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# Teaching citizenship in the pre-school educational process

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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to clarify pre-school teachers' and teacher students' views on citizenship education, its contents and teaching. The subjects in this study are two pre-school teacher students and two pre-school teachers, each of whom was interviewed.

The curriculum of pre-school education in Finland does not directly include the subject of citizenship education. The contents are hidden in other subjects for instance ethics and social areas, as integrated subjects in pre-school education. It is important that pre-school teachers are able to analyse the content which relates to citizenship education. This case study is part of a larger study dealing with teachers' and student teacher's views, attitudes and visions of citizenship education in early childhood, pre-school and primary education.

## Citizenship education

Citizenship can be seen in different levels: according to Bauer *et al* (2003) these are global, regional, national, local community, family and personal. At the global level citizenship has a very large meaning and at the personal level it is very close to the individual. All these dimensions are valuable in education; it depends on children's age which level is stressed in education, for instance personal dimension is more suited to the lower grades pupils. These are questions which teachers solve in their teaching.

Citizenship education is defined by Patric (see Bauer *et al* 2003 , p 3) as:

Global trends for civic education and democracy are

1. Civic skills: the development of decision making skills, comparative and international analyses of government and citizenship and the development of participatory skills and civic virtues through co-operative learning activities
2. Civic knowledge: a systematic teaching of core concepts and the use of case studies
3. Civic virtues: the use of literature to teach civic virtues

According to Quisumbing (see Berg *et al* 2003, p 3), citizenship education is a lifetime process of continuing learning, involving the total development of the whole person, not a finished product or outcome of a curriculum for a given time or location.

## Citizenship in early childhood

Citizenship for young children – is there really such a concept? What could citizenship for the young child consist of? Would it be different to citizenship for an adult? These questions are discussed in *CiCe Professional Guidelines 1* (see Dyrfjord, Fumat, Pergar Kuscer & Andersen 2004, p4), which states

the child is a citizen from birth, but also that the young child has to grow into the responsibility and rights that are part of being an active member of a democratic

society. In one way, being a citizen is different for young children than it is adults. The child has to develop and grow into an active citizen, working from experience and trying out different roles, gradually taking on more and more active role.

One of the aims of every early childhood program should be to teach the child to become an active citizen in a way that does not conform to their surroundings, but is imaginative and exploratory. This emphasis on experience in early childhood institutions reflects certain values that firstly indicate that the child is looked on as an active citizen from the beginning, and that secondly show that children are trusted to make decisions concerning their everyday life, which will lead them to being able to make decisions about wider society (Dyrffjord *et al* 2004.)

### **Principles for educational process in pre-school education**

Dyrffjord *et al* (2004, p 2) suggest the following as a code of quality for early childhood programs:

1. All children should be in an educational setting that enriches their life experiences; allows learning to collaborate with others; and allows them to become a strong person.
2. To further the process of democratisation, it is important that children are able to participate in a democratic society within an early childhood program from an early age. In this way children develop both a sense of their self-worth and of the worth of relationships with others.
3. The skilled pre-school teacher should be able to choose pedagogical methods and philosophy in line with recent knowledge about how children learn.
4. No single educational method is preferable over another. Methods must depend on the cultural context of children and their families as well as professional knowledge. This freedom places a large responsibility on each teacher to always act professionally and ethically.
5. Part of being in a democratic society is to have the right to be oneself and to be acknowledged as a person with personal needs. Children's backgrounds – social, cultural, economical or racial – should not be held against them in any way.

These principles are suitable also for a program of pre-school education and they form the background for both my larger study and this article.

### **Learning environment and contextualism**

Contextualism (see Bronfenbrenner 1996; Hujala 2004), which is based on the theory of ecology, suggests that a child lives at the same time in different environments (mesosystem), and all of these have influences on the child's life. When a child is in pre-school and is a member of a children's group s/he has opportunities to take part in group activities with other children and learn social skills during play. Pre-school time can be emotionally stressful and contacts with other children and teachers are important. This is a place where a child can observe models for acting in society and learn social manners.

### **Learning citizenship at pre-school age**

Children learn citizenship in everyday life, by playing in groups, through fairytales, stories and television programs, discussion with others, in the teaching process, from school books etc. There are set goals for the child's learning and for teaching in the Finnish national curriculum for pre-school education:

- to understand self and others;
- to have the power to recognise ones' own and others' feelings;
- to have the capacity to negotiate with others and oneself; and
- to develop creativity, communicative ability and critical thinking in order to strengthen their self-image, security and ability to resolve problems in a peaceful manner; participate in a group with peers, and to learn from the group.

Osler and Starkey's framework (1999) for learning citizenship list the following necessities for citizenship education:

1. Information and rights. It is important that the child learn that she/he has rights. She does, not for example, have to accept that another child takes her toy. But she has to understand that other children also have rights: she cannot have the ball all the time in the kindergarten.
2. Identities and feelings. The child can learn to reflect on her own identity through contact with others. She can be guided to develop empathy to other children, to accept their needs and to play together with them.
3. Inclusion. Children can do things together as a group and learn to help each other, despite differences in age, cultural backgrounds, etc. It is important that the pre-school teacher notice and include all children in the group.
4. Skills. Children should learn how to solve conflicts, how to argue and how to use their knowledge about their rights. (see further Dyrfjord et al, 2004, p 14).

### **Research**

This research consists of a case study and interviews with pre-school teaching students and pre-school teachers, conducted in spring 2005 in the Department of Teacher Education in Rauma. There were four subjects; two pre-school teaching students and two pre-school teachers. The method used was individual interviews:

Questions for teacher students:

1. What do you think citizenship education what is?
2. What kind of experience have you had of this area?
3. Have you taught citizenship education to children?
4. What kind of methods have you used?
5. What kind of materials have you used in teaching?

The questions differed for the two groups: the students' questions were more concrete than those for the teachers. Teachers have more experience in teaching pre-school children and students are just studying for teaching, so their situations are naturally different.

Questions for pre-school teachers:

1. What is citizenship education?
2. What do you do with children when you teach citizenship?
3. What is the main goal?
4. How do you act with children?
5. What are the main contents of citizenship education?
6. Are the children motivated?
7. Do you think children like the subject?

## Results

### *Teaching students' views about citizenship education*

At the beginning of the interviews both students said that this area was very new to them and they did not know anything about it. After some questions they recalled their own school time and told their own experiences. The students' answers were mostly very concrete:

I think that one important area is traffic and good behaviour in public areas, for instance in the streets.

Excursions are good for children, we can go to somebody's parent's workplaces and so on

It is good that we speak with children about good behaving and good manners.

I remember my school time – civic education was in the upper grades; I didn't like it very much. We had some book, I don't remember exactly.

Students had only a few ideas for teaching.

Maybe it is good to discuss about this.

Some visits for instance to the library and the market place.

Some celebrations during Christmas time and Easter.

### *Teachers' views of citizenship education in pre-school education*

Both teachers were sure that citizenship education was a part of values and ethics:

I think that it is most important is that I can get children understand and respect themselves and the others. These are values, I think. We have talked about these a lot in our staff meetings.

I want the children to trust the others and that they have good self confidence.

It is good that we talk about what is 'right or wrong', so they learn moral things.

I think that in fact many subjects and activities constitute citizenship education. It depends on the group and the teacher how they include it.

I like to read the children books which include these kind of topics.

Children have to be in their group and have possibilities to play and be together.

Children's homes and pre-school together create skills of citizenship for children.

Comparing the contents, the teachers' views were on a different level to the students' answers.

### Conclusions

This article reports a few cases from a much larger study. These examples show that there are different levels of citizenship education. The teachers' answers deal with teaching based on experiences which students have not yet had, but these results give a reason to develop the curriculum of teacher education.

Most of the students' answers were on a general level and many were based on their experience as children. It may be that the reason for this is that students only have experiences from these areas – for instance they have just planned traffic education lessons for children during their practical period. The students' own experiences from this area were not large and they had only few memories from their own school days.

These interviews showed that citizenship education ought to be one part of teacher education, so that teaching students have enough knowledge and have the opportunity to develop their understanding, and have the pedagogic material to teach and discuss with children. Students need more knowledge and study in the pre-school educational process.

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