

Active Learning and Citizenship Education in Europe

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CiCe
Guidelines

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Active learning in citizenship education – why?

Mathijssen and van Raak argue that active learning in citizenship education is a diverse and dynamic reality that does not involve predefined and unchangeable sets of knowledge, attitudes and capacities that can be learned once and for all time (2002). Hendrikson (1984) points out that 'while experimental research continues to show the usefulness of active learning, descriptive research indicates little application of active learning methods'. And in his study of schooling Goodlad (1983) noted:

a preponderance of classroom activity including listening, reading textbooks, completing workbooks and worksheets, and taking quizzes -with a paucity of activities requiring problem solving, the achievement of group goals, student's planning and executing a project, and the like. (quoted in Hendrikson, 1984 ERIC Digest)

It is necessary therefore to explore the concept of active learning and its use within citizenship education classes.

What is active and life-long learning?

Learning and the learner are of central importance in the teaching/learning interaction (Marton and Saljo, 1976; Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle, 1997; Prosser and Trigwell, 1998; Biggs, 1999).

Denicolo, Entwistle and Hounsell (1989) consider that no hard and fast definition should be applied to active learning. It should rather take on different meanings and different degrees of emphasis in different subject areas and for different groups of learners. They identify four distinctive features of active learning:

- a search for meaning and understanding
- greater student responsibility for learning
- a concern with skills as well as knowledge
- an approach to curriculum that looks to career and social settings.

Revans (1982) suggests that active learning involves giving students greater responsibility for their own learning so that they have full opportunity for active involvement – being challenged to think for themselves and to share and discuss ideas with others. Active learning entails more than the mastering a body of knowledge and the associated attitudes and tasks: it is helping students acquire and refine the skills they need to make use of what they know. This is difficult to achieve and a major challenge facing teachers in contemporary education, especially in the context of life-long learning.

Candy, Crebert and O'Leary, (1994) argue that a life-long learner exhibits the following characteristics:

- | | |
|--|---|
| An inquiring mind – | someone who sees problems and asks questions and who is not afraid to question current orthodoxies |
| "Helicopter vision" – | someone who can rise above the surrounds and see the big picture |
| Information literacy – | the ability to operate appropriately and control the seeking of information in print and electronic forms |
| A sense of personal agency – | the belief that they can be effective in what they choose to do, and that they are capable of taking responsibility for themselves and their learning |
| A repertoire of learning skills – | the skills and attitudes that will facilitate life-long learning. |

Developing these characteristics in an active learning framework facilitates a greater understanding of the complexities of citizenship.

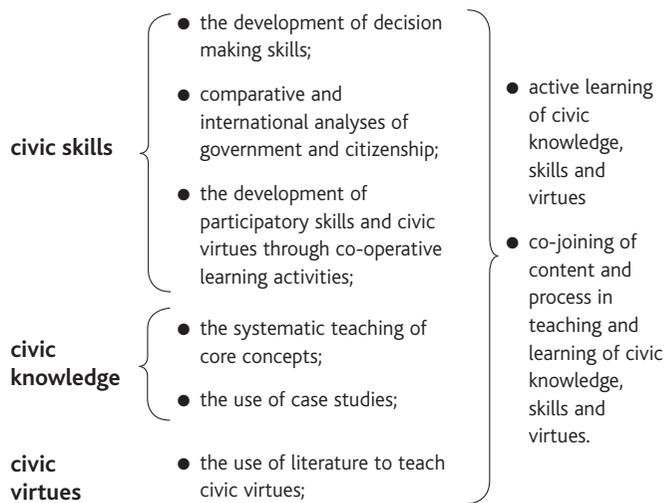
Citizenship education

Citizenship is a highly contested and complex issue, difficult to define and fraught with difficulties. As Koutselini (2002) points out:

To examine citizenship education in different countries requires the contextualisation of meaning, processes and results, because different social, economic and political conditions imply different understandings of the concepts of citizenship, social, national and professional identities, in addition to the understanding of the characteristics possessed by the good citizen.

(Koutselini 2002, p.257).

A number of international trends have been identified in the area of teaching citizenship education. Patrick (1997) conceptualises civic education in *Global Trends for Civic Education for Democracy* as three interrelated components



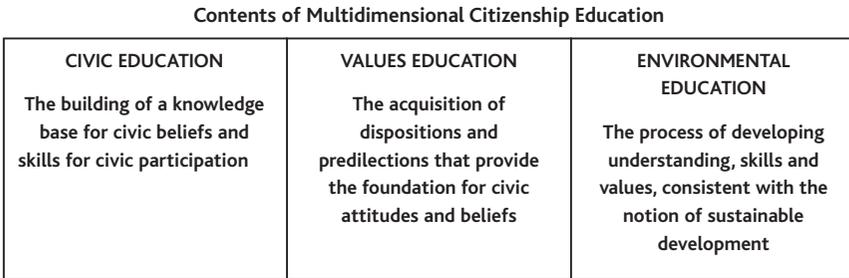
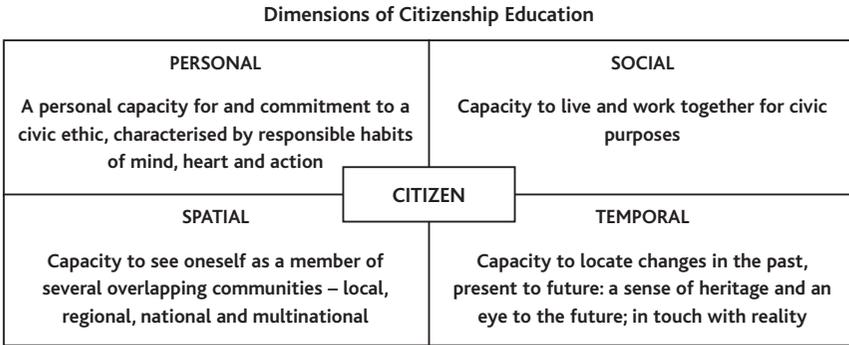
According to Quisumbing:

Citizenship education is really a lifetime process and continuing learning, involving total development of the whole person, not a finished product or outcome of a curriculum, for a given time or location

(Quisumbing, 2002, p. 10).

Grossmann (2000) articulates this in Figure 1. This model of citizenship education places the citizen at the centre of the process where the personal, social, temporal and spatial aspects are considered, combined with civic education, values education and environmental education.

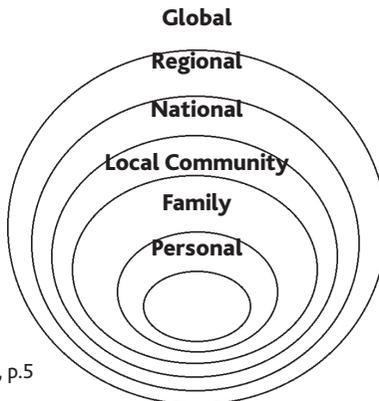
Figure 1: A multidimensional model of citizenship education



Source: Grossmann *et al.* 2000 quoted in Quisumbing, 2002, p.4

Quisumbing suggests that this can be developed into a holistic approach, which constantly expands from the personal towards the global as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Holistic diagram of the expanding social context of citizenship education



Source: Quisumbing, 2002, p.5

While these models convey a sense of unity to the purpose of active learning in citizenship education, the manner in which it is facilitated and operationalised is an issue that requires serious consideration, particularly in a teaching context.

Teachers and active learning in citizenship education

Every day teachers struggle in schools to engage adolescent students' attention. Many students find their schooling irrelevant to their lives. Over the past decades, the curriculum has adapted to social conditions with a succession of models: '*academic* (development of the mind through subject matter); *social meliorist* (the use of curriculum to improve society); *social efficiency* (school as preparation for a job); and *student-centred* (curriculum that offers students rich experiences' (McNeill, 1999, pp 53-54).

Killeavy, Collinson and Stephenson (2000) researched the professional practice of exemplary second level teachers in the United States, England and the Republic of Ireland, and found that, to make the curriculum relevant, teachers in the study seemed to balance these four curriculum orientations. But two approaches dominated: the development of personal and societal values, and intellectual development. These model teachers attached considerable importance to making the classroom experience of their students relevant to socio-cultural issues in both global contexts such as human rights and the problems of developing countries and in local, community and personal concerns.

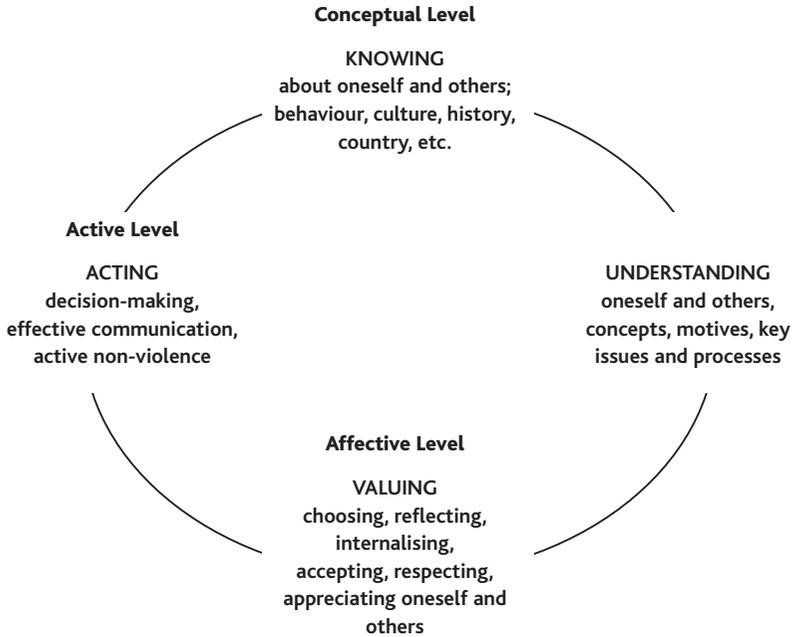
Holden and Clough (1998) found that assisting children become active citizens requires the teacher to balance providing security with offering challenges. They argue that education for participation involves reflecting on values, helping children acquire the skills needed to take action and providing opportunities to become involved as active citizens. Integral to using these skills is the development of a values base from which to make decisions and responses. This has implications for teachers and others who work with pupils. Osler and Starkey (1996) suggest that educating pupils to participate will mean they require a 'range of skills, including social skills, and skills of communication and judgement' and opportunities to practise and develop these. Central to this approach is an acknowledgement of children's citizenship rights in the process: this is reflected in Figure 3.

For classroom teachers this calls for reflection on one's own values, on the freedom and autonomy they give their pupils, and on curriculum choices (Holden & Clough, 1998). These challenges are equally present in higher education. As Light and Cox have argued:

there are increasing social and economic pressures on higher education to generate a wider range of knowledge, skills and

attitudes for coping with the demands of our 'super complex age'. The current pace of technological and social change is impelling teachers to think in terms of educating students not for today's problems but for those of tomorrow (Light and Cox, 2001, p.69).

Figure 3: Teaching and learning cycle with a holistic approach to citizenship education



Source: UNESCO-APNIEVE, 2002

A number of projects in an international and European context have sought to address these issues, some of which are included in this report to highlight the nature of the activities and their relevance in a life-long learning context.

International and European examples of best practice

Mathijssen and van Raak suggest that in any citizenship programme:

there should be structure, but within that structure freedom to innovate and take risks. People, individually and collectively, should have space to participate in their own ways and should be encouraged to develop the skills to do so. What is required is support for several forms of participation. (Mathijssen & van Raak, 2002, p. 30)

Examples of best practice reinforce the point that what is required is not simply a knowledge of citizenship and how democratic societies operate, but the development of values, skills and understanding.



Project Citizen, a **USA** civic education programme created in 1995 for middle school students (6th – 8th grades), offers an interesting approach to active learning in citizenship, directly involving students in the civic life of their community (Policy Research Project, 1998). Active learning in classrooms and communities is combined with team-based project activities that build both community and an understanding of public policy. Flexibly designed to fit diverse classroom settings, it has been used successfully with different subjects and in classes of varying academic ability, and is used in 38 states. A University of Texas evaluation reported:

- students using Project Citizen believe they can – and do – make a difference in their communities
- students and teachers believe that it helps students develop a greater understanding of public policy, learn how government works, develop commitment to active citizenship and governance, become involved in their communities, and learn about specific community problems
- students and teachers believe it develops communication and research skills.
- Project Citizen could be adapted in a European context in the area of active learning and citizenship. There are a number of examples of active learning in citizenship education in life-long education.



In **Slovenia** study circles offer a popular form of non-formal adult education, focusing on encouraging life-long learning, reducing functional illiteracy and concentrating on issues in civil society.

The variety of subject matter dealt with in study circles is large. Participants can learn about medical herbs, mushrooms, legal rights of senior workers, project work, organising international scientific conferences, managing ngos, the Slovenian war of independence, opportunities for

the blind in towns, various handcrafts, and so forth. Readings and discussions give deeper insights into many themes.

(Bogataj and Maleckar, quoted in Mathijssen and van Raak, 2002, p. 32)

Having attended study circles, participants use their knowledge in their environment. They pursue action goals – including publishing books, postcards and newsletters, using printed and taped materials such as brochures, articles in regional and national papers, guides, websites, and making presentations at public events such as exhibitions, workshops, radio and TV. They participate in celebrations, concerts, dramas, excursions and literary evenings (Mathijssen and van Raak, 2002).



Study Circles in Adult Education are also popular in **Finland**, operating at grassroots level. The *Alkuvoima* (Primal Force) group of young farmers in Finland is an example: *Alkuvoima* has no formal organisational hierarchy and contains forty members. There is no age limit and both women and men are welcome. The group has written press notices, arranges street campaigns and demonstrations, meets politicians and contacts various organisations.



Another example of active learning in citizenship education is the networking approach in **The Netherlands**. A horizontal organisational approach is adopted in these, which permits a variety of collaborations and exchanges, each participant retaining his or her autonomy. Negotiation and dialogue play a central role because there are no hierarchical decision-making structures and each participant can make their own individual contributions (Van der Veen and van Raak, 2001).



In **Austria** *Citizens of Europe: being at home in Europe* is a teacher training programme which focuses on living and working in other EU member states. Seminar presentation and simulation activities heighten awareness about the rights and opportunities that citizens share within the EU. Participants are confronted with everyday problems and issues that arise for a family who decide to extend their stay in another EU country. They work out solutions and strategies to deal with these, and then their reflections are presented to the wider group for a broader discussion. These seminars have been organised at different educational levels, and modules have been developed and incorporated into some teacher training programmes.



In **Ireland** the POWER Partnership programme *A Women's Political Development Programme: Feminist Approaches to Politics, the State and the economy in Ireland, North and South* is a learning programme with explicit active learning and citizenship dimensions. It develops participants' understanding about working within existing political structures.

The initiative was a collaboration between higher education and women's organisations with the aim of supporting women's political development and placing women's learning and participation in community development within a political context (Keogh, 2002, p.11).

The programme centres on active learning in networking, lobbying, personal and general organisation context.

These examples highlight the diversity of initiatives in education, and also the need to research this broad and complex area.

Research methodology to investigate the issues confronting teachers

In drawing up these CiCe Guidelines the authors sought to investigate the relationship between active learning and active citizenship. Our starting point was a literature review examining descriptions of models of active learning in citizenship education, internationally and in Europe, described in the previous section. Following this analysis, we decided that we needed to enable participants to express more detailed views.

Bannister, Burmen, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1994, p 3) describe qualitative research as 'an attempt to capture the sense that lies within and that structures what we say about what we do'. A qualitative method seemed appropriate: we considered conducting observations and an ethnographic approach, but time limitations and the limited number of possible participants were against this. We therefore designed an open-ended questionnaire, which we piloted, and then sent to all members of the CiCe Thematic Network, asking for it to be completed and returned within a month. Questions focussed on interpretations of the terms 'active learning' and 'active citizenship'; asked for examples from teaching experience; and enquired about the criteria employed to measure the active involvement of students in citizenship issues. Fifteen responses were received from a number of countries in the network: Iceland, Norway, Sweden, England, Portugal, France, Belgium, Lithuania, and Latvia.

In conjunction with this, we interviewed teachers working in pre-schools, second level and third level education in Lithuania, Austria and the Republic of Ireland. A semi-structured interview focused on themes emerging from the questionnaire responses. We chose these target samples to reflect the professional working situations of each member of the working group: it also reflected our wish to investigate a life-long learning approach. We wanted to explore whether common attitudes and experiences about active learning and active citizenship were present across the three levels of education and across the European context.

- Seven female teachers were interviewed working in pre-primary education in Lithuania;
- three teachers teaching at second level were interviewed in Austria two females and one male, and
- three male academics lecturing in higher education were interviewed in the Republic of Ireland.

Their responses are analysed in the following section.

Issues confronting teachers in promoting active learning

Defining active learning

Respondents were asked to define active learning.

The issue that was common to all three levels of education was that learning should be a process of intellectual formation, in which students develop the capacity to learn for life. At pre-school level, respondents focussed on the importance of the child's overall development and the need for a relationship of equality between teacher and child. At second level respondents referred to developing communicative skills and enabling pupils to work in teams and independently. At the third level there was reference to student engagement and involvement in the learning process, active participation, and moving the learner towards self-directed learning and promoting intellectual activity.

There was a clear focus on the need for equality and cooperation between teacher and student, with an approach of knowledge construction rather than knowledge transmission. There were references to active learning in relating subject matter to everyday life and practice, enabling students to change their conceptual outlook and viewpoint gradually.

Employing active learning methods in the classroom

We then asked about the methods employed in their classrooms.

Many examples were offered: at pre-school level methods cited included role play, story telling, games and discussions. There were many references to educating children to be creative individuals. At the second level, there were references to class activities and to visits to neighbouring countries. At the third level, methods included student selection of topics, class discussions and setting autonomous work for students. Most respondents focused on the student as a person.

Group work featured prominently in all responses. Simulation cards, role-play, drama and video were other examples. Offering frequent feedback to students about assignments, field trips, meetings students from abroad, debates, presentations and micro-learning situations followed by analysis were also cited. An interviewee from the third level observed of active learning methods that participative active learning can be shaped, but only within very narrow boundaries: *'I could lead them by prompting and have discussion to get them on to the right answer, that's what I would have done in the past, now I have moved from that approach and I am open to seeing where the discussion can go'*.

Planning for active learning in course design

Respondents were asked how they planned for active learning when designing courses.

All respondents said that they did plan for this. In pre-school active learning methods were always planned, and also in the second level. In the higher education sector it was generally felt that this approach would be a more effective learning experience, and that students would feel more secure in their learning as a result. But it was also pointed out that active learning activities required much more preparation than lecturing. One respondent said that although she planned this approach in her course design, she experienced time constraints in implementation.

Areas of curriculum that facilitate using active learning methods

Respondents were asked which areas of the curriculum particularly facilitated the use of active learning methods.

All of the respondents felt that all areas of the curriculum allowed active learning methods. At pre-school level, it was felt impossible to teach in the context without using active learning methods. At second level, respondents gave examples of subjects such as English and History where active learning approaches were used. In the higher education sector, some said that it was easier to implement an active learning approach in practically-orientated courses. It also emerged that good active learning methods require skills on the part of the lecturers / teachers. One respondent in teacher education made the point 'I believe that in order to train teachers to work with children, the teachers must themselves experience the activities'.

Areas of the curriculum that do not facilitate using active learning methods

Respondents were asked whether any areas of the curriculum that did not facilitate the use of active learning methods.

Most respondents said that there were few areas of the curriculum that did not allow the use of active learning. At second level, teaching grammar was suggested as an area in which active learning might be difficult. In higher education, reference was made to the dominance of factual content and the use of memorisation in subject areas such as history and geography. It was thought that to a certain degree the theoretical aspects of certain subjects inhibited the use of active learning, where it was felt that material had to be conveyed in the traditional format of the lecture.

Possibilities of teaching without using active learning methodologies

Was it possible to teach their subject area without using active learning methods?

All of the respondents felt that while it was possible, this would not be a valuable or worthwhile approach. One respondent described it 'both intellectual and human regression'.

What factors inhibit the use of active learning methods in the classroom?

Respondents were asked to think about issues that might inhibit active learning in the classroom.

A number of issues emerged in response to this, in particular pressures of time and lack of adequate facilities. At pre-school level, teachers said it was hard to use active learning methods when classrooms were overcrowded, and this was also referred to in the second level context. In the higher education sector, some respondents suggested that the employment of active learning methods was solely at the discretion of the individual teacher.

It was felt that much depended on the teacher's capacity to use active methods effectively, and this required a major shift from the traditional view of the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge and information. A number of respondents referred to student experiences at second level; students often had very traditional expectations about their role as students in higher-level education – as passive receivers of knowledge. Some students might also have had negative experiences of active learning during second level education, and changing their views was seen as very challenging in this context.

The rigidity of national curricula at second level was also referred to: in some contexts there are few opportunities provided for active learning. One interviewee in the Irish context commented '*what second level pupils experience is very destructive, they have highly structured things to do. Sometimes we get calls from parents of students in the college, "my son or daughter is missing, can you keep the notes", very much the Gradgrind school syndrome. Very hard to explain to them that it doesn't work like that.*' The increasing numbers of students attending higher education was also thought to be an inhibiting factor.

Criteria to assess students' active involvement in citizenship issues

Respondents were asked about what criteria they used to assess students; involvement in citizenship issues.

Citizenship proved to be a difficult concept for the interviewees to define, and this led to them expressing personal views rather than having a specific focus within their subject areas. Respondents answered this difficult question in a number of different ways. At pre-school level citizenship is not stressed at an early age, and the focus in Lithuania is on preparing children to be responsible, on moral behaviour and future citizenship roles. None of the respondents, at any levels of education, had structured criteria to measure student involvement in citizenship issues. At second level, respondents referred to feedback after topic presentations, and observing how students interact with each other. In higher education, indicators used included the degree of preparation made by students for their seminars and group work, students' ability to articulate reasonable arguments on various topics, and their capacity to discuss and debate issues. One respondent referred to her students' *capacity to act as active citizens in the classroom*. The ability of students to develop citizenship projects or sessions with their own pupils in second level teaching was also cited as a measure of their active involvement in citizenship issues.

Does studying the subject area help students become active learners and active citizens?

Finally respondents were asked if they thought that, as a result of studying their subject area, students had been helped to become active learners and active citizens.

Respondents were confident that as a result of studying their subjects their students *would* become active learners and active citizens, although none indicated whether or not they had conducted any research in this area. In the higher education sector, one respondent referred to the fact that former students had informed him that they had learned a lot from the approaches taken and they themselves were using similar methodologies in other settings.

Guidelines and recommendations

Certain common experiences in relation to active learning and citizenship education emerged across all three levels of the education systems investigated in this diverse European context.

All respondents favoured the use of active learning methods, and definitions offered across all three levels of the education systems were fairly similar. Many of the approaches offered within the three levels also shared similarities. Citizenship was considered important, but was defined differently in each context. No respondents used specific criteria to assess whether their students had become active citizens as result of their teaching, but most were hopeful that, having studied their respective subjects, students would become active learners and active citizens.

The recommendations offered here reflect the issues that emerged from this research.

1. Define active learning approaches within the context in which you operate

It is important that teachers at all levels of the education system reflect on their personal definitions of active learning methods in the classroom, and that methods are employed that will enable students to move to becoming autonomous learners in a life-long learning context. The ultimately focus should be the development of the student as a person.

2. Be aware that citizenship is a complex issue, which is informed by many contexts and situations

In relation to citizenship education, international perspectives suggest that approaches to the area are best if informed by active learning methods that promote equal participation and action. International examples of best practice in the area of citizenship education also support this view.

3. Focus on the student as an individual, using a number of methods to facilitate active learning in the classroom

Methods include discussion, group work, selecting topics with students, role play, story telling, drama, using video, debates, presentations, field trips, meeting with students from abroad and offering frequent and sustained feedback to students about their assignments and work. Small groups facilitate this type of approach more appropriately than larger groups. It is important for teachers / lecturers to reflect on the purpose of the methods that they employ: students should move to their own solutions, as opposed to being directed towards the answers that the teacher wants them to reach.

4. Plan active learning methods in course design to make the learning experience more meaningful

This will lead to students themselves employing such an approach when they enter a professional situation. It is important in considering active learning methods that all aspects of the curriculum are considered, so that areas which might have been considered unsuitable to an active learning approach can benefit from its use.

5. Consider what issues might prevent active learning methods being employed

These include lack of space, large numbers and inappropriate time allocation. Active learning methods need to be introduced into the learning situation with preparation and care, to ensure that students have a positive and successful experience of the learning situation.

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The Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe (CiCe) Thematic Network links 28 European states and some 80 universities and college departments which are engaged in educating students about how children and young people learn about and understand their society, their identity and citizenship.

A cross-disciplinary group, we include lecturers in social psychology, pedagogy, psychology, sociology and curriculum studies, and those who educate various professions such as teachers, social pedagogues, psychologists, early childhood workers and youth workers.

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