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Achieving Citizenship Education. A Theoretical and Experimental Approach

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Abstract

Identified problem. In the Romanian society, there is gap between the scientific and moral progress due to under-evaluating ethical education as opposed to intellectual education. The necessity of human effort towards moral adjustment ensures freedom, dignity, creative and self-creative capacity for every person. *Study's goal.* From a theoretical perspective, the paper aims at highlighting the importance of ethical and civic education in shaping personality and approaching the specific methodology for Citizenship education. In this respect, an applicative research has been undertaken, having as main purpose projecting and experimenting a methodical approach centred on practicing the self-awareness skills, developing communication and social abilities and applying methods of cooperation, as elements of Citizenship education. *Research methodology:* The research involved a sample of 24 pupils (7 girls and 17 boys), with ages between 8-10, with different intellectual levels and diverse behaviour skills. In order to check the hypothesis and achieve the goals, we have applied the psycho-pedagogical experiment, the collected data being added to the data from observation, conversation, analysis of activity products. For recording, transcribing and interpreting the data we have used statistical and mathematical techniques. *Results.* The results confirm the working hypothesis. The pupils' performances in Citizenship education, obtained in the final evaluation, were superior to those obtained before the training program. *Conclusions.* The experimental approach has shown that all exercises, plays, learning situations and problem-situations have determined learning and efficient practice of self-awareness, social, communication, cooperation and active participation skills. *Recommendations.* Knowing the pupils' individual psychological particularities, adapting the educational intervention strategies so as to focus on implication, participation, communication and relationing are a must for any successful educational process.

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1. Introduction

The historical transformations from the 90s, which have influenced the evolution of the civic conscience and of citizenship education, were related to the crisis of the welfare state, economic and cultural globalization, the depreciation of the fundamental values of modern epoch. This decade has been named “of citizenship” and the civic ideal has been invoked like a hope, a solution or a new project of civilization (Bîrzea, 2000) meant to re-establish social cohesion and solidarity based on moral order.

In this context, learning the democratic behaviour, centred on the principles and values of pluralism, the primacy of law, respecting human dignity, cultivating sensitiveness towards human issues, moral-civic and religious values, respecting the environment are the main goals of current education, achievable particularly through moral-civic education. Moral-civic education promotes mutual respect and the valuing of others as fundamental principles, whereas transposing these practices into educational practice contribute decisively to building a pluralist society based on living in harmony with one’s neighbours.

The concept of “citizenship” has no generally accepted meaning and has been defined in several ways over time. As legal and political status, citizenship represents the set of rights and liberties granted by the state to its citizens, a balance between rights and responsibilities, a civic contract between state and individual. As a social role, citizenship is one of the individual’s identities, which implies building a civic culture, a set of competences which may enable the actual exertion of the status of citizen and citizenship.

The theoretical approaches and research in this field (Dumitru, 2013; Adler & Goggin, 2005; Baum, 2001; Bîrzea, 2000; Audigier, 2000; Evans, 1997; Almond & Verba, 1989; Bourdieu, 1984) are centred on the analysis of the main dimensions of civic engagement, involving the citizens in the political decision-making process, their competences and social implications, the models of participation demand and offer, the role of individual factors and activism according to the social hierarchy position. Other studies address the issue of the role of leaders, participants and passive persons as individual resources for community participation (Hatos, 2006); the need to professionalise parenting and develop national programs for educating parents (Cojocaru & al., 2011; Frumos & Munteanu, 2011).

In Europe, Citizenship education is seen as a priority of educational reforms, a major dimension of the educational policies, an educational purpose, guiding the educational system towards a set of shared values (diversity, pluralism, human rights, social justice, welfare, solidarity). Educating children, young people and adults to become active and responsible citizens is an essential goal of postmodern school, Citizenship education being perceived like a tool of social cohesion.

“The student self-constructs himself in a socio-economic way, in a ludic, interactive environment of mutual, collective education, where children, parents, educators learn together to know, to do, to evolve, to analyse carefully what they think they know, what they think they know how to do, based on their own resources, acknowledged ignorance, the desire to know, successful relationships, in contexts in which they had used various techniques and instruments” (Ionescu, 1997, 85).

The *objectives* of moral-civic education may be rendered through a pedagogical model centred on the general-particular continuity, expressed at a theoretical and practical, informative-formative level (Cristea, 1998, 132). The theoretical *informative* level is related to a moral-civic culture which includes a set of knowledge, representations, notions, judgments and moral reasoning, by means of which moral-civic education becomes an element of education for values, of man’s integral education, being closely connected to intellectual, aesthetic education, ensuring spiritual continuity at a social and individual level. The practical, *formative* level consists in involving all the intellectual skills in decoding and experiencing the meanings of life by internalizing the moral-civic norms, by exploiting the intrinsic, moral substratum of civic values and by transposing them into facts. Regarded from the perspective of the formative role, moral-civic education should constantly promote deep emotional feelings and eventually build a series of civic skills and habits, character traits and behaviours of the child in relation to his own ego, fellows, the social community.

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