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Malatesta, S., and Granados Sanchez, J. (2013) *A geographical issue: the contribution of Citizenship Education to the building of a European citizenship. The case of the VOICES Comenius network*. *Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography (J-Reading)*, 2 (2). pp. 57-66.

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<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/100154/>

Deposited on: 4 December 2014



## **A Geographical issue: the contribution of Citizenship Education to the building of a European citizenship. The case of the VOICES Comenius network**

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Received: October 2013 – Accepted: November 2013

### **Abstract**

Citizenship Education is currently a consolidated issue within several European curricula. It has been integrated in national educational laws in different ways: as cross-curricular education (UK, Italy), as a subject (France, Spain) or as a skill (Ireland). Despite these differences, there is a common agreement on the ethical value of Citizenship Education and on its main aim: to foster students' sense of local, national and European citizenship. In some ways this goal has been inspired by Morin's path to a “plural” education and a planetary citizenship (Morin, 2000). Social sciences, and in particular Geography and History, keep the function of giving tools able to show how a dialogue among the different scales is possible. Nevertheless European citizenship is undergoing a constant redefinition due to the European enlargement process, the role of Europe inside national jurisdictions and to the changes in national curricula. This evolution directly affects the guiding function conferred to school in terms of skills, aims and themes; therefore competences and methods adopted by teachers may have to be reconsidered. This essay presents the first results of the updating of the state of the art of this issue that has been carried out by the *Citizenship Education Research Group* of the VOICES Comenius network (The Voice of European Teachers). The main aim of this international research group is to face the challenge of building a European citizenship by developing a comparative analysis of teachers' practices and strategies in different local, regional and national contexts, aiming to contribute, with renewed ideas, to the debate on this promising field of research.

**Keywords:** European Citizenship, Geographical Education, Citizenship Education, National Curricula, Educational Structures, Scale, Place

### **1. Introduction: the VOICES European Comenius network**

VOICES (the Voice of European Teachers) is

a European Comenius network which includes ten universities in ten different European countries (Table 1). The network includes university teachers, researchers, teacher training

students and primary and secondary school teachers and their pupils. VOICES is the continuance of two previous projects: Face-it (2007-2009) and ETSIZE (2010-2011). Both projects were focused on the development of the figure of the European teachers and their proper education. The overall aim was to develop both content and a methodology to enable students (of teacher training colleges and faculties) to acquire the knowledge and to develop the competences, skills and attitudes required to become a European teacher, professionally at international level.

The aim of VOICES is to contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning by integrating the European Teacher model developed during Face-it and ETSIZE, which includes the focus on diversity, the multiperspectivity of identity, European citizenship in which respect and tolerance are keywords, and European professionalism which needs attitudes by teachers to combat racism, prejudices and xenophobia, among other things.

The purpose of the network is to foster the development of the following European teacher competences:

- to cooperate with others: teachers work in a profession, which should be based on the values of social inclusion and nurturing the potential of every learner;
- to work with information, knowledge and technology: teachers need to be able to work with a variety of types of knowledge;
- to work in ways which increase the collective intelligence of learners and to co-operate and collaborate with colleagues to enhance their own learning and teaching;
- to promote mobility and co-operation in Europe, and to encourage intercultural respect and understanding;
- to work with and in society: teachers contribute to preparing learners to be globally responsible in their role as EU citizens.

INSTITUTE	COUNTRY
Hogeschool Edith Stein / OnderwijsCentrum Twente	The Netherlands
HUB-EHSAL	Belgium
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	Spain
Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca	Italy
University of Derby	United Kingdom
Uludağ University, Bursa	Turkey
PHZ Zentralschweiz Schwyz	Switzerland
Pädagogische Hochschule Steiermark, Graz	Austria
Universidade do Minho (UMinho)	Portugal
Palacký University in Olomouc (UP Olomouc)	Czech Republic

Table 1. The VOICES network.

A second aim of the network is to expand and deepen the goals, content, methods and learning materials for European teachers, and to develop a structure of a European master program. Teachers' work should be embedded in a professional continuum of lifelong learning, which includes initial teacher education, induction and ongoing professional development, as they cannot be expected to possess all the necessary skills on completing their initial teacher education. A master program for European teachers does not exist in any of the teacher training institutes involved. The network will develop an international platform for European teachers' knowledge sharing, the acquiring and disseminating of articles, project examples and research projects to promote high

performance and innovation, and to implement a European dimension in systems and practices.

The main VOICES' thematic research fields are: European diversity, European identity, European citizenship, European professionalism, language competences, new teacher education and early years development. A thematic research group carries out each issue.

In this paper we focus on the *Citizenship Education Research Group*. The group has been charged with proposing new horizons and new tools for teacher training, with a specific focus on Citizenship Education (CE) in a European perspective. The group includes members coming from five different countries (Italy, UK, Spain, The Netherlands and Belgium), and it involves students of teacher training, primary and secondary school teachers, university teachers and researchers specialized in a wide body of subjects such as Humanities, Geography, Biology and History. This is undoubtedly a potential source of difficulties, but also a stimulating and diverse challenging atmosphere for carrying on with the great job done during FACE-IT and ETsize, the VOICES' previous projects, (see [www.european-teachers.eu](http://www.european-teachers.eu)). During our preliminary working meeting, that took place in Brussels in 2013, we firstly stressed our starting key-points<sup>1</sup>:

- Citizenship is a consolidated issue within several European curricula and it is often viewed either as a cross-curricular competence or as a trans-disciplinary form of education.
- CE has to cope with a transforming and evolving idea of Europe that affects the meaning of being a European citizen in the 21st Century.

These two key-points are both sources of complexities and possibilities, and therefore, by starting from these basic targets, the group set its own research's drivers: *to refresh* and *to compare*.

Refreshing the idea of CE across a multi-national continent and throughout a transforming era, requires a previous work of comparison among practices and structures teachers use and

<sup>1</sup> These themes emerged after some workshop sections elicited using qualitative techniques such as mental map drawing, round tables and brainstorming.

develop within their own geographical, social and cultural contexts. Achieving these aims is, of course, a demanding challenge. Therefore we tried to plan our "Road to 2015" by pinpointing our general aims and tasks in three phases. The first one consists in:

- reflecting on the new horizons of CE across Europe;
- defining common theoretical and methodological frameworks on CE;

The research is structured on a series of parallel packages. This paper presents the results achieved by carrying out the first phase: a review of documents, declarations, reports and academic papers on CE in Europe, in order to produce an updated state-of-the-art.

As a second phase of the project, the research group aims to involve a number of schools and teachers coming from different geographical contexts, and makes an analysis of experiences, best practices and projects coming from the schools included in our network.

The final phase will consist in:

- developing a CE Toolkit for primary and secondary school teachers;
- promoting a teachers-oriented approach to CE across Europe.

## 2. Educating citizens: rethinking some pivots of Citizenship Education?

In this essay we read the pedagogical structure of CE by adopting some key-concepts of Political Geography: scale, State, region and place. Our goal is to stress the need for a geographical glance at CE across Europe.

In the last years a number of geographers have worked on the relationship between geographical education and CE stressing its pedagogical relevance (van der Schee, 2003; International Geographical Union, 2006) or its political dimension (Staheli, Attoh and Mitchell, 2013); starting from a national perspective (Reid and Scott, 2005), followed by a European one (Keane and Villanueva, 2009), to a global one.

This relationship directly concerns the political dimension of school education, above all if we think of citizenship as acting at

different scales: the local, the national, the supra national and the global ones. In the contemporary debate two distinguished voices stressed some relevant issues regarding citizenship as a multi-scale concept: from a pedagogical point of view, Morin (2000) claimed the need to teach “*la citoyenneté terrestre*” both as a political and pedagogical attempt to build mutual relationships between humans and society and to think the global community as the only possible “citizenship horizon”. Habermas (2012) recently argued that Europe is facing a political transition due to the crisis of the “*nation state*” and that the Union has to decide between transnational democracy and post-democratic executive federalism. At the same time he asserted that we should “continue to cling to the European Union” (ivi, p. 1) against the “defeatism of the Eurosceptics” (ivi, p. 13), and that we should keep in mind that the “goal of a democratic constitution of world society calls for the creation of a community of world citizens” (ivi, p. 58). In other words we should consider ourselves as post-cosmopolitan citizens (Dobson, 2006).

Therefore, beyond the general agreement on CE’s structures, and beyond the mature legitimization of CE as a school subject, primary and secondary schools teachers and educators have to deal with the changing meanings societies and communities give to citizenship, identity, culture and belongings, as claimed by Habermas and Morin. Referring to this challenge, some years ago, Banks (2004) stressed the quest for common values in CE by arguing that: “the increasing racial, ethnic, cultural and language diversity in national states throughout the world, and the growing recognition and legitimating of diversity, are causing educators to rethink citizenship education” (Banks, 2004, p. 3). This perspective helps us to understand that the “educator’s role is to help students to better understand their cultural knowledge, to learn the consequences of embracing it, and to understand how it relates to mainstream academic knowledge, popular knowledge, and to the knowledge they need to survive and to participate effectively in their cultural communities, other cultural communities, the mainstream culture and in the global community” (ivi, p. 13).

The quest for common values and the consideration of teachers and educators as socio-political actors are two key targets in the promotion of CE not just as a school subject, as it is often considered, but as a mighty driver of the Europeanization process. But before facing this challenge we need to rethink some pivotal axes of CE in the contemporary socio-political context.

According to Banks (2004), we can affirm that an important goal of CE in a democratic multicultural society is to help students acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to make reflective decisions and to take actions to improve democracy and justice. Therefore, teachers in multicultural societies must teach the toleration and recognition of cultural differences. This is in line with the official declaration of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers which stated that: “democracy is best learned in a democratic setting where participation is encouraged, where views can be expressed openly and discussed, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, and where there is fairness and justice” (2010).

These visions on CE point out two crucial overlaps that regard the education of European citizens. The first one concerns the difference between national and supra-national horizons. In fact, insomuch as CE has recently gained a concrete *status* within a number of European texts and syllabus, it remains linked to the Westphalian idea of nation-state or, in some cases, to the regional scale. CE refers mainly to actions, responsibilities, rights and duties at national or regional levels, while the European one and global one remain implicit, in fact: “there is no formal status as global citizen, although we are all holders of human rights. There is coverage of human rights within the official curriculum, but an individual’s status as a holder of universal human rights and an exploration of what this might mean in terms of global citizenship remains implicit” (Osler, 2011, p. 7).

The second overlap refers to the distance between subjects and society; this gap directly affects the legal meaning of “being” and “educating” citizens. As already mentioned, CE in the 21st century has to cope with the changing nature of citizenship as a political, social and legal term, in fact, as Castles pointed out, the principle of being a citizen of just one nation state no longer corresponds in reality for

millions of people who move across borders and belong in various ways to multiple places (Castles, 2004). Heater and Faulks have named it *multiple citizenship*: “Multiple citizenship suggest, in contrast to purely stated centred citizenship, that rights and responsibilities must reach across a range of political institutions ranging from the local to the global. If we are to take seriously the idea that all humans are equal, then we must embrace a citizenship that is internationalist and multi-layered in its obligations” (Faulks, 2006, pp. 132-133). Heater, apart from considering that people belong to different political scales (from local to global), also highlights the idea of belonging to groups of identity or groups with common life objectives, sharing their allegiances to ideals, groups or institutions, both below and above the state, and which every person can join during just periods of time (Heater, 2004, p. 195).

Within this complex framework, as both teachers and academics, we have to stimulate the use of a dialogic or conversational pedagogy, which stresses the need for a renewed view of CE.

The brand new tasks CE has to cope with, that is to face the multi-scale nature of citizenship (individual, national and European and even global), has been discussed by other authors. Feinberg and McNonough (2005) remind us that both local cultural allegiance and national loyalty are outdated ideals. According to this cosmopolitan view the greatest need is to establish global objects of loyalty that supersede local and national ones. Nevertheless, according to Osler (2011) and within the EU Member States this binary between education for national and global citizenship is troubled by the issue of European citizenship and belonging. Nuhoglu Soysal tried to point out the dimensions that, nowadays, separate the former idea of national CE from a renewed European one: “three qualities strike one about this formulation of European identity, and distinguish it from national identity, the type of identity we are most familiar with. First unlike national identities that locate their legitimacy in deeply rooted histories, cultures or territories, Europe is not past-oriented: it is future oriented” (Nuhoglu Soysal, 2006, p. 34). This framework reminds us of the well known, but not easy to achieve, vision

of Beck (2000) and Habermas (1996) that there is no reason why there should necessarily be a tension between education for cosmopolitan citizenship and education for European citizenship. Citizens of EU Member States enjoy the benefits of European citizenship, and these citizens need to learn about their rights and obligations as European citizens (Osler, 2011, p. 3)

This approach brings us to the emerging idea of a plural citizenship across the EU, following the awareness that, as already mentioned, in the contemporary historical and geographical contexts, being a citizen of the so-called Westphalian model no longer corresponds with the daily experience of millions of people who belong to different places even crossing national boundaries. These political processes entail the need to rethink CE and “to include a kind of civic education that will prepare students to function within as well as across nations throughout the world, as well as the number of citizens in the world who are spending parts of their lives in different nation-state who have commitments to multiple places,” (Banks, 2004, p. 7).

We aim to promote this critical approach even to methods, didactics and practices. In fact in most cases syllabuses, texts, textbooks and teachers tend to trivialize the historical and political consequences of the Europeanization process, presenting Europe as a taking-for-granted object, rather than as a process built through the encounter, and in some cases through the clash between different social and cultural systems. We should foster the awareness that nowadays, as European citizens, we must deal with a pluralistic idea of citizenship due to the meeting of different social systems and to the coexistence, in the same space, of a number of overlapping socio-economic statuses: two phenomena depending on the recent evolutions of the so-called “enlargement” process. Banks criticizes this trivialization of Europe “because they [teachers] seem to forget that what is celebrated as the European legacy was born out of competition as much as cohesion. Europe’s history is about more than commonality; it is often about conflict and that should be admitted” (Banks, 2004, p. 7).

This provocative sentence reminds us that the Europeanization process, and above all the

construction of a European citizenship, should be presented as a complex challenge and that it has to be taught by stressing the historical and contemporary transitions our countries are going through.

### 3. The institutional framework: CE as a school subject

Within the last ten years several national school systems have incorporated CE as a part of their curricula. This incorporation has been carried out according to the EU 2007-2013 *Europe for Citizen Programme*, which aims to promote the Europeanization process through formal and informal education, as declared by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in 2012: “imparting the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable to young people to become active citizens with the ability to shape the future of our democratic societies in Europe is one of the principal challenges faced by education systems in the 21st century. CE is one of the principal means by which European countries help young people acquire the social and civic competences they will need in their future lives”. (EACEA, 2012, p. 97).

CITIZENSHIP IN THE CURRICULA	COUNTRIES
Separate subject at secondary level	Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, United Kingdom (England)
Separate subject at primary and secondary level	Estonia, France, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Spain
Not a separate subject at either primary or secondary level	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Sweden, United Kingdom (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales)

Table 2. Citizenship in the curricula across Europe. Source: EACEA 2012.

The periodic reports of EACEA (2005 and 2012) show a number of interesting issues regarding the “formal” status of CE across Europe. In general terms it is declared that: “very few countries have defined a set of common competences directly linked to citizenship that all newly-qualified secondary teachers should acquire, even though a majority of countries has now conferred a cross-curricular status on elements of this subject area”. (EACEA, 2012, p. 15). More in detail the 2012 report clearly shows that CE is part of the curriculum within a large number of European countries (Table 2), and that national curricula adopted different kind of approaches in order to integrate traditional subjects, such as Geography and History, with cross-disciplinary knowledge and education, such as CE. Despite the evidence that, in the vast majority of countries, CE is included at all levels of education, by reading the text we can underline that elements related to CE are embedded “in the general objectives and values of the education system but there are no requirements for subject-based citizenship teaching nor introducing it through a cross-curricular approach” (ivi, p. 18). This dissociation is one of the most relevant weaknesses of CE as a subject among the contemporary European school systems. Focusing on the formal position and role of CE within national curricula we can list three main approaches: CE is defined as a stand-alone subject; it is integrated into one or more subjects or curriculum areas; and it is declared, and taught, as a cross-curricular education. These are not separate and incompatible visions; in fact a large number of legislators combined more than one approach to CE. Nevertheless the Eurydice Report underlines a number of very interesting points regarding how CE is taught within national contexts: “when CE is taught as a separate subject, it is provided more often at secondary than at primary level. [...] In some cases, schools may decide which specific approach to use to deliver CE. [...] CE curricula in European countries cover a wide and very comprehensive range of objectives, knowledge and skills” (ivi, p. 38). Such kinds of emerging differences can be noted even if we analyse objectives and tasks conferred to CE within the national curricula, although there is a collective agreement on the ethical value of CE and on its

main aim: to foster students' sense of local, national and European citizenship. As a Research Group we are reading these official documents and assessments in order to re-elaborate, in the upcoming phases of the research, the body of themes and issues (recommended by European institutions) that can inspire and guide our proposal.

#### 4. A common Portfolio?

In 2009 the European Commission declared: "a greater focus on practical skills, a learning outcomes approach and new methods of assessment supported by the continuing development of teachers' knowledge and skills, are all crucial to the successful implementation of key competences. Furthermore, the European framework also demands greater opportunities for students to actively participate in, for example, school-based activities with employers, youth groups, cultural activities and civil society organisations" (European Commission, 2009, in EACEA, 2012).

The discussion on teachers' competences and training is a central topic if we aim to develop a common background for CE across Europe, moreover this is also a crucial theme of VOICES, because the network's main goal is to build some guidelines, or even a critical portfolio, for upcoming European teachers. We must consider that "generally, teachers of CE at primary level are generalists, that is, they are qualified to teach all or most curriculum subjects. As a rule, the teaching skills required are common for all generalist teachers. In contrast, at secondary level, teachers of citizenship are specialists, usually qualified to teach one or two curriculum subjects (EACEA, 2012, p. 87). Then, the qualifications required to teach CE at primary level are not specific, while at secondary level they are subject oriented. Furthermore, we can, also, observe that Geographical Education is considered as playing a key-role in CE's teacher training.

Finally we would like to point out the recent guidelines proposed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (2010). According to these

guidelines national and European institutions should work on ten key-aims useful to build a common CE portfolio for teachers and schools across Europe:

1. Social, political and civic institutions.
2. Respect for and safeguarding the environment.
3. Defending one's own point of view.
4. Conflict resolution.
5. Citizens' rights and responsibilities.
6. Participation in the local community.
7. Critical and independent thinking.
8. Participation in school life.
9. Effective strategies to combat racism and xenophobia.
10. Future political engagement

#### 5. A socio-pedagogical agenda

From a general point of view, as a Research Group, we aim to conceptualize a set of guidelines that can give teachers common values, skills and references to work on CE across Europe. Nevertheless this demanding challenge should be integrated with an analysis of the specificity of each social, cultural and geographical context. Also we move away from the idea of providing recipes; contrary we think in guidelines as orientations that are critical. In fact "EU education policies assume the idea that a common pan-European "culture" is inherent and inherited, despite the rhetoric of "unity in diversity". These debates leave unexamined the ways in which Member States intertwine calls for a European and intercultural dimension with their existing national agenda which is the main focus of this comparative curriculum analysis". (Faas, 2011, p. 472).

Parker (2004) showed a possible way to develop this comparative analysis working both on social contexts and subject matters. Comparing different contexts does not mean just reading national curricula in order to stress common values, skills and aims, it means starting from local and national backgrounds looking at the differences and the communalities between the social and cultural *milieus* we meet every day as European citizens. In other words



“to educate students to be effective citizens in their communities, nation-state, and in the world community it is important to revise the CE curriculum in substantial ways so that it reflects the complex national identities that are emerging in nation-states throughout the world that reflect the growing diversity within them” (Banks, 2004, p. 13).

To educate effective citizens means, above all, thinking of students as active and operative subjects within their own lifetime places and their socio-cultural environments. This is the socio-pedagogical agenda schools should follow: as they are the places where students experience this activism and participation as citizens.

Reading the 2012 Eurydice Report, in the previous paragraph, we underlined how “the objectives most usually recommended in national curricula throughout all school levels relate to “developing values, attitudes and behaviours”. The least recommended is the “active participation and involvement of students in school and at community level”, which is more often addressed at secondary than at primary level. From primary level, students must develop knowledge in various different areas related to citizenship. For instance, among the most recommended themes are the “national socio-political system”, “democratic values” and “tolerance and anti-discrimination” (EACEA, 2012, p. 38). These statements emphasize the role of schools as socio-political actors. In fact one of the emerging issues of the last Eurydice Report is the need to activate three different actors, or even scales, in CE: students, families and schools, each one of them viewed as an active player both in local and in supra-local contexts.

We should view schools as places where students, teachers and family can play their own role of citizens through the exercise of their agency, through their active involvement in debates, action-projects and decision-making processes. One of most common and practical ways to experience citizenship at school is through the election or nomination of class representatives or representatives to the student council or school governing bodies.

EACEA listed some priorities that institutions can follow to engage schools, teachers, families and students in concrete practices of citizenship within local contexts.

These priorities regard national curricula that should offer “links with the community or on offering experiences outside school” (ivi, p. 13), and political structures that should provide “students with opportunities to elect representatives and the creation of forums for discussion on matters either strictly related to school issues or on any other social matter directly concerning children and young people” (ibidem); and, finally, nationwide programmes and projects that should be focused, for instance, “on working with the local community; finding out about or experiencing democratic participation in society; or on topical issues such as environmental protection, or cooperation between generations and nations” (ibidem).

## 6. A way to proceed not to conclude

VOICES is a long term project. We are just carrying out the first phase and therefore we would conclude this essay by resuming a few emerging considerations about new horizons regarding CE in Europe, and by proposing a “geographical glance” at CE.

In the first part we evoked the challenge of reading CE in theoretical terms, and we stressed the need to refresh CE through a critical reading of its political and social relevance in contemporary local, national and supra-national contexts (specially the European one), adopting a perspective able to consider schools as active subjects. As geographers we think that a possible strategy to achieve these tasks is by scaling CE, or in other words by studying and teaching citizenship as a multi-scale category, applicable to different social and cultural contexts, and not as a concept trapped by dialogical oppositions between subject and society, local and national, national and supra-national, juridical and identity. The following phase of the project will be the development of a comparative analysis of teachers’ practices and strategies in different local, regional and national contexts, aiming to contribute, with renewed ideas, to the debate on this promising field of research.

## Acknowledgements

This paper was presented at the EUGEO 2013

Conference in Rome (September 2013). We would like to thank all the members of VOICES for the consistent work they are carrying out.

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