CONTEXTUALISING COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE IN DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

A GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

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CONTEXTUALISING COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE IN DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Council of Europe

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Contents

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In this Guidance document, Brian O'Neill who is one of the founding members of the Council of Europe's digital citizenship education (DCE) concept and Ted Huddleston and Olena Stsyslavska-Doliwa, who have sound experience in working with the competences for democratic culture (CDC) discussed and explained the relationship between DCE and CDC and provided concrete examples of use to underpin digital citizenship education in classroom settings.

The contributors, listed below, contributed significantly to the richness of the discussion and validated the approach.

Authors

This Guidance document was prepared by Ted Huddleston, Brian O'Neill and Olena Stsyslavska-Doliwa.

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The authors would like to thank their fellow members of the Council of Europe's Digital Citizenship Education Expert Group for their invaluable contributions:

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INTRODUCTION

Who is this document for

This Guidance document has been drafted by the Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) Expert Group within the framework of Education for Democracy Programme 2022 – 2025. The primary target group of this document is the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU), however it will also be of interest to education policymakers, curriculum developers, trainers, teacher educators, school leaders, administrators, teachers and student teachers of all subject matters, and other stakeholders. The document is relevant to formal and informal education settings in the primary, lower and upper secondary levels and professionals teaching in higher education institutions.

Purpose and overview

The purpose of this Guidance document is to explain how the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC or 'Framework') and DCE are related and how the competences for democratic culture (CDC), outlined in the Framework, are used to underpin digital citizenship education in classroom settings.

Background and context

A consideration of the RFCDC's role in supporting digital citizenship education is timely. The Secretary General's Report, *Moving Forward 2022,* highlights education for democratic citizenship and empowerment of young people as a key priority. Against the background of some of the most significant challenges to democratic culture that Council of Europe member states have yet to face, the Secretary General highlights the importance of the RFCDC

> *in assisting countries to develop the values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding required for a democratic society.*[1]

The High-Level Reflection Group established by the Secretary-General in June 2022 likewise underlines the key role of education for democratic citizenship. It observed that

> *ensuring a strong culture of democracy is key to defending it.*[2]

1. Moving Forward, Annual report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (2022), p.63.
2. Report of the High-Level Reflection Group of the Council of Europe (2022), p.15.

and has recommended the development of a new legal instrument on education for democracy based on the RFCDC to strengthen the democratic culture in member states and to give further impetus to its implementation.

Meanwhile, the adoption by the Committee of Ministers in November 2019 of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)10 on developing and promoting digital citizenship education (the 'DCE Recommendation')[3] marked a highly significant endorsement of the importance of competences for democratic culture in a digital context, emphasising that empowering citizens by giving them the means to acquire the technical and functional skills and competences for democratic culture is no less important than their protection and safety.

Moreover, shortly after the adoption of the DCE Recommendation, the Ministers of Education of the States Parties to the 1954 European Cultural Convention declared that:

> *We firmly believe that education should empower our citizens with digital and functional skills as well as competences for democratic culture (CDC) enshrined in the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) and we subscribe to the definition of digital citizenship as "the ability to engage positively, critically and competently in the digital environment, drawing on the skills of effective communication and creation, practicing forms of social participation that are respectful of human rights and dignity through the responsible use of technology" and endorse the concept of digital citizenship education set out by the Council of Europe.*

The Reykjavik Principles for Democracy, adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government, includes a commitment to investing in a democratic future by ensuring that everyone can play their role in democratic processes (Principle 8).[4] According to the declaration, priority will be given to supporting young people's participation in democratic life and decision-making processes, including through education about human rights and core democratic values, such as pluralism, inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability.

These actions are well reflected in the recently adopted Education Strategy 2030 "*Learners First - Education for today's and tomorrow's democratic societies*".[5] The Strategy is based on the following three pillars, which will support the Council of Europe's mandate to strengthen democracy, human rights and the rule of law and reinforce the values underlined in the 4th Heads of State and Government Summit:

1. Renewing the democratic and civic mission of education
2. Enhancing the social responsibility and responsiveness of education
3. Advancing education through a human rights-based digital transformation

3. Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on developing and promoting digital citizenship education.
4. Reykjavík Declaration - United around our values, 16-17 May 2023.
5. https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/26th-session-of-the-standing-conference-of-ministers-of-education

Pillar 3 encompasses wide-ranging activities to examine the impact of digitalisation on education. This includes the extensive ongoing work relating to Artificial Intelligence and Education (AI&Ed), digital citizenship education and activities to promote an open dialogue among stakeholders to promote ethical and rights-based approaches in education.

The Education Department, as part of its work programme 2024-2027, proposes to establish 2025 as the European Year of Digital Citizenship Education to provide a platform for member states to exchange sense-making practices, measure achievements and define a standard road map for the future. It will also be an opportunity to highlight the need to continuously support the development of digital literacy and competences for democratic culture in a digital context for which the RFCDC provides the foundation.

International organisations, including UNESCO and OECD, have highlighted this policy agenda and emphasised the importance of preparing learners for digital citizenship. Among the global initiatives launched at the UN Summit on Transforming Education in September 2022 is the specific action of harnessing the digital revolution for the benefit of public education.[6] The SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee will also add indicators for digital transformation and will support the curation of good practices on the SDG4 Transforming Education Knowledge Hub[7] to monitor activities and national commitments.

Key concepts

This Guidance document draws on a number of concepts and definitions developed by the Council of Europe for its main instruments and resources to support democracy and human rights-based education. The following are of particular relevance:

Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) is a set of materials that can be used by education systems to equip young people with the competences needed to take action to defend and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law to participate effectively as citizens in society.

Competences for democratic culture are 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 societies. The Framework identifies 20 such competences, presenting them in the form of a butterfly in which each of the four wings defines a different type of competence: values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding.

Clusters of competences are the groups of interconnected competences people deploy in real-life democratic situations. Though theoretically distinct, the competences for democratic culture are, in practice, rarely deployed separately.

6. UN Secretary General, Report on the 2022 Transforming Education Summit Convened by the UN Secretary-General, January 2023.
7. https://knowledgehub.sdg4education2030.org/

Different combinations of competences, or 'clusters', are brought to bear in different situations, depending on the person and the situation.

Descriptors are defined in the Framework as examples of observable behaviour that indicate how well a person has mastered a competence. They are used to provide evidence for the assessment of learning, to diagnose gaps in learning, identify areas for further development, and evaluate the effectiveness of educational interventions. The list in the Framework is not exhaustive, and its role is to guide professionals in education in defining their own specific descriptors relevant to their learning situations.

Digital citizens are citizens living in societies that are rapidly evolving due to digitalisation. The gap between citizens in such societies who have the means and the competences to use digital technologies effectively and those who do not is known as the 'digital divide'.

Digital citizenship is the exercise of social and political rights and responsibilities by citizens living in societies undergoing digital transformation. It refers not just to rights and responsibilities in relation to the digital environment, but also in the relationship between online and offline worlds in such societies. The DCE Recommendation is the capacity to participate actively, continuously and responsibly in communities (local, national, global, online and offline) at all levels (political, economic, social, cultural and intercultural).

Digital literacy skills are the skills that enable citizens to navigate the digital environment effectively, e.g., to access, read, write, download and post information, participate in polls and express themselves as a means of engaging in their community.

Active participation refers to the active involvement of citizens in shaping the societies and communities to which they belong. In digitally-rich societies, this includes citizens participating in debates about the role of technology in society, using digital technologies and the internet in socially responsible ways, and defending human rights and the rule of law in online and offline interactions.

Citizenship education is the general process of empowering citizens for active participation in societies through education. It enables citizens to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities, and to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Digital citizenship education refers to the aspect of citizenship education that deals with the impact of digital technologies on people's lives as citizens, including their rights and responsibilities, and ability to participate in society. The Council of Europe has developed a distinctive approach to digital citizenship education to support learners to develop the values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding necessary to participate fully in today's highly digitised society and assume their responsibilities as democratic citizens. It builds on the Council of Europe's long-standing programme Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). The abbreviation of 'DCE' is used as a shorthand throughout to refer to the Council of Europe approach.

Digital domains represent the different ways in which people use digital technologies and engage with them as well as with the digital environment in the course of their everyday lives. In the Council of Europe approach to digital citizenship, 10 such domains are identified. These are subdivided into three wider groups: 'Being Online', 'Well-being Online' and 'Rights Online'.

Learners refers not only to children and young people in formal education but includes people of all ages engaged in formal, non-formal and informal education in accordance with the principle of lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning refers to the ongoing, self-motivated acquisition of competences by citizens to enhance personal development, social inclusion and self-sustainability, and enable active participation in society.

Formal education refers to the structured education system that runs from primary (and in some countries from nursery) school to university, and includes specialised programmes for vocational, technical and professional training.

Non-formal education refers to planned, structured programmes and processes of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational curriculum.

Informal education is the process whereby each individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience.[8]

8. Definitions of formal, non-formal and informal education derived from Council of Europe *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*, Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7.

THE RFCDC AND DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture

What the Reference Framework is

The RFCDC is a conceptual tool designed to support education systems in the teaching, learning and assessment of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. At its heart is a 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 societies.

How the Framework was developed

The initiative for developing the Framework was launched by Andorra during its Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers in 2012-13. The development of the Framework was carried out by an expert group established by the Council of Europe's Education Department, working under the supervision of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (now, Steering Committee for Education – CDEDU). Based on an audit of existing schemes of democratic and intercultural competences, the expert group identified 20 core competences which were then used to build a new comprehensive competence model. This model was submitted to an international consultation with academic experts, education practitioners, and experts nominated by member states and education ministries. Descriptors were then identified for all of the competences in the model, and screened, validated and scaled to different levels of proficiency using data collected from teachers working in countries across Europe. The Framework was approved by European Ministers of education at their standing conference in Brussels in April 2016, and published in three volumes in 2018.

Why the Framework was developed

During the course of the Council of Europe's Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education programme, established in 1997, a great many educational tools and resources were developed, and training courses implemented. In 2010, the Council of Europe adopted the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education to raise standards and ensure quality in democratic citizenship and human rights education across Europe and beyond. The Charter defined key terms and identified a common set of principles for planning and implementing citizenship education across various settings.[9] What was lacking in the Charter was a clear understanding of common goals in citizenship education.

9. Council of Europe *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*, Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7.

The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture was designed to bridge that gap.[10]

The urgent need for this was brought into sharp focus by a series of terrorist attacks in Europe. It was argued that such extremism could only take root when young minds had not been taught to understand diversity and when young people struggled to think critically for themselves.[11] The problem of extremism lay not in the absence of democratic laws and institutions but in the lack of a culture of democracy among citizens.[12] This analysis echoed words expressed earlier at the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2005 when the Council of Europe was tasked with "promoting a democratic culture among our citizens".[13]

What the Framework contains

The Framework consists of three main components addressed in three volumes:

- a conceptual model of the competences that young people need to acquire in order to be able to participate effectively in democratic culture;
- descriptors for the competences in the conceptual model;
- guidance for education practitioners and ministries of education on how the conceptual model and the descriptors can be used to create more effective education systems for promoting the democratic competences of young people.

How the Framework works

The Framework is not a prescribed or even a recommended curriculum; it is a reference point for citizenship education. Its purpose is not to tell education policymakers and professionals what to do but to empower them to plan and implement teaching, learning and assessment in citizenship education in alignment with international standards and the common goals of Council of Europe member states.

It establishes a shared language and common set of goals to ensure consistency and transparency in citizenship education both within and across education systems and institutions and encourages mutual understanding between stakeholders. It also establishes a shared approach to curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment in citizenship education through suggestions of appropriate curriculum arrangements, pedagogies and assessment methods and the guidance given on these.

How the Framework is implemented

Although the Framework offers detailed guidance on the role of education in promoting the democratic competences of young people, it does not prescribe what policymakers or educational professionals should do in particular circumstances. The competences, descriptors and other approaches identified in the Framework are generic. They do not presuppose any specific context – educational, social, historical or geographical – but are designed to be suitable across various contexts and

10. Council of Europe (2018). RFCDC Volume 1: Context, concepts and model, p.5.
11. Council of Europe (2016). RFCDC. Competences for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies, p.7
12. Council of Europe (2018) RFCDC Volume 1, Chapter 3.
13. Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (2005).

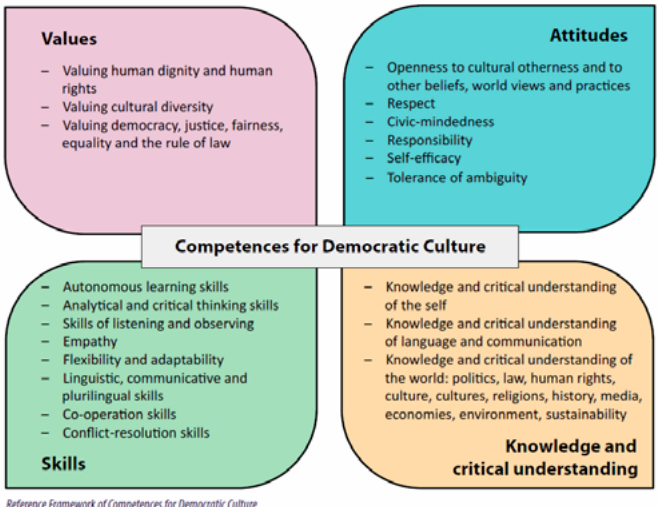
educational systems. How the Framework is implemented in particular educational settings will depend on the specific circumstances that apply in those contexts. The implementation of the Framework thus depends on the co-operation and decisions of local stakeholders and their understanding of how the concepts in the Framework apply to their local social and educational circumstances. The relevant local actors will vary but are likely to include local policymakers, curriculum designers, education advisors and inspectors, teacher trainers, school directors, teachers, students, parents and other local stakeholders and organisations.[14]

How the competences are applied

The Framework employs a distinctive understanding of the concept of competence. In the Framework, the term competence is used to describe psychological attributes associated with democratic behaviour and is regarded as a dynamic concept. It relates not simply to beliefs that individuals happen to hold about democracy but to the nature of their actions in situations that present the possibility of a democratic response – described in the Framework as 'democratic situations'.[15] Examples of such situations, as cited in the RFCDC, might be a political debate, an encounter with hate speech directed towards refugees or migrants, or being confronted by extremist propaganda.[16] The competences described in the Framework refer to the specific psychological resources a person needs to have acquired to be able to respond democratically in situations like these.

The Framework identifies 20 such attributes and presents them in the form of a butterfly with four wings, where each wing defines a different type of competence (Figure 1). One wing describes *values*, a second lists *attitudes*, a third identifies *skills*, and a fourth defines areas of *knowledge and critical understanding* – all of which are positively correlated with democratic behaviour.

Figure 1 – Competences for democratic culture



14. Council of Europe (2018). RFCDC Volume 1, p.20.
15. ibid., p.32.
16. ibid., p.34.

In real-life situations, democratic behaviour rarely involves the application of a single such competence. It invariably involves an entire cluster of competences. Nor is it likely to involve the application of only one type of competence (one wing of the 'butterfly'). Democratic behaviour typically involves a complex mix of different values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and critical understanding, which are difficult, often nigh on impossible, to separate. The concept of the clustering of competences is thus a central one in the approach to citizenship education promoted in the Framework and has important implications for curriculum design and for the teaching and learning of the competences, as well as for their assessment.[17]

The notion of 'clusters' of competences is illustrated in Volume 1 of the Reference Framework with the example of a person taking a principled stand against hate speech. Such a stand is likely to involve the employment of a cluster of competences, including valuing human dignity, civic-mindedness, a sense of responsibility, analytical and critical thinking, knowledge of human rights, and linguistic and communication skills.[18]

How the competences are developed

The concept of the competences as complex forms of human behaviour has important implications for our understanding of the processes by which people come to acquire them and the ways in which these processes can be harnessed by education systems and institutions.

Firstly, there are issues relating to how different types of competence are learned. We know, for example, that values and attitudes are not learned in a single lesson but develop over a lifetime. We also know that values and attitudes are not particularly susceptible to teaching by direct instruction but are more likely to develop within a social milieu or culture that supports them. Skills often require demonstration before they are learned and need practice for the learner to achieve proficiency. Factual knowledge is more susceptible to teaching by direct instruction, but critical understanding requires learners to take an active role in their learning.

Secondly, the complex nexus of ways in which the competences are learned suggests that equipping learners with these competences cannot be the responsibility of a single teacher or even a single school subject, nor can it be achieved purely through the use of formal instruction. Developing competences for democratic culture demands a response from the school as a whole, with all teachers and subjects, and even wider stakeholders like parents and community organisations having something to offer. The school's culture and the classroom climate will have an important role, as will critical and participative forms of pedagogy. Learners will need opportunities to try out and practise competences, perhaps through simulated situations but also in real-life situations within and beyond the classroom, for example, through extra-curricular activities and student participation. This further implies a need to co-ordinate these practices across the institution, such as through an enabling whole-school policy, a curriculum that integrates competence development into all areas and phases of education, and a dedicated curriculum leader.

17. ibid., pp.32-33.
18. ibid., p.34.

Thirdly, there are issues about how the competences relate to each other. Though separable in theory, the competences are rarely separable in real life. They are naturally employed by a person in groups or clusters, the combination of competences in a cluster depending on the person and their situation. As there is an infinite variety of persons and possible situations, the number of possible clusters is endless. The impossibility of teaching all the competences separately, or of covering all the different situations in which they might be employed, merely reinforces the essential role that local stakeholders play in implementing the Framework.

Finally, education policymakers and professionals at the local level have to make their own selection of what to teach based on their understanding of their learners' existing level of competence and their social and educational circumstances. They can do this by reflecting on the citizenship issues that impact most on their learners' lives and identifying the competences their learners are in most need of developing. These issues vary from place to place, and with the learners' age and experience. In one place, it might be youth crime, ethnic conflict or gender equality; in another, conspiracy theories or radicalisation, and so on.

What is the role of the descriptors

The descriptors are examples of observable behaviour which indicate how well a person has mastered a competence. Their role is to provide evidence for the assessment of student learning, with a view to diagnosing gaps in learning, identifying areas for further development, and evaluating the effectiveness of educational interventions. There are many observable ways in which a person can express their level of competence. The forms these take varies from competence to competence, and with the individual social and educational context. The list suggested in the Framework should not be taken as exhaustive but understood as just one selection from an almost endless list of possibilities. It is offered as an illustration of the kind of evidence practitioners can use in making judgements about their learners' level of competence development and an inspiration for them to develop forms of assessment appropriate to the situation.[19] In using descriptors for this purpose, it should be borne in mind that competence development does not always take place in a linear way. Competences are not something that a person acquires at a certain moment and then possesses for the rest of their lives.[20]

Finally, it should be remembered that descriptors set out in the Framework are not fixed like the twenty competences, but simply examples acting as models to show what is possible. In practice, the descriptors selected by practitioners may vary considerably from the ones given in illustration.

19. Council of Europe (2018). RFCDC Volume 2: Descriptors of Competences for Democratic Culture.
20. Council of Europe (2018). RFCDC Volume 1, p.20.

Digital Citizenship Education

The background to DCE

The digital citizenship education (DCE) project was launched by the Education Department in 2016 as a response to the wide-ranging changes, including in education, brought about by rapidly digitalising societies. Digitalisation profoundly affects all aspects of contemporary life and affects all citizens and society as a whole. Digitalisation brings many new opportunities and benefits but can pose new ethical questions and concerns. Citizens need a broad range of new skills – including digital literacy – to avail of the many opportunities that digital technologies offer and to negotiate challenges that are likely to arise. Importantly, new citizenship skills are needed if citizens are to participate fully in the life of society and to flourish in the digital environment.

In 2016, the Council of Europe convened an expert group to take forward the concept of digital citizenship education and to assess how best professionals in education can support learners to prepare for a digital future. The work commenced with a scoping review of the field and the available literature. This found that educational responses to the challenges facing citizenship in the digital era up to that point had been focused on single issues such as online safety, responsible online use, practising digital civility, or delivering educational material more effectively through digital platforms.[21] A need for a more structured approach to education for digital citizenship, founded on the values of democratic culture, was therefore highlighted as a priority. As a result, the Council of Europe initiated an intergovernmental project to develop a holistic concept of digital citizenship education, sometimes referred to in Council of Europe documents as DCE, to be supported by appropriate resources and guidance materials aimed at policymakers, educational administrators, industry and professionals in education.

The work of the DCE project

The first task undertaken by the expert group was to elaborate on the conceptual model of digital citizenship education. Building on a systematic survey of the field, a holistic theoretical model of DCE was put forward, supported by a literature review[22] and an extensive stakeholder consultation. The multi-stakeholder consultation contacted over 200 organisations and experts across all member states and surveyed them on relevant policy issues, sense-making practices regarding education for digital citizenship and the gaps and challenges in formal and informal learning contexts.[23] A second follow-up questionnaire was sent to national contacts for 42 projects focused on children's digital skills. This questionnaire – the Competence Grid Survey – asked specifically about the level of focus being placed on the 20 competences and four areas of the CDC to identify any areas of particular concentration or special focus.

21. See Frau-Meigs, D., O'Neill, B., Soriani, A., & Tomé, V. (2017). *Digital Citizenship Education Volume 1: Overview and new perspectives*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
22. ibid.
23. Richardson, Janice, and Elizabeth Milovidov (2017). *Digital Citizenship Education Volume 2: Multi-Stakeholder Consultation Report*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

In fact, the survey found little evidence of a systematic approach and mostly *ad hoc* approaches to developing competences in projects oriented towards fostering digital citizenship. It also found that parental engagement in digital citizenship was low, and that resources and awareness-raising materials were needed to increase understanding of digital citizenship.

Building capacity for digital citizenship education

An outcome of the initial scoping activity and stakeholder consultation was a greater focus on capacity building. Recognising that there was generally low awareness of DCE as a priority issue, a series of conferences and events were held to promote digital citizenship education, facilitate networking and build awareness, particularly among policymakers.[24] The DCE expert group then further engaged with diverse stakeholder groups to create a series of networks of relevant NGOs, civil society organisations and public institutions.

In 2019, the DCE Promoters Network[25] was created to promote and develop DCE at local, regional and national levels. Nominations of DCE Promoters and local experts were formally ratified by ministries of education in member states, thereby further building awareness of this policy priority. A DCE network was also established with diverse civil society organisations and public institutions to build stronger links with parents and carers across Europe.[26] A major survey of parents was carried out in 2020 on the topic of how they can support the competence-building process to help children become responsible digital citizens.[27] Finally, following a series of networking events with the industry, guidelines on developing partnerships between education institutions and the private sector based on principles of digital citizenship education were published, leading to an ongoing structured dialogue with the private sector on DCE topics.[28] Each of these initiatives has served the direct function of raising the profile of DCE and the Council of Europe's prioritisation of it while further disseminating its work, tools and resources.

The second key priority in capacity building has been the development of educational resources that can be adapted for different age groups and settings, and which can support professionals in education in translating these important principles into practice. Significant outputs to date include the *Digital citizenship education handbook,*[29] the Trainers' pack on *Digital Citizenship Education,*[30] and a

24. See for example General report of the Working Conference "Digital Citizenship Education - Empowering Digital Citizens": General report, 21-22 September 2017, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
25. https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/promoters
26. https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/parents-network
27. Richardson, J., & Samara, V. (2022). *Digital Citizenship Education From A Parent's Perspective*. Council of Europe.
28. https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/dce-privatesector
29. Richardson, J., Milovidov, E., and Schmalzried, M. (2022). *Digital citizenship education handbook*. Council of Europe. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/1680ab222c
30. Raulin-Serrier P., Soriani A., Stayslavska O., Tomé V., Huddleston T. (Ed.) (2020). *Digital Citizenship Education: Trainers' Pack*. Council of Europe. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/16809efd12

resource for practitioners on *Educating for a Video Game Culture*.[31] A series of leaflets and brochures have been published targeting specific groups and topics such as "Keeping Young Citizens Busy at Home during the Coronavirus Crisis"[32] and "Easy Steps to Help your Child become a Digital Citizen".[33] Lesson plans have also been developed on diverse topics, including Cyberbullying, Fake News, Ethical Shopping, Solidarity, Speaking Out, etc.[34] More recently, an animation series, the Digi-Nauts, was developed to encourage young children, their parents, and educators to think about what it means to be a digital citizen. Each video is accompanied by activities and exercises brought together in an Activity Book to recall scenes from the videos, reinforce key messages introduced, and generally support the development of digital citizenship competences.[35] Finally, a series of online courses for educators have been developed. These cover how to deal with the different aspects of DCE and how to integrate them into everyday practice, not simply to teach what digital citizenship education is but to enable educational professionals to integrate DCE into learning activities.[36]

Why digital citizenship

While the RFCDC provides a common foundation for all forms of citizenship education, there are some distinctive features of the digital environment that merit special attention. Digitalisation has eroded boundaries between the physical and the virtual worlds. Social interactions are reconstituted in ways that would have been unthinkable to earlier generations. For many young learners, the digital world is something they have never been without. As digital natives, they turn effortlessly to digital technologies to find information, solve problems and engage with others. Being an active citizen and fulfilling all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in these contexts requires access to and competent use of a range of digital services, platforms and settings. Preparing learners to participate effectively in a digitally transformed environment is the challenge to which digital citizenship education is dedicated.

Accordingly, the DCE Recommendation offers the definition of digital citizenship as

> *the capacity to participate actively, continuously and responsibly in communities (local, national, global, online and offline) at all levels (political, economic, social, cultural and intercultural).*[37]

31. Soriani, A. (2021). *Educating for a video game culture—A map for teachers and parents*. Council of Europe Publishing. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/educating-for-a-video-game-culture-a-map-for-teachers-and-parents/1680a6ce9c
32. https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/e-library/-/asset_publisher/AkjaSjifj6fD/content/keeping-young-citizens-busy-at-home-during-the-corona-crisis
33. https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/e-library/-/asset_publisher/AkjaSjifj6fD/content/easy-steps-to-help-your-child-become-a-digital-citizen
34. All lesson plans and other educational materials are available in the Council of Europe DCE E-Library at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/e-library
35. https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/dg-nauts
36. https://theewc.org/resources/launch-of-what-is-digital-citizenship-education/
37. Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on developing and promoting digital citizenship education.

These capacities are not inborn, and all citizens are entitled to be educated to achieve them. Therefore, a goal of education for digital citizenship is to support citizens to acquire a broad range of competences to engage with evolving digital technologies and participate actively and positively in both online and offline communities, whether local, national or global.[38] This involves a process of lifelong learning (in formal, informal and non-formal settings) and a commitment to defending human rights and dignity.[39]

What is new about the Council of Europe approach

The Council of Europe is not alone in highlighting the significance of digital citizenship as a priority for education. Many international organisations and researchers have similarly called attention to the need for a structured approach to developing competences to equip citizens for the digital age.

The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp) of the European Commission, for example, is a comprehensive framework that describes '*the knowledge, skills and attitudes that help citizens engage confidently, critically and safely with digital technologies*.'[40] The DigComp Framework specifies five competence areas: Information and data literacy; Communication and collaboration; Digital content creation; Safety; and Problem solving. DigComp has a particular focus on operational skills, activities and uses. While citizenship through digital technologies is included as a competence area (defining it as '*the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life*'),[41] DigComp tends to present Digital Competences and Citizenship as separate spheres, with the primary focus on the former as operational skills citizens should acquire.

The UNESCO Media and Information Literacy framework (MIL) also includes digital competence to support citizens' empowerment in societies undergoing digital transformation. Its specific focus is on deepening the understanding of the role and functions of media in democratic societies and developing skills of critical consumption of media sources.[42] Additionally, global citizenship education, as developed by UNESCO, includes a number of complementary learning outcomes, including "socio-emotional" competences, concepts such as a "sense of belonging to a common humanity", "sharing values and responsibilities", and "attitudes of empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity".[43]

The OECD's Learning Compass 2030 is a further example of a learning framework that aims to prepare learners for a digital future. This includes, for example, skills

38. Richardson, Janice, and Elizabeth Milovidov. 2019. *Digital citizenship education handbook: Being Online, Well-Being Online, Rights Online*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, p.11.
39. See the definition as originally presented in *Digital citizenship education Volume 1: Overview and new perspectives*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, p.15.
40. Vuorikari, R., Kluzer, S. and Punie, Y., DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens - With new examples of knowledge, skills and attitudes, EUR 31006 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, ISBN 978-92-76-48883-5, doi:10.2760/490274, JRC128415.
41. DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens, p.6.
42. UNESCO. (2021). *Media and information literate citizens: Think critically, click wisely!* https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377068
43. UNESCO (2015). Global citizenship education. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced

such as "the ability to interact respectfully" and "empathy", and attitudes such as "openness towards people from other cultures" and "respect for cultural otherness".[44]

Managing digital presence and engaging in respectful and ethical interactions with others online also features in the Digital Citizenship programme developed by Common Sense Media.[45] This offers curriculum resources on topics such as media balance and well-being, digital footprint and identity and news and media literacy – each of which also features in the DCE concept.

The MediaSmarts programme developed by Canada's Centre for Digital Media Literacy similarly proposed seven core transversal competences for schools, including "ethics and empathy", described as socio-emotional skills and the ability to make ethical online decisions, and "community engagement", particularly in terms of exercising rights as citizens and consumers and social norms to engage positively in online spaces.[46]

While all such frameworks address important and relevant dimensions of digital citizenship and ultimately are complementary with the DCE concept, **what is distinctive about the Council of Europe approach is that it draws together a holistic concept of citizenship that emphasises empowerment in a digital society framed by respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law**. Thus, digital citizenship from the Council of Europe's perspective encompasses "digital engagement" expressed in the confident and positive use of digital tools; "active participation" in the life of the community; "critical understanding" frequently articulated as media and information literacy and the values underpinning a "culture of democracy" for which the competences outlined in the RFCDC are decisive.

The 10 Digital domains

In an effort to be as comprehensive as possible, the conceptual model of DCE specifies 10 digital domains that underpin the concept of digital citizenship (Figure 2). The domains are intended to capture in a flexible manner the multiple digital activities undertaken by citizens (and learners) and the diverse contexts in which they engage with the digital environment in the course of their everyday lives.

For presentation purposes, the 10 domains are further grouped into three clusters as follows:

Being Online: domains related to competences needed to access the digital society, freely express oneself and use digital tools creatively and critically.

Well-being Online: domains related to competences needed to engage positively in the digital society and develop a healthy relationship with technology.

Rights Online: domains that relate to competences regarding the rights and responsibilities of citizens in complex, diverse societies in a digital context, where privacy is protected, and active participation is empowered.

44. OECD (2016). Education 2030, The Future of Education and Skills. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/
45. https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship
46. https://mediasmarts.ca/tag/categories/digital-citizenship

Figure 2 – 10 Digital Domains

The identification of the 10 domains derived from a review of the scholarly literature, policy guidelines and frameworks for digital citizenship, and the work of relevant civil society organisations.[47]

In brief, the 10 digital domains incorporate the following areas of focus, each of which relates to specific competences.

Access and Inclusion: This domain concerns issues of access to the digital environment without discrimination, and participation in digital spaces open for diversity of any kind.

Learning and Creativity: This domain concerns the willingness and the attitude towards learning in the digital environment over the life course and prepares to use technology in creative ways for personal and professional development.

Media and Information Literacy: This domain concerns the ability to understand critically and interpret digital media and use them for self-expression.

Ethics and Empathy: This domain concerns online interactions with others. It shows how to recognise the feelings and perspectives of others in online interactions, sets standards of ethical behaviour and constructive reactions to cases of violation of rights.

Health and Well-being: This domain concerns various positive and negative impacts of digital technology, including, but not limited to, online addiction, distressful content, ergonomics and posture, and excessive use of digital and mobile devices or health apps.

47. Frau-Meigs, D., O'Neill, B., Soriani, A., & Tomé, V. (2017). *Digital citizenship education Volume 1: Overview and new perspectives*. Council of Europe.

ePresence and Communication: This domain refers to the development of personal and interpersonal qualities that support citizens in building a positive, coherent and true online identity and maintenance of positive online interactions.

Active participation: This domain relates to establishing conscious online interactions in various groups and digitally enriched communities online and offline, making informed decisions and taking effective actions.

Rights and Responsibilities: This domain concerns education about basic rights of digital citizens, like privacy, security, access, inclusion or freedom of expression and responsibilities that guarantee those rights to others, such as ethics, empathy or transparency.

Privacy and Security: This domain refers to the ability to ensure personal protection and proper management of one's own and other's online information while using digital technology, filters, passwords, antivirus, but also tagging others and sharing their information.

Consumer Awareness: This domain concerns understanding of the implications of commercial reality on digital transformation, including issues of sustainability, and is focused on supporting learners to maintain autonomy in the online space influenced by it.

The 10 digital domains are the backbone for organising the various educational resources developed as part of the project and assist stakeholders in identifying areas most relevant to their interests or expertise. Thus, for example, the *Privacy and Security* domain may be particularly relevant to technology providers and administrators, *Health and Well-being* to parents and *Access and Inclusion* to education planners and policymakers. However, as emphasised by the project, digitalisation is something that affects all citizens and is the responsibility of all stakeholders. Accordingly, the 10 digital domains need to be considered holistically, each containing aspects that may be relevant according to the context and the circumstances.

The multiple dimensions that comprise each of the 10 digital domains are further described in depth in the *Digital citizenship education handbook,* which is intended for education decision-makers, teachers, parents and platform providers alike. It includes the theoretical background and fact sheets on each domain, providing ideas, good practice and reference to further resources to support educators to integrate DCE in their professional context.

Conceptual mapping

How the RFCDC and DCE complement each other

The RFCDC is the starting point and inspiration for the Council of Europe's approach to digital citizenship education. DCE builds on the RFCDC and updates the Council of Europe's programme of practical support for citizenship education to make it relevant to life in the digital era. The catalyst for this re-purposing of citizenship education is the recognition that digital transformation impacts citizenship

profoundly, giving rise to new opportunities that advance participatory democracy, but also new risks and challenges that may threaten human rights.

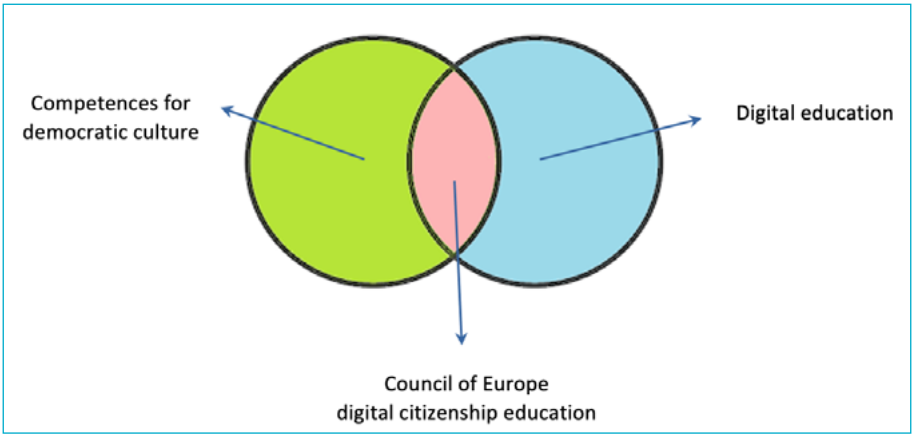
DCE, as developed by the Council of Europe, does not suggest a new competence framework or add any new competences to alter the RFCDC. It is not an alternative to the RFCDC but an application of it. It is an attempt concerned with applying the Framework principles to digital situations, i.e., situations related to, affecting or affected by the use of digital technologies.[48] That digital situations can also be 'democratic situations' is spelled out in the Framework:

> *"… democratic discussions and debates and intercultural encounters and interactions take place not only through face-to-face exchanges, traditional print and broadcast media, letters, petitions, and so on, but also through computer-mediated communications, for example, through online social networks, forums, blogs, e-petitions and emails."*[49]

Drawing on the RFCDC's comprehensive concepts, model and guidance for implementation, digital citizenship education is a necessary extension of its scope that will ensure its relevance and adaptability to emerging digital contexts.

From this, we can see that the Framework and DCE are two complementary initiatives – one theoretical, the other practical – with a common goal. Neither stands alone, however. Without some form of practical application, such as that provided by DCE, the Framework remains an academic document. Without the Framework, digital education lacks an appropriate understanding of the dimension of citizenship. Taken together, however, the RFCDC and DCE provide a solid foundation for fostering the democratic competences needed in a rapidly evolving digital environment. Therefore, the Council of Europe's DCE project is where the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture meets and overlaps with the needs of preparing learners for the digital environment – see Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Council of Europe digital citizenship education: competences for democratic culture in the digital education



48. Frau-Meigs, Divina, Brian O'Neill, Alessandro Soriani, and Vitor Tomé. 2017. *Digital citizenship education Volume 1: Overview and new perspectives*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
49. *Digital citizenship education Volume 1:* p.32.

How the RFCDC adds value to digital education

Through its focus on the competences for democratic culture, DCE adds a new important dimension to digital education, both complementing and enriching it, and helping learners to become competent, confident and creative users of digital technologies including AI.

Through DCE, social and ethical values and questions are infused across the curriculum. This democracy, human rights and intercultural perspective is illustrated in Table 1.

DCE takes each of the 10 digital domains in turn and shows how the integration of teaching and learning based on the competences for democratic culture enables learners to explore important social and ethical issues arising out of the use of digital technologies.

Column I lists the 10 digital domains. Column II gives examples of standard outcomes in forms of digital education aimed at improving learners' general digital competence/literacy. Column III shows how the integration of the competences for democratic culture opens up new learning possibilities for learners.

Table 1 – Digital education with and without the competences for democratic culture

Digital domain	Digital education	New dimensions brought by the Council of Europe digital citizenship education
Access and inclusion	Technical skills to access and navigate the online world. Knowledge about digital tools and infrastructure and how to use them.	Representation of diversity in the online world, e.g., in terms of ability, language, opinions, culture, gender, age and other forms of human difference. Openness to minority and underprivileged group participation in digital communities. Advocacy for inclusive online policies and practices.

Digital domain	Digital education	New dimensions brought by the Council of Europe digital citizenship education
Learning and Creativity	Knowledge of tools and platforms that support learning. Individualisation of the learning process. Tailoring the learning process to the diverse capacities and expectations of individuals.	Skills of collaborative learning in a digitally-enriched environment. Self-efficacy, design thinking and problem-solving to address social injustices and promote equality through the use of digital technology. Responsibility, critical thinking, civic-mindedness, effective communication and co-operation to protect fundamental rights and freedoms of members of online communities. Active participation in the digital world, respecting the principles of democracy and human rights values.
Media and Information literacy	Ability to access and critically assess information. Ability to understand, criticise and create information.	Ability to engage with digital media and information channels so as to be able to participate actively in local and global communities, hold power to account, promote transparency, and protect individuals' rights to freedom of expression and access to accurate information. Resilience to the influence of disinformation and other kinds of information disorders.

Digital domain	Digital education	New dimensions brought by the Council of Europe digital citizenship education
Ethics and Empathy	Civility and polite and respectful interaction online. Netiquette	Ability to recognise and address digital forms of human rights violations, e.g., cyberbullying, hate speech, radicalisation, sexual abuse online. Ability to consider diverse world views and experiences of individuals online, recognise perspectives of marginalised groups and contribute to the development of digital communities that ensure equal treatment and protection to everyone.
Health and Well-being	Knowledge about ways in which digital technology can affect the social, mental and physical well-being of individuals (routines, ergonomics, addictions, etc).	Skills and habits that ensure meaningful and healthy participation in the digital environment. Ability to actively participate in the debate on quality of life in the digital environment and how it might be improved.
E-presence and Communication	Knowledge of how to use electronic communication technologies to exchange information and ideas. Ability to maintain a positive online image and relationships and avoid risks.	Ability to think critically about online profiles, posts and interactions and their potential impact on the wider digital community. Knowledge of how to use digital platforms and technologies to foster democratic voice, the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes, foster inclusive dialogue and amplify marginalised voices.

Digital domain	Digital education	New dimensions brought by the Council of Europe digital citizenship education
Active Participation	Competent use of digital tools and software that enable self-expression and cooperation online.	Ability to use digital forms of citizenship participation to contribute to the development of local and global democratic communities. Critical understanding of the influence of digital technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) on social and political participation, and ability to engage in discussions on ethical issues about users' rights and the fairness of digital mechanisms for participation. Ability to participate in constructive discussions on controversial issues online.
Rights and Responsibilities	Knowledge of online rights, such as freedom of expression, privacy, access to information and digital property. Knowledge of online responsibilities, such as civility and ethical behaviour and respect of digital property.	Ability to apply digital rights and responsibilities in practical situations. Knowledge of how and ability to act when digital rights are violated, or responsibilities ignored. Ability to think critically about digital rights and responsibilities and who should have them.

Digital domain	Digital education	New dimensions brought by the Council of Europe digital citizenship education
Privacy and Security	Knowledge of mechanisms for protecting personal online information. Knowledge of how to maintain personal security through the use of navigation filters, passwords, antivirus and firewall software.	Awareness of how personal information is collected, used and shared in different online contexts, and the ability to take proactive steps to secure personal data and privacy as well as making sure that personal online behaviours do not put others at risk. Ability to participate in public debate on the issues of protection against unauthorised surveillance, and how individuals may exercise their rights without fear of prosecution, discrimination or exploitation.
Consumer Awareness	Knowledge of the process of personal data collection. Understanding the role of cookies and newsletters. Knowledge of online consumer rights and mechanisms for their protection.	Critical understanding of the implications of the commercial reality of online spaces. Ability to assess the effects of online consumerism on the environment and local communities. Ability to make sustainable digital choices that protect local communities and the environment.

As set out in Table 1, the emphasis is not only on competent use of tools and technologies but also on the exploration of the social and ethical issues to which they give rise, and the opportunities to safeguard human rights and sustain democracy on- and off-line which they present.

How DCE provides a practical form of implementation of RFCDC

Digital citizenship education provides important real-life contexts for the implementation of the RFCDC. It creates opportunities to apply the Framework principles to digital situations, i.e., situations related to, affecting or affected by the use of digital technologies, and to develop competences for democratic culture.

Each of the 10 digital domains provides a different context for learning and requires the use of a different cluster of competences. Each domain includes problems

influencing everyday life, choices and opportunities that arise in digitally enriched societies. In this way, competences for democratic culture may be naturally developed through focusing on issues that are meaningful to learners and influence them directly.

This is illustrated in Table 2 which describes examples of clusters of competences. Column I lists the 10 digital domains. Column II gives examples of DCE learning contexts. Column III describes clusters of competences for democratic culture that are naturally deployed in each of these contexts.

Table 2 – Clusters of competences for democratic culture deployed in the Digital Domains

Digital domain	DCE learning context	Cluster of competences for democratic culture
Access and inclusion	Value online representation of diversity, e.g., in terms of ability, language, opinions, culture, gender, age and other forms of human difference. Openness to minority and underprivileged group participation in digital communities Advocacy of inclusive online policies and practices.	Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law Valuing cultural diversity Civic mindedness Respect Empathy Knowledge and critical understanding of the world
Learning and Creativity	Skills of collaborative learning in a digitally-enriched environment. Self-efficacy, design thinking and problem-solving to address social injustices and promote equality through the use of digital technology. Responsibility, critical thinking, civic-mindedness, effective communication and cooperation to protect fundamental rights and freedoms of members of online communities. Active participation in the digital world, respecting the principles of democracy and human rights values.	Valuing cultural diversity Self-efficacy Tolerance of ambiguity Cooperation skills Flexibility and adaptability Knowledge and understanding of the self

Digital domain	DCE learning context	Cluster of competences for democratic culture
Media and Information literacy	Ability to engage with digital media and information channels so as to be able to participate actively in local and global communities, hold power to account, promote transparency, and protect individuals' rights to freedom of expression and access to accurate information. Resilience to the influence of disinformation and other kinds of information disorders.	Valuing human dignity and human rights Self-efficacy Tolerance of ambiguity Analytical and critical thinking Skills of listening and observing Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication
Ethics and Empathy	Ability to recognise and address digital forms of human rights violations, e.g., cyberbullying, hate speech, radicalization, sexual abuse online. Ability to consider diverse world views and experiences of individuals online, recognize perspectives of marginalised groups and contribute to the development of digital communities that ensure equal treatment and protection to everyone.	Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law Valuing human dignity and human rights Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices Empathy Conflict-resolution skills Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
Health and Well-being	Skills and habits that ensure meaningful and healthy participation in the digital environment. Actively participate in the debate on quality of life in the digital environment and how it might be improved.	Valuing human dignity and human rights Responsibility Self-efficacy Analytical and critical thinking Autonomous learning skills Knowledge and critical understanding of the self

Digital domain	DCE learning context	Cluster of competences for democratic culture
E-presence and Communication	Think critically about online profiles, posts and interactions and their potential impact on the wider digital community. Knowledge of how to use digital platforms and technologies to foster democratic voice, the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes, foster inclusive dialogue and amplify marginalised voices.	Valuing cultural diversity Responsibility Civic-mindedness Analytical and critical thinking Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills Knowledge and critical understanding of communication
Active Participation	Ability to use digital forms of citizenship participation to contribute to the development of local and global democratic communities. Critical understanding of the influence of digital technology and AI on social and political participation, and ability to engage in discussions on ethical issues about users' rights and the fairness of digital mechanisms for participation. Ability to participate in constructive discussions on controversial issues online.	Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices Respect Linguistic communicative and plurilingual skills Flexibility and adaptability Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
Rights and Responsibilities	Ability to apply digital rights and responsibilities in practical situations. Knowledge of how and ability to act when digital rights are violated, or responsibilities ignored. Think critically about digital rights and responsibilities and who should have them.	Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law Valuing human dignity and human rights Responsibility Civic-mindedness, Conflict-resolution skills Knowledge and critical understanding of the world

Digital domain	DCE learning context	Cluster of competences for democratic culture
Privacy and Security	Awareness of how personal information is collected, used and shared in different online contexts, and the ability to take proactive steps to secure personal data and privacy as well as making sure that personal online behaviours do not put others at risk. Ability to participate in public debate on the issues of protection against unauthorised surveillance, and how individuals may exercise their rights without fear of prosecution, discrimination or exploitation.	Valuing human dignity and human rights Respect Self-efficacy Cooperation skills Autonomous learning skills Knowledge and critical understanding of the world
Consumer Awareness	Critical understanding of the implications of the commercial reality of online spaces. Ability to assess the effects of online consumerism on the environment and local communities. Ability to make sustainable digital choices that protect local communities and the environment.	Valuing human dignity and human rights Civic-mindedness Skills of listening and observing Analytical and critical thinking Knowledge and critical understanding of the self Knowledge and critical understanding of the world

The above examples are illustrative only and further clusters may be developed according to the particular needs in any educational setting.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

Curriculum development and design

As described in this Guidance document, the relationship between the RFCDC and DCE has important implications for curriculum development and design.

Understanding the nature of the competences for democratic culture and the ways in which learners become proficient in them is central to the planning of education for digital citizenship in schools and other institutions. Key factors to take into account are the long-term nature of competence development, the part played by school and classroom climate in competence development, the need for learners to encounter competences in real-life settings, the importance of opportunities to rehearse and practise competences, and the value of learners taking an active role in their own competence development. Taken together, they suggest an approach to curriculum planning that recognises that DCE:

- is not limited to a single age group or teaching phase but relevant to all learners throughout their learning journey;
- does not only take place in formal lessons but also in extra-curricular activities and in the life of the school, and considers its relations with the surrounding community;
- is not restricted to any one school subject or discipline, such as Civic Education, Information Technology or Computer Science, but can be integrated into any lesson or aspect of school life;
- is not the sole responsibility of specialist teachers but can be taught by any teacher who references or uses digital technology in their lessons;
- is most effective when integrated into the real-life experience of learners through opportunities to reflect on their own and their school's use of digital technologies, and participation in real-world problem-solving, e.g., through service-learning, student councils and clubs, school campaigns and events, and contributions to school and classroom decision-making;
- is able to make the academic curriculum more relevant and meaningful for learners by connecting subject content with real-world digital experiences and activities.

It is not only the nature of the competences that has implications for curriculum development and design, but also the nature of digital activity itself, with its distinct issues and challenges for citizens. The 10 digital domains have a key role to play here. The digital domains:

- provide a basic structure, a simple framework through which curriculum content can be organised;
- give the curriculum breadth and balance, ensuring that all major areas of digital citizenship are covered;
- enable the development of a 'spiral' curriculum, in which key elements in the curriculum are re-visited with increasing levels of sophistication in successive teaching phases.

Curriculum planning in DCE thus revolves around the digital domains, which, in turn, are informed by competences in the Framework. The selection of content to be covered within each domain will always be a matter for local decision-making and depend on local understandings of digital and democratic issues, events and problems with the most public significance at the time. Curriculum content is best conceived in terms of real-life topics or themes. Identifying the key questions that need to be addressed in each topic is a useful way of ordering and shaping what it is intended to teach – see the examples in Table 3.

Table 3 – Consumer Awareness – examples of topics and questions

Topic	Questions
Shopping	How can you shop safely online? What can you do if you buy faulty goods? What rights should people be able to expect when shopping online? Is it more ethical to buy online or from local shops?
Online selling	How are goods and services marketed and sold online? What responsibilities do online sellers have? Are there some things people shouldn't be allowed to sell online?
Advertising	How do platforms sell advertising? How does personalised advertising work and what does it mean for the user? Who is responsible for making sure online ads are truthful? What should be done about gender stereotyping and other stereotypes in online ads? Should there be special rules about online marketing to young children?

Topic	Questions
Contracts	What rights do you have if your mobile phone develops a fault? What can you do about junk mail? Is it OK to share your password to a TV or movie-streaming service with someone else? What contractual terms are included in your favourite social media app?
Personal data	How do organisations collect your personal data? What do organisations do with the data they collect? Should you be able to control how organ-isations use your data? What rights do laws such as the General Data Protection Regulation and the Digital Services Act give you?

Decisions about the means by which DCE is to be delivered and who will be responsible for it will also depend on local conditions, including the curriculum model in use and how teaching staff are deployed. This includes decisions about the respective roles of different subjects and disciplines, particularly Civic Education and Information Technology or Computer Science. It also includes decisions on what is to be taught in the classroom and what is to be delivered through whole-school or extra-curricular activity or community-linked education.

At the level of the individual subject or discipline, there are two main ways in which DCE can be embedded in curricula. Firstly, when using technology as a learning tool. Wherever technology is used to mediate learning there are opportunities to introduce digital citizenship, not only to advise on safety and privacy issues, but also to raise questions about the role of technology in education and in society. All subjects and disciplines can do this, for example through the use of:

- research activities, e.g., learners evaluate the credibility of online sources of information, including the use of videos and images;
- student assignments, e.g., learners learn about plagiarism and copyright, including when and how to credit others for content;
- collaborative tasks, e.g., learners consider appropriate behaviour for different types of online chat;
- real-life examples, e.g., learners look at the implications of social media and online platforms for society, including meme and influencer content;
- remote and hybrid learning, e.g., learners reflect on the need for rules in online meetings, including to protect individual privacy.

Secondly, by using DCE to add value to academic subjects and disciplines. Different subjects link naturally to specific elements of the digital citizenship curriculum. By actively making these links, teachers can enhance learning in their subject area while achieving DCE goals. See the examples in Table 4.

Table 4 – Making links between digital citizenship and school subjects

Topic	Questions
Science	Study the physical effects of excessive screen use, e.g., eye-strain, poor posture, repetitive strain injury, etc.
Maths	Calculate mean, median and mode of a data set on children's access to smartphones and other devices at home and in school.
History	Compare historical examples of propaganda to disinformation online.
Civic Education	Look at the websites of some politicians, choose one and write an email to them on an issue you feel strongly about.
Art	Look at some images of famous paintings and reflect on the gender roles they are promoting.
Physical Education	Discuss the pros and cons of e-sports in schools.
Music	Create an annotated playlist to illustrate how you feel about a citizenship issue.
Geography	Suggest a way in which technology could be used to improve the local community.
Information Technology	Plan a campaign about cyberbullying using a spreadsheet.
Language	Record a podcast about a fairness issue in school.
Environmental Studies	Research the environmental impact of digital technology and data.

Educational management and leadership

The range of experiences learners require to develop the competences needed to function effectively in a culture of democracy go far beyond what is possible in a single school subject, or even in the classroom itself. It is for this reason that the Framework recommends the integration of citizenship education principles and practices into the entire school structure and supports schools' links with the wider community. This is usually known as a 'whole-school' approach. Concerned as it is with the development of these self-same competences, DCE clearly requires the same 'whole-school' approach. This has important implications for education management and leadership in digital citizenship education. It means creating an institutional environment in which all stakeholders have opportunities to contribute to the development of digital citizenship – teachers, parents and school administration, as well as representatives of the local community and learners themselves. It means identifying opportunities for learning not only in classroom lessons, but across a whole range of school activities – including whole-school events, extra-curricular learning, clubs and recreational possibilities, participation in school governance and decision-making processes, and co-operation with the wider community.

The application of a 'whole-school' approach calls for a high level of coordination within schools and education institutions. Quality digital citizenship education depends on the bringing together of a wide range of different stakeholders and activities, including:

- policy development;
- curriculum;
- classroom and school rules;
- technological infrastructure and support;
- teaching and learning processes;
- learner voice;
- parental involvement;
- community partnerships;
- monitoring, evaluation and school improvement;
- professional development.

The most effective means of coordinating the stakeholders and activities involved will vary from place to place, depending on the nature of the school system and the human resources available. Co-ordination strategies include giving responsibility for digital citizenship education to a senior school leader or member of the school management team, setting up a school support team (with the option of including student digital leaders), or appointing a lead teacher or school digital policy officer.

Pedagogy and teaching and learning methods

The sorts of teaching and learning methods most effective for digital citizenship education are recommended in the Framework. Digital citizenship education and the Framework share the same goal – equipping learners with the competences required for participation in a culture of democracy – and so require the same kind of pedagogical approach.

As suggested by the Framework, no one teaching method will be appropriate for all the competences. The competences described in the Framework are of different kinds – values and attitudes, as well as skills, knowledge and critical understanding – and these are acquired by learners in different ways. What is required for digital citizenship education, therefore, is not a single 'one-size-fits-all' teaching method but a dedicated set of learning strategies that takes account of the distinctive characteristics of the different kinds of competence in the Framework.

However, as has already been observed, the competences are rarely separable in real life. They are typically acquired in groups or clusters. And, as observed, the competences are dynamic – they describe what a person does. The most appropriate learning strategies in digital citizenship education, therefore, are likely to be ones that actively involve learners in real-life 'democratic situations'. This suggests a general pedagogical approach which is essentially 'active' in nature, and based on forms of learning that are:

- *experiential* – learning by doing;
- *task-based* – problem-solving, inquiries, or project work;

- *collaborative* – working with others, in groups or teams;
- *interactive* – discussion and dialogue;
- *participative* – actively involved in own learning process;
- *contextual* – making a difference to school or community life.

In digital citizenship education, the focus is on the evolving digital world, and its implications for democracy and citizenship. The 'democratic situations' which form the basis of children's and young people's citizenship learning in DCE are the digital issues, problems and events that arise in the world they inhabit – in their families, schools and communities, as well as globally. For example, learners might reflect on the consequences of excessive screen use for the health and well-being of young people, on their school's policy on personal devices or remote learning, or on digital access for elderly people in their community. Where authentic experience is impossible or impractical, learners can be presented with imaginary scenarios, case studies and simulations.

For practical purposes, the repertoire of strategies and methods used for developing learners' competences for democratic culture in digital citizenship education can be condensed into a number of simple maxims or formulae, or short checklists – see Figure 4.

Maxims, formulae and checklists like this can have a number of uses. As a professional development tool, they can help teachers of all subjects and disciplines to understand how they can contribute to their learners' citizenship education. As a planning tool, they can help teachers and others to plan digital citizenship learning activities. As an evaluation tool, they can be used to monitor standards in digital citizenship teaching and learning.

While, in principle, DCE does not require any particular access to technology, in practice 'hands-on' familiarity with technologies featured in learning can help to make that learning real for learners. Digital technologies can also be used to support learning more directly, for example, by facilitating collaboration, the expression of opinion, discussion, negotiation and opportunities for social action.

Figure 4 – Checklist for planning and evaluating digital citizenship learning activities

Six Key Elements that Distinguish Digital Citizenship Learning Activities

Designed around a current issue, problem or event related to digital citizenship.

Help to understand more about the digital dimensions of our world and what it means to be a citizen of an increasingly digitalised society.

Enable to interact and explore ideas about the world together, in particular its digital aspects.

Allow to express beliefs and opinions about digitalisation and the digital transformation.

Encourage to arrive at common understandings or positions through negotiation about the digital environment.

Give the opportunity to change the digital environment through their actions – in or out of school, online or offline.

Assessment of learning

As with pedagogy, the approach to assessment in DCE is essentially the same as that recommended in the Framework and follows the same principles.[50]

This includes the type of assessment methods that are employed, such as surveys and questionnaires, observations and documentation, performance assessments, portfolios, diaries and journals, interviews, focus groups and simulations. By employing various assessment methods, educators can gain a more comprehensive understanding of learners' digital citizenship learning and tailor instruction and future interventions accordingly. In a digital age, it is important to take advantage of what technology can bring to assessment and feedback to learners. Incorporating technology into the assessment process enables learners to present their learning in a wider range of formats, demonstrates their democratic competence in authentic settings, and captures competence learning that is less amenable to traditional assessment methods, such as peer interaction, group performance and collaboration.[51]

The process of assessment itself, including the competences assessed and the methods used to assess them, is ultimately a local one and depends on local factors. This includes decisions about the sorts of behaviour that are to count as evidence for competence development, the 'descriptors'. As previously noted, the descriptors in the Framework, like the competences for democratic culture, need to be understood as generic: they do not presuppose any specific context. They have to be adapted to meet the demands of different situations.[52] In DCE, this means adapting the descriptors to meet the demands of a society shaped and influenced by digital technologies, for example, by taking account of the proliferation of false and misleading information on social media and the internet – see Table 5.

Table 5 – Suggestions of descriptors appropriate for assessing learning about disinformation

Descriptors	Competences
Can describe different types of online information disorder: disinformation, misinformation, mal-information, propaganda, parody/satire. Can explain the difference between fabricated content, manipulated content, and false context. Can explain some of the social consequences of spreading disinformation. Can give examples of disinformation relating to current issues.	Knowledge and critical understanding of the media.

50. Council of Europe (2018). RFCDC Volume 3, Chapter 3 'CDC and assessment', pp.51-74.
51. https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/education/documents/researchreview.pdf Assessment in a Digital Age: A research review, Oldfield et al 2012
52. See earlier section on relation between RFCDC and DCE.

Can check and assess the reliability of a piece of online information.	Analytical and critical thinking skills.
Can explain what they should do if they come across disinformation online.	Civic mindedness.
Can understand the implications of using AI and AI-based technology.	Critical thinking.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Guidance document has elaborated on the many interconnections between the RFCDC and DCE and how the Framework can be usefully applied to the digital environment to help learners develop as democratic citizens within the context of a digital society. Digital citizenship education provides learners with the competences they need to become responsible citizens in a world shaped by digital technology, and for this, the RFCDC provides a vital educational resource.

As highlighted in Section 3 on implications for educational policy and practice, all education stakeholders can contribute to this goal. To be able to do so, they need first to understand the basics of digital citizenship education - who it is for, what it is for and how it is taught. Once acquainted with this, there are a number of ways stakeholders can support DCE, depending on their professional roles or relationship with the education process.

As set out in the DCE Recommendation (2019), there are actions which all stakeholders can undertake to advance digital citizenship education. This Guidance document focuses on how such actions can be enhanced by a deeper understanding of the contribution the RFCDC makes to digital citizenship.

- *Policymakers*, for example, can emphasise the importance of the competences for democratic culture in reviewing existing practices and arrangements relating to DCE. Policies incorporating DCE into education should be developed as a whole-school activity with the monitoring of standards of DCE provision in education based on the concept of a whole-school approach.
- *Curriculum developers* can establish learning objectives for DCE curricula aligned with the model competences in the RFCDC and national priorities and ensure breadth and balance in the content of DCE curricula through the incorporation of the 10 DCE digital domains. Instructional material for DCE can be created based on real-life 'democratic situations' and active teaching and learning methods.
- *Education leaders and managers* can contribute to establish a coherent vision and policy for DCE in their institutions, and foster an institutional environment supportive of the aims and purposes of DCE, including through policy on the use of technology, and remote and hybrid forms of learning. Competences for democratic culture can be fostered through involving learners in policy and practice development in DCE, for example through students' voice and student representative bodies.

- *Teachers* in adopting a pedagogical approach supportive of DCE learning, can involve learners in decisions relating to the use of digital technologies in their classrooms, model responsible digital citizenship behaviour in their own use of digital media, and assist with out-of-classroom activities relating to DCE, for example through clubs or student councils.
- *Teacher educators* contribute to fulfilling the objectives of DCE through encouraging active forms of pedagogy and the use of real life digital issues in training on teaching and learning in DCE practice. They can also help teachers learn how to identify opportunities for DCE learning in their own curricular areas.
- *Parents* can talk with their children about current digital issues affecting them and their peers. They can also volunteer their expertise to help enrich their school's DCE programmes; while collaborating with other parents and organisations to advocate for the importance of DCE in education.
- Finally, *learners* can reflect on the effects of digital technology in their lives and the lives of their communities; involve themselves in debates and decisions relating to policy and practice on digital technology in their schools and education institutions; support peers who have difficulty with digital media, and campaign for better access to DCE for young people globally.

Final remarks

The RFCDC and DCE are, as described in this Guidance document, separate but complementary developments. A central aim of the document has been to show how the competences for democratic culture, outlined in the Framework, may be used to underpin digital citizenship education in classroom settings. A clear understanding of interconnections between the RFCDC and the DCE and coordinated efforts of all education stakeholders will help to develop relevant educational practice and strengthen the role of schools as agents of personal empowerment and democratic social culture at a time when developing such competences is of the highest priority.

APPENDIX – REFERENCES AND FURTHER RESOURCES

Legal instruments

Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on developing and promoting digital citizenship education. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/recommendation-on-developing-and-promoting-digital-citizenship-education

Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cf01f

Publications

Council of Europe. (2018). *Reference framework of competences for democratic culture. Volume 1: Descriptors of competences for democratic culture*. Council of Europe.

Council of Europe. (2018). *Reference framework of competences for democratic culture. Volume 2: Descriptors of competences for democratic culture*. Council of Europe.

Council of Europe. (2018). *Reference framework of competences for democratic culture. Volume 3: Guidance for implementation*. Council of Europe.

Richardson, J., & Milovidov, E. (2017). *Digital citizenship education Volume 2: Multi-stakeholder consultation report*. Council of Europe.

Frau-Meigs, D., O'Neill, B., Soriani, A., & Tomé, V. (2017). *Digital Citizenship Education Volume 1: Overview and new perspectives*. Council of Europe.

Richardson, J., & Milovidov, E. (2019). *Digital citizenship education handbook: Being online, well-being online, rights online*. Council of Europe.

Web resources

Digital citizenship education (DCE). Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/home

DCE for Policy Makers. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/digital-citizenship-education/policy-makers

Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture

RFCDC, Guidance for implementation. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/guidance-for-implementation

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