

European Approaches to Civic Education for the Promotion of Democracy

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1. Formulation of Questions and Their Scope:

The question of concept in learning about democracy, in the European context, and from the perspective of civic education, can be placed in different fields or areas.

Common reference points seem to be the current political challenges. I will limit my comments to the rough sketch which shows exemplarily with three countries, the position that civic education holds. I will also show where central concepts are located and what consequences are necessary for the promotion of learning about democracy, from the political didactic perspective.

Much of this remains as implication as the basic research, the studies of the effects of such learning and the intercultural comparison studies have been lacking up till now. (see the study paper of Dagmar Richter)

2. European Endeavours Towards Civic Education

We can only show roughly and individual aspects in the concept of civic education, especially in the international comparison studies, the reason: International comparative studies on civic education are especially difficult because of the lack of a common understanding of what civic education is as a subject and because of different cultural and political traditions or different school systems (Oesterreich 2003).

I would like to name a few individual, yet interesting results, that are relevant to civic education. I have chosen three extremely different countries, Slovenia, France and Norway.

The basis of these examples has been taken from reports from these countries (Länderberichten) from the results of an international civic education study. Through this central political didactics, structural categories have been established as well as the empirical data.

It is my hope that through this course of action, a patchwork picture can develop, a puzzle, showing the strengths and weaknesses of civic education, so that every conception of democratical learning must take this into consideration.

2.1 First example: Slovenia

It can be argued that there is a plurality of factors that influence civic knowledge of citizens, formal education being just one of them. Equally or more important are for instance media, peer groups and everyday experience of the students - in the final analysis society itself and its political culture should be studied in order to get a complete picture of civic education in a particular country. In this remarks the scope of analysis will be limited to the primary and secondary level of formal education.

Slovenia has experienced a *transition* from a one-party system to a parliamentary democracy at the end of the eighties. One of the most obvious effects of that process at the level of the

educational system was the abolishment of two explicit ideological subjects. A subject called "self management and the fundamentals of Marxism" was withdrawn from the curriculum of secondary schools. In primary school, the "social and moral education" was transformed into an experimental subject named "ethics in society". At the same time a rethinking of the educational system has been going on. The result was The White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia which provided the conceptual solutions for the set of laws on education adopted in 1996.

Major emphasis of The White Paper were: the *public education system*

- should be transparent and open;
- should be "legally neutral", in the sense that it should not adopt any particular ideology;
- should provide the possibility of choice at all levels;
- should encourage democracy in the decision-making in the system;
- should be a "quality" system emphasising learning rather than accumulation of facts.

As will become clear below, for our discussion "legal neutrality" and "quality" of the public education system are the elements that have important consequences for the conceptualisations of civic education in Slovenia.

Even more important, "education for and participation in democratic processes" was established as one of the basic principles of the Slovene education system:

"The essential premise for the participation in the democratic processes is the development of a *critical spirit*, personal decision-making, and autonomous *judgement*. School plays an important role in forming a democratic public, and in the development of the capacity to participate in the democratic processes. The contents of curricula (variations of the so called citizenship education) as well as their forms are important for such a process."

National identity, tolerance and critical judgement are important of civic education.

However, at the level of the national education the aims of the compulsory education concept of citizenship are not explicitly mentioned. It is present in a more implicit form, in the expression "to develop ability to live in a democratic society". When the Law on the Elementary School was adopted by the parliament, the subject with the name Civic Education was not included in the list of compulsory subjects. The subject "Ethics and Society" was on the list. Its name was changed, as a result of negotiations between the parties of the coalition government, into "Citizenship Education and Ethics". As the reader might have guessed, this is not the usual practice. It shows that citizenship education is one of the privileged places where newly created democracy is trying to define itself.

The system of education in Slovenia starts with non-compulsory pre-school education for children between the age of 1 and 6. At the age of 7 (after the reform at the age of 6) students enter eight-year (after the reform 9) compulsory primary school (which consists of primary and lower secondary level). After finishing primary school students may enrol in a (upper) secondary school of one of the following types: grammar school which prepares students for further studies; technical and vocational schools which prepare students for employment; short term vocational programmes. The duration of grammar school is 4 years, the duration of the vocational schools is 2 to 4-years and the duration of technical schools is 4 to 5-years. The Slovene educational system is now in an "in between" period. The changes are being introduced gradually, so the old system partly still exists. For instance, the new curriculum for primary school has only been implemented in a number of pilot primary schools. In the school year 2003/2004 it will be introduced in all schools. The consequence is that at the moment the subjects are being taught according to two different sets of syllabuses.

According to the new curricula, civic education is present at all levels. It is present implicitly, in subjects like history, geography and Slovene language at all levels, and in sociology and philosophy in grammar school. However, the elements of civic education which are present in these subjects are not, if we put declarations aside, result of carefully preparation or planning.

They are more side effects than result of the explicit intentions of expert groups to establish civic education as a cross-curricular subject. The reason for this is the absence of effective tradition of cross-curricular themes in Slovenia. If one would say that the best way to achieve a minimal representation of a certain topic in the school curriculum is to include it as a cross-curricular topic (and not as a separate subject), this would not be a completely inaccurate description of the Slovene school system at the moment.

In primary schools civic education is represented as a compulsory subject "Citizenship Education and Ethics", in grade 7 and 8, one hour per week. In grade 9 there is an elective subject "Civic Culture". In grammar school it is present as a compulsory elective content. In 3-year vocational schools "Civic Culture" is a special area within the subject called "Social Sciences".

In grammar school citizenship education is one of the compulsory elective courses. Each school has to carry out 15 hours of "Civic Culture". In comparison with other subjects, compulsory electives are different because there are no syllabuses set at the national level, only recommendations, and they are as a rule performed as projects, discussions, excursions etc. Recommendations for "Civic Culture" include a list of 5 topics (the constitutional order of the Republic of Slovenia, government, individual-society-state, political systems, the economic system of the Republic of Slovenia), and the course should include 3 topics from the list. Because there is little evidence as to the effectiveness of the elective contents it is difficult to estimate to what extent civic culture as an elective content contributes to the civic education of the students. However, a widespread opinion is that there is still enough space for improvement in this area.

The description of the *subject* refers to knowledge about society and participation in the community. The conceptual framework consists of a general concept of society and community rather than more specific the political system or government or citizenship. The vocabulary is neutral yet there is a subtle implication: the subject deals with society and not with politics. This *avoidance of politics* in a narrow sense is also noticeable at the level of aims.

This avoidance of citizenship in hard sense might be motivated by *historical reasons*. As mentioned before, a subject called "Self-Management and the Fundamentals of Marxism" was part of the curriculum of the Slovene secondary schools. One of its aims, besides indoctrination, was knowledge about the political and economic system. Ideology and information about the system were thus closely connected.

To conclude with, the position and status of civic education in the curriculum of the Slovene schools is secured. There is a traditional place in curriculum for this type of a subject. However, there is an absence of a tradition of effective cooperation between teachers of different subjects; this cooperation is essential for cross-curricular teaching of citizenship education. Even though it is often emphasised in official documents that certain themes should be dealt with in all subjects in reality little has been done to assure this coverage. One of the future challenges for citizenship education in Slovenia is certainly to continue this discussion with the teachers of civic related subjects. And to reflect upon civic related topics in all the subjects in order to make sure this topics really become part of the implemented curriculum. Last but not least: "ethics and society" was a non-assessed subject. However, teachers are required to assess students in "citizenship education and ethics". The decision on appropriate assessment arrangements is one of the biggest challenges facing citizenship education in Slovenia in the near future.

(Marjan Simenc 2003)

2.2 Second example: France

In summer 1999, a new compulsory subject was introduced in French upper secondary school: *civic, legal and social education* (éducation civique, juridique et sociale or *ECJS*). Sixteen hours a year are devoted to this teaching. The organisation differs a lot from one lycée to the other. It stresses the status of ECJS as a subject "different from others", less normative or less dignified. The curriculum in ECJS, through contents and through pedagogy, upsets traditional secondary teaching. It is understood either as a welcomed whiff of liberty and puff of reality or as a concession to demagoguery and a token of the decline of secondary education.

To support her reflection, the French researcher draws results from a short empirical study that she conducted with several colleagues in the National Institute for Pedagogical Research (INRP) during the year 2000: they observed 15 debates in ECJS, on different topics, and interviewed the teachers working in these same classes.

In this remarks, she draws on French researches only; even if the questions of political or civic education are largely debated in Europe nowadays, and if many projects are developed in a national or international or European frame, French teachers and students don't regard this debate as relevant for themselves. They only do refer to a French horizon. Just the same, the official project of ECJS does not mention any general European preoccupation on civic or political education.

At the same time, several enquiries reported a growing *indifference to politics*, an increasing critical view of politicians and political debates, and a weakening attachment to common values. Politicians and media displayed anxiety about individualism, communitarisme, violence, and incivility among the youths and in schools. These attitudes were interpreted as a crisis of social cohesion and a danger to democracy.

Teaching civics on every school level seemed a solution (at least a part of a solution) to social and political crisis.

In this context, and in the context of Europeanisation and globalisation, the meaning of "citizenship", and especially the relevance of the French definition of it, is debated. From the Revolution to the Third Republic the political meaning was dominant. During this long period from 1789 to 1940, it was thought that the main social problems should be resolved through radical political change, i.e. the institution of a democracy, of a republic or of a socialist regime (la Sociale). The vote was the core of citizenship. The supremacy of common interest over groups' and/or individuals' interests was asserted as the basis of political choices and of citizens' duties. In this framework, the *State* was the only sphere for exercising citizenship. Citizenship and nationality were tied together. And the citizen was defined as a human being, free of any distinctive identity (religion, ethnicity, gender, class etc.): this was already the basis for the Declaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen, that refers political rights to natural equality.

Other problems also raise questions about the capacity of French citizenship to face the evolution of political culture, of society and of Europe: the political philosophy on which French democracy and French parties work is blurred; social exclusion results in a two-speed citizenship; the claim for multiculturalism is in opposition to the French republican model, the gradual elimination of limits between private and public space, between human being and citizen, weakens the political aspects of citizenship etc.

Three points are very different from any other subject: the priority given to concepts, both in the organization of the contents and in the intended knowledge; the stress upon discussion and debate and upon students' autonomy; the mention that ECJS "has generally not to add knowledge to contents learnt in other subjects" (our translation). The main particularities of this curriculum are

- to give opportunities to reflect on the different aspects of citizenship, including, but not exclusively, the political ones; to practise a real respect of the Other, and the Other's speech and opinion
- to inspire an approach of the meaning of Law and Rights, deeper than through a knowledge of legal rules and institutions (e.g.: not only "knowing the rules" but reflecting on how they were invented, how they are used and talked about...)
- to conform to secondary students' expectations: to legitimate opportunities to express oneself and to debate social problems and topical questions.
- to focus the work on critical approaches to topical questions, current events and problems;
- to set argumentation and debates in the core of the subject, with attention paid to the avoidance of prejudices and purely affective arguments; in this respect, to develop the ability to inform oneself seriously and to favour reasoned argumentation.

The aim of ECJS is *conceptual reflection*. The contents are very specific: it consists firstly of notions (and neither of factual nor of procedural knowledge), and secondly of knowledge which is supposedly already learnt, either from former grades or from other subjects. This is not at all usual for French curricula: even if notions are prescribed, they are generally secondary, not to say subordinate to factual knowledge; and of course, what legitimises a subject is that its content is original compared to others.

Some teachers are absolutely opposed to ECJS. They argue that this teaching has no knowledge-content, or that the contents are too polemical to be school ones. Traditionally the current problems, the burning questions and the present political issues are not allowed in the classroom: the only legitimate knowledge is "*scientific*" and therefore "true", and does not allow discussion or debate. The teachers' opposition is mainly grounded on their (largely shared) social representation of school knowledge. It is supported by the importance given to debate in ECJS: usually, debates are mainly thought of (except sometimes in philosophy lessons) as a motivating introduction to a lesson, not as work which increases knowledge, or develops reflection. The main objection is that *students are students*, they have no consistent and reliable knowledge before having learnt, and so they cannot get any profit from the debate. This is not a refusal of the relevance of debates to social and political life; it is a refusal of the relevance of debates to instruction. Furthermore, there is a sort of professional distrust towards young people's ability to find reliable information, especially because teachers are rather suspicious towards media.

The group of researchers investigating the practices in 2000 (the 1st year for ECJS) had the opportunity to interview teachers about how they had organised progressive learning for their students.

In contrast to the teachers preoccupations, there is an impressive lack of referees to school knowledge during the debates. Even if the students have worked a lot on collecting and organising a documentary file before the debate, only very few refer themselves to this file during the discussion. The arguments taken from lessons or from textbooks are scarce, be it because stamped "school" and so not relevant to social problems, or be it because stamped "science" and, therefore, not questionable. When the teacher puts forward some argument drawn from her or his professional knowledge, she or he is listened to politely - but then, either the students go on just as if nothing has been passed on, or they change the matter discussed: either what is said is put aside, or it is taken as a full stop, and the students neither discuss it nor try to expand or enrich it. It is just the same when the teacher intends only to clarify the words used by the students, or to alert them to a possible slip from one notion to another. It also seems that what is learnt in French about argumentation and rhetoric is not imported in ECJS.

Analysing the arguments used in the ECJS debates, they found that they were partly stories issuing from personal experience or from neighbours' or relatives' experiences. But their

status is very different from one group or context to the other: they are a justification for being concerned by the subject, or they are linked directly to some general assertion relevant to the topics- or here and there, they are dismissed, because "school is not a place to talk about oneself". The discussion is thus very close to any discussion between young people, or to any middle-class discussion, that sociologists analyse as drawing mainly arguments from experience and everyday life.

They found more often a large amount of information drawn from the media, without a critical approach. She links this to the *lack of explicit critical position in the debates*. What is said by anybody must be respected; if anyone disagrees, she or he puts forward one another "fact" or one another information, adding a contradictory piece to the discussion – but never criticising the origin, or the reasoning, or the exemplary nature of the other's argument. In fact, the implicit model seems to be common discussions, and not intellectual or *political debates*. The objective seems not to get more understanding or knowledge of Law, of civics and of society - but only to talk about some topics in which young are concerned or interested. The references to citizenship are very scarce. The arguments are nearly never political ones, even when such information was collected or given in the documentary file: they are more often psychological and sometimes economic. It may be for different reasons. The students involved in the debates in 2000 were rather young (15-16), and in this age group interest in politics is low, as attested by several enquiries. The students may also adhere to the image of a "neutral" school, where ideologies and politics are to be avoided. When they speak of what we can take for collective and political values, most of the time, students understand them as individual. "*Liberty*" is a good example: in the students' speeches it is personal freedom to come and go, to think and talk, to choose one's life not a condition for political choice. Law is never taken as instituting freedom and capacity. *Law* is reputed to be incomprehensible, unknown, irrelevant, and inefficient. Law is either compelling and limiting one's freedom, or failing and scorned. (In such a framework, what use could it be to vote for a legislative assembly?) In *research about Europe*, they remarked that *students lacked a political vocabulary*, as if the notions were not necessary to analyse the problem or to express one's opinion.

For some young people, politics is a very distant and opaque world, and Mr or Ms Everybody is powerless towards it; in this respect, it is vain to try to take an interest in it; the only relevant and concerning referee is one's own life and environment. There are exceptions of course. Here a young person tries to define the political meaning of a notion; there a migrants' daughter invites the taking of some critical point of view of what is presented as "difficulties for women" in French society, by comparing it to Third World societies; or a part of discussion is focused on the homeless' legal rights etc. But the dominant feeling is that the students (because they are students or because they are young?) do not refer their reflection to politics.

One possible interpretation is that such debates have no stake for the young. They are motivating because they give opportunities to express oneself, to discuss or better to exchange opinions, but they have no prospects in politics, civics or even school-life. They are not problem-solving situations: the youths have no personal or collective decision to make towards law or towards most of the social problems debated (ex. jail, the jobless, risks, technical evolution etc.). The only apparent possible gain is to get and to give more information about the topics. This refers to an understanding of democracy as a regime where information is free for everyone, and where communication is one fundamental value. But at the same time, the political sphere still remains far from young people's preoccupations- at least in school.

If the objective of the introduction of ECJS was somehow to organize a meeting, or a confrontation, between political, social and legal world, school world and young world, it

rather failed. I have shown that the argumentation refers to different worlds: politics (official texts' authors), school (teachers), everyday experience and common sense (students).

ECJS is new and thought of as a lever to change teaching and learning, school and more widely political society, when present students will become the adult majority. These aims are necessarily far-off ones, and this paper is written very (too?) shortly after the introduction of this subject. ECJS destabilises the usual way to teach and to learn. It is not surprising that school actors are standing back. They are used to constraints that organise school as a sort of sanctuary from politics and from social tensions, even if the general final aim is to train citizens and adults. They are used to building a consensus grounded on knowledge: for most, the legitimacy of upper secondary school is to pass on "science", not to socialise the young. The heterogeneity in what is dealt with in the classrooms can be seen as the result of this destabilisation: on one hand, there is no shared certainty on which specific topics are right or not for ECJS discussion, because there is no referee to any scientific background; on the other hand, it is difficult to create a true political space (ECJS class and classroom) in a wider non-political one (school). Each teacher and each class attempt a local compromise. At the same time, local compromises are placed, too, in the organisation of time, of classes, in the topics and concepts worked upon, and even in the conceptions of what must be learnt and how. I interpret those compromises in contents and in forms not so much as individual and contextual choices, than as random responses of the system to a disruptive input. It could lead either to a renewed system, after a period of instability; or to a reinforced system, after evacuation of ECJS.

(Tutiaux-Guillon 2002)

2.3 Third example: Norway

The Norwegian students in the Civic Education study are doing very well on civic knowledge, skills, attitudes and concepts. Despite this documented democratic awareness the student's score is below international average on interest in politics and conventional participation. On the other hand the 14 year olds carry an important willingness to vote as adults, they have a high level of trust in their government and they want to participate in the school society. In what way can these Norwegian findings be explained, and are the school system and the school activities part of the explanation?

Civic and citizenship education in Norwegian schools is supported by strong policy documents and is governed by comprehensive implementation, especially through the Curriculum for the 10-year compulsory school in Norway. The education takes place both as a distinct subject area, integrated in several subjects and through relations between student and teacher and through student's participation in the school community. The main responsibility for Civic education in the Norwegian schools is assigned to *social subjects*. Throughout all ten years of compulsory schooling, the students participate in lessons in this subject. The subject consists of lessons in history, geography and social studies. The subject takes into account both democratic ideas and training for practical democracy. The general aim for this social subject's course is described in the introduction:

It is a prerequisite for a dynamic, democratic society that its members are familiar with, and support, certain democratic values. Each new generation needs to learn the value of participation, and to uphold the democratic rules that govern various sectors of our society. All pupils are members of society and will in due course take part, in a variety of ways, in its shapening and its government. Social studies are intended to prepare students for different tasks in the society by equipping them with knowledge, confidence in their own value, and the desire to undertake tasks for the common good. These aims must be achieved in close cooperation with wider society outside school.

The objectives as a whole can be regarded as a synthesis of a democratic *competence* or *awareness* consisting of knowledge, skills, attitudes and concepts. The building of the democratic competence emphasizes theoretical and more practical teaching and learning. Democratic knowledge consists both of knowledge of democratic institutions, democratic rights and obligations on the one hand and knowledge of society in the past and contemporary political questions on the other. Important democratic values are both individually oriented, like freedom, equality, fairness and honesty, and collectively orientated values like empathy and social responsibility. Democratic attitudes originate from values and include gender equality, tolerance, compassion and solidarity. Democratic skills include thinking skills like reading, interpretation, reasoning, problem solving and the ability to separate facts and opinions, and social skills like ability to listen, to speak, to discuss, to cooperate, to master conflicts and build compromises. Democratic concepts are influenced both by knowledge and skills, and by values and attitudes. Certain concepts regarding democracy are required and important components in a democratic competence.

This competence is regarded as necessary, but not sufficient for being an active citizen in the future. In recent years the Norwegian authorities have put weight on practicing democracy through participation and influence in school and engagement in classroom activities and student-centered methods in teaching. The Norwegian Basic Curriculum points to that when stating:

In the course of their schooling, children and young people should have imparted to them such basic democratic rights as intellectual freedom, tolerance, the rule of law, freedom of opinion and religion, freedom of organization and freedom of speech. Pupils must be given insight into and develop respect for democratic ways of thinking and working through their day-to-day classroom work and by participating in representative bodies in the school democracy. As they experience joint consultation in planning and influencing their own learning and schoolwork, they gain experience of democracy in practice. It is also one of the tasks of compulsory education to develop pupil's social attitudes and social skills (Norwegian Curriculum page 64).

This means that Norwegian schools are facing a double task in citizenship and civic education. Traditionally the schools are supposed to teach the students *about* democracy and politics. This involves democracy-related knowledge, skills, attitudes and concepts. Over the last years the task is extended to train the students for democratic citizenship. The last task is conducted through student participation and real influence in the school society and through a democratic and activity-oriented teaching and learning climate in the classroom. Briefly we can sum up the Norwegian the *about* and *through*-perspective in four points, which we call *strategies for teaching and learning democracy in Norwegian Schools*.

- Teaching and learning about democracy, its institutions, its possibilities, its Prerequisites
- Developing democratic skills and increase consciousness on democratic values and important attitudes
- Teaching and learning *through* democracy - student's participation in class council, students council and influence on planning and evaluation of various school activities
- Promote an education with teaching-activities which contribute to active students and student participation

The Civic Education Study reveals that Norwegian students have a good democratic awareness and carry a will to engage in society. Regarded solely and in an international comparative perspective, the Civic Education Study in Norway presents a picture of 14 year olds who seem well prepared to enter their role as citizens in a democratic society. Most of them are well informed, they master democratic skills, they carry good attitudes and they have

a high level of consensus on what is good and not good for democracy. Almost all of them answers that they intend to vote in national elections and some of them want to be a candidate for a local office. Quite a lot are positive to take part in peaceful demonstrations. The answers from the 18-year olds in Norway are even stronger and more desirable in a democratic perspective. The results support the theory that civic knowledge, skills and concepts in a high grade are connected to age, more specific to years in school. Mackey shows how thinking regarding the political socialisation of young people is inspired by Lawrence Kohlberg (*Kohlberg 1987*). According to Kohlberg a significant leap in socialisation takes place around age fourteen. He states

(..), at about age 14, there is a dramatic change in capacity of teenagers to think about social phenomena. At this time, many adolescents begin to think abstractly and are able to engage in thought processes that characterize adult thinking (Mackey 1991 op cit)

Analyzing the differences between 14 year olds and 18 year olds in Norway, we find this change in capacity to think about social phenomena. The scores on cognitive questions have improved very much. The concepts on what is good and not for democracy emerge as more wanted and mature. This indicates the importance of age, but when looking on age alone we find small differences between students who are 17, 18, 19 or 20 years old. It seems to be years in school that is connected to the change. Years in school seems to be a key factor.

Politics today first of all deals with *adjustments*. He calls this a shift of horizon, and he argues that the engagement will go down when society no longer discuss important questions as the environment and human rights. This is extremely important for young people. A statement that seems to be confirmed in the Civic Education Study. When describing the grown up citizen 91% (84%) answers that he/she is supportive to human rights and 91% (81%) that the good citizen do something for the environment (international average in brackets).

There can be various reasons for an adjusting political agenda instead of discussions of important political questions and principles. One explanation can be found in the Norwegian welfare state. Norway is a rich country, and the richness is democratically distributed. Even if there are some very rich individuals, most Norwegians benefits from the welfare state. In fact in the Human Development Index for last year (*Human Development Report 2002*) Norway is ranked as number one. The index combines various indicators with the weight on National Gross product, education and health. For many political parties this ranking seems to call for adjustments more than reforms and profound changes. On the other hand there are signs on growing political differences in the Norwegian society as liberalism and market-orientation are introduced and forced on new sectors. For example new public management nowadays is tried out on the school sector.

More than half of the Norwegian students has been or is in a position of trust in class councils or school councils. In lower secondary school almost 47% of the student's answer that they have or have had *positions of trust* in the class council or in the student's council. In upper secondary more than half of the students answer positively to this question.

An interesting question for analyses is *who these students with positions in trust, are*. This could be an indication on the effect on the strategy for learning democracy through practicing democracy in school. In both lower and upper secondary more girls than boys participate as students with trust. The trusted student's score slightly well on knowledge and skills, and more of them are interested in politics than the average student. They come from homes with more books than average, and their ambitions for future education are much more advanced. In fact you could say that many students with plans for further education in 5 years or more call on such positions. These are students with rich resources, both culturally and intellectually. This indicates that the challenge for schools here is to stimulate students with weaker resources, to "run for office".

Compared to other countries, the perception of an open classroom climate in Norway is very high. Norwegian lower secondary students show the second highest scores on the scale variable for open classroom climate among students of the 28 countries participating. Particularly on three questions concerning the possibility *freely to disagree with their teachers in social and political questions, freely to express their opinions in class even if they are different from others and teachers encourage them to make up their own minds* - the Norwegian students deliver strong answers compared to the international mean. The American researcher Carol Hahn (*Hahn 1998*) points out that schools in one Nordic country, Denmark, seem very skillful in working with the classroom climate. The perception of an open classroom climate for discussion in Norway are significantly higher than in Denmark. Norway has an integrative school system. Almost no students are taken out of classes to participate in special programs, and the theoretical and vocational grading takes place first at the age 16 or 17. This integrative school-system together with the open classroom climate seems to make conditions for attractive democratic attitudes. The Norwegian students have very high scores on support to woman's rights and high scores on support to immigrant's rights correlating with this open classroom climate. Despite a good awareness, high trust in government and positive indications on participation and influence in the school society, there seems to be a challenge to translate this into political interest and with the exception of voting a stronger support of the representative democracy. Few questions from the political agenda are discussed in classrooms, especially when they are regarded as belonging to the party-politics. (Mikkelsen 2003)

3. Learning About Democracy. Political Didactical Comments

The promotion of learning about democracy can take place in different areas. Sibylle Reinhardt makes the difference between “democracy in school life” and “democracy in lessons or teaching”. Democracy in school life includes the vote or voices of the students (student council) (this is to be seen less as a body fighting for their interests but more as contribution towards social harmony of the school). The democratic school community(= Just community, according to Lawrence Kolberg), the peer mediation. The few empirical results show a limited positive effect of student participation in democratic situations in school life and later accessibility to politics. (Reinhardt 2005, 58).

Democracy in lessons means the teaching style (experiments from Kurt Lewin), the contribution to lessons (civic-education-study; Oestereich 2003), civic education as a principle in teaching in all subjects, as well as in the social science political education. Empirical data confirms a positive connection between a wide variety of methods, a less that is structured to include controversial discussions and the acquiring of democratical competences.(Reinhardt 2005, 66).

As a Thesis:

With this learning principles there would be an adequate structure balance between the subject of democratical politics and the learning arrangement.

In the programme of the commission of the German state which is called “learning and living democracy” there are four modules that are pursued:

- Lessons
- Projects
- School as a democracy
- School in the democracy

The dangers of this concept are (compare the critics of Massing 2002):

- To stagnate at the experiencing stage (neglecting the critical reflection)
- Not taking the necessary step from social to political learning (on the level of system)
- Neglecting to see the contradiction between pro-social views and cognitive capacity to deal with conflicts (Reinhardt 2005)

4. Conclusions

From the viewpoint of the political didactics the following tentative conclusions arise from the reports of the countries. The double perspective that was referred to in connection with Norway seems to me something that should be continued: Education about democracy, and education through democracy. Herewith, democracy becomes a object of teaching, and at the same time a method (Kuhn 2003). This leads further to the question of what democracy actually means. Democracy always was and still is a maxim to fight for. What democracy is, is not a fixed definition, but there are many different forms (e.g in the constitutions of democratic countries) and the continual change in our democratic practice and in our society. The typological differentiation in the area of democracy is so broad that even a short working definition of democracy doesn't necessarily help.

Two important examples show clearly the ambivalence of the concept: Firstly, In Greece, the democracy in Athens was abolished by the decision of the majority in the year 411 BC (v.Chr) and replaced with an Oligarchy (rule or power of the few) (Although the experience with it was also not so positive, so after a few years it was deposed and replaced by a democratic power). Secondly, the known German scientist, Klaus von Beyme, speaks about “democratization as a means to induce the collapse of a system” (1992) referring to the global changes in regards to the eastern European states and the DDR.

Misdirected or flawed concepts play an important role in political learning: To these flawed concepts, Sibylle Reinhardt counts, among other things,

- All humans are the same
- Everyone can decide for themselves
- The majority is always right
- Private affairs are political, political affairs are private (compare 205, 47ff)

As a consequence the promotion of dialectical thinking is proposed as a solution, which can avoid a reduction in the conception of democracy and politics (e.g. the relationship between

the majority rule and the protection of the minority). Criteria for judgement is formed finally by the question:

Does democracy provide the political governing form that is in the position to solve the present political problems? Added to this is the following observation from political theory: In the republican tradition when crises arise, one is advised to orientate oneself on the “beginning”, to go back to the foundations, (compare Münckler/Krause 2002,225). “back to the roots” in another connotation.

Besides this, democracy is bound to social moralistic premises in the political science consensus, as a limited resource for democracy.

These questions will not only be of central importance for countries going through a system change, like Slovenia, but also for established democratical countries like France and Norway. The reports of these countries show deficits, for example in the cultural of carrying out conflicts in France and transition problems in Slovenia.

5. Theses

I would like to conclude my sketch of the European concepts of promotion of democracy in education with 5 theses.

Five Theses

1. In all the European concepts of promotion of learning about democracy there is a surplus of programmes, curricula and decisiveness in aims, at the same time there is a conspicuous lack of empirical studies about civic education concerning on one hand the every day teaching of politics and on other hand the presumed effect of civic education.
2. In many of the concepts of teaching democracy there appears to be a normative surplus as far as the expectations of the citizens. This contradicts not just the effect of civic education in the schools, but also the necessity in a democracy of representation. This is not dependent on “active citizens” but more on “citizens who are capable to intervene”.
3. A realistic democratic concept (Massing 2002) and an innovative learning concept that connects categorical thinking and orientation for action, is based on two points of departure: the reflection on your own political socialization and the examination of current political problems, by which political conduct and decision making competences are trained.
4. Fundamental for the civic education in the different European lands, seems to be not only the political cultural and history, but just as much the correction of political mistakes of concepts or the correction of naïve ideas as to how politics function.
5. Democracy and learning should be in a necessary correlation, they can complete or complement each other, but don't have to, they are dependent on each other, also when they seemingly don't want to know anything from each other.

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