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Fostering teachers' professional development for citizenship education

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Teachers' professional development for citizenship education is reported.
- Collaborative inquiry-based curriculum development benefits teachers' development.
- Citizenship education has an implicit presence in teachers' practices.
- Enhancing professionalism and practical wisdom takes time and room for experimenting.

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ABSTRACT

This article reports of a research project with eleven schools for primary and secondary education in which teachers were involved in collaborative inquiry-based curriculum development for citizenship education. Its main purpose was to get a better grasp of teachers' understanding of citizenship education, what teachers consider the professionalism needed for citizenship education and how this professionalism could be encouraged. The results show an increase of teachers' awareness of citizenship education and its implicit presence in their practices. According to teachers enhancing pedagogical professionalism and practical wisdom with respect to teaching citizenship education takes time, room for experimenting, and the possibility to collaborate and exchange ideas among colleagues.

1. Introduction

Citizenship development and the role of education has been increasingly discussed by educators, politicians and researchers over the past decades (e.g. Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Hansen, 2011; Johnson & Morris, 2010; Kennedy, 2012). This includes the teacher's role to support students to be active, responsible and socially engaged citizens. Despite the compulsory character of citizenship education (CE) in many countries around the world (Euridyce, 2005, 2012), teachers do not always consider it easy to establish CE, are not aware of this task of schools or even refuse schools' responsibility regarding enhancing citizenship. A majority of teachers did not receive any training to teach citizenship education (cf. Akar, 2012; Willemse, Lunenberg, & Korthagen, 2008; Barr et al., 2015; Chin & Barber, 2010; Euridyce, 2012; Thornberg, 2008) and, as a consequence, they do not feel confident about teaching it or struggle with how to establish CE practices (Akar, 2012; Chin & Barber, 2010; Outlon, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004). Moreover, many teachers lack clear concepts of CE, in the sense of an interpretation of what 'good citizenship' in a democratic society entails and what the task of schools therein can and should be. This is an even greater concern seeing that there is an international trend towards greater autonomy of educational institutions and increasing decentralization (OECD, 2011; Ranson, 2003) which places greater demands on teachers' professionalism.

In this article, we report on a two-year research project with eleven schools for primary and secondary education in the Netherlands in which teachers were involved in collaborative inquiry-based curriculum development in cooperation with us as

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researchers during a period in which educational policy mandated schools to explicate their vision and make curricular choices regarding citizenship. The project was based on the assumption that participating in such activities would encourage teachers to explore and develop their own concepts of CE and professionalism in relation to teaching CE. This would empower them to shape CE more thoroughly and enhance teacher professionalism with regard to CE. Our involvement in the project enabled us to get a better grasp of the development of teachers' understanding of CE during the project, of what teachers consider the professionalism needed for citizenship education and to explore how teachers themselves think this professionalism can be fostered.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Framing citizenship education

Governments in many countries have introduced citizenship education as an obligatory part of the curriculum in the last decades to foster social cohesion and more active participation by citizens in social and political life (Euridyce, 2005). This mandate for CE can be seen as a response to social changes, such as the rise of individualization and the emergence of a multicultural society (Karsten, Cogan, Grossman, Liu, & Pitiyanuwat, 2002; Veugelers, 2011; Geijsel, Ledoux, Reumerman, & Ten Dam, 2012), or poignant events in society, such as 9/11 (Torney-Purta, 2002). In 2005, the Council of Europe proclaimed that year as the European Year of Citizenship through Education (Euridyce, 2005) and 2011 as the year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship in which schools were expected to play an important role (Euridyce, 2012). In the US, notwithstanding a long tradition of citizenship education (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006), in 2012 the Obama administration released a nine step road map to enhance civic learning and engagement in democracy (http://www.ed.gov/civic-learning retrieved July 2013). However, the compulsory inclusion of CE in the formal curricula has also been criticized. Biesta and Lawy (2006; Lawy & Biesta, 2006) argued that this type of educational policy suggests that citizenship is an achievement, an outcome of education, and focuses on individuals who lack the proper knowledge and skills, the right values and correct dispositions. This largely ignores that young people already participate in everyday (social) life and learn in schools from interactions with teachers, subjects and peers, and from activities such as participation in school councils, as well as in other contexts and practices like with their family, friends, media and other leisure activities. The authors plea for a focus on 'citizenship-as-practice' instead.

In our view, young people's development of 'citizenship-as-practice' cannot be considered separately from their moral and social development, identity development and development of critical reflective capacities. This broader concept of citizenship of youngsters can also be recognized in other scholarly work, either augmenting or opposed to a narrower focus on citizenship as knowledge to be achieved of the political functioning of our societies (Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, & Ten Dam, 2013; Banks, 2004; Haste, 2004; Veugelers, 2000).

In the present study, departing from a broad concept of citizenship, we situate CE as part of teachers' pedagogy and connect it to the tenet that teaching fundamentally is a moral activity aimed at identity development (e.g. Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Hansen, 2001; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). From this perspective, contributing to CE is part of the responsibility of all teachers -and not just those who teach subject matter that can easily be related to citizenship, like civics or history – to meet the overarching purposes of education (cf. Fischman & Haas, 2012; Pykett, 2010; Sanger, Osguthorpe, & Fenstermacher, 2013).

2.2. Teachers' professionalism regarding citizenship education

In comparison with other teaching domains, the moral dimension of teaching citizenship is quite prominent (e.g. Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Sanger et al., 2013). For example, teachers are moral persons themselves and (role) models for their students (Leenders, Veugelers, & De Kat, 2008; Oser, 1994), through their interactions with students (Hansen, 2001) and through what they emphasize when they are teaching particular value-loaded knowledge and skills (Cleaver, Ireland, Kerr, & Lopes, 2005; Torney-Purta & Barber, 2004). Besides, teachers as moral agents are responsible for students' moral development as well as for their social and intellectual development (Bergem, 1990). Therefore as educational professionals, they need to make normative professional judgments of what is educationally desirable in all teaching domains. In the past few years, the current technical, evidence-informed and qualification-oriented trend in education is being criticized and it has been argued that education also needs to be understood by its normative nature in the sense that teachers need to balance the different purposes of education (e.g. Biesta, 2010, 2011; Kelchtermans, 2009, 2012). In order to become professionals capable of making educational and pedagogical judgments, teachers need to possess practical wisdom (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Bergem (2003) refers to this capacity as *pedagogical professionalism*, which concerns teachers possessing *professional ethical competences* (the understanding of teaching as a moral enterprise and understanding the moral dimensions of teaching), *educational competences* (the ability to teach, foster and nurture students' development) and *academic competences* (the skills to gain, or make use of knowledge and theories in their teaching practices). Given our broad view on citizenship as mentioned before, pedagogical professionalism is essential for teaching CE.

Teachers' professionalism regarding CE at least partly depends on values, beliefs, personal and professional knowledge and skills which teachers may not be fully aware of (Hushu & Tirri, 2007; Kennedy, Jimenez, Mayor, Mellor, & Smith, 2002; Patterson, Doppen, & Misco, 2012). For instance, Thornberg (2008) argues that 'a common formal ethical language as well as knowledge based on educational and behavioral scientific theories and research' (p.1793) is lacking among teachers. Consequently, teacher practices are often reactive, unplanned and partly unconsciously performed instead of guided by common theories, knowledge and language (cf. Hansen, 2001; Thornberg, 2008). This could mean that, although teachers do not always have clear concepts of CE, they sometimes establish more CE practices than they are aware of. Besides, Patterson et al. (2012) argue that teachers' (unconscious) pre-existing beliefs or concepts may filter out any ideas they cannot reconcile.

Thus, professionalism regarding CE in particular means that teachers need to become aware of and explore their (implicit) concepts of CE, develop practical wisdom and recognize the moral dimensions of teaching. In addition, they should learn to use their educational and academic competences to establish an environment in which reflection on citizenship-as-practice is fostered. This asks for a (shared) pedagogical language and knowledge to foster teachers' professionalism.

However, not all teachers are used to thinking about themselves as moral agents, or to talking about moral aspects in their teaching practice (Sockett & LePage, 2002; Klaassen, 2002; Thornberg, 2008; Campbell, 2008). One explanation for the latter is an overemphasis on academic achievement in modern society. Another explanation might be that teaching in general, and perhaps in particular when it comes to citizenship education, is still often practiced in an individual, isolated way with a high degree of autonomy (cf. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992; Levine & Marcus, 2010). According to