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

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Student teachers' views, attitudes and visions of citizenship in pre-school and primary school

Riitta Korhonen

University of Turku, Department of Teacher Education in Rauma (Finland)

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to clarify student teachers' views, attitudes and visions about citizenship education. The subjects in this study are students from different study programmes in the Department of Teacher Education in Rauma.

The curricula of pre-school education and primary school education in Finland do not address the subject of citizenship education directly, but includes it in other subjects such as ethics, history and the social subjects: this applies to both pre-school education and primary school education. In the teacher's code of professional ethics (2002) it states that 'One point of departure for the ethical principles of teaching is the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. It is important that future teachers are able to analyse that content which belongs to citizenship education in both the pre-school and primary school.

Citizenship education

According to Bauer *et al.* (2003) citizenship can be seen on different levels - global, regional, national, local community, family and personal. At the global level one can see its widest meaning, while at the personal level it is very near the individual. All these dimensions are valuable in education, but which level is stressed in education depends on pupils' age: pupils in the first and second grades in primary education understand citizenship education in different way to older pupils. For younger pupils the personal and family dimensions are probably most appropriate.

According to Patric (see Bauer *et al.* 2003, p 3; Berg *et al.* 2003, p 1-2) the definitions of citizenship education are as follows:

1. Civic skills

- the development of decision making skills
- comparative and international analyses of government and citizenship
- the development of participatory skills and civic virtues through co-operative learning activities

2. Civic knowledge

- the systematic teaching of core concepts
- the use of case studies

3. Civic virtues

- the use of literature to teach civic virtues

According to Quisumbing (see Bauer *et al.* 2003, p 3) citizenship education is really a lifetime process of continuing learning involving the total development of the whole person rather than a finished product or outcome of a curriculum for a given time or location.

Dimensions of citizenship education

Citizenship consists of four different dimensions:

1. personal - the personal capacity for a commitment to a civic ethic, characterised by responsible habits of mind, heart and action
2. social - the capacity to live and work together for civic purposes
3. spatial - the capacity to see oneself as a member of overlapping communities - local, regional, national and multinational
4. temporal - the capacity to locate several changes in the past, present to future: a sense of heritage and an eye to future; in touch with reality (see Bauer *et alia* 2003, p 4).

In primary school education these dimension are seen in many subjects and teachers recognise these in learners' behaviour and social contacts.

Contents of different dimensions in citizenship education

According to Grossman *et al.* (2000) citizenship education includes different areas which are as follows.

- civic education: the building of a knowledge base for civic beliefs and skills for civic participation
- values education: the acquisition of dispositions and predilections that provide the foundation for civic attitudes and beliefs
- environmental education: the process of developing understanding, skills and values, consistent with the notion of sustainable development (see Bauer *et al.* 2003,4)

All these dimensions and areas together make up citizenship education. The results of the study reported here are formed according to this theory.

Citizenship education in practice

Holden and Clough (2002, p 3) have listed the following guide to practical teaching:

1. **Truth** (Teachers and learners will be concerned to research topical and political issues, through collecting evidence from a full range of courses of information including those reflecting different perspectives and understand self and relation to others)
2. **Honesty** (Teachers and learners will be concerned to explore how the media present information and recognise stereotypes and others forms of unfair representation)
3. **Justice** (Teachers and learners will be concerned to understand that resources can be allocated in different ways and that these economic choices affect individuals and communities and reflect critically on their own views of people living in other places and times and people with different values and customs)

4. **Trust** (Teachers and learners will be concerned to recognise that the voices of children should be heard, recognise that the law of the land and Human Rights Conventions protect citizens and understand how groups can work together to solve problems locally and globally)
5. **Sense of duty** (Teachers and learners will be concerned to ensure that children can and do participate in the decision-making process of the school and challenge stereotypes and other forms of injustice).

Holden and Clough (2002, p 10) show examples of citizenship education in the following ways:

Effective citizens of the twenty-first century will work co-operatively with others, develop social justice principles to guide own actions, think in a critical and systemic way, appreciate and learn from cultural differences, evaluate problems in the wider community and global context, resolve conflicts non-violently, change lifestyles to protect the environment, recognise and defend human rights, dare to strive for fairer future and participate in democratic politics.

Research

The questionnaire to teacher students was administered in spring 2004 in the Department of Teacher Education in Rauma. There were 92 subjects: 55 primary school teacher students and 37 kindergarten teacher students. They were all first or second year students. Most questions were open. Fifteen students were also interviewed.

Students wrote their answers at the beginning of the lesson and some volunteered to take part into an interview. After completing the questionnaires the students were very interested in the questions, but they also said that this area is rather unknown to them.

Questionnaire

1. What is citizenship? What is your opinion of this term?
2. What do you think about citizenship education? What kind of experiences have you from your own schooling?
3. How do you think citizenship education is important to you? (on a scale of 1-5)
4. What kind of citizenship education do you think we need in the future?
5. What age or stage do you think it would be good to start this?

Examples of results

Students' views

Some points from the answers from kindergarten teacher students:

I think that children must be happy and enjoy their childhood (female 66)

Maybe it is a very natural way to understand if they have opportunities to be with the people from abroad, maybe children would like to help them (female 65)

Children must feel that they belong to some nation (female 70)

They have own language and habits (female 87)

Some points from the answers from primary school students:

It is important to teach facts about other countries at school (female 12)

Citizenship education is something that pupils know how to manage in society
How to earn money and get a good job (male 4)

There are wars in the world; pupils are not able to understand it (female 52)

Overall the primary school students' answers were less emotional than the kindergarten students.

What is citizenship ?

I don't know exactly what it is, that citizenship education, maybe I have heard something; it is not clear for me (male 2)

Not much used term, I don't know what it is (female 6)

It would be nice to know what it is (female 10)

We had at school civic education in history lessons. Is it the same? (female 16)

We must be good and honest civics; pay taxes etc... (female 72)

There were no differences in the answers of primary school and kindergarten teacher students.

Best starting age or grade for citizenship education

Primary school teacher students:

I think that from the first grade... (female 16).

Not too early, they don't understand and pupils maybe start to be afraid... (female 8)

Maybe in the 5 to 6th grade (male 2)

I think that good age is at six, in pre-school (female 21)

Kindergarten teacher students:

From a very young age (female 86)

Maybe about three years old children must start, but their own way... (female 61)

I think that at pre-school (six years old) (male 57)

These answers showed that kindergarten teacher students think that it is good to begin citizenship education with young children.

Attitudes

All the students rated citizenship education as important, but gave different reasons. The primary school students' answers showed positive and optimistic attitudes:

I would like to teach children this subject (female 42)

I wish that pupils have possibilities to learn these... (female 36)

My own experiences from school are almost nothing, but I wish I could do something (female 19)

Kindergarten teacher students' answers were also positive.

Values were mentioned only by a few, perhaps because they found it difficult to connect values to citizenship education.

I think that there is also something about showing respect to other people. I don't know but I think so (female 16)

I wish that pupils could understand difference and show respect to the others (female 8)

Visions

Overall the students' visions for their future in teaching were optimistic. Primary school teacher students placed greater emphasis on teaching and on and pupils behaving well at school and in a classroom with others:

Pupils must learn to understand human beings more and more and they have to feel good friendship in their own classroom (female 31, primary)

I think that this area is important and I want to do my best in my own class in the future (female 40, primary)

I have to know more before I can do good plans for my teaching (female 49, primary)

I think that children must be good friends already in kindergarten. This is the beginning (female 62, kindergarten)

I think that in future we'll be wiser to understand more and safe childhood is really important (female 83, kindergarten).

Conclusions

These examples demonstrate different levels of understanding of what citizenship education is. Their future teaching careers are something new for these students to think about at this moment, but these results give a reason to develop the curriculum for teacher education in the area of citizenship.

Most of the answers were at national and personal levels, although some were at a very general global level. Possibly the reason for this is that the students' own experiences come from these areas, and are from media and newspapers rather than from their own school days. Students' own experiences were limited and they had rather vague memories from their own school time. However, it was important to them that as teachers they keep in mind both history, both present and future, and that they see citizenship education as multidimensional, combining civic education, values education and environmental education. This questionnaire and interviews show that citizenship education ought to be a part of teacher education. If student teachers have sufficient knowledge enough and they will be able to develop their own understanding, and will also have the pedagogical material to teach and discuss questions of citizenship with their pupils.

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