

Chapter 84

Education for Citizenship in the Latin American Context

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ABSTRACT

The chapter shows the situation of education for democratic citizenship in Latin America and its evolution over the last 25 years, taking as an example three countries: Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. First, the concept of citizenship in curricula is analyzed. Its role in the political and social re-democratization and its limitations are proposed as a result of a national identity concept that limits cultural, social, and political diversity. Their strengths and weaknesses are compared, considering issues like human rights, citizenship responsibilities, citizen participation, community boundaries, levels of identity, and cultural diversity. Second, the purposes of their teaching are interpreted in the curricula. It presents a curriculum focused on relevant social problems and on the formation of critical thinking and social participation and citizenship awareness. Finally, it reflects on the results of the international study on civic and citizen education in Latin America, pointing out its contradictions and the need to continue deepening in research and in teaching practice and training.

INTRODUCTION

Citizen education occupies and concerns many countries of the world. It is closely linked to democratic education and the maintenance and deepening of a political regime and a system of coexistence centered on the application, respect and deepening of human and social rights, human dignity and social justice.

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School systems in most of Europe and America have been replacing their civic education curricula, focusing on teaching their political and electoral systems by curricula of civic education, focused on the rights and duties of citizenship and participation in the life of the communities. Increasingly, the convenience of linking national citizenships with global citizenship has been considered in curricula and teaching. Simultaneously, research has grown to try to find out how citizenship education is presented in the curricula, what happens when teaching and learning citizenship in schools and what happens when their teachers are educated.

It can be affirmed that the situation of civic education has changed in Latin America in the last 25 years, at least formally. It is known, however, that there are problems for the fundamentals of school education - educating and training children, youth, as free and autonomous citizens, capable of thinking, feeling and acting with absolute freedom- to be performed without obstacles. There is awareness that the compulsory school must prepare fundamentally for life, so that boys and girls, young people, act as citizens conscious that their world will be what they want it to be. This education involves converting educational centers into spaces of citizenship, of democracy, with clear and explicit rights and duties for the entire educational community. It means to practice more citizenship and democracy than to preach it. And it also means, to understand that in compulsory education knowledge must allow building citizenship by giving students the theoretical, conceptual and procedural tools, norms and values, which allow them to locate themselves in their world and make conscious and reasoned decisions about it and their place in it. This involves rethinking teaching contents and learning methods so that students can think about the world and think about themselves in it.

As a result of the political changes produced since the end of the 20th century, many Latin American countries chose to strengthen the teaching of democracy through the revision of existing civic education curricula or the inclusion of citizen education. There are important works that analyze the changes produced, the characteristics of the proposals made, the problems of their implementation and the training of their teaching staff. Some of these works also point to possible problems in the immediate future due to the political changes that are taking place in many countries. And to the very weakness of citizenship education, whose place in the curriculum differs between countries (some place it in the area of social sciences, others as a sole discipline and some as a transversal knowledge). This situation is further aggravated by the lack of coherent teacher training programs.

This chapter analyzes the current conceptions of citizenship and participation in the curricula and, in particular, those of Chile, Colombia and Mexico. And it concludes with some reflections on the future.

Concept of Citizenship in Latin American Curricula: Controversies About the Conceptualization of Citizenship

The citizenship on which modern societies have been constituted, is conceived as a form of political identity, defined as the juridical bond between an individual and a nation-state and consecrated in the citizen's rights and in the obligations that they should fulfill, in their status as autonomous persons and in a situation of equality (Heater, 2007). It is a conception of traditional citizenship that has a controversial nature for two reasons. First, because it assigns a double constitutive dimension: the individual one and the collective one (Faulks, 2000), while demanding the recognition of the importance of individual rights and demanding an active, responsible and ethically committed participation with the community. And, secondly, because it was based on the paradox of identifying citizenship with nationality, limiting universality and egalitarianism in access to rights, a situation that remains unchanged to this day.

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