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The challenging process of preparing education professionals to promote citizenship awareness

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The Challenges

This paper has as its primary message the need for more serious support for teachers as they promote their students' citizenship awareness. We must use the best ways to promote teachers' professional development, so that they practice effective and responsible teaching in citizenship education. As they promote their social, moral, and emotional growth, teachers play a key role in organising constructive and meaningful experiences for students in citizenship studies. If they feel insecure in this and feel they lack support, we cannot expect much progress in schools.

Before addressing how we can best support teachers in promoting citizenship awareness, we must first ask why teachers might need special support in teaching such issues. I suggest that teachers' work within citizenship education includes the following unique challenges.

Firstly, the nature of the topic is a challenge for teachers. Working with students on social, moral and emotional issues is more subjective than teaching them to read, write, and do maths. The content is far less defined and straightforward to handle and to teach. It requires sensitivity to deal with moral issues - societal or individual rights and duties, justice and care, respect and honesty - and to deal with interpersonal issues, such as resolving conflicts and coming to agreement.

Secondly, and related to this, teachers must have content knowledge and understanding that differs in many ways from the content knowledge of traditional subject matters: it is more subjective and depends on the teacher's own values and feelings. In teaching citizenship issues, it is essential for teachers to realise what they stand for, that is, their own social and moral values and attitudes, as well as which of their own pedagogical ideas and aims around citizenship issues they want to work towards with their students.

Thirdly, it is a particular challenge for teachers to assess student progress in citizenship awareness, compared to progress in the other subject matters which are traditionally tested.

Fourthly, teachers must specifically justify citizenship education to parents; they must convince them that it is important to spend time on citizenship issues in the classroom. Thus, it has to have a deep meaning for the teachers, both personally and professionally.

Fifthly, it is a special challenge for teachers because citizenship education requires that they create a classroom atmosphere of trust and truthfulness among the students themselves as well as between teacher and students. This takes effort. It takes time for a teacher to create a comfortable atmosphere in which students feel free to express their ideas, feel that they are heard, feel the need to listen to each other, and at the same time are motivated to argue, debate, and reach agreement around the various citizenship issues.

Sixth, it is a special challenge for teachers because citizenship education claims specific teaching methods following constructivist approaches (e.g., Oser, 1992; Power, Higgins,

& Kohlberg, 1989). These teaching methods focus on open discussions and activities (e.g. role-playing, writing, drawing, painting) that stimulate students to consider various social, moral, and emotional aspects of interpersonal issues. This type of teaching requires flexibility and courage.

In the light of the above, it is clear that it is very challenging to work on citizenship issues with students. No wonder many teachers feel insecure and need support (Adalbjarnardottir, 1994).

Intervention and research programme in Iceland

In Iceland I have been running a joint intervention and research programme since 1988: I call it “Fostering students’ socio-moral and interpersonal development.” This is a citizenship education programme directed towards elementary school teachers. Its major aim is to support teachers as they promote their students’ citizenship awareness and social and moral growth by fostering their autonomy and intimacy as a basis for community involvement and political literacy as they grow older. Thus the programme aims to provide students with opportunities to develop autonomy, as reflected in, on the one hand, the freedom to raise different points of view as we encourage autonomous and critical thinking, and on the other hand, the responsibility to share mutual rights and duties. It also aims to provide students with opportunities to develop their ability for intimacy as reflected in their care for each other and their concern, trust and truthfulness, goodness and generosity.

In supporting the teachers in this role I have organised various programmes. The question is which ones seem to be the most effective in supporting teachers in their work with their students on citizenship issues. We can classify the organisation of the programmes into three main categories:

1. Summer courses for some teachers with no follow-up courses.
2. Summer courses with follow-up courses during the school year in three different forms:
 - (a) two meetings (autumn, spring) and internet contact for all the participating teachers,
 - (b) regular meetings with resource persons among some of the schools (2-3 schools together; three meetings per semester),
 - (c) a whole-school project; a follow-up course with teachers in one school with meetings, individual consultation, and evaluation. Follow-up course the second year.
3. Winter courses involving
 - (a) two half-day courses in the autumn with follow-up meetings (three per semester) with a resource person (2-3 schools together),
 - (b) meetings with the project organiser every other week throughout the school year (twenty meetings, 10-15 teachers from 4-5 schools).

Similarities and differences in the programmes

The three programmes have a common base. In each we introduce teachers to theories of children’s social, moral and emotional growth so they understand children’s development

in this area. The teachers are also introduced to and work with teaching methods that seem to have been effective in promoting this growth. A focus is on relating theories (both of children's development and of constructivist teaching and learning) to practice by trying out theories in practice and bringing those experiences back to the meetings for discussion. An essential focus is on encouraging teachers to reflect on their pedagogical ideas, aims, and attitudes; what they want to teach and why; how they work towards these aims in the classroom and why they choose these teaching strategies. Also, during the school year they are encouraged to reflect on changes in their work due to their participation in the program, keeping in mind questions such as "Do I experience any changes in my pedagogical ideas, values, attitudes; in my aims; in my teaching skills, or in the students' social interactions?"

The main differences between the programmes are the time and context that provides different opportunities for the teachers to reflect upon their work. In the programmes when we meet regularly every other week throughout the school year (20 meetings) or where we take a part in a whole-school project with regular meetings over an extended period of time, teachers have much more time for reflection on their the work. We have many more meetings with the teachers, so they get the opportunity to construct their knowledge and understanding and receive practical training. The frequent meetings provide richer opportunities for building a community of trust and support among the teachers, where they share their ideas, concerns, and feelings. More time is available to interview the teachers about their ideas and classroom work and for them to reflect on their own thinking in those interviews. Each teacher writes many more reports on the process of the work, helping them to reflect on their daily work. Also, there are more visits to the classrooms, providing opportunities for discussion and reflection on daily practice in the classroom.

What I have learned in the process about how to support teachers

Through my thirty years of working with practising teachers, I have learned many ways to support teachers in being more effective. Among them are:

Structure the programme

- Organise a long-term and systematic approach, at least whole school year course, with or without summer courses. School-year long courses are more likely to be a forum for change than traditional workshops (Olson, *et al.*, 2002) as they provide the opportunity for constant reflection.
- Encourage more than one teacher from each school to participate in the programme so they can support each other throughout the work outside our more formal meetings.
- Have regular and frequent meetings during the school year: these provide the teachers with time to construct and reconstruct their knowledge and understanding, both theoretical and practical, and to share their ideas and concerns, as well as to support each other.
- Encourage teacher leadership within each school in this area of teaching (Bean *et al.*, 2002).
- Have a resource person for the teachers within each school to provide ongoing support.
- Involve the Principals/Head teachers in the work
- Inform the parents about the work.

- Encourage each school to develop its own school curricula, outlining the aims of citizenship education and how they will be worked on. This helps the continuity of the work even if the active teachers in this area take on other responsibilities.

Teacher knowledge and understanding

- Provide the teachers with theoretical knowledge and understanding of (a) children's social, moral, and emotional growth, and (b) teaching practice that seems effective in promoting this growth (such as constructivist approaches).
- Provide the teachers with content knowledge and get them acquainted with curriculum material in citizenship education.
- Focus on the active participation of the teachers in constructing their theoretical and practical knowledge and understanding by working with them in the ways we recommend they work with their students (cf. constructive approaches).
- Relate theory to practice with activities teachers try out in the meetings and then in the classroom, followed by discussions at the meetings.

Teacher Reflection

- Encourage the teachers to reflect on their pedagogical ideas, aims, attitudes: what they want to teach and why, and how they work in the classroom towards these aims and why.
- Encourage the teachers to reflect on their daily teaching in written reports: the aims of each session, how it went - what went well and what not so well - and how they could have run it differently. Such reflection and writing helps teachers evaluate their work and consider how they can improve.
- Focus on reflection in and from practice, for example by bringing classroom data into the meetings for analysis.
- Use teachers' narratives to help the participating teachers reflect on and learn from others' experiences (Shulman, 2002).
- Create a community of trust and sincerity among the teachers as major changes in professional orientation may prove difficult (Fullan, 1991), discouraging, and even risky. It is often not an easy process to re-evaluate one's own attitudes towards teaching and teaching methods.

What I have learned about teachers' motivation and professional competencies

Elsewhere I have outlined what the teachers felt they learned by participating in the programme (see Adalbjarnardottir, 1994). Here, I would like to list some of the general things I learned from them in this process.

Motivation

- Even though all of the teachers attended voluntarily, they differed in their motivation to work on citizenship education. Some were more enthusiastic than others. For example, some attended because their Principal recommended it but others came because they felt they had always been especially concerned about students' social competencies and felt they needed support in working with them.

Professional competencies

- The teachers differed in the meaning they made of their teaching as illustrated in their themes and aims (short-term vs. long-term; Adalbjarnardottir & Selman, 1997). For example, Anna's themes were democracy, autonomy, and respect, and her aim

was to prepare her students to participate actively in a democratic society (a future-oriented aim). In contrast, Lilja's theme was to "get along well in the classroom" and her aim was to improve social relationships among the students (a classroom-bound aim).

- The teachers differed in their autonomy in planning and organising classroom tasks. For example, Anna organised a Friendship Island where the students settled and created a community with social and moral principles and rules about interpersonal relationships. This was different from some teachers who relied solely on the material provided in our programme.
- The teachers differed in their use of a variety of teaching strategies (discussion, role-playing, writing essays and poems, art).
- They had different competencies in integrating citizenship issues into other subject areas (such as language, literature, environmental projects).

Reflection

- The teachers differed in their ability to reflect on their teaching. Some were more ready and willing to reflect than others. Some found it difficult to write their weekly reports, particularly in the beginning, while it was not an issue for others.
- The most open and sincere teachers helped other teachers to reflect on their strengths and vulnerabilities, and both positive and problematic classroom experiences. For example, Disa seemed to find it relatively easy and natural to criticise herself and reflect on her shortcomings in her interpersonal style and temperament ("I was far too leading"... "my patience runs out") and this helped other teachers in the process of reflection.

Student Progress

- Being reflective and showing flexibility makes the teacher ready for more diversity and more able to meet the individual student where he or she is (Ellison, 2002).
- By constantly reflecting upon their work with their students, the teachers in the program were able to improve their students' perspective-taking ability in solving hypothetical interpersonal conflicts more than teachers who did not participate. Also, in real-life situations their students improved more in their perspective-taking ability when negotiating with their classmates. For example, the students seemed more often to discuss problems instead of quarrelling, to explain instead of scolding, and to ask questions instead of commanding (Adalbjarnardottir, 1993).
- Moreover, within the programme, we saw some hints that those teachers who appeared more professional in their work were more able to improve their students' perspective-taking ability in solving hypothetical conflicts with classmates (Adalbjarnardottir, 1999).

Special Concerns

- Teachers need constant support over a long period of time to actively promote citizenship awareness. Otherwise they tend to give up.
- It is important to try to meet the diverse needs of the teachers (some may need more time and support than others).
- It is important to listen to teachers' individual voices and to find ways to work with them based on the meaning they make of their teaching.

In conclusion

We, teacher educators and researchers, teachers and principals, must find the ways we can best support teachers in working effectively and responsibly on citizenship education. I argue that an important way to achieve this goal is to create a context for teachers where they can constantly reflect on their role as a teacher in actively fostering their students' citizenship awareness.

This type of work relies on many sources. Political will, within both the government and the ministry of education, as well as among other educational authorities, has to be clearly supportive of work on social, moral, and interpersonal issues in schools. Teacher education, both in the form of pre-service and in-service training courses, plays an essential role in the attempt to promote students' citizenship awareness. All teachers should receive education in this area about theories of children's and adolescents' social, moral, and emotional growth and about teaching approaches that have been effective in promoting this growth. Moreover, teacher education programmes should provide both practising teachers and student teachers with possibilities of specialising and becoming leaders within and among schools in the area of citizenship education.

In short, we need to support teachers constructively in promoting their students' citizenship awareness by putting time, effort, and money into such demanding work with principals and teachers. The burning question is whether there is enough political interest and understanding to provide such action. The same is true for principals and teachers regarding their work with their students. This may be one of the limitations or weaknesses of intervention programmes of this type, but it can also be one of its strengths.

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