

France

Working Paper

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Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship





Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship (EduMAP)

EduMAP is a Horizon 2020 research project focusing on adult education among young adults at risk of social exclusion. Particular attention is paid to educational policies and practices needed to foster active citizenship among vulnerable young people.

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1. Challenges in AE provision and access

The Second Chance Schools (*Écoles de la deuxième chance*) or short: E2C, in France provide an example of how the long term tradition of addressing economic, education/training and social issues at the same time eases the school-to-work transition process of young adults. A widely accepted assumption is that successful transition into the labour market of young adults starts with a reasonable integration into the society, and a perfect acceptance and following of its mores, and therefore with a reasonable participation to the life of the city. The concept of citizenship therefore largely encompasses the concept of social integration. In France, it seems widely accepted that finding a job demands social integration and that social integration demands the owning of a decent job.

The E2Cs target 16-25 year-olds who are experiencing severe challenges in finding a job. They employ a work-based learning methodology, which takes into account individual participants' learning styles. The E2Cs facilitate school-to-work transition by providing personalised training lasting six to nine months. There are three key elements to the E2C's work-based learning approach:

- The Training Hub, which updates young people's basic competences;
- The Business Hub, which establishes partnerships with local companies; and
- The Social Life Hub, which encourages inclusion in the wider community.

The partnerships forged with businesses are a pillar of the E2Cs' success; a key element of the work-based learning programme is the immersion internships in partner businesses. Therefore one of the main challenges consists in building a strong relationship with companies which engage in supporting young people during their internship giving them a 'second chance'.

Another challenge stated by the E2C staff and practitioners/researchers outside the network – is that the E2C do not reach the individuals the most in need for heavy assistance, but the layer just above. The former is close to illegality, and/or totally marginalised whereas the latter has some hope they could take part in the society as it is.

2. Gender and diversity aspects tackled in the studied programmes

One of the principles is to make no difference between genders and this is also seen as one of the foundation of access to citizenship: no limit, no discrimination, and everything is potentially open for everyone, regarding of whether they are female or male.

Some participants are foreigners, or of foreign origin, and heavily need French class before anything else. This is acknowledged in all E2Cs and the steps are therefore being taken whenever necessary to make sure participants reach the basic literacy level. It was often presented as a first step to citizenship: **understanding and being able to use the language of the country where you live.**

The E2C staff in one of the schools insists that **only the French language is used anywhere on the school premises.** And by the same token, it is **forbidden to wear a hat, for men, and a veil, for women.**

3. The concept of APC as it is defined, understood or approached in the context of the study by different respondent groups

Polymakers

The word “citizenship” is barely used as such in the E2Cs, but approaches promoting citizenship, and democratic values in general, are at the heart of the E2C activities. The topic, and its many declinations, is covered on a daily basis. This is done in relation to certain actions, in the context of voluntary projects, to which most of the participants contribute. In a nutshell, the work on citizenship is diffuse but permanent. It is transversal.

AE practitioners

The mission of any E2C is **first and foremost to equip participants with an occupational project and the means to achieve it**. It is dependent on the particular school to the extent that some makes the job placement their priority – and they are aiming at full time unlimited contracts or at any lower alternative such as internship or short term contracts – whereas others work more on providing participants with key tools such as learning to learn. In the former case, the approach is clearly pragmatic: finding participants a job is the priority; even if the work is based on helping them finding, understanding and using pieces of information. In the latter case, the line of argument is that the E2C does not follow participants long enough to follow them through all the hurdles of the labour market and/or the education and training system. They do not know for sure where they will go either, **so they teach them to become independent in potentially acquiring new competences**.

Some practitioners consider that citizenship is just as important as occupational competences and the E2C aim at using whatever will help E2C participants to go out of their neighbourhood where they tend to be ghettoized.

Participants

Participants give accounts of different activities such as going to a museum, a theatre or any other cultural activity that was beyond their reach before the exposure to E2C activities. This enables them to leave their living environment and encounter new experiences.

4. Elements that are critical and or significant for enabling learners to become active citizens, or to develop APC competencies in the studied programmes

Each E2C has a tailored approach to building the schedule of participants. The assumption is that every single participant has different needs and that a one-size-fits-all approach would not work. It is therefore possible that different participants have different schedules, even though they arrive at the same time and share the same objectives.

The nine months are organised so that participants are quickly sent to an internship position, in a company based in the neighbourhood. On average the participants will experience 3 to 4 internships during the nine months. Other than, that, the nine months are organized as one month *discovery*; after 2 to 3 months: *taking stock and guidance*; and 2 to 3 months before the end: taking stock again, and guidance.

In between, there are the internships. Participants may ask for an interview with the staff any time. Finally, when participants find a job or resume studies, they quit the E2C, and a fair amount of participants quit before the end of the nine months.

In another E2C, the participants seem to agree with the approach used (*cognitive remediation*) because it gives them confidence. It may not be always easy at the beginning, because the teacher is always challenging the participants but, in the end, there is a strong commitment to using this approach.

Helping participants in their private life is just as important as equipping them with hard competences. Participants are often sent to health checks or have been taken to a hospital in cases of urgency.

Activities are also organized in which citizenship is at the forefront of the activities. Examples are

- A visit to an exhibition connected to the shooting of journalists on the 7 January 2015 in Paris (*Charlie Hebdo*);
- A visit to a deportation camp from the Second World War
- Going to theatre plays, to see plays such as “Antigone”, and “Memories of Sarajevo” that provide opportunities to discuss citizenship since the former partly addresses civil disobedience and the latter questions the current European crisis.

Several catalysts have been activated to include active participatory citizenship in the curriculum:

- team work, for young adults to learn to live and work together;
- elaboration of projects for improving the commitment and the sense of belonging of the young adults;
- involvement of teachers and administrative staff who greet E2C participants individually every morning to create a positive atmosphere;
- Internships are compulsory;
- Scheduled activities and lectures have to be attended;
- Creation of partnerships – for improving/creating bridges between the school and employment – and of a job search culture among local businesses, and enterprises.

5. Competencies and qualifications possessed, represented and/or cultivated through by the AE practitioners who contribute to the design, development and delivery of APC programmes for Participants

According to interviewees, several competences are key in teaching and guiding young adults participating in a second chance school. They must be good listeners. They have to be attentive to the needs of the participants and to be empathetic. They must display dynamism and place them at the centre of their project(s). In a nutshell, teachers and staff must have quite a few competences that are said to be “less frequent in the regular French education and training system”.

Without necessarily concurring to this last statement heard during the fieldwork, it remains true that teachers and staff operating in an E2C have to have an interesting mix of competences, including capacity to maintain order and discipline the class. For example, the use of “vous” – denoting politeness and respect in the French language – instead of “tu” – which is more familiar – is the standard procedure on the school premises.

Teachers state very clearly that working in an E2C is very demanding. Because the approach is resolutely to transfer competences in the context of group activities, the teachers cannot rely on a fixed routine and have to constantly change and adapt to emerging projects. This is the choice made to have a pedagogical approach based the acquisition of socio-occupational competences on the ground, in real life.

Worthy of note also is that in one of the E2C’s the staff members do not necessarily call themselves teachers, but rather “facilitator” (*médiateur* in French) in some instances. This is presented as a rather innovative approach, connected to the use of the cognitive remediation. The difficult part is that teachers have to invent the tools and re-invent themselves. In fact, one of the interviewees presented the typical E2C staff as the “Swiss army knife” of the teaching force, meaning they have to cover a range of skills from social worker to teacher and to psychologist.

6. Critical factors and conditions (favourable and unfavourable) that affect the potential of AE policies to cultivate APC for Participants

Favourable

E2Cs were born from a political will (the White Paper) to reduce the negative effect of having such a large fraction of young adults leaving the initial education and training system without a qualification (early leavers; see above). The objective was therefore to prepare them for a quick integration into the labour market. The pedagogical approach is far from being standard and classroom based. On the contrary, almost by definition, the participants to E2C would not be able to cope with a similar classroom formal approach than the one who failed them for the many previous years.

-Second Chance Schools (E2C) may act as an eye opener for some young adults that may then see themselves as future workers. They also teach young adults formerly at risk of social exclusion how to live together. This may go through internships in local enterprises or not-for-profit organisations that young adults did not know, and this may be conducive to promoting active citizenship.

-The Law on Citizenship was passed in the French Parliament soon after the 2015 terrorist attacks. It also created a sense of what it means to be French.

- The reform of the Vocational Baccalaureate aims at promoting the vocational track in upper secondary education. If successful in providing upper vocational secondary graduates, this reform may reconcile young adults and school.

Unfavourable

Young adults with no personal sense of agency are left out of the debate regarding citizenship all together;

- There is a heavy deeply rooted social reproduction – which means that the education and training system does not set in motion the “social lift” (OCDE-PISA, 2015);

- Access to decent jobs is highly inequitable – anonymous CV and similar experience, for instance for renting a flat, provide strong evidence that it is difficult for some groups of the population;

- Access to housing opportunities is difficult and fully connected to access to a decent job (lenders of places to rent demand a fixed term employment contract, a guarantee by the parents, unfair deposit and monthly income up to four times the monthly rent);

- Access to quality health support is also somewhat connected to socioeconomic status even if the welfare State usually provides for the most basic health care; and

- There are tensions and social unrest across the society, which do not promote active citizenship. A lack of a feeling of ‘belonging’ creates barriers to social mobility contributing to ghettoization

7. Lessons learnt from laws and policies that contribute effectively to cultivating APC for Participants

The example of the Second Chance School (E2C) demonstrate that thanks to the involvement and the proximity of the staff and participants, there is a positive spirit that brings about trust. The E2Cs clearly have an impact on the active citizenship of the participants even if this not put forward systematically and clearly by the staff. The staff members are fully conscious that they work at preparing tomorrow's citizens, but the participants do not fully realise it. Young adults enrolled in Second Chance Schools are mainly interested in finding an internship or a job (even if low qualified) but they do link it to becoming a citizen. To help addressing this, civic education could be added to the curriculum. In practice, stressing the facts that participants should be on time every day for the activities, should keep their commitments, should work in team is a way to develop citizenship competences among them.

But the authors judge the current policy approach in France to include marginalised young people to be rather hypocrite. It is based on creating "*cordées de la réussite*", i.e. to rope all young adults for success, for young adults in the suburbs to become successful too. This is based on the assumption that they have little or no ambition and they are too few to want to access renowned tertiary education institutions. Given that it is the school system that creates the negative image they have and little by little they take for granted they will not succeed and will not be invited in the social lift that the education and training system used to be, the Second Chance Schools do a good job to prepare young people also for life and not only for employment.

All together it is unrealistic to believe that one may develop active participatory citizenship only through specific punctual schemes. On the contrary, what is even more annoying is that for the few actors or stakeholders that look into the issue of citizenship, it is almost all the time connected to difficult neighbourhoods, in the suburbs of big cities.

8. Existing practices of information access and communication (emerging patterns and tendencies; people/social networks; media/platforms/channels; content/messages) about adult education in the studied programmes

Specifically one of the E2Cs researched in EduMAP has noted a general change in its communication behaviour. For a long time the school did not communicate about its offers until a communication officer was recruited. He went to look for the young people to attract them, in addition to those sent by the local mission and also posted the work of the school on social networks. The aim was specifically also to get better known amongst the companies and build better networks with the employment and social sector beyond the city borders. As a result there are now also stronger relationships between the teachers of the school and the managers of the companies. Young people have an opportunity to give accounts of their working experiences in regular meetings. There is also an effort to get more information published through the local print media. Building large social networks are important for the school, so that the young people can find a placement.

Young people themselves use social media, but not related to school work.

There is barely any exchange among the many E2Cs and this is unanimously seen as an issue, precisely because the E2C Network is first and foremost a Network. The reasons for that may come from the fact that each school is completely autonomous and may not share the same issues of interest.

9. Leveraging on young adults' information access and communication practices about adult education

Young people's communication practices are not used as a leverage in the schools. Virtual support has been set up, where young people can specifically find support for their learning projects and be in contact with their tutors. When young people miss their classes, tutors will send messages per Whatsapp or SMS and help them to get back on track.

The value of personal relationships is stressed. Most young people wish to restrict their engagement in learning to the school hours and are not willing to extend this time. Information about the E2C's is mostly accessed through the mission locale.

10. Information accessed and used during the design of AE for APC programmes

Information accessed for programme design in the case of the E2C depends on the pedagogical needs of the individual participant. Because many young people have negative experiences in the formal school system, teachers try to find approaches and material which help young people to become autonomous. This can for example be a specific role play or a web based game, anything that fosters motivation to learn. Teachers mention for example the IBM platform, creating role-playing games for companies or games for business schools. In one of these participants have to run a pizzeria or a bank and take decisions. This is how students learn a lot about the economic and social system. A competency based approach is used, but the design does not follow a formal curriculum, because no exams have to be taken.

The main reference system mentioned is the first inter-professional certificate of professional skills (CléA) created by French social partners in 2015, which is widely used by different organisations. Based on seven knowledge and skills elements prior learning is validated promoting employability and access to vocational training and a pathway to modular learning. The skills also include basic skills and competences deemed necessary for APC such as communication.



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