

Chapter 22

The Construction of a Citizenship Model Through the Teaching of History

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ABSTRACT

References to education today necessarily encompass the type of citizens we are forming in the classrooms. Curricular proposals, regardless of their educational stage, reiterate that the basic purpose of education is to make people aware of their reality, foster their critical thinking, and ensure they participate in the political, social, and cultural system of which they are part. However, this declaration of intentions, which is widely legislated but rarely subject to empirical verification, is even more evident in certain subjects such as the History of Spain. In order to explore whether the curricular proposals put forward by History are truly educating citizens, the authors interviewed 50 first-year university students representing various areas of knowledge from seven Spanish universities. The results have identified a citizen profile that does not align with the social and civic model described by legislation, which has prompted us to suggest certain improvements pursuant to the purposes of History as a subject taught at school.

WHAT KIND OF CITIZENS WOULD WE LIKE TO SHAPE?

Since the Greek polis, the concept of citizenship has changed and varied according to current political, social, economic and cultural trends. At present, there is a special focus on it, not only as subject of political and philosophical interest, but as a practice that has specific rights and duties. Thus, the public policies of all democratic states, and the regulations governing those policies, reflect the conception and values that guide democratic citizenship, in addition to the rights and duties associated with it.

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As such, we are becoming increasingly aware that terms such as citizenship and education for citizenship are not stable and that they do not have a single and fixed definition, since it is the context and its reality that allows us to associate it with one set of ideas or another. In addition, our current global society does not facilitate associating citizenship with simply belonging to a state or to participating in elections; our new social realities connect citizenship with all those actions that in one way or another affect our community's development and make society and the individuals that comprise it an active part of life and of the transformation of their environment. An example of this is found in the deep-seated crisis that the European Union is currently experiencing, where an education for citizenship that gives stability to the entire project is more necessary than ever; one that ensures its citizens are aware of their role in democratic participation (Pausch, 2016).

The current situation we are experiencing, stemming from an economic, social and values crisis, demands that the education curriculum put forward classrooms to be based on relevant contents, since students who merely memorise facts and data are of no use if they are not able to apply that knowledge to understand and interpret the reality that surrounds them, to improve their daily life, or for their comprehensive formation. It is essential that these students know how to act in society and acquire the content and values that allow them to participate as citizens. Education must be conceived "as a fundamental social right, a privileged resource of legitimacy of the democratic State of law, [...] where the fate of contemporary democracies is at play" (Cortina, 2006, p. 10). The idea is to use the school as something more than solely a mechanism for transmitting knowledge and skills, a place which merely develops strategies for the labour market (Gimeno, 2010); we should commit to an education that bases itself on training citizens to be the main actors in the global world in which they live. Therefore, believing that the formation of participatory and democratic citizens is the ultimate goal of education is valid. In fact, if we are to insist that education educates people who are capable of addressing and democratically building their social, cultural and personal life, the education for citizenship¹ we encourage should include more than only political participation in society². It must serve as a mechanism for social cohesion - overcome the barriers of integration certain social groups face because of their national identity, ethnic group, religion, economic level, sexual identity, etc. - and organising society, by increasing citizen participation at all levels (Martín Cortés, 2006). It is about developing students' personal and cognitive skills and their capacity to use them to develop and strengthen their social and citizen facets; providing them with the necessary strategies they need to resolve all those issues that do not allow them to flow as free, participative and democratic citizens. Thus, we must commit to fostering a personal autonomy that is based on the freedom of the human being, which allows us to exercise and experience a full democratic life and which, in turn, allows for the creation and defence of an active citizenship as a platform on which our societies can evolve. Educating to shape citizens who are capable of reflecting on personal but also global issues and considering both individual and collective rights to be complementary, not a contradiction. The objectives are to separate the concept of citizenship from a single national reality and build a citizenship that is "integrated with the problems of the planet and the community" (De Alba, 2007, p. 347). Thus, there is a need to educate students to be citizens of the world. Coupled with this idea of globalisation, is the "emergence of particular realities linked fundamentally to cultural and identity issues" (De Alba, 2007, p. 347) which should also be considered an improvement in comprehensive education and not an obstacle to citizen development. The objective would be to establish a symbiotic relationship between citizenship, democracy and participation, where citizens deepen their models of democracy, not only those that include market regulations, but models that include citizen participation as an active and transforming mechanism of social reality, where citizens feel capable of directly

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