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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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Citizenship education through the eyes of teachers in post-graduate professional development

Florbela Trigo-Santos and Carolina Carvalho
University of Lisbon, Faculty of Sciences, CIE (Portugal)

Introduction

The Portuguese education system is in a continuous and unsettling process of change. Ingrained in the old European values, society and thus schools are trying to find their own space. As part of this context, and at its very centre, is the concept of citizenship education, which was introduced into the school curricula as a trans-disciplinary area, demanding the development of new pedagogical and organisational concepts in the school. How this concept is understood by responsible and interested teachers, and how they are following the implementation of new practices in the schools, is the concern of the authors. Taking advantage of the fact that we are in direct contact with four groups of teachers enrolled in Education Masters courses (Didactics of Mathematics, Didactics of Sciences, Educational Administration, and Personal and Social Development) through teaching and supervision, we designed a research project to elicit the relevance of the problematic relationship between theory, regulation and practice in this area, and how they are being experienced.

The apparent problem with the new regulations lies in the difficulty of implementing a curricular model without the background to support its practice, as our pedagogical system is still based on traditional individual disciplines.

By collecting different interpretations of the reality of each of these teachers' contexts, we aimed to identify the main obstacles to the development of an education for citizenship and thus to formulate proposals for overcoming the current problems. This qualitative study has demonstrated values and the valuation of citizenship education at a personal and institutional level, its meanings, and the associated fears of citizenship education as a potential ideological tool.

Methodology

In this paper we present the results of an empirical study, conducted with the four Master's groups, for which we developed and administered an open-ended questionnaire with the whole population of 48 educators. With this research we wanted to:

- identify perceptions about citizenship education and civics education;
- understand how these Master' students valued the role of the teacher as an educator of citizenship;
- describe how they were adapting the National Curriculum to their own classroom practice; and
- describe how the schools were implementing these new fields.

Our research questions were:

- how is the concept of citizenship understood by responsible and interested teachers;

- how are they following the implementation of new practices in the schools and classrooms; and
- how relevant is the problematic relationship between theory, regulation and practice, and how is this being experienced.

The Respondents

From the 48 students, only 29 responded. In Didactics of Mathematics only five, all female, aged between 24 and 42, returned the questionnaire. One of these was a teacher trainer in the school. In Didactics of Sciences, six female and one male teacher, aged between 27 and 42, answered. In Personal and Social Development, we had nine respondents, all female and aged between 28 and 56. Six of them had pedagogical leadership duties. In Educational Administration, eight Master's students responded, six female and two male, aged 35 to 55, of which four were school heads.

Our qualitative, interpretative field study was fruitful as it allowed us to understand controversial areas in teachers' perceptions of the main problems concerning the introduction into the school curriculum of citizenship and civics education.

The data

We collected data from a questionnaire of ten open-ended questions. The Masters students were invited to express their experience in the new cross-curricular areas of Citizenship Education and Civics Education. We then developed content analysis, starting from categories which allowed a comparison of the different groups of students who participated in the study.

Table 1 presents their definitions of Citizenship Education (CE). A first reading indicates a close proximity in their understanding of the concept (two of the groups, Personal and Social Development and Educational Administration, had attended courses in specific fields related to this area). It seems that the students emphasised the rules and behaviour required in the school's daily life. For these teachers, socialisation appears to be a priority and is associated with the concept of citizenship.

The idea that citizenship calls for an active and critical participation by each teacher in their work with the pupils, both in the classroom and in the school, does not appear in the responses. In fact, these teachers did not even refer to the National Curriculum, where some suggestions were offered on working citizenship into each specific subject area. Some respondents referred to citizenship as a specific curricular area, while the legislation indicates that it should be integrated into every subject across the curriculum.

Table 1: Meanings of citizenship education

	Didactics in Mathematics Education	Didactics of the Sciences	Personal and Social Development	Educational Administration
Meanings of Citizenship Education	Rules for everyday life;	Development of an active and civic consciousness;	Cross-curricular area in every subject;	A sample of values including identity and good manners;
	Cross-disciplinary tendency;	Reflecting on the values necessary for daily life;	Involvement of the community;	A subject area;
	Attitudes and values to be promoted in society;	Helps to participate in society.	Values education;	It is meant to transmit values.
	Norms to educate somebody.		Connected to rights, duties and consciousness	

Citizenship education was also defined as a scale having on one side the rights of the State towards the citizens and on the other the rights of the citizens towards the State. It is noticeable in Table 1 that the teachers attending Master's in PSD and EA, though having had to reflect about this theme, did not show evidence of having acquired the knowledge necessary to change their practice: their discourse is far from what is recommended in the curricular orientations.

Table 2: Meanings of civics education

	Didactics in Mathematics Education	Didactics of the Sciences	Personal and Social Development	Educational Administration
Meanings of Civics Education	Rules and principles to leave in society;	Space for citizenship;	Curricular field for debating human rights and environment;	-Learning rules to become an active and participatory citizen;
	Practice of those rules;	Acquiring competencies for an actual citizenship;	Values Education;	Learning to exercise their duties and rights;
	Civility;	Preparation for the future;	A background for a person to define values and social rules.	It aims at a civic and social development;
	Knowing how to behave in society.	Preparing citizens able to intervene in a civilised way.		A curricular subject area; A subject intended to transmit values.

Table 2 shows responses very close to the previous table. This might be an indicator of some weakness in their knowledge, indicate a lack of in-service development, or perhaps show that the national policies are ambiguous. We did not find any significant differences between the groups. 'Learning the rules' and 'how to interact' still dominated the meaning ascribed to civics education.

Table 3: Role of the school

	Didactics in Mathematics Education	Didactics of the Sciences	Personal and Social Development	Educational Administration
Role of the School	Valuing these areas;	Design the school project;	Replaces family in the socialisation process;	Reinforcing basic and democratic values;
	Answering the needs for teaching Civics;	Paying attention to change;	Valuing the pupil as person;	Designing projects for every actor in the school;
	Promoting activities directed at the development of attitudes towards social values;	Responding to the pupils' needs;	Allowing for a co-reflection of everybody for a better understanding of citizenship;	Establishing a dialogue and valuing cooperation;
		The way it works;	Promoting respect for everybody;	Substituting the family;
	Due to the diversity of its pupils, it may contribute to the application of the basic principles of citizenship.	How it substitutes the family in the implementation of rules;	The activities undertaken;	Involving the pupils in the daily activities;
		Arranging for school clubs.	Establishing relationships with the whole educational community.	Alerting the pupils for their;
			Allowing for the development.	

The data shows that these teachers think that the school needs to value the non-disciplinary curricular areas more, such as those related to citizenship and civics. For them, the school has to accept this new responsibility in the education of a more critical and participative citizen. These respondents expect that new leadership in schools might help in the development of students' civic consciousness.

However, as we can see in Table 4, they only propose that more collaborative work be implemented in the daily life of the classroom. They seem to lack the vision to make use of other methodologies and knowledge that each subject area may add, and to disregard what the national curriculum defines as the 'flexible curriculum', meaning that the teachers need to be more autonomous and make decisions in order to introduce interdisciplinary and personal and social issues when planning their teaching.

Table 4: Role of the teacher

	Didactics in Mathematics Education	Didactics of the Sciences	Personal and Social Development	Educational administration
Role of the teacher	Being a role-model;	Being a role model;	The success of the activities depends on the teacher's character;	Correcting pupils' behaviours;
	Implementing respect;	Using the contents for debates on current;		Allowing for student self evaluation;
	Allowing for group work and activities where there is innovation.	Including the topics whenever possible;	Paying attention to pupils' behaviour and correcting them;	Actually doing debates and classroom meetings;
		Respecting people and their opinion	Respecting students' ideas;	Reinforcing rules;
	Promoting co-operative work.	Promoting cooperation among them.	Viewing films with the students.	

Again Table 5 shows that the teachers stress the importance of specific themes for non-curricular areas. These results enforce the need to establish carefully planned in-service teacher development, with a strong emphasis on reflective thinking

Table 5: What is taught?

	Didactics in Mathematics Education	Didactics of the Sciences	Personal and Social Development	Educational administration
What is taught?	Human rights and peace education;	Autonomy/responsibility;	Sexual education;	Environment education;
	Drugs and violence;	Respecting others;	Human rights;	Sexual education;
	Behaving in society.	Promoting cooperative work among the students;	Peace education;	Values in societies;
		Sexual Education and Health;	Learning to be and knowing how.	Peace education;
	Civic duties;		Human rights;	
	Violence.			Violence and racism;
				Cultural diversity.

Table 6: Positive and negative aspects

	Didactics in Mathematics Education	Didactics of the Sciences	Personal and Social Development	Educational administration
Positive aspects	Learning social rules;	Project development;	Allow for the students' reflective thinking while paying attention to the problems;	Change schools in order to educate the pupils as citizens;
	Discussion of each one's rules and its role;	Preparing pupils for current challenges;	Teachers clarify own values and discuss it with pupils;	More time to reflect with the others;
	Contributing to the pupils' civic education.	Confronting ideas;	Development of social skills and competencies.	Teachers are becoming more open to these areas;
		Learning to accept the ideas of others.		Without a national curriculum it allows its development according to the pupils' needs.
Negative aspects	Deciding who is the teacher responsible for these areas;	Lack of coordination among teachers;	Negotiating the topics with pupils;	Difficulty to implement across the several disciplines;
	The plurality of the pupils gets lost.	Conflict of idea;	Too much time lost with the subject;	Lack of materials and resources;
		Not every teacher promotes these competencies.	Difficulty in distinguishing what is right or wrong;	It depends on the teacher's profile;
			Cannot be taught it has to be lived.	Most of the times it is only rhetoric; No teacher preparation or time to do it; The pupils don't realise what is the curriculum; Some parents don't accept what is taught.

The results in Table 6 show the positive and negative aspects the teachers encountered in these areas. They suggest that the teachers are uncomfortable with having to introduce this new content into their own classroom practice, although they all affirm the importance of these new directives. Working together collaboratively seems still very difficult for the teachers.

Table 7 shows politically correct replies, which follow the Ministry's regulation, but which contradict previous responses.

Table 7: Whose responsibility?

	Didactics in Mathematics Education	Didactics of the Sciences	Personal and Social Development	Educational administration
Whose responsibility?	Every teacher through their attitudes;	Teachers as they are developing the school projects;	The class tutor; The school leadership;	Teachers and helpers through the school project;
	The whole educational community.	Everybody.	Teachers.	Every actor in the school.

Results

- The data show some misunderstanding of the differences between the meanings of citizenship education and civics education according to the Portuguese Educational Reform. Both are included in the new national curriculum but with different status, meanings and regulation.
- Almost all the respondents show some concern with the rules of social behaviour. When asked for a definition, this appears in their answers as a kind of ‘translation’ for both citizenship and civics education. Rules are presented as the foundation of society.
- Our understanding of teachers’ cultures led us to conclude that this over-emphasis on the rules indicates teachers’ main difficulties in dealing with student misbehaviour in the classroom and in schools.
- For these teachers, school is replacing the role of the family in ‘teaching’ these rules. (The secondary socialisation process is trying to accomplish that not done by the family and at home).
- Although they are studying at post-graduate level, it seems that in this ‘domain’ these teachers’ arguments lack clarity and show poor, simplistic thinking.
- They seem to lack knowledge of the curriculum and of suggestions about how to approach this ‘new’ area in their own disciplines.
- These teachers undermine the contribution and participation of other educationalists.
- They do not seem enthusiastic but the Ministry of Education has done little to change this devaluation of more general and open educational aims.
- They lack understanding both of the concepts and of how to work with them in the classroom, but do not recognise the need for more information and in-service development.
- There were too many ‘common sense’ answers.
- For them a teacher is a role model as a good citizen.
- They gave no examples of activities in their own teaching to introduce citizenship.
- The teachers confirmed repeatedly that they mostly ‘discuss’ with their students how to listen to and respect their peers.
- They are interested in ‘fitting’ all students into the same model, described as ‘knowing how to live and interact with others.’
- School projects are considered a means to solve problems rather than as educational development projects.

- They do not appreciate having to teach civics education as an independent subject but do not include citizenship as a cross-curricular area in their own subject of expertise.
- The Mathematics and Science Master students, who are mostly in secondary teaching, show more concern towards their didactics and its demands: it seems that they do not 'have the time' for anything else an over-emphasis disciplinary knowledge.

Conclusions

The curriculum reform introduced by Law 6/2001 had the advantage of filling a gap, long felt in the Portuguese educational system, for the need to have a *flexible* curriculum in compulsory education. Previously, with the exception of the first cycle (primary), the plan of studies was based on disciplinary subject areas, which undermined issues of the personal and social development of the young people. The new document stressed the importance of such areas as civics and the education of a conscious, responsible citizen, ready to participate as an individual or collectively in their communities and in society in general. The need for an educational project, including plans for new experiences to be lived by the whole school, were intended to change teachers' routines and cultures. From the results of our research, it seems that there is still a long way to go. Further development is not enough for teachers, who need to confront their own practices and beliefs and feel the urge to change. For that reason they need to establish a personal programme to be negotiated with the different teams in the schools.