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## **Globalised society and active citizenship education in upper secondary education in France today**

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### **Abstract**

*Citizenship education in secondary school is recent and connected with societal issues. The paper examines changes observed in an upper secondary schools and how citizenship education is conceived in the curriculum? To asks under which forms, in which proportions and to which outcomes? Can we speak of active citizenship and longlife citizenship? To answer these questions, analysis of the work of practitioners' in three French high schools forms the basis of understanding ways of educating or training tomorrow's citizens. From this approach we shall seek to perceive the implementation of education for citizenship which has some difficulty to impose itself at this level of the students' curriculum.*

### **Introduction**

Within the context of a society concerned with integrating individuals globally, school is made to play a responsible part in mentoring the students throughout their training. In France, from a historical and cultural point of view, education for citizenship has been integrated into elementary school from the 19th century onward within learning acquisition aiming to educate the people and to build up the nation-state that had been weakened by major economic, political and social contexts. Mass education and the big flow of pupils brings up the notion of school failure. Consequently, for quite a recent period of the history of the French system of education, citizenship and its didactic and practical transposition have arisen in High School. But other social events, in particular the rise of individualism, of violence, of tensions and school students' movements explain that political authorities will try to incorporate progressively some institutionalization of education for citizenship into high schools, in a narrow outlook meeting the expectations of old.

Does this obvious determination lead to significant changes within the schools? If so, how is citizenship education understood in the high school curriculum? In what way and in what proportion can we talk about active citizenship and learning in today's French high schools? Using a comprehensive research-based approach, we will attempt to provide a critical description of citizenship education as it is practiced in France, a description based on the analysis of practitioners' work and activity itself, within three French high schools chosen for their diversity in structure and context. Certain spaces and devices used inside or outside the classroom focused our attention. The observed sessions and their content allowed us to discover and understand the reality of an activity concerned with the acquisition of active and democratic citizenship, and to perceive differences between government intentions and actors' intentions through analysis of curricula and discourse in semi-directive interviews, conducted ante and post session.

This data will be the basis to observe the way of understanding the education or training of tomorrow's citizens. From this approach we shall seek to perceive the implementation of education for citizenship which has some difficulty to impose itself at this level of the students' curriculum.

In upper secondary education three trends can be observed concerning an active and lifelong citizenship education. On the one hand, citizenship education reveals a tension between two logics: one of educating and one of training within the high schools' confined organisation. On the other hand, it shows the emergence of more pragmatic and active practices in the students' curriculum. Lastly, despite political intentions and declarations, citizenship education is not an educational priority.

### **1. What pedagogic tools to conceive lifelong and active citizenship in high school ?**

In France, the teaching of students has always been conceived by dividing the learning process: on the one hand instruction and scientific knowledge 'savoirs savants' (Chevallard, 1985) which are the teachers' responsibility and on the other hand education together with social and civic skills which are the responsibility of a specific personnel, the supervisors, 'conseillers principaux d'éducation' (CPE), who are in charge of the students when they are not attending lessons. This model is still valid even if the evolution of the student profile and the new challenges of social integration, the loss of interest for the public area and the worsening of social links are coming up as time goes by.

Regarding education for citizenship, it is considered as marked at the very core of traditional disciplines (history and geography, philosophy, economic and social sciences) in which the teachers according to the national prescriptions take pain to 'transmit the Republic values and to prepare to full practice of citizenship'<sup>1</sup>. To this end, a few innovating methods have started from the 1990s onwards and have led to a new pedagogical relation between the teacher and the learner. These approaches lead the actors to leave a part of co-building of learning with the students within their teaching sphere which makes them reflect on concepts in the approach of debate or discussion on burning issues in education.

First of all, civics 'l'éducation civique juridique et sociale' (ECJS) deals with current and collective issues contributing to citizen formation through 'expressing reasoned opinion, the capacity for expression and (...) the capacity to take part'<sup>2</sup>. Then, so as to give more autonomy and initiatives in the students' work, a collective task linked to several subjects (two or more) concluding with a final oral production implemented through tutored personal work, 'Travaux Personnel Encadrés' (TPE) in secondary school, and pluri-disciplinary projects dealing with professional aspects 'Projets Pluridisciplinaires à Caractère Professionnel' (PPCP) in vocational schools. At last, from 1999 onwards 'l'heure de vie de classe', class-life hour has opened some space between class life, school life and 'la vie lycéenne', school community life.

<sup>1</sup> Circular "n°97-123 du 23 mai 1997 du BO du 29 mai 1997" about teachers' mission.

<sup>2</sup> "BO Hors série n°6 du 29 Août 2002" about ECJS in upper secondary education.

All these methods to encourage students to speak have been implemented following successive secondary school protesting movements giving partial answers to the students' claims. The time devoted to carry out these projects is at the margins on the students' time-table (half an hour of ECJS per week three years in a row, TPE and PPCP two hours per week in fifth form only, and a monthly hour of 'vie de classe' for three years on, it means one hour and a half on the whole, mainly transmitting knowledge necessary to gain a diploma at the end of the curriculum.

Pupils' participation and global education connecting knowledge, practices, and values are not fully spread in France where there is still entanglement in knowledge culture that can be traced back to the Enlightenment<sup>3</sup>. Scientific knowledge and the teacher are seen as prominent authority figures in front of students who are less and less capable to learn what School offers. Given this, is conceiving lifelong and active citizenship an impossible challenge?

It is outside the classroom that change is noteworthy; the concern for the student who is seen as a social and moral person in development is blatant. Since the 1990s the secondary school protest movements have also made the public authorities change their view on the democratic conception and lifelong citizenship education. The decree of February 18th, 1991 granted students rights of association, meetings, publication especially amongst the students within the frame of strict rules having to respect people's integrity and possessions.

Exercising these new rights is to be found in representative authorities, in councils ('conseil de classe, conseil de la vie lycéenne' - CVL) or official measures ('comité d'éducation à la santé et à la citoyenneté - CESC, le foyer socio-éducatif', clubs, sport organisations) where students' opinion is mainly advisory. The latter have been elected or mandated to exercise that right for one or two years but it only concerns a minority of students. They are asked to express their grievances (Condette, 2009), to suggest actions that can improve school daily life within most of the framework that is at their disposal and yet they cannot question the internal organisation of the school itself. Regarding their deliberative participation, it is only limited to one authority, 'le conseil d'administration', (CA), that gives its opinion on the pedagogical, educational and financial aspects of the school, only with 1/6th of the students' votes at the very most.

Those who accompany the students in acquiring these rights and in exploiting these spheres of speech through the acquisition of responsibility and autonomy, is the privilege, almost exclusive, of the supervisors (CPE) who have become the 'promoters of citizenship' (Rémy et al, 2000).

## **2. The application of lifelong and active citizenship: between intention and reality**

The tools of active citizenship which have been promoted in official instructions are undoubtedly going to be developed and exploited in a diverse manner depending on the secondary school.

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<sup>3</sup> In France, the age of Enlightenment is the 18th century.

If the instructions about citizenship education in recent years have shown more and more pragmatism for learning and have encouraged students to participate to acquiring their own knowledge and school experience, their implementation has no common references whatsoever. Depending on their identity, their culture, their values and their working practices, the actors will get involved or will avoid engaging themselves according to their own being, to their ideal of education and the constraints related to action.

The values that drive the actors are a whole array of approaches that are important to understanding how citizenship education, with its pedagogical and educational paradigms, is viewed. Implementing it has become complex also because actors have been subjective in defining it, not only because official instructions and tools are lack focus, but also because there is a lack of elements that show traces of its implementation in the secondary schools, in that 'Official discourses put praise on citizenship without considering the practical forms of its implementation' (Bruder, 2002, p. 55).

The diversity of actors, status and missions does not help strengthen the implementation of permanent and global citizenship; as it is rationalized when applied as a discipline it leads to an unsatisfying and difficult execution in secondary schools. Practices are autonomised according to one's choices and outcomes brought about by the development of such education, its interaction with the others, working situations that come up but also according to one's didactic and pragmatic skills. Thus the exploitation of active citizenship is closely linked to what the actors are and do in this field which is imposed to them (Joshua, 2002).

Whether in class or in school what is the use of speaking of citizenship education if it does not go with active learning and critical reason, with a minimum of tool acquisition and practicing responsibility and democracy (Perrenoud, 2004)? Indeed, it means helping build an ethic stance and transferable skills in the students' future life.

And yet, in the innovating practices proposed in class ; civics 'l'éducation civique juridique et sociale' (ECJS) for instance has remained prisoner of the curriculum or more precisely of general work themes that are still encyclopaedic and do not leave enough space for a reflexive attitude or for some discussion ethics. The democratic approach of how to lead a debate (Tozzi & Etienne, 2004) that should be at the foundation of ECJS is the issue of some active citizenship which causes some fears amongst teachers.

These fears show on different levels: the non-mastery of debate and its management in class, with worries about students who will not talk or will be unruly, or unexpected events that can upset the debate, and the question of maintaining balance being always a bit of a problem in public debate. Still, if the discussion turns to be effective it is under the adult's control who handles its length, organization and meaning. The students' participation is reduced. ECJS is often transformed into a learning subject where citizenship is exercised very sparsely. The students are not actually used to seizing this space of dialogue which is not a traditional means of teaching. They always hesitate to take part to this new type of exercise either because they lack maturity, interest, or for fear their peers or teachers may judge them.

This can also be felt on some other occasions in the student's school life such as 'l'heure de vie de classe' which is a tool inviting the future citizens to express themselves, to communicate, to prepare collective and individual projects, to prepare the class council 'le conseil de classe' about issues related to community life school. The observations carried out in secondary school councils within our research show that this time is often used to prepare 'le conseil de classe' or the election of their representatives at the beginning of the school year and not on class projects that could be elaborated together with the students. Thus, it is used in a functionalist way and it reveals two things.

On the one hand, while preparing le conseil de classe, the students are invited to give their opinion on themes only dealing with material or logistic aspects. Apart from these aspects, this time of exchange is often used for the students to write out their pedagogical self-assessment which is some indicator for the conseil de classe representatives to help the teachers give an opinion on their work. There is no time left for questions that could embarrass some teacher's teaching practice, the school organization or pedagogical contents. Word is directed (Clot et al., 2001) by the rules settled by the adults without discussion being envisaged democratically in respect of person integrity and possessions, without students being able to exercise their rights.

On the other hand, l'heure de vie de classe is a strong point to elect the class representatives. In most cases rites and rituals of elective democracy overshadows sensitization and what is at stake in this mandate that constitutes the solid prerequisite of a reflection on civic meaning, the social link, the feeling of belonging or the defence of one's rights. This appropriation of territories highlights that students have not enough space to speak especially as future citizens and points to the minor issue that citizenship education represents in the curriculum.

This lack of education to democracy is in keeping with the mandatory opportunities (conseil de classe, CVL, CA, CESC) that are found outside class. Many principals distrust students exercising their rights as well. The democratic opportunities that can compose the different councils (conseil de classe, CVL, CA) and committees (CESC) are organized and composed so that few initiatives are given to students despite so-called willingness to educate the students towards autonomy and responsibility. Three essential factors are at the root of this hypothesis: these councils are advisory, they rarely meet and do not give free access of speech to the students.

First of all, it is important to underline that the named authorities, in theory, represent places where students are allowed to express themselves about la vie de classe, la vie de l'établissement, and the needs related to their formation, the information on fields that are linked to citizenship and health (risk-taking behaviour, exercising their rights, education to other fields,...) an array of opportunities to facilitate students' expression and participation. However, actually these intentions are implemented with some difficulty. Why such a firm conclusion? Because due to the way these authorities are constituted it cannot be helped.

Indeed, the deliberative authorities assess the students (le conseil de classe) and the projects assessment or the evaluation of fundamental pedagogical and educational axes (CA,CESC) are sensitive sectors that affect closely the school functioning, the

established norms and pedagogy. While these assemblies are held, the topics remain in the adults' hands, especially the principals' and teachers' for what concerns them. They control, lead, elaborate each in their field of competences the applications of school instruction and education imposed upon students without some space for dialogue in these councils' and committees' procedures. How could it be different when in the latter the adolescents are in minority facing an imposing majority of adults who have complete power over their curriculum?

The CVL is the only exception that respects some parity in its composition and predicts possible discussion and negotiation. This council is often led by the supervisors (CPE) and through small group-work exchange with the students how they can improve school life. One of the CPE responsibilities is to favour community life at school outside lessons and to accompany the representatives in their tasks and to facilitate the process of their projects related to daily life improvements.

If this practice points to active and more permanent citizenship, it is limited to a number of elected students; they are only two per class and five in the CA, ten in CVL and two in CESC with their suppletive delegates, which is a very small number for the whole school. In France, this democratic system and its policy show that the students are not represented enough and do not participate enough to the major issues of the school and the class.

Then, time reinforces this outcome. The representatives can only work one year in most cases and it doesn't help them implement actions in the long run. Besides, these citizenship opportunities vary depending on the school. These councils meet two or three times a year outside daily life in school which is mainly related to schoolwork, preparing for diploma or the choice of a good career. Then, can we speak of continuity in this citizenship education?

Lastly, spaces for dialogue and debate are replaced by plenary assemblies that rather inhibit than encourage students who are not experienced enough to express themselves in public nor to voice their opinion nor to support a project they had first to elaborate and then to build thanks to their peers and the adults. Facing that major difficulty, the students avoid exposing themselves and follow the educationalists' propositions.

Lifelong and active citizenship is confronted to tools that are inadequate and not adapted to tackle that school issue. This divide blurs the collective values that shape citizenship education and makes it difficult to achieve. The lack of common reference in practices and adults fearing students expressing their rights actually slow down helping actors share citizenship and facilitate students' autonomy and sense of responsibility.

However, active and democratic citizenship is taking shape in the students' community life.

### **3. Lifelong and active citizenship: hopes for achievement**

Active citizenship that does not modify school organization nor threatens many teachers' practices comes into existence thanks to school associations (sport, clubs) in which the social link and integration amongst peers sharing the same tastes and expectations are paramount.

Thus clubs, school associations of all sorts allow a limited number of students to join some adults who are available (CPE, PE teachers) feeling less pressure from the authorities because this is the opportunity to get away from the scheduled, normalized organization (cell-organization, assessment, etc.). These spaces remain under the adults' tutoring but also students cooperate to carry out collective projects, which give another perspective and a different kind of relationship between students and also benefits to teacher-student relationships.

Citizenship education reveals here some homogeneity combining politeness, civism, and citizenship including at the same time autonomy, responsibility, emancipation and living together. Some unity in form and content entails some stability throughout the year that is rarely found in pedagogy, non-stop lessons, only sixteen hours of Civic lessons, ten hours of community life and democracy education opportunities being scattered and devoted to the representatives only.

Lifelong and active citizenship in the French curriculum for secondary schools shows some tensions, ambiguous aspects, paradoxes, dead-end situations of its implementation. It is still torn between political intentions, imperfect tools, multiple uses and the good will of actors to see it emerge from a context still branded by all-mighty scientific knowledge and adult authority. However, if this trend is still predominant it cannot conceal the attempts towards lifelong and active citizenship elaborated by some educators for its sole purpose and may encourage students to take initiatives, responsibilities which will lead them towards autonomy and personal development.

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