

Civic education in pluralist societies

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By no coincidence schools have been a major arena of controversy across Europe, linked to the integration of new minorities. Education has been a crucial issue to immigrants, eager to convey to the children their traditions and religious beliefs, but also to European authorities and politicians, eager to convey to immigrant children the predominant norms and values of society through public schooling. Western European schools are no longer transmitting simplistic messages of nationalism, but are more concerned with so-called universal values of democratic participation and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Faced with new minorities, particularly from the Muslim world, there has been a general endeavor to pass on liberal skills and attitudes. This has instigated some shared dilemmas concerning limits of tolerance and freedom of belief. Beneath these shared dilemmas, however, the challenge of religious and cultural pluralism has been differently addressed in different countries. France and Germany represent to contrasting examples in this regard: whereas France has demanded from immigrants that they adhere to the principle of a strict separation between private and public spheres and recognize the secular public ethics of the Republic, Germany has sought to domesticate Islam through Islamic instruction supervised by the state. Rather than demanding the privatization of Islam, it is believed that Islam may play a socially beneficial role, as a source of civic morality alongside Christianity, if transformed and merged with liberal German values.