COMPETENCES
FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

Living together as equals
in culturally diverse
democratic societies

Executive summary

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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.
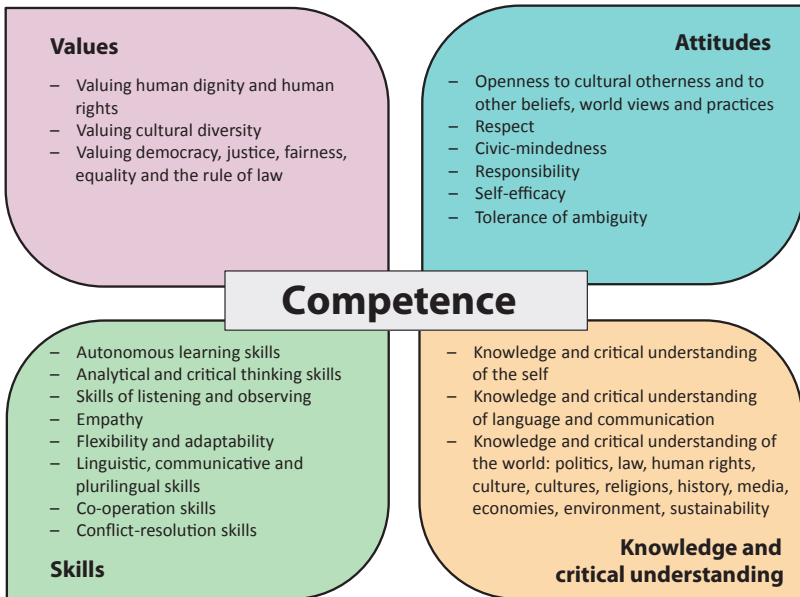
Chapter 4 then unpacks the concept of "competence" that is employed by the model. Democratic and intercultural competence is defined as the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/ or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, 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

Values
– Valuing human dignity and human rights
– Valuing cultural diversity
– Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

Attitudes
– Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices
– Respect
– Civic-mindedness
– Responsibility
– Self-efficacy
– Tolerance of ambiguity

Competence

Skills
– Autonomous learning skills
– Analytical and critical thinking skills
– Skills of listening and observing
– Empathy
– Flexibility and adaptability
– Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills
– Co-operation skills
– Conflict-resolution skills

Knowledge and critical understanding
– Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
– Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication
– Knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment, sustainability

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.

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 analyse, 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 behaviour.

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 behaviours 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.

Contemporary societies within Europe face many challenges, including declining levels of voter turnout in elections, increased distrust of politicians, high levels of hate crime, intolerance and prejudice towards minority ethnic and religious groups, and increasing levels of support for violent extremism. These challenges threaten the legitimacy of democratic institutions and peaceful co-existence within Europe.

Formal education is a vital tool that can be used to tackle these challenges. Appropriate educational input and practices can boost democratic engagement, reduce intolerance and prejudice, and decrease support for violent extremism. However, to achieve these goals, educationists need a clear understanding of the democratic competences that should be targeted by the curriculum.

The Council of Europe has produced a new conceptual model of the competences which citizens require to participate in democratic culture and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse societies. The model is the product of intensive work over a two-year period, and has been strongly endorsed in an international consultation with leading educational experts. It provides a robust conceptual foundation for the future development of curricula, pedagogies and assessments in Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Its application will enable educational systems to be harnessed effectively for the preparation of students for life as engaged and tolerant democratic citizens.

This brochure contains the executive summary of *Competences for Democratic Culture* for quick and easy reference. The full text is available in Council of Europe publication ISBN 978-92-871-8237-1.

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