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MED-23-7

Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education

“Education for Sustainable Democratic Societies: the Role of Teachers”

23rd session

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 4-5 June 2010

Introduction to sub-theme C: Partnerships and
networking in Education



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Education is a social activity which involves virtually all sectors, all types of institutions and public policies. Educational problems cannot be reduced and are not solved by solutions that are limited to precise pedagogic approaches, no matter how relevant they are. Whether we refer to drop out, to access to quality education, to the education of migrant children or to adult education, all have social and civic implications which make necessary partnerships, networking and intersectoral policies.

What are partnerships?

There is no standard definition of partnerships, although the word is more and more frequently used with respect to the implementation of public policies. Forming partnerships is, more often than not, a spontaneous and pragmatic activity, linked to some problems that need to be solved, rather than a precise conceptual approach.

Nevertheless, the common meaning of partnerships is that of *association* of some institutions, organisations, groups or people in order to obtain mutual benefits from sharing expertise, experience and resources. It is a democratic form of association, formed for an overarching common purpose, where the contribution and the identity of each partner is clearly defined and acknowledged. Partnerships are *temporary settings* whose functioning is limited to the duration of the cooperation agreement and to a well-determined operational context. The term which is generally used is *partnerships*, because there is a great diversity of association forms and contexts.

Why do we need partnerships?

Partnerships are built for immediate concrete purposes. They are *pragmatic* and *"ecological"*, in the sense that they are set up in order to solve a concrete proximity problem which is of interest to several institutions, organisations, groups or people.

Each participant expects some added value or benefits in terms of knowledge, problem-solving or implementation capacity. Unlike bureaucratic or technological structures, partnerships imply mutual trust, equality, two-way communication, shared values, common ownership and different perspective.

Who participates in partnerships?

Each actor of the public policy arena is entitled to create partnerships and to participate in existing or emerging partnerships. The most frequent associations are those between state structures and civil society organisations, due to their complementarity.

In education, partnerships can involve central and regional administration (ministries, inspectorates, territorial structures), municipalities, specialized agencies (e.g. centres for curriculum development, institutes for teacher training, research institutions, national services for evaluation and quality assurance), trade unions and professional associations, organisations of social partners, parents and students associations, teachers federations and individual schools. In our context, we are not so much interested in partnerships which involve individual actors (representative voices, charismatic leaders, opinion formers), but rather in the association of *collective actors*.

Types of partnerships

Partnerships are diverse and context-related. Partnerships do not have one single form; there is rather a very dynamic *continuum*, in keeping with the participants' interests. According to Hartley and Huddleston¹, there are five levels of this dynamic continuum of partnerships (see table), the most advanced form being *civic partnerships*. The latter are the most sustainable and efficient ones, because they are values-bounded and aim at solving problems related to citizenship, management of diversity and intercultural dialogue (that is to say, the problematic area assumed by the Council of Europe as a human rights organisation).

Levels of partnership

Level 1 : Exchange	Sharing information or goods
Level 2: Dialogue	Seeking to understand
Level 3: Networks	Formation of associations with shared interests
Level 4: Partnerships	Working together towards a common goal and, ideally, a common purpose
Level 5:Civic Partnerships	Partnerships that address social problems and build democracy

How are partnerships built and how do they function?

Like any form of cooperation, partnerships start from the decision of two or more different bodies to join their efforts, expertise and resources to obtain a common good or to solve a problem of mutual interest. This association can be formal or informal, temporary or sustainable (e.g. the social partnership structures involved in the development of vocational education and training (VET) curricula or continuing vocational adult education). Irrespective of the concrete form and duration of these associations (exchanges, alliances, coalitions, networks or common projects), building partnerships imply concrete goals shared by all participants, a clear definition of roles and division of labour, the establishment of mutual communication and decision-making schemes, a definition of group norms, as well as setting procedures for self-evaluation, transparency and public responsibility.

How to involve teachers, head teachers and other educational professionals?

Partnerships are beneficial at all levels and in all contexts of the educational practice. Teachers, head teachers and other educational professionals (advisors, counsellors, mediators, trainers) play an important role in forming and carrying out partnerships.

To this end, teachers must be empowered and trained, so that they can act as social players. This involves a propensity towards social dialogue and working together, corporate management skills, openness to democratic values and shared responsibility, as well as competences for collective action and project development.

¹ M. Hartley, T. Huddleston, *Civic Partnerships for a Sustainable Democracy: A Guide to School-Community-University Cooperation*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 2009, p. 14.

From the standpoint of policy makers, this implies a *new outlook on the teaching profession*, which should go beyond the narrow disciplinary training, ex-cathedra teaching and individualistic transmission of knowledge.

This outlook must be such that teachers become active participants in the public arena, sensitive to social problems and community development, fully involved in democratic life and collective knowledge production.

It is a new perspective on the teaching profession, essential in order to have sustainable democratic societies, which is the main theme of the 23rd Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education.

From the point of view of the participants to this Conference, partnerships and networking can be dealt with on two levels: public policies and school governance.

With respect to *public policies*, the claim for partnership and cooperation is not new. The Council of Europe study on Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) policies in Europe², for instance, shows that there is a shift from sectoral approaches to multisectoral policies, from one-department responsibilities to transversal approaches, from the centre to the outskirts. The old vertical / bureaucratic model tends to be complemented by an approach which uses effectively the diversity of competences and the problem-solving capacity of multiple actors. This leads to new forms of policy development, such as partnerships, networks, intersectoral projects or corporate policy schemes.

In the spirit of these conclusions, during the European Year of Citizenship through Education (2005), organised by the Council of Europe in cooperation with member states, different partnership schemes in the field of education for democratic citizenship were adopted, such as:

- integrated national plans to promote EDC (Poland, Malta, Romania);
- intersectoral councils (Turkey, Bulgaria);
- large-scale programs on values, democracy and participation (Norway, Czech Republic);
- local area partnerships (Ireland);
- inter-agency programs (Norway, UK – England).

These ad-hoc partnerships, dedicated to issues that are particular to the Council of Europe (citizenship and human rights education, social inclusion, intercultural dialogue) are supplemented by the existing consultative bodies attached to most ministries of education in Europe, such as the social partnership structures in each German *Länder* or the Conseil de l'Education et de la Formation (Belgium – French Community).

What is particular to these flexible inter-institutional arrangements is the fact that they focus on actual issues, not on rigid administrative structures. Their goal is to involve a wide range of interest groups and to guarantee a fairly inclusive policy of stakeholder representation.

² All-European Study on Education for Democratic Citizenship Policies, Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing, 2004, pp. 48-49.

Another example is the recommendation made by the 5th Prague Forum (November 2008), organised by the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Czech authorities. On this occasion, it was assessed that the competences and resources of the ministries of education are not sufficient to implement the right to quality education. Even if they have a leading role concerning education policies, the actual achievement of the right to quality education is not possible without the support of civil society, parents or administrative bodies devoted to Social Policies, Culture, Youth, Family Affairs, Labour, Health or Home Affairs.

Such partnership and participative settings must function not only at the level of central authorities, but also at regional and local level. Educational institutions (Kindergarten, school, university, youth and adult education centres) contribute directly to the development of partnerships and networks. In the past few years, the Council of Europe has been promoting *democratic governance* in educational institutions as an important method for quality assurance. In this respect, in 2005, a work instrument called “Democratic Governance of Schools” was launched and implemented on a large scale by means of the network of national EDC coordinates and the “Pestalozzi” program for in-service teacher training. Another interesting example is the ongoing project on “EDC partnerships for social change”, which aims at building sustainable partnerships among schools, universities and communities, devoted to proximity problems such as the integration of the poor and excluded, whether they are children, youth or adults. The participating institutions use jointly their resources, expertise and experience: for instance, the practical training of Medicine, Law and Social Work students takes place in deprived communities, in the form of assistance to needy people and families. In turn, schools, students and teachers take part in voluntary work, in the form of non-formal education projects. The local community and authorities provide a public policies approach and offer training and learning opportunities for pupils and students.

These approaches involve more flexible relationships, focused on actual problems and joint projects among various partners. They are accomplished by means of another type of leadership and participative management, which involves co-opting experts and decision-makers from outside the education system, at least for the projects and activities which are the subject of the cooperation.

Guiding questions for debate

1. Based on your experience, which forms of partnerships and democratic governance do you recommend for implementing citizenship education, intercultural dialogue and management of diversity? How can you recognise, endorse and stimulate partnerships at various policy levels?
2. What kind of support might the Council of Europe offer in this area and how could the Council be put in a position to provide this support?
3. How should the educational staff be trained in order to take part in partnerships and support the democratic governance of educational institutions?

Illustrative case from Sweden

Universities Regional Engagement in Regional Settings in Sweden and the Case of the National Centre of Lifelong Learning (Encell), Jönköping University

Ann-Kristin Boström, Mohamed Chaib, Helene Ahl, Christina Chaib, Ingela Bergmo Prvulovic, Rune Petterson

The Swedish government has placed emphasis on lifelong learning since the end of the 1960s. In 1968 professor Torsten Husén published his article “*Lifelong Learning in the Educative Society*” where he discussed formal education in relation to vocational education and foresaw that the future would require a longer period of formal education and education during different phases in life. More recent policy documents in Sweden regarding lifelong learning, where partnerships are an important factor, have largely appeared in the period since 1991 after Sweden became a highly decentralized country. The Local Government Act (1991) gave municipalities and county councils the option to implement their own organisational structures. There has also been an explicit desire from the Government to see higher education institutions take on an active role in regional development and it has further been proposed to develop the strategies of higher education institutions in connection with regional growth programmes.

In practice this has enabled different ways of collaboration between universities in Sweden and the surrounding region where they are situated. An example of this is The National Centre for Lifelong Learning, Encell, situated in Jönköping University. Encell works in close collaboration with several other actors, nationally and internationally, in order to create research platforms and environments through partnerships and networks. Encell is an active partner in cooperation between regional bodies, trade and industry, educational actors, institutions etc.

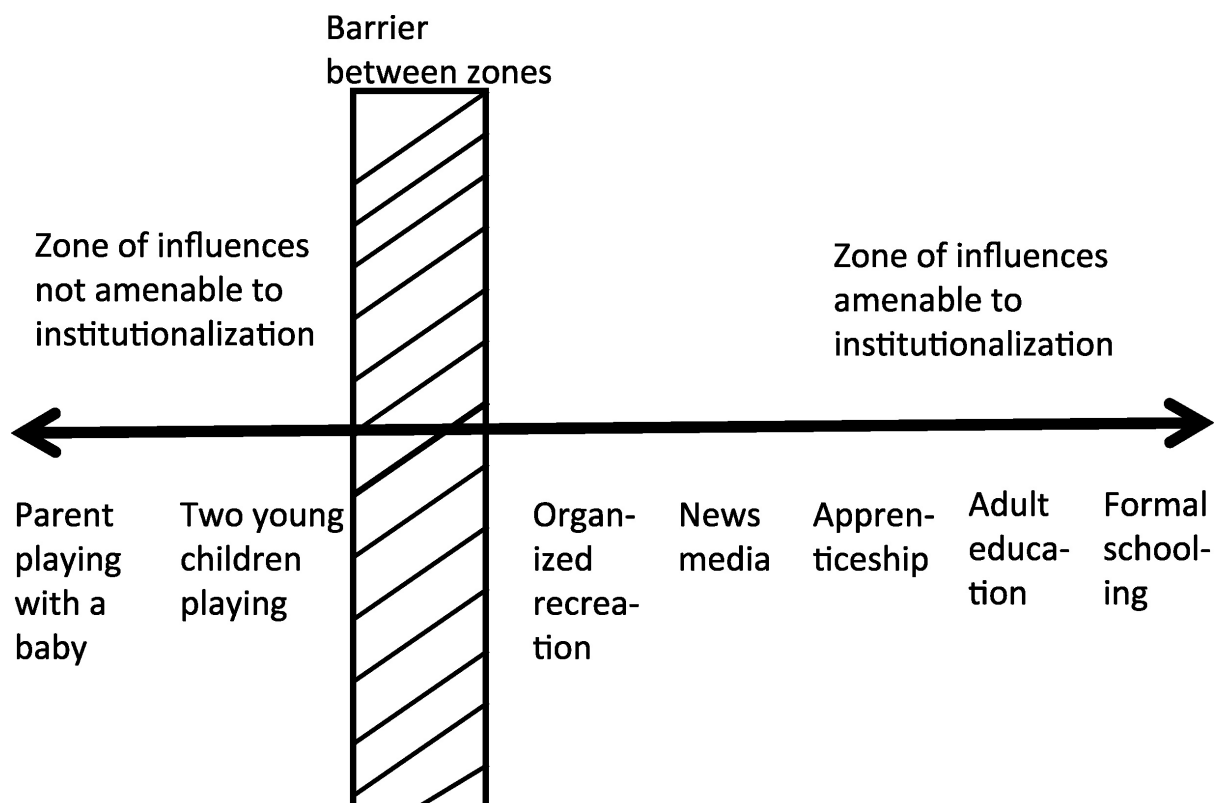


Figure 1. from Cropley (1980) the continuum of influences of learning

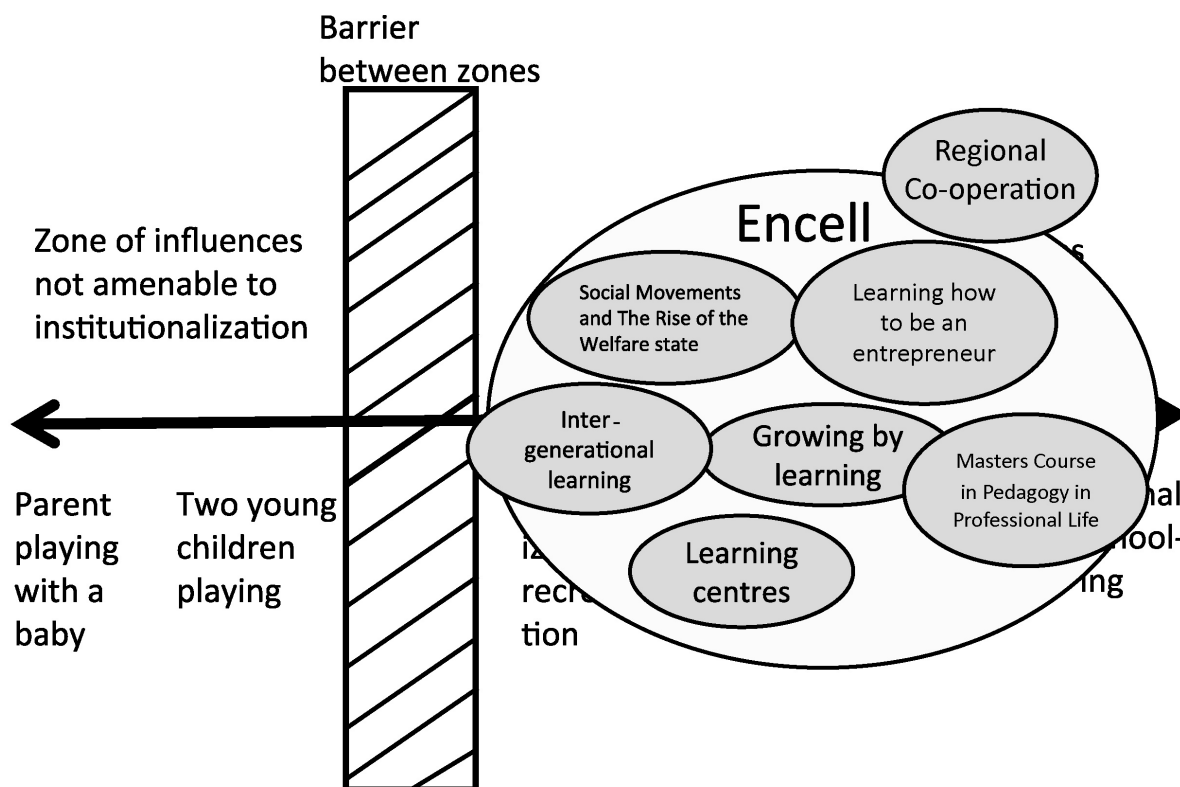


Figure 2. from Cropley (1980) the continuum of influences of learning, the example of Encell

Encell can be positioned in the model (see Fig. 2) made by Cropley (see Fig.1) as the Centre covers the zone of influences amenable to institutionalisation to a great extent.

Based on your experience, which forms of partnerships and democratic governance do you recommend for implementing citizenship education, intercultural dialogue and management of diversity? How can you recognize, endorse and stimulate partnerships at various policy levels?

In Sweden the policy has been focused towards lifelong learning for a long time. When individuals are working and living influenced by the policy of lifelong learning, the individual might change his/her values to be more focused towards lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is influencing policy at different levels as well. Due to this, the dividing line (barrier between zones) in the model could be moving to the left which supports the possibilities for implementing citizenship education, intercultural dialogue and management of diversity.

What kind of support might the Council of Europe offer in this area and how could the Council be put in a position to provide this support?

The Council of Europe can support and give opportunities for representatives from the different member states to meet and discuss their work. There is also a possibility to participate in working groups on different themes such as implementing citizenship education, intercultural dialogue and management of diversity. Meeting colleagues from other cultures, with other backgrounds, lays a foundation for deeper understanding and fruitful co-operation at various policy levels.

How could the educational staff be trained in order to take part in partnerships and support the democratic governance of educational institutions?

This process could be supported by reading and studying documents prepared by the Council of Europe and other literature and could take place in study circles for teachers, managers etc. in an educational institution in order to prepare for and welcome changes and discussions. By participating in the Pestalozzi programmes, the educators could meet and work together with colleagues in other member states in order to share information, skills and knowledge.

