



★ NETWORKING EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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Closing the empowerment gap through citizenship education How to address educationally disadvantaged groups

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Project based teaching/ learning as a tool for students' empowerment

by Marianna Hajdukiewicz

Center for Citizenship Education (Poland)

The main topic of my presentation is to show problems of Polish schools in creating democratic and cultural competences. I would like to share with you some experiences of Center of Citizenship Education (CCE) in challenging the empowerment gap. We believe that schools should act more as democratic institutions, giving students space and freedom positive engagement.

First of all I would like to present you the results of Education Report prepared last year by Educational Research Institute. The main causes of education inequality in Poland are still division between city and countryside, as well as parents' education, income and social position (**Socioeconomic status**). A strong influence has also participation in preschool education. Which is still luxury for many Poles. The next essential moment is the transition from middle school to high school. When you compare these researches with the result of Social Diagnosis done by Prof. Janusz Czapiński, which tells us that participation in social and political life is influenced mostly by education of citizens – it is easy to make the conclusion that: Good and equal education, especially during the first part of the education cycle is the key to active and effective citizenship.

Till now the system of preventing exclusion was diffuse and ineffective, more focused on the results than on causes and creating learning environment. The issue of inequalities has been neglected in political and scientific discourse for several decades in Poland.

Contemporary the strategy of Ministry of Education is:

- Extension of compulsory education- individualization of the education process
- Emphasis on training of LLL key competencies

Students spend a lot of time on learning at school, but the outcomes are not satisfying neither for themselves, nor for their parents, nor future employers and probably nor for themselves in the future. Numerous research studies prove that young people do not have basic competences needed in the contemporary world – not only in the field of citizenship but also in life skills.

The main question is what kind of competences Poles need and expect.

Children and young people spend 12 years at school, which is a total institution - on one side dependent on the central government, on the other, on local authorities; institution with a very strong position of the school director, and a relatively small influence of parents, students, pupils, the local community, and even teachers themselves. At school students and pupils are taught patterns of thinking - rather than critical thinking or creative problem solving, theory approach - not practice skills, individualism – rather than teamwork. However there are lessons on democracy, but in fact democratic methods are not used. Polish teachers frequently use traditional summative assessment instead of formative assessment.

CCE believes that schools should act more as democratic institutions, giving students space and freedom positive engagement. We have been implementing projects based teaching/learning for the last 15 years, believing that this is the best way of giving students the equal opportunity, content and assessments. It is also a challenge for the schools working as a community – that can strongly involve students, parents and local communities into the teaching/learning process.

The project methods is the method:

- Students acquire specific knowledge and skills through the planning and execution of practical activities.
- Solve practical problems over a period of time
- Project is planned and executed by the students themselves.
- Requires varied and frequent assessment.

I would like to present strengths and opportunities of project method, especially in the context of disadvantaged groups – students from small towns, undeveloped regions, and these with learning difficulties. My idea is also to share with you some reflections about weaknesses and threats connected with the implementation of the project method in Polish schools.

CCE promotes the use of the project method in different areas:

- Civic education – social science and active participation in social life.
- Cultural education – history, culture and creative attitude.
- Ecological education - the interactions between the people and the environment, principles of sustainable development.
- Global issues – how the globalized world functions and how we interact with each other across the boundaries.
- Students’ council – students’ participation in schools.
- ICT in education – the use of new technologies in teaching, communication and assessment.
- Science – experiments and reciprocal learning projects.

Strength

- Learn to organise themselves
- Learn to find information and use it in practice
- Be trained in logical and creative thinking
- Discuss to reach the consensus
- Work in a team and learn how to cooperate

Opportunities

- The students are more motivated and develop higher self-esteem.
- The students can play an active role regardless, whether they are „good” or „bad” students.
- The projects involve knowledge and skills from different areas.
- Parents and the local community are involved in students’ activities.
- The monitoring and evaluation is an important part of work.

Weaknesses

- Too much time and effort spent on one project.
- Students who do not manage with some tasks, can get away with it.
- Encourages the expression of opinion, often without sufficient knowledge and understanding.

Threats

- The teachers may assume the students responsibilities – doing most tasks themselves.
- The project frequently is a one-time activity, instead of a planned action integrated with school curriculum.
- The teachers forget about monitoring and evaluation, focus on the topic or the activities.
- The result of the project is not used in further education.

CCE supports schools in implementing project methods:

- Preparing materials
- Training teachers
- Training school directors and teachers’ council
- Promoting good practices
- Creating space for public presentations
- Rewarding outstanding teachers

CCE strongly influenced implementing project method as an obligatory task in Polish schools.

The democratic and empowering potential of project based learning is good to illustrate with a few examples of several initiatives, developed by pupils and students aged between 10 and 18 years in the frame of CCE programmes, such as:

Citizenship Education in Municipal Schools - civic lessons in junior high schools, in which are used active learning methods based on curriculum and handouts prepared by CCE.

School with Class 2.0 – educational programme promoting ICTs as a tool, which can be used in teaching, communication and assessment, and showing how this may help to enhance creativity, good judgment and team spirit.



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Traces of the Past – programme of cultural education, that builds awareness and responsibility for cultural heritage of local communities.

Action! Film Academy – film education programme, that guides teachers on using film in different teaching contexts. It also encourages youth to take part in some civic activities that should involve film-making.

Student Self – Government - programme which main aim is to increase self – government and students' council activities.