Study Mission on Civic Education Curricula Development

Warsaw, Poland
23-26 April 2012

1. Success Model: Poland

The fall of communism in 1989 precipitated the reform of civic education throughout central and eastern Europe. Since 1990, mandates for new civics, ethics or sociopolitical classes have been called for to replace the former Marxist-Leninist subjects. At all levels of the educational communities, there seems to be broad, general acceptance in principle that classes that address democratic education and human rights themes need to be developed.

Recent trends in Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) in Poland should be viewed in the context of the major social and economic transformation that started fifteen years ago and in particular the reform of the whole educational system. The system was decentralised and responsibility for running schools was transferred to the local authorities. This in turn has stimulated stronger co-operation between schools, local authorities and parents. Although the civic education as a separate subject has been present in curricula for over 30 years now, the content of this subject was completely changed in the early 1990s. Typically, very boring lessons with teachers struggling to explain the details of the functioning of the socialist state or some basic notions of Marxist social theory were replaced by lessons highlighting the functioning of modern democracies and participation in the life of the community, tolerance, human rights issues.

In 1997, the Ministry of Education adopted a new core curriculum plan for general education in primary and secondary schools (KOSS). This plan has made civic education a required subject at all grade levels. This change was made possible through lobbying by various NGOs and from the significant know-how transfer and financial support from the US and EU. As a result of collaboration amongst the Ministry of Education, the National In-service Teacher Training Centre and the Centre for Citizenship Education, a large resource of trainers and educators has been created and teaching material, lessons scenarios and student handouts have been prepared. This allowed a major improvement in the quality of EDC. The recent IEA citizenship and education study across 28 countries proved that Poland scored very high on nearly all the measures of civic knowledge, engagement and attitudes. The national core curriculum obliges each school in Poland to fulfil the civic education curriculum guidelines, i.e. one lesson per week. Already from the 1st grade of primary education some EDC elements are to be included. From the 4th grade on, EDC is to be implemented cross-curriculum through the co-ordinated efforts of teachers of various subjects. Starting from 7th grade, EDC
becomes an independent subject. While the cross-curricular approach in the case of 10-12 year old pupils is theoretically very appealing, it is difficult to verify whether teachers are really implementing it. Still, the methodology of teaching civic education has much improved. Teachers are trained to run interactive classes making use of new technologies and involving their young audience. There is a large variety of good textbooks. All these make civic education classes attractive to pupils, as various surveys show. The opportunity to express their own point of view, discuss problems openly, make group presentations and play and have fun at the same time is what pupils like. On the negative side, many teachers tend to prefer the traditional lecture model of classes which needs less preparation and simplifies evaluation of students’ knowledge.

On the other hand, a significant contribution to better EDC situation comes from the NGO sector. One good example is the Centre for Citizenship Education programme, promoting an additional civic education lesson in schools. This initiative began in the mid-1990s and proved to be a big success. Currently, many Polish schools over and above the standard civic education lesson have an additional lesson where the local community dimension is covered in more detail. The necessary condition for introducing such lessons is that local government agrees to finance an additional hour. The popularity of this programme confirms that some local authorities have understood that supporting civic education brings benefits to their communities.

2. Specific Objectives

i. Exposing Iraqi stakeholders to success models and innovative practices in civic education curricula development as an integrated and shared effort among authorities, experts, teachers and students;

ii. Highlighting the successes and lessons learned of the Polish model, with particular emphasis on the adopted methodology and the capacity building strategies;

iii. Establishing linkages and networking arenas between Poland and Iraq for the transfer of knowledge and expertise.

3. Methodology

The Study Mission will be conducted using primarily the applied knowledge transfer methodology, which is based on sustained interaction between Iraqi participants and the proposed success model. The methodology could comprise lectures and presentations on success models and lessons learned, but will be mainly geared towards field visits applying the “visiting learning methodology”. Hence, presentations will be combined with – and even performed – on-site during the field visits in order to maximize their impact on the target audience. Key experts representing other interesting practices in Europe could be also invited to share their experiences (among the most successful in the field of civic education CV development are: UK, Norway, Netherlands and Czech Republic).

4. Focus Areas

The Study Mission will focus on the following challenges and convey to participating officials relevant success stories and lessons learned:

**Pillar 1: Curriculum, and Best practices in clarifying content and philosophical principles of civic education**

How can principles of individualism, democracy and human rights best be presented in textbooks when such concepts are ill-defined and understood in popular culture, and when they are just beginning to be evidenced
in social and political practice? How can such principles avoid being interpreted through the 'old lenses' conditioned to see a unitary ideological perspective?

**Pillar 2: Promoting democratic culture in the classroom and civic education non-formal activities**

How can teaching practices that reinforce 'learner-centred ' approaches rather than lecture-driven modes of teacher-student interactions be introduced in schools?

In the past, lessons usually entailed the reading of text by teachers and the use of questioning in order to ensure that students had memorised the 'proper answer'. Such long-standing practices have reinforced the primacy of the text, the teacher as the sole source of authority in the classroom, and a passive, rote-oriented and non-differentiated style of learning.

**Pillar 3: Designing programmes at national level**

How can human rights education programmes be designed so as to take into account an overall national context of political uncertainty, centralised policymaking traditions and severe resource shortages in planning for such change?

5. **Stakeholders/Beneficiaries**

The primary beneficiaries will be Eighteen (18) among senior educational experts from partner ministries who have responsibility in curriculum development and teaching methods, school masters, teachers, human rights NGOs' representatives involved in civic education and life skills training. Representatives from the following entities should be included in the study mission and due attention is to be given to the representation of women and the local level:

1. Ministry of Education
2. Ministry of Education – KRG
3. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
4. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs – KRG
5. Ministry of Youth and Sports
6. Ministry of Youth and Culture – KRG
7. Ministry of Human Rights
8. School Head Masters and Teachers (males and females from the four targeted regions of the project)
9. Representatives of NGOs particularly active in the field of human rights, education and sport (males and females from the four targeted regions of the project).

**Experienced professionals with deep knowledge** of the existing textbook on Civic Education in Iraq and other relevant civic education and life skills training toolkits, the Iraqi Constitution, the main International and National legal references for the protection of human rights;

**Knowledge/Exposure to the teachers' training strategy** and contribution to the National debate for education system reform, civic education enhancement and life skills development through culture and sport;

**Innovative** Heads and Teachers of schools where have been introduced pilot measures to test new teaching models, practices of democratic principles in school daily life as well as new ways of relating with students and the informal education sector environment;

**Committed** to the mission; **Ready** to pilot innovative applications; **Open** to synergies and cooperation;

**Influencing** decision taking once reporting the outputs of the study tour.

Terms of Reference for the Study Mission on Civic Education Curricula Development
Warsaw-Poland; 23-26 April 2012
Promoting Civic Values and Life Skills for Adolescents (12-19 years old) through Education Project