Involving teacher training students in civil society through 'Education for Citizenship' and human rights

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Abstract

In recent years Spain has been marked by an intense controversy over the contents and relevance of 'Education for Citizenship', creating a unique climate for educational practice in civil society. In this study a set of interviews were designed by 100 teacher training students to 33 different actors in civil society, such as unions, political parties, family associations and religious groups. The aim of these interviews was to examine their respective positions on the subject of 'Education for Citizenship'. Spokespersons for the most relevant organisations of Spanish civil society were interviewed, and only four organisations declined to participate in the project. The results of this work have been published and shared with the community.

*Keywords***:** *citizenship education, practical activities for training teachers, interviews on political issues*

1. Introduction

Citizenship Education was introduced in the educational curriculum in 2006 by Spanish Organic Law on Education, the main educational act in the country. Both the objectives of this course and the content of its curriculum are determined by the same European context (Bolivar, 2008, Keating, Ortoloff and Philipou, 2009), and the recommendation issued by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which calls for the inclusion in the educational systems of democratic values and participation. Within this, knowledge and involvement of students in civil society play a particularly important role. Alongside these curriculum requirements and aims the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid sets that future elementary school teachers shall also receive training in citizenship.

Due to various reasons, the inclusion of education for citizenship in the curriculum of primary and secondary education, generated significant public debate in Spain, leading to all sorts of associations and political parties to comment on this. The controversy stems from the opposition of some groups of parents who showed opposition to their children being "indoctrinated" in areas such as sexual diversity and family or the separation of church and state. The confrontation of positions went so far that various representatives of the Partido Popular, the main opposition party at that time, proposed to abolish the subject, supported by some members of the Catholic hierarchy and representatives of associations linked to the same institution.

It is within this context that a project, involving more than 100 future teachers was established. The project organized teacher training students who attended the course of

education for citizenship into small groups of 3 or 4 components, with an aim to seek the opinion of representatives of diverse organizations of civil society on the legislation concerning this matter, seeking also for some proposals. The objectives of the project can be divided into the following areas:

- Education of future Elementary School Teachers: From this project, students:
    - Acquired new knowledge about the functioning of civic associations involved in civil life
    - Assimilated from a constructivist practice the actual contents of the Citizenship Education and the possibilities of creating future programmes with their own pupils.
- Participation / service: In addition to facilitating access to new learning, the project made a collective contribution to society, since the same, students
    - Generated own reflections on civil society organizations, which had to respond to questions raised by students.
    - Made available to interested persons a wide range of responses to the dilemmas generated around Education for Citizenship and the various ways of addressing them.

2. Project Development

2. 1 Research and prior learning

For its purpose, students had to design an interview basing their questions on three documents: the report *Citizenship Education at School in Europe* (Euridice, 2005) the Spanish Organic Law on Education and the specific curriculum for the Comunidad de Madrid (the local education authority). In order to obtain an appropriate result, students had to clarify two key concepts in public participation:

- Institutional stance. Students should try to get an authorized opinion from each association, not the personal view of any of its members. The purpose of the interview was to obtain the opinion of a person legitimated by the association to speak on their behalf. They could not search for a relative or acquaintance who were members of the association but should address the organization directly. Only if the organization did not answer they could look for alternatives.
- Aims and activities. Not all associations have guidelines on all aspects of society. Hence, the students had to select an organization that had among its aims and activities education and the channelling of views regarding it.

Additionally to the assimilation of these two key concepts, students first approached the major types of organizations with positions around the education system: trade unions, political parties, student organizations, religious institutions, NGOs...

2.2 Design of the interview, selection of civil society organizations and implementation of the toll

Based on this research, each group of students developed a list of 10 to 15 questions that were posed on particular aspects of the possible regulation of the Education for Citizenship, connecting them with national law or the situation in another country within the European Union, so that questions would not remain excessively open. Final questions had this kind of expression:

> '*Not all countries have the same objectives, Germany, Finland, Sweden, the UK and Iceland (primary level) and Bulgaria (in all levels of education) in their curricula do not mention anything on the political culture. Do you think it appropriate or necessary to mention it?*' (Interview with 'Unión de Estudiantes Progresistas', student association)

> 'In Iceland class delegates exist only in secondary education, but only participate in upper secondary education. Are you agree with that or believe that they should choose delegates from primary school?' *(Interview with 'Hazte Oir', religious NGO)*

Each group then had to choose an organization that could set statements on the issue, trying to cover a range of perspectives as wide as possible. The final result was the selection of 33 organizations, which are distributed as follows:

Table 1: Selected organizations

Organization	Number	Examples
Political Parties	12	Partido Popular (now in government) PSOE (Previous government)
Teacher unions	6	C.S.I.F.(right wing oriented) C.G.T. (anarchist)
Non GOs	4	Amnesty International Save the Children
Organizations of Students	3	Sindicato de Estudiantes
Organizations of parents of students	2	CEAPA
Political youth organizations	2	Jóvenes de IU (Marxist youth)
Religions	2	Catholic church
Nonpartisan political organizations	2	15-M

Once the interviews were designed and the organization selected, students should address them. Thus, the channels offered by different entities to communicate with the public were discovered, and so were the difficulty or reluctance of some, territorial differences and other aspects of the internal life of each selected group. Those students that encountered difficulties in obtaining a spokesman for the selected organization, were given the opportunity to locate any member of the same ready to answer personally, and if this also was impossible, could write a series of responses based on fictitious data obtained from the guidelines of the organization.

2.3 Results

Finally, only four of the selected organizations refused to participate in the project, and students performed their interviews in several ways: personal interview, video, radio or mailed interview, distribution being as follows:

Table 2: Interview format distribution

Video	Radio	Personal interview	E-mail
5	4	13	7

The results and contents of the interviews were surprising when compared to the biased reporting that usually appear in the media: All respondents assumed that school actually transmit values on political and citizenship issues, and only one organization (España2000 far-right party) proposed that values should be transmitted only in the family. Despite this consensus on the transmission of values in school, we did find more diversity in regard to the specific values that ideally should be learned. While most advocated concepts such as respect and tolerance, only some groups stressed on the importance of generating skills of civic participation or social control of institutions. We also found some groups that criticized the way the government of moment was managing the controversy, rejecting the impact on content such as equality between the sexes or the visibility of gay or bisexual realities.

As each interview had unique questions and formats, we have not made an statistical analysis of the answers, but we consider interesting to note some of the key aspects that we found. We will review several answers regarding key issues: Education for Citizenship as a separate subject, the values to be transmitted at school, participation of students in the organic life of schools and the involvement of children and adolescents in the political life in general or in activities that benefit society:

a) On the existence of a separate subject, we also found conflicting positions. From those who advocate strongly for it to opponents:

> 'We defend the existence of a compulsory subject whose main objective is to ensure compliance with the constitutional provision which states that education "shall be directed to the full development of human personality in respect for democratic principles of coexistence and the rights and fundamental freedoms' (EC, 27.2). (Interview with Francisco Rodriguez, member of the political party UPyD)

> 'The role of this [subject] is to isolate the individual from his family environment, national and natural to mould the taste and the need for large corporations and international powers.' (Interview with Rafael Ripoll, vice president of political party España2000)

b) With respect to the values to be transmitted or not at school, positions are polarized. From those who thought they had to go deeply into issues of all kinds to those who felt that some issues should be treated only at home:

> 'The subject Education for Citizenship as it is currently designed, does not have clearly defined their fields, so it has been controversial because it goes far in

ways that can not work at school, such as those that conflict with beliefs. We need to introduce, as Savater told me, "what unites us." This subject failed because it came into personal areas that the school can not impose. For example, we can´t show students a Hebrew worldview because we are Jewish, or Catholic because we are Catholic. It also failed because there was a chance to object, a dangerous path. In fact these terms are expressed by ANPE and the Supreme Court when speaking of the objection, since there can´t be in the curriculum materials that are controversial. All materials must be based on consensus realities, such as Science or History.' (Interview with Carmen Guaita, national vice president of the union of education employees ANPE)

'I think the subject is established primarily by changes in legislation in recent years, which are quite "groundbreaking" in relation to Spanish society, which has always been more traditional compared to other countries in central or northern Europe. I think many people think it is to indoctrinate, but I think it is to explain these new measures that have been taken, such as gay marriage. Gay marriage has to begin to be seen as normal. Parents at home can show their children that it is unnatural, but it is precisely the state work, and the school itself, to handle that views and transform them in the opposite, normal and natural. (Interview with Jorge Osma, member of the political youth organization Juventudes Socialistas, tied to the governing party at the time)

c) Almost all the interviews inquired about the views of the organizations on the participation of students in organic life and decision-making centre, and most believe it is necessary to use participatory tools and training for future civilian life.

'Within the school, we have spoken before of the great importance of mainstreaming not only curriculum but throughout life, relationships and school organization. How is the responsible participation of students in these fields promoted? A very clear example, what role the course delegates really have? Did the students know prior to the election of delegates the responsibility that comes with this position? Are they involved in the design of the profile and attitudes according to the functions to be performed by their candidate? Do you consciously and responsibly vote for the person who is considered more appropriate to develop these functions or, on the contrary, vote for the most popular person in the class, or one that gets along better with teachers or ...? We believe that in general, with the theme of the delegates of the students we are missing great opportunities for active learning and participation in democracy.' (Interview with María Jesús del Olmo, member of the international NGO Intermon Oxfam)

'Any decision-making must necessarily involve, apart from the institution, the students and their parents. It would be pointless to row in a direction not counting the players in the team. Stakeholders should be valid and feel that they have a role in making decisions on day to day.' (Interview with imam of the Islamic Board of Melilla)

d) There were also some groups that showed their concerns about the involvement of

children and adolescents in political life generally, or on the opportunities offered by the school to go into the community and take part in it.

> 'What happens is that these things are done here too sometimes, when we have to celebrate the constitution or parliamentarianism children go to the seats, they sit, but it has more folk than anything else. Is it true then that is up to each school, if that works in their classrooms and have that reference in that subject or that curriculum in their daily work, then it does count. By the time we are now, we're well below many countries that are more advanced in that, as here it really is quite anecdotal. That may make sense in any particular commemoration, at some point, but is useless if just to get on television and politicians are very friendly, very familiar and pat their children ... no sense in my sight. Conclusion: in the current state of our society and our country, they are not taken seriously'. (Interview with Roberto Pina and Raquel Anula, volunteers of the political party Izquierda Anticapitalista)

> 'I will give you an example: The students mobilized to all municipalities to promote the activity (a festival held) to raise funds for Haiti. Within this activity was also attended by school councils and parents. It is also about participation and involvement of students.' (Interview with Aurora Viso, Mayor of Cobeja and member of the Partido Popular political party)

Finally, each student group was publishing his interviews on the blog of the subject (http://www.igualdadyciudadania.com) thus sharing the fruits of their labor with the rest of civil society, and actively clarifying the debate on Education for Citizenship in school and sharing their interviews with other training teachers for future debate on the subject.

3. Conclusion

We believe that the project presented here is an active research mode which can be applied to all university students or older high school courses. The project has fulfilled its objectives both in academic and social participation, as it has achieved fruits that have been shared with the community and contributed to public debate about the matter at hand.

Many of the future teachers that were working in the project had their first contact with citizen participation organizations and it was also a novel experience for them publication in a website for public broadcasting. Finally, interviews are already being consulted by the different social actors, and we hope that involve a substantial contribution in the process of drafting the new education legislation actually being prepared in the country, which will certainly involve changes regarding the matter. In sum, we consider the current project as a good example of service learning in Citizenship Education as defined by Puig, Gijón, Martín and Rubio (2011)

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