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The role of education and educational research for a sustainable future

October 10, 2017

The European Educational Research Association stresses the important role of education in helping people to participate in a democratic society

The problems that afflict humankind today are complex, pervasive, and affect all of us. We have legitimate ambitions for a happier, fairer and more humane life. Addressing these issues represents a major challenge that calls upon the active and collaborative effort of all sectors of society, and a clear awareness of the central role of education.

Education is crucial in helping people at all age levels to participate fully and responsibly in a democratic society, in its discourse and its institutions. Education for such European citizenship, or even better for world citizenship, needs to include the competence to participate and deliberate.

The essential elements of education for world citizenship are knowledge, skills and attitudes that help students become fully informed through an open flow of ideas. Students **must be empowered** to use critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems and policies. They need to develop a concern for the welfare of others, the common good, and for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities.

As advocated by the high-level group appointed by the European Commission and chaired by Pascal Lamy education can help students to develop creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. We would contend that it also enables young citizens to cope with a range of other highly important matters that concern European citizens, for

example, in responding to the challenges of (youth) unemployment, migration, terrorism, (social) inequalities, and political extremism. These have been listed recently, in the Eurobarometer as central challenges from the citizens' perspective.

More research is needed on the development of an approach to education that will help students to become active and critical citizens in a challenging and changing world. Educational research is the crucial link between educational reform and the effects envisaged. Only educational reforms that are based on sound educational research can lead to the societal changes we all strive for.

Research into improving education

Educational research in many domains has already demonstrated the capacity to improve student learning and overall development and develop more efficient approaches to a range of specific educational challenges. An example is the area of education for key [competencies in Europe](#). Educational research has shown clear evidence of the essential role of well-being and social and emotional competencies in pupils' school success and success in later life (e.g. employment, active citizenship and personal fulfilment).

The development of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is another example that would not have been possible without educational research. This framework encourages the development of educational practices that encourage the emergence of tolerance, respect towards otherness and the valuing of cultural diversity, arguably resulting in the diminishing of realities such as human conflict, racism or xenophobia.

Educational research is not limited to a narrow focus on empirical research and statistical results. It also has the capacity to look behind the statistics and to answer-through qualitative and mixed methods research-questions on key processes in education.

Why and under what conditions do some interventions work and others not? Which approaches work best with which students and why? The fact that education in so many different countries has been at the forefront of policy experimentation means that there has been ample opportunity for educational research to learn about system change, and the differences that national contexts make. Thus, educational research results can be of great help in moving towards the introduction of an educational agenda for world citizenship.

Problems in education are often complex, multidimensional and contextualised and to solve such problems interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches are needed. [Educational research](#) by its very nature is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary bringing together insights from disciplines as diverse as politics, economy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology and applying them to educational.

Thus, educational research makes an essential contribution to solving the enormously challenging problems in the areas of educational and social reform. Collaboration between educational research associations in different countries helps tremendously in building teams that are able to draw on different modes, methods and traditions to solve the multifaceted challenges facing European education.

The European Educational Research Association is proud to have developed platforms not only for the collaborations between associations but also between educational researchers from all over the world. Over 2,500 researchers from over 60 countries participate in EERA's annual conference to critically engage with each other's work and build networks for collaborative ventures.

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