



This paper is taken from

*Future Citizens in Europe  
Proceedings of the fourth Conference of the  
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe  
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2002

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 356 5

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*Lukasova-Kantorkova, H., Rozsypalova, M., and Sigutova, M. (2002) An analysis of primary school pupils' attitudes to citizenship and the implications for teacher education, in Ross, A. (ed) Future Citizens in Europe. London: CiCe, pp 45 - 49*

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

#### Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- Cass Mitchell-Riddle, head of the CiCe Coordination Unit
- The University of North London (now part of the London Metropolitan University) for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of the European Commission Department of Education and Culture for their support and encouragement.

## **An analysis of primary school pupils' attitudes to citizenship and the implications for teacher education**

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### **Background and research focus**

During 2001-2002 we have been investigating a sample of primary school pupils and their attitudes to citizenship. On the basis of this investigation, we shall propose some curriculum changes concerning citizenship issues be implemented in the design of a new 5-year primary teacher education course.

### **Method of research**

Our research was based on a questionnaire designed by a CiCe colleague, Professor Maria Luisa Freitas of the University of Minho in Portugal. The Czech version of the questionnaire was adapted by two primary teacher education student-teachers, Rozsypalova and Valova, tutored by Professor Hana Lukasova-Kantorkova, and was distributed to two hundred 5<sup>th</sup> grade pupils (aged 11-12) in 2001.

The questionnaire comprises seven sets of questions:

1. Pupils' preferences or non-preferences for children of different nations (Brazil, Hungary, Israel, Finland, Tanzania, Japan), asking two open questions: Which of these children would you easily make friends with, and why? Which children would it be difficult to make friends with?
2. Two pictures (a child on a rubbish dump and a demonstration) are provided. Pupils were asked to comment on what comes into their minds when looking at the pictures.
3. A list of statements about participating in social and communicative activities, both at school and in the community, is presented. Pupils were asked to agree or disagree with statements such as "At school I participated in..." or "When I grow up, I would like to be..."
4. Pupils were shown pictures of two people important in the Czech Republic and our region (President Vaclav Havel, and the Chairman of the County Council of North Moravia, E. Tosenovsky). The questions were open, for example: What does this person do? What is his name?
5. Pupils were asked to choose three statements they would make to present themselves and their own country on meeting Bill, an American boy. Each statement has three dimensions: regional, national and European. Pupils were also asked to select a historical or contemporary personality they would like to introduce to Bill.
6. Pupils were asked where they would like to live if they could choose somewhere other than their local town, and why. Analysis is focused on whether the pupil chooses another region in the Czech Republic, or abroad.
7. Lastly, there was a problem-solving situation: "You are the Minister of Transport. Imagine that you have to decide on a route for a motorway, which will you choose and why?" Both routes suggested present advantages and disadvantages.

## **Research sample**

Research was carried out in two schools. One was in Ostrava (an inner city school) and the other in Pribor (a small district town). The questionnaire was filled in by 200 pupils, all from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in primary school. There were 104 pupils from Ostrava and 96 from Pribor.

## **Research questions**

1. What were the significant preferences of Czech pupils when choosing friends from abroad?
2. What topics did the pupils see in the two pictures? Were there similarities in their interpretations?
3. What communicative and social activities with other people and children do they prefer?
4. Do the pupils recognise well-known personalities from their own country and region? Do they know what these people do and what their names are?
5. How would the pupils present themselves and their country to the American boy?
6. On what bases would pupils make decisions if they had a chance to move to another town?
7. What reasons do pupils give for selecting a particular route for building a motorway?

## **Research results and discussion**

### *Question 1*

Pupils formulated twenty reasons for choosing a friend from abroad. It was clear that choices were related to the state/country a prospective friend came from. Respondents agreed that "a boy/girl could be a good friend". The most popular choice was Monika from Hungary, the second was Danake from Japan, and the third Aarive from Finland. Children with very different looks, for instance with dark complexion, were selected less frequently. These children were also listed among those with whom it would be difficult to make friends. The most frequent reasons given for why this should be so were: "I would not understand them, we could not talk together, they use a different language". These were the most frequent reasons for not selecting children from Brazil or Tanzania as potential friends, which may suggest that a perception of otherness alienated respondents.

### *Question 2*

Most pupils had difficulty in identifying the first picture (a child on a rubbish dump), while the other was identified as a demonstration or a protest. It may be that the image of a child (rather than an adult) on a rubbish dump looked strange to pupils in Ostrava and Pribor.

### *Question 3*

The most frequently selected communicative activities were those carried out at school. Pupils claimed that they listened to somebody even when they disagreed with what s/he

was saying (83%). Approximately the same number admitted that they had participated in a quarrel with a classmate (82%). 60% stated that they had been in group which organised something for the whole class. Nearly 50% children were planning to approach elections responsibly, and 46% would like to work as volunteers in organisations helping other people (e.g. the Red Cross). Very few expressed a wish to be involved in (local) politics, for example as a mayor/mayorress, a member of Parliament, etc. in the future.

#### *Question 4*

50% of pupils from Ostrava and Pribor recognised President Vaclav Havel and wrote his name correctly. Less than 20% recognised E. Tosenovsky, (the Chairman of the County Council), or were able to write his name correctly and say what he does. It may be that respondents have had very few opportunities to get to know local political representatives on a 'personal' level, for example from watching local TV news, but we suggest that most pupils do not feel engaged in local politics.

#### *Question 5*

When meeting Bill,

- 30% pupils would introduce themselves as Czech, 8% would also introduce themselves as coming from Ostrava, and 12% would introduce themselves as European
- approximately 83% would speak about pork, dumplings and sauerkraut as a typical Czech meal
- about 84% would choose Prague Castle as an important sight in the Czech Republic
- 49% would choose a contemporary sportsperson or singer as an important personality.
- about the same number (48%) would choose important personalities from Czech history to introduce to Bill. This indicates good knowledge of history and awareness of links between history and present.

It seems that more pupils identify themselves as Czech than as European; they would also present themselves as Czech when abroad. Respondents also demonstrated positive attitudes to the history of their country.

#### *Question 6*

When moving to another town, nearly 60% pupils would choose Prague rather than Jihlava (a small town in the south of Moravia) or Wien, the reason given being that Prague is a beautiful city, and many respondents have relatives and/or friends there. If pupils had to choose between the continents of Europe, North America and South America, the choice would be Europe, with Paris (70%) named most often. The remaining responses were divided equally between North and South America. The most frequent reasons given for choosing Paris were "It is nice there", "It is in Europe", "There is the Eiffel Tower there". In sum, the data indicates that the concrete knowledge of close, or at least less distant, communities is important when making decisions and constructing meaning.

#### *Question 7*

Finally, nearly 84% respondents chose Route A for building a road, even though this was a more expensive project than Route B, which would have run close to a national park.

The main reasons given were saving animals and being able to protect them further. In short, it is clear from the above that the protection of the environment is preferred to economic reasons.

### **Conclusions and implications for primary teacher education programmes**

The results from the questionnaire have helped us to map areas of concern which can be addressed further in our teacher education programmes.

It is a positive sign that pupils at the age of 11-12 demonstrated a natural interest in social participation and co-operation, especially in the safe environment of their school. Their awareness of the importance of local politics and their own active involvement in (local) politics was weak, but pupils expressed their willingness to take a responsible approach to elections in the future, and readiness to help other people, for example by acting as volunteers in aid organisations. It is possible to conclude that social learning has been taking place, so it seems appropriate to build on pupils' previous knowledge and experience, and to develop these further. We suggest that teacher education programmes need to focus on providing high quality social and citizenship education to future teachers, including issues of co-operative learning and co-operative school (Sigutova, 2001). Moreover, the programmes need to focus on children's (and student-teachers') active involvement in community life beyond the boundaries of school institutions.

With the planned accession of the Czech Republic to the EU, the requirement for including multicultural education linked to the understanding of human and children's rights has become crystal clear as far as teacher education programmes are concerned. However, we believe that it is necessary to understand multicultural education from an interdisciplinary point of view, and to integrate scientific knowledge from cultural anthropology, pedagogy, ethnography, theory of communication and inter-cultural psychology with developing future teachers' decision-making skills and cultivating their personal attitudes to citizenship. This is a challenging task for teacher educators, and we are only at the beginning of the process of changing the curricula. It is obvious that more effort is needed to facilitate the process of multicultural education as a practical activity ( Prucha, 2001, Ross, 1999, 2000, 2002).

Further, it is possible to deduce from our research that the ability of future primary school teachers to communicate in at least one foreign language, and their competence in skills to promote communication with children from abroad, could help to share ideas and to lower anxiety over causing misunderstanding and being misunderstood. Communicative competence in a foreign language, competence in using the Internet in teaching, and a profound knowledge of citizenship issues seem to be a priority for implementing changes in the new 5-year primary teacher education curriculum.

We note that the pupils in our research felt satisfied with their Czech identity. Many of them also demonstrated appropriate knowledge of, and positive attitudes towards, the history of their country. A small number also demonstrated positive attitudes to Europe. As for primary teacher education programmes, it is important to continue developing positive attitudes to both Czech and European identities.

Finally, the preference for an environmentally friendly solution to building a road is not surprising, but is very valuable. It indicates that primary teacher education programmes may continue to draw upon positive results already achieved in environmental studies.

Integrating educational and environmental studies in primary teacher education programmes appears to be a good foundation for involving primary school pupils in the protection of life in their environment.

### Acknowledgements

The study above was made possible by co-operation with the 7-11 Age-Related Group within CiCe 1998-2001. Our thanks are due to the chairperson and other colleagues in the group - Panayota Papoulia-Tzelepi (Greece), Louisa Freitas (Portugal), Beata Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz (Poland) and Hugo Verkest (Belgium).

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