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Council of Europe Working Conference “Competences in action”

**Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture:
moving towards a competence-based approach
to teaching and learning**

**Florence
14-15 November 2019**

Background Note





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Council of Europe

Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) **& Democratic Schools Network**

Education is crucial to developing the democratic culture that democratic institutions and societies need to function in practice¹. The Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) offers a systematic approach to educational processes at all levels by introducing in the education system the kind of competences for democratic culture children and young people should develop at different levels of formal education in a coherent and comprehensive way.

It aims to assist in the preparation for lifelong active democratic citizenship of all learners in education and training by equipping them with the necessary competences (values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding) that will enable them to engage as active citizens in democratic and diverse societies.

To perform well their role as the preparatory micro-systems for democratic culture, schools of all levels need to be strengthened and empowered to exercise this role in a meaningful way.

The objective of the current phase of the Council of Europe RFCDC is to support its implementation at national, regional and European level, with particular focus on assisting educational practitioners as well as supporting institutional settings that would favour such initiatives.

Schools are increasingly seen as places where solutions to problems or everyday concerns may be developed, tested and adapted to specific circumstances. They potentially promote the concept of democratic school culture by the content taught, and by training, information, practices and activities aimed at enabling the development of values, attitudes and skills. They also potentially build up knowledge and critical understanding that strengthens students' capacity to exercise and defend their democratic rights and assume responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active role in democratic life with the aim of promoting and defending democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In this respect, the Council of Europe Democratic Schools Network brings together schools from across Europe to share their practices and learn from each other how democracy and human rights can be better developed as a day-to-day practice in schools. The members of this Network implement the RFCDC and further disseminate their experience with a view to identifying and promoting good practice and addressing any difficulty encountered.

¹ Rec CM/Rec (2012)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on ensuring quality education



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The Conference

Given the importance of strengthening and further developing democratic culture in schools by involving all actors in a whole-school approach, the Council of Europe is advocating a competence-based approach to teaching and learning, with its Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture as the main tool.

This conference will contribute to introducing this approach in practice by offering specific feedback and training on the RFCDC to practitioners from schools across Europe. It will bring together academics, experts, teacher trainers, teachers and school representatives, and offer a forum for discussing achievements as well as challenges in the RFCDC implementation. The implementation of the RFCDC through participatory pedagogical methods for fostering the competence-based approach to teaching and learning will also be introduced in practice. The conference will also link to the Democratic Schools Network and the important work done on Competences for Democratic Culture and other EDC/HRE² themes in schools across Europe by presenting and highlighting their practices.

The two-day event will be structured in plenary sessions/ panel discussions/ interactive exchanges and parallel workshops.

The first day plenary session work will focus on the key role of the RFCDC in building a democratic school culture, followed by an induction on the RFCDC tools (Descriptors, Portfolio, Reflection Tool) in parallel rotating workshops. Discussions will continue with an interactive exchanges session which will look at the place of the RFCDC in schools as a common ground for connecting, sharing experience and discussing practices. Concrete examples from school practices and lessons learned will be presented and discussed and meaningful practices will be identified and disseminated.

On the second day, the plenary session discussions will address the importance of participatory pedagogical methods for fostering the competence-based approach to teaching and learning. The parallel workshops to follow will deal with a) the importance of the Service-Learning Approach for enhancing students' empowerment and undertaking of responsibilities within school communities, b) improving critical thinking for addressing controversial issues through participatory methods and strategic communication and dialogue, and c) techniques suitable for improving well-being and resilience at schools. All participatory pedagogical methods will link to the RFCDC and the themes of the "Free to Speak, Safe to Learn-Democratic Schools for All" project.

An exhibition of school practices will run during the first day of the conference.

² Education for Democratic citizenship and Human Rights Education



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Partners

The event is organised in cooperation between the Council of Europe - through its Education Department/Education Policy Division - and the University of Firenze, through its Department of Education, Languages, Intercultures, Literatures and Psychology (FORLILPSI), which will also be hosting the event.

The University of Florence is an important and influential institution for higher education and research. It offers a wide range of study programmes at various levels and in all areas of knowledge. It is one of the largest and most productive public research systems in Italy and represents a modern research university which among other things accounts for its excellent position in national and world rankings.

In particular, FORLILPSI is an interdisciplinary department that embraces research areas ranging from the sciences of education and psychology to languages, philology and literature. The purpose of the Department is to conduct research and to promote training courses in the area of relationships between languages, cultures, minds, behaviours, training and education, investigated in relation to texts and contexts and to the spatial and temporal dimension. The Department is based on four axes: integrated teaching; interculturality; interdisciplinarity; promotion of well-being and education.

The European Wergeland Centre (EWC) and the Zürich University of Teacher Education, which are ongoing cooperation partners to the Council of Europe “Free to Speak, Safe to Learn” project, will also contribute their specific expertise and facilitate the involvement of schools and other stakeholders from their networks.