



The Roots of Solidarity: How school systems can influence societies

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Abstract

Education can change the world. If we want citizens that can solve conflicts and live-in today's world under constant change we need to start early, in schools. Educational systems are not compatible with the demands of today's society. Children are expected to know multiple languages, know how to do a proper presentation, know how to perfectly deal with technology but they were never taught to do so. When solving a problem, the easiest thing is to cut it by the root; we can change societies if we change the way citizens learn.

"The first step in the evolution of ethics is a sense of solidarity with other human beings"
- Albert Schweitzer.

It is even possible to define such a strong word that, motivated by kindness, includes every border and everyone. Maybe, it is possible to say that solidarity is taking an action that will not only benefit others or oneself but the interests of all those involved as well as their common goals.

People are shaped by the world around them, beginning with their homes as well as their schools. Solidarity, among other important values, should be taught and given a great amount of importance inside and outside of classrooms. Tibor Navracsics, EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport said: "We need to harness the potential of education to foster social cohesion and a sense of belonging" (Gothenburg summit, 2017), which can support that the impact of schools has been acknowledged in previous years and change has been made, but is it going in the right direction? Are educational systems creating supportive people? The answers to those

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questions will be the foundation of this paper. Furthermore, the influence of school systems on societies and how they can improve solidarity within the European Union, as well as the European Union itself, will also be discussed.

To cooperate and work towards the same objectives, it is fundamental to know how to communicate, not only to have your field's required skills but to understand others. Hence, language learning needs to be prioritised in a community that contains such diversity. The promotion of language learning is necessary so that more people, especially the younger ones, speak at least two European languages besides their mother tongue (European Council, 2017). On average, more than 80 % of EU Member States' pupils learn English in primary school, but not even 10 % learn the other two official languages of the European Union (French and German) in the same school year (Eurostat, 2018), which can suggest a delay on the inclusion of other languages compared to English. Programs such as Erasmus+ are a great opportunity for students to practice languages and an incentive to learn even more. Although, it is more difficult for the students who are underage, this type of initiative would be successful if it were available to high school students, as it could be extremely helpful not only to develop the language but also the social and interest-specific skills.

The knowledge of several languages breaks another wall in terms of work and socialization abroad. Moving to a new country, which is an EU Member State, is quite easy nowadays with all the advanced policies, but building a life there can be more difficult for some people due to the university or the need to find a job, at the same time when trying to meet new people.

For these reasons, language should not be another barrier that needs to be crossed. Instead, it should be safe, something that you can depend on.

The 21st century generation has access to more information than any other had before, everything can be learned and taught easier than ever, so why aren't students more connected around Europe and the world? It matters not only what is being learned, but also how it is being learned, because different students have different ways to absorb information. Some may work better in groups and others alone, which is not acknowledged by teaching them all the same way. The COVID-19 pandemic brought technology and education together, before that, one was not benefiting from the other nearly as much as it should have. Firstly, technology is able to provide students and teachers with materials beyond textbooks, more interactively and pragmatically (European Centre for Economic, Policy Analysis and Affairs, 2020), maintaining their interest in the content. Secondly, it can help them with autonomy and responsibility, developing personal skills that will be useful in their professional careers. Thirdly, it can change classrooms into environments full of diversity, making it possible to learn with people from every country and every background without even leaving the house. But how are students and teachers supposed to use technology for educational purposes if they are not trained to do so? In countries such as Denmark and Germany, students of ISCED 2 (International Standard Classification of Education) have between 180 and 170 hours of technology lessons, which are the highest numbers compared to other EU Member States (Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation, 2014). These 180 hours represent, approximately, 3.2 % of all workload in the ISCED 2 in Germany, with



a six-year duration, and 6.3 % of all workload in the ISCED 2 in Denmark with a three-year duration. These numbers may show a lack of importance being given in mastering today's reality. Children and teenagers are being taught to use technology to provide fun and distraction for themselves, which causes a disconnection with education and studying. The lack of interest in certain areas can be changed if students redirect their devices to serve the school purposes.

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The European Union is working to create a more mixed educational space through language learning and technology. Initiatives such as Erasmus+ and The Digital Educational Action Plan (2021-2027) are great examples of our progress. The Erasmus+ program (2021-2027) promises to be even more inclusive by offering different types of learning suitable for everyone who desires to study abroad, including migrants as well as people with disabilities. It also promotes the participation of students in small scale organisations (European Council, 2020). Since its creation in 1987, Erasmus+ has made improvements that seem to be making a difference, not only because of the high number of students who had the opportunity to participate, but also the ones who will benefit from the changes in the future. The Digital Educational

Action Plan (2021-2027) promotes the development of digital education through better infrastructures, effective capacity of digital planning and secure platforms that respect the user's privacy. It also will enhance digital skills and competencies by including computing education and good knowledge of data-intensive technologies in schools from an early age, so that all can be easily accessed. Representation is key for the younger generation. Therefore, the training of more specialists in digital studies and careers will count with women to be equally represented in the field.

This type of approach has started to show positive results as well as an overwhelming response. In the academic year of 2008/2009 there was about 198 523 student mobility for studies and traineeships (A Statistical Overview, 2008/2009). This figure went up to 351 682 in 2018, (Erasmus+ annual report, 2018) in 10 years, which can suggest the program has been successful and keeps gathering participants. The Digital Educational Action Plan is brand new, so no data could prove satisfactory results, but the predictions expect to have a significant impact on the bond between education and technology.

According to the information provided above, it is possible to say that the European Union is making an effort to support young minds through projects that encourage them to be creative and think outside the box. Although everything points to a breakthrough in today's education, the system itself can still be improved and it is essential that it does. Many children and teenagers see the school as an enemy instead of a friend because they don't fit in, not because they don't have friends or don't get along with teachers, but because of the way they are being taught.

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid”. – Albert Einstein. If they feel frustrated with school, it can severely affect their mental health. This study presents the results of a meta-analysis of data on the prevalence of internalised and externalised disorders in young people, from more than 50 community surveys from around the world, published in the past 15 years (US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, 2015). The results have shown that 17 % were struggling with one or more disorders, being any type of anxiety disorder the most common (8 %).

Sometimes schools don't notice how important their role is. In Germany, students at public schools have classes from 7:30 or 8:15 in the morning until noon or 1:30 in the afternoon, (National Centre for Education Statistics) which is nearly 35 hours of school per week. If we spend that much time in one place, it is natural that it shapes our thoughts and influences us in some way, therefore, going there against our will is only making everything worse. In a nationwide survey of 21 678 US high school students, researchers from the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence and the Yale Child Study Centre, found that nearly 75 % of the students' self-reported feelings related to school were negative (Yale News, 2020). But why are students not enjoying school as much as they could and should?

As some studies have proved, many students feel bored or stressed. The reasons can be: the importance given to standardized tests,

the lack of enthusiasm grows up each grade, the lack of motivation and the difference linking a creative and stimulating phase of school, as Primary Education, and a strict less captivating phase of school, as Secondary Education (Harvard Ed Magazine, 2017). If we want our future leaders to learn, we should be motivating them by making school an interesting place where they will be excited to go to.

In conclusion, it is clear that schools represent the base of society as well as its future. What children and teenagers are learning along with their environments will form their personalities, which can be either good or bad.

Sometimes education can be an underappreciated topic while economy and technology dominate our world. It is necessary to think ahead for predicting our problems as well as possible solutions instead of just remediating them when they happen. One way of doing that is by educating and preparing tomorrow's generation, implanting solidarity among other important values and ensuring they are capable of changing the planet for the best.

Solidarity can be gold in such a material society where a human life is lacking importance almost by the second. It reminds us that we need each other, we always have and always will.



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