



Schwerin Declaration

Strengthening democracy - more civic education in vocational training and further education!

The current corona crisis and its consequences, as well as ongoing social upheavals, present us with challenges of unprecedented dimensions. Conspiracy fantasies and fake news are on the rise, and our society is becoming increasingly fragmented. But it is not only the corona pandemic that shows us that our democratic coexistence has become fragile. We see further alarming developments:

- the deepening of the division between rich and poor,
- increasing racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism and hostility to democracy,
- lack of solidarity, isolation of individual states (e.g. from the EU or the Geneva Convention on Refugees)
- changes in the media landscape and loss of critical media competence, impairment of the freedom of the press.

These challenges cannot be met by subject-specific education in vocational training and further education alone. Values such as peace, freedom, human rights, participation, co-determination, social justice and diversity are increasingly being called into question, but more than ever they must be conveyed through civic education. Civic education must counter anti-democratic tendencies and ensure public exchange about them. It must also enlighten and enable reflection.

Civic education must become a natural part of all educational processes in which young people acquire the skills needed to assess the

consequences and interdependencies of political, technical and social decisions. Basic democratic values and human rights must not only be incorporated, but also practiced. Civic education has the responsibility to support learners in the development of a reflective attitude towards values - also through diverse opportunities, embedded in educational concepts, to visit places of remembrance such as Auschwitz.

The opportunities offered by cosmopolitan education, as provided for in the UNESCO concept of "Global Citizenship Education", have so far hardly been used in vocational schools or in adult and further education: The imparting of knowledge and skills to understand global challenges and to actively participate in shaping them, should enable learners to develop a sense of belonging to the global community, to become involved and to take an active role in society in order to contribute to a peaceful and equitable world in which ecological resources are preserved. In order to understand coherences and to develop the democratic formation of will, it is time to firmly incorporate civic education in the daily routine of the educational system - in all educational institutions.

Already at its congress in Freiburg in 2017 the German Education and Science Union (GEW) adopted a resolution that civic education must be an interdisciplinary focus in the curricula of all school types in all federal states and in 2018 supported the "Hofgeismar Declaration on Civic Education".

Civic education must be recognised as a part of public education, as an independent, primary component of lifelong learning, and at the same time be integrated into all areas of vocational education and training and adult and further education. Civic education must consolidate critical faculties and discourse capabilities, i.e. "future literacy" (Wuppertal Institute), in order to implement all of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Civic education in initial vocational training

The education and training mandate incorporated in the German constitution is closely connected with the necessity of imparting inter-professional and general education skills and contents and to promote the personality of the learners - not only in vocational schools as locations of the subject classes within the Dual System, but generally in all vocational schools. Considering this educational and training mission, the demands for education content to be geared exclusively to vocational qualifications or economic needs, particularly expressed by employers and the business community, must be categorically rejected.

Civic education is currently often reduced to timetables, so that there is only one lesson per week - and sometimes only in one half-year period within a course lasting several years - often taught by teachers not familiar with the subject. Instead, civic education should not only be valued more highly as a subject in its own right, but should increasingly be an interdisciplinary task in all other subjects.

This means that civic education in vocational schools should regularly be combined with school projects of participation and co-determination in which students can experience the effectiveness of political action.

In order to fulfil the democratically legitimized holistic educational mission of vocational schools, it is more than ever necessary

- to incorporate civic education systematically and equivalently with a corresponding teaching load in the curricula of the relevant fields of learning, learning situations and also in chamber tests,
- within the vocational education and training system vocational schools should be equal to chambers and companies (vocational schools as equal partners rather than service providers for chambers and companies),
- to expand university teacher training for civic education at vocational schools in order to significantly reduce the high proportion of teachers not familiar with the subject,
- to initiate measures to attract junior staff for civic education analogous to technical and scientific fields and call on vocational schools to recruit teachers with relevant qualifications for civic education,
- to urgently expand offers for binding further and advanced training courses for teachers in civic education,
- to establish research funding programmes for civic education and political socialisation in the vocational training sector.

Civic education in adult and further education

The discussion about further education is currently dominated by mastering digitisation. Qualifications and vocational retraining are supposed to generate digital skills and make employees adaptable to changes on the labour market (keyword: "Work 4.0"). In doing so, it falls from view that the positive potential of digitisation can only unfold if it is not left to corporations and their algorithms, but if people can democratically participate in decision-making at the workplace and in society.

Several decades of further education policy under the sign of economic structures and measuring methods, reduced the significance of civic education in adult and further education and, instead of professionalisation, reduced resources and worsened working conditions. Public funding of civic education is linked to - often questionable - evaluation and quality assurance procedures, the content of civic education is less important. However, this public funding must be primarily oriented towards socio-political content and objectives.

In initial vocational training as well as in adult and further education, "orientation ability" and knowledge of coherences (Oskar Negt) are of decisive importance for the future. Maturity and solidarity, self-determination, awareness of diversity and respect for the rights of those who think differently are central concerns of civic education. Vocational education and training must, therefore, leave the confined space of functional strengthening and, in a new integration of vocational and civic education and training, enable people to understand backgrounds and coherences and encourage them to shape the world of work and society in a humane and just manner. To this end, we affirm the three central components of the Beutelsbach Consensus: the prohibition of overpowering, controversy and the student, i.e. subject orientation.

For the propagated "new culture of further education" beyond the National Strategy for Further Education (NWS) we need more civic education and, in order to cope with the challenges of the future, more than ever

- qualified personnel, continuous training and cooperation,
- employment relationships covered by collective agreements,
- reliable advancement,
- up to date spatial and technical equipment,
- support for the development of networks, especially in political, professional and educational areas.

Trade unions are important alliance partners in this respect because they can impart knowledge of contexts and support the necessary structures to develop civic education.