

# Civic Education in Basic School: Problems and Challenges in the Digital Age

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**Abstract** — This paper focus on the analysis of preliminary data of an ongoing study involving Portuguese teachers and students, in the non-disciplinary curricular area of Civic Education. The project aims at encouraging collaborative behaviour in educational communities, involving teachers and students in the development of digital contents, and at exploring different issues on citizenship education, under a case-based methodology. We believe this action research study is of relevance because it can unveil examples of good practices and innovative teaching strategies that need to be disseminated in this compulsory subject taking into account the results of recent studies, which exposed some of the inefficiency of the strategies adopted so far.

**Index Terms** — Civic education, Collaboration, Information and communication technologies, Teachers' perceptions

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, along with the society's mutation, the theoretical concepts and practical implementations of the concept of Citizenship has changed. The meaning of this term is steadily broadening and expanding as relations with others and lifestyles become more globalized and diversified [1].

Global exchanges and realities, technological progress and knowledge mutability are some of the characteristics of our time, which result in different constraints and pressures upon the structure of our societies, and demand critical reflection, new solutions and concerted decision-making [2]. Citizenship is therefore, along with Education, at the heart of political and philosophical world discussions.

In general terms, Citizenship is directly linked to a legal status that makes individuals members of a society with rights and duties. Nevertheless, in a deeper sense, Citizenship is much more than that. The notion of Citizenship has its genesis in Ancient Greece and it was related with democratic involvement and direct participation of the citizen in the *Polis* (or city-state). Since that period, the concept has been evolving continuously and is now in the centre of western political discourses underpinned by the idea of social justice and welfare [3].

Contemporary social problems such as inequalities and social exclusion, lack of tolerance and violence in multicultural communities, anti-democratic and racist movements, global environmental problems, inadequate (or lack of) engagement in civic and political life [4], [5], has put in education – particularly in School – the responsibility to promote critical, participatory, tolerant and responsible global Citizens.

According to one of the UNESCO reports [6: 11] "promoting quality education and training for all young people between the ages of 12 and 18/20 is essential to securing a better future and constitute an essential mechanism for combating social exclusion at the local, national and global levels". In its broadest sense, Citizenship Education is seen as a panacea for fragile democracies, social cohesion crisis resolution, and an essential tool for building a social sustainable order [7].

Educating for Citizenship therefore implies an intentional and systematic educational effort, across and involving the whole school as a community, with the ultimate goal of promoting a global enrichment of students as people, and preparing them for active participation in society.

Obviously, the role of education in "making good citizens" is not a recent discovery, once at the end of the 80s, beginning of the 90s, most European countries chose to develop programmes for Citizenship Education and Learning, focused on the school sector. According to Brooks [8: 90], "in part, this can be explained by the relative ease of accessing large groups of people through such initiatives". Although the different European member states developed multiple approaches for Citizenship Education promotion [9], there is

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an effort to promote a common benchmark of skills within Citizenship [1], [10].

In Portugal, after several reforms and projects within the scope of personal and social education and democratic citizenship [11], [12] a non-disciplinary curricular area named Civic Education<sup>1</sup> was implemented (Government Act No. 6 of 18 January 2001).

This study aims to discuss preliminary data of an ongoing study about this compulsory subject. It is our purpose to understand its current teaching in order to promote significant changes, linking it with the potential that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can have in today's society and the attraction it triggers in the children of the age range with whom we are developing this study.

Is the school prepared and teachers trained for the challenge of Citizenship Education? What is the importance of collaboration in this field? What is the role of ICT in a society increasingly dominated by the power of technology? These are some of the questions we intend to answer by the end of this research process.

The action research nature of this study requires a primary comprehensive analysis of reality, the diagnosis of problems and the description of good practices that already exist. Only after the construction of this framework it will be possible to develop change mechanisms based on a collaborative approach between external researchers and the actors in schools, in order to evaluate their educational impact.

In the following section we present the theoretical framework that guided and motivated this action-research study, explaining how schools are dealing with the challenge of Citizenship Education (policies inputs and findings from research studies) and reflecting about the role of ICT in the promotion of Citizenship Education.

In the third section we describe the motivations and framework of the present study, in order to introduce the main focus of this paper: preliminary data analysis of teachers' interviews.

Finally we present the results from the interviews conducted with teachers responsible for Civic Education (n=10) in order to attain the following objectives: a) to understand teachers' perceptions about Civic Education; b) to understand the functioning of the non-disciplinary curricular area of Civic Education; c) to analyze teachers' digital

literacy; d) to analyze teachers' training in the field of Citizenship Education and ICT.

In the last section, some final comments and reflections are put forward.

## 2 CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION WITHIN SCHOOL

### 2.1 Educational policies

Citizenship Education has been in the last decades a subject matter of fruitful International and European discussions and also an object of large-scale research projects [13], [14], [15], which have resulted in important guidelines for political leaders, policy makers and educators [1], [16], [17], [18].

A recent study from Eurydice [9] allowed us to understand different curricular approaches (not mutually exclusive) that European countries had developed in the past few years.

Some countries adopted citizenship education as a "separate stand-alone" compulsory or optional subject, others defend 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 option was to look upon Citizenship Education as a cross-curricular educational theme included in all subjects of the curriculum [9].

In Portugal, the implementation of a Citizenship approach in formal education has a long history of advances and setbacks. The evolution of the concept and the practical applications are directly connected with the social and political context, as we can confirm in multiple articles [12], [19], [20], [21], [22].

A consensus around Citizenship Education was achieved, within the curriculum reorganization of basic education in 2001 [23]. Among other changes, a non-disciplinary curricular area (Civic Education) was created and it was defined as a privileged space for the development and exercising of citizenship. Since then, Citizenship Education has been expected to be offered from a trans-disciplinary point of view (a component running across all subjects of the curriculum, methodologies and attitudes), but also focused on a specific time of the curriculum. Similar situations are happening (or happened) in other countries: "in secondary education (or at certain stages of it), nearly half of all European countries have established a separate subject for teaching pupils citizenship" [9:59].

Despite the compulsory nature of this non-disciplinary curricular area, the National Curriculum "gives schools and teachers great

<sup>1</sup> Although some official documents, such as Eurydice, translate this non-disciplinary curricular area as Civic Training, we choose to translate it as Civic Education.

flexibility to develop their own innovative approaches to citizenship education and develop their own curriculum contents” [24:2]. Schools and teachers are therefore primarily responsible for its design, implementation and application in the schools, and it is up to them to outline the projects and activities in order to construct meaningful learning and foster citizenship skills in students [25], [26], [27].

## 2.2 Recent research findings

Across the world, multiple academic and non-academic studies regarding Citizenship Education have been conducted. However, in this article the emphasis is given to some Portuguese studies concerning the non-disciplinary curricular area of Civic Education and the links that can be established with similar international findings.

Several years after the implementation of Civic Education, national studies that evaluated the impact of this policy showed that this compulsory subject is confronted with several difficulties. Despite the broad consensus around this area, several authors [28], [29], [30], [31], [32], [33] indicate some of its limitations. In general, Civic Education has primarily served the resolution of administrative issues (justification of students' absences; school information; academic success) and management of conflicts (disciplinary problems; peer conflicts; etc.) and, to a lesser extent, for the development of projects within the framework of citizenship. About this, Bettencourt [28] states that Civic Education is considered an essential area in managing the class, although it is noted that the programmatic content of this area associated with the promotion of citizenship, is relegated to the background or even totally marginalized.

In the first year of implementation of Citizenship Education as a non-disciplinary curricular area, Santos' [31:83] research pointed out that “teachers had an idea about Civic Education but had difficulties in its implementation” that is why this non-disciplinary curricular area functioned more for information transmission rather than for experiential training.

More recently, Figueiredo [30], regarding the experiences and data collected in several teacher training programs, states that the difficulties around this subject are largely due to the absence of teacher training in this domain but also because of the lack of interest in teaching the subject. The existence of a significant quantity of teachers that perceive Citizenship Education as a burden have already been highlighted by Holden [34].

Brooks [8], referring other empirical studies, shows that practical constraints to teaching citizenship also mentioned were inadequate training and support in addition to the status of the subject and considerable variation in the level of teacher competences.

The results of these studies allow us to understand that the objectives underlying this non-disciplinary curricular area are far from being fully implemented.

## 2.3 Issues in Citizenship Education: the role of ICT

We are witnessing the development of the knowledge society, demanding in cognitive skills and structured around the use and manipulation of information. ICT, particularly the Internet, constitutes a social phenomenon and that is why it must also be considered as a citizenship-related matter. Williamson [35: 2] notes the numerous discussions around the idea that being “computer illiterate is to miss out on the full opportunities of citizenship”. Its very existence (ICT) and the manner in which it is used have implications for many aspects of today's living [36].

Sellwyn [24], [37] has synthesized the role of ICT regarding Citizenship Education in three different perspectives: i) as a source of citizenship information; ii) as a means of taking part in Citizenship discussion; and iii) as a source of producing citizenship materials. Looking at websites of governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, companies and other local groups, we realize that there is a substantial amount of online information about Citizenship, which is the most prevalent use of ICT in educational practices. There is a powerful and unquestionable argument behind this practice – the use of the Internet allows access to a wide range of information, opinions and perspectives from around the world that would otherwise be inaccessible. Although we do not question this evidence, we believe that these three approaches must be increasingly interconnected in the teaching/learning process, in order to achieve a real paradigm shift in which Citizenship is transmitted through experience itself.

According to Martín [38], the information society creates virtual spaces for communication, collaboration, and teamwork and, by extension, new types, models and forms of socialization, constituting therefore an important opportunity for innovation. Consequently, a kind of teacher knowledge concerning the use of new technologies is desirable and even required, which will gradually make teachers more accustomed to

working in virtual environments, in interdisciplinary teams, and to be able to join a process and style of permanent training and retraining (lifelong learning).

### 3 TICITIZENSHIP: TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION AND CITIZENSHIP

#### 3.1 Motivation and framework

Citizenship skills, abilities and attitudes are required of teachers, but they are rarely provided the necessary training to perform this role [20].

One of the major motivations of this project named TICitizenship (integrated in a major PhD research) was the will to develop mechanisms to support the teaching activity, taking into account the research findings previously described.

On the other hand, behind this investigation is a strong interest in exploring the potential of ICT in the development of a community of practice around Citizenship Education. The purpose of the creation of a community of practice is to develop its members' capabilities, to encourage the sharing of experiences, to build and share knowledge [39].

ICT play an important role in this field, as practices have been less affected by the boundaries of time and space through the use of ICT. Moreover, the greatest possibilities to interact create further opportunities for learning and for the collaborative construction of knowledge.

The ongoing study we are developing can be divided into different dimensions (since this is an action-based research, we should point out dimensions and not phases, to the extent that different tasks intersect with each other and are cumulative over time):

1. *Diagnosis of Civic Education functioning* (Document Analysis; Interviews to teacher and school staff; Questionnaire to students; Class observations);
2. *Development of a teacher training program* (joint reflection and discussion of the problems and potentialities of Civic Education);
3. *Development of a Community of Practice* (TICitizenship) through the support of Web 2.0 tools and the *DidaktosOnLine* platform to promote collaborative development of digital resources within the framework of Citizenship (involving teachers and students from different classes);

#### 3.2 An action-research project

Once the aims guiding this study have been presented, it is now essential to clarify our methodological choices. Given the interest in producing effective changes in Civic Education and encourage collaborative work between the students and teachers involved, this study is action research based.

The relationship between research, action and training will be continuous in this project with a real and significant transformation of practices as its primary goal.

Action research is a reflective process of progressive problem solving, involving teams and work group directly associated with the concept of communities of practice. One of its main features is related with the ability to break the barriers between theory and practice, allowing an analysis of the real state of the art of the situation under study and an effective involvement of the key actors in the educational process [40], in this case the teachers.

Associated with this research methodology various techniques of data collection can be used. In this first phase of the study, we have already used different strategies for a detailed analysis of the functioning of Civic Education, in terms of students, teachers and institutions. Thus, interviews were conducted with Class Teachers, the Coordinator of Class Teachers and the Chairman of the School Executive Council; questionnaires were applied to students and institutional documents were analyzed (Class Curricular Projects; School Curriculum Project and School Educational Project).

Within this paper, we will only discuss some preliminary data, gathered from Class Directors interviews, and they will be discussed bearing in mind the findings of other studies and the future intervention plan (development of a teacher training program).

## 4 PRELIMINARY RESULTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

### 4.1 Population characterization

The data presented were collected from 10 of the 12 teachers who taught in the school selected to participate in the study, in the academic year of 2008/2009. All teachers were class directors, teaching in lower secondary education, seven (70%) female and three (30%) male. The interviewees are experienced teachers – with more than 10 years of teaching experience, 3 of whom with more than twenty years of teaching experience.

## 4.2 Methodology

In the first phase of this study, the main goal was to analyze the role of the non-disciplinary curricular area of Civic Education in the educational community on multiple dimensions.

In order to accomplish this task, it was important to identify the teachers' perceptions on this subject and to understand the real functioning of this non-disciplinary curricular area.

Once the main goal of this research project is directly associated with the use of ICT, it was also necessary to analyze the teachers' levels of digital literacy and the way they used these tools. Another key aspect in this preliminary phase was to identify the teachers training needs in this non-disciplinary area, especially as far as an effective planning of a teacher-training program is concerned.

In order to obtain these data we adopted a qualitative methodology. The process started with the analysis of official school documents and an informal conversation with some teachers. After that, the interview guidelines were drawn, in order to conduct semi-structured interviews to Class Teachers, to the Coordinator of Class Teachers and to the Chairman of the School Executive Council.

The collected data from the interviews made to the teachers was analyzed using the qualitative method of content analysis. According to Berelson [41:18], content analysis is an "investigative technique that aims to describe objectively, systematically and quantitatively the manifest content of communication", which allows a structured reading of the collected data, enabling an understanding and accurate representation of the communication conditions, as well as the relations with other variables relevant to the ongoing investigation (gender, age, professional category, etc.) [42].

The content analysis process is structured, according to Bardin [43], in different phases: 1) pre-analysis; 2) exploration of the material (coding and categorization) and 3) results inference and interpretation.

It is the exploration material that conducts and enables the encoding of the "text" (transcribed interviews). Moreover, Holsti [44:94] also explains "coding is the process whereby raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units which permit precise description of relevant content characteristics". This transformation takes place around specific rules involving choices and decision-making by the researcher that establishes the link between the data, the theoretical framework and research

assumptions. One of the first decisions relates to the delimitation of the registration units – understood as the "unit of meaning" – that corresponds to the segment of content to be considered as the basic unit for categorization and counting [43]. In this study the registration unit considered more appropriate was the "theme", given its relevance to the analysis of motivations, opinions, attitudes, values and trends.

The following procedure involved the content categorization of the interviews. This process of structuring/classification of the content requires the definition of categories – significant items that take a generic title (keyword) and bring together groups of elements (units of registration).

The category system developed within this study was based on the qualities proposed by Bardin [43] for thematic categorization:

1. Mutual exclusion between elements;
2. Homogeneity of categories;
3. Pertinence, reflecting the intentions of the investigation;
4. Objectivity in the definition of classificatory variables;
5. Productivity, in the sense of providing innovative inferences.

Given the underlying complexity, the category system design suffered a gradual process of maturation. Therefore, in addition to the initial categories, new and reformulated categories emerged (ideographic perspective).

Below there is a summary of the main results of Class Director interviews, divided into analysis dimensions according to the different objectives listed previously.

## 4.3 Discussion of dimensions of analysis

### 4.3.1 Perceptions about Civic Education

The analysis dimension concerning the perceptions about Civic Education was divided into five categories:

1. Civic Education implementation;
2. Civic Education aims;
3. Civic Education teaching difficulties;
4. Students receptivity to Civic Education;
5. Civic Education impact.

Each one of these categories was divided into subcategories, which allowed us to reach conclusions on some important issues. As to the implementation of this compulsory subject on the national curriculum, the majority of the interviewees agreed with the main principle of this subject, i.e. they considered that it is necessary, useful and important, nevertheless some defended that it should exist in different formats. The respondents considered that

there is little time allocated to this subject and they are aware of the wrong use of Civic Education classes for behavioral or bureaucratic issues – in line with Bettencourt's [28] conclusions. One teacher even argues that the Class Director should not be the one responsible for this non-disciplinary curricular area, to avoid it. Several interviewees also indicate that the lack of training and preparation made them rather reluctant in developing this subject. This is consistent with Figueiredo's findings [30] who states that the lack of preparation is associated with less interest in "teaching" this non-disciplinary curricular area.

Regarding Civic Education aims, we can confirm that majority of the respondents relates this non-disciplinary curricular area with personal and social development. All of them mention that its main goal is to promote the existence of "good people", e.g. helping students acquire the civic information and values commonly accepted by society in order to facilitate their interpersonal relationships and social integration. To improve the students' behavior in and out of school is also an objective underlying the respondents' speech. Henriques [32], in a recent study, concluded that Civic Education aims at solving some of the students' problems, namely to fight indiscipline and to improve the students' attitudes in other classes. Actually, only one interviewee mentioned the importance of alerting students for dimensions of political knowledge and participation.

The difficulties concerning this subject are similar to other research results: lack of time; inadequate training; behavioral problems; sensible or controversial themes (e.g. sexuality) and lack of collaboration or coordination.

According to the interviewees, the majority of students tend to enjoy the Civic Education classes, because they perceive it as an important space for dialogue and debate:

"They (students) accept this subject because it is seen as a space where they can talk, can expose all their problems... we go to that classes to solve problems!" (D1).

However, some teachers reveal that the interest varies according to the theme that is being worked. The perception that Civic Education is a minor discipline in comparison to others, in the students' point of view, was stressed by two of the interviewees.

As to the Civic Education impact, the respondents tend to affirm that it has a positive impact; nevertheless, they state that this is not an easy issue to evaluate:

"I hope so. The problem is you never

know... (...) I notice some improvements ... the behavior of the students, the way they face some problems more related to their age, there is an improvement... but I cannot say, because there isn't any initial or final assessment..." (D9).

In some way, still concerning the impact of Civic Education, there is some positive evidence concerning behavioral problems and school conflict resolution. Several interviewees argued that the impact of Civic Education depended directly on the teachers responsible for the subject:

"(...) it also depends very much on who is leading, that is, the teacher!" (D4).

This statement also reflects recent findings [8: 90], once it draws attention to the influence of the "considerable variation in the level of teacher competences".

#### 4.3.2 Civic Education functioning

In order to understand the way this non-disciplinary curricular area is being implemented, we explored multiple issues concerning practices and categorized them in the following structure:

1. Civic Education planning
2. Methodological strategies
3. Current pedagogical practices
4. Themes
5. Materials
6. Assessment
7. Collaborative work

The discourse analysis and its synthesis allow us to state that, in this school, there was a concern to guide the teachers' practices within this subject. An internal program was developed years ago and it is distributed to all teachers at the beginning of each academic year. This program lists the skills students must develop, the themes to be addressed and the methodologies that should be used. The school's attempt to implement a curriculum at a micro level for Civic Education is based on the revealed difficulties underlying the implementation of this subject. Santos [31] and Borrego [29], in their studies, had already highlighted that most teachers felt the need for this kind of practices guidelines. However, none of the interviewees ever fulfilled the program completely; the majority claims having focused promptly some topics, mainly at the beginning of the year. Some even stated that they did not focus on any of those contents in class. Individual planning based on this school program is, therefore, in some cases, totally away from the current practices. Some teachers revealed their

planning only in the beginning of the year, but rarely follow those plans, and a larger number state that they draw their informal plans on a weekly basis. These findings are in line with the conclusions drawn by Thornberg [45: 1795] about the teachers' point of view about their practices, which are "most often reactive, unplanned and embedded in everyday school life with the focus on students' everyday behaviour in school as a constantly ongoing informal curriculum".

Concerning methodological strategies, we conclude there is a strong propensity for developing work groups and debates.

Reinforcing Bettencourt [29] and Henriques [32] inferences, in this school current pedagogical practices are mainly linked with class management and conflict resolution. Nonetheless, a few develop some themes or projects in line with Citizenship Education:

"(...) if you ask me if I worked extensively on a theme in Civic Education, I will have to say that I did not work any..." (D6).

Nevertheless, the most recurrent theme was sexuality, followed by inter-personal issues (emotions, solidarity) and vocational guidance. Moreover, the interviewees took into consideration the willingness of students concerning theme selection.

Most materials used in Civic Education classes are made by the teachers, and they approach some topics withdrawn from commercial manuals, and also information gathered on the Internet (texts, images, newspapers). Pedagogical videos are also an important material used by some respondents. Concerning assessment the school has a grid with the criteria, which is also used for Civic Education. A large number of interviewees extend Civic Education classification by using transversal criteria:

"I make them feel that it is a transversal area that has to do with their attitudes... in school, in the different subjects and not only in subjects but also out of school" (D1).

Only one respondent assumes to focus the assessment on the activities concerning this non-disciplinary curricular area. This focus on transversal assessment is probably a result from the excessive importance given to students' attitudes and behaviours in this subject, rather than a real evidence of trans-disciplinary practices.

As to collaborative work between teachers, the majority of the interviewees state that collaboration did not exist:

"Civic education is the sole responsibility of the Class Director" (D1).

Occasionally they share some class materials (especially videos) and some structured collaboration guidelines in sensitive topics/themes as sexuality (science teachers' help other teachers). The remaining references to collaboration refer to aspects related to class management, conflict resolution and other issues related more with the liability of the Class Director than with the objectives of Civic Education.

#### 4.3.3 Teacher digital literacy

Digital Literacy is an important issue in our society and for the study we are undertaking. We divided our analysis in the following categories:

1. Competences in ICT
2. Attitude towards ICT
3. Use of ICT.

Regarding competences, based on the definition of Costa *et al* [46] we can conclude that only one interviewee lacked basic competences in ICT; a large number of respondents seem to be in the second level of pedagogical skills in ICT and only one seems to be at an advanced level of pedagogical skills in ICT.

As to the use of ICT, we can highlight that most respondents revealed that they did not use any kind of technological tools in Civic Education classes or for issues related with this subject. Most interviewees recognize that the advantages associated with ICT use are almost exclusively linked to motivation, and some respondents mentioned the Internet as an important means to access information.

ICT use is in most cases related with some research, integrated into group tasks, about the themes they discuss in classes, especially for the development of written papers. One respondent mentioned the use of email to save some of the time available for this subject, so that he could develop further work with students.

#### 4.3.4 Teacher training

In order to plan a teacher-training program on Civic Education, we asked the interviewees about their previous training and expectations about this specific issue.

We categorized this analysis dimension in:

1. Civic Education training in initial teacher educational programs
2. Civic Education training in in-service teacher educational programs
3. Interest in Civic Education training
4. Training in ICT

The most important conclusion in this

dimension is that none of the respondents had any specific formal training in Civic Education. Only two interviewees revealed that their initial teacher educational program was important, giving them the tools to fulfill this subject's aims. The other considered their training irrelevant for this domain or even non-existing.

Regarding future training, several teachers demonstrated interest in having formal training in the area of Citizenship Education or specifically about Civic Education. Their interests concern methodological strategies, the clarification of the subject's main themes, appropriate practical activities, plan activities, developing materials, pedagogical tools...

Finally, as to ICT, we can conclude that a large number of respondents had formal training in this specific area, complemented by self-training or peer support. Only one interviewee stated not to have developed the necessary competences, claiming lack of training opportunities in this area.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The data presented in the previous section are part of a broader set of data collected through interviews to teachers from the school that will take part of our action research project.

The empirical results presented above allowed us to understand that several years after the introduction of this non-disciplinary curricular area, its effectiveness is still far from initial hopes and expectations.

Despite the fact that the interviewees consider it useful and relevant, they seem to have many doubts and some defend a different framework. Since the majority of time is spent with bureaucratic issues and behavioural problems, teachers ask for more time per week for Civic Education in order to implement projects connected with Citizenship Education. Is this the solution? During the last years, teachers were trying to increase good behaviour, values and rules, but problems and conflicts remain.

Inadequate training is also a relevant issue regarding this study. We can find several studies with similar findings: the majority of teachers do not have scientific knowledge and pedagogical training for implementing efficiently an area such as Civic Education. We do not argue that teachers have to know all about political participation, civic education, value education and character education, not even do they have to know all about

controversial and extended themes like sexuality, human rights, sustainable development, gender discrimination, racism, etc. If teachers join all their knowledge and skills together, helping each other, sharing tools and ideas, collaborating towards an articulated action plan, certainly changes will happen.

We believe teachers have to develop active citizens, critical thinkers, participating and involved individuals, and many other skills that can only be developed through action.

Different European institutions have developed a great number of literature references and projects and yet so many teachers talk about lack of material and support tools. What is wrong in this scenario? Is this evidence of the "subject status" problem that Brooks [8] highlighted? Teachers are, above all, interested in their specific areas of teaching and to a minor extent in this transversal domain.

Following the work developed by the Forum for Citizenship Education, whose strategic goals and recommendations were published in June 2008 [47], we think it is essential to promote reflection on the role and functions of the non-disciplinary curricular area of Civic Education within the educational community, creating an opportunity for teachers to share their experiences, adjust their practices/strategies and consolidate their knowledge.

The document under consideration, among other objectives, refers the need to "ensure initial and continuing training of teachers (...) directed towards the acquisition of working skills in education for global citizenship, ensuring the creation, adaptation, development and dissemination of resources and materials for this purpose". It also recalls the importance of "promoting the culture of joint and individual responsibility with social networking in particular through ICT" [47: 25]. Preliminary results from the interview analysis allowed us to develop a teacher-training program in which the principal aims are: a) to promote discussion about teaching strategies and methodological principles under the concern of Civic Education b) to encourage teachers to promote joint and individual reflection about their practices. Alongside, this teacher-training program also aims to foster collaborative development of digital educational resources, in order to promote the acquisition of technical skills and facilitate the use and appropriation of ICT in Civic Education approaches.

Why not try to minimize the problem of lack of time and collaboration through the use of ICT? Some technological tools, the ones children use the most (Messenger, Skype, Social networks) allow to extend discussion themes outside the school walls (as one of the interviewees mentioned).

Teachers may also share and discuss information, ideas and resources with other professionals through online communities of practice. On another dimension, ICT are privileged tools to communicate with the global world (other cultures, other languages, other realities), and also to access and share immeasurable quantities of information [36].

We therefore believe it is appropriate to carry out this study, which includes the reflection and/or modification of practices within the area of non-disciplinary curricular Civic Education with the promotion of collaborative work and exploitation of the potential of ICT.

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