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Paper for Workshop III: Competences in the Media and Information Society

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Learning From History – Online: A Project of Civic Education in Germany

Political and civic education in Germany developed as a result of the Nazi crimes. It was initiated and influenced after 1945 by the Allies, USA, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union and their expectations for denazification and re-education. Despite their own distinctive political cultures, the Allies were basically united, after the capitulation of Nazi Germany, in their belief that democratisation and moral re-education of the German people was just as essential as fundamental political and economic reform. From the Allied point of view, the German educational system had failed because it had complied with Nazi ideology. Democracy required continuing education, encouragement of critical thinking, and basic values – equality and freedom - shared by all members of society. Soviet occupation goals for reform were initially quite similar to those of the Western Allies. They also aimed for as long a phase of unified education as possible, so that class distinctions could be levelled. But with the beginning of the Cold War and the confrontation between East and West, unity came to an end. Separate political cultures developed in the two post-war German states—the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), founded on May 23, 1949, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), founded on October 7, 1949.

The necessity for re-orientation after World War II was also recognized by Germans, and particularly by politicians in the newly created political parties. After 1945, most Germans did not have a positive attitude toward democracy. Even in 1955, an expert's report for the German Education Committee documented lack of identification with politics and political participation in substantial sections of the population. In order to "secure and broaden democratic and European ideas in the German people," the Federal Office for Homeland Matters [since 1963 Federal Agency for Civic Education) was founded in 1952 in the West German capital Bonn as a national educational agency, and both the federal agency and similarly organized agencies in the West German states became responsible for communicating democratic rules and how new government institutions were to operate. While in the FRG democracy was understood as repudiating totalitarianism, whether national socialism or communism, the GDR, in contrast, defined itself as a new state, whose legitimacy derived solely from anti-fascist resistance. In the GDR, education in schools, and state organized youth work remained primarily imposed by the program of the one-party state. Equality was to be accomplished through education for conformity, and individual needs were to be subordinated to the norms of the "true socialist society." This difference of political socialisation can still be traced, even 15 years after the peaceful revolution in the GDR, the fall of the Berlin Wall in the autumn of 1989, and the unification of the two German post-war states on October 3, 1990. The cultural, political, and mental unification is still work in progress.

The Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany is a federal state. Article 70 of the Basic Law grants the sixteen states jurisdiction over education. There are sixteen different education laws and also sixteen different curricula for historical-political education, among others, in the

subjects of history, social studies, civics, and political science. Nevertheless, the federal states cooperate, for instance, to guarantee equivalent standards. The Standing Conference of State Cultural Ministers [KMK] influences state educational policies by general guidelines and recommendations for political education and training. Paragraph 1 of the Berlin school law, whose mandate dates back to the immediate post-war period and the goal of re-education, expresses the consensus of all the federal states then and now:

"The goal must be the education of individuals, capable of standing resolutely against Nazi ideology and all other violent political belief systems. They must also be able to build a state and society based on democracy, peace, freedom, and human dignity. Individuals must be aware of their responsibilities toward society, and their behaviour must recognize the basic equality of rights for all human beings, respect every honest conviction, and understand the necessity for progressive social conditions as well as peaceful understanding among nations."

The economic crisis of 1966-1967, and the student movement of 1967-1968, resulted in growing political involvement in West Germany and required new educational concepts in both school and non-school settings. "Reform from above," the system of political education linked to government and political parties, was vulnerable to criticism. In the 1970s and 1980s, increasing accommodation to the demands of politically mature, self-confident citizens ready for political participation led the federal and state offices to transfer political education and continuing education to independent state-based educational bodies. The programs were mainly directed toward adult disseminators of political education, such as teachers, lecturers, journalists, and representatives of social organizations.

The Role of the Nazi Era and the Holocaust in Civic Education

The memory of the Nazi dictatorship – of which the Holocaust is an integral part – and its traumatic legacies have been shaping German politics to this day. It is discussed again and again in a number of different contexts. The treatment of the Nazi period in all its aspects is compulsory teaching and learning matter in all types of schools in Germany and at all levels of education. The duties of both federal and state offices continue to include the history of the Nazi period, the history, culture, and politics of the state of Israel, and, since 1980, the documentation of memorials to victims of National Socialism in the Federal Republic of Germany. The KMK stresses the necessity to focus intensively on National Socialism and its crimes, because this part of German history is closely bound to basic constitutional values and "the credibility of the Federal Republic as a free and democratic constitutional state.

The Project >Learning from History>

The Website Project www.lernen-aus-der-geschichte.de was initiated in 1995 by the German Fund for Cultural Education at Bonn (Fördergesellschaft Kulturelle Bildung e.V. supported by the Goethe-Institute, the Federal Press- and Information Office, the Foreign Office of Germany, the Robert Bosch Foundation. The international debate after the re-unification of Germany and specifically around the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II had raised fears in Europe and the USA that the legacies of this history, and the memory of the Holocaust in particular could be considered obsolete. At the same time it was not well known internationally that in Germany this period of German history has been an integral part of civic education for decades. The idea for launching this project was to document why and how school history and civic courses as well as non-school institutions and organisations confront this chapter of history. The first multifaceted product was a bi-lingual (English-German) CD-ROM accompanied by a booklet, published in April 2000. The 10.000 copies were distributed free of cost to a broad international educational audience. (CD unavailable since 2001)

Based on an extensive research the CD-ROM presents 50 projects from primary and secondary schools, classes of learning-disabled, vocational training and commercial schools, at memorial sites and youth clubs. It provides a unique and realistic insight into best

practices in classrooms and independent programs for youth in the sixteen German states since 1990.

The projects show the great variety of methodological approaches and the wide range of subjects dealt with interdisciplinary, combining history, art and literature, social studies law and ethics. The projects present the teacher's lesson plan and reflections, the materials used, historical photos, documents, and student products. The CD contains extensive supplementary materials: maps, an elaborate glossary of historical terms, comprehensive bibliographies of historical and educational specialist literature, addresses of memorials and relevant institutions in Germany, that specialized in the subject matters. Like the project texts all the materials can be downloaded for print-out.

This insight into the practice of teaching and learning allows teachers and educators in Europe and around the world to enter into dialogue with German colleagues.

On the basis of this multimedia offline product a complimentary German-English website was launched in February 2001, augmented by a Spanish and Polish Version in 2002 and 2003. An international advisory board of 12 members meets twice a year to decide about new projects and to contribute new ideas for the further development of the project. The Website offers beside the projects news about current events, exhibitions, conferences, new media or publications as well as radio and TV broadcasts. It now presents 57 fully documented projects and 50 short reports about new projects or project plans, posted by users of the website, which are featured in the interactive database, the themes ranging from Holocaust to racism and xenophobia today. The search in *archives* leads to the comprehensive background information, audiovisual materials, bibliographies etc. The *links* icon provides a comprehensive list of links to relevant web addresses and most important, teachers and students are invited under *post your project* to publish their project outline and establish contact to potential partners for cooperation.

Since 2001 the numbers of website users from around the globe have risen from a few thousand to between 130.000 to 140.000 per month. According to a survey and evaluation of users' requests, the downloading of teaching material is the most attractive offer.

A new perspective has been opened this month by beginning a special and intensive Cooperation and exchange of experience with Poland. The partner in Warsaw, KARTA, a foundation with broad experience in civic education, will open its independent website editorial for school projects in Poland. Close cooperation between the German and Polish editorial staff will help to promote school partnerships, facilitate youth encounters, excursions to memorials and binational teacher training.