



This paper is taken from

*Teaching Citizenship  
Proceedings of the seventh Conference of the  
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe  
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2005

**edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 389 1**

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
  - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
  - a official of the European Commission
  - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

*Jurgena, I., Mikainis, Z. (2005) Citizenship education in the secondary school: Latvian experiences and problems, in Ross, A. (ed) Teaching Citizenship. London: CiCe, pp 415-420.*

© CiCe 2005

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

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 at the time of the conference, and for the initial stages of editing this book
- Lindsay Melling and Gitesh Gohel of IPSE, London Metropolitan University
- 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.

## **Citizenship education in the secondary school: Latvian experience and problems**

*Inese Jurgena, Teachers' Training and Educational Management Academy, (Latvia)*  
*Zigurds Mikainis, University of Latvia (Latvia)*

Latvia has regained its independence and is developing as a democratic state with a functioning liberal and open market economy. Integration in the European Union has also begun. Within this context, a transition to the civil society is taking place, which emphasises the need for education to focus on the development of an active personality, capable of functioning in a free civil society.

The 1995 EU White Paper *Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society* (COM(95) 590), points out the idea that 'knowledge and practical skills will play a decisive role in the relations of an individual with his/her co-citizens'. This condition, which can be defined as 'the learning relationship', will become the dominating feature of our social structure (p 14).

The Latvian national program *The Integration of Society in Latvia* (2001) emphasises the importance of active participation and points out that 'the educational system affects the understanding and inheritance of social values to a great extent'; therefore, 'children and young people are the most important target groups in the process of social integration' (p 11).

In the citizenship education curriculum it is intended to enhance the awareness of citizenship by young people, to consolidate it in activities related to increased individual participation, to perfect the forms of civic upbringing, and to promote the development of a system of basic citizenship values. Education is the most effective means by which the views of the younger generation can be formed and the skills related to democratic citizenship and consolidated society can be developed.

This article analyses the experience of citizenship education in general secondary schools in Latvia and outlines the possibilities for its perfection.

### **Citizenship education in the Latvian general secondary schools**

The issues of citizenship education in Latvia have to be related to the historical development of our society, because the specific features of citizenship awareness are determined by the fact that Latvians have a thousand-year long history of ethnic development, but a very short period as an independent nation state starting from 18 November, 1918. After regaining independence in the 1990s there was a necessity to improve the Latvian system of education in terms of citizenship education.

Due to misinterpreted liberalism there was a certain moratorium concerning this issue. A hasty decision was taken that, along with the de-ideologising of the educational system, Latvian secondary schools should be freed from the purpose of upbringing and should only deal with educational matters. Fortunately, this view did not find much social acceptance, as it would have been contrary to modern pedagogic ideas (Aboltins, Vebers, Pabriks, 1999).

Therefore in the early 1990s no active work towards citizenship education was started. Academic discussions on the contents and objectives of citizenship education and on the

issues related to active participation in the democratic civil society were quite passive, while in other European countries this process had started much earlier. It was a historical coincidence that in countries with a long experience of democracy there was dissatisfaction with the results of citizenship education, civic activities, skills, and traditions (Drivdale-Karuskina, Geske, Grinfelds, Kangro, Sarma, Tipans, 2003, p21-23). It is therefore important to analyse and evaluate citizenship education in Latvia, its present difficulties and problems, in the context of the development of democracy.

Recent opinion polls and studies have aimed at identifying and evaluating the knowledge, skills, and behavioural values of secondary school students concerning the aspect of citizenship education. Research findings show that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of Latvian students in the area of citizenship education are contradictory, and overall cannot be considered satisfactory. The major problems identified are:

- young people lack sufficient knowledge and understanding about the contents of democratic citizenship, its principles, and the political processes taking place in Latvia;
- it is difficult to involve young citizens in the election process and other traditional activities of a civil society; and
- young people either lack the skills to analyse news presented in the mass media or they tend to pay no attention to the news.

The results indicate that most Latvian secondary school students support traditional activities related to civil society, but show less support for more active socially-oriented models of civil participation. For instance, 75% of students agree that free elections constitute the most important feature of a democratic state, and 75% also say that participation in national elections is the most favoured political activity (Drivdale-Karuskina et al., 2003, pp 113, 120).

But research also reflects the experiences related to a totalitarian society. For example, about 22% of those questioned think that the right to vote can be harmful to democracy. This is also felt in the responses to the questions related to trust in state leaders. Only 35% of respondents reject blind trust in the people with real power. Almost one fourth of the respondents (24%) assumes that complete trust in the head of state promotes democracy (Pabriks, Vebers, Aboltins, 2001, p54). Only 44% think that people's participation in political parties promotes democracy (Drivdale-Karuskina, 2003, p114). Of particular note is the view that 'a good citizen' can be one who does *not*

- does not join political parties (65%),
- take part in political discussions (52%),
- take part in social activities (26%),
- support human rights (20%), and
- who may not know the history of their state (27%).

According to 77% of the respondents, 'a good citizen' works hard, takes care of his/her family, and leads a calm and quiet life. This lack of social participation by active and good citizens may indicate an alienated society. The views of Latvian young people on the nature of citizenship have to be evaluated critically, as they imply that people can

demonstrate their citizenship in leading lives that are alienated from political and social processes. Naturally, these views have been formed with the help of stereotypes characteristic of the adult environment.

Contradictory views and values also reflect Latvian teenagers' understanding of some issues concerning the interrelationship between human rights and democracy. For instance, while 53% of those questioned consider that democracy is promoted when people demand political or social rights, 34% of the respondents think that this is harmful to democracy, and 13% do not have a definite opinion on this (Drivdale-Karuskina, etc., 2003, p115). It can be concluded that one in three students has formed the dubious view that demands for social and political rights can be a burden to democracy.

Only 30% of the students consider that democracy is developing if a person refuses to obey a law that violates the norms of human rights (Drivdale-Karuskina, Geske, etc., 2003, p115). As democratic citizenship does not accept such blind submission to power, it can be concluded that many young people lack the skills to critically evaluate social processes, and to become involved in controlling these processes. There is a certain attitude of a 'screw', escaping from the 'dangers' of freedom, absence of individual judgments and assessments.

We suggest that the problems indicated above are based on the fact that those positive changes towards democratisation and the development of a civil society in Latvia are mainly taking place at the macro-level – state institutions, local governments, political parties, non-governmental organisations, and mass media. In contrast, the changes affecting the micro-level have been much slower and seen as less essential, including:

- the mutual relationships between individuals
- the psychological climate in the society
- individuals positive value-orientation
- family relationships (parents/children, spouses, etc)
- attitudes towards elderly people, the disabled, etc.

Most members of Latvian society, including secondary school students, acquire new positive life skills in the conditions of competition and market relationships in the form of self-education, by means of searching, errors, and delusion, as well as by copying the experience of other countries in a primitive way.

Negative factors of social life such as alienation and fragmentation also affect the process of citizenship education in secondary schools. The following effects can be considered as important in Latvia:

- the general education system is open to negative social tendencies, and has not developed a protective mechanism to help the individual to separate himself/herself from them;
- the slowness of dealing with social issues concerning teachers' work (low salaries, lack of social guarantees, etc) has hindered teachers' gaining further qualifications and their attitude to work;

- the educational process cannot compensate for the effect of poor family life on students;
- the alienated attitude of families to the state and social processes negatively affects the value orientation of young people; and
- families cannot compensate for the negative effects of the society, e.g. lack of sympathy, benevolence, politeness and other moral values, including the daily presence of violence, cruelty, and murder on television.

The results of this discussion leads us to conclude that the level of students' knowledge and citizenship skills are insufficient. There are doubts about whether students will be able to become involved in social life and bring new positive changes to it. Secondary school students' views on democracy and citizenship do not show that they are prepared for life in a democratic civil society.

#### **The experience of citizenship education in the general secondary schools in Latvia**

There are two approaches to citizenship education in Latvia. At first, it was understood as 'the teaching and learning of the principles, ideas, and practice of the democratic state and the society, as well as the instrument for the development and preservation of democratic ideals and institutions' (Civic Education, Democracy in Latvia, 1997, p11), the main goal of which was the upbringing of responsible citizens for the state. Consequently, civic education is education for the development of citizenship.

There is now a broader understanding of citizenship and its development in education policy, standards and curricula in Latvia. It cannot be identified with legal aspects of citizenship, which reflect the individual's legal relationship with a particular state. Citizenship is a reference-point of educational activity, and as a social and spiritual phenomenon it reflects the level of independence of a free personality. It is an integral characteristic of a socialised individual, in which his/her ethical culture and feelings of self-respect, inner freedom, discipline, and responsibility manifest themselves. Citizenship creates an opportunity for an individual to be a subject of real socio-political and legal activity in society.

In a democratic society, citizenship education is a process resulting in the development of an independent individual possessing critical thinking, sovereignty, and responsibility. The task of education is to provide succession of the system of values. 'In the pedagogic aspect, the objective of citizenship education is to develop an active personality, capable of functioning in the civil society' (Kaposta, 2004, 65). The environment of citizenship education in contemporary Latvia is formed by the interplay of various factors, and the system of general education is the principal means of its implementation.

The experience of citizenship education has accumulated in Latvia over the course of many years. Attention is now principally paid to the holistic approach within a social studies framework, which integrates topics related to civil studies, ethics, economics, and health education. This model of citizenship education focuses on the individual student, reflecting the many possible influences that form an active citizen of a democratic state and affect knowledge and skills in citizenship education (Torney-Purta, Schwille, Amadeo, 1999). There is no specific subject called 'Citizenship Education' in Latvian schools, and the process of education is open to various innovations.

Obviously, citizenship education differs from other school subjects in that it cannot only be taught within the framework of lessons. Its objectives can only be achieved when teachers of various subjects participate in the process, there is a democratic school environment, and students are actively involved in extra-curricular activities related both to the goals of citizenship education and the students' own interests.

A new subject has now been developed, confirmed, and is being implemented, called 'Social Studies' (Social Studies: the Standard of Basic Education, Forms 1 – 9, 2004). It comprises civil studies, an introduction to economics, and health education. The purpose of this subject is to help students understand themselves and social processes, and to motivate them to be active participants in social life by making a conscious and justified choices.

'Social Studies' started to be implemented in 2004/2005, and it is a logical and purposeful step in citizenship education. According to the draft curricula, the subject 'Social Studies' is an integrated school subject for forms 1 to 9, giving students an opportunity to develop their skills to make ethical choices and form their own system of values based on the principles of humanism and democracy. In senior forms the issues of citizenship education are dealt with more thoroughly in the course 'Politics and Rights' (Politics and Rights: Draft Course Guidelines, 2001).

Citizenship education is a relatively new area in the Latvian educational system, and it is clear that it will be necessary to pay more attention to the development of students' citizenship skills and attitudes in various pedagogic activities. There are other directions for citizenship education. Schools have to become active centres of civil studies, and overcome problems in the acquisition of social studies (including citizenship education), raise teachers' professional qualifications, and expand cooperation with parents. These centres must have the necessary educational literature, methodological literature, and teaching aids.

Within this integrated approach, students will perfect their skills and abilities to use and integrate knowledge and skills acquired in various school subjects. An integrated approach is connected not only with school subjects, but also with upbringing and interest education. This approach is closely related to the dimension of time: it is important to emphasise the future viewpoint in the context of social studies.

To change the dominant atmosphere in schools, and to increase awareness of the importance of civil studies, we need teachers who have acquired professional citizenship education in their university education. Systematic courses of professional development for school teachers are needed, to give opportunities to enhance students' understanding and create a more positive attitude to the activities of state institutions, local governments, etc.

The goal of citizenship education – to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills which would promote students' active involvement in the social life and enable them to be successful citizens – is one of the priorities the education system has set itself, while still recognising the complex nature of this issue.

### Conclusions

1. Since regaining independence, the democratisation of society, the development of civil society, and the formation of a progressive educational system has been noticeable in Latvia.
2. Social research suggests the fragmentation of the society, lack of moral values, and manifestations of alienation cause problems for citizenship education in general secondary schools.
3. The standards of citizenship education for general educational institutions developed in Latvia include knowledge, skills, and the development of attitudes.
4. Citizenship education is a new area of education in Latvia, and its development depends to a great extent on the qualifications of teachers, the formation of a democratic school environment, the perfection of the content and methodology of citizenship education, and the complex treatment of class and extra-curricular activities related to citizenship education.

### References

- Drivdale-Karuskina S., Geske A., Grinfelds A., Kangro A., Sarma V., Tipans O. (2003) *The International Study on Citizenship Education in Latvia*. Riga: Macibu Gramata
- Kaposta T. (2004) Thoughts on Civic Upbringing. *Riga, the Teacher* No 4
- Pabriks A., Vebers E., Abolins R. (2001) *The Social Integration: Overcoming of Alienation*. Riga: Nipo NT
- Citizenship Education for Democracy in Latvia: Basic Concepts, Practice, Reference Materials for Teachers*. (1997) The Latvian Democracy Development Center, Social Studies Development Center of Indiana University. Riga, Bloomington (Indiana)
- Politics and Rights* (2001) The Course Guidelines. The Center for Educational Standards and Examinations. Order No 62, 10.05. 2001
- Social Studies: The Standard of Basic Education Forms 1 – 9*. (2004) Riga: The Latvian Ministry of Education
- The White Paper (1995) *Teaching and Learning: towards the Learning Society*. COM(95) 590, Brussels: Commission of European Community
- Torney – Purta, J., Schwille, J., Amadeo, J. (eds) (1999). *Civic Education across Countries: Twenty Four National Case Studies from the IEA Civic Education Project*. The Netherlands: Eburon
- The National Program (2001) *The Integration of Society in Latvia*