

Teachers and citizenship: What knowledge for what role?

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Abstract:

Given the current historical and social context, teachers can no longer limit their actions to the transmission of knowledge and values; they need to assume 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 recent decades, different countries have developed multiples curriculum approaches for the promotion of Citizenship Education. In Portugal, since 2011, Citizenship Education has been expected to be provided from a trans-disciplinary point of view but also through a specific time of the curriculum. 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. We advocate 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 (Nogueira, Moreira, & Pedro, 2010). Therefore, in this paper we present a framework proposal 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 which 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). 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 which have addressed teachers’ knowledge dimensions; however none of them analyze teachers’ knowledge regarding citizenship education or non disciplinary curriculum areas. This paper focus on an ongoing Ph.D. research carried out in close collaboration with teachers in the context of continuous training. The data presented are the result of different cycles of research, reflection, training, data collection and analysis. The interpretative analysis of the teachers’ “voices” resulted in the proposal of a teachers’ knowledge framework, based on the Grossman’s model (1990) as well as on the input from other recent investigations (Hashweh, 2005; Magnusson, Krajcik, & Borko, 2002; Park & Oliver, 2008). 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 and towards the debate on teacher education policy in the field of citizenship education.

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