

INTERACT – Intercultural Active Citizenship Education

Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra

WP12 Teachers as Citizens

Summary Report

The main aim of Work Package 12 was to analyse the data gathered in the empirical study generated by the teachers' interviews, both individual and focus-group, carried out in primary, basic and secondary schools in Coimbra and Lisbon, Portugal, and analysed within the scope of the concept "teachers as citizens". Ten focus-groups and 70 individual teacher's interviews were carried out in a semi-structured form.

The Work Package was divided into the following broad categories which were agreed by the partners in order to organize the relevant data: (a) Teachers' Identity (b) Teachers' Competencies; (c) Scope of Agency (d) Conceptual Framework (e) Teacher Education. Within these main categories, it was found some subcategories according to the national data.

The focus of this study is to see how teachers' understandings and perceptions of their civic participation reflect on their professional role as teachers. The main ideas pointed out by the interviewees are the following:

a) Teachers' Identity:

The majority of teachers felt very concerned and disappointed about their public image passed through the mass media at the moment and which devalues their professional role. Their tasks are being more and more bureaucratic, they stated, and, consequently, this prevents their full engagement in civic and school life. Some of them considered that they have to follow rigid curricular guidelines, which demand more content instruction and than educating students as active citizens. One of the interviewees stated that s/he is, in the first place, a state's employee which means in his/her words s/he is expected nothing but to implement policies. It was pointed out that what should be the teacher's role varies mainly according to each school socioeconomic

context, whether its students have or not behavioural problems. Therefore, each school requires from teachers different competencies and, consequently, different teacher education programmes.

Teachers' actions are also expected to contribute to the School Annual Project and to be collaborative among them towards this purpose. In our interviewees' understanding, teachers are a heterogeneous class with a range of different backgrounds and interests with different motivations to have embraced this profession.

As a matter of fact, all teachers considered themselves to be citizens in the first place. Citizenship education is perceived to imply a cross-curricular approach. The majority of them view subjects like history, geography and foreign languages more deeply linked with citizenship than others. However, the latter is more a concern of primary school teachers and not as much for secondary school teachers who perceive their role as requiring them to priority to exams and access to university. When they do, some teachers mentioned to have been led to reflect upon their own perspectives and perceptions about schoolbooks by the fact that they had multiethnic classes. At the same time, students who are not used to having teachers who are themselves from a different race or ethnicity are also led to question their stereotypes.

Controversial issues such as slavery, racism, discrimination or religion are outlined in subjects, whether they are directly highlighted or not. However, some of these issues bring uncomfortable feelings to some teachers when they have to deal with multiethnic classes. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that those who have taken postgraduate courses or teacher development courses related to citizenship education felt more confident with them. The others, who do not have this academic background or teacher education in this particular area, follow their personal values and beliefs. As for the latter, civics or citizenship education is essentially about being a good person.

The teachers' role is therefore perceived by themselves as having to mainly with educating students to be active and responsible citizens in a multicultural school and, consequently, in a multicultural society. In

sum, teachers should provide them with knowledge and skills aimed at this purpose. However, some of the interviewees stated that their role is only about teaching their particular subjects and basically following curricular syllabi and not about educating citizens but rather preparing them to the pressures of the job market. For others, the teachers' role implies more than respect for differences, it implies to be a conflict manager and to promote dialogue.

b. Teacher's Competencies:

Some teachers, when asked to define their role as an intercultural educator, often confessed that were reflecting on it as such for the first time. They also confessed they avoided dealing with controversial issues because they had not had professional training preparing them specifically for that purpose. As for others, they said they got on very well with diverse classes and thought they had good research competences as far as the internet was concerned.

c. Scope of Agency:

Teachers' civic participation was generally episodic and can be described as:

- acting as a volunteer, e.g. distributing food to homeless people or working in a professional setting such as being director of a fire department.
- voting rather than belonging to political parties is the political action which they envisage most. However, there are some teachers who emphasised their active political engagement during the transition period of dictatorship regime to democratic regime in Portugal. They emphasised the relevance of principles as freedom of expression and democracy.
- contributing to a national campaign like collecting food from supermarkets "Banco Alimentar Contra a Fome" (Food Bank).

Nonetheless, there are some teachers who make a point in identifying themselves as pacific people and state that engaging in social, cultural or political campaigns, are not their way of life. Others, after reflecting

upon their practices say that although they are engaged in social problems, their action is more verbal than actual agency.

All teachers pointed out that it is impossible to separate their role as citizens from their role as teachers. Some of them invite relevant figures to their classes: representatives of World Bank or environmental associations. Others participate in Roma communities to bring together dialogue between students in an inclusive community and *teaching citizenship in an intercultural society*. With regard to Roma students, there are teachers who are open about their difficulties to interact with them.

Many resources and strategies were mentioned to be used by teachers in order to deal with citizenship education in class, such as class meetings as a democratic strategy to debate and reflect critically on student's opinions about citizenship issues. Games, songs are also popular methods used as well as traditional tales, role plays, films and documentaries.

A majority of teachers act at the school level in partnership with local authorities and associations. At the national level, they participate in projects where they become familiar with good practices of schools spread around the country. At an international level, some of them participate in European projects like Comenius, Socrates and summer courses or exchange programmes with their students abroad and perceive these activities as involving citizenship and intercultural education.

d. Conceptual Framework:

Citizenship education is defined as a broad concept linked with environmental, social, cultural responsibilities in order to prepare "*citizens of the world into the world*". Teachers affirm that their approach to citizenship education depends very much upon their political ideologies and recognise that they are not neutral and that impacts on their performance as teachers. The major concepts outlined by interviewees are: respect, integration, tolerance, human rights, and competences such as how to know and how to be. It was mentioned

that in the Portuguese context, nowadays citizenship education is now prioritised over intercultural education which was given more emphasis in the 90's. At the same time, they recognised that due to the increase and more visibility of multiculturalism in our societies it is crucial put more emphasis on intercultural education.

Regarding the familiarity with both international and national documents on citizenship education, many interviewees pointed out that they do not know them in detail. However, they added that the national ones reflect the major guidelines of European recommendations with regard to integration of minorities, respect of cultural diversity and Human Rights. Some of them stated particular attention to Declaration of Human Rights which is used in class, in order to have an active role in the *surrounding world*. Nonetheless, others underlined the syllabi as being deeply linked with these concerns, particularly those such as philosophy, history and foreign languages. The recent syllabi aim to develop citizenship competences instead of arithmetics and reading.

(e) Teacher Education

Some teachers recognised that taking up the role of citizenship educators without formal education in the field can be risky. As it was mentioned above, those teachers who felt uncomfortable to deal with controversial issues are the ones who have not undergone advanced training or postgraduate studies related to citizenship and, having said this, they confirmed to have followed their personal values and beliefs.

Moreover, there are no explicit guidelines in curricular programmes and therefore it is difficult to avoid individual and subjective approaches. In addition, the need for a common conceptual framework concerning citizenship education was mentioned by our interviewees. In addition, teacher development programmes and assessment of teachers' practices were pointed out to be of primary importance.

In the Portuguese context, teachers who had been much influenced by the Entreculturas Department mainly due to the use of their materials

and by their development programmes, gave them as an example of good theory and practice articulation in teacher education.

Finally, teachers assumed their engagement in civic life as part of their professional roles in educating students as responsible and active citizens in an inclusive society, mainly those who are high qualified in the field. Some teachers who did not received formal education recognised that this would be an essential tool to help them perform better in their teaching with regard to citizenship education.