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Is it really necessary to train teachers to teach civic education?

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In the late 1970s the idea of citizenship fell out of fashion amongst politicians. Fifteen years later, however, this notion has started to resurface in political speeches from all parts of the political spectrum (Kymlicka, 1999, p. 10). Demands to put civic education at the centre of modern education have become louder and louder (Heater, 1990, p. 342). Most European countries have therefore started to design new programmes for civic education: in Eastern Europe, in order to replace the old ideology which dictated civic education, in the West because of political apathy, growing intolerance, xenophobia, racism, violence and terrorism, as well as the disillusionment of young people over increasing poverty and inequality. People, no doubt, learn to become responsible citizens through the influence of their family, their immediate environment, from churches and from many other groups and institutions within civil society. Schools are not the only, and probably not even the most important, institutions in which civil rights and responsibilities can be learned, but in the larger picture they hold a very special position. All other institutions can supplement, but not replace, the civic education that can be delivered at school (Kymlicka, 1999, p. 16-19). Only schools can provide an insight into the complexity of social interrelations, and help develop skills for a tolerant coexistence with others, not only by telling students how to behave but also by insisting on having students of various nationalities, religions, traditions, cultures and abilities sitting together in one class - cooperating on their projects and thus developing an understanding of themselves, their social identities, loyalties and prejudices as well as a respect for others and their different values.

However, advocating and arguing the case for civic education often remains at only the declarative level. It is not just a matter of the number of hours dedicated to civic education in schools. Teaching this subject, in countries where it is part of the curriculum, is often left without any organised teacher training and its content is often considered less important than other subjects within this field.

The intention of this paper is to highlight some aspects within this area, and to underline some issues teachers should consider in order to achieve results related to this field. In this way I wish to draw attention to the need for quality teacher training, not only to ensure better teaching, but also to give teachers a reason to take this subject seriously and with due respect. In the light of the Slovenian experience (it is not much different elsewhere), I believe that existing attitudes result from the fact that there are no special requirements for teachers of this subject, and that not only other teachers and students perceive this subject as second rate, but teachers in the field see it as such as well.

The link between civic education, the school ethos and other subjects

Developing children's skills in order that they can participate more autonomously in society is the duty and responsibility of every democratic country. Furthermore, most countries are bound by various international agreements and resolutions to try to do so. Schools can develop these skills in many different ways.

Firstly in their selection of teaching contents: squabbles over the contents of subjects such as history, and instruction in the learning of a 'mother tongue', become understandable

when one realises that the purpose of these subjects is not just to pass on specific knowledge, but also to develop citizenship education. These subjects can have an even stronger civic component than those which are declared as such, because their impact is less obvious. Results are achieved in the way facts are presented and interrelated, underlined or left out.

Another way of developing civic skills is in the selection of teaching methods - how subjects are taught, which methods are applied, what kind of assessment is taking place, how students are encouraged - all this has a broader educational impact, and determines the kind of people we are trying to mould.

Then there is the 'hidden curriculum'. While the first two methods offer a means to create a civic impact through teaching, this is more about the effects of the teacher's personality, and the mechanism of discipline as implemented by schools. I refer here to the views, ideas and opinions students receive in school meetings, from their relationship with teachers, from the way their classrooms are organised, in other words, from the school ethos. The teacher should not be forgotten in this context: he or she is always the person who most affects students by his or her behaviour, their way of teaching, the manner in which they argue their views and their own personality.

Finally, there is also the most obvious way of teaching civic education, in the form of specific subjects that have broader education as their main purpose and goal. In Slovenia this subject is called Civic Education and Ethics. Students in years 7 and 8 study it for one hour per week. The objective of this subject is to prepare children for active, responsible and competent participation in society. As the syllabus states, students here 'learn about society, consider their experiences and develop skills to understand and solve ethical questions' (Drzavljansk, 1999, p. 4). It is necessary to add, however, that the aims of this subject are broader than its title suggests. The subject should indeed prepare children to become citizens, based around 'their existing knowledge of social issues and their awareness of ethical questions into whole, internally harmonized and outwardly open interpretive units' (ibid.), and at the same time compensate for the lack of a social science curriculum in Slovenian primary schools by giving children an opportunity to talk about and reflect on their adolescent problems. Contemplating the problems of young people together with other social issues can accelerate 'development of the ability and construction of social and moral thinking, skills, motivation, interest for ethical and social questions, value orientation and identity' (ibid.).

These points about the implementation of civic education have at least two implications. Firstly, like it or not, civic education is, in its content and method of work, included within all subjects at school. Secondly, a specific subject in the school curriculum can only mean a more focused and systematic approach to helping students develop into citizens, and can add and broaden the topics discussed in other school subjects. On the other hand, such a subject is not, and cannot be, just another subject within the school curriculum. It represents the educational concept of the whole school, and is closely linked to general educational goals. Consequently, such an education can be effective only if the whole school, and everyone working within it, adheres to the principles it represents. Civic education is thus a matter for the whole school and its management. It prepares children not only for their future role in society, but also for the present, as their life is happening now, during the time of their schooling.

The value aspect of civic education

Civic education is about values, and as such is open to indoctrination and manipulation. The key question is therefore how to develop skills for active citizenship without imposing one's views and values on students. Searching for the right answers should start with the question of what all citizens have in common, what values are necessary for living together in one country, and what values are generally acceptable and desirable in a democratic society. The question itself implies that public schooling today cannot be an extension of a particular value system, considered as the only one acceptable, imposing its code of values and denying differences between people with regard to their conceptions of life, views and opinions about what is good for themselves. On the contrary, it should begin at the highest level of citizens' consent, taking into account different traditions and opinions, as well as common civic principles which have developed through history, and are today the building blocks of our society. Looking at the key documents and papers agreed upon by the international community, this is what we find in the human and children's rights charters. The same concerns are also underlined by the Council of Europe, who recommend that international agreements and conventions be used as the key reference in the classroom, and suggest to teachers that they avoid conflict by encouraging discussions about various problems and pointing out potential dilemmas and questions. In this context, human rights should be the basic principle of civic education (Audiger) or rather, in civic education as well as elsewhere where values are an important issue, human rights should always be the main reference point (Starkey, 1991, p. 22). Education in Slovenia has been conceptualized in a similar way. In the introduction to the White Paper on education in Slovenia, the founding authority for legislation in education, it is stated that the concept of the Slovenian school system needs to draw on the 'common European heritage of political, cultural and moral values as acknowledged in human rights, the legal state, pluralistic democracy, tolerance and solidarity' (Krek, 1995, p. 5).

Such guidelines for civic education do not make teaching this subject any easier. In my opinion civic education is one of the hardest subjects to teach in primary school, not so much because the subject is hard to grasp, or because it is very broad, requiring a good knowledge of the social sciences, but because it does have a considerable scope, and is as such difficult to teach. However, arguing that this is one of the most challenging fields in education, I wish to touch upon the 'value aspect' of education, since the teacher has to broach, in a planned and systematic way, delicate issues and questions. Discussions, students' reactions and their views and values cannot be planned in advance, and it is even harder to change them, since students take an instant dislike to anything that sounds like moral education.

Instructing teachers to follow human and children's rights charters as a basic working principle, and to refer to them in conflict situations, is unfortunately not very helpful in real life. Human rights are contradictory (see Cerar, 1996): parents' rights are in conflict with students' rights, teachers' rights are in conflict with students' rights, rights of the individual are in conflict with group rights, where 'in the name of common group features it is prescribed what is good for each individual member of such group' (Mocnik, 1994, p. 160-161).

There are other problems with human rights that teachers cannot avoid. Human rights are based on reason, but we also experience the world through feelings and intuition. We do

think rationally, but our actions are also subject to prejudices and clichés, which often drive us into situations that have very little to do with sense and reason. This makes education relating to human rights even more complicated. The teacher is faced not only with the prejudices and clichés of students, which must be considered, but also with their own, which they might not even be aware of.

Civic education cannot avoid such contradictions. Not only that, its aim is to articulate these and thus provide an insight into the complexity of social relations. By doing so it also helps to develop skills for living together tolerantly. Tolerance is not an excuse for ignorance, passivity, or lack of arguments about why something is not and should not be acceptable, but addresses issues of understanding and the ability to judge what is acceptable and what is not. Because of such dilemmas school can succeed in its educational role only if it forces a dialogue upon students, making them not only learn about values important to others but also to recognise their own attitudes. They should become aware of the necessity to create and respect rules of coexistence, and understand the need for institutionalised mechanisms that are able to govern these rules. In this regard such a dialogue equates to a search for the fairest way to negotiate an agreement between opposing views. For this reason we should put at the centre of our thinking about successful civic education the process of education. Not only *what* and *why*, but *how*. Civic education can prove successful only in a democratic school that accepts different views and maintains neutrality, supports known and defined ways of behaviour and communication, and respects both personal integrity and human rights.

Key didactic elements

The aim of civic education is to develop individuals who:

- have knowledge concerning public affairs,
- have a citizen standpoint, meaning the ability to understand oneself, one's social identity, loyalties, prejudices, together with respect for others and their values;
- have the skills to participate in the political arena - basic intellectual abilities such as gathering information, organising and evaluating data and the ability to argue and discuss, judge, communicate and act (Heater, 1990, 336-338).

Thus, civic education cannot be confined to the teaching and learning of information regarding the functioning of society. By focusing only on this aspect of the learning process civic education cannot be fully effective. It is true that everybody needs to learn how society functions and how an individual can participate in it and promote their own interests. More important, however, is that individuals should develop the competence to participate, to take a stand, to act independently and responsibly. Knowledge about citizenship is useful only if it helps to develop a citizenship viewpoint - which is no more than a collection of prejudices if not based on understanding. To act one has to be guided from a standpoint which is totally useless, unless based on knowledge (ibid, p. 336-337). For an active, responsible and competent participation in society students have to develop such skills.

In order to achieve this goal it is necessary to apply appropriate methods of work, the most obvious perhaps playing the least important role. Successful methods are probably various forms of team work, role-playing, research projects, visits to various institutions (provided they follow serious preparation and evaluation), the organisation of meetings

and the publishing of school magazines. The guiding principle for all such methods should always be the independence of students, their active participation rather than passive receiving of information, and problems encountered on the way should be seen as useful and even desirable. By discussing problems encountered, students will not only acquire skills needed in public life but also be better placed to understand their role in society.

It is very important that teacher does not impose his or her views on students, but rather encourages them by means of asking questions relating to potentially contradictory statements. The teacher's task is to reflect the situation in the classroom, at the level of personal relationships, as well as to examine what has been discussed. The limits of what is allowed and what is not are set by the framework of both human and children's rights. In other words the teacher has to create an environment for discussion where an individual and his or her values and views are respected, and where there is no room for discrimination and pressure. The teacher has also to be aware of the right to privacy. They have no right to be overly inquisitive, and should never allow students to pry into the private affairs of others. The teacher's task is to encourage both thinking about oneself and those rules which arise from human interactions in society, but they should never pressurise students to tell more about themselves than they are willing to.

In civic education it is also important to keep lessons focused on students' personal experiences, to begin from an understanding of their own position in society, their values and views, and only from there progress towards discussions centred upon issues connected with society in general, and differences in individual experiences. The idea of such an education is not to 'drown' an individual in issues relating to society, but to start from an understanding of themselves, their own views, values and prejudices, and from there to develop understanding of the views, values and prejudices of other people. The goals of civic education are not just to teach some basic citizen virtues, including respect for the law and solidarity, but also to develop critical thinking, questioning the norms and fixed beliefs that appear on the surface beyond questioning, and thus to develop an interest in active participation in common affairs. This can only be achieved by starting from the individual's own experiences and their understanding of their role in society.

Teacher training

In Slovenia, teaching civic education has a long tradition, albeit in a different political environment. In 1952, when religious instruction was abolished in all schools, it was replaced by a subject that dealt with moral issues and education from the socialist point of view, with the intention of promoting appropriate civic education. In primary school, it was taught as a subject for one hour each week in years 7 and 8, but its topics had been included in other subjects and taught throughout the whole primary school curriculum. During the first five years of primary education the person responsible for this education would be the class teacher. In Year 6 this responsibility was passed on to the teacher of Slovenian, and for Years 7 and 8 it would become the task of the 'School Board' to find a suitable teacher who had some social-moral skills, and who had a very good understanding of the adolescent students they needed to mould into an adult (Osnovna sola, 1973, p. 158).

The subject was often criticised, mainly because of its ideological orientation. The fact is that lessons followed a model of correct thinking and speaking within clearly set norms.

Students were expected to learn a prescribed set of values, which in other words meant that this subject could not be implemented without some forms of moral pressure, very similar to moral or religious education. Teacher training for this subject had also been neglected. A proposal to employ academics and to secure funds to start an undergraduate programme for this subject within the Faculty of Education in Maribor in 1973 was rejected with the argument there was no need for 'red religion teachers (Cajnko, 1976, p. 18). It later became approved when the Faculty of Education intervened. It was first introduced in the academic year 1974/75.

It is very interesting that the subject was assigned great importance, as it represented a major means of forming a 'socialist person'. Nevertheless, teacher training in this field began very late in the day, and only in Maribor, not in Ljubljana where another Faculty of Education was located. Furthermore, the study programme in Maribor soon reinvented itself as a sociology programme. Thus, the subject was very rarely taught by a specifically qualified teacher (only about 6%). It was usually left to teachers of geography and history, or at times psychology, sociology, sciences, arts or languages (Logar, 1990, p. 239). Research shows that it was usually left to beginners, or those who did not have enough hours for full employment, and that most teachers dodged it if they could.

A similar attitude has remained to this day. After gaining independence in 1991, and holding its first democratic elections, Slovenia has also changed school legislation and the school curriculum. Instead of a subject with a clear ideological orientation we designed a new subject which draws on our common European heritage of political, cultural and moral values as reflected in human rights, legal state, pluralistic democracy, tolerance and solidarity. As mentioned before, the subject is called Civic Education and Ethics and is taught one hour per week in Year 7 and Year 8 in the primary school. The subject is still assigned great importance, yet teachers of this compulsory subject are still the only ones who are not required to undergo any special training. This puts them and the subject on the back shelf. Despite all declarations to the contrary, the subject is still considered inferior. It is clear this area will not prosper and develop until such a time when it becomes acquires and equal status with other subjects. To become equal, however, teachers need to acquire the appropriate status and knowledge which can be achieved only if they get appropriate training.

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