

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION POLICIES: THE CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN MASKS OF DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to reach a wider understanding about the impact of democratic transitions across Europe, considering the experience of three EU member countries with diverse political histories: England, sometimes characterized as the oldest democracy in the world; Portugal that experienced a dictatorship until 1974; and Slovenia that restored democracy in 1991, after being a constituent state of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Our goal is to understand whether educational policies emphasise a political culture that values citizens' active participation, but simultaneously acknowledges the country's political history in terms of citizenship rights and duties.

Results will be discussed assuming that CE should give pupils the opportunity to critically engage with the past and that it should help students to find in their current opportunities for civic and political participation the context to exert their rights as citizens.

Key words: citizenship education, educational policies, transition to democracy, active citizenship

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last 30 years, formerly authoritarian countries across Europe have witnessed a transition to democracy with a deep transformation of their political institutions, which, particularly since the mid-nineties, was accompanied by a strong emphasis on the role of education in the promotion of (democratic and European) citizenship.

Since then, we have witnessed a renewed interest in citizenship both in terms of theory and research (Arnot, 2009), particularly related to the intensification of the signs

of political disengagement and apathy of young people and adults, both in emerging and consolidated democracies (Amadeo et al., 2002). Not surprisingly, there is a widespread emphasis on the role education should play to counteract these tendencies, and particularly on Citizenship Education (CE) which became the motto for educational reforms across Europe (Menezes, 2003).

Schools have historically played a central role in the promotion of the “ideal” citizen, particularly during the institution of the Nation State when the school was the vehicle for the “creation” of national identities (Habermas, 1992). European educational reforms, from the mid-nineties onwards, have assumed that both curriculum and school environment should promote social cohesion, mutual understanding, solidarity and the active and democratic participation of citizens.

However, there is an intense diversity in European history in terms of democracy and citizenship; some countries belong to the European Union, and some other do not; some countries have stable democracies since the World War II, while other experienced democratic transitions during the seventies (Portugal, Spain and Greece) or the nineties; in some European countries we find a vibrant civil society while in other countries the authoritarian structures appear to be still dominant.

Given this diversity, the aim of this project - *Participatory Citizenship Education in Transitional Societies* - is to understand whether educational policies emphasise a political culture that values citizens’ active participation, while simultaneously acknowledging and taking into consideration the country’s political history in terms of rights and powers of citizens, the struggles of different social groups, and the relevant historical transformations achieved.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted between November 2010 and April 2011 and it involves data from 3 selected European countries. It should be noted that these countries have different cultural and political traditions and have experienced a transition to democracy in different historical periods. Our data includes **Portugal** that, until 1974, has experienced a dictatorship that lasted 48 years; **Slovenia**, that restored democracy in 1991 and **England**, a Constitutional Monarchy, the so-called as the oldest democracy in the world.

Figure 1: Analysed Countries



Mainly, our study entails a comprehensive analysis of principles, intentions and key-concepts of Citizenship Education (CE) presented in each national legislative and policy documents (e.g., constitutions, laws, regulations, curricular guidelines, programmes and textbooks). Besides, we complemented this information using a multi-level approach with other range of resources (e.g., articles; existing databases; European surveys; web-sites).

Our study combines both direct and secondary sources and translations. In order to answer our research questions - Which approaches to Citizenship Education (CE) educational policies advocate for? How do these policy texts define and operationalize citizenship, specifically in terms of the role of participation and of a critical consciousness of the past? -, we have established 6 categories that will be discussed below.

3. RESULTS

3.1. CURRENT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM (structures of compulsory education in each country)

Compulsory education in Portugal, Slovenia and England is based on a *comprehensive system*, which means that schools don't practice a selected admittance of students (obviously, after compulsory education, higher education institutions have their admittance criteria). Compulsory education is 9 years in Slovenia and England, while in Portugal, since the beginning of 2009/2010, it was increased from 9 to 12 years.

3.2. VISION OF CE IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY DOCUMENTS

On table 1 we transcribe concepts and aims of educational policy present in several laws and legal documents; policies and legal documents of these 3 countries reveal a central commitment to Citizenship Education. We can also state that, similarly to Taylor's (1994) point of view, they experience and share an "emphasis on the promotion of citizenship and participation in the democratic life, personal and individual development and on environmental issues, both at local and global scale." Concepts like critical thinking, engagement, participation, decision-making, pluralism and democracy are integrated in educational policies and curricula, which shows each country concern regarding citizenship and illustrates their particularities and definition.

Table 1: Vision of CE in Educational Policy Documents

Country	Definition
Portugal	"Education promotes the development of democratic and pluralistic spirit, respect for others and their ideas, open dialogue and free exchange of opinions in order to develop citizens capable of judge, with critical and creative thinking, the social context in which they are involved and engage in its progressive transformation." Basic Law on Education System [LBSE], 1986
Slovenia	Education should "foster the feeling of citizenship and national identity as well as the knowledge of Slovene history and culture."

	Law on Elementary School, 1996
	“(…) the essential premise for the participation in the democratic processes is the development of a critical spirit, personal decision-making and autonomous judgment. School plays an important role in forming a democratic public and in the development of the capacity to participate in the democratic processes. The contents of curricula (variations of the so called civic education) as well as their forms are important for such a process.”
	White Paper on Education, 1996
England	“Education for citizenship equips young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding to play an effective role in public life (...). Pupils learn about their rights, responsibilities, duties and freedoms and about laws, justice and democracy. They learn to take part in decision-making and different forms of action. They play an active role in the life of their schools, neighbourhoods, communities and wider society as active and global citizens.”
	<i>in National Curriculum Online</i>

3.3. TERMINOLOGY, CURRICULA STRATEGY AND NUMBER OF HOURS OF CE IN CURRICULA

The analysis of how CE is defined in each country reveals diverse definitions and approaches. For instance, in Portugal, CE is a cross-curricular theme that permeates the whole curricula but also the focus on a non-disciplinary curricular space designated Civic Formation; in Slovenia, besides the cross-curricular approach, CE is the object of a compulsory subject Civic and Patriotic (7th grade) and an optional subject Civic Culture or Peace Education (7th to 9th grade); in England, CE is integrated in “Personal, Social and Health Education” (Key Stage 1 and 2), a non-compulsory subject, but it is compulsory at Key Stage 3 and 4 under Personal, Social, Health and Economic Wellbeing), as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Terminology and Curricula Strategy of CE

Country	Definition
Portugal	<p>“Civic Formation, the privileged space for citizenship education, aims to develop students’ civic conscience as a fundamental element in the process of forming responsible, critical, active and intervening citizens, appealing, namely, to the interchange of class, school and community.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Law Decree 6/2001</p>
Slovenia	<p>The curricula strategy for CE differs across the educational level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7th and 8th grade: “Civic and Patriotic” is a compulsory subject which occupies 1 hour per week. <p>Additionally, through all Curriculum, Citizenship is a cross-curricular theme integrated in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compulsory subjects (e.g., Mother Tongue, Psychology, Philosophy, Sociology, Social Sciences, History and Geography); - Optional subjects (e.g., “Civic Culture” and “Peace Education”) – 7th to 9th grade, 1 hour per week. <p style="text-align: right;">(Krek & Sebart, 2008)</p>
England	<p><u>Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2:</u> “Citizenship” is integrated into the non-statutory programme of the non-statutory subject PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education):</p>

- "This programme is non-statutory and schools are not required to follow it."

PSHE is linked to other compulsory subjects, such as: English, History, Geography, Sciences, Physical Education, etc.

Key Stage 3/Key Stage 4:

Citizenship is a **statutory component** of school curriculum. It is **linked to non-statutory subject Personal, Social, Health and Economic Wellbeing (KS3 and KS4)**.

in <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-1-and-2/subjects/citizenship/keystage1/index.aspx>

As far as *Curricular Strategies*, data show that each country adopts, at least, two different approaches to CE, combining cross-curricular with curricular spaces or subjects:

- In **Portugal**, Law Decree 6/2001 stresses the "integration, with cross-curricular nature, of citizenship education, in all the curricula areas." Besides this, "Civic Formation" is also integrated in Personal and Social Education as a non-disciplinary area from 1st to 9th grade;
- In **Slovenia**, the Ministry of Education and Sports²⁵ establishes "Civic and Patriotic" as a compulsory subject in the 7th and 8th grade and it is also a cross-curricular theme through all curricula;
- In **England**, "Citizenship" is integrated into non-statutory subjects Personal, Social and Health Education (KS1 and KS2) and into Personal, Social, Health and Economic Wellbeing (KS3 and KS4). Additionally, "Citizenship" is also linked to compulsory subjects such as English, History, Geography, etc. This reform was provided by the Education Act in 2002.

Regarding the *Number of Hours of CE* in Curricula, Portugal and Slovenia prescribe 1 hour per week of CE in curricula while in England the National Curriculum doesn't establish a curricular schedule.

3.3. TOPICS AND FRAMEWORK OF CE IN CURRICULA

Comparing the three countries in terms of CE concepts and themes there are interesting variations. Portugal stands out for its lack of legal definitions around CE: contrary to other curricular domains, there are no specific programmes and textbooks are not recommended and seldom used; very recently, a group of experts was invited by the Ministry to define the official guidelines for basic and secondary education – but, as the government changed, the dissemination of these guidelines is very poor. However, the 1986 Education Act refers several topics such as "ecological education, consumer education, family education, sex education, accident's prevention, health education, education for participation in institutions, civic services and others"

Slovenia, as England, has a structured curricula concerning CE, even if the topics vary in each national context and school level. In Slovenia, CE starts with a local vision of citizenship (e.g. 7th grade - Life in the community, Family) to develop, in the 8th grade,

²⁵ *in* <http://www.mss.gov.si>

concepts related to Culture, Democracy and the European Union. The focus on political system and institutions only occurs in the 9th grade. Regarding CE framework, Krek & Sebart's (2008) highlights that schools can offer 150 hours of civic education but "they usually offer only the required minimum of 15 hours."

England embraces a perspective that focus on wider civic participation, critical thinking, the decision-making process and engagement with civil and state institutions. The National Curriculum relates CE to "social justice, human rights, community cohesion and global interdependence", critical skills, "Democracy and Justice", "Rights and Responsibilities" and an "active role as citizens". But, according to Best (2003:19), the "citizenship curriculum is conceived within a knowledge-centred (rather than a person-centred) tradition of education; that it seems to emphasize integration into the society and the development of attitudes and dispositions that are about responding to the world rather than changing it".

4. CONCLUSION

Our findings show that CE has a diffuse concept that entails curricula strategy (e.g. specific subject, integrated into another one and cross-curricular theme) and its contents; however, there appears to be a focus on knowledge (e.g. about the nation, the state and political institutions) and competences, such as "critical thinking, participation and active involvement" of pupils. However, researchers have criticized these CE policies stating that, contrary to the explicit and official discourse, they are promoting a conception of citizenship based on conventional actions (e.g., voting), reinforcing the pupil's passive role (Best, 2003:19).

In this sense, it is time to question if CE should be focused on the transmission of values, rules and knowledge about society, playing a function of mere social control where citizens are considered to be "spectators who vote" (Walzer, 1995:165) or if it should remove the contemporary masks of democracy in order to conceive citizens as authors, with conditions and opportunities to make choices and decisions, and "begin to consider the opportunities that students actually have for experience democracy in the schools." (Campos, Costa, Menezes, 1993:15)

The breath of the data collected and the richness of the topic justifies that we affirm this study as a continuing effort that will hopefully produce still further fruit.

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