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A framework for civic education teachers' knowledge

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Abstract

Educational attainment depends on a range of mechanisms that affect the teaching and learning process, among which we highlight teachers' knowledge. Our research aimed to build an approach to Citizenship Education teachers' knowledge based on the analyses of several Civic Education teachers' conceptions and practices regarding this issue. This paper focuses on a previous study whose main purpose was to understand the conceptions, practices and contexts related to the teaching and learning process of the non-disciplinary curriculum area of Civic Education. The interpretive analysis of the teachers' "voices" resulted in the proposal of a teachers' knowledge framework, based on Grossman's model (1990) as well as on the *input* from other recent studies. We believe that this framework can contribute towards the definition of guidelines for the design, implementation and evaluation of teacher training programs in the scope of the non-disciplinary curriculum area of Civic Education.

Keywords: Citizenship Education, Civic Education, Teachers' Knowledge, Teacher training;

1. Introduction

Given the current historical and social context, teachers can no longer limit their actions to the transmission of knowledge and values; they need to adopt a flexible and responsive approach so that they can contribute towards the development of their students as critical and active citizens, with full rights and responsibilities. In this paper we present a framework for Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge based on the conceptions and practices of Civic Education teachers concerning this non-disciplinary curriculum area. The basis of our framework is the understanding that teaching is an extremely complex activity that relies on different types of knowledge. Teaching is a complex cognitive skill occurring in an ill-structured and dynamic environment (Spiro, Coulson, Feltovich, & Anderson, 1988). Furthermore, the effectiveness of teacher education policies, which enhances teachers' knowledge, depends first of all on the quality of the structures and mechanisms designed to support it, and secondly on the resources available. We advocate in early studies (Nogueira, et al., 2010) that the implementation of Citizenship Education as a non-disciplinary curriculum area (in Portugal called Civic Education) requires a conceptual clarification and a renewed focus on teacher training, taking into account the inefficiency of the strategies adopted by the teachers so far. In the following section we present the theoretical background of this research, mentioning some of the modern societal challenges and explaining how schools and teachers are coping with the challenge of Citizenship Education (policies inputs and findings from research studies). In the third section we describe our sources of evidence and confront them with Grossman teachers' knowledge model (1990) and the *input* from other

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recent studies (Magnusson, et al., 2002; Hashweh, 2005; Park & Oliver, 2008). Finally, in the last section, some final comments and reflections are put forward.

2. Globalization and the emergence of Citizenship Education in the national curriculum

Globalization is commonly defined as a global phenomenon of multidimensional and complex nature, involving the combination and sharing of information, cultures and markets. We live in an interconnected world, expressed in knowledge mutability and accelerated rhythms of life. These features of the modern era result in different constraints and pressures upon the structure of our societies, and demand critical reflection, new solutions and concerted decision-making from us all, but especially from the teacher, whose mission is to educate critical, participatory, tolerant and responsible global Citizens (Osler & Starkey, 2006). In recent decades, different countries have developed multiples curriculum approaches (not mutually exclusive) for the promotion of Citizenship Education. Some countries adopted Citizenship Education as a “separate stand-alone” compulsory or optional subject. Others argue that it has to be integrated into the curriculum of some specific subjects (one or more) such as Social Science, History and/or Philosophy. Another curriculum model has elected to look upon Citizenship Education as a cross-curricular educational theme included in all curriculum subjects (Eurydice, 2005). Regardless of the curriculum model adopted, we advocate that teachers are key elements for effectiveness and success in school (Cochran-Smith, 2005) and therefore their role in the promotion of Citizenship Education cannot be ignored. By focusing our research on teachers’ conceptions and practices concerning Civic Education, we aim to contribute towards the debate on teacher education policies in the field of citizenship education.

2.1. Civic Education, a curriculum approach towards the promotion of citizenship skills

The curriculum model that underpins the current Portuguese educational system was established by the Government Act No. 6 of 18th January 2001. Since then, Citizenship Education has been expected to be provided from a trans-disciplinary point of view (a component running throughout all subjects of the curriculum, contents, methodologies and attitudes), but also through a specific time of the curriculum taught by the class teacher, called Civic Education. Our attention will focus on this “subject” approach, to the extent that its nature (compulsory and non-disciplinary) raises important issues in terms of pedagogical approach and teacher training.

Designed as a non-disciplinary curricular area, the purpose of Civic Education is to promote citizenship skills in a less structured and formal learning scenario. In the scope of curricular autonomy principles, the Portuguese National Curriculum has provided schools and teachers with flexibility to develop their own curriculum content and innovative approaches towards the promotion of citizenship education. Class directors are the teachers that are mainly responsible for this curriculum time and it is up to them to outline the projects and activities that will construct meaningful learning and foster the development of citizenship skills in students. The assumptions of these responsibilities have clear implications on the training needs and professional development of teachers, as we will describe later.

Despite the broad consensus around this area, several studies (Almeida, 2006; Araújo, 2008; Bettencourt & Pinto, 2007; Figueiredo, 2005; Fonseca, 2009; Henriques, 2008; Santos, 2005) indicate its limitations. In general, Civic Education has primarily served the resolution of administrative issues (justification of students’ absences; dissemination of school information; academic success) and management of conflicts (disciplinary problems; student conflicts; etc.) and, to a lesser extent, the development of projects within the framework of citizenship. It was the awareness of these difficulties that prompted the development of this research project concerning the need and importance of teacher training in the domain of Citizenship Education.

3. Teachers’ Knowledge and Teacher education

Teaching is an experiential process that demands holistic and integrative critical analysis of both the theoretical frameworks that support it and the context in which it develops. The result of this process is the construction of a

professional knowledge that integrates a specific knowledge of the teaching profession, composed of multiple dimensions and modes of cognition (Montero, 2005). Thus, the teachers' knowledge that we report includes not only *pedagogical knowledge* (theoretical and conceptual knowledge), *know-how* (practical schemes of education), *know why* (the justification of the practice) (Garcia, 1999), but also *know how to be* (personal characteristics, emotions, values) (Tardif, 2002).

Recent studies (Bettencourt, 2009; Fonseca, 2009; Nogueira, et al., 2010) point out that most Civic Education teachers do not have any specific training in this field of knowledge. Considering that teaching depends on the teachers' knowledge about a particular curriculum domain, we then consider that teachers should be trained or provided with specific knowledge and skills necessary for an effective teaching of Civic Education. Taking this into account, what should be the nature of teacher training for Civic Education? In other words, how can we conceptualize Civic Education teachers' knowledge?

In the literature review we did find several studies that have addressed teachers' knowledge dimensions; however, none of them analyze teachers' knowledge regarding citizenship education or non-disciplinary curriculum subjects.

3.1. A framework for Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge

According to Shulman (1987), teachers possess a specific knowledge which distinguishes them from other professionals: pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). PCK focuses on the act of teaching, i.e., transforming knowledge of a particular topic or content and "*becoming able to elucidate subject matter in new ways, reorganize and partition it, clothe it in activities and emotions, in metaphors and exercises, and in examples and demonstrations, so that it can be grasped by students*" (Shulman, 1987, p. 13).

Based on our descriptive research findings (Nogueira, et al., 2010) around the conceptions (what they believe, the reasons for their actions) and practices (what they do) of Civic Education teachers and on the confrontation of these data with teachers' knowledge models (Grossman, 1990; Hashweh, 2005; Magnusson, et al., 2002; Park & Oliver, 2008), we put forward a framework for Civic Education teachers' knowledge (figure 1.). Our goal was to provide and list the dimensions we consider to be the knowledge base teaching for Civic Education and that would then be at the basis of future proposals for teacher training in this domain.

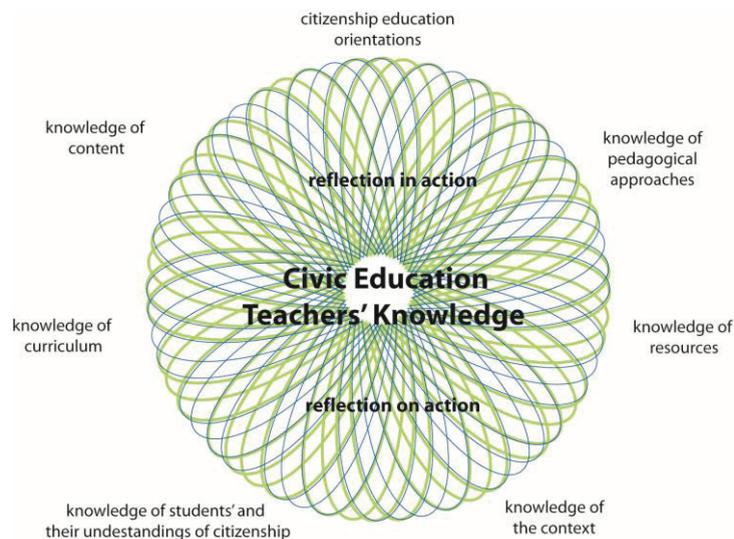


Figure 1 – Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge framework

In our point of view, Civic Education (or any other subject in the scope of citizenship education) needs a solid framework to guide teacher-training programs. Following the line of thought of several authors who over the past decades have focused their attention on this area of research, we argue that Civic Education teachers' knowledge is a dimension endowed with heuristic value structured on a combination of knowledge sources of internal origin (personal reflection, analysis of practices and feelings) and external origin (content to be taught, social context, politics and curriculum, working conditions) (Hashweh, 2005). Integration of multiples dimensions of knowledge occurs in a constructive process based on reflection in and on action (Schön, 1983). Therefore, one of the dimensions to take into account is the orientations of Citizenship Education. Teachers' beliefs about the purposes of this separate subject and the main goals within the scope of citizenship are very important and influence all decision making in class context.

Despite being a non-disciplinary area, Civic Education has curriculum orientations and relevant subject matter that teachers need to be aware of. Moreover, teachers' autonomy for planning and creating curriculum guidelines according to students' characteristics and contexts requires an even stronger knowledge not only of subject matter and curriculum orientations but also of the purposes underlying them. Curriculum knowledge is also very important in a trans-disciplinary perspective because Civic Education teachers are expected to integrate different knowledge domains in their lessons or activities (political, social, economic and cultural dimensions).

According to Park and Oliver (2008), knowledge instructional strategies – or pedagogical approach, as we labeled above –, concern subject specific strategies and also topic specific strategies. Taking into account that Civic Education may be linked with three major objectives – knowledge and understanding; skills and aptitudes; values and attitudes (Audigier, 2000) –, the pedagogical approach must be suited to the subject-matter (citizenship themes) and engaging activities or projects in the scope of critical and participatory citizenship.

Citizenship is mainly a multidimensional, dynamic and social construction. Therefore, the absence of a clear and unique definition of citizenship influences not only the curriculum and the content knowledge but also the remaining dimensions listed above (Figure 1). Bearing this in mind, resources in the field of citizenship education are multiple, disperse and not always reliable. Therefore, critical knowledge of resources available online and offline is crucial to gather relevant information and efficient pedagogical mechanisms interconnected with Civic Education.

Finally, as in other subject areas, transforming knowledge related to a particular citizenship topic or content needs to be adapted to a specific social context and take into account specific difficulties, characteristics and motivations of the students. Since controversial issues are very likely to be addressed in the context of citizenship (cultural or religious issues; political views; values and moral principles; etc.) an accurate analysis of the students' characteristics and possible misunderstandings is essential, along with a correct interpretation of the students' and schools' context.

4. Conclusions

In this paper we have made explicit our main concerns linked to Citizenship Education, namely with the current curriculum approach in Portugal: Civic Education. Most teachers responsible for this non-disciplinary curricular area do not have any kind of specific knowledge related to major issues of citizenship. Taking into account that teachers' efficiency relies on their pedagogical content knowledge, i.e., their ability to transform a particular topic or subject and to teach in an effective, useful and interesting way, Civic Education teachers lack training in multiple dimensions (Nogueira, et al., 2010). Our framework proposal listed the various components that we consider to influence teaching in the class context of Civic Education. We believe that this framework can contribute towards the definition of guidelines for the design, implementation and evaluation of teacher training programs in the scope of the non-disciplinary curriculum area of Civic Education. Research is still being carried out in order to enrich this framework and assess its relevance in the design of teacher training programs.

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