

Dr. Ruud Veldhuis

Institute of Public Participation, Civitas Int. Steering Committee member, Nederland

Opportunities for education and learning for active citizenship

Abstract

1. Democracy has to adapt to recent social and political developments. Decisions are increasingly made in the European Union. The global civil society withdraws from national decision-making. The international economy has national consequences that are out of politicians' reach. The EU is declared in crisis after the rejection in France and the Netherlands (and the expected 'no' in other member countries, like the UK) of the referendum about the EU 'constitution'. A gap is visible between politicians and citizens. Another issue, high on the political and public agenda, is the 'integration' of immigrants.

2. A democracy fails, can even collapse, if a large part of the population abstains from participation. A well functioning democracy needs participating citizens. Tensions between Islamic and autochthon citizens can increase as a consequence of terrorist attacks and lasting conflicts in Muslim countries. Societies with a multicultural population need to train their citizens to respect each other's opinions and religions.

3. Democratic citizens are not born as such; citizenship has to be learned. This is a mission for schools, but governments and parliaments have to decide about the priority. Due to the changing character of national politics new opportunities for adult participation should be created, like interactive decision-making, referenda, etc. Since there is a positive relation between participating in voluntary associations and political participation societies should invest in civil society.

4. Learning active citizenship should start as early as possible. In most countries the preparation of citizens is not adequate.

5. It is important to formulate a realistic, concise and practical set of competences (knowledge, attitudes and skills) that citizens need for participation. In various (international) institutions the formulation of civic competences is under way: OECD, Council of Europe, European Union, Advisory Education Councils, ministries of Education, curriculum development institutions. The broad national and international discussion of standards for citizenship would attract considerable attention of teachers and trainers and put citizenship on the public and political agenda.

6. In order to function well in the current society citizens need to be media literate. Media education is especially vital to bridge the digital divide that exists in certain social layers.

7. Various institutions influence the acquisition of competences for democratic citizenship. School, the Internet, television, parents, peer groups, sport organizations, work place, neighborhood, the civil society.

8. The daily situation of youngsters and adults is decisive for democratic participation.

If the daily situation of people is undemocratic, then learning democratic citizenship does not make much sense.

9. For effective citizenship education a democratic school and class climate is essential; but also: parents who define the borders for behavior and who create safe situations for their children; by transferring knowledge and training skills; by creating opportunities for co-decision in school and work; etc.

10. Recommendations

Democratic living, learning and working contexts are essential for democratic behavior.

Promote learning democracy by doing.

Formulate and discuss a standard with core competences for democratic citizenship.

Create opportunities for citizen participation preferably at local level.

Key words

Active citizenship, Associative democracy, Citizenship competences, Citizenship education, Civil society, Democracy, Digital divide, Framework, Learning, Learning by doing, Media literacy, Multicultural society, Participation, Relocation of political power, Service learning, Standard, Teaching.

Introduction: The code of the street

In June 2005 professor Micha de Winter delivered his inaugural lecture at the University of Utrecht (The Netherlands) titled "Democracy education versus the code of the street". He spoke about a 'democratic-pedagogical offensive' to learn children democratic competences. From an American friend and colleague from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia he received critical comments on this offensive. The friends' reaction was: an interesting story, but if I teach the children in the ghetto's of Philadelphia what you want them to learn "It could get them killed" and he mentioned the publication of Elija Anderson¹, The Code of the Street.

Anderson describes the life of parents and children in the black ghetto's of Philadelphia with high unemployment and poverty, where families try to survive with a 'poverty income'. Where illegal activities, drugs dealing, prostitution and criminality grow abundantly. A lot of 'decent families' are trying to live up to certain moral standards. These parents are aware of the grave threats for their children. Beating children is normal, since these children have to survive in this jungle. An authoritative education with family discussions and negotiation between parents and children can be dangerous. On the contrary, children are trained in surviving violent and aggressive situations. The 'Code of the Street' is the informal set of rules that defines how people have to behave towards each other. 'Respect' is the key word. If you don't enforce respect or authority in the street, you risk physical danger, and the risk to be disrespected, in the jargons: "dissed".

Respect is enforced by the preparedness to use violence. Children are trained to be 'tough'; they should be able to defend themselves and be capable to fight well. Training in democratic behavior, and in understanding other peoples values or religions is out of order.

Professor De Winter received a similar reaction from Dutch community workers: interesting enough, professor, to solve conflicts in a peaceful way, but in my community parents who are present at conflicts support and encourage their children by shouting: beat him in his face.

According to De Winter there is a tension between democratic citizenship and the code of the street. He finds it unacceptable that children grow up in situations with violence and distrust. It is bad for children but it is also bad for society itself.

To change that it is not sufficient to tell people to change their behavior.

What people will do with the information that you transfer to them, depends on the question if they have the feeling that it is advantageous for their own situation.

What lesson to draw from this small story: it may help to give parents support in raising their children; it may help to train teachers how to deal with this kind of children; and lessons in democracy for the children can also help. But that is not sufficient. The situation these families live in have to be improved. In the words of De Winter: you have to fight the toxicity of the neighborhood.

Education and learning of active citizenship does not take place in a vacuum. A program can only contribute to democratic behavior if it takes all circumstances into account.

In this article I describe what opportunities citizenship education has to influence the active participation of citizens in a democratic society, how it has to adapt to changing political power structures, what competences citizens ideally need to be politically active and under what circumstances the democracy learning process is most effective.

1. Active citizenship learning processes have to be adapted to the changes that take place in democracies

In The Netherlands, like in several other countries, a discussion is going on about the problematic functioning of the democratic system, given the signs at recent Dutch elections that can be interpreted as dissatisfaction of citizens. The party of Pim Fortuyn gathered a considerable number (26 seats in the Second Chamber in 2002, reduced to 8 after elections in 2003) of voters; the subsequent murder of Fortuyn saw a country in disarray with public mourning of citizens on large scale.

A second signal was the referendum for the so-called European Constitution, which was rejected by a convincing 62% majority and at a turn out of 63%. Governing parties (social-democrats, liberals and social-liberals) saw their advice to vote in favor of the EU constitution neglected on a impressive scale.

Some scientists and politicians see the solution of this problem, sometimes called 'the gap' between citizens and politics, in experiments with direct democracy, like referenda (the first national referendum in The Netherlands was a big success!)

Others see the solution in interactive decision-making: asking the opinion and visions of citizens in the political discussions in an early phase when all policy options are still open.

For others it is clear that the type of citizen has changed. One type mentioned in the literature is the *calculating citizen*: citizens expect from politicians that they deliver clear answers for political problems; and from government they expect the delivery of solutions for problems and quality of education and health care (no waiting lists in hospitals); protection against terrorist threats; safe public transport and unobstructed high ways for their journey to work and free time activities. Another type of citizen is the *monitoring citizen*: the citizen who observes politics and undertakes action when his or her interests are at stake.

An influential approach sees the current political problems as the consequence of the *relocation of politics*. If this is the problem then democracy must also relocate, in this approach.

Four examples of relocation of political power are:

- Power shifts from central government to (semi) private organizations and associations (especially in the field of healthcare, welfare and education);
- Power shifts from central government to multinational organizations as a consequence of the globalization of the economy;

- Power is relocated from national government to the European Union;
- Non governmental organizations are increasingly playing a role in the global civil society. As a consequence they withdraw from national decision-making.

What is called *associative democracy* may offer a solution in addition to the other approaches (deliberative democracy, representative democracy and direct democracy). This political model gives democratic associations greater responsibilities and authority. The model is based on the conviction that there are possibilities for effective participation at the level of associations, since citizens are involved there directly and have indispensable knowledge and information. Examples of those associations are schools, patients-, consumers- , worker-, parents associations.

There are several pressing problems with which western democracies are confronted. The 'integration' of immigrants is high on the political and public agenda, causes public discussion and expects politicians to look for solutions. Most European countries had an inflow of guest workers from Mediterranean countries (Morocco and Turkey) of refugees and asylum seekers. In the Netherlands the tolerant policy of subsequent governments had as a consequence that these groups were badly integrated in society, and because of a lack of education had difficulty at the labour market. The attacks of 9/11 in the USA and similar attacks in London and Madrid, plus the political murders in the Netherlands, brought the integration of ethnic groups and how to deal with Islamism (Political Islam) in public and political debate.

In the Netherlands we are now seeking for solutions to integrate citizens with a foreign background and with (mainly) Muslim religion.

It is clear that under these changing social and political circumstances education and training programs have to be developed for (new) citizens that take these changes into account. We will come back to this in paragraph 5.

2. A sustainable democracy needs informed and active citizens

If a large part of the population abstains from participation, a democracy fails, or can even collapse. The legitimacy of democracies is in general based on a 'sufficient' rate of participation, which is best seen at election time. Among political scientists there is no accepted minimum turn

out to vote percentage. But 40% turn out like in the USA and Japan at first category elections is seen as a bottom line.

In the Netherlands, as in other countries, the form of political participation is changing from formal participation (voting and membership of political parties) to becoming active in one issue associations or donating money to organizations like Green Peace and Amnesty International.

Scientists like Putnam² put the declining participation rate in civil activities in the USA in discussion. In a much cited analysis Putnam demonstrated extensively how US citizens participate in society and in politics and why the rate of participation is declining.

Given the tensions that in some European Union countries exist between Islamic and autochthon citizens this should have consequences for education. Citizens need not only specific qualities to participate in politics, they need skills, knowledge and attitudes for participation in multicultural societies. Learning to tolerate and respect other citizen's opinions and religions has to be an integral part of education.

Education, regular as well as adult education, has an opportunity to assist in the promotion of social and political participation of citizens.

3. Participation is a learning process

Various EU member countries underline the importance attached to what schools can contribute for education for citizenship. The changes in the population (the multicultural society), secularization of the autochthon population (while the Muslim population is increasing) and individualization make it necessary to include citizenship education as an indispensable part of the curriculum in order to prepare for the multicultural society.

A democratic society is the only guarantee that people with differing religious, cultural and political backgrounds can live together in a peaceful way. On the other hand democracies can become uncertain by changing voting and participation behavior and declining involvement in society and in decision-making processes of citizens.

Democratic citizens are not born as such; citizenship has to be learned. This is a mission for schools, but governments and parliaments have to decide about the priority that citizenship education should have. Due to the changing character of national politics new opportunities for adult participation should be created, like interactive decision-making, referenda, etc.

Since there is a positive relation between participation in voluntary associations and political participation societies should invest in civil society³.

In countries where a shift takes place of citizen participation from membership of traditional organizations, like political parties and trade unions, to member/donation organizations, like Amnesty International and Greenpeace, adult citizenship education programs should take into account that three groups are underrepresented, namely women, ethnic groups and lower educated citizens.

A group that needs attention of adult education are the citizens with a foreign back ground. The Netherlands is now formulating demands for special citizenship courses for foreigners that strive for Dutch citizenship and to improve their chances at the labor market. Like in the USA the Dutch government considers to let this citizenship course finish with an examination and a diploma.

Good practice: Participatory Budget – Porto Alegre

An interesting experiment with participation of citizens in local politics takes place in Brazil. It is a project that has proven results since more than 15 years. The so-called Participatory Budget, which has its origins in Porto Alegre (Brazil, 1989) has followers in more countries. It is a method where citizens learn democracy by doing, in the words of Schugurensky “where they acquire a great variety of political skills, knowledge, attitudes and values, where they become more democratic, tolerant and caring. It is also a place where citizens increase their self-esteem and political efficacy.”⁴

What is the Participatory Budget (PB)? The PB is essentially an open and democratic process of participation that enables ordinary citizens to deliberate and make decisions collectively about budget allocations. This includes neighborhood discussions and decisions about priorities regarding investments in local infrastructure like pavement, sewage, storm drains, schools, health care, child care, housing, etc. It also includes forums on city-wide issues such as transit and public transportation, health and social assistance, economic development and taxation, urban development, and education, culture and leisure. The PB has four key moments: diagnosis, deliberation, decision-making, and follow-up (control). Each one is important in itself, and is connected to the other three. Each year participants review the criteria, rules and procedures, and in light of the experience of the previous year, changes can be made -and often are made- to improve the process' quality and fairness.

The PB goes beyond alternative budgets, which are mainly academic exercises that do not deal with real budgets, and beyond traditional consultation mechanisms which are often

characterized by token participation. The PB is a real decision-making body. It is about ordinary citizens making real decisions about real monies, which are public monies. Although in some cases the PB council can make decisions on all areas of the municipal budget, most often it only allocates resources in the areas of infrastructure and services. In Porto Alegre, this amounts to distributing approximately 15-20% of the total budget. Items related to salaries and maintenance, which make up the bulk of the budget and theoretically could be included in the deliberative process, in practice are seldom discussed.

5. In the PB, participation is governed by a combination of direct and representative democracy rules, and takes place through regularly functioning institutions whose internal rules are decided upon by the participants. There are two operational levels: the Fora of Delegates and the PB Council. There are also plenary assemblies, and a multitude of intermediate sessions. It is not direct democracy, but a combination of participatory and representative democracy.⁵

4. Education falls short in education for active democratic citizenship. Learning citizenship should start as early as possible

Schugurensky (2004) perceives a “democratic deficit” which he understands as the expectation that a general increase of the educational level of a population will increase the participation of its citizenry. “Poll after poll, all over the world, tells us that citizens have low confidence in politicians and in political institutions, and they believe that many politicians have lost touch with those they claim to represent.”⁶ One of the reasons for “the democratic deficit is that most educational systems (from elementary schools to universities) pay little attention to the development of an active, critical and engaged citizenship”⁷. Schugurensky in this same article promotes the introduction of the Participatory Budget as one tool to address this problem.

Putnam in his publication *Bowling Alone* states that preparation of citizens in most countries is not adequate. He suggests as solution for the lack of social and political participation: improved civics education in school, because it is well known “that knowledge about public affairs and practice in everyday civic skills are prerequisites for effective participation”⁸. He stresses the practical aspects of civics lessons. Not lessons about how a law passes Parliament, but “How can I participate effectively in the public life of my community?”⁹. Another strategy that works well is “service learning”: “well designed service learning programs improve civic knowledge, enhance citizen efficacy, increase social responsibility and self esteem, teach skills of cooperation and leadership, and may even reduce (one study suggests) reduce racism.”¹⁰

Torney (2001) concludes among others that “Within countries there is a substantial positive relationship between students’ knowledge of democratic processes and institutions and their reported likelihood of voting when they become adults.”¹¹ Niemi & Junn (1998) conclude that school and curriculum have an impact on the development of civic knowledge in high school students. But schools are not the only factor in developing political knowledge. The home environment and the mass media proved to have significant effects.

Learning active citizenship should start as early as possible. Since we know from research that young children already have notions about power and government citizenship should be part of the curriculum from primary education onwards¹².

De Winter (2005), speaking about democracy education in the Netherlands, is of opinion that in the Dutch education system there is no consequent thinking how to teach children the knowledge, attitude and skills for participation in society as a democratic citizen. For the future of the “democratic way of life” and the maintenance of the rule of law it is necessary to transfer democratic competences to all children.

5. Citizens need certain knowledge, attitudes and skills for participation

There are developments in the field of formulation of frameworks, or standards, or competences in the field of citizenship education that make it opportune to bring the content of what citizens should know in order to be able to participate in democracy, in discussion with the practitioners: the teachers, trainers and other intermediary organizations.

In various, especially international bodies as the following overview will demonstrate, a lot of research has been done on which can be build. Now is the perfect timing to assist those at the work floor in determining what to teach and to train them adequately for the learning process in citizenship education.

It is important to formulate a realistic, concise and practical set of competences (knowledge, attitudes and skills) that citizens need for participation.

In various countries and international institutions discussions take place about the content of education and in some instances specifically about the content of citizenship education. Let me review briefly what developments take or took place.

The **Council of Europe** started an ambitious project titled **Education for Democratic Citizenship** which focused on in- and out-of-school education. The project resulted in a bookshelf of publications, of which most relevant are the four publication that describe the competences of citizenship, sites of citizenship, teacher training . The framework that was developed is worth taking as a basis for further exploration.

http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/E.D.C/

The **Unesco-International Bureau of Education** runs a project 'Learning to live together' that has citizenship dimensions in it. It is worth having a look at their web site for the concept, which formulates competences for life and living together, but also for good practices.

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/International/Databanks/Related/relaconcept.htm>

The **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development** (OECD) runs a project called DeSeCo, Definition and Selection of Key Competencies. The OECD recognizes the importance of knowledge, skills, and competencies for individuals and society. "A well-educated, knowledgeable, highly qualified citizenry is seen as playing an eminent role in facing the challenges of the present and the future." The reason for the project came from the economic sector.

But from a broader perspective competencies are important because of their contributions to society at large. The OECD mentions:

- increasing individual participation in democratic institutions;
- social cohesion and justice; and
- strengthening human rights and autonomy as counterweights to increasing global inequality of opportunities and increasing individual marginalization.

http://www.oecd.org/document/17/0,2340,en_2649_34515_2669073_1_1_1_1,00.html

A special web site "Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations" can be found at <http://www.portal-stat.admin.ch/deseco/index.htm>

As part of the so-called Lisbon strategy, the **European Union** established expert groups that worked on 13 objective areas. A working group on key competences started work in 2001. The main objectives of the group were to identify and define "what the new skills are and how these skills could be better integrated into curricula, maintained and learned through life. A particular

focus should be in *less advantaged groups*, those with *special needs*, *school drop-outs* and *adult learners*.”

A report is available that describes key competences for the knowledge-based society, of which a special paragraph is dedicated to ‘civic competences’.

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/basic-skills_en.pdf

Advisory Education Councils are organized at European level in the **European Network of Education Councils** (EUNEC) <http://www.eunec.org/> They issued statements on civic education and European citizenship. The Dutch Education Advisory Council published two reports for the Dutch minister of Education, titled Education and citizenship (published in 2003, summary in English) and European citizenship (published in 2004, summary in English)

Various **ministries of Education** are very active in the field of developing citizenship curricula. An example worth looking at because it is extensively documented and researched is the United Kingdom, where in 2002 a new subject was introduced in the school system and where teacher training and the publication of didactical materials gets a lot of extension. Various quality internet sites are in the air to assist teachers and teacher training.

The current Dutch minister of Education has made citizenship a key issue. During the EU chair in 2004 she stimulated discussions with her colleagues, produced input from scientists, and published a brochure.

At the moment laws are in preparation that formulate explicitly that citizenship is a key mission of education from primary schools up to universities.

In **the Netherlands** a discussion takes place in the media about a standard (what every citizen should know of ...) for history, culture and social issues. A taskforce citizenship is active within the ministry and a commission was installed to advise the minister.

Since the terrorist attacks in the USA, Spain, the UK, and the murder on the cineast Theo van Gogh, a public debate started about how to deal with ethnic groups in the country. Integration and what foreign citizens should know about the Netherlands, how to behave in the Dutch society is now a hot topic. On the other hand the Dutch have to fight discrimination, promote tolerance and respect. This already led to a public debate about norms and values.

The broad national and international discussion of standards for citizenship would attract considerable attention of teachers and trainers and put citizenship on the public and political agenda.

Such a Standard (the word 'framework' would perhaps avoid misunderstandings) sets out the importance of citizenship education, the scientific basis of citizenship education, describes the pedagogical climate in which the learning process takes place, formulates the didactical approaches that are characteristic for learning democracy and for becoming an active citizen; in addition it gives a compact description of core competences that citizens need for active social and political citizenship. That framework should then be discussed in a broad circle of officials, advisory bodies, (civics) teachers associations, pupils representatives, parents associations, etc.¹³ A next step would be to operationalize the standard or framework in practical modules for use in educational situations. It would be helpful for material developers, for authors and publishers, but also for NGOs that produce material for use in educational settings.

In Annex A I formulate a first beginning for of such a framework based on the work of the international organizations listed in this paragraph 5.

6. Media literacy is of vital importance for the functioning in the current global society It is one of the most important elements of citizenship education

In order to function well in the current society with high speed internet connections, rapidly changing information provision and structure, an overload of available information via various media channels, citizens need to be media literate. This means that they have the knowledge, skills and attitude so that they can participate consciously, critically and actively in the complex information society of today. This is what we call **media literacy**. Research indicates that in some instances a **digital divide** exists: elderly -, unemployed - and lower educated citizens have less access and are less familiar with the new media, in particular internet, than youngsters, employed and higher educated.

Media play an important role in the provision of information and in opinion formation. But what is more, the media are a powerful institution in the political process itself. They not only play a role in setting the public and political agenda, they often play their own role.

Citizens not only should know how the media function, or how to deal with the media, they should have the competence to participate in the social process where (digital) media play such an important role.

For adult education, as well as for primary and secondary school programs, these developments should have consequences for the educational practice.

See a recent example of so called **citizen journalism**: citizens who were in the London Metro on July 7, 2005 reported about the attacks by calling to family, friends and news media via their mobile telephones. Some of them sent digital photographs immediately after the attacks¹⁴.

Another new phenomena is **weblogging**. This use of personalized web sites are used on a large scale, not only for publishing personal diaries, but in increasing size for political activism and to support social cohesion.

The newest development is **podcasting**. Here broadcasting (and in the future video) takes place via MP3 players. The name is a combination of 'broadcasting' and 'iPod', the successful Apple player). In principle every citizen with a digital recorder and a web site can broadcast his or her opinions and ideas. The use ranges from the weekly message from the president of the USA and of the Dutch Justice minister, to news coverage, daily talk shows, and educational programs. Characteristic of podcasting is that you listen to the programs that you selected at the moment that it fits you.

In its programming adult education should also anticipate on the possibilities that Internet offers. Let me mention some recent initiatives that offer opportunities:

For **community development**:

- senior citizens use internet to organize themselves on local or community level
- in recent years web sites were built to facilitate the organization of meetings in homes and public places (meetup.com)

For **political activism**:

- outreach to the broad public with internet to realize political goals (anti-globalisation groups
- see the campaign web sites in the US presidential elections: the sites of Bush, Dean, Kerry and Clarke were innovative in various respects; for communication with party volunteers, and especially because of the amounts of money that were collected via Internet.

Good practice:

In situations where a digital divide exists, government - or private programs are initiated to make Internet or computer access possible for groups that are lagging behind.

An example from the USA is [Access@home](#). This is a private initiative to bring some 100.000 families from lower income groups at the internet. In addition to computers and broadband Internet connections trainings are provided. In August 2005 this 5 year and 1 billion dollar project was started in the Bronx in New York¹⁵.

Other recent examples of the use of Internet for political participation, still in their pilot phase, are the **Issues Forums**. An Issues Forum is an online forum like a town hall meeting where citizens, journalists or local councilors can post ideas, ask questions, communicate with others, ask for public reactions, etcetera. <http://www.nifi.org/> and <http://www.e-democracy.org/newham/>
 In the USA an experiment just started with **the National Conversation**, which is an interactive event across the United States to exchange ideas and opinions and compare them with other people. www.nationalconversation.net

7. Competences for democratic citizenship are acquired via different socialization processes

Various institutions influence the acquisition of competences for democratic citizenship. School, the Internet, television, parents, peer groups, sport organizations, work place, neighborhood, the civil society.

However, the effectiveness of the acquisition of competences depends on various factors. They are briefly summed up here. For a more detailed explanation see the literature¹⁶.

Background	School	Politics
Social-economic situation	Level of education	Behavior of political decision-makers
Ethnic origin	Democratic atmosphere	Trust in politicians
Sex	School management style	Political interest
Age	Teaching style	Political knowledge
	Issue based citizenship education	Political efficacy
	Debate training	Membership political party
	Possibility to participate	
	Knowledge transfer	

Family Background of parents (education, profession)	Friends and peers Exert influence	
Church Attending or belonging	Work Possibility to participate	Media Reading newspapers Time spend watching television
Networks Participation in networks	Associations/organizations Membership Active in board	Internet Participation in virtual communities Chat rooms/MSN

8. The daily democracy is decisive for participation

In the introduction I let De Winter illustrate that the living situation is sometimes in contradiction with what has to be learned about democracy. He illustrated this with a clear example of youngsters in American ghettos. He mentions that two major actions have to be undertaken: the educational support that parents should receive in raising their children in a more democratic way; the other action is the responsibility of local and national governments, namely to improve the living conditions of people living in the margins of society.

For adults a similar reasoning holds true: If the daily situation of people is undemocratic, then learning democratic citizenship does not make much sense. If people have a chance to bring democracy in practice, there is a learning effect: they see that participation can make a difference. In other words: it improves their political efficacy.

Adults that participate in voluntary associations (be they political parties, trade unions, sport clubs etc) are inclined to participate in political decision-making.

Here the school can contribute considerably by organizing the contact between school and parents. Parents can learn how to make their voice heard in local politics or in the neighborhood. They can learn how to take responsibility and initiative in their own environment. This way they are trained in democratic citizenship. A similar effect can be expected from employee participation, becoming a critical consumer, or critical patient, etc.

Good practice: The Consensus Conference

An approach that gives adults the opportunity to learn to participate is developed in Denmark.

The "Consensus Conference", developed by The Danish Board of Technology, gives citizens the opportunity to discuss and form an opinion about complex ethical, social and political issues. In Denmark the conference is conducted over three days and is open to the public. The King Boudewijn Foundation in Belgium adapted the formula and held the conference during three *weekends*. The goals of the consensus conference are:

- To let citizens express themselves about complex social and political issues
- To familiarize experts and policy makers with questions and opinions that citizens have
- To formulate an advice for policy makers
- To promote public debate

The panel of citizens is comprised of open-minded citizens of different backgrounds. They are selected by sending out invitations to some 1.000 randomly selected citizens above the age of 18. From this group 14 citizens are selected for participation in the conference where possible proportionally representing age, gender, education, profession and geographical origin.

The preparations consist of information material on the topic and two weekend courses. During the weekends the citizens get to know each other. They formulate the questions which the conference will revolve around and participate in choosing the experts.

On the first day of the Consensus Conference the experts make presentations where they address the questions posed in advance by the citizen panel. The 12-15 experts explain financial, biological, legal, social and ethical aspects of the issue.

On the second day the morning is spent by the panel asking individual experts for elaboration and clarification of their presentation. The audience also gets the chance to ask questions. The rest of the day is a break for experts and audience, while the panel works on the final document. Late in the evening the first draft of the final document is ready for discussion by the panel. Thereupon follows another round where smaller groups hone the answers. The panel strives to find unanimous formulations.

On the third and last day of the conference the citizen panel presents the final document to the experts and the audience - among them the press. The final document of the panel together with the written contributions of the experts are set out in a report to the members of Parliament.¹⁷

9. What can contribute to promote citizen participation?

1. Promotion of citizen participation via regular education

Based on extensive research of which the IEA Civic education study is very prominent, as it is based on the study of countries all over the world, and the experience that the UK has since the introduction of citizenship in their curriculum the success factors of citizenship education can be summarized as follows:

- The introduction in secondary schools of a **separate subject “citizenship”** (in the United Kingdom in 2002) or civics or a cross-curricular approach, is crucial to prepare the youth for active social and political participation
- Lessons in citizenship or in democracy should start as early as possible in primary school.¹⁸
- Class and school democracy contributes to a democratic attitude: a teacher who offers a say to his pupils in the subjects and in the way the subject is treated in class room; the possibility for pupils to participate in school councils (with real decision power about real things and not only the coffee- or coca cola- machine)
- The items in citizenship lessons should have a connection with pupils’ interests, or have a link with their (later) life
- A thematic and issue based approach that gives pupils the chance to discuss, proved to be motivating
- Keep the pupils in school and fight ‘drop out’ (leaving school without diploma).
- Service learning is a program that connects learning in school with activity in the local community. The results of the community activities are discussed in school again. Feedback is important. The effects of these projects is encouraging: students who participated in service learning activities are inclined to participate more than students who did not experience service learning activities¹⁹.
- Learning by doing (youth councils in school and in the home town); there are various projects aimed at the involvement of youngsters in social and political activity. Some are simulations of local decision-making (youth parliaments), others give youngsters the opportunity to influence youth policy of the town where they live.
- Parents who define the borders of behavior of their kids and who create safe situations for their children.

2. Promotion of citizen participation via adult education

- Several conclusions that were made for regular education are also valid for adult education, like learning by doing, service learning, participation in class- and school activities
- Adult education can prepare adults for co-decision in work, and participation in school board, parents associations, etc
- A main assignment for adult education is to help fight the inequality in participation of women, immigrant people and lower educated in general

10. Recommendations

The strategy to promote the participation in society and in politics is a complex and multidimensional affair. It is not something education alone can realize. It requires a multi-faced approach. Ideally the results are best if all players strive for the same goal and work in the same direction.

Let me summarize what this approach on more fronts looks like.

1. First and for all education plays a crucial role, but cannot be successful alone
2. Learning about democracy and participation should start in primary school and be a life long learning project. A standard with core competences for democratic citizenship should be brought in discussion in wide circles of intermediaries of citizenship education.
3. The behavior of politicians from local, national to European should be a good example for the behavior of citizens
4. Trust in politics and in politicians has to be restored
5. Education in the family should set clear standards of behavior so as to contribute to a democratic attitude
6. The possibilities to participate should be increased; from participation in school, work, local politics etc
7. Promote media literacy
8. Improve social and economic living standards

Annex A. Competences of a 'good' Citizen

This list of competences is a compilation and reformulation of the work that has been done by among others the EDC project of the Council of Europe, the working group B of the European Union, the DeSeCo project of the OECD, and a report by Fratzak-Rudnicka and Torney Purta²⁰

A 'good citizen' has the following characteristics.

Knowledge of:

- key elements of the political and legal system ((human) rights and duties, parliamentary government, the importance of voting) (local, national, European level)
- the basics of democracy, political parties, election programs, the proceeding of elections
- the role of the media in personal and social life
- social relations in society: of social rights (social security)
- the history and cultural heritage of own country; of predominance of certain dominant norms and values
- different cultures in the school and in the country
- main events, trends and change agents of national, European and world history
- the work of voluntary groups

Attitude:

- support for the political community (including patriotism)
- democratic, responsible, political confident, trust, loyal
- sense of belonging to the community
- tolerance and respect; open to change; able to adapt and to compromise
- preservation of environment; respect human rights (freedom, diversity, equality)
- that it is important to be/become involved

Intellectual skills:

- to take part in political discussions; consciousness of current political issues; able to evaluate
- to resolve conflicts in a peaceful way; ability to judge
- to interpret the media messages (interests and value systems that are involved etc.)
- media skills to look, choose, 'use the buttons'
- to learn; language competence, reading and writing; critical handling of information and information technology; communication skills

Participatory skills:

- how to vote; monitor and influence policies and decisions
- to critically handle information
- to use the media in an active way (not as consumer, but as producer of media content)
- to participate in voluntary organisations; build coalitions; to co-operate; to interact
- to handle, gender - and religious differences, multiculturalism

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About the author

Ruud Veldhuis Graduated as a political scientist, specialised in international relations, sociology, history and mass psychology. He worked as a teacher of history and social studies in secondary schools. From 1981 until 1994 he worked as lecturer and deputy-director at the Stichting Burgerschapskunde (The Citizenship Foundation). From 1994 until 2005 he managed the European projects of the Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek, the Dutch Centre for Political Participation.

He directed the European Union part of a 2,5 year large scale transatlantic (EU and USA) project to institutionalise **education for democracy in Ukraine**. A programme for education for democracy in secondary schools and teacher training institutions was developed. School books and teacher guidebooks were published; teachers were trained in new teaching methodology; information about education for democracy was made available countrywide a/o via web site and newsletters.

His further activities focused on “**European Citizenship**”, the promotion of citizen awareness of and participation in the European integration-process (voter education for the elections of the European Parliament and the referenda in the ratification process of the EU Constitution).

He participated in a research project of the **European Commission** (Directorate Education) to establish the European dimension of action programmes of the Commission. He ran projects, lectured and trained in the European Union and in Central and Eastern European countries.

He was Dutch representative in the **Council of Europe** project “Education for Democratic Citizenship”. From 1995 until 2005 he published the quarterly newsletter of the POLITEIA, Network for Citizenship and Democracy in Europe. He is still one of the editors.

He is a member of the Steering Committee of the worldwide education for democracy network **CIVITAS International** and is a member of the board of editors of the Journal for Social Studies Education.

Publications vary from schoolbooks for citizenship education, about education for democracy in the Netherlands, Europe and in Iraq, didactical guidebooks, to contributions in readers.

He is now an independent Democracy Learning Consultant.

¹ Anderson, Elija (1999), *The Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company

² Putnam's book *Bowling alone* received a lot of attention in the USA and abroad. His theory is however not generally accepted.

³ Putnam (2000) and others

⁴ Schugurensky, page 10

⁵ Schugurensky, page 5

⁶ Schugurensky, page 2

⁷ Schugurensky, page 3

⁸ Putnam (2000), page 405

⁹ Putnam (2000), page 405

¹⁰ Putnam (2000), page 405

¹¹ Torney (2001), page 176

¹² Easton, D. & J. Dennis and Easton, D. & R.D. Hess published various articles and books in the sixties about children and the political system, the acquisition of regime norms, images of government etc. Also De Winter is in favor of learning democracy as early as possible.

¹³ In the world of human rights educators a similar discussion takes place. You can follow that via the web site and list serv of www.hrea.org

¹⁴ The BBC had examples at their web site at 28 September 2005

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/uk/2005/london_explosions/default.stm

¹⁵ For more information see http://www.lisc.org/whatwedo/new_initiatives/ (available at 28 September 2005) and www.nefinc.org and www.one-economy.com

¹⁶ Niemi and Junn(1998), Birzea(2000)

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¹⁷ Based on the article *Consensus Conference: A Danish description* <http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-ConsensusConference1.html>

¹⁸ See note 12

¹⁹ See Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*. There is a lot of information about service learning at the Internet. A good beginning is the web site of the organization Innovations in Civic Participation www.icip.org

²⁰ the reports are mentioned in the Literature