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## **The commitment of young people to political and civic life: An analysis of Spanish citizenship education textbooks**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores the different ways in which Spanish citizenship education textbooks are used to promote and educate participating and committed citizens. Ten textbooks for a new compulsory subject - "Education for Citizenship and Human Rights" - were analysed, with the aim of identifying what kinds of citizens were being promoted, what sort of specific knowledge related to political issues were being provided to students, and what kind of society young people were being encouraged to build. Results revealed that, in general, the textbooks promote "good citizens" based on the fulfilment of obligations and give few opportunities to reflect critically on present society or on ways to change it.*

**Keywords:** *citizenship education, political education, textbooks, democratic education*

### **Introduction**

2011 may be viewed as the year of "protests" in the history of social movements. All around the world we have seen many demonstrations, frequently involving youth, against capitalism; social and economic measures; the devastating consequences of crisis, particularly against the 'wrong' - in their view - performance of governments in order to face the economic crisis that affects Europe these days.

Paradoxically there is a common opinion that young people are not interested in political issues nor committed to improve the societies where they live. Some studies show data and express concern that people in general, and youth in particular, don't actively participate in civic and political issues (Putnam, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Jennings & Stocker, 2004; Torney-Purta & Barber, 2005; González-Anleo Sánchez, López Ruiz, Valls Iparraguirre, Ayuso Sánchez & González San, 2010). The Council of Europe (2002) stated also that they were "Worried for the increasing level of political and civic apathy" (p.2) so then they considered that the education for democratic citizenship "should be, in its widest sense, in the centre of the reform and application of educational policies" (p. 3).

However there are others that affirm that the level of participation of youth today is not less than it has always been (Kaase & Newton, 1995; Klingemann & Fuchs, 1995; Morales, 2005, 2003; Martín Hernández, 2006) or they even suggest that maybe the new generations have found other ways of participation (Haste & Hogan, 2006) but they are not all indifferent about political issues.

In 2006 the Spanish Government proclaimed the Educational Statutory Law (Ley Orgánica de Educación, LOE in Spanish) that provides the need to educate students in order to make them accomplish a 'social and citizenship competence'. By acquiring this competence students will be able to "understand the social reality within which we live, cooperate, live together and to practice in democratic citizenship in a plural society, as well as to commit themselves to contribute in improving it" (RD 1631/2006, p.688).

This change in the Spanish compulsory curriculum responds from one side, to the suggestion given by the European Council regarding the need of education for democratic citizenship (Council of Europe, 2002) as we have already pointed out; and from the other to the increasing concern the educational and political agents have, in relation to this apparent low commitment to social and political issues that young people worldwide, and especially in Europe, show. This low commitment is also perceived among young people in Spain taking into account the results published by the advanced report about Spanish Youth, in which we can read that for 56,5% of the people of this survey "politics has nothing to do with me, it doesn't affect at all my private life" (SM, 2010).

The introduction of this compulsory subject generated a deep public debate and provoked complaints and critics from diverse social agents, mainly from the Catholic Church and the right-wing political parties and parents. They consider that the aim is to educate children and teenagers in values for which parents are the ones that exclusively have the right to educate in. Some parents also denounced publishers because of the ideas or content they introduced in their textbooks of Education for Citizenship.

After the general elections of November 2011 the new government (whose members were part of the ones that were against this initiative) has decided to change not only the name of the subject "Education for citizenship" to "Civic Education" but also its content as detractors of the former curriculum considered that it provoked "indoctrination" of students.

Within this context and framed in a wider research project that includes surveys related to the conceptions Spanish young people have about political content, and their attitudes and intentions of future political participation, we analysed a sample of textbooks of Education for Citizenship and Human Rights, and of Civic-Ethic Education of Secondary Compulsory Education.

The aim of this paper is to show the results of the analysis in relation to the proposal the textbooks make to promote and educate active and participative citizens.

## **1. Theoretical framework**

During the last years there have been many voices stating that democracy is in danger because its citizens (mainly the young ones) - disappointed with their governments and institutions - don't participate and don't get involved in the decisions that affect their lives and societies (Putnam, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Jennings & Stocker, 2004; Torney-Purta & Barber, 2005; Hart, 2009; González-Anleo et al., 2010). In consequence,

governments and international institutions developed policies to educate children and young people in order to have active and participative citizens.

Many European countries such as the United Kingdom, Finland and recently Spain, among others, have introduced specific and compulsory subjects in their educational curriculums that are called in general 'Citizenship Education'. However it becomes difficult to have a common idea of citizenship and when and how people become involved, active and participative citizens. Then for those who have the task to teach these subjects the uncertainty about what to teach is a problem they have to face daily in their classrooms.

As Crick (2007) pointed out there are two distinct meanings regarding the term 'citizen', and he wisely attracts our attention by saying that there is a difference in being "good citizens" and "active citizens". People can live in an autocratic state and obey the law, respect their governments and commit no crime. We can say they are "good citizens" but still they don't enjoy political rights: free speech, free elections and the right to change things or to prevent undesired changes. So then they are not "active citizens".

It is also true that "one can be *only* a good citizen in a democratic state, that is one can obey the law, pay taxes, drive carefully and behave oneself socially (say minimizing offence to others) but not work with others on any matters that effect public policy, either at all or minimally – may be just voting or signing a Standing Order form for a voluntary body" (op. cit., p. 243). In this sense, Crick criticized the tradition of citizenship education as just 'Civics', that means, stressing only the knowledge of rules, laws and learning about the constitution.

Also as Hargreaves (1996) clearly shows "since Aristotle it has been accepted as an inherently political concept that raises questions about the sort of society we live in, how it came to take its present form, the strengths and weaknesses of current political structures, and how improvements might be made..." (quoted in Crick, 2007, p. 243). All this seems to be related to the political right of participating to make things change. In that sense we could say that citizenship education can be approached by teaching only "civics" or by teaching also "politics". 'Political literacy' is a term developed to refer to the fact that people should have the knowledge, skills and values that make them effective in public life (Crick and Lister, 1978).

Having politically-literate people would empower them to participate in society effectively as active, informed, critical and responsible citizens convinced they can have an influence on the decisions taken by their governments at all levels (Crick, 2007; Turner, 2009). This seems to be in accordance to reach objectives that both the Council of Europe and the Spanish Statutory Educational Law have.

When talking about political content all those studies included in the field called "Knowledge about society" (Delval, 2007) are of particular interest for our work. The knowledge about society in general refers to the understanding of how the social institutions work, the roles played by the agents there involved, and also the rules that regulate the running of these institutions (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Searle, 1995, 1998)

Assuming that economy and politics are the main cores through which the social world is shaped, 'politics' could be specifically seen as how *the power* is coordinated and managed in societies. In that sense the aspects of the knowledge about society closely related to politics are those who say something about power and authority, governments' systems or models of political organization, political parties, institutions, law, justice and conflict related to war and peace (Delval, 2007).

Joining what Crick and Lister (op.cit.) say about "political literacy" and the knowledge related to the understanding of politics (Delval, 2007; Kohen, González & Messina, 2012) we could suggest that educating children and young people within the context of education for citizenship, should give them knowledge, skills and values to understand how a democratic society organizes its political power in order to make them able to become active citizens and agents of change in their societies.

In the case of Spain for the specific subject called 'Education for Citizenship' the Educational Statutory Law (2006) establishes that its main aim consists:

(...) in giving all students a place for reflection, analysis and study about the main characteristics and the functioning of a democratic system, of the principles and rights established in the Spanish Constitution and in their treaties and in the universal declaration of human rights, as well as the common values that constitute the basis of a democratic society in a global context (page 17163)

Regarding the basic curriculum content developed in the Royal Decree (Real Decreto 1631/2006) of special interest for us are those who contribute to understanding the political organization of a state and those related to political participation, like for example: Citizens' duties and rights, the way a Democracy works, Common goods and public services for the 2<sup>nd</sup> course; and for the 4<sup>th</sup> course, Ethic and politics, Democracy and citizen participation or Democratic institutions.

Although textbooks cannot be seen as 'what is' in a specific field it is assumed that they can be indicators of how a field is represented (Messina, Sundaram & Davies, in press) as well as "potent transmitters of a selective tradition" (Williams, 1989). As children and students learn through 'printed words' it is important to analyse the books with which they study and try to understand how they guide students and children to develop their thought on a particular content (Cornejo, 2006).

According to this, the objective of our paper is to present the results of the analysis of a sample of Spanish textbooks for teaching Education for Citizenship in the Secondary Compulsory Education stage.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Objectives**

The aim of this study is to analyse the textbooks of Education for Citizenship for Secondary Compulsory Education, particularly in relation to the political content and content related to citizenship participation.

We are interested in identifying:

- What type of political participation is mainly promoted through the content selected by the publishers to include in their textbooks
- What values related to political participation in democratic societies underlie this content
- What kind of citizen is then promoted

## ***2.2 Sample***

To choose the textbooks we took into account those that were the most used in secondary schools in Madrid, regarding the data provided by the National Association of Publishers of Books and Teaching Materials.

We analysed 10 textbooks of 5 different publishers (see Appendix), 5 of which were for teaching the subject “Education for Citizenship and Human Rights” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> course of the Secondary Compulsory Education, and 5 of the subject “Ethic-Civic Education” in the 4<sup>th</sup> course of the same period of education.

## ***2.3 Procedure***

Once the textbooks were chosen, two members of the research team made a quick reading of each of them. Afterwards political content related to the aims of our Project was marked. Then a more detailed selection of content was made and we finally had a list with content related to political and social participation.

The team discussed the content and tried to determine if they were or not of political knowledge and if they were related to participation. The analysis of the textbooks then was focused on trying to describe how each textbook introduces the political content. Moreover we tried to identify what kind of political participation they promote among students through the content and activities proposed.

Regarding the notion of ‘citizen’, the categories worked out have allowed us to classify content according to the features the textbooks use to define these notions: “sharing a territory”, “sharing a language and/or cultural values”, “sharing rights and duties because of sharing territory, cultural values and/or language”, “sharing rights and duties due to the fact of recognizing their human nature as moral subjects” (see section 3.1). In relation to participation, these categories have permitted to distinguish between those texts in which public spirit is promoted: “the good citizen” and those who promote a “participative citizen” (see section 3.3). In this respect, the working-out and the use of

categories of analysis referred to different themes has been useful to organize and give sense to the political content shown in the texts of Citizenship Education.

### 3. Results

According to one of our objectives we identified the political content the textbooks developed. The results showed that there are frequent political contents we can find in all the textbooks and others that are found only in some of them. Table 1 shows the results of the most frequent contents, and Table 2 the least frequent.

**Table 1. The most frequent political contents in textbooks**

2nd course	4th course
Citizenship	Politics
Human Rights	Human Rights**
Democracy	Democracy
Division of powers*	Spanish Constitution
Spanish Constitution	
Spanish political model*	

\* Except the Publisher Edelvives \*\* Except the Publisher edebé

**Table 2. Least frequent political contents in textbooks**

2nd course	4th course
Local Government	Local Government
European Political Model	Justice
Distributive Justice	Laws
Politics*	Citizenship**
	Spanish political model ***

\* Only developed for this course by Anaya, SM and Santillana Publishers \*\* Content developed only for this course by Santillana Publisher, and it is also developed throughout the whole textbook in relation to the rest of the contents by SM \*\*\* Except the books by Edelvives, SM and Santillana

In this paper we are going to focus only in some of the content gathered in three sections, as follows:

#### 3.1 *Citizenship: the place or the person?*

Regarding *citizenship* there are some common aspects in the way the different textbooks present the theme although each Publisher stresses other aspects. Taking into account the common aspects we can say all give a definition about *citizenship* or what being a *citizen* means. But we can find some differences in where they put the emphasis. Most of them stress the importance on the fact of “living” in a location, place, city or state, and only one links the condition of being citizen just to the human being condition. That leaves the door opened to argue about the relevance of talking about “local, national or regional citizenship”.

Edelvives (2007) and Edebé (2007) relate both the concept of *citizen* with the fact of “sharing a common territory” or “living in the same country” what allows them to share rights and duties. Anaya (2008) and SM (2008) in their proposal for the 2<sup>nd</sup> course put the *citizen* in relation to a society or political community. Santillana (2007, 2008) finally develops first the idea of the “Greek Polis” to show the evolution the concept has had from “citizen-inhabitant” until the one of “citizen-person” of today.

This is interesting because if we compare the definitions given by all of them, soon appear the different meanings each publisher gives to what a citizen is. Edelvives, Edebé, Anaya and SM seem to be closer to the concept the Greeks used to give while Santillana admits that this concept has developed and stresses the importance now the person has over the state.

Edelvives (2007) defines citizenship as:

- “Group of people that live in the same location and share rights and duties necessary and essential for living together” (page 8)

While Edebé (2007) gives three possible dimensions of citizenship:

- Condition of being citizen of a country for which a series of rights and duties are acquired
- Group of citizens that are part of a town or a nation
- Characteristic behaviour of a good citizen (page 6)

By reading these definitions it appears that these textbooks want to stress the fulfilment of tasks and duties by the people living in a place which leads us to the idea of being a “good citizen” but says nothing about the possibility of participation in order to contribute to the construction of this ‘location’ or ‘place’ or the intention of changing things. This would go then in the sense of teaching only “civics” (Crick, 2007).

After giving these definitions, in the Edelvives’ textbook we find some text that talks about “citizens without borders” and points out that the citizenship, as group of people, is more and more diverse (in age, sex, jobs, beliefs, races and nationalities) and that thanks to the new technologies we can establish connection to people all around the world which allows us to talk about “global citizenship”. However they do not give any definition about what this means.

Edebé (2007) has a section dedicated to the relationship between individual and society. They point out that this can be negative, based on exclusion, or positive based on harmony. The negative relationship can come when society rejects the individual or when individual rejects the society. About the first one they don’t say anything else but the result of the isolation of the person, and regarding the second one they pointed out the “auto-exclusion” of the person from the society. Finally they mention ways people have to exclude others, all behaviours that are gathered under the common label of “social prejudices”.

Then it is worthy to mention how they describe the positive relation based on harmony. This harmony is based on a reciprocity relationship only possible when there is “a real

integration between the individual and the society” (op. cit. page 17). This reciprocity is explained in the textbook as follows:

For one side, the society respects, protects and favour the individuals’ interests; normally, by means of the giving of services through the State. (...) On the other, the individual is responsible and conscious of the interests of the majority. For example, by respecting and preserving the common goods, by assuming the political and social duties as citizen (page 17)

Apart from the “paternal” idea of State that can emerge from this paragraph, this explanation stresses – in our point of view - more the importance of contributing to the maintenance of the society the way it is instead of encouraging students to criticise it and looking for ways of changing things. That is the accent puts on being a “good citizen” according to the rules where they live than on reflecting whether things are well done or not and how they can change them.

The same idea is reflected in the proposal given by SM (2008) in its textbook. The citizenship is defined by “the relationship between the person and his/her political community (State)” and the citizen “the person who has rights and duties as member of a State” (page 14). It is also interesting to remark that in the section “The democracy” they mention that we need “good citizens: intelligent, informed, responsible, fair, (and supportive)” (page 157).

Anaya (2008) presents a citizen as a person “committed to be part of a society” (page 50), in that sense the common good, the duties and the rights are stressed. Then the following 3 lessons are articulated around the three values in which the human rights are based: freedom in society, its limits and social norms; social equality and diversity; and finally solidarity as a right but also as a duty.

Santillana (2007) in the textbook for 2<sup>nd</sup> course presents the first lesson about “learning to be citizens”. They show a brief history of the evolution of the idea of citizen from the Greek Polis to the actual societies. It is remarked that before being a citizen was inherently connected to *live* in a city but today, due to the social changes we have experimented, citizen is seen as a person that has rights just for being a human being. That means an important difference for changing the focus from the ‘place’ or ‘location’ to the person - with independence to the place where this person lives - could lead us to a different way of teaching citizenship.

Moreover, it could be suggested that putting the focus on the relationship the person has with the local/national/regional community where she lives, may provoke situations of discrimination. In fact, being part of a community is always related to concepts of ‘identity’, ‘cultural identity’, ‘feelings’, ‘customs’, ‘integration’, etc. all of them very controversial. However, if the accent of citizenship and being a citizen are put on the human condition and the human rights, the barriers of borders – and with them the discrimination – could be avoided.

In this sense, we can clearly see that the proposals analysed have different directions regarding which aspects they lead the students to think about and to discuss.

### 3.2 Democracy and models of political organization

“Democracy” is the only content developed in all the textbooks analysed without any exception. They mainly present the division of powers and the Spanish Constitution. All of them also give the classical definition of democracy: “the people’s government”. Then the majority try to develop the content in relation to a way of organising a State. For this purpose they introduce the division of powers: the Legislature (represented by the Parliament/Congress), the Executive (represented by the President) and the Judiciary/Judicial (represented by the Courts). This is accompanied by a brief explanation of the function of each power and how they are elected. Afterwards the government system is introduced, and finally they mention the Spanish Constitution and some of the books also mention and describe in a few words the Autonomous Region System in Spain. All the Publishers stress the importance the non-concentration of power in a democracy has in contrast to what happens in a totalitarian system, and that the people should control the performance of the organisms of the political power.

Regarding the different political models the Spanish political organization is present in 4 of the 5 books analysed both of the 2<sup>nd</sup> course and of the 4<sup>th</sup> course. In the case of the European Political Organization only one textbook says something about it.

According to the purpose of our study it is interesting here to show whether the different publishers discuss the control of power within a democracy. SM explains in both textbooks that the division of powers is based on the intention to avoid the problems derive from the concentration of power. It is the only proposal that dedicates a section of two pages in the book for 4<sup>th</sup> course to discuss about the power and its legitimacy, and when the power is legal and legitimate. The latter is of course connected to the citizen’s consent.

Anaya (2008a) introduces too in the book for the 2<sup>nd</sup> course the theme ‘Democracy’ related to political power but it is viewed as the Supreme power in the sense that “(it) has to have the final say of what must be done and must not be done” (page 90) although afterwards in another section it is said that “The *sovereignty* is the supreme political power that a State executes (...)” but “this sovereignty is vested in the people” (page 100). The proposal for the 4<sup>th</sup> course (Anaya, 2008b) clarifies it also by saying that “The political power and, then the Government and the laws should emerge from the people themselves and be strictly controlled by them” (page 74).

Santillana for the 2<sup>nd</sup> course introduces the theme in a wider section called “The Politics and the Common Good”. It describes the minimum conditions for a democratic system: 1) Elections; 2) Constitutional Law; 3) Division of Powers; and 4) The adoption and effect of fundamental principles established in the Constitution. Regarding the third condition it is explained that in the Spanish political system these three powers are clearly distributed but it says nothing about why it is important that this works this way in a democracy. On the other hand, in the book for the 4<sup>th</sup> course a new topic of reflection related to the definition “The people’s Government” is considered by

introducing two questions: Who are ‘the people’? And what does it mean that ‘the people govern’?

With the first question the authors of the book lead the students to reflect on those who along history have always been excluded of ‘the people’ that govern: from the slaves and minors in the ancient Greek till the foreigners, women and minority groups of our societies of today. All these groups don’t have political rights that means they are not part of the people in which sovereignty is vested, they were not citizens for the Greeks so we should ask ourselves: are they not citizens today? How could be then the democracy ‘the people’s government’ when there are people not included within ‘this people’? Is it then a Government “for all”?

Regarding the second question the textbook asks more questions that help students to think about how the people can govern in a democratic system, if it is better a direct democracy or a representative one, and it also impels students to think on the representatives: what their function is and how they must perform their tasks. Finally, the text offers some questions that make students think about whether the people must obey a democratic government in the case they take wrong or illegal decisions.

As a summary of this item we can say that the contents presented for the different textbooks analysed go in the direction of showing that citizens have something to say and to do regarding the government of a State but not in a very deeply way. Only one Publisher makes students to reflect a bit further from the classical definitions and established ideas regarding ‘democracy’. This leads us to the following section related to participation.

### **3.3 Politics and participation**

If we recall what we said before about ‘politics’ and the objective of ‘Education for Citizenship’ in order to promote and educate active and participative citizens so then they can have some kind of effect on the decisions the Government or the political institutions take, we could say that most of the textbooks studied only stress one way of participation: voting.

Anaya in its book for 2<sup>nd</sup> course reproduces a report about the low level of young people’s political participation taking into account only the percentage of young people that voted in past elections. In another section they say the State should be respected by all citizens because they have the power given by the own citizens through voting. In the book for 4<sup>th</sup> course they stress the same idea: “*Democracy is the political power of the people that express their communal will through voting*” (page 75), and as the unique method to control the power they remarked again the division of powers.

But Santillana again makes a difference in the way they promote participation in students and make them being aware of the need to control their governments. Yet in the book for 2<sup>nd</sup> course they name not only voting as one way to control the power in a democracy but also “*By influencing in the attitude of those who have the power of taking decisions (negotiations, demonstrations, strikes...)*” (page 82) and by participating in

different kind of associations. It is also interesting and remarkable that they include in this section another topic under the subtitle “The pressing groups”. In there they give information to students about the different groups like “The Davos’ Economic World Forum” or the “Social World Forum” that started in Porto Alegre, Brasil. They go deeply in this idea in the textbook for the 4<sup>th</sup> course when they introduce the democracy just as a mechanism (voting representatives, citizen as consumer, system that promotes only participation through voting) and democracy as a way of life (people should have the government but they choose experts for some fields, the citizen is an active member of the community, the system encourages citizens to participate in as many ways as possible).

As a conclusion of this section we can also add that textbooks fail in showing students the complexity of the societies in where we live. This complexity is behind almost all the problems to put into practice the theoretical ideas regarding democracy, tolerance, respect and no discrimination but if students are not able to see this clearly, they will not be able to reflect in ways to participate in order to make things change.

#### **4. Conclusions**

‘Politics’ is related to how the power is distributed and managed in a society (Delval, 2007; Kohen et al., 2012), and considering the power within a democratic political system we could see the citizens have something to say or they should be able to participate in the organization and decisions made for the management of the societies where they live. For that purpose, training participative and active citizens was stated by the Council of Europe and many European Governments promoted the inclusion of a specific subject in their educational curriculums. But according to the analysis made of some Spanish textbooks of Education for Citizenship we can conclude that they promote in students only the idea of being participative and have some influence by voting, neglecting other ways of political participation that in our opinion could be not only more effective but also more visible and executed with more frequency. They say nothing about what happens after the elections and during the period the elected Government governs regarding the control citizens – in theory – are obliged to have in order to be committed, active and participative citizens.

It is also an issue to criticize the stress they still put on the place or territory to define whether someone is a citizen or not, and on the other side they talk about human rights for all despite their origins, the rights of minority groups and the global citizenship. We think there is a clear contradiction in this approach that not only contributes to maintain a way of politics that may disenfranchise a large amount of young people – because of lack of understanding – but also does not contribute to fulfil the objective the European Commission and the European Educational Systems have of educating active citizens.

Finally, regarding the textbooks analysed we should be aware that they not only are made according to publishing criteria, but they also reflect the social shared beliefs regarding political content that are transmitted to citizens within the formal educational system. It seems to be, like many other times across history, that we are confronted with one of those occasions in which the recommendations of international organisms and the

guidelines that develop them run ahead of social representations about certain issues. The challenge is then to find how to intervene to reduce the gap between practice and social beliefs about citizenship, and the pattern expresses in the recommendations already mentioned. At least, if we want that the inclusion of citizenship education content in school curriculums have the sense we seek they have.

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## Appendix

*Textbooks for 2<sup>nd</sup> course:*

Navarro Sustaeta, P., Díaz Martínez, C. (2008a) *Educación para la Ciudadanía*, Madrid: Anaya

*Educación para la Ciudadanía ESO* (2007) Madrid: Santillana Educación S.L.

*Educación para la Ciudadanía – ESO* (2007) Barcelona: grupo edebé

Marina, J. A. (2008a) *Educación para la Ciudadanía*, Madrid: Ediciones SM

González Lucini, F. (2007) *Educación para la Ciudadanía*, Madrid: Edelvives

*Textbooks for 4<sup>th</sup> course:*

Navarro Sustaeta, P., Díaz Martínez, C. (2008b) *Educación Ético-Cívica*, Madrid: Anaya

*Ética y Ciudadanía 4 ESO* (2008) Madrid: Santillana Educación S.L.

*Educación Ético-Cívica – 4 ESO* (2008) Barcelona: grupo edebé

Marina, J. A. (2008b) *Educación Ético-Cívica*, Madrid: Ediciones SM

González Lucini, F. (2008) *Educación Ético-Cívica*, Madrid: Edelvives