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Title

Teaching the Good Citizen? Teacher's Approaches to Education for Democratic
Citizenship in Portugal

Abstract

This study is informed by the need to critically approach the perspectives and experiences of teachers when teaching for citizenship, to provide a 'thick' understanding of teaching for democracy (Carr, 2011), and to foster a critical political approach to citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Inspired by Critical Pedagogy, this study investigates how school teachers in Portugal view good citizenry and teaching for democracy by exploring their preferred aims and practices. The study employs a qualitative methodology to analyse data collected from interviews, document analysis and classroom observation. Initial findings reveal teachers' uncertainty regarding what citizenship means, a tendency to focus on cultivating a personally responsible citizen and an overemphasis on the rational and linear approach to citizenship.

Keywords: citizenship education, critical pedagogy, teacher education, and democracy

Summary:

-Aims:

For the past few decades, there has been a worldwide interest in teaching about democratic citizenship, which has become one of the central aims of public schools. The emergence of challenges, such as mass immigration, extremism, populism and apathy among young people has alerted to the need to provide the kind of education that is capable of safeguarding and sustaining peace, plurality and democracy.

The area of citizenship education remains contested as different debates continue to argue on what citizenship is and what it is that it is trying to achieve and how. In some contexts, citizenship education is viewed as a way to prepare young people to be engaged in their

communities or to promote democracy and engage in decisions such as elections. It has also been considered a way to educate young people to respond to racism and intolerance.

This research has been motivated by prominent arguments about the teaching of citizenship education, including the depoliticisation of citizenship as well as arguments against viewing citizenship as ‘outcome’, which assumes that citizenship is something that someone can attain after successfully finishing a path (Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Fischman & Hass, 2014).

An increasing number of research studies have attempted to look at citizenship education initiatives and to investigate the ways young people learn about democratic citizenship but little has been done to investigate teachers’ perspectives. Teachers have reported that they don’t feel confident to teach citizenship education and are unsure which materials and approaches to use (Willemse et al., 2015). Recognizing the key role of teachers in the provision of effective citizenship education, the current study aims to investigate how a sample of school teachers in Portugal view ‘the good citizen’ and teaching for democratic citizenship and what civic features they value the most and how that reflects on their pedagogy and practice in the classroom. The study will provide a critical examination of citizenship education, its goals and implementation in the context of contemporary processes, including globalization, immigration, and the dominance of neoliberal rationality in educational policies and practices. The study attempts to go beyond conventional understandings of citizenship and to provide a framework for an active and critical citizenship education that is key to education for social justice, active participation, empowerment, human rights, and democracy.

The Research Questions:

1. How do teachers view good citizenry? What goals do they try to achieve in their classes when teaching for citizenship?
2. How do teachers teach for citizenship? What pedagogical practices do they prefer using?

-Methodology

Dealing with a contested area of research, the study is to be situated within a critical theoretical and methodological framework to allow for multiple perspectives to be heard and to deliver the emancipatory aim of citizenship education. This qualitative research utilizes the case study design and discourse analysis to analyze data collected by interviews, document analysis and classroom observation.

For data analysis, a guide was developed based on some elements of Carr (2011)'s thick and thin spectrum of education for democracy. The guide was also inspired by literature on critical political literacy and Westheimer & Kahne (2004)'s three types of citizens. The guide is meant as a qualitative tool to highlight some data and their implication and is not to be understood as a way to establish fixed dual positions.

-Findings

The study is still ongoing and final findings are yet to be confirmed. However, data has revealed initial findings. That includes:

- A gap between policy intentions and implementations in the field, which is materialized by teachers' complains about lack of resources, materials and training.
- Uncertainty on what citizenship is and on what and how to teach citizenship
- The overemphasis on the rational and linear approach to citizenship (citizenship as an outcome)
- Tendency to promote a personally responsible citizen as opposed to social justice oriented citizen
- Teacher's discomfort and avoidance of approaching sensitive and controversial issues when teaching for citizenship.

-Theoretical and educational significance

This study deals with an area of education whose goals are included in almost every school curriculum worldwide. The research has been motivated by the current discourse surrounding citizenship education and the lack of research on teachers' perspectives and

approaches to this area of education. Westheimer & Kahne (2004) maintain that defining the relation between education and democracy at the teacher's level is important, as it may have important implications for the delivery of teaching and learning that influences how students relate to, and do, democracy in and outside school.

Based on teacher's perceptions of citizenship and their pedagogical practices, the study is hoped to provide some insights for teacher educators and policy makers involved in the area of preparing teachers to teach this area of education, which has been a challenging task in many countries. It is hoped that this work can provide recommendations for teachers and educationalists aiming to engage the youth in the country studies and world-wide in real active, engaged and transformative citizenship education. The study aims to add further empirical research to the existing research on citizenship education, namely to the area of pedagogy and teachers education, which are two areas that have been understudies in relation to citizenship education.

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