



This paper is taken from

*Europe's Future: Citizenship in a Changing World
Proceedings of the thirteenth Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Academic Network*

London: CiCe 2011

edited by Peter Cunningham and Nathan Fretwell, published in London by CiCe,
ISBN 978-1-907675-02-7

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Pratas, H. & Amado, N. (2011) Citizenship in a changing world: What is missing in teachers' competences?, in P. Cunningham & N. Fretwell (eds.) Europe's Future: Citizenship in a Changing World. London: CiCe, pp. 32 - 38

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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.

Citizenship in a changing world: What is missing in teachers' competences?

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Abstract

The aim of this study, developed in different European countries (Cyprus, Germany, Portugal and Italy), was to explore and compare teachers' perceived professional competences and practice, with the students' awareness of their teaching. The original Italian questionnaires, one for students and another for teachers, were translated into Portuguese. Nine secondary schools were selected to run the survey in Lisbon and its suburban areas. In this study, our aim was to measure the perception of both teachers' and students' regarding the teachers' competences, as defined in the Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (2005). In this document, the key competences include the teacher's ability to: work with others, with their fellow human beings; work with knowledge, technology and information and work with and in society. In Portugal, the students' responses seem to show appreciation for their teachers' professional competences in terms of knowledge, and also of their consistency and coherence; they consider that teachers respect them and allow them to state their opinions openly, but they also feel that the teachers are, somehow, distant (they don't try to 'put the student's shoe') and not open to new challenges, not committed enough to explore the learning opportunities outside the school walls. This indicates a need to include citizenship competences in teachers' professional development.

Keywords: *key competences; citizenship; teachers' competences*

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that teachers play a significant role on the success of any implemented educational policy. There is an increasing pressure and growing expectations for their ability to promote key competences, so the students may be able to participate effectively in society. This research study has offered the opportunity to compare, in five different European countries, the teachers' competences as perceived by themselves and by the students. The five-country team developed a comparative research in Europe, concerning the question of competences in secondary schools: what the teachers offer and what the students demand. Competences play a crucial role in school life. Teachers and students face the challenge of the knowledge society, in terms of designing new contexts of citizenship. The dilemma the research poses is the ability of theoretical competences to become practice in educating towards a new European citizenship (Chistolini, 2010).

The Council of Europe's Parliament adopted Resolution 1849 (October 3, 2008) recommending the promotion of a culture of democracy and human rights in schools through teacher education. The necessary teaching competences involved would include

aspects as the ability to create learning environments beyond the classroom, allowing community to engage in partnerships and making learning more significant. Moreover, the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (2006/0962/EC) on the eight key competences for Lifelong learning stressed that the social and civic competences should be acquired by all students through schooling. How are teachers responding to the complex challenges of the knowledge society? How are teachers integrating cognitive, ethical and action-related competences in their practice? And how are the students experiencing teaching? These were some of the questions that the research has tried to answer according to the achieved results.

2. Key competences and citizenship competences in Europe

According to the Council of Europe, ‘competence’ is defined as a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes which permit a person to solve the specific problems of a given social, cultural and political context (Glăvan, 2008). The Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (2005) states that teachers should be able to: *work with others, with their fellow human beings, learners, colleagues and other partners in education; work with knowledge, technology and information; and work with and in society*, at local, regional, national, European and broader global levels. In a report presented at the Council of Europe, Glăvan says that:

What is generically understood through ‘citizenship competence’ or ‘civic literacy’ is the totality of knowledge, skills and attitudes which permit exercising the rights and responsibilities in a specific ‘polity’ (public sphere). As for teachers’ professional competences, they are in fact a set of specific competences enabling them to carry out certain educational activities in the field of citizenship, human rights and diversity education. They comprise: pedagogical competence; subject-based competence; social and civic competence. Civic competence include certain skills and attitudes such as: capacity to incorporate Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) principles into teaching practice and subjects; knowing how to implement rights and responsibilities in specific contexts; respect for the rights of learners and sensitivity to their needs and interests; ability to promote a positive classroom climate; co-operative learning skills; team work; taking shared responsibilities; coping with conflicts; intercultural mediation; emphatic communication; participation in collective decision making; capacity to develop projects and create non-formal learning opportunities; capacity to manage situations arising from discrimination, injustice, racism, sexism and marginalisation; ability to bring up and discuss openly the problems imposed by hidden curriculum; ability to adjust teaching styles to a variety of learners; capacity to stimulate active participation within the school community; capacity to take part in public debates; ability to encourage exchanges, openness and interaction (Glăvan, 2008)

3. Citizenship competences in Portugal

In Portugal, the essential competences for basic education are the outcome of a wide-ranging debate which took place between 1996 and 2001. The process of defining these

essential competences involved schools, higher education institutions, specialists and researchers, educational associations and civil society in general. This led to the curricular reorganisation for Basic Education implemented by Law 6/2001. Some essential transversal competences were introduced in the National Curriculum and that is the case of Citizenship Education whose broad conceptual definition was loosely structured including a set of topics to be introduced in all subject areas: democracy, social cohesion, diversity, intercultural awareness and education for peace, environmental sustainability, human rights, equity, and others. In spite of its importance, and the political intent to involve different curricular areas in the development of school projects, aiming to promote student autonomy and civic awareness (essential for the development of active citizens), the gap between the rhetoric of educational policies and its practice in schools is still wide.

4. The Portuguese study. Methodology

The questionnaires, one for students and another for teachers, were applied in nine secondary schools in Lisbon and its suburban areas. The student sample was responded by 318 students, aged 14 - 18 years old. For the teacher questionnaire there were 109 respondents. The items provided an answering five-point agreement Likert-type scale. In a previous study (Sousa & Pratas, 2010), the items and their mean scores have been analyzed. In this study, our aim was to measure the perception of both teachers' and students', regarding the teacher's civic competences, as defined in the Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (2005). In this document, the key competences comprise the teacher's ability to: *work with others, with their fellow human beings (1); work with knowledge, technology and information (2); and work with and in society (3).*

To be able to measure these three areas of civic competences, we adopted the following methodology to identify which items could be used to measure their perception amongst students and teachers. The questionnaire addressed to the students was given to four groups of teachers and education professionals along with a document providing the description of the three areas of competences highlighted in the Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (2005) as presented on table 1. A request was made for them to choose, after a group discussion, from the 28 questionnaire statements, those that they thought corresponded to the three areas of competences. Then the results were collected and to each of the three areas a correspondence was established only to items that had been chosen by all the groups as belonging to that competence area. The results can be seen at table 1

Table 1: Key Competences areas

	Student's questionnaire items	Teacher's questionnaire items
Work with others: promote each student's potential; work with them as individuals, support them	1,2,3,4,7,16,17	35,38,6,5,28,1 1,24

to participate and act as full members of society		
Work with knowledge, technology and information: work with a variety of types of knowledge; access, analyze, validate, reflect and transmit knowledge making an effective use of technology; use a wide range of strategies to fit the needs of the students	8,12,15,22,26,27	15,30,12,8,13,16
Work on and with society: Encourage respect and intercultural understanding; awareness of diverse cultures and identification of common values; create social cohesion, avoid exclusion, be aware of the ethical dimensions of a knowledge society. Work with the local community, partners and stakeholders: parents, teachers, institutions and representative groups.	19,20,21,24	37,21,1,9

The next step was to draw a correspondence between the items in the student's questionnaire and the teacher's questionnaire. Although we couldn't achieve a perfect content correspondence between teachers and students for all the items, we assured that the content was very similar and focused on the competences being measured by it. Once this was achieved, we could consider the three areas of civic competences as psychometric constructs measured by the defined items and have some trust that the teachers' and the students' measures of the civic competences could be comparable.

Below, we illustrate the sort of items chosen to define each competence area:

Work with others

Student's questionnaire Item 3 'Generally, my teachers allow students to express their viewpoints, and don't impose their own opinions in debates.'

Teacher's questionnaire Item 6: 'When a student expresses his viewpoint, I can welcome it without judgment'

Work with knowledge, technology and information

Student's questionnaire Item 8 'My teachers present the content in a clear way'

Teacher's questionnaire Item 15(reversed) 'It can happen that I do not make myself clear, and students, therefore, do not understand me.'

Work on and with society

Student's questionnaire Item 21 'My teachers show themselves available towards the student's families.'

Teacher's questionnaire Item 1 'I consider my relationship towards my student's family important, and I commit to it.'

5. Discussion on the results

First we evaluated the reliability of the scales, through the analysis of their internal consistency. For the student samples, the three scales showed good results: the

competences for *work with others* had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0,78, the scale competences for *work with knowledge and society* had an alpha of 0,76 and the scale competence for *work on and with society* had an alpha of 0,73, even though it possesses only 4 items. However, the scales created for the teacher's sample showed low reliability with all three showing Cronbach's alpha results between 0,5 and 0,6. This can be partly explained with some content difference between the scales of students and teachers, for, as we have mentioned, a perfect correspondence between all items was not obtained. The teacher's sample was also smaller which could have affected these results. Nevertheless, the data for the teachers must be carefully considered, since we cannot be sure of the reliability of the data. The next step was to calculate the means for each competence scale. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2: Competences' Scale

Competence	Students Mean (St. Dev.)	Teachers Mean (St.Dev.)
Work with others	3,52 (0,71)	4,41(0,32)
Work with knowledge, technology and information	3,39 (0,68)	3,94(0,38)
Work on and with society	2,84 (0,81)	4,29 (0,5)

First we have compared the several competence perceptions in each group. The students' evaluations, as seen in previous studies (Sousa and Pratas, 2010; Chistolini, 2010; Koutselini and Agathangelou, 2010) were positive. All three civic competences were evaluated as being above average (which, taking into account the rating scale used, is at 2,5), which means that students find that the majority of their teachers possesses these competences. However, the value for the *work on and with society* was the lowest, being slightly above an average result.

Teachers seem not to be aware of these shortcomings, showing much higher ratings of self competence than their students' evaluations would assert them, and also finding that their fault, if any, lies with *work with knowledge, technology and information* and not with *work in and on society*. This may show some uncomfortable situation or resistance on part of the teachers towards the new tools and requisites an information society demands (Ertmer, 2005).

When looking at the standard deviation of the results, students seem to have more varied perceptions, with the results varying between 0,68 and 0,81. The teachers have much more homogenous results, ranging from 0,32 to 0,5 that may indicate some inability to ponder their role and their competences in a serious way.

We now look at the results for each competence.

Regarding *work on and with society*, teachers rated themselves about 30% higher than what the students rate them with, which can be an indication that teachers believe they have an adequate understanding of the full context of their students lives and that their teaching embraces this complexity, when the students find that this is not so. An example of this discrepancy can be seen through the analyses of the results of Item 21 of

the students' questionnaire ('My teachers show themselves available towards the students' families.') which has a direct correspondence to Item 1 of the teacher's questionnaire ('I consider my relationship towards my students' families important, and I commit to it.'). Although the mean answer of the students was 3,15, the mean answer of the teachers was 4,22, a difference of more than one point in a five point scale. This illustrates the twisted view of teacher's ratings about their own competences towards *work with and on society*, wherein, although students find teachers to have competences in the classroom setting, they do not go much beyond it and the family. Social and communal life of the students gets neglected.

Regarding competences of *working with others*, both students and teachers agree this is the strongest characteristic of the teachers. Students consider that the teachers respect them and allow them to state their opinions openly. They believe the teachers are consistent and responsible. Teachers are seen as coherent with their stated values and actions. And teachers find themselves able to respect the students' opinions and to promote an environment of open and non judgmental debate and interaction.

Regarding competences of *Work with knowledge, technology and information*, we found that from the students' standpoint, teachers are perceived and accepted as knowledgeable in their main teaching area but not committed enough to change or to explore multidisciplinary approaches. Teachers rate themselves the lowest in this area, maybe due to a lack of skills regarding new technologies and methodologies able to improve teaching and learning to go beyond traditional textbook based methods.

6. Concluding remarks

In the Portuguese sample, taken as a whole, the students seem to appreciate their teachers' professional competences, mainly in what concerns their specific areas. Both teachers and students stressed the importance and centrality of the content of their specific area in the education process. Both teachers and students agree that teachers respect the responsibilities they undertake. However, the students' responses seem to indicate that teachers are, somehow, distant and not open to new challenges or to explore the learning opportunities outside the school walls. This indicates a need to include citizenship competences regarding the full contexts of students' lives in teachers' lifelong learning professional development.

Social and personal competences are supposed to promote more active, participatory efforts to improve the sense of community that schools still lack, and are crucial for active citizenship, such as linking school activities with activities beyond school - extracurricular activities (Kerr et al, 2004). By centring their activities in the classroom teachers are not facilitating the opportunity for students to exercise their citizenship. As recommendation for improving the quality of teacher education, the stress is in the need to prepare teachers to engage with diversity which implies the development of socio-cultural competences, enabling them to assume a personal responsibility in all school activities. In this process, teachers should engage students' families and communities as well.

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