



This paper is taken from

*Citizenship Education in Society  
Proceedings of the ninth Conference of the  
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe  
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2007

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-1899764-90-7

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***Dooly, M. (2007) Citizens of the Future: The Concerns and Actions of Young People around Current European and Global Issues: Preliminary Results from Catalan Teacher Trainees, in Ross, A. (ed) Citizenship Education in Society. London: CiCe, pp 53-58.***

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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 Montpellier III
- 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

## **Citizens of the future: the concerns and actions of young people around current European and global issues: preliminary results from Catalan teacher trainees**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper was outside the main symposium, but it describes the next stage of this study. It outlines preliminary findings of work with teachers and teacher trainees in Northern Spain (Catalonia), on conceptualization of Educación para la ciudadanía (Citizenship Education). This study will be part of a larger-scale ECRP research project (Poland, Turkey, Spain, possibly the UK), which explores both current concerns of young people about social and political issues and their predisposition to act for change.*

### **Introduction**

This short paper outlines preliminary findings of semi-structured interviews of teachers and teacher trainees at an education faculty in Northern Spain (Catalonia). The interviews principally focused on their conceptualization of *Educación para la ciudadanía* (Citizenship Education). This subject will soon be introduced as a compulsory part of the Spanish National Curriculum (LOE; 2005), yet there has been little research into teachers' and trainees' views on how the subject should be introduced into schools, either as to content, concepts, values, skills or pedagogy.

This preliminary study is part of a larger-scale ECRP research project to be carried out between four European countries (The United Kingdom, Poland, Turkey and Spain) entitled *Citizens of the future: the concerns and actions of young people around current European and global issues*. This explores the current concerns of young people about social and political issues and their predisposition to act for change. Examining the extent to which young people feel their home and school experiences have helped them understand and engage with these issues is an important element for anyone involved in educating young people as active citizens. At the same time, triangulating those perspectives with those of educators about what their students need to become active citizens will provide data relevant for future educational policies. Indeed, the preliminary results indicate that the apparent ambiguity by the government concerning Educación para la ciudadanía (Citizenship Education) has been dialogically reproduced by teacher trainees, indicating the need for further research and debate within the Spanish context.

### **Citizenship Education in Spain: a brief overview**

Similar to its conceptualisation in other European countries, Citizenship Education in Spain has usually been broadly construed to encompass the preparation of young people for their roles and responsibilities as citizens and, in particular, to help them to learn to

This paper is part of *Citizenship Education in Society: Proceedings of the ninth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network*, ed Ross A, published by CiCe (London) 2007. ISBN 978-1899764-90-7; 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.

get along with others. Until recently, citizenship values have been taught transversally across several subject topics, such as civics, social sciences, social studies, world studies, society, geography, or ethics. The government proposal establishes Citizenship Education as an obligatory subject within the National Curriculum. This has created an open and very public debate – largely promoted by religious authorities who feel that Citizenship Education will replace (non-assessed) religious courses. There is an ongoing debate about underlying models of religious education - which is still the basis for many private (primarily Catholic) schools throughout Spain - and the proposed secularized citizenship education course. Although the law requires Citizenship Education to be taught in all public schools by 2007, it remains a question as to whether current and future teachers can yet develop a comprehensive understanding of the implications of this course for their students.

Once we have the results from the other sections of the proposed project - which aims to highlight current concerns of young people about social and political issues - a dialogue can begin about the inherent tensions between the conceptualisations the teachers and trainees have about the Citizenship Education course and the students' perceptions of citizenship. Additionally, young peoples' understanding of current political and social situations, their perceptions, and what they feel it means to be a citizen, can all be integrated into a framework for the proposed subject. Inevitably, a lack of clear definition as to how to carry out citizenship education may be related to the uncertainty the teachers feel about what they are supposed to teach as well as questions concerning the ultimate ends of Citizenship education.

#### **Approach to the compilation of data**

This is a preliminary sample for a larger transnational project, and the research undertaken so far is qualitative. This allows for an understanding of the social world as complex, multidimensional, and constructed through people's actions, and it also provides insight into the relationships between policies, practices, representations and context in educational systems. The integration of different types of data (to be added later in the larger project) can be justified in two ways. Firstly, we assume that education policies, practices and representations must be made sense of (by the social actors involved) within the social contexts in which they are produced, and secondly, each element cannot be explained in isolation from the others. By embedding qualitative data within a larger, transnational project, the researchers hope to be able to produce contextually-rich accounts of education policies and practices in specific local, regional or national contexts at this historical moment, while at the same time analyse how social actors' real-life practices differ from official policies, and how they manage the contradictions and tensions which might emerge.

#### **Collected Data**

Between October 2006 and February 2007, four teachers and four trainees agreed to short, semi-structured interviews concerning the newly proposed Citizenship Education course. Twelve people had been approached to participate in the interviews but three declined and the fourth person was unable to meet for the interview. The interviews were in Spanish and Catalan, according to the preference of the interviewees (responses given

here have been translated into English by the author). Before the interviews, respondents were given written information about the larger-scale European project, including a brief synopsis of the project outline and objectives. The main questions asked were the following (originally in Spanish/Catalan):

- What do you know about the new subject called Citizenship Education?
- Where have you found information about the subject?
- One of the aims of the subject is:  
*Without entering into contradiction with democratic practice, which should inspire the entire scholastic life and which should be developed with a transversal characteristic within all school activities, the new subject will allow deeper learning of some of the aspects of our lives which are related to others, thus contributing to form new citizens. (p. 13)*
- How do you think this aim should be carried out within the new subject?
- Do you have any ideas about how the contents and methods should be carried out?
- Which teachers do you think will be responsible for this subject?
- What kind of preparation do you think they will need?
- Anything else you would like to add?

As this was a preliminary study for the larger project in order to pilot the questions, the respondents' answers were put in as field notes but they were not audio-recorded. Further interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

### **Respondents' Results**

#### ***'Sé muy poco' (I don't know much):***

As Starkey observes, 'no education policy can operate successfully without the commitment of teachers' (Starkey, 2007:60). It could be argued that ambiguous education policies can also contribute to less than ideal results of implementation. This may be reflected in the way Citizenship Education is perceived by the public at large.

'[Citizenship Education's] rise to prominence and fall from grace within educational circles has repeatedly coincided with the vagaries of intellectual whim and political expediency, neither of which has served the concept in any particularly favourable light. Paradoxically, this has both reaffirmed its appeal as a panacea to the myriad of social problems that beset our society and yet has also contributed to its failure to secure any permanency or lasting status within the formal curriculum - as a subject in its own right'. (Palmer and Garret, 2003:1)

It is clear from the proposed policy that all teachers will be expected to engage with a wide range of issues relevant to citizenship education – and not just teachers of the subject itself. At the same time, there is no clear outline of who should be responsible for the integration of these aspects into the general teaching, or how. This ambiguity was apparent in the respondents' answers.

*Miriam (trainee): I don't know much. Here in Catalonia they work with a book called "Si us plau" (If you please) which is about rules for getting along.*

*Roberto (Primary - Physical Education teacher): I know it exists and there's been a lot of talk about it but I don't know exactly what it's about.*

*Núria (Primary - English teacher): Not much, in fact I guess that it's related to extracurricular activities, I mean, those things that don't affect what's going on inside the classroom and also the everyday life outside of the school.*

The fact that the respondents did not have much detailed information about the new law is not necessarily due to their own lack of interest. They largely indicated that they had received information about the law primarily from newspaper and news coverage on the television (most of which has focused on the controversy and debate of the proposal, not what the law proposes). Several indicated that they had been unable to find more specific information on the Internet or from official education department information. This lack of information can have far-reaching consequences, not least of which is that it can render the policy and planning ineffective. It may also create disparity in how and how much students are actually taught in the subject, while inevitably allowing the government to evade responsibility for failing to implement effective programs for Citizenship Education teaching.

***Practice what you preach:***

Recently, Smith et al (2004) suggested that educational policy is a form of theatre in which symbolic politics are often on show. The policies can be seen as little more than symbolic gestures towards values of democracy if the schools and the society have marginalising practices rather than democratic ones. This premise seemed to be intuitively included in the teachers' and trainees' conceptualisation of the subject – despite the lack of official information about the course and how it should be implemented.

*Patricia (trainee): It should be structured around a working methodology based in dialogue, student assemblies, group dynamics, etc.*

*Jana (trainee): (...) it should be practical and part of the way of the school, not just theoretical.*

*Roberto (Physical education teacher): (...) it should open up debate about everyday life (...) active student participation oriented by the teachers.*

*Miriam (trainee): It should also include working with the parents.*

The teachers also felt that the subject should teach the students to be more empathetic towards others. In fact, many of them highlighted the need to learn 'to get along' in order to become better citizens.

*Dolors (trainee): In my opinion, the best way is on a day-to-day basis – working with the kids from a young age to help them learn to put themselves in the situation of the other – (symbolic games).*

### **What does it have to do with me?**

On the whole, the teachers and trainees seemed to distance themselves from the proposed subject. While they recognised the importance of the subject for ‘forming good citizens’ (Montse); for ‘improving the relationships between citizens’ (Noelia) and for ‘improving behaviour in society’ (Dolors), on the whole the teachers tended to use impersonal subjects or ‘they’ when discussing content and methods. This corroborates Schostak’s (1996) premise that teacher training tends to focus on subject specialists – the teachers and trainees identified themselves with their specialised subject matter, not with the proposed subject of Citizenship Education.

However, the proposed law clearly indicates that while teachers in primary and secondary schools may be working within a particular subject, they will also be required to teach and communicate beyond the limits of their subjects. Despite this, the respondents in this survey did not seem to feel the new subject would be part of their responsibility, although several of them suggested that it would be best taught ‘transversally’. None of them expanded on ideas of how it could be incorporated into their own teaching. Indeed, as indicated earlier, one teacher went so far as to state that it would be an extracurricular activity.

The respondents agreed that politics, religion and ideologies in general should be kept out of the teaching of the subject. The predominant view was that students will and should be introduced to ideas like ‘values’ and ‘civics’, but these features should not be linked in any way to politics or religion or individual (teacher) ideologies.

*Noelia (trainee): The content should be free of any political or religious connotation, it should be based on a scale of current and traditional values. It shouldn’t be influenced by archaic religious principles nor ridiculous progressive ideas. The structure of the class is not important, nor the teacher as long as it is a well-prepared person who does not let their ideologies influence the normal development of the subject.*

### **Discussion**

Citizenship education is one component of a highly debated general education reform taking place in Spain – a process aimed at responding to an unprecedented level and pace of global change at the end of the twentieth century. The newly proposed Educación para la ciudadanía covers a wide range of thematic areas such as human rights and responsibilities, civic awareness, democratic values and freedom; identity, social values, ethics and justice, conflict resolution and culture of peace, appreciation of and respect for diversity, and environmental awareness. While these are important features of a young person’s development as a citizen, there may be a need for better conceptualisation of citizenship and citizenship education in light of current socio-

economic and political realities within Spain and its autonomous regions in order to make these topics relevant to the students.

If the policy behind the subject is to implement a cross-curricular or transversal approach, it should also be accompanied by a student-centred, participative learning framework. This will require innovative teacher training programmes that prepare generalist and specialist teachers for citizenship education. This training should include learning how to incorporate and respond to youths' needs, criteria and perspectives - something we have proposed in our transnational project. As the respondents in this small case study have implied, this may be achieved through a synthesis of the day-to-day life of the school within larger educational goals of creating citizens of the future.

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