

NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

NECE Workshop: The Impacts of National Identities for European Integration as a Focus of Citizenship Education

Project Example

Facing changes: how can history remain relevant?

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History is not just an (academic) field of knowledge or a neutral school subject. It cannot be separated from the identities and motives of those who produce and disseminate representations and narratives of the past and it should not be separated from the identities and needs of those who (are supposed to) consume it. Without the idea that history contributed to educating citizens in the European nation-states, history would probably not have become such a basic element in the curriculum of various schools. It is not a coincidence that history appeared in school classes during the nineteenth and early twentieth century when nationalism was very strong across the continent. But in later decades less emphasis was placed on the importance of knowledge about heroic deeds from the national past.

European unification, globalization as well as the development of multicultural society - developments which haven't become more popular over the years - have recently affected the way in which the content and meaning of history is regarded. For instance, in the Netherlands there is nowadays a fairly strong tendency to propagate the importance of the national past. On request of the Dutch government, a national historical canon has been compiled for educational purposes and preparations are made for a national historical museum. These (re)presentations of the pasts are especially targeted at the substantial number of migrants in Dutch society. The question needs to be addressed how useful such historical presentations with their explicit national framework are in a world where national borders seem to become less and less relevant. Educating today's citizens, with their diversity in cultural background and with their increasingly transnational outlook, might profit from a more diverse approach.