Participation Now!
Citizenship Education and Democracy in Times of Change

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NECE Focus Group: Citizenship Education with
Hard to Reach Learners

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Participants:
Christoph Müller-Hofstede, Federal Agency for Civic Education, Germany
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Bekim Agai, Project Head; Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-University of Bonn Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies; Department of Islamic Studies; BMBF-Project „Europe from the outside“, Germany
Harald Weilnboeck, Project Coordinator, 'Culture Interactive', Berlin
Tatjana Mejvogel Volk, ProDemos, Den Haag
Boudris Belaid, Fes, Morocco
Elia Petridou, Cyprus

Minutes of the Kick-off Meeting of the Focus Group

Christoph Müller-Hofstede explained the purpose and aims of this new instrument, which is aimed at consolidating the NECE network between the yearly conferences around specific topics and fields of expertise. The issue of 'hard to reach learners' in citizenship education was the focus of the NECE conference in Warsaw, November 2011 on 'Closing the empowerment gap through citizenship education: How to address educationally disadvantaged groups'. For documents of this conference go to: http://www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/netzwerke/nece/66270/closing-the-empowerment-gap-through-citizenship-education
The focus group (FG) on “Hard to Reach Learners” should act as a knowledge base regarding approaches and methods as well as conceptual frameworks, which are available to reach out to this specific target group. The FG has several options for organizing its task:

1. An online tool with a database on important projects, research findings and material as well as best practice reports will be available at www.nece.eu. This tool will be implemented and coordinated by Christoph Müller-Hofstede.
2. There are also funds available to organize a European workshop within the year 2013 not only for the focus group but including other people (beyond the current participants)

Professional background and interests of the members in joining the FG:

**Christoph Müller-Hofstede** is project leader of the "Dialogue at school" format run by the Federal Agency for Civic Education and the Robert Bosch Foundation. It has been tried out and evaluated for several years now and will be continued in the future to reach out to young people with a multicultural background. He has studied Sinology and Political Science in Berlin, Peking, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

**Dr. Bekim Agai** works at Bonn University and already participated in seminars of the Federal Agency for Civic Education. Some of his students are coming from immigrant families. Bekim Agai wants to find out ways and ideas on how to inspire youth (and reach out to them).

**Dr. Harald Weilnböck** is active in social and media research. Worked for projects with young people, financed by the EU. Harald Weilnböck is a psychotherapist; he works in Berlin and in the East German States (Bundesländer) with young people, who are hard to reach for anyone who represents anything like the state or the middle class or the elite. They are hard to speak with because they don’t speak very easily to anyone. Even teachers or colleagues who have a background on education do not have the sufficient “tools” for reaching out to this youth. Therefore a lot of creativity and innovation is needed. There are some model projects financed or co-financed by the EU and the Federal Government of Germany. The most important one is here: http://www.violence-prevention-network.de/projekte-mainmenu-37/enod

The aim is de-radicalisation of young people who for various reasons have turned to radical groups either in right wing milieus or islamist/ salafist milieus. One group is on prevention and early intervention (within schools?)

**Tatjana Mejvogel-Volk** works for ProDemos in The Hague (the Netherlands). ProDemos is one of the partners within the NECE network and co-organizers of the conference. Prodemos has a significant involvement in schools and youth milieus and works within the migrant community in order to explain aspects and the workings of Dutch politics to them. The question arising for ProDemos is how they reach out to Dutch people who are not organized.

**Siamak Ahmadi** is a psychologist, trained in England. He works as a moderator/ facilitator and coordinator of the 'Dialogue at School' project run and financed by the Federal Agency for Civic Education and the Robert Bosch Foundation. (For more information: www.dialogmachtschule.de). Siamak Ahmadi likes the bottom up approach of this project, which he describes as follows: Two moderators, who divide the class and moderate the group for two years in weekly sessions. Part of the ethics class. The idea is that these weekly sessions should have a sustainable impact on the lives of the youth. Each session is of 90 minutes duration. The idea is to try to understand the students, see their needs, identify how/
what they think what they want to talk about. The basic fundamental issue of this work is trust, and once trust is built, the topics emerge organically. The basic idea is to build bridges from these 'private' and 'pop-cultural' topics to the field of politics.

Katharina Müller has a Master Degree in Political Science from the University of Cologne specialising in European studies. She, too, works as a Dialogue moderator in the Dialogue at School project. Her motivation is based on own experiences within EU networks and agencies. She sees the project as a way to help people, who have not these capacities neither from the family nor from the school, acting as citizens. She, too, stresses, that the trust building process is most important. She suggests the FG could try to find a way to standardize trust building processes, building on the experiences gathered in the FG and relevant scientific research.

Boudris Belaid, Fes (Morocco), is a trainer of teachers who will eventually start a career as supervisor of teachers. His field is philosophy of education and didactics of philosophy. He is an activist of the Moroccan Organization of Human Rights and interested on how to use the ordinary language of the people especially in rural areas to help them develop critical thinking.

Elia Petridou, Cyprus
She works in the field of global education. She is interested to hear of ideas on how to reach teachers (her hard to reach group are actually teachers).

Summary of discussion and recommendations
Several key issues emerged from the discussion that followed:
- There was a significant agreement on the need to discuss the role of emotions in reaching out to hard to reach target groups. The pedagogical context of this issue is the 'basic need' of trust building and of building up stable and lasting relationships between the moderator/teacher and the 'target group'. Discussion, yet it is not yet clear in the group as to how this could be introduced.
- Another challenging issue is apparently the need (and the capacities needed) to translate the codes of (for example) socially disadvantaged youth in order to break down concepts into segments that they can understand and relate to.
- A related question could be: How to use the research on an elementary curriculum of citizenship education (mostly done in Germany) for reaching out to hard to reach learners?
- Another important issue raised by participants concerns the need to formulate aims and methods for evaluating the social effectiveness of projects in this field? How can evaluation and the cooperation with academic experts integrated in the project design without 'getting lost' in details and abstract aspects of the academic discourse?

Procedures next steps
- The minute of the kick off meeting will be put on the website nece.eu and sent to participants asking them for additional proposals.
- The group will have to choose /to pick one of the key issues and questions which can be considered the most relevant (or burning) one.
- A discussion on how to identify relevant sub-topics and research questions should follow either online or via a skype conference or via a preparatory workshop.
- As a result a concrete plan to organize a transnational workshop on this topic should be designed. The workshop should include other activists and experts who are able to significantly contribute to the workshop. Christoph Müller-Hofstede as the coordinator would apply for funds re: venue, travel, honorarium and overhead within the NECE network.