

Key Findings

Citizenship education

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Using an international comparative approach, this study aims to understand the various uses of the phrase 'citizenship education' in different European countries, the uses of the concept in national curricula and the representations and applications of the concept in practice.

1. Citizenship education: contexts of use

How might the growth of interest in democratic citizenship education be explained? Possible explanations include the persistence of social injustices and inequalities, globalization and increasing migration flows, concerns raised by disengagement and lack of interest in civic matters, political apathy among young people, the rise of violent anti-democratic and racist movements, and the effects of the Cold War and democratic transition, particularly in Eastern European countries (Osler & Starkey, [2006](#)).

The research literature on citizenship education published in the last five years has tended to focus primarily on the concepts of democratic, active or global citizenship.

In an [All-European Study](#) published by the Council of Europe, C. Birzėa outlined the key differences between political statements and current practices in democratic citizenship education. 'Policies' have tended to involve statements of values, action plans and normative statements operating at different levels: society as a whole, the education system, schools, the curriculum (whether formal or informal) and school subjects. In 2005, the different versions of 'citizenship education' in formal curriculum emphasized civics, political education and social studies, or involved a variety of interdisciplinary combinations, including: history and civics; history, civics and economics; history and social studies; anthropology and social studies; religious and moral education; the study of man and ethics; civics and ethics; ethics, social sciences, geography and history (Birzėa *et al.*, [2005](#)).

Research on what democratic citizenship education could or should involve often focuses on what specific governments understand by democracy. Contradictions between the respect of human rights, civics, specific local concerns and the desire for a universalizing discourse are also emphasized (Osler, [2009](#)). A number of American researchers have argued that by deliberately promoting patriotism in school, the federal state is at odds with educational objectives, is guilty of coercion and discourages critical thought and dissent. By contrast, a fully articulated critical patriotism is deemed to be entirely compatible with a renewed sense of political engagement (Haynes, [2010](#)). In countries of the former Communist bloc (e.g. Russia) or in South Africa (following the apartheid era), citizenship education has tended to be heavily influenced by the events of recent history. In the Soviet Union (an 'empire-state'), the idea of belonging to a state was never part of the concept of nationality. Government programs have since provided strong arguments to justify the predominance of a common language and culture by formalizing a patriotism based on the safety of the individual and a specific vision of the world, of moral ideals and of norms of behavior (Piattoeva, [2009](#)). In South Africa, the patriotic feelings expressed in the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (2001)

This document presents an overview of the key findings of the Dossier d'actualité.

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may conflict with the construction of a nation, a process that requires a reconciliation of communities. The case of South-Africa illustrates the extent to which the principles of democratic citizenship education may vary because of specific local or regional needs, serving as an argument for either defending or attacking the critical dimension of citizenship education (Waghid, [2010](#); Enslin & Horsthemke, [2004](#)).

Though often evoked, the concept of global citizenship has only a vague grounding in reality. A distinction may perhaps be posited between 'national citizenship' and 'global citizenship'. National citizenship has a legal and institutional significance and refers to a nation-state involving a finite collection of individuals with a fixed civic identity operating within a territorial community and as part of a national political system. Global citizenship is a moral concept and involves an open transnational political community founded on the principle of a global civil society with a flexible and multiple identity (Myers, [2010](#)).

2. Conceptions of citizenship and the construction of 'citizenship education'

The shift from the political (civics) to the cultural (citizenship education) is a response to the need felt for the socialization of school children. Since the late 1970s, the issue for Western economies has no longer been to form citizens (notion of public-spiritedness) but to seek to integrate and assimilate migrants.

In the **United States**, J. Banks has contrasted the principle of the cultural integration of immigrant populations with the promotion of the cultural rights of all citizens and multicultural citizenship. Banks advocates a form of transformative citizenship education that transcends borders and respects diversity, associated with critical citizenship education: *'the identity of self and the identity of others is co-related and co-creative'* (Banks, [2008](#)).

In **Britain**, A. Osler has emphasized the opposition between a cosmopolitan rhetoric focusing on the role of Britain in the world and the promotion of Britishness, which stigmatizes the radicalization of young Muslims and uses history to promote national unity (Osler, [2009](#)). Similar discriminatory attitudes were underlined by K. Ajegbo, who recommended the introduction of the concept of identity associated with diversity in history teaching at the end of primary school. There have been many debates over the perceived gap between the values that schools ought to promote and the values promoted by society. Recent debates have also focused on the dangers of using the concept of identity as a foundation for social cohesion in preference to the fundamental principles of a democratic society, resulting in a form of 'cosmopolitan citizenship' (Brett, [2007](#); Maylor *et al.*, [2007](#); Osler, [2008](#)).

In **Finland**, the objectives linked to active participation and the development of attitudes and values have taken precedence over those relating to the development of a political culture (Eurydice, [2005](#)). The specific history of Finland may explain this trend: Finland developed as a homogeneous nation-state, with a unity of language and culture, a specific ethnic origin and a sense of loyalty toward state institutions deeply rooted in history (Piattoeva, [2009](#)).

The French education system removed 'civics' (*'éducation civique'*) and 'moral lessons' (*'leçons de morale'*) from its educational vocabulary when it set about rekindling the civic-mindedness of French teenagers. While civics has been reintroduced in primary school curricula, references to morality have tended to be more discreet. By contrast, educational research in the English-speaking world has emphasized the acquisition of moral intelligence (Clarken, [2009](#)) and has questioned the re-emergence of 'character' education, a term commonly used in the United States (Creasy, [2008](#)) and Britain (Arthur, [2005](#)). In Belgium, non-confessional moral ethics (secular ethics) goes hand in hand with citizenship, and is aimed at educating children in fundamental rights and at developing the critical mind of future citizens. Leleux shows how such teaching fosters the acquisition of affective or socio-affective, cognitive, ethical and decision-making skills (Leleux, [2009](#); [2010](#)).

What role should be given to citizenship education? It is difficult to choose between formal and informal teaching, between political teaching (civic-mindedness) and learning about others, and between different subjects (history, social sciences or health, etc.). The identification with cultural communities generates affiliations that have no historical foundation and are as a result open, fluid and mobile. Openness to heterogeneous communities and global citizenship may make teenagers impervious to national civic education, fostering a very narrow image of society (Myers, [2010](#)).

Lastly, the acquisition of citizenship competences is legitimized by the acquisition of 'learning-to-learn' skills. A teaching method involving a high level of student involvement in the learning process (problems-based learning, learning through experience) promotes values such as cooperation, participation, justice and equality in diversity, all key civic values (McManus & Taylor, [2009](#)).

3. Citizenship education in curricula: some examples

In France, the national frame of reference defining basic skills and core knowledge specifies the social and civic skills that all pupils must acquire. Learning to 'live together' begins at **nursery school** and involves learning the 'business of being a pupil' and the rules of social life. The learning of rules of politeness and behavior in society is further developed at **primary school** as part of '**civic and moral education**': the principles of morality, awareness of the notions of rights and duties, further consolidation of the rules of social life, the social uses of politeness and cooperation in class. Pupils are also trained in health and safety. At secondary level (*collège*), civics, taught in history and geography lessons, focuses on the missions and organization of *collège*, the duties of *collège* students, the importance of education, diversity and equality, freedoms, rights and justice and finally democratic citizenship. At *lycée* (French equivalent of sixth-form college), the focus shifts to '**civic, legal and social education**' ('*éducation civique, juridique et sociale*', or ECJS) founded on the notion of citizenship. From *sixième* (first year of *collège*) to *terminale* (last year of *lycée*), citizenship involves roughly ten yearly 'hours of life in class' and is taught by history and geography teachers.

In other countries, formal elements relating to the teaching-learning of citizenship and to the values, skills and mechanisms at play have been defined in curricula and incorporated into new or existing teaching (Nelson & Kerr, [2006](#)). Curricula include knowledge and understanding of political institutions and key concepts such as human rights, but also a range of new topics, including social diversity, community cohesion, the environment, communication and the globalization of society (ICCS; Schulz *et al.*, [2010](#)).

In **England**, citizenship is an integral part of the curriculum. At **primary school level**, students are encouraged to develop self-confidence and a sense of responsibility, and to become aware of their skills and abilities. Students must prepare to become citizens and to learn the basic rules of life, hygiene and safety. They must also develop good relations with others and learn to respect difference. At **secondary school level**, the key objectives of democratic citizenship education are to develop the knowledge and skills that enable individuals to play an active part in society. Addressing a wide range of issues through debates or actions within schools, neighborhoods or communities, students consolidate their knowledge and understanding of parliamentary democracy, of the electoral and legal systems, of human rights, of freedoms and of the rights and duties of the individual. Citizenship education aims to encourage respect of different national, religious and ethnic identities (Kerr, [2007](#) ; National Curriculum, [2010](#)).

In **Finland**, schools are required to promote the national culture and values, but also to support pupil development. In secondary curricula, 'citizenship education' is now a separate subject, though it is also a cross-disciplinary theme (Piattoeva, [2009](#); Eurydice, [2005](#)). **Scotland** is often cited as an exception in Europe. In 2004, Scotland incorporated citizenship education as a cross-disciplinary theme in the Curriculum for Excellence. Citizenship is included as one of the four capacities subtending the curriculum. These are: to become successful learners, responsible citizens, confident individuals and effective contributors (Biesta, [2008](#)). In the **Netherlands**, citizenship education takes place in class, in school and within the community. In each of these contexts, pupils are required to engage in active citizenship (Nelson & Kerr, [2006](#)).

4. Educating in citizenship: in practice

In practice, altruistic discourses aimed at promoting democratic, critical and globalizing citizenship in schools face significant concerns over school peace, which turns citizenship education into the inculcation of the rules of social life in a school context without any incentive to transfer these skills into social life (Birzėa *et al.*, [2005](#)). The importance given to academic knowledge and the transmission of such knowledge, in addition to the difficulty of allowing for student freedom, represent significant obstacles to genuine citizenship education (Audigier, [2007](#)).

The introduction of citizenship as a school subject presupposes that teachers have the skills required to lead, organize and encourage debate, but also to approach citizenship education from a multidisciplinary perspective. Teachers are required to provide citizenship education in ever-changing daily contexts and amid busy teaching loads that are difficult to adapt to current events that require on-the-spot explanations, etc. In addition, citizenship is not an exact science and the prescribed content is often subject to interpretations linked to the need for simplicity or greater 'efficiency'. When the focus is on difficult issues such as identity or diversity, teachers may make 'critical choices', steering clear of subjects that are likely to be contentious issues in the classroom. Teachers are not trained to explain the political foundations of society, to discuss ethical or moral issues, particularly through debates, and to allow pupils to express themselves without influencing them while transmitting certain values (Arthur, [2005](#); Frazer, [2007](#); Dürr, [2004](#); Sandström Kjellin *et al.*, [2010](#)).

Pupil representations of citizenship and learning in citizenship are key issues in a significant number of research papers. The concept of 'student voice' is widespread in Anglo-American research examining the viewpoint of pupils and their understanding of citizenship. Experiments in active citizenship education (pupil participation) have suffered from a lack of recognition by teachers, for whom academic knowledge is of prime importance (prevalence of theory over action), and pupils, who struggle to transfer the knowledge acquired at school to make it useful and operational and yet consider that only academic knowledge is valid (García Pérez *et al.*, [2009](#)). There is a risk that the voice of pupils may be devalued in relation to the voice of adults, since teacher discourse tends to be viewed as irrefutable (Sandström Kjellin *et al.*, [2010](#)).

Active citizenship (which should translate as pupil participation in the life of the classroom, school or the external organizations in which they are involved) is more likely to be fostered in the classroom or within school than at a regional or national level. Almost all of the countries studied have elaborated explicit recommendations encouraging learner-centred participatory learning and good practices aimed at developing learner autonomy (Dürr, [2004](#)). Although an assessment of civic skills appears to be difficult (since the acts of every citizen would need to be assessed *a posteriori*), several recent studies and surveys have been conducted to define indicators aimed at 'measuring' the attitudes, values and knowledge that constitute civic competence and at assessing progress (CRELL, CIVED).

In countries with a democratic tradition, the attitudes of young people in terms of participation and civic values are relatively weak, whereas the attitudes of adults tend to be more clearly defined and more robust. Conversely, in southern and eastern European countries, where the process of democratic transition is more recent, young people tend to be more engaged. A more detailed analysis indicates that pupils in northern and western European countries stand out because of their greater understanding of democratic institutions and the values of social justice (Hoskins *et al.*, [2008a](#)).

It appears that the most important point to emphasize is that *'only when a nation-state is unified around a set of democratic values such as human rights, justice, and equality can it secure the liberties of cultural, ethnic, language and religious groups and enable them to experience freedom, justice and peace. Citizens who understand this unity-diversity tension and act accordingly do not materialize from thin air; they are educated for it'* (Banks *et al.*, [2005](#)).

To quote this Dossier :

- FEYFANT Annie (2010). « L'éducation à la citoyenneté ». *Dossier d'actualité de la VST*, n° 57, October.
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