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Adolescents' Views Of Citizenship Education In Spain

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Abstract

This paper analyses the ideas of a Spanish group of secondary compulsory education students aged 14-16, about Citizenship Education. The paper shows adolescent's views about the democratic citizenship building process, as well as their attitudes towards this new subject in the Spanish curriculum called 'Education for Citizenship and Human Rights', in order to contribute to developing an adequate educational training and to contribute to the new subject proposed by the Spanish Educational Ministry, in order to fit in with the needs and expectations of the educational community. For this purpose, sixteen students of this age group were interviewed.

Introduction

During the last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first, the interest in Citizenship Education has been progressively increased all around the world, and especially in the countries that belong to the European Union. According to Osler and Starkey (2004), this interest can be explained by taking into account some aspects.

Firstly, in view of the increasing situations of inequality and social injustice nowadays in the world, different international institutions, like UNESCO and many ONGs, present Citizenship Education as the adequate response to these global challenges that the situations mentioned before mean. The insights about the links among poverty, injustice and inequality have meant that the international organisations and the nation states review Citizenship Education and education in Human Rights. Despite being two different areas, they have many points in common and overlapped. There is an increasingly international consensus in considering that Human Rights Principles underpin Citizenship Education in the new multicultural democracies.

Second, the economic globalisation process and migration are impacting directly on different countries throughout the world, but mostly in those of the European Union. The democratic countries that receive a lot of immigrants are starting to experience an increase of the diversity that affects different fields of their communities. The constitution of multicultural democracies generates tensions between the need to preserve the union or national cohesion, and the need to support the different cultural communities installed within the nation state. This cultural diversity emerges clearly and convincingly in the classrooms, which implies the transfer of the tensions mentioned above into the core of the educational institutions. This situation requires from the governments to give an educational response to those tensions. It is recognised in Citizenship Education in schools the attribute of being the means more adequate to approach both poles in tension: unity and diversity. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development worried about the challenge of 'increasing the quality of

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the education for all' and of taking decisions accordingly, and became aware that education has to promote not only the development of skills and abilities directly related to the labour world but also, more and more, that it has to encourage the development of those skills which support the continuity of living in democracy and social cohesion. In the conviction that democracy is essentially fragile and that it depends on the active implication of the citizens (and not only those with the right to vote), Citizenship Education has gained significance as a promoter of citizens engaged and involved with democratic values.

This makes us consider thirdly, the worries that provoke the political commitment levels of youth in many democratic nation states. Young people seem to worry little about public life in their communities, so Citizenship Education is seen also as a response to this problem.

Lastly, in fourth place, the emerge of antidemocratic and racist movements which undermine democratic values have alarmed the governments, mostly in Europe, where the European Council is particularly conscious of the need to make common cause with these movements through the reinforcement that implies the establishment of Citizenship Education in the classrooms.

The inclusion of a specific subject for Citizenship Education in the school curriculum is becoming very common in many European countries. In Norway, for example, its curriculum was approved by the Norwegian Parliament in 1996, where civic education is supported by comprehensive policy and extensive implementation, especially through the curriculum for the ten years of compulsory schooling (Fjeldstad and Mikkelsen, 2004).

The Spanish situation is not overly different from what is happening elsewhere in Europe, although the decision to include a specific referent in the school curriculum has been later than in other countries. In effect, in the Education Law (LOE, 2/2006, May 3rd), it is provided that among the primary and high school objectives is the importance of preparing students for the active practice of citizenship and respect of human rights, and so the need to include a specific subject to reach such objectives, Citizenship Education and Human Rights; on the other hand, in the recently published order which develops the law, objectives, contents and assessment criteria of the subject are detailed (RD 1631/2006, December 29th). Both legislations were preceded by intensive debates in the core of the Spanish public opinion as well as in the academic and educational-scientific fields.

Many reflections and ideas were arrived through many books and articles about citizenship education (Arnault, 2002; Benedicto and Morán, 2003; Martínez, 2003; Ferrán, 2004; de la Caba and López, 2005; Le Gal 2005; Souto, 2005; Delval, 2006, entre otros); however, empirical studies carried out from the psychology and educational perspectives about teachers' and students' ideas on citizenship are still limited.

Those studies are fitted into an intercultural framework (Bartolomé, 2004a and 2004b; Bartolomé and Cabrera, 2003) and, recently, we find some work on high school

students' concept of citizenship (Cabrera, Marín, Rodríguez and Espín, 2005) and an analysis about primary education text books (de la Caba and López, 2006).

This situation reveals the lack of studies focused on the importance of knowing teachers' and students' previous ideas. It is assumed that, to promote a teaching-learning process fitted into a citizenship education framework, we should start by knowing and analysing, firstly, what is the previous knowledge and attitudes of those directly involved in the mentioned process, according to which many international studies have stated (Kerr, 2004, 2006; Torney-Purta, 2004; Torney-Pourta and Barber, 2004; Torney-Porta et al, 1999; 2001; Haste, 2004; Osler y Starkey, 2004; Whiteley, 2005). In accordance with Howard and Gill (2000), this will allow us to lay the foundations for a better understanding and characterisation of that knowledge, as well as to analyse its role in the learning and teaching of this subject.

The paper we present here aims to contribute in that way by showing the results of an exploratory study about the citizenship education ideas of a group of Spanish students of Compulsory Secondary Education.

Method

Objectives

The aim of the exploratory study is to analyse the knowledge and attitudes that a group of Compulsory Secondary Education students aged 14 -16 have on some aspects related to citizenship education.

Hypothesis

The general hypothesis that guided this exploratory study is that Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education Students from 14 to 16 years old have a citizenship concept that implies only the right to vote, and they relate that concept scarcely with political and social participation within the community in where they live.

Theory Framework

As mentioned above, democratic citizenship education is a topic that is being investigated in many countries and from several different fields: political science, sociology and education (Putnam, 1999; Norris, 1999; Torney-Purta, Schwille and Amadeo, 1999; Haste, 2004; Torney-Purta and Barber, 2004; Torney-Purta, Barber and Wilkenfeld, 2007; etc.).

Studies on the political socialisation of youth have revealed in many cases a complex interaction between political socialisation and democratisation of former totalitarian societies (Toot, 2003). 'Being citizen' in this situation involved, thus, both aspects, the legal and the democratic ones (op. cit.).

If we link the permanence of democratic systems to citizenship participation in the political and social life of the states, the question about if 'being citizen' is something

that can be learned or that is something you take for granted for being born in a determined place, is crucial.

The way young people are prepared to play their roles as citizens in a democracy is one of the guarantees of such a continuity and was, thus, the fundamental objective of the Educational Civic Study carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald and Schulz, 2001).

The paper we present here explores relevant aspects related with the research field of citizenship (Osler and Starkey, 2004), and is founded, also, on the need of knowing the students' ideas and previous concepts because this will allow us to lay the foundations to have a better understanding and characterisation of that knowledge and its building process, as well as to analyse its role in the learning and teaching of the new subject included in the Spanish compulsory curriculum (Howard and Gill, 2000; Haste, 2004)

Subjects

Sixteen Spanish Students of Secondary Compulsory Educational Level aged 14-16 years were interviewed following the method of the 'clinical interview' for an exploratory survey. Students were chosen randomly.

Procedure

Students were asked about some aspects related to Citizenship by the method of clinical interview¹. This interview was focused on different aspects related to Citizenship: what is a good citizen; the new subject 'Citizenship Education and Human Rights' included recently in the Spanish curriculum, and their opinions about immigration.

In relation to the item 'What is a good citizen', we asked students to write down on a paper everything which they consider related to being a good citizen, and then we asked them to justify each thinking with more details. We also asked about their beliefs on the link between political and social participation as aspects to take into account in the citizenship building process. According to the clinical interviewing method, we also showed students contra-suggestions (in a Piaget's sense) which allow us to explore deeper the matter at issue.

About the new subject included in the Spanish school curriculum, Citizenship Education and Human Rights, we explored if the students consider that it is possible to learn how to be a good citizen, where and how it is learned; then we asked about the knowledge they have in relation to the inclusion of the specific mentioned subject in the school compulsory curriculum, what professor they consider the best to teach such a subject, which contents they think should be included and how it should be taught.

Finally, in relation to the immigration item, we asked them about the concept, about the equality among immigrants, the need of their integration in the Spanish culture, whether they have the same rights as Spaniards to continue the interview with questions about the possibility of immigrants to participate in the political and social life in Spain.

Instrument

The questions of the interview were made by taking into account some questions that are part of the IEA CIVIC EDUCATION STUDY instrument (Torney Purta et al., 1999), and others were specially made by a Ph.D group of Students of the Psychology Faculty of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

As we work with the clinical interview, the group of questions is the basic instrument from which the interviewers start their research of interviewees' ideas. Following the clinical method, each answer is followed by justifying questions that allow to deepen the students' thinking. We also include contra-suggestions that give the opportunity to know the consistence their thinking has.

Results will be analysed by a content analysis only because of the size of the sample we present in this paper.

Results

Due to time limits, we are going to show only the results of the significance for students of being a good citizen, some aspects related to being a good citizen, and all the answers they gave related to the new subject. We leave aside other results related to human rights and all the ones related to immigration for another better opportunity to be discussed.

So the results obtained are the followings:

Being good citizens: significance

As we explained in the Procedure item, students had to write down everything they consider related to the fact of being a good citizen. The results suggest that students relate citizenship with the notion of 'respect'.

This 'respect' is related, at the same time, to three aspects very well differentiated:

- 1) Norms,
- 2) Environment,
- 3) Others.

In reference to the first one, the answers obtained refer always to the 'respect' for norms; in some cases, they talk about laws and, only one of them talks about rules.

When we ask them to specify which laws, norms or rules they are talking about, in general, they say they can't specify it even more:

'...Well in general... traffic norms, that if you can't pass on, you can't pass on, if dogs are not allowed here, they are not allowed...' (1m 14;01)²

'...Well, like those in the city...' (4f 14;07)

'...I don't know...for example when a citizen throw away a paper into the wastepaper, or when you are driving a car and you respect the traffic rules all that...kind of things' (9m 16;00)

Others say:

'...not to commit offence, no one in general, of any kind, don't disturb the public order...' (5m 14;08)

'Respect for laws and don't do things out of ordinary things, for example, I don't know, or throwing away something...' (6m 14;09)

Those answers related to the respect for environment make reference to some good citizen's behaviours like not to pollute, not to dirty or damage the setting:

'Don't pollute too much, just having a car means to pollute the environment, but there are some things you can't avoid doing...' (2f 14;06)

'If you are in a park you don't throw away all rubbish through the road because there are wastepapers for that purpose... and I don't know, if there is a small tree don't climb it because you may damage it and things like that' (7f 14;04)

Finally, those who consider that being a good citizen is respecting for others, say some things like these:

'Respect for people and others' (2f 14;06)

'Respect for the other citizens...(what do you mean?) Well that if you are passing by the street and you don't like someone, you bear him because he is another citizen and you have no right to pick a quarrel with him...' (7f 14;04)

'(...) is rather complicated...respect for others, for the laws, without provoking anybody, to do what he wants to do, to work, to make his own money, I don't know, get to know with people' (8f 14;10)

We should note that students don't answer in relation to only one of these aspects; many of them make reference to two (or to the three) of the pointed areas.

In short, we can see that students relate the fact of being a good citizen to a way of behaving which is related to the respect for both the setting and the others that are immersed within it, as well as to the respect for norms established in order to regulate people's life that live within it.

It is important to remark that this way of behaving they refer to seems to contemplate only those aspects related to duties that people have as citizens, and they don't say anything about rights.

These results contrast with those found by Cabrera et al. (2005) among Spanish students. While the highest percentage of the sample of students of the mentioned study relate the concept of being a good citizen with the need to 'do one's duties and has some rights' (op. cit., p. 144), fifteen of the sixteen students interviewed in our exploratory study talk about the fulfillment or respect for the norms and laws, but in any case they mention rights. However, there is a coincidence in our results with the second most mentioned dimension of Cabrera's study students; thus, 31% state that being a good citizen means being respectful, which coincides also when they mention the respect for others and for the environment, as our students answer. In other international studies, like the Fjeldstad and Mikkelsen (2004) from Norway, they also find that students state that being a good citizen is related to participating in protecting the environmental activities (op. cit.) as ours and Cabrera's do.

It is also remarkable that, when they are questioned explicitly that if being a good citizen is related to respect for the laws, five from the sixteen students say yes, five say that some laws are to be respected but others don't, while one of them say that it has no relation at all. The rest of the sample doesn't answer this question.

Being citizens: politic and social participation

Once the students showed their ideas about the significance of being a good citizen, and the justifications of those ideas, we contra-suggested by saying 'the other day a boy/girl of your age told me that (being a good citizen) was related to politic, what do you think?' Most of the students interviewed answered in a negative way; they added 'it shouldn't' or 'not necessarily' or 'depends on the person' (twelve students); two of them answered 'no' to this question and only one of them answered he didn't know.

'No, there are people who think that they don't care about politics, and others who are more interested in it, but a good citizen doesn't have to be interested in politics' (9m 16)

'Not necessarily...(a good citizen) could be absolutely apolitics' (5m 14,08)

The results of our study coincides in part with those found among Italian young people (Losito and D'Apice, 2004), since the majority of the Italian students interviewed answered in a negative way to the political ways of participation pointed out as related aspects to citizenship.

However, these results (ours and the Italian ones) contrast with those found in other international studies like the Norwegian mentioned before, in which a high percentage of the students interviewed point out diverse political activities related to the concept of good citizenship, such as: voting, being involved in political discussions, or joining a political party, among others. The Estonian students also relate in a significant high percentage, the good citizen with activities like voting in national elections, joining a political party, or getting information on candidates before voting.

In relation to social participation, we asked them the same question but the answers were more scattered and varied:

'I think that (...) being a good citizen has to...keep close to the rest, and in social participation I mean...and to be a good citizen...it should...participate' (3m 14;07)

'So to collaborate in campaigns of...of...against hunger and so... ' (11m 14;05)

'...If we don't participate the all of us in doing things, in the end we won't get along with each other and we will have a city as a complete disaster...and we have to try to collaborate the all of us...' (16f 14;07)

One of the students, when the interviewer contra-suggested, related the social participation with voting in election periods:

'Yes, because when you vote, if you haven't voted and you don't agree with what has happened in the elections, so you don't have the same right to claim because you haven't voted' (11m 14;05)

The results we found agreed with the idea stated that 'the majority of students (aged 14) adopt a passive rather than an active style of engagement in citizenship activities' (Papanastasiou et al., 2003, p. 522.)

Subject: Citizenship Education and Human Rights

Learning citizenship

The students asked about the possibility of learning to be good citizens, in general, agreed with the idea; only one of them said that he didn't know, another one said that it's possible to learn some things and others don't, and only one of them said it couldn't be learned.

'No, it should be yourself, you have to see what you do in a wrong way and what you should do (...)' (8f 14;10)

Three of them pointed out that the person should want to learn; otherwise, no one can learn to be a good citizen if he doesn't want to although someone wants to teach him.

'It depends...you should want to...' (15m 14;05)

But curiously, only one of the students thinks that being a good citizen could be learnt, and this is the only way to learn 'if you are taught, yes (you can learn)' because 'you can't learn alone' (14m 14;01)

What, who and how to teach to be a good citizen

We asked students to reflect on the contents more appropriate to teach people in order to be good citizens.

In accordance to what the majority of them pointed out in relation to the significance of being a good citizen, they answered that it should be included as content 'respect' or teach 'to respect', this answer was given by six students; two of them answered by saying respect (student 7), and also teaching of some laws.

Three students gave answers related to the learning of the goodness or badness of some actions, thus, learning to 'do things in a good way' (2f 14;06) or '(do) what you should or what you shouldn't do' (3m 14;07), or 'learning to know what it is good or bad done' (14m 14;01). Curiously, student 3, although he considered that being a good citizen was related to recycling, collaborating with and helping others, it was another student who included as teaching content 'recycling' (5m 14;08), not him.

Other teaching contents pointed out were: being mutually binding, tolerance, human rights and learning to get to know people.

More scattered was the answer related to who should teach this subject. Three students coincided in saying a Social Science teacher should teach it while two others considered that a psychologist should do it. One student said it should be an open-minded teacher that '...thinks. That he doesn't care what others think, thus, he doesn't care but also doesn't recriminate or nothing when you think in any way' (2f 14;06).

Only one student said that it should be taught by a police officer because he is 'who makes people respect for the norms' (14m 14;01), according, thus, with his thinking about what a good citizen is.

It is very important to remark that some students suggest that this subject could be taught by 'the history teacher' or 'the language teacher', but when the interviewers investigate more deeper in their answers, they find that they choose that teacher because of the way of being of the teacher that teaches them now in those subjects. They don't mean in any case that those teachers are the most suitable for teaching Citizenship Education because of the subject they teach but, actually, for the way they are. The lack of this link between a subject with the teaching of this specific subject, is reinforced when they answer by giving characteristics that people who will teach it should have: being open-minded, being neutral, has studied for it, etc. To sum up, as student of interview number 15, says, 'it depends on the way the teacher is' (15m 14;05)

In relation to how to teach this subject, the answers vary a lot. While three students answer 'like the others', some other students say that the best way to teach this subject is to '(do it) in a way in which you can express your opinion' (2f 14;06), 'by compulsory educational conferences' (6m 14;09), 'by explaining, with videos' (13m 14;07).

The two most original answers were the following:

'By doing excursions to places where there is no respect for the laws and to other places where there is respect for the laws, so you can see the difference' (14m 14;01)

'I don't know...they could do it the same as with the driving license with points...each person should have a carnet and for each fault you would loose points...' (15m 14;05)

So, as we can see, in relation to the teaching of citizenship, in a general way students would like to have a space in where to discuss and interchange ideas and experiences, rather than a common subject in the same format they have nowadays.

They don't specify a teacher of a specific area as the most adequate teacher to teach citizenship but, instead, they point out some special characteristics he/she should have.

Conclusions

The survey data allows us to conclude that the students interviewed relate the fact of being a good citizen with a general idea of respect. This respect then is related to three different areas: laws, others and environment. According to their answers being a good citizen is not related to political or to social participation. They think that a good citizen doesn't need to be involved in those activities.

In relation to the respect for the laws as one of the characteristics of being a good citizen, although they relate both to each other, they think that there are some laws that people should respect to be a good citizen but they don't need to respect others, or if they don't respect them they don't lose their position as good citizens.

Finally, those results related to the knowledge of the new subject in the Spanish compulsory curriculum show that students know nothing about its inclusion so this indicates that the Spanish Educational Authorities have to make more promotional campaigns in order to give more information to students about the subject Citizenship Education and Human Rights, recently approved.

When the interviewers ask them to reflect on the possibility to learn how to be a good citizen, most of them agree with the idea, stating some teaching contents that should be taught like respect for the laws, what things have to be done and which ones don't, rights, etc.

In reference to who could be the most suitable person to teach it, they don't point out a specific area teacher. Instead, they mention teachers they actually have because of their attributes, so their answers give us a tip on those characteristics needed to be developed by those who want or are designated to carry on the teaching of this subject in the near future. These answers underline also some things students want from those who are responsible to educate them.

We expect that, in the coming months, we could interview a wider sample in order to continue this research line or do the corresponding fittings so that we could contribute to develop a subject that responds to the needs of our youth.

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¹ Data were collected by Ph.D. Students of the course "Learning to interview children". Faculty of Psychology. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. We wish to thank them here for having left us their interviews for this study.

² The first number is the interviewee number; "m" of male and "f" of female; and, finally, the age in years and months