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Pro-social competencies and Citizenship Education

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Summary

The role of Education for (European Democratic) Citizenship (EC) has remarkably increased in recent years in the school curricula of European countries. There have been increasingly strong official documents and political acts by the European Commission, and programs by several supranational organisations, designed to achieve the objectives of EC in relation to the aim of spreading democratic principles and promoting social inclusion among young people in the EU member states.

EC has ambitious educational goals: to develop citizenship and a European identity in children and adolescents, and to strengthen them in adults. Therefore EC has the outcome of promoting the development of a wide and complex framework of competences. Several theoretical patterns of competences involved in EC have been analysed by sociologists and specialists in the educational field.

All the models proposed are generally based on the assumption that EC implies the formation of a large range of general skills (linked to critical and argumentative thinking, creative and productive thinking, problem-solving, assessment and evaluation, moral reasoning, etc.), specific skills (linked to participation, multiple communication, co-operative tasks and team-work, debating, negotiating and compromising, intercultural comprehension, conflict-prevention/resolution, mediation and facilitation etc.) and attitudes. In this last sphere, some authors especially refer to pro-social and pro-active dimensions, usually defining attitudes related to citizenship in terms of involvement or commitment in (respect for, attachment to, defence of) something that is recognised as of universal value in society (see in part Veldhuis, 1997).

This paper is aimed: a) to review these patterns and critically discuss and compare them; b) to show the role of *pro-social competences* in *active citizenship*; c) to present a new model of competences involved in citizenship proposed by the author and focused on *active citizenship*; d) to present the construct of some empirical tools for achieving these competences. These tools have been elaborated by the author especially for a project surveying on a large sample of children, adolescents and adults in twelve European countries.

Models of core competencies developed by EC

Most important theories about EC focus on a set of educational goals around a framework of core competencies involved in acquiring *active citizenship*. Many fundamental components are common to most part of these models. The need for a set of competencies that is widely shared among professionals in education is important for the Lisbon process, which proposed developing a set of key competencies that would be a

reference point in assessing how far member states had fostered citizenship through education.

Audigier (2000) reviewed most relevant basic classifications of competencies for democratic citizenship. These models represent for the author different theoretical frameworks that can be used to define, orient, motivate and analyse educational activities. He stresses 'these constructs are intended to help us, so let us take them as such and try to improve them through constantly comparing them with reality'.

The *first classification* comprises three broad categories of competencies (a triangle of interdependent dimensions):

A) *Cognitive competencies*;
B) *Affective competencies* and those connected with the *choice of values*;
C) *Capacities for action* (*social competencies*).

Cognitive competencies can be separated into four families:

The first family concerns *competencies of a legal and political nature*, which are 'weapons' with which 'citizens can defend their freedoms, protect individuals and challenge abuses of power by those in authority'. These competencies are particularly connected to knowledge about the rules of collective life and about public institutions in a democratic society.

The second family concerns *knowledge of the present world*, i.e. knowledge and understanding of the most important phenomena characterizing today's society (for such a program of literacy about contemporary society see also Lastrucci, 1996, 1997, 2000a, 2000b and below § 3).

The third family includes *competencies of a procedural nature*, which we hope are transferable and hence usable in a variety of situations (in addition to various general intellectual capacities, they concern, more in particular, 'the ability to argue, which is related to debate and the ability to reflect, i.e. the capacity to re-examine actions and arguments in the light of the principles and values of human rights, to reflect on the direction and limits of possible action, on conflicts of values and of interests, etc.)'.

The fourth family is related to *knowledge of the principles and values of human rights and democratic citizenship*.

The second field of competencies concerns ***ethical and axiological dimension.*** This dimension involves not only cognitive, but also affective aspects: 'citizenship cannot be reduced to a catalogue of rights and duties, but entails membership of a group or groups, bringing identities into play in a very profound way. It consequently requires an ethical shift that includes a personal and collective emotional dimension'.

The third dimension, concerning ***capacities for action***, includes in a special way three orders of capacities:

a) *To live with others* and *cooperate*;
b) *To resolve conflicts in accordance with the principles of democratic law*;
c) *To take part in public debate.* **'**Knowledge, attitudes and values, take on meaning in everyday personal and social life; they are embodied in these capacities and help give sense to the presence of each to others and to the world'.

To explain more clearly how the three dimensions interact in a concrete situation, Audigier uses the example of the peaceful resolution of a conflict. To reach such an objective:

> implies knowledge on the democratic principles that organise this resolution, a personal attitude which involves controlling one's own violence and accepting not to take the law into one's own hands, and the capacity for action in connection with the debate. The majority of the competences thus classified also refer to the two other fields. For example, argumentation and debate call for a knowledge on the subject under discussion, the capacity to listen to the other and acknowledgement of his point of view, as well as the application of these capacities in the precise situation in which the people find themselves. There is no effective citizenship other than that exercised in and by the actions of the individual; conversely, knowledge of and reflection on his acts and their social and personal, practical and ethical significance are just as important. According to the training and education criteria, the accent should be on the weakest dimension. Another advantage of this type of construct is that it constitutes an instrument which is an aid to the evaluation and reorientation of practices (Audigier, 2000).

The second classification is that proposed, in particular, by **Veldhuis** (1997). It is grounded on the distinction - based on an analysis of life in society – in four dimensions of citizenship: *political and legal, social, cultural and economic*.

The *political and legal dimension* covers rights and duties with respect to the political system and the law. It requires knowledge of political institutions, democratic attitudes and the capacity to participate, to exercise responsibilities at all levels of public life.

The *social dimension* covers relations between individuals and requires knowledge of what these relations are based on and how they function in society. This dimension is connected to others, in particular the economic one, through the weight of values such as solidarity.

The *economic dimension* concerns the world of production and consumption of goods and services. It opens directly on labour and the way it is organised, on the fruits of labour and their distribution, requiring knowledge on how the economic world (including the world of work) functions.

The *cultural dimension* **'**refers to collective representations and imaginations and to shared values. It implies, like the others and sometimes more than them, historical competence, recognition of a common heritage with its varied components, a mobile

heritage, a heritage to exchange with others'. Culture is also connected with literacy and linguistic education. In EEC this is a very important dimension, for it is based in a great part on a widening of cultural horizons to European civilisation, also through acquisition of linguistic competencies in a second and third European language.
Audigier observes:

> Although they differ in presentation, both these classifications stress the importance of constructing a critical social consciousness, that is to say a consciousness of belonging to the world, a 'fellow-citizenship' which involves the citizen shouldering his/her responsibilities on a day-to-day basis, but also necessitates a broader dimension beyond any immediate and local concerns. Such a social, but also historical and geographical, consciousness involves developing a capacity for stepping back from oneself, as well as establishing a public forum for debate (Audigier, 2000).

The most important European organisations and networks in the educational field are currently working to elaborate models of competencies related to citizenship education.

In the context of OECD activities, an important study has been carried out through the DeSeCo project, defining of a threefold framework of key competencies which are very close to citizenship issues.

1. *Interacting in socially heterogeneous groups*: relating well to others; cooperating; managing and resolving conflicts;

2. *Acting autonomously*: acting within the big picture; forming and conducing life plans and personal projects; defending and asserting one's rights, interests, limits and needs;

3. *Using tools interactively*: using language, symbols and text interactively; using knowledge and information interactively; using technology interactively.

Moreover, a specific working group has been set up for defining active citizenship competencies (Rychen, Salganik, 2003; Rychen, Tiana, 2004).

The European Commission's programme on the definition of key educational objectives shared by schooling systems of member countries includes Working group B on *Basic Skills, Foreign Languages and Entrepreneurship*. This group had developed a model composed of eight key competencies, which include 'interpersonal and civic competences' (Working Group B, Second Report, European Commission, June 2003). Working group G is dealing specifically with the objectives related to active citizenship. This group has also the task to ensure that democratic values and participation are effectively promoted in all sectors of curricula (Working group G, interim report, European Commission, October 2003).

A limit of this - as of other models – is that they refer exclusively to the first stages of development and to the school context, and do not put enough attention on socialisation and the exercise of citizenship by adults. As Cecchini (2004) observed, 'so far, when

collecting examples of good practice in this area, [the report of group B] concentrated on formal school education and did not consider adult education nor the lifelong learning perspective'. However, 'the working group [G] identified as a future action to provide political support to active citizenship in lifelong learning by ensuring that citizenship skills and competencies become essential life skills. It will in future cooperate more closely with working group B dealing with basic skills'.

The European Network of Education Councils (EUNEC) provided in September 2004 a detailed framework of competencies to be formed by Education for European Citizenship. They are divided into three categories.

1.   *Knowledge competency* (a student possesses *knowledge* about a common European history with different perspectives, culture and capacities (this includes the European ideal and the integration efforts since 1945), political and legal rights and duties (including power, consultation, expression of opinions, decision-making, institutions and processes, notions of the law, state and freedom), the socio-economic domain (including labour, trade and wellbeing), the socio-ethnic domain (with aspects such as education, spare time, family and group formation), the working of political institutions, negotiation strategies; is *able to clarify* the role of international institutions and the functions performed by European institutions, the enhanced visibility of the global dimension of our society, as well as other economic, political and ethnic issues (is aware that this may create problems and conflicts as well as new opportunities); is able *to explain* the complexities of international collaboration; the student respects democratic outcomes).

2.   *Capacity development competency* (a student possesses a welcoming *attitude* towards immigrants and a willingness to recruit newcomers to enhance Europe's capabilities; *is aware* of a joint, though diverse, European culture and its development, characteristics and testimonies; *is able* to participate in Europe's multilingual environment and its ethnic richness.

3.   *Networking competency* (the student is able to participate in collective activities in Europe aimed at resolving economic, ecological, social and political problems, to participate in extra-curricular activities aimed at strengthening ties between learners and the school and between learners and the educational process; this may involve natural learning, that is to say that the extra-curricular activities are integrated into the learning process, to participate in defining clear-cut and jointly agreed school rules, that will produce the best results with respect to learning to build and maintain social networks so as to gain access to social resources; *is aware* of his own responsibility for his behaviour; *is involved in* voluntary community service (they engage themselves in democratic procedures and strategies) (EUNEC, 2004).

Gollob and Huddlestone, Kraft, Salema and Spajic-Vrkas (2005) have also developed a model of competencies, aptitudes and dispositions required for teachers for supporting Education for (Democratic) Citizenship. It is interesting to note that these are strictly analogous to those generally included in the models of competencies that EC intend to

promote in students (communication and expression: how to express and justify a personal opinion; critical thinking and argumentation: how to make judgements and form arguments; problem solving: how to identify and define EDC problems and arrive at a common conclusion; decision-making: how to negotiate collective decisions; intercultural skills: how to see issues from other people's points of view; research: how to investigate and present EC issues; political action: how to engage in forms of lobbying and campaigning; evaluation: how to reflect on personal and collective learning; openness; respect for social and cultural differences; readiness to share and delegate; trust and honesty; commitment to trust; respect for self and others; tolerance of ambiguity and open undecided situations).

Finally we have to mention the resources provided by ERIC for EC, that include a Handbook (Remy, 1979) and a Guide for assessing competencies related to citizenship (Turner, 1979).

A model of core competencies and attitudes involved in citizenship for empirical research

Our proposal of a model of competencies developed by EC is grounded in the view of a citizenship that is active and solidly behind other citizens (especially the weakest) (Lastrucci, 1996, 1997). From this comes the fundamental principle that EC must be focused on the acquisition and the active exercise of a wide set of competencies, globally referring to the *aware*, *active* and *participatory contribution of the citizen to political and social life* (Lastrucci, 1996, 1997, Lastrucci, Viana, 1996).

De Weerd, Gemmeke, Rigter and van Rij C. (2005*)* have defined seven indicators of active citizenship: voluntary work in organisations and networks, organising activities for the community, voting in elections, participation in political parties, participation in interest groups, participation in forms of peaceful protest, and participation in public debate. This checklist of indicators is based on the definition of active citizenship in terms of 'political participation and participation in associational life characterised by tolerance and non-violence and the acknowledgement of the rule of law and human rights'. This definition is very similar to that which inspired our model. Our model has been elaborated on the empirical base of research findings and, similarly to the checklist, for empirical purposes. In fact, our model is also inspired by a need for economy and synthesis, because of the need to create a questionnaire and other assessment tools in a wide comparative inquiry on active citizenship

In our model we distinguish between two fundamental classes of competencies: *cognitive competencies* and *pro-social/pro-active competencies*. This second class is strictly related to specific attitudes.

Concerning cognitive competencies, we can use as a basis a framework that is close to the first classification presented by Audigier and can accept the distinction into four families. These competencies can be conceived as the result of an educational program of *civic literacy* (Lastrucci, 1991, 1996, 1997). We can consider it as *the knowledge base for active citizenship*. In synthesis, the main contents of this literacy program that we

have proposed and applied in a significant sample of Italian schools from 1991 to the present, are illustrated in the following table.

Economics	Fundamentals of economics and main market dynamics
	Different models of economic organisation and of economic development
	Sustainable development and problems/difficulties of application of this model in several areas of the world
	Main dynamics of labour market and analysis of organisation of productive activities and services and of jobs and professions
Law	General principles of constitutional law and public law
	Fundamentals of private, administrative and labour law
	European law and European Union organisation
	Public international law (main international tractats and acts, international cooperation, role of United Nations and sopranational organisations etc.)
Theory of the State and political doctrines	Fundamentals of democratic system
	Comparative analysis of main issues and principles of different political theories and models of social organisation
	Equality, social justice and other democratic ideals
	Individual, collective and human rights
History	Local and regional history
	National history
	European history
	World History
	Knowledge and understanding of processes and phenomena characterising today's society, if possible in a global perspective (recent history in a world dimension, globalisation, migratory processes, multicultural society, most relevant findings by scientific and technological research, development of new media and new ITC, information society and so on).
Sociology and social psychology	General methodological principles and main issues of sociology
	Analysis of most important social phenomena of contemporary world and of distinctive characters of actual society (migrations, environment problems, problems for development in Third World, suicide, alcoholism, drugs, youth discomfort, criminality, etc.)
Ethnoloy/Anthropology	Main cultural elements of different human groups and societies
	Religions in an historical and comparative perspective
	Popular culture and local traditions
Natural sciences	Environmental educational
	Health education

Concerning pro-social/pro-active competencies, we propose the checklist of competencies presented below. The list follows a hierarchical order: at the lowest level

we have competencies of lowest degree of complexity and that are, in principle, formed at an earlier development stage; at highest level we find competencies of most complexity and that are formed only at a very advanced degree of development and training of citizenship.

The checklist is grounded on the theory about process of socialisation developed by Emile Durkheim. Our starting point is that all the competencies listed are formed and applied in the concrete context of little groups, inside the school environment or inside the small local community in which the individual lives, and gradually they are also applied to the wider society. Our classification is, for some aspects, close to the third dimension in Audigier's classification and also to Veldhuis' model.

1. *Capacity to de-centre to the other's standpoint and point of view* (to take account of others' reasons and interests). This competence has its sensible/affective aspect in feelings of empathy (emotional, at the same time intellectual, immediateness with the other: cognitive and affective aspects, together, produce *comprehension* of the other).

2. *Dialectic competencies*: being able to debate and exchange opinions, assuming specific standpoints freely without conditions, developing arguments to convince others and, with energy hear others and listen to their arguments, be available to change or modify his/her own point of view; to work for conduct discussion to synthesis and resolutions and concrete outcomes; to arrive at a firm conclusion in identifying a shared solution that is best for the entire group, not just a few members (to consider collective interest always more relevant than individual's personal interest).

3. *Democratic engagement and participation*: to recognise as a value others' point of view and, in general, the pluralism of points of view and *weltanschauungen* for social and civil progress; to support and encourage the other to express his/her reasons and interests and defend other's point of view both if it is more or less close to one's own.

4. *Solidarity in action*: to act in an organised and associated form for defending the rights of the most weak individuals and minority groups and, in general, to promote social inclusion and improvement of everybody's conditions of life (to act to realise the principle of equality).

5. *Cooperation and teamwork*: to play a specific role in a group directed at a well-defined task. To share the aims and goals of the group, and the principles and values related to them. To put one's own talent and abilities at the service of the group; to act taking into account the interests of the group instead of his/her own satisfaction and gratification (to regard collective success as the main objective and consider his/her own success related to the collective one; to link his/her own personal project to the collective project (at group level)).

6. *Capacity to mediate conflict between him/herself and others* and to find peaceful solutions.

7. *Capacity to mediate conflicts between others,* promoting peaceful solutions.

8. *To act, in the context of a political, or social (voluntary) organisation to realise a better model of society* (to link one's own individual life project to a collective project of transformation, in a progressive direction for society: political socialisation – participation - at society level).

This checklist is the basis for a questionnaire composed of 50 items (focused on the habits and current behaviour of respondents, devised to assess the degree of citizenship competencies in a broad sample of citizens in several European countries. The sample is stratified on four criteria: age, gender, level of education and employment. The survey will be developed in a preliminary pilot-study of a smaller sample, undertaken at the end of 2006. The administration of questionnaires for the research on the full sample will take place in the summer of 2007, with the publication of findings in late 2007.

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