



# THE CASE FOR ETHICAL EDUCATION

Bridging the Gap between  
Practice and Policy in Europe

little 

LEARN TOGETHER TO LIVE TOGETHER  
Teachers Leading Ethical Education For An Inclusive Society

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



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## Project Partners



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# INTRODUCTION

## What's This Paper About?

This paper is the final output of a three-year project<sup>1</sup> which set out to develop educational resources for teachers in order to build confidence and competence in Ethical Education. At the heart of the project is a fundamental trust in the contribution of Ethical Education to the achievement of the EU vision for an education which promotes citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination, strengthening social cohesion, and helping young people become responsible, open-minded and active members of our diverse and inclusive society.

## Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning & Ethical Education

More than a half-century in existence, the EU is now experiencing significant challenges from several fronts. Growing cultural diversity, unparalleled climate change, global conflict, rapidly developing knowledge and technological economies and growing disillusionment with the established political and economic systems all require urgent attention so as to build and maintain social cohesion, stability and common values for a healthy, functioning and fair European Union.

In 2017 Heads of State and Government met at the Gothenburg Social Summit where they discussed education and training. This has resulted in EU Council recommendations<sup>2</sup> which define eight key competencies that are crucial to better prepare people for today's societies, for personal development, employability, social inclusion and active citizenship. The recommendations are accompanied by concrete guidance to member states to implement, assess and validate these competencies effectively. The 8 competencies are summarised below:

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<sup>1</sup> The LITTLE Project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and The LITTLE Project is being led by the EducateTogether National Office in Ireland in partnership with three European partners; the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia; Educational provider Petit Philosophy in Croatia, and the Italian based Education Research organisation, STePs srl. The project is aimed at building teacher confidence and capacity in relevant pedagogies and methodologies in Ethical Education.

<sup>2</sup> Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning. Adopted in Brussels, 2nd May 2018.

## IMPROVING 8 KEY COMPETENCES



### **1- Literacy**

Strengthening literacy as a basis for further learning and communication in different societal and cultural contexts



### **2 - Languages**

Enhancing the ability to use a variety of languages to be active and better cope with the challenges of today's multilingual and diverse societies



### **3 - Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)**

Focusing on improving acquisition of these competences to nurture scientific understanding



### **4 - Digital**

Strengthening the confident and critical use of digital technology , including coding and programming, safety and citizenship related aspects



### **5 - Personal, social and learning**

Improving the skills necessary to participate in an active social life



### **6 - Civic**

Stressing the importance of democratic participation, European values, sustainable development and media literacy



### **7 - Entrepreneurship**

Enhancing entrepreneurial attitudes to unlock personal potential, creativity and self-initiative



### **8 - Cultural awareness and expression**

Increasing intercultural skills and the ability to express ideas in a variety of ways and contexts

Ethical Education directly contributes to a number of these competencies and is particularly salient to the development of Personal, Social and Learning Competence; Civic competency and Cultural Awareness and Expression competence.

## What is Ethical Education?

Ethical Education<sup>3</sup> focuses on promoting ethics and values such as, justice, equality and human rights. It is an education, which includes aspects like nurturing a respectful attitude towards others, the positive formation of character, building capacities for reflective and informed moral judgment, putting one's beliefs and values into practice. It is taught under different names in different EU contexts, but commonly cited goals include aims to:

- Guide individuals to explore and develop a respect for different values and viewpoints
- Promote a commitment to human rights and the basic values inherent in a respect for the human rights of self and others;
- Provide learners with opportunities to examine and understand ethical principles, values and ideals;
- Cultivate competencies needed for moral and ethical judgement, decision-making and action (critical thinking, reflection, creativity, communication, cooperation, comprehension).

Ethical Education is predicated on active learning methodologies in which students are fully engaged in shaping how, what, and where they learn. Inquiry-based pedagogies are a central feature as are cross-curricular / integrated teaching approaches that by definition overlap and interlock competencies between different domains. Examples of this approach have been identified and guidance provided through the LITTLE Teachers Guide to Ethical Education.

*“Our growing cultural diversity, which presents opportunities, but also significant challenges call for more social cohesion. Education systems are more critical than ever in development a society based on shared values. It is not enough to give learners cutting-edge skills and knowledge, if we do not also give them a value framework”*

**Tibor Navracsics, EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport in a speech entitled “Why STEM Subjects and Democratic Citizenship Go Together”, at the CESAER annual conference in Budapest, 19 October 2017.**

## Who is this Policy Paper for?

This policy paper is targeted at education policy makers and practitioners at EU, national and school levels and sets out the **5 key recommendations** of the LITTLE project as to how Ethical Education can bridge the gap between policy and practice and thus contribute to the achievement of the EU vision of education for all.

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<sup>3</sup> Different terms are used to designate this domain or part of it, including ethics education, moral education, values education, education for values, character education, etc. In this guide we will understand Ethical Education in its broadest sense and also use this term for all of its aspects unless otherwise indicated.

**Key Recommendation 1**  
**Promotion of Values in Schools Through Ethical Education**

**Key Recommendation 2**  
**Readiness of Teachers**

**Key Recommendation 3**  
**Readiness of Schools**

**Key Recommendation 4**  
**Readiness of Educational Systems**

**Concluding & Overarching Recommendation:**  
**Promotion of Care as a Core Value in Education**

# KEY RECOMMENDATION 1

## PROMOTION OF VALUES IN SCHOOL THROUGH ETHICAL EDUCATION

### Background to Recommended Measures

In a pluralistic and diverse contemporary society, marked by increased interconnectedness and the need for mutual cooperation in addressing the challenges that we face, one of the key questions becomes how and where to cultivate shared values. A shared values framework, which is accompanied with critical reflection and active citizenship, offers an opportunity to attain universality and unity, while at the same time recognizing the diversity of humanity and many specific differences (cultural, religious, etc.) that co-exist in European society.

Human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and non-discrimination, respect for human right and the rule of law are core European values.<sup>4</sup> There exists a commitment *“to reinforce the teaching and acceptance of these common fundamental values and laying the foundations for more inclusive societies through education - starting from an early age”*<sup>5</sup>, alongside of other important competencies (open-mindedness, responsibility, autonomy, social awareness and emotional intelligence, cooperativeness, critical reasoning and active citizenship).

There is clarity in relation to *what* these values are, less clear is *how and where* such values are promoted throughout Europe.

In today's society, school represents the main public space where children and young people can learn and experience the “basics” of cooperation, fairness, respect, inclusiveness. Schools are “natural” centres for the promotion of common values. Creating more space for the inclusion of Ethical Education provides a clear framework for schools in how to shape such common values to maintain democratic society. A democratic society that would be prepared to tackle the main challenges and be resilient to marginalisation, radicalisation, manipulation, racism and intolerance, must consist of active, responsible, critically-thinking, open-minded members. Ethical Education presents a way towards such a society.

- Ethical Education comprehensively addresses, the development of core knowledge and competencies combined with ethics and values in a way that combines critical thinking with experiential, social and emotional learning in the classroom.
- Ethical Education is an approach that is inclusive, participatory with active learning at its core.
- Ethical Education provides the opportunity for learners to make sense of themselves and the world around them.

The following recommendations are aimed at increasing the space for the promotion of common values through Ethical Education in schools.

<sup>4</sup> Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union.

<sup>5</sup> Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance, and non-discrimination through education, 2015 (Paris Declaration).



## Recommended Measures

### 1.1 EU level

1. Develop and implement policies to empower schools to teach Ethical Education. Utilize existing funding, training, and exchange programmes to support projects and initiatives that are learner-centred and experiential e.g. Ethical Education pedagogies.
2. Ensure that EU values are at the forefront of each major EU initiative, Strategic Framework and Resolution (e.g., Creative Europe) with measures outlined as to continuous learner-centred improvements can be made. Ensure feedback from education systems on the learner experience in education.
3. Support research in the field of education, with a particular focus on Ethical Education and education that integrates values, active citizenship, wellbeing with active and engaging methodological approaches to teaching.

### 1.2 National level

1. Develop and implement policies and measures that enable more schools to teach Ethical Education.
2. Ensure initial teacher education includes a strong focus on Ethical Education; such a focus must, by necessity be holistic and address knowledge, skills and attitudes. Teachers should be given the opportunity to develop their confidence and capacity to teach through active learning and learner centred pedagogies.
3. Support national and regional networks of teachers of Ethical Education. Promote the value of such education as necessary for a rounded education experience.
4. Provide support for teachers to participate in CPD in Ethical Education throughout their career; put in place financial supports for schools to allow teachers to participate regularly throughout their career.
5. Support recruitment of school leaders taking account of competency in Ethical Education.

### 1.3 School level

1. Establish an in-school educational community and support members to actively contribute to the promotion of shared values and Ethical Education within this community.
2. Provide support for professional time for teachers to reflect and collaborate as part of Ethical Education communities of practice.
3. Encourage teachers and other staff members to be proactive in the promotion of common values. Provide the necessary support to teachers to equip them to address complex and often controversial and sensitive issues related to Ethical Education.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION 2

### READINESS OF TEACHERS

*"I want to be Obi-Wan Kenobi, finally training Jedis again. I want to be Luke Skywalker, finding a way to put everything right. I want to be Leia, standing up to the regime. I want to be the spark of inspiration again – that proton torpedo that sets up a chain of events that will ultimately change the universe."*

(Excerpts from the anonymous teacher blog "the secret teacher blog", The Guardian)

#### Background to Recommended Measures

A minority of European countries have Ethical Education as a separate, and in some cases a, compulsory school subject offered as an alternative to Religious Education. The majority of member states however, have a more informal approach adopting educational programs like Peace Education or Citizenship Education. Teaching Ethical Education in school allows for an integrated approach to teaching and learning. This gives students the opportunity to learn to reflect critically, discuss openly, listen carefully and understand different perspectives for more informed decision making. Teachers generally express the need for better preparation through education and training to teach disciplines such as Ethical Education. Such preparation can be divided into two interrelated areas: 1. professional readiness and, 2. personal readiness. Professional readiness relates to the preparedness of teachers to implement a diverse range of teaching methods to meet the needs of different learning styles and aptitudes.

Personal readiness involves affording teachers the time and space to explore and understand their own world views and values.

The importance of values in education are irrefutable. Despite this Ethical Education in teacher education programs is "invisible or mostly hidden"<sup>6</sup>. Across all countries, a high percentage of teaching staff express a positive attitude towards the teaching of Ethical Education but a large portion do not feel adequately prepared. If we want to equip teachers for the 21st century, we should implement the following measures:

#### Recommended Measures

##### 2.1 EU level

1. The EU should support in-depth research into teacher preparation for Ethical Education and related disciplines. Teacher preparation at pre-service and in-service levels should be included and an EU index developed against which data is updated on a regular basis. The aim of such research is to encourage nation states to support teacher preparation.
2. Training teachers to use engaging approaches (like dialogical teaching) is the best way to

<sup>6</sup> ETHOS (Ethical education primary and pre-primary schools for a sustainable and dialogic future; Project Number: 527134- LLP 2012-SI-COMENIUS-CMP; Project funded by the European Commission, Comenius Programme. User Need Analysis, Evelyn Schlenk & Anne-Marie Meier, 2013.

overcome the uneasiness and uncertainty they might feel when dealing with difficult ethical discussions in the classroom.

## 2.2 National level

1. Ministries of education in each member state should consider how they are supporting Ethical Education as a choice on the curriculum for a wider number of schools.
2. Initial teacher education and continuous professional development should be supported in include;
  - The Ethics of Care in teaching;
  - Teaching Ethical Education across all subject domains;
  - Reflective practice of teachers.

## 2.3 School level

1. With the support of national education ministries schools should be supported to adopt more integrated learning approaches such as Phenomena Based Learning approaches. Assessment approaches should be reviewed in order to alleviate time pressure and create space for innovative approaches to teaching and learning that are at their core, learner centred.

# KEY RECOMMENDATION 3

## READINESS OF SCHOOLS

### Background to Recommended Measures

Ethical issues are part and parcel of everyday life at school. A key aim of Ethical Education is to help students to be responsible for their behaviour, their actions and the attitudes and values that shape their decisions and actions. The nature of Ethical Education requires authenticity; the school community, including staff and parents and the education system to which they belong, need to model the behaviour that they are attempting to impart to students.

Some of the EU countries have introduced Ethical Education, however it is not unusual for teachers to be unqualified in this domain due to lack of provision at third level. To counter this links between NGO's with education programmes can be supported and fostered.

### Recommended Measures

#### 3.1 EU level

1. Support for international Ethical Education teacher exchange to encourage cross fertilisation of ideas and good practice between member states.
2. Adopt and promote the LITTLE Guide for Teachers of Ethical Education at EU level.
3. Support the development of comprehensive online platforms, networks and projects in Ethical Education following the example of Youth Work and Human Rights Education programs.
4. Formation of a Council for Ethical Education to oversee Ethical Education in EU states and to monitor good practice and support EU sharing and cooperation.

#### 3.2 National level

1. Provide for greater autonomy for schools to develop their own curriculum based on key competences and skills.
2. More support and funding for NGOs that work in Ethical Education related areas, to include non-formal education.
3. Development of a national database of organizations working in support of Ethical Education to support schools in identifying potential partners.
4. National-level survey to identify needs of teachers involved in Ethical Education and related disciplines.

#### 3.3 School level

1. Development of Ethical Education charter at school level to involve all members of the school community.
2. Development of partnerships with NGO's working in Ethical Education related areas.

3. Cooperation between schools to share good practice in Ethical Education.

# KEY RECOMMENDATION 4

## READINESS OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

### Background on Recommended Measures

*“Today, young people need a broader set of competences to find fulfilling jobs and become independent, engaged citizens who contribute to society. Education and training have a crucial role in enabling young people to develop these competences, giving them the best possible start in life”.*

**Tibor Navracsics, EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Launch of the public consultation on the review of key competences for lifelong learning, Brussels, 22nd February 2017**

Educational systems in Europe differ substantially, however technology is reshaping the way education is delivered everywhere. Teaching methods are slowly changing also, shifting from teacher-centred to student-centred. More and more teachers are adopting the role of facilitator of learning through interactive teaching approaches that emphasise learner engagement and collaboration.

International migration and geographic mobility have major implications for societies and economies. Educational systems must respond appropriately, placing interpersonal, communication, critical thinking and relational skills on a par with STEM subjects

The abundance of information in a digital world, makes critical thinking and informed decision making a basic required skill. For educational systems this means taking on board the values, goals and consequences associated with change and assess their implications.

### Recommended Measures

#### 4.1 EU level

1. All EU Education policy includes provision for Ethical Education and related disciplines.
2. The Commission should work closely with Education ministers from EU countries to add Ethical Education to the current priority areas<sup>7</sup>.
3. The European Commission works closely with national policymakers to help them develop school education policies and systems that support Ethical Education and related disciplines.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/school/about-school-policy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/school/about-school-policy_en)

## National level

1. Member states should allocate resources for the professional development of teachers in Ethical Education.
2. Member states work with other EU States to develop clear and comprehensive benchmark indicators for quality school
3. Recognition at national level for Ethical Education and its value to the promotion of common value and key learning outcomes in education.
4. Develop and implement policies and measures that would enable existing Ethical Education initiatives and programs are maintained, properly resourced and evaluated for effectiveness.
5. Promote existing programmes about European values (e.g. the European Parliament Ambassador School Programme<sup>8</sup>).

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<sup>8</sup> Link to these networks

Facebook site: <https://www.facebook.com/EPAmbassadorSchools/>

Ireland: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ireland/en/youth-outreach/ambassador-school-programme>

Slovenia: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/slovenia/sl/za-mlade/%C5%A1ola-ambasadorka-evropskega-parlamental>

## CONCLUDING AND OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

### PROMOTION OF CARE AS A CORE VALUE IN EDUCATION

*“We are on the cusp of a digital transformation. It will bring with it challenges and opportunities. It will confront us with its challenges much sooner than we expect. We need to be ready, as a policy, to offer its opportunities as widely as possible, and be prepared of course for the disruption it may offer to society as a whole. We will require policy options that can cater for and accommodate the principles and values by which we might all live together ethically, and in a manner that will ensure intergenerational fairness”*

**President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins ‘Making a new Mind for Europe - Of the Discourse that we need’ - Speech at the launch of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence in the New Political Economy of Europe, UCD, Thursday, 28th March, 2019**

The **Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: A European Reference Framework** states that the identified competences aim to lay the foundation for achieving more equal and more democratic societies. *“They respond to the need for inclusive and sustainable growth, social cohesion and further development of the democratic culture”<sup>9</sup>.*

Alongside this is the goal of strengthening our national democracies and Union and strengthening, *“social cohesion in order to fight the rise of populism, xenophobia, radicalisation, divisive nationalism and the spreading of fake news”<sup>10</sup>*. To date, the European Union has invested considerable resources in Citizenship Education which have resulted in many noteworthy outcomes<sup>11</sup>. Despite this investment, and many positive outcomes and experiences for learners, *Citizenship Education at School in Europe, 2017* reveals; that there are significant differences between countries’ policies that can affect the implementation of citizenship education in schools, including;

- Nearly half of the countries still have no regulations or recommendations on the development of prospective teachers’ citizenship education competences through initial teacher education (ITE).
- The majority of education authorities organise or support opportunities for teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD) in this area of learning, similar opportunities for school heads are rather limited.

<sup>9</sup> Council Recommendation on Common values, Inclusive Education, and the European Dimension of Teaching. Adopted by the Council on 22nd May, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> *Citizenship Education at School in Europe, 2017*. Published: 2018-01-08. Corporate Author(s): Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (European Commission).



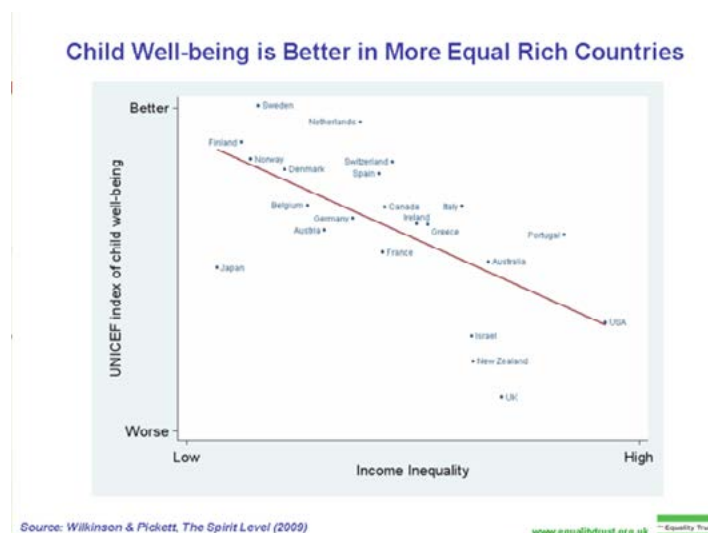
- Education authorities have also not systematically issued guidelines for teachers on how to assess students in citizenship education.
- In just over a third of the education systems, there are no central level regulations or recommendations on suitable methods for classroom assessment in this area of learning.

## Disturbing The Way We Do Things

Considering the challenges facing the European Union today it is timely for a strategic analysis to be carried out on the impact of this investment on the overall European aims to “ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”<sup>12</sup>. This is a worthy aim, but to achieve it will require introspective, courageous and progressive strategies that disturb the way we do things. Ethical Education provides such a framework that will stretch the boundaries of teachers and learners and evoke a lifelong commitment to such aims.

## The Ethics of Care in Education

The active citizenship framework needs to be bolstered and expanded to take account of such domains as the Ethics of Care in Education<sup>13</sup>, indeed this should be core value in education that would provide a counterbalance to the values of neoliberalism that result in growing inequality<sup>14</sup>, as noted from this figure below. The graph illustrates the more equal a society is in economic terms the higher the level of child well-being. If the EU is to fulfil its aims in education, we need to instil in our citizenships the core value of care for ourselves, each other and our common humanity and the critical thinking and action required to bring about true equality and respect for all human rights. Ethical Education provides such a framework.



<sup>12</sup> United Nations Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September, 2015, Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

<sup>13</sup> The LITTLE project promotes this through the online course in [Module 6: The Ethics of Care](#)

<sup>14</sup> Lynch & Kalaitzake, 2018. “Affective and Calculative Solidarity: The Impact of Individualism and Neoliberal Capitalism”, *European Journal of Social Theory* 1-20.

***“...[The] Ethical Education curriculum framework recognises that the spiritual dimension of young people’s lives is nurtured and that they are made aware of a sense of moral and ethical standards in the areas of honesty, respect, justice, integrity, trust and responsibility. This philosophy is the cornerstone of all interactions within school communities.... ... The philosophy also recognises the unique nature of each student, ensuring that no one is an outsider through the living out of an ethos that recognises that students may have different identities”***

**(Educate Together, Ethical Education Curriculum Framework).**

## **Recommended Measures**

- Address the deficits in the active citizenship framework as documented in the Citizenship Education At Schools in Europe, 2017 report in particular the gaps in ITE and CPD.
- Broaden the values of education to reflect an Ethics of Care as a core value in education. Invest in ensuring inquiry-based, project-based and integrated learning approaches become the norm.
- Invest in ensuring inquiry-based, project-based and integrated learning approaches become the norm.
- Develop ways to measure ‘care-related’ outcomes within Education so as to place them in equal value to market-led measures
- Create a common definition of Ethical Education and support for ITE and CPD at national level through public education systems.
- Promote teacher exchanges across Europe and support such exchanges through an EU approved certification in Ethical Education.
- Declare Education for Sustainable Development an emergency EU requirement for all member states.

## Bibliography

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Project Aristotle, a study released by Google in spring 2017, supports the importance of soft skills. Project Aristotle shows that the best teams at Google exhibit a range of soft skills: equality, generosity and curiosity toward the ideas of the teammates, empathy, and emotional intelligence. And at the top of the list: emotional safety. (Washington Post December 20, 2017).

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