COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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About this document

This document is a product of a Council of Europe project which is taking place in four phases during 2014-17. The first phase has been devoted to the development of a conceptual model of the competences which citizens require to participate effectively in a culture of democracy. This document describes the model and the methods that were used to develop it. The document is aimed at readers who wish to understand the underlying assumptions and technical details of the model.

Phase two of the project will be devoted to the development of descriptors (i.e. statements or descriptions of what a person is able to do if they have mastered the various competences that are specified by the model), phase three to ascertaining whether it is possible to assign the descriptors to levels of proficiency, and phase four to the production of supporting documentation. This documentation will be addressed to educational practitioners and policy makers, and will provide a less technical description of the current competence model. It will also explain how the model and the descriptors can be used to assist curriculum design, pedagogical design and the development of new forms of assessment (for use in either self-assessment or assessment by others).

All of the materials that are produced by the project will eventually be incorporated into a Council of Europe reference framework of competences for democratic culture.

Further information about the project is available from the project website: www.coe.int/competences

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Preface

The Council of Europe has long been active in the fields of education for democratic citizenship and intercultural dialogue. Our European Cultural Convention first entered into force in 1954. While the memory of war was still stalking the continent and new divisions were taking hold, Europe's nations states agreed, through this Treaty, to encourage the study of languages, history and civilisation for the sake of unity: to help "safeguard and realise the ideals and principles which are [our] common heritage".

Ever since, the Council of Europe has been able to play a leading role in re-establishing trust and understanding through education in many of the conflict situations which have arisen in Europe. Through education we have also been able to assist many newer member states in their transitions to democracy. Democracy is, of course, built on institutions and laws, but it lives through the actions and behaviour of its citizens. Democratic culture must therefore be taught and fostered too.

Today Europe's nations face new challenges which require our Organisation to step up our support in the classroom. Increased migration, growing diversity, the boom in information technology and globalisation are having a profound effect on people's identities. More than ever, within our communities we find people living side-by-side who hold different beliefs, backgrounds and outlooks. This enriching of European societies is to be celebrated, but it also requires us to think carefully about how we nurture a set of common values around which to organise. How do we resolve clashes between competing worldviews? What are the attitudes and behaviours we can and cannot accept?

Such dilemmas are not easy. The danger of avoiding these questions, however, has been brought sharply into focus by the recent surge in foreign terrorist fighters: young, radicalised Europeans who have been brainwashed into turning their back on democratic life and waging war on their fellow citizens. Such extremism can only take root when young minds have not been taught to understand diversity, rather than to fear it, and when young people struggle to think critically, for themselves.

The Council of Europe is therefore equipping the continent's educators with a ground-breaking set of competences to help teach pupils how to live together, as democratic citizens in diverse societies. As our nations continue to grow more mixed, such knowledge and skills will become ever more important. The aim is not to teach students what to think, but rather how to think, in order to navigate a world where not everyone holds their views, but we each have a duty to uphold the democratic principles which allow all cultures to co-exist.

The competences have been developed in such a way as to allow member states to adapt them to suit their own needs and the distinct cultural contours of their own societies. Through this framework, teachers will be able to instill in their pupils the values of tolerance and respect, as they grow to understand their rights and responsibilities in relation to others. We will continue to educate for democracy by offering our member states advice on the implementation of this competence framework and help in training those who will make it work in practice. I hope that all member states will give this ambitious and timely initiative their full support.

Thorbjørn Jagland
Secretary General
of the Council of Europe

Executive summary

This document describes a conceptual model of the competences which need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies. It is intended that the model will be used to inform educational decision making and planning, helping educational systems to be harnessed for the preparation of learners for life as competent democratic citizens.

The document is divided into seven chapters.

In Chapter 1, the educational purpose of the competence model is outlined. This section also explains why the phrase "culture of democracy" is used in the present context rather than "democracy": this is to emphasise the fact that, while democracy cannot exist without democratic institutions and laws, such institutions and laws cannot work in practice unless they are grounded in a culture of democracy, that is, in democratic values, attitudes and practices. Chapter 1 also explains the interdependence between a culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue in culturally diverse societies: in such societies, intercultural dialogue is vital to ensure the inclusion of all citizens in democratic discussion, debate and deliberation.

Chapters 2 and 3 describe some of the background assumptions underlying the model. Chapter 2 describes the assumption that, while it is necessary for citizens to acquire a range of competences in order to participate effectively in a culture of democracy, these competences are not sufficient for such participation to occur because democratic participation also requires appropriate institutional structures. In other words, both competences and democratic institutions are essential to sustain a culture of democracy. In addition, the democratic participation of all citizens within society requires measures to tackle social inequalities and structural disadvantages. In the absence of such measures, the members of disadvantaged groups will be marginalised in democratic processes, whatever their levels of democratic competence might be.

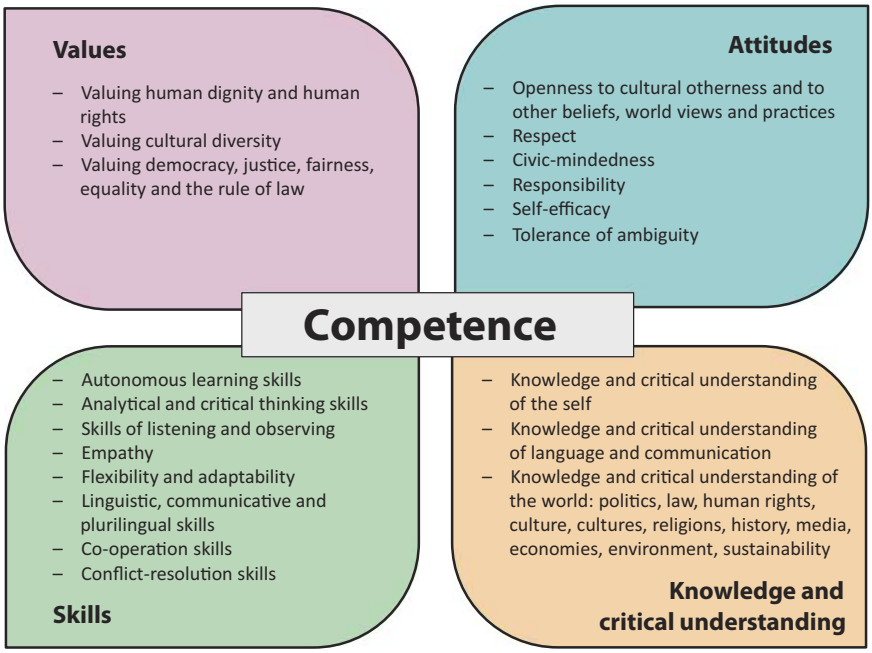
Chapter 3 describes the concept of "culture" that is assumed by the competence model. All cultures are internally heterogeneous, contested, dynamic and constantly evolving, and all people inhabit multiple cultures that interact in complex ways. The concept of "intercultural" is also examined in this section. It is proposed that intercultural situations arise when an individual perceives another person or group as being culturally different from themselves. Intercultural dialogue is therefore defined as dialogue that takes place between individuals or groups who perceive themselves as having different cultural affiliations from each other. It is noted that, although intercultural dialogue is extremely important for fostering tolerance and enhancing social cohesion in culturally diverse societies, such dialogue can be extremely demanding and difficult in some circumstances.

Chapter 4 then unpacks the concept of "competence" that is employed by the model. 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.

Chapter 4 also describes how, in addition to this global and holistic use of the term "competence" (in the singular), 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.

Chapter 5 describes the working method through which specific competences were identified for inclusion in the current model. A notable feature of the model is that it was not designed from scratch. Instead, it was grounded in a systematic analysis of existing conceptual schemes of democratic competence and intercultural competence. An audit was conducted through which 101 such schemes were identified. These 101 schemes were decomposed to identify all the individual competences which they contained, and these competences were then grouped into cognate sets. This led to the identification of 55 possible competences for inclusion in the model. In order to assist in reducing this list of competences to a more manageable and practical length, a set of principled criteria and pragmatic considerations was used to identify the key competences which needed to be included within the model. The application of these criteria and considerations led to the identification of 20 competences for inclusion in the model: 3 sets of values, 6 attitudes, 8 skills and 3 bodies of knowledge and critical understanding. These competences were used to construct the model. A draft document describing the model was then produced and circulated in an international consultation exercise involving academic experts, educational practitioners and policy makers. The responses received in the consultation strongly endorsed the model but also provided a range of useful feedback. The feedback was used to fine-tune the details of the model and to guide the writing of the current document.

The 20 competences included in the model



Chapter 6 describes the resulting model in full, by listing and describing all of the specific values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding which enable an individual to participate effectively and appropriately in a culture of democracy. The model is summarised in the diagram above, while a full list of the 20 competences, together with a summary description of each competence, is provided in the box below.

Chapter 7 concludes the document by noting two hopes for the current model: that it will prove useful for educational decision making and planning, and that it will assist in the empowerment of young people as autonomous social agents capable of choosing and pursuing their own goals in life within the framework that is provided by democratic institutions and respect for human rights.

Appendix A provides a list of the sources of the 101 competence schemes that were audited by the project. Appendix B provides a list of the 55 possible competences that were identified across the 101 schemes. Appendix C provides some suggestions for further reading beyond the references that are listed in Appendix A.