

Emil Mutafchiev

University for National and World Economy

Educational Standards, The Law on Preschool and School Education and the Framework on Competences for Democratic Culture

The Framework of competencies for democratic culture has been basically unknown in Bulgaria when the new Law of Education has been elaborated and the new standards of civic, environmental, intercultural education, health education have been approved in the second half of 2016.

Article 5 of the new Law underlines the basic objectives of preschool and school education in Bulgaria. It could be noted some of it among the others:

- “Acquiring competences necessary for successful personal and professional realization and for active civic life in contemporary communities;
- Acquiring competences for implementation of the principles of sustainable development;
- Acquiring competences for understanding and implementation of the principles of democracy and of the rule of law state, of human rights and freedoms, of active and responsible civic participation;
- Formation of tolerance and of respect toward the ethnic, national, cultural, language and religious identity of every one citizen;
- Formation of tolerance and of respect toward the rights of the child, of the students and of handicapped people;
- Acquiring competences concerning the understanding of global processes, trends and its interrelations;

- Acquiring competences for understanding and implementation of the principles, rights and responsibilities, which follows from our membership into European Union“.

As we could see the educational objectives are formulated as competences and these competences could be discovered as well in the Framework on Competences for Democratic Culture.

Article 75 of the Law defines the school process as a summary of competences – knowledge, skills and attitudes, necessary for the successful passage of the student into the next school grade, stage of education, competences which are connected with the accomplishment of the objectives of the school education.

In the process of school education could be studied school subjects like global education, civic education, health education, intercultural education, entrepreneurship, management of personal finances, defense of the fatherland, population and the environment,. These subjects will broaden the content which already exists integrated under another subjects.

The beforementioned school subjects will be taught according to special programs approved by the school headmaster. In this way the Law provides opportunity school subjects which build the competences for democratic culture to be incorporated into the curriculum. These school courses should be placed in the broadly defined field of civic education. In such a way it will be ensured opportunities to elaborate and to present in almost each school a course on civic education, intercultural education, digital citizenship, environmental education, health education, media or digital literacy as elected or mandatory subjects. The realization of similar courses could be realized on the foundation of the Competences for Democratic Culture and this will be a good opportunity how CDC could be introduced into the educational practice. The problem is that these competences could not be introduced immediately or even in the next years because only in 2016 new educational standards on civic education, health

education, intercultural education and environmental education have been elaborated.

Article 77 of the Law of Education defines the following groups of key competences:

- Competences in the field of Bulgarian language;
- Skills for communication in another languages;
- Mathematic competence and basic competences in the field of natural and technologies;
- Digital competence;
- Learning skills;
- Social and civic competences;
- Initiative and entrepreneurship;
- Cultural competence and skills for creative expression;
- Skills in support of sustainable development and for the healthy way of life and sport.

As we could see the bigger part of these competences do belong to the Framework of Competence for Democratic Culture. In the Law of Education these competences are formulated quite broadly – therefore in concrete cases it could be used the Competences for Democratic Culture Framework in which the competences are more elaborated, concrete.

The new developed standards in social studies

As it has been mentioned the new standards in civic education, intercultural education, environmental education and health education have been elaborated in 2016 and what is important they have been elaborated on the basis of the competence approach.

The Ordinance which postulates these new standards is from August 2016.

In article 3 (1) of the Ordinance is stated:

“Civic education, health education, environmental education and intercultural education are interrelated and do present an interdisciplinary complex, directed toward the acquirement of social, civic and intercultural competences and of competences related with health and with the support for the sustainable environment. Civic Education aims at formation of civic conscience and civic virtues and is related with knowledge about the structure and functioning of the democratic society, with the rights and the responsibilities of the citizen, with skills and readiness for a responsible civic behavior... Intercultural education is directed toward acquiring of knowledge about the different dimensions of the cultural identities and about the basic characteristics of the intercultural relations, about the formation of a positive attitude toward diversity in all fields of human life, as well about skills and attitudes for constructive interrelationships in multicultural environment”.

Article 4 of the Ordinance confirms the competences approach while formulating in a following way the objectives of civic, health, intercultural and environmental education.:

Formation of an autonomous, active personality which:

understands and stands up the human values, the values of democracy and human rights, which participates in civic, political and social life I a responsible, creative and effective way for herself and for the society;

recognizes institution, structure and the procedures of the democratic society, the economic and political realities of the globalizing world;

respects the importance of every human person and its multiple identities, recognizes the right and the value of the diversity, accepts the equal standing of everyone in the common social space;

is aware and values her own cultural identity;

interacts with members of her family, community and with the other people in a constructive and a respectful way;

expresses her justified and critical civic position;

undertakes autonomous decisions about her own development, is initiative and has a capacity for goalsetting, to plan and to justify her actions;

being responsible for her own behavior and assesses the impact of her actions on her own life and on the other people;

selects adequate information, products and services in order to improve her health and support the healthy way of life for herself and for the people around her;

recognizes and follows the norms of environmental culture and behavior in order to preserve nature and to create sustainable environment;

recognizes the mechanism of public institutions and of the civic society in order to apply shared responsibility for the preservation of the environment and expresses readiness to participate in public actions in that field;

could make connections between the different spheres of human life and to understand the causes of social inequalities, environmental and global challenges.

In fact, we could see here under one form or another the bigger part of the competences for democratic culture sometimes formulated in another way. That's way it is right to assert that the competences approach is already realized in Bulgarian education system and in particular in social studies. This approach will be fully realized in the next couple of years when based on competences just mentioned will be elaborated curricula and different social studies courses.

This will be fully possible because article 7 of the Ordinance states, that “civic education, health education, environmental education and intercultural education will be realized in an integrative way or through a separate subject-civic education. Its integration will be realized through directing the education on general education subjects toward the realization of the key competences in accordance with article 77 of the Law on Preschool and School Education”.

Since 2018/19 civic education will be taught as a separate subject in 11th and 12th grade “in accordance with the state educational standard and with curricula developed for that subject”.

Article 11 paragraph 1 of the Ordinance states that civic education, health education, intercultural education and environmental education will be taught as well in the hour of the class (1 lesson weekly) and as well through activities for acquiring competences in such thematic fields as tolerance and intercultural dialogue... prevention of violence, dealing with anger and with aggression, peaceful conflict resolution... prevention of terrorism, behavior under terrorist danger

At high school level as a result of such education the student will acquire skills for entering in different social roles (role’s plasticity); to describe and explain group processes and roles, group affiliation, leadership; to demonstrate skills for critical reasoning of the cultural influences, traditions and influences of media on interrelations”.

In none of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) official documents there are special texts for the necessity of media and information literacy. The European texts concerning the introduction of media literacy at school are not included in the Ministry documents. There is no document of the MES where digital competency is defined (visual and information literacy; digital and media literacy; intercultural literacy; interactive communication; co-operative skills; adaptivity and management of complexity; personal, social and civic responsibility). There is no official definition or name for media education. Often it is thought that media literacy means digital culture and competency which are only components of media literacy.

There is no legislation which does recommend media literacy to become part of general education curriculum. The schools are relatively well equipped technologically but there are not programs concerning media literacy.

In the curricula as well there are no specialized programs for media literacy. There is information technologies subject starting from 3rd grade up to 10th grade for all schools. But practically this is exclusively technology computer education.

The existing documents concerning digital literacy are:

1. National Strategy for introducing ICT in Bulgarian schools 2012
2. National programme “Information and communication technologies at school -2013
3. National program “Digital Bulgaria 2015”

Most of the researchers active in the field do accept the European definition of media literacy „the competence to use media, to understand and to assess critically the different aspects of media and media content in order to realize communication in different contexts.

One of the biggest educational conferences in 2013 was “Against the crisis in the educational system” and was devoted to media and digital literacy.

In Bulgaria media literacy is part of university based courses. In general education the existence of programs depends on the initiative of some teachers in different educational projects mainly financed by EU, CoE and different other initiatives.

There are several NGO’s which are involved in these problems are: the Center for Media Development, “Media with Human face” foundation, Media Democracy

To conclude:

In public space noone asks the question what is to be a literate person in digital era (the idea of basic literacy is moving toward knowledge of several foreign languages; scientific literacy; economic literacy; technological literacy; visual literacy – abilities to interpret, use, create images video materials, intercultural literacy, global literacy – knowledge of global problems and trends an global interdependencies).

As much as we could check there is neither an ongoing neither single analyses of the democratic culture of the young people in the Net. But this is true for the whole process where civic and democracy competences are perceived as something which could be developed and accomplished outside the real context of the young people – the digital world. There is no research on democratic culture in the net.

In educational theory, policy and practice in Bulgaria there is no space for media literacy or digital literacy which could be central for the modern society where more and more of human life is realized through interactions online and through social media. In the new Law of Education digital literacy is mentioned as a key competence and is provided the opportunity to organize educational

courses on digital citizenship, digital literacy, media literacy but this should happen only in a case where there is a qualified teacher, a group of students and a decision on behalf of the school headmaster. It is clear that delivered in this way media or digital literacy or digital citizenship education will embrace only small number of students.

From the focus groups on social media realized with students and teachers it is quite clear that the young people do live and function more and more in a digital world and they are not prepared to live in this world. Building digital competency and developing media literacy or digital citizenship is not among educational priorities and there do not exist special programs and curricula not only for students but as well for teachers who say that they are completely unprepared to deal with the challenges from the digitalization of the world and of human interactions. From the review that have been realized there is not a single program on digital literacy, social media literacy, digital citizenship not to mention an attempt to develop such a program on the competences for democratic culture. In fact there is no way to manage, to direct the socialization of the young people in the digital world and they are left to themselves in their efforts to become part of it and to function effectively.

The key elements of a program on digital citizenship are:

Digital access – digital divide, defined by social-economic status

Digital literacy is the ability to find, evaluate, utilize and create content using information, technologies and Internet.

Digital rights and responsibilities - basic human rights in the net, Rights of the child – does this make a difference - violence, safety, privacy,

Digital laws regulating the Net

Digital communication diversity of digital environments, structure of communication, elements of communication, I and You messages, Listening and Feedback, Principles of Effective Communication, Barriers in Communication

Identity in the Net Who am I – identity in “real life” and identity in the net – exploring my digital identity – multiple identity, identity fragmentation, fake identity, temporary character. Mapping digital identity – self-expression, what do I share in the net, interests, Beliefs and opinions. Status. Purchasing, Avatars, Audience, Knowledge, Certification of my identity.

Civic technologies and open and transparent government: access to data and transparency ; voting; using data; citizen’s feedback –connecting with citizens’ representatives; taking decisions in public.

Activities in community: sharing information; fundraising; neighborhood forums; digital community organizing

Civic participation in the Net - the essence of E-democracy; What means an active digital participation; different forms of civic participation; How to start public campaigns. How to participate in an open and transparent government of the community and of the society – access to data, feedback of the citizen, connection with the elected representatives in the government, participation in the decision making process. Activities in the community – sharing an information, starting campaigns, fundraising, organizing community actions.

Digital etiquette – different for different environments

Digital trade – pluses and negatives of online purchasing; digital trade and responsible consumption

Digital health – socially responsible health behavior (stress in the net, physical and psychological health in the net)

Digital Ethics - copyrights, piracy, privacy, doing good and doing wrong
Competences for Democratic Culture - review of the Bulgarian Education

We analyzed the standards – most of it are based on the competency approach. This is valid especially for the new elaborated standards of civic education, environmental education, intercultural education, health education. Now we expect to see programs based on these competences but this is going to happen with the beginning of the new school year.

We did analyze the existing standards and especially the standards in so called social studies – and there is no mentioning of digital competency. In the curriculum the competences for democratic culture could be found in Civic Education, Philosophy, History curricula.

The big debate whether to have Civic Education – as a single subject or to use a cross curriculum approach has been solved by the beginning of 2000 in favor of the latter.

Therefore we have Civic Education standards elaborated in 1999 and reframed in 2016 and in the curriculum we have “Man and Society” subject (from 1st to 4th grade) and “Personality and Society” (for 12th grade). There is no Civic Education in the crucial for the social development age 12-15 years or in the middle school.

With the new Law of Education (June, 2016) have been elaborated as well standards for Intercultural Education, Environmental Education and Health Education but these subjects could be only elective. There are no standards for Human Rights, Global Education neither for Digital Citizenship, Media Literacy.

The crosscurricular approach in fact means that the students are not going through a basic Civic Education.

There are Civic Education Olympics based on the project approach but competitions of this kind do include only an insignificant number of students.

The conclusion is that the competences for democratic culture or civic competences are not developed in a consistent way.

The new Law of Education doesn't change significantly the existent situation.

The Project approach is something which has very strong influence for the development of democratic culture competencies. If this approach was limited by the funding from foreign sources in the Nineties, with the accession to the European union there was an access to significant amount of resources for the development of projects at school level in the field of broadly understood civic education (intercultural education, human rights, community development, global education, sustainable development). If in the 90's most of the projects have been realized by NGO's now the majority of the projects are realized by the schools itself and they involve about 20-30% of the students. The project approach develops competencies not only in traditional way (co-operative learning and practice, problem solving, critical thinking and analysis and cet.) but as well is based often on online communication and practicing.

Up to now in a contrast with the development of the ICT and its use in formal and non-formal education there is no analysis on CDC in on-line space. There are initiatives and programs on safety in the net ("Safe Internet" initiative, "Day of Safe Net" initiative, Center for Safe Internet, "To counter the language of Hate!" and cet.) but they are more instrumental and behavior oriented and are not trying to change the focus on development of competences for democratic culture as a basic [recondition for a safe or informed behavior online.

The crosscurricular approach means that all the teachers should be trained in civic education, human rights education, problem solving, conflict resolution and etc. in order to be able to incorporate elements or contents of civics in their subject

teaching. Because this had never taken place the crosscurricular approach doesn't work and most of the teachers still do their job as subject specialists.

Officially the teachers' opinion about the social (civic) standards and the key social and civic competences is in consistence with the data from other European countries. Most of the teachers do consider these competences as an essential component of the curriculum:

“The structured approach to the development of social and civic competences of students in school should start from the age of”: 6-8 years - 75% of the teachers answer “yes”

“I think that social and civic competences should be taught in all subjects” - 83% of the teachers answer positively.

In fact these responses reflect the educational practice in Bulgaria where Civic education has not been introduced as a separate subject and where has been officially promoted interdisciplinary approach. But we have to have in mind that interdisciplinary approach to civics means that most of the teachers feel free from responsibility to teach civic competences and a reluctant to change their teaching programs and ways of teaching and to integrate civic elements in it.

As well there is a great consent that what does today's educational community about why and how we should teach students critical thinking and through the media.

“The use of media for teaching critical thinking skills can and should be applied in the teaching of almost all subjects”. - 95% of the teachers do answer positively. As well there is a consent, that media education is important , but only 27% of the teachers agree, “that teachers of all grades and in all subjects already have the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, training and support to develop critical thinking skills for and through media”.

Teachers training. For this situation is mainly responsible the existent system of pre-service and in-service teachers training.

Pre-service teachers training usually only in Civic Education is done initially at national level in universities. The problems is that because of cross curricular approach and therefore no existing need for civic education teachers, the higher education institutions do not open Civics as a specialty and the existing Civic education courses are of several tens of lessons and therefore not comprehensive and do not prepare future teachers for their job.

In-service training is influenced as well by the fact that Civic Education is not a substantial part of the curriculum. Therefore there are not enough training courses, they are usually short ones and are not the first choice or do not have enough added value for the teachers. Most of the training in Civics and related subject fields are realized by the NGO's usually under non-formal education programs. Only now is started an unified program for in-service teachers training with equal in rights training providers (state institutions, academic institutions, private providers, NGO's) . With the elaboration of national standards for intercultural education, environmental education, health education and with the existing opportunity to have as optional subjects as well global education, Human rights education and Education for sustainable development we could expect more space for social studies in-service training.

3. In new Law of education passed in 2016 there is mentioning of media literacy. The Article 77 of the Law of Education mentions digital competence as a key competence (along with learning competence, social and civic competences, cultural competence, sustainable development and healthy way of life competence) but as possible subject areas are enumerated global education, civic education, intercultural education, environmental education and there is no mentioning of media literacy (nor social media literacy).

Media and information literacy includes: critical thinking and reflection of media and information systems- assessment of information and media content ; reflection on the political and economic influence on media; knowledge and realization of media rights such as the right to use and to get disconnected from the net; right to privacy; right to use information, media and digital technologies for personal and social purposes- including self-expression, for intercultural and interreligious dialogue, right to use media for learning, work, leisure, the competence for creating content and information products and to use ICT in this process