

Editorial. Europe as an Educational Framework: Cultures, Values and Dialogues

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The reality of Europe is that it comprises diverse cultures, with different ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. However, over and above these characteristics, there is common ground which is accepted, in theory at least, by its citizens and politicians. This basis may be summarized as: human rights and universal citizenship. This common base allows for and facilitates that frequently controversial political, social and civic dialogue which is the foundation on which a common European identity may be built.

European identity synthesizes and integrates the national feeling of the individual into the wider element of being Europeans, and, more generally, into being citizens of the global village. This national, European and international confluence and coexistence can only be possible if, in addition to personal references and the standards of our own nations, we accept those superior values which are common to all human beings by the mere fact of being a person with dignity: such is the coherence of the standards of human rights. However, occasionally, these universal references collide with national ones, and complicate the construction of this common European identity, as it means overcoming differences in order to favor what unites the different nations.

On this subject, education is the key to promoting approval of common values and features above individual features among citizens. Thus education can transmit and integrate what is universal and what is individual, and find unity from diversity. Education can arouse a feeling of common European identity, which does not only mean the transmission of knowledge, but also adhesion to values and the acquisition of skills and habits. In order to educate in this common European sentiment, we must, among other matters, be aware of European history in depth – both the past and more recent events; to find its roots; to recognize the present systems of justice and law, together with the workings of the different European Union political organizations: the Council of Europe, European Parliament, etc. But in order to promote European identity, knowledge is not enough, we must also transmit values (freedom, equality, tolerance, pluralism, etc.) and these must become civic habits and values. This knowledge, values and habits will be complemented by the acquisition of different skills, particularly participative and communicative ones. Therefore we could say that education helps to form the common European identity of each individual, on the basis of human rights and the common good.

From the perspective of the different articles, this monographic issue tackles the question of how education can contribute to the construction of a European identity in several areas, including the media. The issue is divided into seven chapters.

The first article is by Marianna Papastephanou and is titled: “The Vision of a Future Europe: Infectious or Infected? The position of Education”. The author outlines those educational proposals which may promote the concept of a unified, just Europe. To support these proposals, she uses the contributions of Habermas and Derrida.

Then, Javier Vergara, with the title “The History of Europe and its Constituent Countries: Considerations in Favour of the New Europe”, analyses the European development process. The article is divided into three parts. Firstly, he deals with the development of Christianity in the formation of European identity. Then he comments on the need to create a united Europe that will go beyond nationalistic perspectives. Finally, he explains how European inter-culturalism, to generate true dialogue, requires ethical and educational commitment.

The article by Mendo Castro Henriques called “Civil Society as a Network of Communities”, defines civil society as a communications network of private origin with a public aim. It would be an entity where the states, international organizations and the citizens could interact and negotiate on interests and values, always for the common good. The author considers that a civil community typology can be constructed using four functions that he calls the three C’s: care, culture, capital and citizenship. The major role of these civic communities is fostered by progress, reason and individuality.

Subsequently, Fausto Colombo and Piermarco Aroldi present an article entitled “Generational Belonging and Mediascape in Europe”, where they consider how interpersonal relationships can be strengthened through the media. They emphasize how certain products can unite generations of people who share a cultural heritage. The article concludes by suggesting that the common European culture can be promoted through institutional strategies that can be spread by the mass media.

Luisa Ribolzi in her "Between Inclusion and Marginality. The Role of Education in Migrant Children", analyses how, through education policies and permanent education, we can transmit the idea of European citizenship based on the values of individual freedom, equality, tolerance and personal dignity without consideration of gender, religion, race or social class. The author does not believe the task is simple, given the heterogeneity of Europe, driven by growing immigration that increases the complexity of communities. On this matter, she emphasizes how education can, simultaneously, be a means of exclusion or a tool for inclusion and social mobility. Thus the concept of citizenship, in association with that of participation, cooperation and tolerance, is crucial in promoting integration.

In his "Educate on European identity?" Enrique Banús considers that the current interest in promoting a "European identity" shows how far the citizens are from the European project, and that, at times, this distance has hindered the very development of the project. Here Banús makes a critical evaluation of this phenomenon and finds the problem is related to the concept of collective identity. The author differentiates between identity and identification, underlines the relevance of the latter concept and wonders how to put this identification into practice through education. Finally, he also emphasizes the importance of understanding of cultural heritage.

In the article named "On the Margins of Europe: Citizenship Education and Identity in Cyprus", Stavroula Philippou raises the question of how the tensions due to national identity in Cyprus could be eased through the concept of Europe, developed within the educational area. Education in European citizenship, as well as in human rights and democracy, may become a tool to promote reflection and dialogue on citizenship and the Greek-Cypriot identity.

This monographic issue concludes with an article by Concepción Naval and Charo Sádaba: "How the media can collaborate in the development of youth participation". The authors emphasize the educational potential of the media for the development of communicative and participative proficiency, as an essential part of civic education. Having described the situation in Spain, which suffers from a certain lack of social participation, the text gives an account of the educational policies on citizenship undertaken in Spain in the last 15 years. These legal initiatives have helped to improve the before-mentioned lack of social participation. Later the article tackles the relationship between the media and civic participation, and analyzes the relationship between young Spaniards and the media in order to discover whether, through them, positive attitudes of social participation can be created.

Thanks to the contributions of the different authors, this monographic issue "Europe as an Educational Framework. Cultures, Values, and Dialogues", discusses the idea that through education we can: contribute to the development of a unified Europe; facilitate European intercultural dialogue; build civil communities; transmit the idea of European citizenship based on the values of freedom, equality and tolerance; assist in the formation of a common European identity based on human rights and democracy, which may reduce tensions of national identity.

Thus, we will conclude by saying that the different cultures and values in Europe give shape to the civic conscience of its citizens, and are the foundation for the construction of its common identity. Europe, apart from an economic and political significance, has a spiritual, social and educational significance. Therefore, the idea of Europe has educational potential. Despite its distinct features, there is common socio-cultural ground shaped by a basic element: the absolute value of dignity and human rights. The existence of a coherent identity, with shared traditions and aims are important elements in the process of European integration.

We hope that the publication of this issue will bring about dialogue between the different cultures and values that Europe, at this point in time, encourages as part of its educational framework.

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