

# **FRANKFURT DECLARATION: For a critical-emancipatory Political Education**

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Political Education (or Citizenship, Social Science or Democracy Education) is delivered, on the one hand, through different school subjects as well as through cross-curricular practice. On the other hand, Political Education is also practiced outside of schools in different non-formal contexts: in educational institutions, through youth associations, political foundations and NGOs, as well as in informal settings, for instance, participation in social movements and other grass-roots initiatives.

Power relations, domination and social inequalities are changing and with them the conditions of political socialization. Meanwhile, new actors approach schools and provide them with educational materials. In this context, principles and standards of Political Education must be constantly thought anew. With this declaration the authors want to articulate important positions for a critical-emancipatory Political Education, as contributions to current discussions.

## **1. Crisis: a Political Education that focuses on the democratization of societal relations deals with the radical changes and multiple crises of our time.**

Changing times require new political alternatives for collective learning processes. As the crises of capitalism, ecology, democracy and reproduction deepen, questions of socio-ecological transformations are of increasing importance to Political Education. A world of changes and crises cannot be grasped with standardized models. An approach based on measurable competencies will be meaningless if political knowledge and skills are not dedicated to the political agency of contemporary and future societal questions.

## **2. Controversy: Political Education in a democracy should reveal conflicts and dissent, and fight for alternatives.**

Society is the theatre of opposing interests and relations of domination. In accordance with the fundamental components of democracy, contestations and social conflicts should be articulated and politicized. Controversy, understood as principle of teaching and learning, is not only the documentation of different positions alongside already existing and influential perspectives, it deals with contentious issues and underlying dissent, reveals opposition and encourages critical thinking. A genuine political controversy unveils different interests, ways of thinking and practices and highlights possible alternative societal developments for the future. The political is not reducible to an understanding of politics as a process of problem-solving bound by an outcome of law-making. Thus, Social Sciences should not be reduced to an education in governance and management.

## **3. Criticism of power: autonomous thinking and action are limited by dependencies and structural social inequalities. These relations of power and domination should be detected and analyzed.**

Debates and controversies in society are determined by power inequalities and the unequal distribution of resources. These phenomena are often not sufficiently reflected upon. The responsibility of a critical and emancipatory Political Education is to reveal dynamics of exclusion and discrimination. Which societal problems are being debated, which voices are being heard and

which actors impose their understanding of the common good? What are the reasons for social- and self-exclusion of groups and individuals from social and political participation? Political Education discusses how exclusions are produced and how barriers are created: between the private and public sphere, between the social and the political, legitimate and illegitimate, experts and lay people.

**4. Reflexivity: Political Education is itself part of the political. Learning relations are not free from power structures, Political Education reveals this.**

Learners and political educators are part of social and political discourses which influence their perceptions, ways of thinking and actions. The neo-liberal approach of the 'self-entrepreneur' or 'self-responsible' consumer imposes itself within educational institutions. Furthermore, power structures continue to be reproduced along dominant gender and ethnic categories. Critical-emancipatory Political Education starts where these kinds of normative constructions are made visible, criticized and questioned. Political educators are conscious of their social embeddedness and take a critical-reflexive stance, which they make transparent and therefore open to criticism. In doing so, they offer learners protection against being subdued by the ideas of the educator, whilst reinforcing the right of the student to self-will and self-determination.

**5. Empowerment: Political Education provides an empowering learning environment within which experiences of power and powerlessness are scrutinized and challenged.**

Political learning and political action are not based solely on rational analysis and decisions. They are also linked to concrete living conditions including struggles for material goods and social recognition. Political judgement is also embedded in society, it arises in social interactions and contains, beside cognitive elements, also physical-emotional components. Political positioning reveals itself through anger, enthusiasm, rejection and engagement. Social orders are also inscribed in bodies. A crucial condition of successful Political Education is the perception of these experiences as being both sources and obstacles of learning processes. This implies the participation of the learners in planning and reflecting on their own learning processes. The complexity of issues in Political Education as well as students' resistance towards education should be considered as productive sources of learning and political empowerment.

**6. Changes: Political Education creates opportunities to change society, both individually and collectively.**

Individuals are subordinated by societal structures and relations, but at the same time they are also in a position to shape these relations. Political Education allows the individual to perceive of heteronomy and self-subjugation. It instead enables people to make self-determined decisions and to participate in society. Political emancipation enables the expansion of individual and collective ways of thinking and spheres of action in a given situation. This takes place through criticism, opposition and protest against the existing social relations of domination. Political Education opens up spaces and experiences to all children, adolescents and adults through which they can appropriate politics as a social field of action. It enables learning processes of self-appropriation and adaptation to the world through confrontation with others in order to find ways not only to reproduce, but also to change the existing order through individual and collective action. Political action gives rise to new possibilities of experience, of thinking, and of establishing (new) political alternatives.

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