, Pleven, Kardjali and Burgas. At these seminars have been presented the Framework on Competences for Democratic Culture and a Program for Digital Citizenship. The teachers participating in the seminars have developed 80 lessons on Digital citizenship and Social media literacy.

In the final declaration adopted in April 2016 in Brussels by the Standing Conference of the Council of Europe Ministers of Education, the Ministers called on the Council of Europe to continue the development of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture and to assist member states in examining and implementing the framework in their national education systems, in dialogue with the educational community.

Democratic and intercultural competence is defined as 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 democratic and intercultural situations. Competence is treated as a dynamic process in which a competent individual mobilises and deploys clusters of psychological resources in an active and adaptive manner in order to respond to new circumstances as these arise.

The term "competences" (in the plural) is used in the current document 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. In other words, in the present account, competence consists of the selection, activation and organisation of competences and the application of these competences in a co-ordinated, adaptive and dynamic manner to concrete situations.

Despite the common vision of two different worlds, a real world and a digital world, often seen in opposition, young people live in fact in one world, encompassing online and offline realities. If education becomes more effective and more meaningful when it takes into account real life and elements of reality which are familiar to learners, it means that education should also take into account the online reality.

There is a bidirectional relationship between CDC and the digital world.

On one side, because people interact with others and with various sources of information in the online environment, CDC are necessary in the digital world to the same extent they are needed in the real world. The same values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding are necessary to interact positively with other individuals, to participate in groups and to make sense of information and ideas in the online environment.

On the other side, the online part of life can represent a valuable opportunity contributing to the development of CDC. Statistics show that young people use the internet more than other age groups for undergoing civic activities, such as: interacting with public authorities; obtaining information from public authorities' websites; taking part in online public consultations on different civic and political issues, etc.

A summary list of the competences which enable an individual to participate effectively and appropriately in a culture of democracy

Values

Valuing human dignity and human rights

This value is based on the general belief that every human being is of equal worth, has equal dignity, is entitled to equal respect, and is entitled to the same set of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and ought to be treated accordingly.

Valuing cultural diversity

This value is based on the general belief that other cultural affiliations, cultural variability and diversity, and pluralism of perspectives, views and practices ought to be positively regarded, appreciated and cherished.

Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

This set of values is based on the general belief that societies ought to operate and be governed through democratic processes which respect the principles of justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law.

Attitudes

Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices

Openness is an attitude towards people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself or towards beliefs, world views and practices which differ from one's own. It involves sensitivity towards, curiosity about and willingness to engage with other people and other perspectives on the world.

Respect

Respect consists of positive regard and esteem for someone or something based on the judgment that they have intrinsic importance, worth or value. Having respect for other people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations or different beliefs, opinions or practices from one's own is vital for effective intercultural dialogue and a culture of democracy.

Civic-mindedness

Civic-mindedness is an attitude towards a community or social group to which one belongs that is larger than one's immediate circle of family and friends. It involves a sense of belonging to that community, an awareness of other people in the community, an awareness of the effects of one's actions on those people, solidarity with other members of the community and a sense of civic duty towards the community.

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.

Self-efficacy

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

Tolerance of ambiguity

Tolerance of ambiguity is an attitude towards situations which are uncertain and subject to multiple conflicting interpretations. It involves evaluating these kinds of situations positively and dealing with them constructively.

Skills

Autonomous learning skills

Autonomous learning skills are the skills required to pursue, organise and evaluate one's own learning in accordance with one's own needs, in a self-directed manner, without being prompted by others.

Analytical and critical thinking skills

Analytical and critical thinking skills are the skills required to analyze, evaluate and make judgments about materials of any kind (e.g. texts, arguments, interpretations, issues, events, experiences, etc.) in a systematic and logical manner.

Skills of listening and observing

Skills of listening and observing are the skills required to notice and understand what is being said and how it is being said, and to notice and understand other people's non-verbal behavior.

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.

Flexibility and adaptability

Flexibility and adaptability are the skills required to adjust and regulate one's thoughts, feelings or behaviors so that one can respond effectively and appropriately to new contexts and situations.

Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills

Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills are the skills required to communicate effectively and appropriately with people who speak the same or another language, and to act as a mediator between speakers of different languages.

Co-operation skills

Co-operation skills are the skills required to participate successfully with others in shared activities, tasks and ventures and to encourage others to co-operate so that group goals may be achieved.

Conflict-resolution skills

Conflict-resolution skills are the skills required to address, manage and resolve conflicts in a peaceful way by guiding conflicting parties towards optimal solutions that are acceptable to all parties.

Knowledge and critical understanding

Knowledge and critical understanding of the self

This includes knowledge and critical understanding of one's own thoughts, beliefs, feelings and motivations, and of one's own cultural affiliations and perspective on the world.

Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication

This includes knowledge and critical understanding of the socially appropriate verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions that operate in the language(s) which one speaks, of the effects that different communication styles can have on other people, and of how every language expresses culturally shared meanings in a unique way.

Knowledge and critical understanding of the world

This includes a large and complex body of knowledge and critical understanding in a variety of areas including politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, the environment and sustainability

It has to be noted that according to the Model the competences include not only skills, knowledge and understanding but as well values and attitudes. Values and attitudes are critical for an appropriate and effective behavior in democratic and intercultural situations.

The review of the competences as they are presented in the Law of Education and in the new standards on civic, intercultural, environmental and health education shows that most of the competences of the CDC Framework could be found in these documents although sometimes named differently.

The competences from the Framework could be accepted and implemented because they are better formulated, in a more concrete way and thus they go beyond the level of abstract definitions. They embrace “values, attitudes, skills and/or understanding “and in that way the individual is in state to use a competence „in order to respond in an appropriate and an effective way to the requirements, challenges and opportunities presented in a democratic situation“.

Another big advantage of the Model is that each of the competences presented is defined in a comprehensive way and developed in details. Thus it could be operationalized and used in the process of curriculum design and elaboration. These broad definitions of the competences provide an opportunity for measurement how much they are acquired. In

another words the educational standards could be realized as something much more effective and workable.

The presentation of the CDC Framework is only a first attempt and a beginning of the process of its implementation and its adaptation to the needs of our educational system. As a whole reactions of the teachers participating in the seminars were positive but the presentation of the Framework should be much longer and better designed process based on extend discussions, a process which will help the educators to change and to redesign their programs and way of teaching.

Present-day societies in Europe and around the world are strongly shaped by the wide access to internet, which makes it possible for citizens not only to have access to an overwhelming and sometimes confusing volume of information, but also to connect and interact between them, with public institutions and civil society stakeholders in different ways, in a digital world. This paper focuses on how education providers should address the relationship between the CDC and the digital world and on what needs to be done for the development of CDC, considering the context of the digital era. SWOT analysis

In the National strategy for Introducing ICT in Bulgarian schools which is an important point for the educational policies in the field is pointed out: “In our contemporary globalizing and dynamic society the use and command of information and communication technologies is a substantial element of the functional literacy of everyone and a necessary condition for his personal and professional growth and development. The basic objective of the Strategy is the effective use of modern information and network technologies in order to raise the quality of education, to enrich educational content and to introduce innovative educational technologies and methods in the learning process”.

The focus groups with students and with teachers realized under the Council of Europe Project do only confirm the main points of our analysis of the current situation. The young people are simply in the Net, this is more and more the way they live and they do enter this digital world without any preparation, the process of digital socialization is simply missing. They learn how to live in the net, how to surf by themselves and they do develop some competencies often unconsciously, without any conscious learning and without reflection. Their digital, social media literacy is like the literacy of some people who occasionally being in a new environment learn the language in order to survive and to be able to function at a very primitive level in the community. The young people would like to develop their digital literacy, they suspect that the learning process and the education as a whole should become digitalized and even they do express expectations in this direction – but the practice shows that this doesn't happen.

The teachers, the educators are less digitally literate than their students and they should not perceive the education as a digitalized one, they do not know how to communicate with their students and the young people, not to talk about the possibility to become their leaders in this new digital world

And this happens at very basic level not to talk that the teachers have no idea how to help young people to develop digital citizenship or how to use social media in this direction. Lack of educational policy, lack of educational standards, lack of putting these problems to become the nucleus of the educational debate on transformation of education, on the necessary new concept of competencies for helping young people to function in the digital world, on the idea of emerging digital citizenship - all this influences teachers professional development and teacher educational philosophy and as well.

Most young people are “digital natives” and the use of ICT is part of their daily life. Their level of knowledge and skills tied to the digital world is often very high, most of the times higher than educators’. The curricula and teaching practice often focus on knowledge and statements about values and less on actual development of values, attitudes, skills and critical understanding.

Often a limited and limiting approach to ICT is present in schools, with a focus on teaching about (and not through) ICT and on protection, security and safety (e.g. cyber-bullying, abuse, online dependency). Teachers often experience anxiety regarding the online space which is an uncharted territory for them. Recent public debates regarding fake news and manipulation through social media raised calls for schools to equip young people with competences to resist online manipulation.

For children and young people, internet and social media are an essential part of their lives. According to international studies, a very large proportion of teens have used some form of social media and have a profile on a social networking. Despite the common vision of two different worlds, a real world and a digital world, often seen in opposition, young people live in fact in one world, encompassing online and offline realities. If education becomes more effective and more meaningful when it takes into account real life and elements of reality which are familiar to learners, it means that education should also take into account the online reality. CDC are necessary in the digital world to the same extent they are needed in the real world. The same values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding are necessary to interact positively with other individuals, to participate in groups and to make sense of information and ideas in the online environment.

We have to note that in none of the Bulgarian policy papers in the field of ICT is pointed out the necessity of developing media and information literacy at school. The European trends and recommendations are not taken into account as well.

In the new Law of Education in art.75 are enumerated some of the basic elements of the media competency – digital competency, social and civic competency, information culture. All these competences are not viewed as elements of the media and information literacy.

As is written in the Paris Declaration on Media literacy “media and information literacy is an all-encompassing concept - including skills, knowledge and attitudes relating to terms such as, media literacy, information literacy, news literacy, advertising literacy, film literacy, Internet literacy, social network literacy, computer literacy, IT literacy, digital safety, privacy and personal cyber security, etc.

Media and information literacy comprises all media (digital and non-digital); literacy means the ability of sourcing, assessing, contributing to, and combining different kinds of media and information and using different media and information in different contexts/for different purposes.

Media and information literacy entails the ability to combine a range of skills and competencies in order to make use of information and media, including new media developments, for achieving personal objectives. These objectives are strongly connected with individual growth (e.g. developmental tasks, identity construction, management of relationships, lifelong learning etc.) and societal challenges (organizing information, participation in public discourse, ethics and human rights, privacy, etc.).

Media and information literacy includes the following: *critical thinking and reflecting media and information systems* - including evaluation of information and media content; reflection upon political/economic influences on information and the media system; the centrality of information, media and technologies to development and good governance; dealing with risks and opportunities of new media developments, assessing right to use/connect and disconnect, being forgotten, privacy, etc. *using information, media and digital technology for individual and societal purpose* - including for self-expression, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, equality, and the right and the ability to make own decisions, enjoying media for leisure, learning/ working with media, etc. *handling of media* - Here there are types and levels of operational, creative and collaborative skills, such as the ability to produce content and information products and the use of ICT in this process etc. As access to information and participation are core principles of today's society, media and information literacy must be regarded as an enabler of human rights”.

If we consider Digital Literacy we could say that one of the biggest myths nowadays is that the young people born in the digital epoch do acquire digital competences in somewhat natural way so they could deal with the challenges and could overcome the inherent risks while using new technologies and media.

A representative Bulgarian research on use of information and communication technologies by young people age 9-17 negates that myth. Yes, it is true that the children

nowadays start using Internet at earlier age and do it more often and more intensively than their peers did several years ago. Without the developed competences as critical thinking, social skills and co-operation skills they face more risks while being online.

About 97 % of the children are active Internet consumers which is a big growth since 2010 with 81%. What is important is that most of the students are online most of the time and there is no difference between school days and holidays. Very upsetting is the fact that a big percentage of Bulgarian students do have public profiles in the Net and that percentage is the biggest in the 12-14 age group. Around 87% of the children use social networks which is a significant growth in comparison with 54% in 2010. About one third of the students do have accessed public profiles. It is important to point out that this percentage in the 12-14 age group is 40% which could be explained with the growing autonomy of the children at that age and with the diminishing parents' control.

About one third of the students have been communicating with someone they have never met in the real world. There is no difference between boys and girls but this percentage grows with the age. The most upsetting fact is that about 20% of the students have met the people they have been in contact in the Net. The last conclusion is that we that the Framework appears in the right moment because as we could see the young people do live more and more in a digital world and there is no attempts or courses who could prepare them how to live and to behave in this new world and how to develop their citizenship in these new conditions.

One of the most important conclusions of the research is that most time spend online doesn't promote digital or media literacy. Using more and more Internet and navigating in the Net means that the students do acquire more technical skills how to use digital gadgets, how to save files, how to organize information they get online, how to create profiles in social nets etc. As well it could be observed that the young people do use more successfully variety of sites and digital communication platforms. Nevertheless the research shows deficits in critical thinking skills and social skills, deficits how to deal with untrue information or how to distinguish between true and false information, how to co-operate actively with the other Internet users. All these skills are fundamental for digital and media literacy and are necessary for functioning in the digital epoch.

Most of the students do spend their time in the Net watching videos, listening music, but do use very rarely Internet for the realization of some educational objectives. At the same time the students do declare clear awareness of the importance of social media and ICT for their personal development, but only 50% do use Internet for educational purposes.

Bulgarian students while facing new information online do have difficulties to verify it. About 70% of the students say that they learn something new every week but only half of them think that they could say whether this information is true or false. Bulgarian young

people are rather passive users of Internet, a fact which hinders the development of their social skills and creative capacity in this new digital reality.

This passive attitude doesn't give the young Bulgarians the opportunity to become part of co-operative networks. The online space is an enormous opportunity for starting communities of people working and aiming to accomplish something together.

We could say that the minimal use of the Net for education purposes is one of the main reasons our students not to be able to discern true from false information and not to be active in search for online co-operation.

Nowadays Bulgarian Education is lagging behind if we look at the realization of Digital Literacy and Digital Citizenship programs. The work in the focus group had shown that the teachers themselves are not prepared to work in these fields, and to become a side in the educational dialogue with the young people. There is not a single Digital Citizenship or Social Media Literacy program in the field of General Education.

The key elements of a Digital Citizenship Program are:

- Digital access
- Digital literacy
- Digital rights and responsibilities
- Digital laws regulating the Net
- Digital communication
- Identity in the Net
- Civic technologies and open and transparent government
- Activities in community
- Civic participation in the Net.
- Digital etiquette
- Digital trade
- Digital health
- Digital Ethics

If the education process is seen as focusing not on accumulating pre-established knowledge but on developing competences and supporting learners to build their own understanding of the world, it should explicitly relate to their life experiences. Thus, educators need to bring the learning process closer to the real life of the children and young people, therefore incorporating also aspects concerning their experiences with the digital world.

The education process should also appreciate and make use of the competences that children and young people accumulated through informal learning in the online environment or by attending ICT related non-formal educational activities. Young people are more and more used to learn by exploring a new tool or by using various online tutorials. This is

actually a proof of autonomous learning skills and should be acknowledged and encouraged in the school context, together with the critical thinking skills in order to develop the ability to identify reliable and valid sources of learning.

Teachers need to feel confident in a position where they do not necessarily know more than the learners. As “digital natives”, it is normal that young people learn fast how to use various new ICT tools. It is, of course, very well if teachers develop continuously their ICT skills but it is not necessarily that they keep up with the pupils on this. Even without being themselves ICT savvy, teachers can find ways to bring the ICT competences of young people into the learning process as resources and enable them to contribute also to the development of CDC.

New educational strategies, inspired by non-formal education, can be developed based on the use of internet and of mobile devices that learners have. Also, many of the educational activities teachers are used to do, can also be adapted by taking into account the digital world.

Teachers should be supported to embrace the view that a mutually enriching dialogue can be established with learners, based on respect and trust. By accepting the role of facilitator of learning, teachers also help learners to develop autonomous learning skills and critical understanding.

To be able to perform this role of facilitator and give proper visibility in the learning process to the experiences of learners with the online environment, teachers need access to training and support materials, preferably in their respective native language.

Training can include examples of ways in which various ICT tools can be used to develop CDC but teachers don't need extensive training in new online applications which risk to be outdated in a few months, they need to feel safe and confident in their role in the digital era and have the capacity to empower pupils through developing their CDC.

Developing CDC through ICT and awareness of the fact that CDC are relevant also for the online environment should not be left to isolated activities done occasionally by civics or ICT teachers. To be effective, such an approach should be reflected across school subjects. Teachers of any subject can contribute to developing CDC while making references to the digital world.