

## Key Messages from the Third Phase of the CoE Programme on EDC & HRE

### Antonia Wulff / CoE Advisory Council on Youth

Ladies, Gentlemen and Others,

I would like to start by saying a few words about where I come from, as you might not be very familiar with the youth sector. I am representing the Advisory Council on Youth, a body that could be described as the equivalent of a steering committee but consists of 30 representatives of European youth organisations. That means that we in the youth sector on the one hand have our own steering committee and on the other hand the Advisory Council on Youth, and these two bodies come together in order to find the best solutions possible for the youth sector.

I have a background in the school student movement, and it was also through my work there that I first came across the materials developed by the Directorate of Education and Languages of the CoE. I was amazed; finally there was an institution that had understood what education really is all about and I benefited from these materials in many ways. However, I also tried to look into the possibilities of getting involved in this work on EDC and HRE but that proved very difficult, and therefore I am extra happy to get the chance of addressing you here today. There are three things that I would like to discuss with you: sustainability, intersectionality and class.

I will start with sustainability. Despite all the fantastic work that has been done, my fear is that we still are far from the sustainable EDC and HRE work that we would like to see in schools across Europe. My fear is that EDC and HRE still is limited to particular lessons or special occasions and that few schools know how to do a systematic and sustainable EDC and HRE work, where these values and practices permeate all school life. There are of course many reasons for this. One of them is related to the difficulties of giving away power once you've had it; I think many teachers are scared of what it is that will happen if they open up for more school student participation for example, scared of not being able to control the situation. Elisabeth Bäckman asked a very relevant question in one of the working groups when she asked whether control-freaks can be democratic. Capacity-building, trainings and different support structures for teachers have to remain a priority of the EDC and HRE programme, aiming at equipping teachers not only with the skills they need but also the confidence and the courage.

Another reason is related to the question of responsibility: on whom in the school community do we place the main responsibility for EDC and HRE? It is against my beliefs to think that change

only can be initiated from above, from the one who is the highest up in the hierarchy. At the same time as I understand why most of the materials have a clear focus on the role and the responsibilities of the head teacher, I am wondering why so little attention is given to the role of the teachers, the school staff and the students. I believe that the work for a more democratic school and learning environment has to involve the whole school community and that this is a prerequisite for sustainable EDC and HRE work. All teachers, school staff and students have to be given the opportunity of defining problems as well as formulating solutions and strategies for the future.

The second thing I wanted to discuss with you is intersectionality - or transversality, as it also could be called. EDC and HRE are first and foremost a set of values. They are based on all human-beings being equal and having the right to be seen and listened to, and these are the values that have to permeate all activities and all policies in school. In my understanding, these values form the prerequisite for any successful EDC and HRE. When I was at primary school, all teachers had a responsibility for our mother tongue education and that meant that they were obliged to look after our prepositions also during biology or maths lessons. I am dreaming of schools where all teachers take the same responsibility for EDC and HRE principles, where all teachers react the second there is homophobia, racism or any other kind of discrimination taking place in their classrooms. After all, it is all about educating the students in how to fight discrimination and inequality, how to make the world a little bit better. That is also why it is important that the strategies and the methods that the teachers use are tools that the students can take with them and use themselves. Here I think there is a lot of space for more methodology and materials.

The third thing I wanted to discuss with you is class and equality. We have to make more of an effort to reach out with the work we do. It is our responsibility to make sure that the values and practices of EDC and HRE don't become limited to the privileged schools in the privileged areas but that they are accessible to all. Yesterday we heard that Obama had characterised problem-solving skills, entrepreneurship and social skills as the skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but these skills are far from what is taught in many of the schools in today's Europe. Education has always been seen as the primary means of social mobility but what happens if school doesn't equip us with the skills that we will need in our future lives? Social mobility is decreasing in most European countries today and I am wondering whether we are creating a system that is reproducing patterns of inequality instead of fighting and challenging these structures. I think this is an issue that we have to give more attention in our future work.

I want to finish with a few words about the role of civil society and the youth sector in particular. As I mentioned in the beginning, it proved very difficult to get involved in your work when I was still a school student activist. I have also been shocked to realise that the importance of involving parents in your work has been mentioned more often than involving the students. To involve the school students is in the core of the learning philosophy of EDC and HRE and we all know that it is a way of increasing the quality of our work. The same has to go for the work of the CoE in the field of EDC and HRE. I think there is a lot to be learned from the youth sector and civil society, and especially from our experiences of EDC and HRE in a non-formal education setting. Therefore I want to end by saying that I, on behalf of the whole youth sector, look very much forward to being more involved in your work in the future.

Thank you.