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Citizenship in Slovenia: statements and contents for development

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Introduction

The complex interrelationships demanded by modern society and the greater incorporation of young people into active social life require social knowledge to become one of the key parts of the curriculum, at all stages of schooling. The understanding of complex social mechanisms and processes, and also of one's individual's position in basic and extended social groups, is now essential for successful understanding of, and for overcoming, obstacles that we encounter in daily life. The need to understand social processes in Slovenia is emphasised by our having witnessed great social changes, which have influenced the reformation of Europe and the whole world, as well as our country itself, during recent years. All this confirms the need for a subject, or a definition of curriculum content, which will demonstrate, explain to and help young people in secondary education solve complex social problems.

Social changes dictate the need for contemporary knowledge

Sociological knowledge is demonstrated by the activity and process of society, and therefore while it should not be necessary to prove it, we may need to assert that sociological subjects themselves have gone through not only contextual changes but also changes in status.

Each school subject has at least two determinants in the curriculum that define its position:
- the contents of subject to which the learner will be exposed and
- the purpose of the subject itself.

The content of the subject proves its role in a curriculum when the curriculum is based on hypotheses about what needs to be known at each stage of schooling - kindergarten, primary school, grammar school or vocational training. The basic question here is what and how do we want to give the young at each stage of schooling.

The question is not simple. There has always been a debate about what we want to give to the young. There are great piles of suggestions that include different and similar contexts and areas. Choices were made to select contexts and areas that were assumed to be necessary for learners to know, on the basis of tradition, of the learners' stage of development and the needs of the greater society. This procedure sufficed up to the point where information technology, and processes of information accumulation, opened up much greater content. The choice of which basic information to include has become very difficult with the increasing numbers and sources of information. At the same time questions were asked about whether this was necessary, because of the growing ease of access to all or almost all sources of information needed.

The basic question of forming a curriculum has been diverted from the content to the question 'why?' Why do we have to give particular knowledge to the learner? Why must

she/he acquire it? These questions diverted us from contents to goals. There is no reason to doubt that a part of any curriculum must be created in order to understand social processes and the functioning of society. Nevertheless, it is still surprising to realise that the same opinion may be held in almost all the science disciplines, as they also wish to transmit their understanding to the younger generations. They equally find the contents and areas they develop so obvious that, just as sociologists, they ask themselves how anyone could overlook their contents and sphere.

Despite our belief in the importance of the social sphere, the sociological sciences need to be part of a more thorough reflection. A radical revision is necessary because it appears that sociological subjects only offer something that we already know, and something we have had to learn in different social situations throughout our lives. It also sometimes seems that the sociologist offers simply common-sense statements, which are little more than pragmatic observations of modern life. Other observers often do not understand that the continuous changes of contents and of emphases in sociological knowledge are a consequence of development in this field. They see it as an undeveloped field with contents adapted to contemporary social conditions. It may therefore appear that these are subjects that have nothing to offer that cannot be learned simply through experience of life. The reproach that it is about adaptation to everyday conditions is particularly dangerous, as it is not far from the thesis that these are subjects that offer a 'today this, tomorrow that, ideology', which makes it an ideological subject for which there is no place in modern society and its schools.

This concept of the ideology of subjects within the sociological sphere has been one that has most changed the position of the subject in the curriculum, and the status of sociological subjects. But it can be argued that some subjects were introduced for ideological reasons, and given plenty of time, while at the same time other sociological disciplines were thrown out of the curriculum (the position of the sociology itself for example).

Apart from these difficulties in forming the curriculum, it seems that a firm basis for sociological knowledge is even more essential today. We need consensus about, at least, the basic knowledge from sociology that is required. The question is the degree to which scientific disciplines should take part in defining the sociological sphere. Not only for reasons of tradition, but also because of the need to locate social knowledge in time and place, it means that history and geography should be included within this area. Sociology itself should also be included because of its nature: for example, its concerns with understanding society, social processes and social interaction. Nevertheless, the contradictory nature of sociology does not allow a simple transmission of this into school practice. We can understand sociology as the discipline that is constantly critical towards social processes and phenomena, or we can emphasise its 'engineering' nature, a science that describes and explains social existence. This contradiction demands that in the process of forming this knowledge as a school subject we deal with certain questions, such as:

- What should really be emphasised?

- Which are global and partial goals?

- What do we want to achieve through the school subject?

It may seem that the dilemma can be solved by choosing a little bit of everything - we select both the critical and the engineering nature of sociological knowledge. Knowledge includes an understanding of the learners' stages of development and their needs in professional and vocational training, and the need to develop their own ability to become orientated in their social life. It is necessary, therefore, to develop critical awareness of sociological knowledge. On the other hand, we want to introduce knowledge of the existing social system, because only through knowing what it is does it become possible to develop independent analysis.

Citizenship education is an essential part of sociological knowledge at school. The goal of citizenship education is to develop knowledge about social structures and basic social processes. It derives from the knowledge base of the special and periodical dimensions of social processes. The knowledge chosen enables the individual to orientate within the society in which he or she will live, and to develop attitudes towards the social processes on the basis of the knowledge they possess.

There is no random model that could be transferred to Slovene society

Reviewing foreign curricula suggests that all curricula, at all stages of schooling, contain knowledge about contemporary society and basic knowledge about social processes. They only differ in the design of the subject. American curricula, for example, particularly contain knowledge about current society. A review of curricular goals shows that they introduce the existence of the social and also develop uniqueness and belief in the rationality of social existence. This scheme of a school subject is based on needs to form the American state: with so many ethnically different citizens it was necessary to strengthen the belief in the power and rationality of the American state.

To generalise, the German case may be seen as rather different. Here confidence in the state as representative of the whole of society is one of the goals in education and upbringing in German society and culture. Therefore it is not necessary to focus on the existence and the power of the country. Knowledge about society is therefore tied particularly to knowledge about the political system, and the goal is to introduce the basic elements of citizen's rights and obligations. Only recently (following the phenomena of xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance of difference) has action against intolerance become included in the curriculum.

From a Slovenian perspective the proposed English model may be the most appropriate, in introducing the current social system (politically and economically). It also gives attention to important sociological knowledge. If this basic sociological knowledge is included, then these contents are linked with the introduction of other cultures and to problems of social difference. Both contents are closely linked to the needs of current Anglo-Saxon society. The number of newcomers to Britain makes it important to develop elements of tolerance and understanding of other cultures, and also to develop knowledge about membership of one's own culture at the same time. On the other hand, many economic changes and crises over a period of time led to different attitudes towards deviational behaviour.
We may conclude that there is no model from another country that could be directly transferred into Slovene society and the Slovene school system, if we focus on the content of citizenship education.

The goals and contents of citizenship education

The goals and the contents of citizen education are based on extensions of knowledge from the spheres of history and geography. Only all three contents together - citizenship education, history and geography - can realise the essential goals of the subject. These include knowledge about the spatial and temporal aspects of social processes, and also the legality of these social processes, which are especially important in terms of developing every individual's orientation in social life. The achievement of the accepted goals of citizenship education demands a knowledge of the processes of socialisation; the relationship of the individual in society; the creation of social rules, norms and values; and an understanding of the differences between cultures in our society. This means knowing about the Slovene political system and understanding human rights and obligations in relation to it.

The citizenship education curriculum thus realises two major aims at the same time:

- it is an introduction to the contemporary political and economical system, and

- contributes towards the development of an understanding of those social procedures which are particularly important for each individual's social life.

The goal of each learner's work is also being clarified. Learners learn about the most topical subjects through knowledge they have already acquired, and the instruments they have developed as a basis for making judgements of social processes.

This accumulation of knowledge about current society, coupled with the capacity for making judgements on social processes, should develop confidence in membership of the Slovene nation and should also lead to the development of a political culture. This is the third major goal of the contents of a relevant curriculum.

Instead of a conclusion ...

Let me add something about naming this curriculum. All the names and expressions in Slovenia that contain the adjective 'state' and everything that refers to the state raise difficult points. Stane Južnič may have been right when he claimed that these terms could not be explained from an anthropological point of view. There is a, perhaps typically Slovene, opposition to the state and to everything belonging to it. This attitude may result from the history of the Slovenes, who have - despite a low number of representatives - survived and retained their own culture in all the different countries to which they have belonged. From this comes our opposition towards foreign authority and towards everything that is (or was) not Slovene. All this might be the consequence of being educated for a long time in a spirit in which the state represents the remains of history, and the future of the state is that it is going to soon die out. It seems that quite a period of time will have to pass before the words 'state' and 'national' will mean something more positive and lose their negative meanings.

When the creators of curriculum subjects, goals and their contents made different suggestions as to what should be the name of the science of society, what we now call sociology, none of the proposals and suggestions adequately described the goals and contents of the subject as well as 'citizenship education'. Its special role is to emphasise the state's creative tradition, and to present and develop those elements that contribute to the development of the political culture of an individual and of the nation. Citizenship

education has appeared in public discussion as one of the main goals of education, focused on developing those elements that are important for every citizen's education. The aim of citizenship education is also to realise a fourth major objective at the same time. This is to re-establish a relationship to the concept of political culture, which is much broader than pedagogy, but is especially about the education that helps to form citizens.

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