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Citizenship Education at Schools in Multicultural settings: The Construction of Identity among Teenager from Minority Groups

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There are several theoretical approaches regarding the construction of the identity among teenagers belonging to a cultural minority background. Basically, we have to look at two main tendencies (Archer, 2005):

A positivist approach – According to this perspective, those young people belonging to minority groups grow up in a cross-cultural way between the cultural contents coming from the majority group and those which emerge from their own minority group. Therefore, they experience a sort of cultural conflict between the two options. This theoretical approach is based in a cultural essentialism which considers the majority as the legitimated group who have a higher status in society. Minorities are considered as a problem in this framework who force necessary conflicts between families and schools. So those young people from these minority families develop higher difficulties when constructing their identities during adolescence. This approach is not sensitive towards interculturality.

A constructivist approach – This perspective defends a more complex process for identity construction between young teenagers who belong to minority groups and families. It is considered that those teenagers face a rich and sensual framework of values regarding dimensions such as social class, ethnic issues, gender or religious beliefs. Cultural identity is seen from a social-cultural construction so we ought to consider the role of history, language and symbolic world to understand the process related to subjectivity and identity (Hall, 1992). From an intercultural position, this approach is very suitable.

This paper has been written from a constructivist approach. This means that we have to leave stereotyped perceptions of cultural reality as well as refuse any sort of essentialist explanations. Young teenagers from minority groups are active subjects for the creation and re-creation of different elements (family background, community background, mass-media, etc.) so we cannot identify a single model to build a cultural identity during adolescence but a wide range of possibilities and models which differ from each other depending on a complex network of meanings and influences.

Spain, as a third generation immigration country (those which passed from being an emigration country to an immigration one during the nineties), does not have a long tradition in dealing with second generation teenagers as most of the number of immigrants started to come very recently. However, some of those children who came when they were babies, or were born very few years ago, are now young teenagers that have to cope with this personal challenge. The situation is sometimes not easy because they are often considered as foreign people as if they were their parents.

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Therefore, a research group on immigration processes at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona has been creating and validating an educational programme to help those teenagers construct their identity from a balanced personal perspective. This programme starts from some social-symbolic premises:

An effective education to facilitate the construction of a cultural identity in the young teenagers belonging to minority cultural groups must consider two dimensions: the political dimension - the rights and duties for every citizen in general - and the cultural one - the common and specific cultural contents of the family and the community where these teenagers live

The process of facilitation must include an increasing process of cognitive and socio-affective complexity, in agreement with the developmental possibilities of the young teenagers at every moment. These stages of facilitation go from the taking of conscience to the taking of a personal positioning, going through the understanding of the cultural and political phenomena of the society, as well as the acquisition of competences to assume their own position

The process must combine activities for exploring both the self and the community, and activities that focus students' attention on descriptive matters as well as social problems.

The design of the different stages must respond to a global and circular process that leads the young teenagers through a learning route that begins and finishes in the same place, but that changes the perspective and their social competence.

This programme has been designed in 4 steps: opening, understanding, critiquing and empowering.

Step	Aim	Dimension	Contents
Opening	To be aware of identity issues from a citizenship perspective	Community	Rights and duties
Understanding	To understand the social dynamics of identity to build identity	Society	Immigration in Spain
Critiquing	To be aware of the formal difference between formal rights and real opportunities	Society	Discrimination
Empowering	To define a personal position about his/her own identity in a citizenship framework	Community	Citizenship

Step 1. OPENING.

In this phase, the goal is to develop a taking of conscience with respect to the identity aspects from the point of view of citizenship. The contents must be focused in a social-political framework from an interpersonal relations approach (in the classroom, the district, etc.). The educational strategy must lead the teenager to a personal transformation, from a descriptive point of view.

Step 2. UNDERSTANDING.

In this phase, the goal is to develop an understanding of the situation of the identities and the citizenship in the social scope. The contents must be focused in a wider social-political framework. The educational strategy must help the teenagers develop a general perspective of society regarding identity issues, from a descriptive point of view as well.

Step 3. CRITIQUING.

In this phase, the goal is to develop a critical analysis of the situation of the identities and the citizenship in society. The content must be focused in a symbolic framework. The educational strategy must facilitate the comprehension of social problems related to identity, and the teenagers must learn social competences to understand the key aspects in the social field, from a prescriptive point of view.

Step 4. EMPOWERING.

In this phase, the goal is to take a personal position about a person's own identity, as well as his/her rights and duties of citizenship, in his/her daily life. The contents must be focused in a symbolic framework, specially related to interpersonal relations (in the classroom, the district, etc.). The educational strategy must improve the personal self-concept that leads to a personal transformation, from a prescriptive point of view.

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