



This paper is taken from

*Human Rights and Citizenship Education
Proceedings of the eleventh Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Academic Network*

London: CiCe 2009

edited by Peter Cunningham, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-0-9562789-6-8

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. (2009) Human Rights Studies as an Opportunity for Advancing Students' Citizenship Education, in Ross, A. (ed) Human Rights and Citizenship Education. London: CiCe, pp 218 - 222

© CiCe 2009

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.



Lifelong Learning Programme

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 therein.

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 CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Lifelong Learning Programme and the personnel of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Human Rights Studies as an Opportunity for Advancing Students Citizenship Education

Inese Jurgena and Zigurds Mikainis
University of Rezekne (Latvia)

Abstract

This paper describes an action research study on differentiated instruction as a means of equity as praxis in mixed ability classrooms. The emphasis is placed on students' voices which are crucial for understanding the difference between equal opportunities and equity in praxis. Fifteen students of the first grade of a Cypriot Gymnasium and four teachers participated in the three-month participatory intervention, in which a three-phase differentiated instruction in Maths was implemented, along with discussion in focus groups with the participants. The results indicate that differentiation is not only an organizational and instructional strategy, but importantly a social process. Teachers cannot differentiate students' performance if they do not employ simultaneously to differentiated instruction processes for image construction and emancipation, which could balance the social inequalities of students.

Introduction

Citizenship education and human rights education plays an essential role within the context of the social development in Europe. Besides, considerable attention is devoted to it in the discussions concerning the development of knowledge-based society in Europe. Preparing citizens for the life in their own country, in the European Union, and in the world is a significant task of the system of higher education. In the last decade, interest in human rights and their role in citizenship education has become increasingly topical and developed in Latvia. In higher education, citizenship education plays a decisive role in the practical implementation of the citizenship competencies of young specialists.

The importance of citizenship education was also emphasized in the Bologna process (2000), where principal guidelines for higher education were determined; it is also an integral part of the European Strategy of Lifelong Learning and the European Youth Policy. It should be noted that the European Commission document a New Impulse for the European Youth (1991) highlighted new forms of the European governance based on youth autonomy and active participation of citizens, while the White Paper defined openness, participation, responsibility, effectiveness, and coordination as the principles of good democratic governance (White Paper, 1998).

Thus, the actualization of citizenship education is an important function of higher education with a significant moral, political, and legal capacity as it ensures the formation of the citizenship identity and citizenship competency of would-be specialists within the context of human rights.

In Latvia, the system of higher education, which undergoes continuous development, is one of the opportunities for introducing change. The potential of higher educational establishments, their resources and capacity in implementing educational reforms (UNESCO, 2005) ensure the development of an institution promoting citizenship education. Academic professionals striving to introduce changes play a key part there involving students in this process as well. Thus, reforms are promoted in a direct way, based on the experience of the participants, active operation, reflection, and formation of the new systems of reference.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the experience of citizenship education in Latvian higher education within the context of human rights studies.

Shared Values of Citizenship and Human Rights.

Generally, citizenship education is underpinned by the principle of human rights, responsibilities, and participation within a democratic society. It is determined by the particular role of citizens and the specific importance of citizenship in the democratic society. Citizenship characterises the desirable actions of citizens referring to democracy as well as their citizenship virtues.

It has to be noted that the list of citizenship virtues is very extensive nowadays. Along with the readiness to participate actively in the social life and protect the democratic system of the state, it also includes readiness to call into question the actions of the authorities, to take part in discussing serious issues, to take into account opponents' views, to substantiate one's attitudes, and to respect other people's rights (Kumlicka, 2002, 288). Therefore, one has to agree to those authors who emphasize the need to analyze not only the formal sense of citizenship, but also its diverse content (Petrućijova, 2004, 246).

Similarly, education for citizenship and human rights development also includes rights, responsibilities, democratic practices and values, and understanding of the interdependence between all aspects of our societies. Citizenship education prepares students to understand and be committed to the values inherent in human rights. Thus, citizenship education activating the questions of human rights, fosters competencies that are essential part of citizenship education, and it can be integrated into a wide range of curricula.

It must be underline that to prepare young people for life in social reality, citizenship education should be underpinned by the focus on the common core values of human rights. Values such as respect, freedom, honesty, self-esteem, trust, courage, and equity would be typical core values, which could be fostered in higher education through different courses. The transmission of such values presupposes a creative environment in the institution of higher education, based on the democratic decision making processes and discussions.

Thus, it can be concluded that the link between citizenship education and human rights education is ensured by the recognition of common values that promote both citizenship and ethical sustainability, focusing on the close link between various values, human life and the environment. From the perspective of sustainable development, there is a need to move from utilitarian and instrumental approaches and towards higher order values of respect and solidarity with the oneness of mankind and nature that supports ecosystems, equitable societies, and a more viable world.

Learning methodologies used in the process of studies should encourage the transmission of various core values through the creation of space for debate, discussion, sharing of ideas, creative problem solving, working in teams, thus developing critical thinking skills enabling future citizens to live in the real environment away from the protection of the safety of the higher educational establishment.

In the authors' view, in Latvia the practical integration of the above mentioned triad –human rights, values knowledge, skills, and citizenship attitudes is shown most clearly in connection with the issues concerning the education of the teachers of social sciences.

A few issues concerning the education of the teachers of social sciences in Latvia within the context of citizenship education and human rights studies.

In Latvia, particular attention is devoted to the citizenship education of the teachers of social sciences within the context of human rights, their training for constructive cooperation both in the local, the European and the world context. In the pedagogic aspect, the task of citizenship education is to develop an active personality, capable of functioning in a free civil society.

At present, the second level professional study programmes in teacher education have been designed according to the provisions of the Education Law, the Law on Higher Education Establishment, the Constitutions of higher educational establishments, and other normative acts, as well as the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 347 "Regulations on the Requirements Concerning Teachers' Education and Professional Qualifications" and No 481 "Regulations on the National Standard of the Second Level Professional Higher Education" (www.likumi.lv), and according to the Direction No 405 of the Ministry of Science and Education of 10.07.2000 "On the professional Standard – a Teacher of Social Sciences" (Professional Standard, 2002).

The main purpose of the study programmes is to provide opportunities for the acquisition of professional higher education and obtaining the qualification of a teacher of social sciences, to train teachers for teaching social sciences at schools, thus ensuring their competitiveness in the labour market.

This can be ensured, from the one hand, by offering a set of theoretical courses referring to social sciences – fundamentals of law, economics, ethics, health education, and citizenship education. On the

another hand, particular attention is paid to the teaching methodology in social sciences and offering topical courses promoting students' professional development and enhancing their citizenship competencies, as well as developing students' critical thinking skills and understanding of the diverse values necessary for living in a civil society with a good democratic political system. There should also be provided opportunities for applying the acquired theoretical knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes in the pedagogic practice, involving students in tackling practical tasks (conducting classes, participation in projects, research, etc.).

As regards citizenship education and acquiring human rights, in recent years in Latvia there has been more emphasis on motivating students for life-long learning, so that teachers themselves would be able to advance their knowledge in social sciences and evaluate new information and its correspondence to the requirements of modern science and the needs of the educational process within the context of active European citizenship.

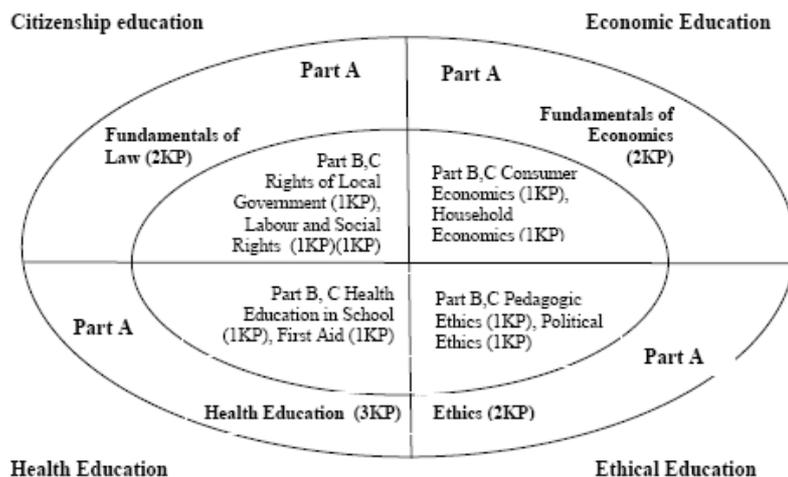
When comparing the study programmes of the second level professional higher education offered in various institutions of higher education in Latvia - the University of Latvia (UL), Rezekne Higher Education Institution (RHEI), and Daugavpils University (DU) - the course descriptions available in the accreditation documents of the Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (HEQEC) (www.aiknc.lv), as well as reports of the accreditation committees and self- evaluation reports, it has to be noted, first of all, that courses concerning citizenship education based on the awareness of fundamental human rights provided in the curricula of various institutions are different and unique. Generally, all these study programmes provide an opportunity to understand the fundamental human rights, the basic elements of a democratic society and clarify what it means to be an active citizen in a democratic environment within the context of sustainability.

We note that there is no single best way as to how to integrate the content of human rights in the development of citizenship education in one particular course or study programme. All in all, it can be concluded that the theoretical basis of professional education is formed in all teacher training programmes in social sciences by four important blocks: citizenship education, economic education, ethical education, and health education. Thus, curricula offered in various institutions of higher education generally consolidate theoretical knowledge in law, economics, political science, philosophy, ethics, etc helping students to combine their understanding of human rights and democracy with a democratic approach towards tackling the diverse mechanism of their protection aspects issues as well.

Constitution, laws, and other normative acts, as well as the programmes and procedures of the authorities are binding attitudes and conditions seriously affecting basic human rights. Within the context of different branches of law, constitutional law occupies a coordinating, stabilizing and regulating role and position. It should be noted, that the real bearers of fundamental rights are all individuals, and many of them have to be informed in their daily life about various matters of legal character in the society, the state, and the world within the context of their implementation and protection. Thus, for instance, Article 89 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia is very important regarding the implementation of the fundamental human rights of law –based state. It prescribed: “The State acknowledges and protects basic human rights according to the Constitution, Laws and international agreements binding in Latvia.” (The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, 2008, 14). This constitutional norm makes the state responsible not only to set up and provide an effective system of human rights protection, but also grants each individual rights to obtain information, express his/her opinion, and participate in the decision making processes concerning the citizenship activities, as well as to influence their judiciousness and balance.

Such approach to citizenship education and human rights education regarding the aspect of sustainability also ensures its transversal role and interdisciplinary character.

Interrelationships in the content of core theoretical courses offered in the 2nd level professional higher education program “A Teacher of Social Sciences” can be seen in the following diagram:



(RHEI accreditation Materials, www.aiknc.lv).

The accreditation materials available to the authors show that the themes of citizenship education and acquiring of human rights are included in the contents of various courses of studies.

The accreditation materials show that the forms of work and teaching methodologies used in the process of studies are not only the traditional ones: lectures, seminars, practical, classes, but also those which promote students' participation: project work, discussions, case studies, the analysis of documents, and research. Students are encouraged to make public presentations concerning the results of their work, do self-evaluation, reflect on their own identity, express a critical attitude, and explain concepts. Various courses include seminars aimed at the development of the skills of democratic cooperation, accepting or clarifying their point of view.

Many of these techniques reflect the humanistic tradition in higher education. This approach is essential as the students need not only to be actively involved in their studies, but also to acquire methodologies which they will have to use when teaching social sciences at school. The future teachers, both as citizens and educators, have to adapt and develop new approaches which will enable them to get involved reflectively and critically in the fundamental social transformations.

Generally, it can be concluded that the acquisition of citizenship education in various Latvian institutions of higher education takes place concurrently with the formation of the motivational attitude of students. While studying the offered courses, students acquire theoretical knowledge and practical skills, as well as realise their self-determination in accordance with the professional qualification of a teacher of social sciences.

Conclusions.

Citizenship education plays a significant role to acquire the human rights and to help ensure the stability of a society. It promotes active position of young specialists and their rational and responsible participation in the implementation of democratic sustainable values.

The link between citizenship education and human rights education is ensured by shared common values, which reveal the sense and importance of both citizenship and basic human rights.

Higher education ensures the intellectual potential of the society and trains new specialists who develop and consolidate citizenship values in the pedagogic process.

Citizenship education is an important function of higher education with a significant moral, social, political, and legal capacity. It promotes the consolidation of the principles and values of human rights, *ethics*, responsibility, law and participation in the democratic society. Thus, the actualization of the issue of citizenship education based on the awareness of fundamental human rights and the mechanism of their protection is an essential function of higher education with a significant moral and politically-legal

capacity. It ensures sustainability for the formation and consolidation of the citizenship identity and citizenship competency of future specialists

Citizenship education and human rights education comprises essential fundamental values and understanding about the mutual dependence and interconnectedness of all aspects of social life. Consequently, it also ensures the formation of citizenship competencies of future specialists.

In Latvia, citizenship education and human rights education can be acquired as an interdisciplinary system. This process is implemented in the context of changes and development, i.e. in a constructive context.

References

- Accreditation reports on the 2nd level professional study programme 'A Teacher of Social Sciences' 2003 - 2008; - www.aiknc.lv
- Kumlicka W. (2002) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction to 2nd ed.* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Petrucijova J., 2004. Civic Education and Non- Citizens. Experience of the Czech educational system. In A.Ross, ed. *The Experience of Citizenship: Proceedings of the sixth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network.* London: Cice Publications, 2004, pp245-258.
- Professional Standard. (2002) Direction No 405 of the Ministry of Education and Science of 10 June, 2002
- RL Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 347. „Regulations on the Requirements Concerning Teachers' Professional Education and Professional Qualifications”; <http://www.likumi.lv>
- RL Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 481 by 20 November 2001. “Regulations on the National Standard of the 2nd Level Professional Higher Education”; <http://www.likumi.lv>.
- The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia. – Riga, 2008
- The White Paper (1998). *On General and Professional Education. Teaching and Learning towards the Learning Society.* Brussels: Commission of European Community, 29.11.1995
- UNESCO (2005) Guidelines and Recommendations for Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability. Education for Sustainable Development in Action. – Technical Paper No.2, October 2005