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## **Citizenship Education: an analysis of some experiences in the Basque country**

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This paper presents the first results of a research project called *Citizenship education: Actors, challenges, proposal and resources*, carried out by the University of Deusto and Alboan, a local non-governmental organisation (NGO). The object was to identify the main actors involved in citizenship projects in the Basque country, and describe who they are and their experiences. The Council of Europe's approach to education for democratic citizenship is from the perspective of lifelong learning, 'embracing any formal, non-formal or informal educational activity, including that of the family, enabling an individual to act throughout his or her life as an active and responsible citizen respectful of the rights of others' (*EDC recommendation R(2002)12*). In light of this, our research compares the inputs and outputs of various projects, and this paper has a specific focus on secondary school projects.

The relevance of this age group in the Spanish context is that there is a current debate on Citizenship Education. During 2004-2005, the Ministry of Education proposed a specific school subject of Citizenship, but other stakeholders, such as the Council of Education (teachers' representatives) and the Parents Association are not in full agreement with the proposal. They accept that the educational system must include education for citizenship, because citizenship education enables people to become active members of society, but argue that it should be addressed through a transversal approach, not just through specific courses. They were also critical of the suggested availability of curriculum time schedule and the compulsory aspects of the proposals.

Meanwhile many NGOs and other stakeholders are collaborating with secondary teachers to implement this kind of initiative. They offer educational materials and specialist professionals who take part in the school life. This research analyses the experience of teaching Citizenship Education from the viewpoint of secondary teachers and partners involved in these initiatives, including NGOs and volunteers.

Because learning for citizenship includes cognitive (knowledge), pragmatic (action), and affective (values) aspects, a main focus of the research was analysing citizenship competences and how these were developed in different kinds of projects. The global and local challenges of citizenship education were also surveyed, as were the methodologies employed, the training of teachers and other agents, the organisational measures used to implement these projects and the relationship between the stakeholders. Our research methodology was the analysis of a range of case studies, representing three different types of projects. Those which are:

- organised and developed by external stakeholders (in such cases, the schools provide the time, the stakeholders personnel and material resources),
- developed by secondary teachers in partnership with other stakeholders, and
- organised and developed by schools.

In general practice, both schools and stakeholders are moving towards the second of these models.

***Understanding citizenship education: from the theoretical framework to the experiences***

One of the fundamental roles of education is to promote the active participation of all individuals in democratic life at local, regional, national levels (Council of Europe, 2001a). This is part of a lifelong learning experience, and is a participative process carried out in a variety of contexts: family, educational institutions, local communities, and so on. Because of this, an important goal of education in a democratic society is to help people to acquire the knowledge, values, and skills needed to participate effectively in public communities (Banks, 1997).

New theoretical perspectives have focused on goals based on a framework of core competencies in active citizenship (Lastrucci, 2003a, 2003b; Remy, 1998). The basic classifications of these competencies are into three categories:

- a) **Cognitive competencies:** these require knowledge of political system and the law, which are the weapons with which citizens can defend their freedoms, protect individuals and challenge abuses of power by those in authority. They include knowledge about the rules of collective life and about public institutions, and must include understanding about relations between individuals, cultural differences, and human rights.
- b) **Ethical and axiological dimension:** these also involve affective aspects, because citizenship entails membership of a group or groups, bringing identities into play in a very significant way. Political identity needs to be defined in relation to other people (Roland-Levy and Ross, 2003): this therefore means a personal and a collective emotional dimension.
- c) **Capacities for action:** this covers the need for learning to emphasise active engagement and process, rather than the passive transmission of information: to live and cooperate with others, to resolve conflicts in accordance with the principles of democratic law, defend human rights and to participate in democratic politics.

We next deal with the Basque experiences of citizenship education. The analysis of competences will be combined with methodological and organisational issues. Although it is difficult to find a project that is specifically called *citizenship education*, many projects focus on the development of some of the characteristics of effective citizens for 21st century (Cogan & Derricott, 1998): working co-operatively with others, developing social justice, thinking in critical and systemic ways; appreciating and learning from cultural differences, evaluating problems in a global context, changing life styled to protect the environment, defending human rights, daring to strive for a fairer future and participating in democratic politics. Such education is dedicated to the empowerment of students to shape their own lives (Steinber, 2000).

In the Basque country some institutions stressed specific topics such as human rights, environmental issues or conflict resolution, but other institutions had a more general overview. Most of these institutions organised workshops for schools using critical thinking as the principal methodology. From these organisations' viewpoint, these activities are related to ethical and religious studies. In the past, some institutions offered

seminars in these areas: then educational centres prepared time and space for them. Student participation was on a voluntary basis, although the workshops were held during periods of formal education. Currently, many institutions avoid isolated seminars, and instead look for a deeper involvement with the centres and closer support and relationships with the teachers.

The environment is another important topic, and schools have been encouraged to develop the Local Agenda 21, mainly in primary schools. The Basque government gives grants to support these projects with secondary pupils. There is a specific institution, CEIDA, in charge of advice and education centres in this area. Courses consider political aspects and knowledge of governmental institutions among other types of experience. Most of these courses would include a visit or a session in a public institution such as the Basque Parliament or the Town Hall. Some municipalities, such as San Sebastian, Vitoria or Baracaldo, have a strong tradition of doing this, and most of them mention that they try to arrange visits during a real session, on a topic that has been well prepared by students<sup>1</sup>. This avoids merely symbolic participation (Hart, 2001).

The status of non-citizens is another topic of relevance in citizenship education. The growth of migration in Spain has been paralleled by the challenge of intercultural education. A greater variety of customs, languages and religious beliefs jostle side by side in the public arena and in the classroom. At school, the influence of what is called a canonical multicultural education (Fullinwider, 2001) developed by Banks (1997) has an important influence, and has been a new challenge for the Basque educational system. It has two separate aims. One is civic: to get students to respect the cultural differences of others, and to carry this over into their roles as citizens. The second aim is remedial: to promote minority ethnic achievement. The teachers and the Basque government are the main actors in this, though a wide selection of other social partners are often involved, such as families, NGOs and others in the community

Subjects like intercultural and environmental education already include a global dimension. In the Basque country, specific projects developed by different NGOs show a remarkable commitment to this element of citizenship education. Some organisations, such as Alboan or Hegoa, have accumulated a wealth of relevant experience, in developing and using curricula with students, and also in teacher training and in organising networks to exchange experiences. In my view it is relevant that the change to localism has produced an identity point for younger generations. We have strong links to the local environment of the city, the region and the Autonomous region. But the disadvantage has been the lower level of identification with farther and abstract places like the European Union or Latin American (Villanueva and Maiztegui, 2005).

However, local citizenship can only be understood if it is seen in a wider context. The global dimension is more than learning about other countries; it should help pupils understand issues such as racism, refugees, asylum seekers and the impact of migration (Brownlie, 2001). It should also provide a reflective framework for students to understand their multiple roles at all levels and to cross, geographical or cultural, boundaries (Cogan & Derricott, 1998). Most of these case studies emphasised the idea of a global world, the

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, in 2004 UNICEF organised a plenary session about gender and violence in the Basque Parliament. Students from different centres in The Basque country prepared it together.

relationship between North and South and the ethics of the wider world. Students are strengthening their sense of identity and encouraged to understand the effects of their decisions on their daily lives. This framework also provides an opportunity to develop future behavioural aspects.

It seems that it is not enough to learn about democracy in schools, since democracy has to be learned and practised throughout life (Osler, 2001). Some of those projects that are most effective in developing active citizenship skills are those in which participants have an opportunity to practice these abilities. Most of the projects described here include practical exercises in conflict resolution or in working cooperatively, but few of them offer a 'training period in real life'. Two dimensions should be mentioned. First, to give students an opportunity to share in the management of institutions in which they are involved. This occurs not only in schools but in the everyday practices of social institutions: in school it is a great challenge (and is a weakness in many projects). At the local level, consultations to find the interests and needs of children include the case of San Sebastian, where the design of a new park and open area was a good opportunity to share pupil's ideas with other social actors (adults, elderly people and architects) and to put cooperative work into practice. Secondly, to provide opportunities to take part in local life as a project volunteer. Some centres work in this area: schools can only achieve this if they work in close collaboration with other institutions that influence lives of young people (Cogan & Derricott, 1998). Society needs to reinforce the work of the school, and collaboration with other institutions is crucial (for example, hospitals, NGOs and residences). This coordination is particularly important in order to practice participation in the public sphere.

Concerning **methodology**, in general active learning is the main approach. Projects use debates and discussion to encourage young people to discuss ideas, to articulate and actively construct meaning from experience. Discussion between peers and other adults (teachers and others) allows a shared understanding to develop. As in other countries, different experiences about an issue, possibly controversial, arouse opinions and encourage collaborative constructed reflections. To consider the points of views of others, and to become aware of different topics (such as racism, the environment, and so on) are other important objectives. But more research is needed to find if they encounter some of the problems pointed out by Ross (2003, p28): an over-emphasis on the experimental element of the learning, and to mistake the outcome for the process.

This aspect is linked to the **teacher's role**. Different stakeholders collaborate to develop projects, but the abilities and training of each are quite different. The chairperson has a complex challenge; it is necessary to maintain a pedagogical style, and requires the collaborators to maintain the critical sequence, since the purpose of the direct experience is to encourage reflection and comparisons (Ross, 2003). Another practical difficulty is that teachers must reassure students, developing their confidence, while also provoking them with controversial questions (Misiejuk, Raubik and Tutiaux-Guillon, 2004). There are interesting developments in the pedagogical departments of most NGOs, as is shown in their most recent documents, but little of this is known by agents.

The Council of Europe points to the importance of this, and mentions the lack of skills and technical capacity to deliver the necessary professional development support for teachers. 'This single factor could effectively limit, if not block, the implementation of Citizenship Education ... The evidence is that if teachers are not well supported through

this process, then the failure of the development is inevitable' (Council of Europe, 2001a, pp 58. 59). In the Basque country the great variety of projects and situations made it difficult to give a general overview.

As has been mentioned, citizenship education can provide opportunities for the involvement of local communities in school life. In the last few years a new educational model has been involved in the Basque country, *learning communities*: the objective is to develop an open learning system in which the school is not a closed place, managed by teachers, but a space open to the community. In this way the school offers its resources to the whole community, and at the same time ensures that other institutions (family, NGOs, educational and religious institutions) contribute to its well being. When this happens, a new paradigm is achieved, which should change the school's organisational model, methodology and curriculum. But in secondary schools this model is not easily developed, even if there are proposals for change. The training and the role of secondary teachers, and their management, are difficult to change. It is possible that some citizenship experiences could arise only from a teacher's individual decisions, and thus miss out the relationship with the 'life of the centre'. This is an important factor in the context of citizenship education: according to the Council of Europe (2001a, p51) for citizenship education to be effectively implemented two further factors are needed. Firstly, political support is necessary to ensure that there are adequate resources. Secondly, there must be understanding and active support from the key constituencies involved in implementation. Currently the organisational structure of secondary schools has two consequences: on the one hand, gaps in implementation, and on the other, uncertainty about the future of projects in the lack of a long-term strategy. This is a general overview of the state schools; private schools might have different perception because their centre philosophy often integrates citizenship education.

### **Final remarks**

In recent years many citizenship education projects have been designed and developed in the Basque country. Although most are not called citizenship education, they include knowledge, attitudes and skills related to citizenship competences (Cogan and Derricot, 1997). Cognitive and affective aspects are well designed, but it seems that engagement in the community is more difficult to implement.

The role of society within the democratic state is essential for promoting active and democratic citizenship. In our case, it could be said that organisations at all levels of the system, whether involved in informal, non-formal or formal learning, are working to ensure learning opportunities and the development of citizenship competences. So far the process has produced some interesting experiences, but the challenge is to develop a systematic framework to support them and avoid uncertainty.

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