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Experiencing citizenship in primary classrooms

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Citizenship education in official documents in Portugal

The Comprehensive Law on the Education System (Law 46/86, published on October 14) stresses in its general principles that the education system 'contributes to the full and balanced development of individual personalities, encouraging the education of free, responsible, autonomous and supportive citizens' (article 2, §4). It also should 'develop democratic and pluralistic ideals which embody respect for others and their ideas and is open to dialogue and free exchange of opinions, forming citizens able to constructively criticise their social system and capable of working towards its progressive transformation' (article 2, §5). The system should be organised to 'ensure civic and moral education of young people' (article 3, c); 'ensure the right to be different with respect for individual personalities and ambitions and consideration and appreciation of different learning and cultures' (article 3, d). The objectives of basic education (article 7) also comprises several statements on citizenship education as for example in points f) and i): 'To develop national awareness open to realities in a context of universalistic humanism and international solidarity and cooperation; to further the acquisition of independent attitudes so as to develop citizens who are civically responsible and participate democratically in community life'.

How these statements should be implemented has been discussed over the last two decades and many attempts have been made. Initially the concept of personal and social development was widespread. Between 1996 and 2001 the essential competencies for basic education were the focus of wide-ranging debate. How to integrate citizenship education was at the heart of that discussion. Following this, official documents started to use the terms citizenship education, comprising not only civic education but also personal and social development and moral education.

The Decree-Law 6/2001 established the new curriculum organisation for basic education. One of its innovative features was to establish cross-curricular dimensions (*formações*) and non-subject areas (named 'non-subject specific' areas) beside the traditional subject areas or disciplines ('disciplinary' areas). Citizenship education is a cross-curricular area, presented as a very important transversal dimension. Together with the other three[1] cross-curricular dimensions, it is considered as a curriculum guiding principle in the article 3 d): 'Integration of citizenship education, as a cross curricular feature, in all areas curricular areas.'

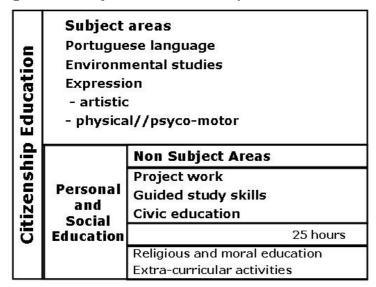Figure 1 and Table 1 being integral to the Decree-Law, clearly show in visual form the role of citizenship education. The table for the curriculum components and its organisation for primary education is presented in Figure 1.

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[1] The other cross-curricular areas are: Portuguese Language; Human Dimension of Work and Information and Communication Technologies (identified as an instrumental area).

Figure 1: First cycle: Curriculum components

Citizenship Education	**Subject areas** **Portuguese language** **Environmental studies** **Expression** - artistic - physical//psyco-motor	
	Personal and Social Education	**Non Subject Areas**
		Project work
		Guided study skills
		Civic education
		25 hours
	Religious and moral education Extra-curricular activities	

These areas should be developed in connections; related to disciplinary areas; using ICT; developing students autonomous work; and should be explicitly include in classroom curricular project.

To make more explicit the orientation of the Decree-Law, the General Directorate of Basic Education published an extensive document titled *National Curriculum for Basic Education: Essential Competencies* (*Currículo Nacional do Ensino Básico – Competências Essenciais*), which was based on a broad public discussion and on the implementation of the new guidelines in a set of schools over several years. This was not an easy task, but it seems that the ideas about citizenship education were not accurately translated from the Decree-Law, at least in its introduction and the sections common to all subjects. The term 'citizenship education' is never used. For example, the introduction states that there are cross-curricular themes and gives as an example health education, while civic education is presented as a cross-curricular area, but in fact civic education is a 'non-disciplinary' area. Citizenship education is a cross curricular dimension (the term used is '*formação*' – formation – that generally speaking means education) but it is not a theme.[2]

The chapter where the ten general key competencies for basic education are presented stresses the principles and values generated from the Comprehensive Law of Education System, which form the basis of the curriculum. Some of those principles are:

*   development and awareness of personal and social identity;
*   free, responsible and critical participation in civic life, with solidarity;
*   respecting and valuing individual and group differences related to belongings and options;
*   development of an ecological awareness to promote valuing and preserving the natural and cultural heritage;

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[2] However this did not influence the development of the document. Certainly this introduction was written when the document was already developed.

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- valuing the relational dimensions of learning and the ethical relationship principles with knowledge and people. (*National Curriculum for Basic Education: Key Competencies*, 2001, p 15).

Most of the ten General Essential Competencies established are related to citizenship education, but at least three of them are crucial: adopting appropriate problem-solving strategies and decision making strategies; carrying out activities independently, responsibly and creatively; and cooperating with others in common tasks and projects.   These competencies were largely discussed in the context of traditional subject matter, and the *National Curriculum for Basic Education: Essential Competencies* includes Specific Essential Competencies for each subject of the National Curriculum which derive from the General Essential Competencies. It also includes suggestions of *learning experiences* to develop the competencies in each subject in order to promote the general competencies children would have at the end of compulsory education.[3]

We analysed how those Specific Essential Competencies integrated citizenship education in general and specifically the competency 'cooperating with others in common tasks and projects'. The differences among the eleven subjects or subject areas (not including the three non-subject areas) are significant. Geography and Technological Education are those that seem to pay more attention to citizenship education, due to the explicit references to it. *'Cooperating with others'* is more often explicitly referred to in Environmental Education and in Physical Education. However the general conclusion is that the focus of Specific Essential Competencies is the set of competencies that directly include or could be related to the cognitive dimensions of the specific subject - those related to information and the process of its acquisition.

The study on citizenship education and primary education

This study was developed with cooperative teachers and prospective teachers. They knew the documents we analysed, and that the ideas stressed were the basis of our common understanding of citizenship education. It is also commonly assumed that the National Curriculum 'is geared to the use of teaching methods that encourage active learning (learning by doing and experimental learning), but this principle accommodates a variety of approaches' (Eurydice, 2002, p. 106). The 'learning experiences' are one item included in units and lessons plans in practice, as were active learning and discovery learning. Inquiry is more stressed than in the National Curriculum.

We wanted to know how teachers and primary education students implement active citizenship education in their practice, and the concrete perceptions they have about citizenship education. Additionally we tried to gain some insight into the influence of official documents and textbooks.

We gave or sent a letter to primary education teachers and prospective teachers - fourth-year students attending primary education courses who are involved in practice in primary schools (2003-2004 year) - to explain briefly our study and ask them to

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[3] Compulsory education comprises nine years; primary education includes the first four years.

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participate. We also asked the teachers to list the learning experiences they use in theirs schools/classrooms to promote citizenship education. The students were asked to include in their list the learning experiences they used and also those they observed the teachers using. All answers were submitted anonymously.

The nine teachers' answers varied from a few general statements to long lists of concrete learning experiences. The ten most cited learning experiences were:

- activities related to environment preservation - how to recycle (8)
- reflection/self and hetero-evaluation (6)
- group work (5)
- games (4)
- rules negotiation (4)
- field work/visits (3)
- elections/classroom assemblies (3)
- pair work (2)
- road traffic prevention (2)
- contacts with institutions (e g., security ones) (2).

Many other learning experiences were referred by only one teacher.

The students' lists were less divergent than those of the teachers. The ten most mentioned learning strategies were:

- group work (26)
- rules elaboration/negotiation (12)
- debates (9)
- field work /study visits (8)
- analysis of tales/stories/adequate texts (8)
- dialogue (7)
- helping colleagues (5)
- road traffic prevention (4)
- dilemmas discussion (4)
- games, voting and presentation to other students or community members (3)

Based on these lists we developed a Likert scale, including only the learning strategies mentioned in them. Some specific learning experiences were amalgamated into a more abstract learning experiences (we had not expected the citing of such experiences as *songs stressing values and attitudes* or concrete public rewards). We wanted to ascertain whether the teachers and students used and valued similar learning strategies, so each group filled in the same scale. This is presented in Table 1. The learning strategies are listed in alphabetic order.[4] Ten of the 13 teachers filled in the scale, but only 14 of the 32 students.

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[4] In the Portuguese language the order is different from the order presented here.

Table 1

Students		QUANTITATIVE SUMMARY OF ANSWERS	Teachers	
Importance	Freq. of Use	LEARNING EXPERIENCES	Importance	Freq. of Use
62	33	Activities related with environmental protection (recycling).	45	20
55	20	Activities valuing differences.	38	18
53	38	Analysis of tales/stories/adequate texts.	46	29
45	18	Assignments related to the country	40	22
55	34	Attribution of daily tasks (or others).	44	25
49	25	Care for growing plants (sense of responsibility)	46	27
47	24	Contacts with institutions (e g., security).	34	15
63	36	Cooperative work.	44	24
50	27	Debates.	48	24
57	35	Dialogue and reflection.	47	26
54	34	Dialogue.	48	21
49	21	Discussion of dilemmas.	44	21
53	24	Dramatisations of stories that include values.	41	22
52	22	Elections.	45	21
58	35	Equal access to materials and opportunities	47	28
58	29	Games.	36	19
52	27	Helping peers and asking for help.	43	19
59	40	Helping to organize the classroom	33	28
59	41	Helping to store materials	33	28
59	23	Hetero-evaluation.	41	23
50	35	Images analysis	44	28
56	36	Listing norms for conviviality in several contexts	47	28
48	17	Listing social/environmental problems and planning possible interventions.	36	17
39	22	Making of posters of correct and incorrect behaviour	29	15
60	39	Negotiating rules.	46	28
55	32	Observing and rating behaviour	42	24
62	32	Pair work.	50	26
47	24	Participation in activities involving the education community	42	20
53	32	Presentation to class, school, community.	36	21
58	35	Project work.	50	26
38	26	Public rewards.	25	15
68	33	Reflection on behaviours, values, attitudes.	48	27
45	24	Road traffic prevention.	41	20
61	34	Self-evaluation.	33	24
55	30	Sharing materials	36	19
36	16	Songs stressing values and attitudes	36	19
56	25	Study visits.	39	23
39	19	Take messages people within the institution (or similar activity).	37	20
46	20	Talking about education or citizenship and discussing	45	20
51	27	Watching movies (or similar activities) and reflection.	37	17
64	37	Work group.	50	27

Two columns are shown for the Likert scale: the first shows frequency (on a 1 – 3 rating), the second the rating of importance (on a 1 – 5 scale). Table 1 gives separate results for students and teachers.

Table 2 shows the results of the ten strategies least and most used, and those considered least and most important, by students and teachers. Many were ranked equally.

Table 2: Learning strategies: the ten more and less used and valued

	Teachers				Students			
	Use		Importance		Use		Importance	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Activities valuing differences	39º				37º			
Activities related to environmental preservation (recycling)							4º	
Analysis of tales/stories/adequate texts	1º		4º		4º			
Assignments related to the country							38º	
Attribution of daily tasks (or others)					39º			
Care for growing plants (sense of responsibility)	3º		4º					
Constructing norms for conviviality in several contexts	2º		3º		6º			
Contacts with institutions (e g, security)	41º		37º				36º	
Cooperative work					6º		3º	
Debates			2º					
Dialogue and reflection			3º		7º			
Dialogue			2º					
Discussion of dilemmas					36º			
Dramatisations of stories that include values								
Elections					35º			
Equal access to materials and opportunities	2º		3º		7º			
Games	38º		37º					
Group work	3º		1º		5º		2º	
Helping peers and asking for help	38º							
Helping to organise the classroom	2º		39º		2º		7º	
Helping to store materials	2º		39º		1º		7º	
Hetero-evaluation					34º		7º	
Images analysis	2º				7º			
Listing social/environmental problems and planning possible interventions	40º		37º		40º		35º	
Making posters about correct and incorrect behaviour	41º		40º		35º		39º	
Negotiating rules	2º		4º		3º		6º	
Observing and rating behaviour								
Pair work			1º				4º	
Participation in activities involving the education community							36º	
Presentation to class, school, community			37º					
Project work			1º		6º			
Public rewards	41º		41º				40º	
Reflection on behaviours, values, attitudes	3º		2º				1º	
Road traffic prevention							38º	
Self-evaluation							5º	
Sharing materials	38º							
Songs stressing values and attitudes	38º		37º		41º		41º	
Study visits								
Take messages within the institution (or similar)					38º		39º	
Talking about education or citizenship and discussing them					37º		37º	
Watching movies (or similar activities) and reflection	40º							

It is evident that there is no concentration on a few strategies that are more or less used, or that are judged to be more or less important by teachers or by students. Few were rated in the middle range of the scales for use or importance.

However it is possible to identify a few common selections and rejections. *Group work* and *Negotiating rules* were the learning experiences most valued and used both by teachers and students. In relation to the frequency of use *Helping to organise the classroom* and *Helping to store materials* appeared in first and second place, followed by *Analysis of tales/stories/adequate texts* and *Equal opportunities*. *Reflection on behaviours, values and attitudes*, *Pair work* and *Project work* were also strongly valued.

It is clear that neither group valued learning strategies that are not (or did not seem to be) constructivist approaches, such as: *Making posters showing correct and incorrect*

behaviour, *Songs stressing values and attitudes*, *Listing social/environmental problems and planning possible interventions.* However, we think that some of these learning experiences are used by teachers in a constructivist way; for example, a poster on which young children mark their participation with symbols would be used as a   self-evaluation activity. One teacher stressed the importance of songs during the long and silence fight against dictatorship and how songs motivated and helped very young children to learn.

It is interesting to compare teacher and student position on helping organise the classroom. Both groups considered that they use this strategy frequently, but the teachers did not value it, while the students did. It is the only strategy that the teachers say that they use but do not value. On the other hand they do value caring for plants growing in school, and we did not find a direct explanation for this. The different values teachers and students give to debates and dialogues may reflect the difficulties students experience conducting dialogue and debates, in spite of the latter being more structured.

One result that we did not expect was that *Activities valuing differences* was one of the learning activities less used. It is not explicitly included in any General Essential Competence in the National Curriculum but the principle is mentioned in several of the documents referred to above. Multiculturalism is a dimension of citizenship education approached in a few textbooks in the set of textbooks used in teachers' classrooms[5] but in a very superficial way. The differences included are racial differences and children with special needs. It seems that it is not easy to find learning experiences for multicultural education. There are significant differences among the textbooks and it is difficult to understand how some textbooks are selected. One of those examined did not have anything related to citizenship education. Three consistently use questions and/or problematic situations to develop systematic thinking and sometimes critical thinking. Only one other aspect related to citizenship education is as evident as this - group work. Some textbooks systematically suggest group work in several contexts. A few include some materials and others present very concrete suggestions. A few include at the end of each topic suggestions for self evaluation. There are also some problem-solving and decision-making activities. Looking at the textbooks as a group, their suggestions for learning experiences to foster citizenship education are similar to the learning experiences referred by the teachers and students in our research. They do not comprise the ideas approached in the most general documents, but they are not far from the suggestions presented in the last and most specific document, the *National Curriculum for Basic Education: Key Competencies*.

However we think that in relation to group work it is necessary for teachers to have more in-service education on how to develop it best.

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[5] We analysed four textbooks for first year, and two for the second, third and fourth years of basic education.

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