



This paper is taken from

*Citizenship Education: Europe and the World
Proceedings of the eighth Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2006

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 899764 66 6

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Berg, W. (2006) *Learning one world: or: What is an active citizen?*, in Ross, A. (ed) *Citizenship Education: Europe and the World*. London: CiCe, pp 435-440.

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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
- The rector and the staff of the University of Latvia
- Andrew Craven, of the CiCe Administrative team, for editorial work on the book, and Lindsay Melling and Teresa Carbajo-Garcia, for the administration of the conference arrangements
- 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

Learning one world: or: What is an active citizen?

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With this contribution I would like to do three things:

- To plead for citizenship education as an endeavour which is dedicated to enhance **global** identity.
- To discuss the concept of ‘**active** citizenry’ which seems to be the recently and everywhere consented objective which citizenship education is supposed to achieve.
- To explain my claim that you cannot teach citizenship, but provide learners with **learning opportunities** which enable them to learn actively.

Citizenry of what?

Using the terms ‘citizens’ and ‘citizenship (education)’ we might be misled to refer to a national state (*Staat*), as it did the old German *Staatsbürgerkunde*. As the European Union has started to address to its ‘citizens’ (at the Treaty of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice, and in particular the Treaty of a Constitution), citizenry goes beyond the traditional states, but remains linked to a polity, a supra-national entity, but a somehow constitutionally defined political system.

Comparatively ‘cosmopolitans’ appear to be ‘extravagant’, going beyond those people who just decided individually to lose their links to the nation and region they come from. Citizens of the world are not created by a political system or any type of constitution – either by the United Nations or the Declaration of Human Rights.

These **human rights** are not divisible. Actually, there are plenty of people who feel committed to all other people regardless of which state or continent they live in. Obviously, there are good reasons, also because of individual, national or euro-political concerns with regard to economic or ecological interests, to take care of global issues, at least to prevent the planet from lethal changes of climate.

At last, under the auspices of globalisation (or *mondialisation*), citizenship and citizenship education have to be reframed: the point of reference, though the curricula seem to remain determined by national authorities, has to become the community of human beings in general and in total. Hence we have to conceptualize citizenship in a global sense.

Traditionally citizenship education used to emphasize teaching, knowledge, and cognitive approaches. More and more, attention is paid to skills, like the capacity to analyse (e.g. statistics), to organize and manage (maybe a project), to cooperate in teams, to argue and deliberate.

This paper is part of *Citizenship Education: Europe and the World: Proceedings of the eighth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network*, ed Ross A, published by CiCe (London) 2006. ISBN 1 899764 66 6; ISSN 1470-6695

Funded with support from the European Commission SOCRATES Project of the Department of Education and Culture. This publication reflects the views of the authors only, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained in this publication.

This still leaves a question regarding attitudes and values. Knowledge and skills are useless, even dangerous, if not based on democratic values. If people are not committed to justice, fairness and equality, and if they do understand these values as selective or divisible, cognitive and practical competences serve for nothing other than ones own interests and power.

As far as political literacy and capacities refer to human rights, we might call it global identity: the globe as the first point of reference.

How to enhance and promote global identity?

We can distinguish different approaches.

- The own interest: I declare my solidarity with indigenous people in Brazil, as they need the rain forest to survive in terms of subsistence and culture, and I need it to preserve me and my children from grave changes of the climate.
- The vague feeling of philanthropy: I love all people (which is mostly a romantic sentiment but not proved in reality), I appreciate the diversity of characters, religions, and cultures.
- The common enemy: Mankind has to be unified in order to combat threats and dangers, be it extraterrestrial beings, terrorism, hunger or ignorance.
- The human rights: it is reasonable to establish guidelines which are general and valuable for everybody – privileges are not only inhuman (human beings are born with equal rights), but also not reasonable: I do not accept privileges (even if I am enjoying ones now), as the situation might change, and I dislike to be underprivileged.

Citizenship education appears to have discovered **the active citizen** in a twofold way: as an objective and as a method, i.e. didactic principle.

The Council of Europe has set up plenty of activities, e.g. the 2005 campaign 'European Year of Citizenship through Education', in order to promote democratic citizenship. In its documents like 'Tools for Teacher Training for Education for Democratic Citizenship' (DGIV/EDU/CIT (2004) 44rev4) it has given clear guidance: 'The core objective ... is to encourage and support learners to become active, informed and responsible citizens' (Tools, p.25).

Here with the distinction and connection between skills, knowledge and values is repeated. In more populist terms, you might say: (citizenship) education includes head, hand and heart.

Thus it is only consequent to expect teachers and their trainers to 'emphasise active learning', and 'learning by doing', e.g. through experiencing situations and solving problems (Tools, p.35).

Actually, it is not possible to *teach* citizenship. You can only **provide learning opportunities**. It is the student who learns. As citizenship education is dedicated to activating people, the learning process has to be an active one. This is true for cognition, but for attitudes (values) and competences (skills) even more. Which opportunities, e.g.

class room arrangements give support to students who are somehow committed to values like justice, equality and solidarity?

Matter-of-factly, in practice, teachers in Germany (and other countries, too) have enriched their lessons in 'social literacy' or 'political education', as our official terms are alike, by casually introducing **role-games, simulations** and other methods of stimulation. The teachers, however, regret that mostly there is not enough time for these time consuming arrangements because they have to 'teach' so much 'knowledge'. Obviously in all countries, we are far from having organized citizenship education as active learning inside the classroom or outside.

How to operationalise global identity and active learning?

One approach, beside many others, to actively learning global citizenship might be an exercise like the following which came to be practiced in my presentation in Riga (thanks to those who contributed to it as players and with critical comments!):

1

I have prepared ten chairs, five times two, separately and ask 10 persons to have a seat. Two persons (chairs) are close to each other, so five couples are present. Then I inform the 5 couples that they happen to live in Europe, North America, South America, Asia or Africa (I fix corresponding labels on the wall behind them). I ask the five couples/regions of the world how happy they are about their situation – from which can arise a longer debate. The main message is, however, that people live where they live without a choice at the very beginning.

2

In a second step I inform the five world regions that there are differences in terms of population. The chairs remain (two for Europe, two for Africa etc) where they are, but in order to mirror the real situation, it will be necessary to reconstruct the scene. I instruct the players to change the chairs as follows: one player remains in Europe, one in North America, one in South America, one in Africa and 6 move to Asia (two chairs each!). I have to add, of course, that the true proportion would be 1 in Europe, 1/2 in North America, 1 in South America, 1 1/2 Africa and 6 in Asia, but the game simplifies (and somewhat reduces) the differences. I ask people how they are doing, e.g. how comfortable they feel with 6 people on the two 'Asian chairs'.

3

In a third step I inform the players that 'unfortunately' the resources are distributed unequally in this world. In order to reconstruct this distribution, Europe should 'possess' three chairs, North America 5 chairs, the other ones 1 each. Of course, I have to add, that realistically Africa should have just 1/4 of a chair, Asia 3/4. But, I argue, the game is easier (and we feel better) when we simplify the proportion. Now I ask the one 'European' on his/her three chairs or the one North American on five chairs and the six 'Asians' on one chair how much they like this situation.

4

In a fourth step I inform that there are refugees (maybe additional players, recruited from the audience as well). Preferably, however, the ten players get instructed that they

are the refugees now and come to the various regions, so one to Europe, one to North America, three to Asia and five to Africa. The chairs, not to forget, remain distributed as before...

This game or exercise, hopefully, causes lots of emotions. The players and the audience probably will be upset and join in criticizing the bad world, blaming colonialism and capitalism, ...

Probably, and this is one intention of those who arrange learning opportunities like this, participants will ask whether this corresponds to the real data and how reliable it is. Is it correct to take the gross product of a state per capita even in purchase power if people run a subsistence economy? How people live in reality? Is it correct to speak about 'Asia' which includes the wealthy Japan, booming cities in China and the desperate villages in Indonesia, the computer expert in Bangalore and the outcast in the desert?

Playing meaningful games should not exclude, but encourage critical approaches! Of course, this game is an invitation for research, study groups etc.

One example might be the demography. The data is based on the 2005 World Population Data Sheet, edited by the Population Reference Bureau (www.prb.org), spread by the EU in German and other versions. The main message this report wants to transmit is that poverty and underdevelopment is due to the growth of population. Though I do not share this approach, the data appears to be reliable.

According to this report, the global population counts (June 2005) 6.477 millions and the average of the gross product per person in purchase power 7.970 US-\$. The distribution is as follows:

	Population	Income per person
Africa:	906 mill.	2.170 \$
South America:	559	7.140
North America:	329	34.980
Europe:	730	18.550
Asia:	3,921	4.920
(Oceania – neglected)		

In order to evaluate this game/exercise (as the audience in Riga did briefly) there are two main criteria: active learning and global commitment.

- Matter-of-factly, the participants had been invited to become active, i.e. to take chairs and move to other chairs, to **express** their feelings (within their role), to give comments. On the other hand, the players were manipulated, somehow placed and handled, treated like a chess-piece!
- Actually the players and the audience have recognized (once again) that the global issue is not fair: liberties, resources, charges are not distributed equally. Maybe they did not only realize, but also **experience** it physically (five person on one chair, three chairs for one person). On the other hand, it was a

simulation, based on arguable data, an abstract situation, just a game, and not reality.

The presenter claims nevertheless that the exercise is an opportunity to learn in terms of knowledge (state of the world) and in terms of values (fairness/justice). It is a kind of active learning – but is it also learning how to act/to become active?

Under which conditions, however, do students/pupils take this opportunity, i.e. actually know more facts and reinforce their commitment to these values?

There remain plenty of questions with regard to this ‘lesson’ (we return to our school reality now), namely ethical, practical, methodological and theoretical ones:

- Are we allowed to expose pupil/students to those exercises which go (hopefully) ‘under the skin’?
- Is an extra scholastic setting (like youth work) more productive than the classroom situation? Is school culture open for ‘active learning’ which has – hopefully – consequences of action?
- Is the learning outcome a dead end if the recognized facts and stimulated values cannot be transferred into action and engagement?
- Do those ‘lessons’ **presuppose what they are intending to ‘produce’**, namely in this case a sort of global identity, the perception of ‘one world’.

The last question is a fundamental one:

Imagine learners who are – in our exercise and literally - possessing five chairs and do not care of the other six persons on one chair, justifying the setting and state of the world with statements like: ‘this is not my problem’; ‘it is their destiny’, ‘who works hard, will be successful’, or even ‘Africans are lazy by nature’...”

By the way, it might be the case, too, that learners only pretend to share values of good (global) citizens, though they are in doubt or opposite to them. They do not express this because of group pressure or institutional expectations or other reasons. It is important to find a way that the participants express these (undesired) statements.

Values, i.e. the commitment to fairness, equality and justice in a global framework, cannot be taught, cannot be simulated, but have to be practiced and applied. This is due to the **‘culture’ in school and in the community** set up by teachers, students and all other citizens, too.

There are of course thousands of good arguments against the egoistic, ignorant, cynical or racist statements mentioned above. We are sure that to argue and deliberate is the only way to convince people. These experiences, might be an **invitation** to reflect ones own values and their consequences.