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## CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND TEACHER TRAINING: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING PRACTICE

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### Abstract

Citizenship Education is one of the main challenges faced in educating children and young people in societies undergoing a rapid process of globalization in this decade, and it requires that teachers marshal particular knowledge and skills. Although this is a subject area that is part of the curriculum, it is often undervalued in teaching practice in the 1st cycle of basic education (CEB) [years 1 - 4]. It is, therefore, important to know the degree to which teachers are prepared to address citizenship issues, the relevance they attach to initial and ongoing training in this area, as well as the topics and/or content they would like to see addressed in their ongoing training, with a view to developing competencies related to citizenship in schools. To achieve these objectives, a descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted using a questionnaire survey as an instrument for data collection. The study covered a non-probabilistic sample of 91 mostly female 1st CEB teachers in the municipality of Viseu (Portugal), aged between 35 and 64 years. Regarding the results obtained, the overwhelming majority of teachers never attended training courses related to citizenship education, recognizing that there are aspects of their work that could be improved through attending such course, addressing issues related to teachers' didactic knowledge and conflict management in the classroom. The suggestions made by the teachers to promote meaningful learning in this area are an important contribution of this research, highlighting the focus on training (teachers and parents/guardians) and in fostering initiatives that promote the involvement of the educational community and other stakeholders in a cooperative and/or collaborative framework. This study aims to raise the scientific community's awareness of the importance of ongoing training in improvements and innovations in teaching in terms of citizenship education. In particular, the data presented enable policy makers, management bodies and teachers to reflect on the importance and implications that ongoing training has or may have on teaching practice for schools to be able to respond to the changing demands of today's society.

**Keywords:** Citizenship education, 1st cycle of basic education (CEB) [years 1 - 4], curriculum, teacher training, teachers' perspectives.

### Introduction

Our society is undergoing rapid change and evidence shows that inequality and the role played by social minorities are becoming increasingly evident. Through citizenship education, schools become key agents in raising active citizens who will be capable of contributing to the development and well-being of the society in which they live. The issue analysed in this research addresses the importance that teachers attach to Citizenship Education training and the impact that such training may have on their daily teaching practice. That way, it anticipates possible responsibilities and implications for teacher training, by raising the scientific community's awareness to the importance that continuing training has in improving and innovating citizenship teaching.

The existence of a curriculum that encourages transdisciplinarity enables the emergence of innovative work practices, by interconnecting the different mandatory subject areas with the complementary subjects offered by the school and by promoting a closer interaction between the school and the surrounding community. This situation has led many teachers to realize that they need to change their practices in order to meet the new social,

technological and professional demands they have to face in their everyday practice in which teachers have to accept profound changes that affect the planning and performance of their profession (Esteve, 2014). These new demands and challenges may often lead to teacher demoralisation and to a growing unease among these professionals.

According to Figueiredo (2002), teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of citizenship issues may differ considerably. Most teachers claim they do not have the specific training required to teach such issues and tend to feel insecure when they are asked to address citizenship topics. For the teachers, training is a necessity and even a requirement whenever any kind of education restructuring and/or reform is proposed. Nevertheless, this alleged failure in the teachers' initial training can be overcome if they are able to plan and handle their own continuing education, one of the necessary skills a teacher has to master (Perrenoud, 2000).

The initial teacher education and the teachers' continuing training are factors that are crucial to the construction of a school of citizenship we all wish for, from the micro level that is the classroom to the macro level represented by the institution itself (Barbosa, 2000). This requires teachers to change the way they act and to acquire and develop the skills they need to be able to reshape school so it can embrace citizenship. That way, teachers' initial education and continuing training should be rethought to enable them to develop citizenship skills in their schools. According to the Eurydice European study (Eurydice, 2017), an effective teacher initial education, a well-planned teacher continuing training and other types of support are instrumental in providing teachers with the skills they need to develop citizenship in their schools. Most European countries offer teachers several continuing training projects in the field of Citizenship Education that may vary in length, objectives, and content. These continuing training programmes aim to improve the quality of Citizenship Education throughout the country and to strengthen teachers' knowledge and skills in this area.

In Portugal, a discussion space entitled "Fórum Educação para a Cidadania" (Education Forum for Citizenship) from the initiative of the Ministry of Education was created and involved several personalities. This initiative led to the production of a document that includes a set of strategic objectives and recommendations to be taken into account when working in this area, namely at the level of teachers and other education agents' initial education and continuous training (Ministério da Educação, 2008).

In order to meet the needs of the Portuguese education system, a new school subject called Cidadania e Desenvolvimento – Estratégia Nacional de Educação para a Cidadania (Citizenship and Development - National Strategy for Citizenship Education) was created (Ministério da Educação, 2017). In this new element of the curriculum, the teachers' mission is to prepare students for life, to be democratic, active, and humanist citizens in a time of increasing social and cultural diversity.

To promote the values of citizenship it is necessary to train teachers and to prepare them to face this challenge. Teacher training, both at a cognitive and humanist level, is crucial to the teaching of this subject, as it will facilitate the interconnection of the learning that takes place in the different subjects and in the different topics explored.

However, the teacher's action in this subject may be influenced by the kind of training he holds in this area as well as by his motivation to teach it. A profile including the specific skills of the Citizenship and Development teacher was defined by the Ministry of Education in 2017. The creation of such subject defines the areas that will be addressed and the skills to be developed.

The topic of this research follows the reflection conducted on the teaching practices surrounding Citizenship Education in Primary Education. It is important to understand to what extent are teachers prepared to address citizenship issues, the importance they attach to teacher initial education and to teacher continuing training in this field and the aspects and/or contents they would like to see addressed in continuing training programmes and that would help them develop citizenship skills in their schools.

### **The Study**

Against this background, and in accordance with the objectives set for the research, we chose a descriptive and non experimental research that, according to Fortin (2009), aims to simply describe a phenomenon or a concept related to a certain population, in order to establish the characteristics of said population or of a sample of that population.

### **Participants**

The study covered all the Primary teachers working in the municipality of Viseu. The sample included 91 teachers. This is a convenience sampling (Hill & Hill, 2000) since it was selected for practical reasons.

The vast majority of the respondents are female teachers (84.6%) and only about one sixth of all respondents are male. Their ages range from 35 to 64 years. The most common age groups are those which include teachers who were between 45 and 49 years old (27.5%) and between 50 and 54 years old (26.4%).

As far as professional experience is concerned, almost half of the teachers have been working for at least 7 years and for less than 25 years. Right after, we find those whose length of service ranges between 26 and 35 (39.6%).

It should be noted that more than half of the participants in the study have completed their initial education between 1985 and 1994 and one third have completed it between 1995 and 2005. As far as academic qualifications are concerned, most teachers hold a bachelor's degree (80.2%) and only a small percentage (16.5%) holds a master's

degree.

### **Instrument**

In order to collect the empirical data we used a questionnaire that was handed out to primary school teachers and that included several types of questions deemed important to collect the wide variety of answers required to achieve the objectives of the study. The instrument consists of closed-ended questions, matrix or Likert scale questions, and an open-ended question (Pardal & Lopes, 2011). It is divided into three parts: i) sociodemographic background data; ii) data concerning teacher initial education and continuing training; iii) data related to the teacher's view of Citizenship Education.

Before the questionnaires were applied, a pre-test was carried out using a small sample of teachers with the same characteristics as those who will take part in this research but who were not included in the final study. No gaps were identified and no amendment to the items was suggested.

### **Procedure**

The questionnaire was submitted to the General Directorate of Education so it could be applied in the different schools using the Plataforma de Monitorização de Inquéritos em Meio Escolar (MIME), a platform whose aim is to ensure the monitoring of school surveys. The request was accepted, and the opinion issued stated that it met all the essential requirements and could therefore be applied.

Subsequently, contacts were made with all the principals of the school groupings located in the municipality of Viseu, and a request to apply the questionnaires was submitted in person.

Once the necessary authorization was issued, we went to the different primary schools to personally hand out the questionnaires to the coordinating teachers who then sent them to the different class teachers and who were responsible for collecting them back.

### **Data analysis methods**

To process the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires, a SPSS statistical programme (version 20) was used. Using this programme we were able to enter the data obtained, by variables, and to calculate absolute frequencies and relative frequency percentages.

To process the data extracted from the answers given to the open-ended question included in the questionnaire, we used the content analysis method (Bardin, 2013), a set of communication analysis techniques that researchers use to organize the information and make inferences based on the objective and systematic description of the specific characteristics of the message.

### **Findings**

We tried to figure out the teachers' opinion on the importance played by their initial education in their preparation to teach Citizenship Education. Data analysis showed that most of the teachers (62.7%) consider that the kind of training they had was enough to teach that subject, whereas the remaining teachers (37.4%) consider that their training was far from enough.

Even though some of the teachers said that their initial education was not enough, they felt that they are prepared (52.7%), or even quite prepared (34.1%), and that they feel confident enough to discuss citizenship issues with their pupils at school. However, according to the data obtained, less than one fifth of the respondents (18.7%) said they had attended training programmes in this area and the vast majority of the teachers (78.0%) stated that they had never taken part in any of those training initiative. In order to analyse the importance that teachers attach to attending Citizen Education-related training courses, teachers were asked whether or not some aspects of their practice could be improved by training courses focusing on that matter. Teachers' opinions are quite diverse: 68.1% of those surveyed consider that the attendance of continuous training courses can improve their pedagogical practices, but 27.5% think otherwise, and some non-answers were also provided.

Teachers were given the opportunity to list aspects of their work that can be improved through continuing training and were asked to specify them. The responses were analysed and grouped into different categories to facilitate their understanding and analysis (see Appendix A).

The first category encompasses aspects related to the teacher's educational knowledge that can be developed in training sessions (59.0%). The indicator that received more references was the one where teachers claim they would like to learn how to address citizenship issues in the continuing training sessions. Evidence also shows that teachers are always eager to share teaching experiences and consider this sharing a good way to acquire a wider teaching knowledge.

The second category, with around half of the references compared to the first, concerns the contents/topics that teachers would like to see addressed in training programmes. The indicator that stood up had to do with learning "how to deal with aggressive and disruptive behaviour in the classroom - conflict management".

Content analysis was also used to study another issue. Teachers' suggestions on what they think can be done to promote meaningful Citizenship Education learning were sorted into different categories. This reflection will be important to help schools respond to society's current demands for change.

The responses were sorted into four distinct categories that are meant to cover different spheres of the educational action, from the micro to the macro level of the educational system, and include suggestions that will lead to

changes in the teachers’ action or that call for changes in the educational system itself (Table 1).

The first category received the highest number of suggestions (37 references which account 33.3% of the responses) and includes the following subcategories: teacher training, parent/guardian training and student training that takes place outside the classroom.

The teachers surveyed consider that it is crucial to invest in citizenship training programmes, both for teachers (suggesting that there should be more training actions focusing on skills acquisition and on the creation and development of teaching resources) and for parents/guardians (general training for these educational agents).

The second category stresses the importance of the educational community and its involvement in the integral education of the pupils. This category obtained the lowest percentage of responses (16 references which amounts to only 14.4%). This category includes three subcategories that put forward a set of suggestions whose aim is to promote the interaction with the community and with other education actors to achieve significant learning and other suggestions that involve cooperative and/or collaborative work with the different agents who are part of the educational community.

**Table 1:** Suggestions for the promotion of meaningful learning in Citizenship Education.

Categories	Subcategories	NR	%
Citizenship Training	Teachers’ training	19	17.1
	Parents/guardians’ training	16	14.4
	Students’ training outside the classroom	2	1.8
Involvement with the local community	Educational community	9	8.1
	Other actors (civil society)	2	1.8
	Suggestions involving cooperative/collaborative work	5	4.5
Organisational and curriculum changes	Statutory and organisational changes	6	5.4
	Curriculum changes	26	23.4
Changes in the teachers’ educational performance	Promotion of citizenship experiences at school	17	15.3
	Human and material resources to implement innovation	9	8.1
<b>Total</b>		111	100.0

NM – Number of references

In the third category, teachers put forward a set of suggestions that will help implement organizational and curriculum changes (32 references which account for 28.8% of the responses). This category includes two distinct subcategories: proposals that will trigger organizational/legislative changes and proposals that will affect the curriculum. In this second subcategory, teachers stress the need for a reduction in the students’ curriculum and for a subsequent curricular revision (that will focus on the extension and on the contents of said curriculum). They also stress the importance of a reduction in the number of students per class.

The fourth category, with a lower percentage of references (23.4%), gathers proposals whose aim is to bring some innovation to the teachers’ educational action and includes two sub-categories: one of them has to do with the need to promote citizenship experiences at school (15.3%) (this need for innovation will be supported by the intervention of theater groups; more field trips, a closer contact with reality; the development of interpersonal relations and the development of more projects) and another subcategory that has to do with the need for human and material resources that are crucial to bring innovation to the teachers’ educational action (8.1%).

### Conclusions

Data analysis shows that most of the teachers consider that their initial education provided them with the necessary training to address Citizenship Education. Some of them say that their education was not enough, but further on, they state that they are prepared and feel confident to work on citizenship issues with pupils.

The outcomes obtained in this study differ from those obtained by Figueiredo (2002). This author states that most teachers do not have specific training and feel insecure to address citizenship issues. However, this gap in teachers’ initial education can be overcome and teachers are responsible for planning their own continuing training (Perrenoud, 2000) to constantly renew their teaching knowledge and practice.

In this study we found out that, generally speaking, teachers have never attended training actions focusing on Citizenship Education. This is a negative aspect that may hinder the improvement of the quality of teaching. The data obtained are in line with the results of a study conducted by Nascimento (2015) where most of the teachers surveyed recognised how important their continuous training was to the promotion of their professionalism.

Teachers stated that, during their continuing training sessions, they would like to discuss aspects related to teachers' educational knowledge. They would like to learn new ways to approach the discussion topic and to be provided with new teaching resources or material. These aspirations are evident in the following answers: "teaching methodologies that take into account the characteristics of our current classes (very big, heterogeneous classes...)"; "to address topics that focus on entrepreneurship, financial education, consumer education"; "how to plan and design teaching materials, to address current issues"; "to broaden what we already know about strategies, activities, games... that we can develop later".

It should also be mentioned that some other topics that teachers would like to see addressed in their continuing training sessions show how concerned they are with conflict management in the classroom - "knowing how to deal with aggressive and disruptive behavior in the classroom - conflict management". According to Esteves (2012), this concern with the behaviour of their students leads teachers to sacrifice the quality and depth of their educational action, by avoiding any sort of activity that may facilitate the emergence of disturbing situations in the classroom. This kind of position stresses the importance of addressing that sort of topics so as not to compromise the quality of the teaching.

Teachers say that, in their training sessions, they would like to be introduced to new methodologies and be provided with new and more effective material resources that would help them address citizenship topics. However, we realize that most of the teachers are not aware of the reference documents developed and made available online by the Ministry of Education. These reference documents were developed to assist the teachers in their work in the classroom since they cover the different dimensions of Citizenship Education and include a large number of activities and strategies prepared to develop the topics/issues that will be discussed. We consider that the continuous training actions should not only make these references known, but should also lead the teacher to reflect on his own practice and on the students he works with so he can be prepared to adapt his teaching practices to the different learning profiles present in his classroom.

Most teachers consider that, during their initial academic career, they had adequate and necessary training to address Citizenship Education and state that they feel prepared to work on these issues. However, they are perfectly aware that the access to continuing training programmes would be important to improve their teaching practices. This shows that we currently have a class of teachers who are concerned with updating their professional knowledge. It is worth noting that, for Nóvoa (2009), continuing training programmes today must be able to adopt a collective vision, providing for the exchange of experiences, by leading teachers to move beyond individualistic and isolated practices that tend to compromise the much-needed reflection on their practice.

Teachers must possess all the skills they need to redefine school and to look at Citizenship Education transversally. The study we have conducted makes it possible to reflect on what can be done during teachers' initial education to provide them with the right skills to teach Citizenship Education. In addition, it puts forward a number of topics to may be addressed in upcoming continuing training programmes and that are based on suggestions and/or concerns shared by teachers themselves. It should also be noted that effective changes in teachers' educational practices will occur when teachers attend continuing training programmes that focus on the aforementioned topics or when initial education is rethought in order to provide them with the suitable skills to deal with citizenship issues, and, consequently, we will have better and more aware citizens who are able to live harmoniously in society.

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**Appendix A:** Aspects of the teacher's work to be improved through continuing training programmes.

Categories	Indicators	NR	%
Teacher's educational knowledge	"How to address the topics"	5	12.8
	"To broaden teachers' knowledge of strategies, activities and games they will develop later"	2	5.1
	"To learn how to plan and create teaching material"	1	2.6
	"Teaching methods taking into account the characteristics of today's classes (very big and heterogeneous classes)"	1	2.6
	"Suggestions of activities that can be developed"	1	2.6
	"How to address the topics in a more playful way"	2	5.1
	"To acquire new skills in this particular field: resources, materials"	2	5.1
	"To update scientific and educational knowledge that will pave the way for new approaches favouring teaching in context"	1	2.6
	"To update new methodologies that will be used to approach the topics to be discussed"	2	5.1
	"Participation in citizenship activities"	1	2.6
	"To share educational material"	2	5.1
	"To share experiences"	3	7.7
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>23</b>	<b>59.0</b>
Topics to be addressed	"To address and discuss current issues"	1	2.6
	"To discuss issues related to entrepreneurship, financial education, consumer education"	1	2.6
	"How to be an active and responsible citizen"	1	2.6
	"The rights and obligations of an individual"	1	2.6
	"Topics related to personal/social relationships between children"	1	2.6
	"Discipline/indiscipline"	1	2.6
	"Current issues related to today's information society"	1	2.6
	"To understand how we deal with aggressive and disruptive behaviours in the classroom- conflict management"	3	7.7
	"To be familiar with the topics that will be discussed"	1	2.6
	"To discuss money saving strategies and interpersonal relations"	1	2.6

“Changes within families”	1	2.6
“Values/ethics”	1	2.6
“Gender equality and sexuality”	1	2.6
“Migration-related issues”	1	2.6
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>41.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100.0</b>

NR – Number of references