

Alternative Active Citizenship

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Due to increasing European challenges of socio-economic problems, political extremism and a lack of confidence in democratic processes, citizenship education has become a key topic in the education systems of many countries. The purpose of citizenship education is to provide the young generation with the knowledge and information they need to enter adulthood as active citizens who take responsibility both for their own situation and for their community. Active citizenship also includes the will and the ability for young people to participate in and influence the political process on various issues (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

On the other hand, there are student-based public protests, such as campus demonstrations and street marches intended to affect the public opinion. Using uncompromising and controversial methods to attract attention these activities sometimes turn into conflicts and riots. However, there is a risk that the undemocratic approach will be more noticeable than the issue. To prevent conflicts of this kind there is a need for new and better ways of communicating dissent among young people (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, Jr & Ganesh, 2011).

To understand the socio-political discourse in the environment requires knowledge about how use different perspectives to interpret and understand the multitude of voices within and outside the current theme. Active citizenship education for young people will increase the societal transformation and the skills to advocate their own perspectives and influence wider social meanings (Finet, 2001).

The Eurydice network

The Eurydice network is an institutional network for gathering, monitoring, processing and circulating comparative information on education systems and policies throughout Europe. Its website gives access to policy information on educational systems for European countries.

According to a Eurydice report “Citizenship Education at School in Europe” (European Commission/EACEA/ /Eurydice, 2017) the content and objectives of citizenship education vary between different countries. Some countries emphasize that students will have skills and attitudes to be active and socially responsible citizens. Other focus on developing personal qualities like critical thinking. Overall, citizenship education reduces the distance between the individual and the community by both expanding the interests of the community and improving the liberty of the individual.

Overall European perspective

The understanding of what are the right competences varies between countries and across time and space. Factors making citizenship education a fluid concept are different political constitutions and the degrees of economic wealth, socio-political stability, national context and international relations. Empirical research has shown that different European countries emphasise different aspects of citizenship through education. Previous Eurydice reports (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012) states that citizenship education in Europe is

characterized by different educational systems, each with its own structures, means, priorities and methods. In the absence of an overall European perspective, active citizenship education can be seen from three overlapping perspectives.

- *Structural factors (organisation of the education system, values, aims and funding)*
- *Contextual conditions (historical tradition, geographical position, socio-political situation, economic system)*
- *Global trends (Europeanisation and globalisation)*

Competence areas

In summary the aims of citizenship education is supporting students to become active, informed and responsible citizens, willing to take responsibility for themselves and for their communities at the local, regional, national and international level. Except from learning relevant topics in the classroom, citizenship education involves practical experiences gained through activities in the wider society. Training and support of teachers and principals is important for an efficient and well-functioning implementation process. To achieve the objectives, citizenship education is divided into four main competence areas (European Commission/EACEA/ Eurydice, 2017).

1. *Interacting effectively and constructively with others*
2. *Thinking critically*
3. *Acting in a socially responsible manner*
4. *Acting democratically*

Content analysis

Fundamental for the project is to examine the content of active citizenship education in order to find a mutual understanding of the topic, valid in Finland, Island, Lithuania and Norway. We start with choosing a number of relevant **keywords** in text with the aim of creating a common understanding of the contextual use of the words or content. As an empirical basis, we use results from previous Eurydice reports. This is a summative content analysis, with keywords identified before the data analysis, and derived from the interest of ourselves as researchers in this project (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The development of a good coding scheme for the desk research is central to trustworthiness in the field research, using data from the content analysis showing national perspectives on active citizenship education in a top-down perspective.

1. Interacting effectively and constructively with others

- *Keywords: Self-confidence, responsibility, autonomy, respect for different opinions or beliefs, cooperation, conflict resolution, empathy, self-awareness, communicating and listening, emotional awareness, flexibility or adaptability, inter-cultural skills*

2. Thinking critically

- *Keywords: Multi perspective, reasoning and analysis skills, data interpretation, knowledge discovery and use of sources, media literacy, creativity, exercising judgement, understanding the present world, questioning*

3. Acting in a socially responsible manner

- Keywords: *Respect for justice, solidarity, respect for other human beings, respect for human rights, sense of belonging, sustainable development, environmental protection, cultural heritage protection, knowing about or respecting other cultures, knowing about or respecting religions, non-discrimination*

4. Acting democratically

- Keywords: *Knowledge of political institutions, Knowledge of political processes (e.g. elections), knowledge of international organisations, treaties and declarations, interacting with political authorities, knowledge of fundamental political and social concepts, respect for rules, participating, knowledge of or participation in civil society*

Literature

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