



This paper is taken from

*The Experience of Citizenship
Proceedings of the sixth Conference of the Children's
Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2004

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 378 6

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Petrucijova, J. (2004) Civic education and non-citizens. experience of the Czech educational system, in Ross, A. (ed) The Experience of Citizenship. London: CiCe, pp 245 - 250

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This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



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
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of the Department of Education and Culture of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Civic education and non-citizens. experience of the Czech educational system

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Since the late 20th century the issue of multiculturalism has been a topic of interest. It is a popular subject with the public, mass media and among experts. Why? The issues of multiculturalism are complex, and to answer this question fully means to analyse many general and specific issues. To illustrate this task I will describe the situation in the Czech Republic, now dealing with the challenge of becoming a multicultural society.

Contemporary Czech society is facing a variety of complex challenges. It seeks to harmonise relations between different national and ethnic groups settled in its territory (the problem of a majority and minorities) in the context of the new liberal economy. Further, it seeks to be prepared to deal with increasing waves of immigrants and refugees from non-European cultures (the problem of the public and newcomers or, from a different angle, of citizens and non-citizens). Moreover, Czech society has to deal with the challenge of European integration in order to be an active participant in the process and become a full-fledged member of the European Union. And, last but not least, it has to face the negative consequences of the processes of globalisation and cultural unification. (This sequence of these tasks does not reflect their political importance, but it is determined by a latent logical order from internal to external inclusion).

The educational system of each country is closely connected with its cultural traditions, its political and social situation. I will focus on the problem of civic and multicultural education in the Czech Republic and analyse the situation of children from ethno-cultural minority groups and immigrant groups in the current educational context. As a democratic state the Czech Republic guarantees equal rights and freedom not only to its citizens but also to its non-citizens (liberty, freedom of speech, thought and faith, etc.). At the same time, it is expected that democratic values will be shared. In multicultural societies, one challenge may be a possible clash between cultural and civic identities of their members. This issue is closely related to the issue of cultural exclusion or inclusion. It is a burning issue, especially for non-citizens (immigrants and their children), who belong to groups facing possible social exclusion.

The civic education tradition of Czech society has always been in relative harmony with the historical form of the state. Civic education has always been a compulsory part of the school curriculum. Since 1998 the issue of democratic citizenship has been a focus at both school curriculum level and in political discussion and practice. Major issues in the civic education curriculum are those of active citizenship and European citizenship. In the context of European integration the issue of cultural citizenship is also now topical. The integration of culturally diverse groups of settled population and newcomers is an extremely important issue for EU policy, and the policy of the Czech Republic is no exception. Europe has to handle the question of whether and how immigrants are

granted citizenship rights. Not all the immigrants are citizens and not all of them will be granted formal citizenship.

The question is how the children of non-citizens (themselves potentially future non-citizens) should be educated in the sphere of civic education. The first possible answer is that as they are members of a democratic society, they should be aware of the society's democratic values, laws, etc. More arguments follow in the text below.

The methodological background of my paper draws upon the concept of citizenship described by T. H. Marshall. For the purpose of analysis he divided the concept of citizenship into three elements, i.e. civic, political and social (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992: 8).

Our own historical period, with its specific focus on multicultural issues, raises a fourth element of citizenship – that of culture and cultural rights. Stevenson suggests that cultural citizenship should be seen as whether demands for full inclusion into the social community have been satisfied. Cultural rights in this sense, herald 'a new breed of claims for unhindered representation, recognition without marginalisation, acceptance and integration without 'normalising' distortion'. These rights go beyond the rights promoting a cultural identity or life style (Stevenson, 2000, p 3).

There is a new distinction being made in the concept of citizenship – i.e. between formal and substantive citizenship. Substantive citizenship can be defined as an array of civic, political, cultural and especially social rights. According to Brubaker (1989, p 36-38), formal citizenship is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for substantive citizenship. Social rights, for example, are accessible to citizens and legally resident non-citizens on virtually identical terms, as is participation in the self-governance of associations, political parties, unions, factory councils and other institutions.

Without the possibility of active social participation in economic and political life, newcomers cannot be equal members of society. In the context of active and substantive citizenship, the possible answer to the question why the immigrants' children should be educated in civics is that even being formally a non-citizen, but being an active participant of economic, cultural, social and political life, the person can influence his/her substantive social position, the measure of acceptance, and can react upon limited rights.

The problem of passivity of citizens is a common problem in the Czech society, as well as in other European countries. It is the problem of a majority and minorities and it is related to immigrants as well.

The reasons for this social phenomenon are different for different social groups. For a *majority* it may be for example, the effect of the welfare state in Western European countries. On the one hand, the welfare state has expanded the social rights of its citizens, including the right to be educated, but at the same time it has taken away the individual capacity of being an active person who creates his/her own life. The extensive protection of many social institutions has contributed to the passiveness of some

individuals. (The fear of losing the social rights citizens have in a welfare state may have been a reason why the people of nations such as Sweden, Norway and Finland were/are not unequivocal in their wish to join the EU). In Eastern European countries, it was connected with the lack of political rights and impossibility of changing the totalitarian reality. The totalitarian socialist societies established important social rights while virtually extinguishing major civic and political rights. However, one factor which facilitated this was that many of the countries involved had had no tradition of securely founded civic and political rights, and little experience of democracy, before their 'socialist' transformation. (Marshall, Bottomore, 1992, p 63). But the passiveness of *minor* groups, including immigrants, might be linked to the exclusion of these groups, with the unwillingness of the major groups in society to collaborate with them.

The reason why the issue of active citizenship (instead of mere citizenship) is stressed by the civic education curriculum is that there is a difference between (1) essential knowledge about rights and obligations, (2) skills how to execute these and (3) real practice based on co-operation with other members of society and on participation in social and political life.

Education should serve as a tool for becoming an active citizen. Teachers should help pupils acquire citizenship skills, and the knowledge and understanding to use their knowledge. Teachers should cultivate these skills and bring knowledge to all pupils - autochthonous and migrants - to empower them in their rights and obligations. Teachers should be able to help prepare migrants' children to become involved in the new cultural and social environment, to receive new language competences, to get to know new cultural habits, patterns of behaviour and to be prepared to become full-fledged members of society.

The realisation of these tasks is possible only through complex educational activities in the following spheres: (1) intra-cultural, (2) multicultural and (3) inter-cultural education. The main task of intra-cultural education is to develop and to encourage the original ethno-cultural, national identity of pupils (including immigrants' children). If we want to reach successful integration of different social groups we should accept their cultural rights for cultivation, declaration and presentation of their identity. It is an essential part of our human rights. The idea is not for European nations to be 'dissolved' into the EU, but rather to contribute their own particular qualities to the EU. The variety of national characteristics should be used for the EU benefits (Article 6 (3) EU). Intra-cultural education should implicitly involve training for dealing with a situation of cultural contact.

The contemporary concept of identity is *inclusive* identity (as opposed to the *exclusive* identity of the earlier times). Cultivating inclusivity is becoming an integral part of both civic education (being a citizen of one's home city, region, country, Europe, the world) and of multi- and inter-cultural education (from ethno-cultural identification to bi-cultural, to multi- and intercultural one) (Ross, 2001, 13). The concept of inclusive identity corresponds to multicultural and intercultural spheres of education.

The main task of multicultural education is to understand the variety of world cultures, and the diversity of value systems and world-views. Our model is only one among many possible and existing models of reality. But our knowledge about other cultures and the practice of co-existence is not the same. The essential condition of cultural co-existence is real cultural communication based on mutual comprehension. This is the sphere of intercultural education competences.

Even though the real content of intercultural education is determined by different conceptions in various European countries and by specific features of educated groups, all experts share the view that the ideal and final objective of intercultural education is to contribute to intercultural understanding in society. In my view, even though the term multicultural education is more widely used than intercultural education, the use of intercultural education is more useful in describing our educational efforts. Intercultural education should be an essential part of practice, based on mutual respect and non-violent co-existence of different ethno-cultural groups and nations. The social and political environment should facilitate intercultural understanding. All social groups (majorities as well as minorities, including immigrants) should strive to achieve consensus.

Which model of multicultural society is likely to be chosen in Czech society?

- Liberal multicultural model of society. Representatives of all groups (both those of a majority and minorities) are equal in law. Society emphasises the equality of people and the value and freedom of the *individual*. The starting point of this social strategy is the individual, not the group. The public sphere is neutral to ethnic and cultural difference, and specific cultural qualities should be preserved at the individual, private level.
- Pluralistic multicultural model of society. Society emphasises cultural diversity. Representatives of various cultures preserve their specific cultural qualities and the public sphere takes into consideration their *group* identities. Representatives of the majority are expected to be familiar with specific ways of life and patterns of behaviour of minorities, while representatives of minorities are expected to be familiar with social mechanisms of the dominant culture.
- Critical multicultural model of society. In this model, both individual as well as group/collective specific qualities (reflected in identity/identities) are considered as changeable, dynamic, determined by circumstances and adapted to current social conditions and needs. This form of co-existence aims to achieve integration of different groups. The different and 'non-dominant' identity should not be a limiting factor or barrier to participation in political, economic and cultural spheres of life. The higher level of identity, i.e. civic identity, involves an abundance of partial identities, which are supported and developed if they correspond to a democratic state.

In my view, the Czech model has not yet been decided. As a result, the educational system is still at a crossroad.

Even though immigrants are considered as a specific target group for policy, educational policy towards migrant children is influenced by the educational policy towards other minorities. I therefore describe this situation of minorities in the region of North Moravia and Silesia in the Czech Republic. Historically, it is the border region where the interests of Czechs, Germans and Poles have traditionally met. As the centre of mining and metallurgy, the region has offered many job opportunities and has welcomed labour forces from different European countries (the waves of immigration before the Second World War, for example migrants from Italy, Greece) and from other Czechoslovak regions (e. g. Slovaks, Romany).

After the Second World War, the multicultural character of the region was promoted by bilingual (Czech and Polish) names of institutions, shops, etc. There were many Polish primary and secondary schools, the young Poles who wanted to study at university had two possibilities: either to study in Czechoslovakia (communicating in Czech or Slovak), or to study in Poland (communicating in Polish). There were also Slovak primary and secondary schools in the region. Persons of other nationalities or ethnics were involved in major educational systems. The situation of Romany children was specific, and a high percentage of them were educated in schools providing special teaching/training for handicapped children.

Since 1998 the situation has changed rapidly. The number of Polish primary and secondary schools has markedly fallen. Currently, there is no Slovak school at all in the region, even though a high percentage of the population in the region is of Slovak origin (although in the last census many Slovaks did not claim Slovak nationality, neither did Romany people). However, the approach to educating Romany children is different, because the Romany are considered to be a potentially excluded group. The contemporary Czech educational system makes an effort to improve the educational level of young Romany people. It attempts to increase a possibility of their social mobility and it facilitates their integration. There is a preparatory school year for pre-school Romany children and Romany assistants work in primary and lower secondary schools.

With reference to children of other nationalities, it is possible to note that nowadays there are numerous groups of not only Slovaks, Poles and Romany, but Vietnamese, Ukrainians, even Americans (about 100,000 US citizens) and that many Russians live on the territory of the Czech Republic.

The position of multicultural education reflects the multicultural quality of Czech society. It is at an early stage of its development. In the school system, intra-cultural education is emphasised as a starting point for developing the national (ethno-cultural) identity of minorities. This is combined with acquiring basic knowledge about culture, history and a current state of the majority population and traditional minorities. This approach is considered multicultural, but it should be enriched with inter-cultural perspective. In my opinion, this model does not fulfil its main task of promoting the co-existence and co-operation of various social groups based on mutual respect and tolerance. It does not overcome the tensions related to cultural and civic identification in

a multicultural state, and thus does not develop European dimensions of civic and intercultural education.

The situation of the educational system is different in cities and in rural areas. Rural areas are still mono-cultural. The presence of pupils of different ethno-cultural origin is rare, or the number of such pupils is very low, so the educational process is *de facto* mono-cultural, failing to meet requirements of respect for the personal culture of a pupil. Pupils learn about others, about possible models of multicultural co-existence. However, education without practice of respect for culturally specific characteristics of educated individuals is not intercultural education, but only implementing the ideology of multiculturalism. In this situation one can talk about a cultural element of civic education.

In larger cities (especially in the capital) one can find multicultural classes, where the multicultural environment can provide a context for general education and for civic education in particular. The educational process may be enriched by the cultural heterogeneity of pupils. Pupils are able to learn from each other, to participate in common activities, to co-operate and in this way to verify and put to practice the principles of mutual respect and mutual tolerance. It appears that this new experience is not always easy for teachers or for pupils.

Our universities have already begun to train teachers in acquiring new competences in these areas. Other retraining institutions have already offered new programmes, courses on the methodology and didactics of inter-cultural education (for example, using new information technologies in civic education: Masek, 2000), in which foreign experiences and home traditions are put together (compare, for example, with Papoulia-Tzelepi, Spinthourakis *et al*, 2003). Some universities work to prepare multi- or intercultural teacher training as a specialisation, while other universities (including the University of Ostrava) are preparing intercultural modules for pre-service civic education courses.

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