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An Experience Of Education For Peace And Human Rights In Teacher Training

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Abstract

The purpose of this experience was to stimulate in order to reflect on the theoretical bases of building Peace and Human Rights Education, and on activities and strategies that might be used in the various curricular areas, promoting peace, respect for the dignity of the person, including minorities and dialogue between cultures. It occurred in a teacher training module on ECD. The participants were 83 students training to become Elementary School teachers at the Department of Education of ISEC, Lisbon, Portugal. The students, aged 20 to 27 years old, were taking a course on Ethics and Education, as part of their senior year at the Initial Teacher Education Program. They were invited not only to reflect but also to live experiences of peace and solidarity.

Laws On Education For Citizenship In Portugal

The Comprehensive Law on the Education System in Portugal (1986) sets out the right of every Portuguese citizen to education and culture, and the duty to promote democracy in education as the key feature of equality of opportunity. The current regime for the autonomy, administration and management of state pre-school education and basic and secondary schools is based fundamentally on the general principles of democracy and participation. There is a tendency to broaden the space for participation in the running of the school, with respect to the role of students, parents, teachers, and local communities: a series of legislative measures led to a progressive accentuation of the importance of student participation and to overcoming the purely advisory function of families (Figueiredo et al., 2000).

In Portugal, in School Curricula, Education for Citizenship is present in an interdisciplinary manner, in all cycles of basic education. After the Curricular Reform (1989) and with the revision and reorganisation of basic education (2001), citizenship became a broad concept including democracy, social cohesion, diversity, interculturality, environmental sustainability, human rights, equity. Education for citizenship is considered: a high priority of all educational, training, and cultural policies; an essential and transversal component of formal and non-formal contexts; one of the main pillars of the construction of a school of citizens based on the construction of a new paradigm – life-long learning and education for all (Salema, 2002).

In basic education, there are three non-disciplinary curricular areas whose realisation is entrusted to schools and that aim to accomplish various objectives: the project area, involving different curricular areas in the development of projects concerning problems or topics for research or intervention; assisted study, aiming to promote autonomy in learning and the acquisition of study and work methods; and civic education, aiming at developing education for citizenship in awakening a civic awareness in pupils as a fundamental element in the process of training responsible citizens, who will be critical, active and ready to intervene, using an interchange of experiences witnessed by pupils and their individual and collective participation in the life of the class, the school and the community (Gaeri, 2001).

Intended Curriculum And Implemented Curriculum

A recent study on education for democratic citizenship in Southern Europe, states:

The recognition of the importance of EDC within curricula is, by itself, no guarantee of its actual implementation. Indeed, there appears to be a gap between the intended curriculum and the implemented curriculum that is perhaps greater than the one usually found for other areas of school education (Losito, 2003, p 10).

This study found it difficult to establish the relationship between school policies and political ones; as there are no practices of systematic evaluation of education policies, it is difficult to reconstruct the variety of initiatives and projects in Education for Citizenship, because of the autonomy granted to individual schools in curriculum design. Curriculum research has shown that there is often a gap between

what curricula formally envisage and the students' actual opportunities to learn. This gap also concerns Education for Citizenship; the existence of this gap is confirmed by some results of the second IEA Civic Education Study. The case studies carried out in the first phase of the study stress, in various ways, the gap between intended and implemented curriculum (Losito, 2003).

The Portuguese case study underlines the gap between the aims of the intended curriculum and student awareness with respect to the learning processes actually developed; the students generally did not recognize that they were participating in within-class activities related to citizenship issues, with the exception of the election of the class delegate. Their awareness of democratic issues seemed to depend on the special characteristic of the teacher or the occurrence of an exceptional event (Menezes et al, 1999).

Teacher Training And Education For Citizenship

Teachers are a fundamental factor for the success of any educational policy and of innovation processes. This also holds for Education for Citizenship. From a perspective that sees Education for Citizenship as the result of the educational action of the school as a whole and of the experience of participation that students gain inside their school, the training issue concerns (or should concern) all teachers and not just the ones of a few school subjects that can be considered as being more directly related to Education for Citizenship. Teacher-training should be carried out on several levels: curricular contents, teaching methodologies, management skills, and relational skills (Losito, 2003).

Most of the degree courses for primary school teacher training and some specialisation schools for secondary school teacher training include some specific teaching and contents relevant to Education for Citizenship. However, in the field of both initial and in-service teacher training, there seems to be insufficient attention to Education for Citizenship issues. An important role for Education for Citizenship development appears to be the participation in international projects focusing on Education for Citizenship related issues. The largely decentralised nature of the in-service teacher-training system makes it difficult to draw a sufficiently precise picture of the existing situation of in-service training. There are several in-service training experiences in Education for Citizenship. Teachers are asked to teach skills and democratic attitudes, but there is little in the training of these instructors to give them the necessary skills to play their role; and it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing training activities (Losito, 2003).

An Experience Of Education For Peace And Human Rights In Teacher Training

This experience occurred in a teacher training course. The participants were 83 students training to become Elementary School teachers at the Department of Education of ISEC, Lisbon, Portugal. The students, aged 20 to 27 years old, were taking a course on Ethics and Education, as part of their senior year of the Initial Teacher Education Program.

The purpose of the course was to inform and to stimulate the students to reflect on the theoretical basis of the theme, and on activities and strategies that might be used in the various curricular areas. The Council of Europe Project 'Education for Democratic Citizenship', as well as a number of published theoretical references, pedagogical materials and identified and published practices, served as a basis for the training.

The students reflected on the importance of building peace and educating for peace. Peace is not just a matter of diplomacy or of acquiring social skills and communication. The promotion of peace is essentially a cultural task and its primary context is education.

Students worked on the theme of peace building and education for peace: read documents, discussed various issues and carried out various activities. These activities were focused on issues such as promoting human rights, the need to live with truth, justice, love and freedom as pillars of peace and social order.

The students presented works and debated about development and solidarity as keys to peace, openness to reconciliation, dialogue and forgiveness; the importance of respect for the dignity of the person, including minorities, and dialogue between cultures. They studied various ways to achieve peace education. A source of reflection, in particular, were the messages of the World Day of Peace, which provide a rich and

deep analysis of the topic in question, going to the roots of the problems. Further, they studied the United Nations, which has helped to promote respect for human dignity, freedom and development of nations, and develop an awareness of being a family of nations.

Education on peace and solidarity is not only to describe concepts or communicate values, but to promote actions that provide experience and help to create habits of solidarity. Thus, students were invited not only to reflect but also to live experiences of peace and solidarity. The proposal has been welcomed: some preferred to pursue a theoretical approach; many others realized volunteer activities in neighbourhoods of the city, in hospitals, or cooperated with associations of social solidarity. The results of this were quite positive: they became more aware of these problems, more awake to act with greater respect for human rights. They had a clearer awareness of the dignity of all human beings, won over inertia to devote time to others, even when they felt they had no time to give. In conclusion, solidarity is learned only when it is lived!

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