

Measuring and Evaluating the QUALity of Teacher Training in Citizenship Education (MEQUAL-TT-CITIZEN)

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Widely recalled in modern democratic societies and put first by national and European educational policies (Joris & Agirdag, 2019) to promote a harmonious coexistence and a mutually beneficial development of the people and communities where they live, citizenship education (Eurydice, 2017) is intended as a tool to help students to become active, informed, aware, eager and able to take responsibility for themselves and the community at the national, European and international level. This raised the question of the importance of its systematization within education (Bombardelli & Codato, 2017) in all European countries, at all levels, in view of the fact that it can contribute to promoting empowerment and "civic well-being", stemming drifts and extremisms of all kinds (Nuzzaci & Rizzi, 2021), and preventing forms of violence through education (UNESCO - PVE-E, 2021).

The problem of measuring its quality, which has now become urgent, especially in teacher training courses, remains unresolved. In fact, there will never be a qualitatively appreciable citizenship education at school without adequate teacher training in the democratic and civic culture in Europe and its founding identity values! Active citizenship is a profound expression of democratic thought and democracy, so much so that it has also been defined as a form of participation in civil and/or political society, characterized by mutual respect and non-violence and in conformity with human rights (Hoskins, 2006) within which different moral, legal, ethical, identity, participatory and cosmopolitan components can be distinguished (Kennedy et al., 2008, p. 53) crossed by objectives of justice, prosperity and peace. Democratic multicultural citizenship (Szelényi & Rhoads, 2007, p. 27) brings with it the importance of:

- respecting the human rights of all actors (pupils, teachers, etc.);
- recognizing the dignity and valour of each individual;
- affirming an idea of high-quality education as a "right" for all;
- ensuring that all actors fulfil their responsibilities, considering education a common good.

It is a process that requires a set of competences, in which the intercultural dimension, rights, awareness and critical thinking play a central role. Convincing evidence shows that citizenship education offers promising paths to civic education and assessment (Kerr, 2008).

Citizenship and democratic education are dimensions open to a myriad of interpretations, with enormous variations depending on countries and cultures, indicating a corpus of principles, ideals, values and practices, which are constantly expanding in scope and depth, referring to different and entirely legitimate “meanings” (participation, rights, informed choices, awareness, conflict resolution, tolerance, responsibility, etc.).

The measurement of the teacher training’s quality in relation to the citizenship education and democratic educational practices is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, involving traits and factors that intersect differently in different approaches and contexts, requiring the use of descriptors and indicators of different nature and without which it is difficult to understand what citizenship and democracy mean within the educational experience. Some attempts have been made to understand the value of democratic educational practices (Davies, 1995), but little has yet been done to identify useful descriptors to assess the progress of democratic citizenship education in the teacher training contexts.

In this sense, the present research proposal aims to develop tools aimed at measuring the quality

of initial teacher education with regard to citizenship education (European, global and intercultural), related skills and civic knowledge, also starting from the revision of existing tools and the elaboration of precise methodological strategies of intervention to help teachers to translate civic knowledge into concrete educational objectives.

Numerous civil society and academic organisations have launched projects that measure teachers' skills in citizenship education in democracies around the world, obtaining useful indicators for measuring the degree of democratic effectiveness at school. However, the absence of tools capable of assessing the strength of the training of future teachers and the necessary arrangements to enable them to operationalize the “teaching of citizenship” at school is a clear sign of structural weakness, since the literature underlines the central role that teachers assume as indispensable supports for making students active, responsible and socially engaged citizens. However, although the compulsory nature of citizenship education has been established in European countries (Eurydice, 2005; 2012; 2017), even today teachers consider themselves to be poorly prepared to pursue precise objectives in education, too often declaring that they do not receive any training on the

issues related to it and feeling unsure to teach at (Willemse et al., 2015; Gordon et al., 2009), although they are aware that it is an integral part of the curriculum.

While European documents (European Commission, 2018a) emphasize a growing focus on the quality of the results of citizenship education, higher education institutions (HEIs) emphasize the widespread perception that civic education is not monitored regularly (European Commission, 2018b) and is a neglected activity in the context of teacher training and that the quality of future students' civic skills will depend on the quality of the teachers' civic skills (and their ability to teach them). International surveys (ICCS-IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, 2016; 2009; etc.; EU citizenship and democracy, 2020; European citizenship, 2016, etc.) show that:

- assessing the quality of civic education is difficult;
- there is little relationship between the quality measures of the civic competences of teachers and those relating to the quality of their teaching;
- there are risks for the quality of civic knowledge in institutional contexts where too little attention is paid to the training of teachers in citizenship education;
- the importance of supporting teachers by encouraging them to develop educational proposals related to citizenship to enable students to have a truly democratic quality school experience.
- The priorities for the citizenship education, therefore, are
- encouraging the acquisition of evidence on the quality of initial teacher training in citizenship education;
- ensuring that it has the same “transversal status” in training as other knowledges have. However both the metric and methodological questions for measuring and evaluating the quality of teacher training in citizenship education and the object of measurement presuppose a plurality of measures to be able to capture activities and practices in different contexts.

While it is true that citizenship skills in the initial training of teachers are usually underestimated (critical thinking, socially responsible action, etc.) it is equally true that there is not yet a “democratic and civic conscious and responsible teacher profile”, which is necessarily linked to the learning of the knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers related to citizenship and civic education learned during the professionalization period spent at university.

For this reason, the idea is to develop a methodological kit that includes: a) tools for detecting the subject and skills, attitudes, perceptions and self-efficacy, etc., which allow to identify the obstacles that prevent the realization of a quality teaching of citizenship in a disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective; b) methodological fieldbook to be used in

degree courses that prepare primary school teachers to improve the acquisitions related to European and global citizenship at curricular and extracurricular level.

In the light of the institutional objectives relating to the quality of teacher education, and starting in particular with the Bologna Process (1999), European universities carry out self-assessment of specific dimensions by referring to the following quality standards within the HEI systems, which, however, almost never include citizenship training.

Some macro-areas of need emerge:

- make the quality of teacher training transparent in terms of citizenship education and acquire data through evaluation indicators and descriptors, which make performance comparable among HEIs;
- enhance the academic experiences that are introduced on the citizenship training of future teachers through the definition of reference parameters, linked to specific indicators, able to measure the quality levels of teacher training in the HEIs, making possible targeted actions to support civic and democratic education.

The design idea is aimed at:

- strengthening the ability to provide evidences of the quality of teacher training in the values and objectives of European citizenship education through the acquisition of integrated data;
- improving the ability to compare certain teaching practices among European HEIs dealing with teacher training at primary level;
- improving the capacity of HEIs to pursue institutional objectives of citizenship education in teacher training, including a “tested” recognition system for the quality of training within each HEI;
- strengthen teacher training in European citizenship, citizenship education and related skills in order to improve the quality of the professionalization processes as a whole.
- It intends to examine the following dimensions:
 - type and adequacy of some indicators used to measure the quality of citizenship education (meta-analysis);
 - promotion of the teachers’ professional development in the fields of citizenship and civic competences in order to ensure an adequate democratic experience at schools;
 - development of a system of direct (practical) indicators to assess the quality of citizenship education;

- definition of a teacher's profile focused on citizenship education with the definition of the reference parameters for the construction of a precise repertoire of skills;
- methodological fieldbook focused on citizenship education to be tested (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) in degree courses of Italian and European universities that prepare future primary school teachers.

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