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Talking about values : a dialogic approach to citizenship education as an integral part of history classes

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Citizenship education, nowadays, receives a great deal of attention. Especially school is increasingly seen as a place where young people can learn to be citizens. Schools are, therefore, expected to pay explicit attention to citizenship. In several countries, including the Netherlands, citizenship education has been introduced as a mandatory part of the national curriculum. Giving shape to citizenship education is a difficult task, considering the many different views on what the goal of citizenship education should be and how it should be implemented in the curriculum. This thesis aims to provide insight in how citizenship education can be realized in secondary education.

Not only is there an increased interest for citizenship education, the concept of citizenship is used in a broader sense than in former days. Citizenship today implies more than a legal status in a country or participation in political activities, such as voting. It refers to a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that citizens require to participate in society and to contribute to the common good (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Haste, 2004). Citizenship education in this perspective necessarily entails the social and moral development of students (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Haste, 2004; Carr, 2006; Davies, Gorard & McQuinn, 2005; Veugelers, 2007).

Besides citizenship education there are many other terms used to refer to education that aims to stimulate the social and moral development of students: e.g. moral education, value education, democratic education and character education. Sometimes different terms are used for almost the same approach, but in some cases different terms do pertain to different perspectives (Solomon, Watson & Battistich, 2001). On the one hand, the focus is on fostering a specific set of values such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, honesty, justice and fairness (Lickona, 1999). On the other hand, a more developmental perspective on moral education based on the work of Kohlberg (Power, Higgins & Kohlberg, 1989) or Gilligan (1982) accentuate the stimulation of skills and attitudes that enable students to make their own moral decisions. In this thesis we primarily make use of this developmental approach to moral education.

1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

A democratic and plural society needs critical citizens who can form their opinion about matters concerning justice and the public interest. It is important that citizens are able to make well-considered choices on moral and social issues and take responsibility for their choices (Ten Dam & Volman, 2004). Therefore, citizenship education will have to be directed at the attitudes and skills that enable students to reflect upon their moral considerations, and take responsibility for their choices (Veugelers, 2000). An important aim of citizenship education, and the focus of this thesis, is the enhancement of the capacity of students to develop personal points of view with regard to value-related matters and to justify their opinions to others. We thereby focus particularly on two aspects that we consider essential to citizenship education.

First, it is important for students to be able to reflect upon the moral values that are at stake and take them into account when justifying their viewpoints to others. Moral values are general ideas, judgements or ideals pertaining to how people ought to behave towards each other (Rokeach, 1973; Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). Moral values are different from social conventions and norms because moral values transcend the specific social context and have a more general and abstract meaning (Oser, 1996a; Turiel, 1983). Moral values are important because they are the criteria or standards upon which moral evaluations and guidelines for moral behaviour are based (Rokeach, 1973; Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). It is, therefore, essential that students understand what moral values are and recognize the values that are involved in certain moral issues.

The second aspect we consider to be important is strongly related to the first. To participate in a plural and democratic society, students have to deal with different perspectives. It is important that students understand that there are multiple perspectives on moral and social issues and that their own view is only one of many possible perspectives (Banks, 2004). Students need to be able to reflect upon multiple perspectives and take them into account while developing their own point of view.

2. CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION THROUGH HISTORY TEACHING

Citizenship education can be realized in secondary education in various ways. Many aspects of school life play a part in the social and moral development of students. Most research in this field concerns the everyday interactions and regulations at school. The importance of school culture for the moral development of students, for instance, received a great deal of attention (Power et al., 1989). Another focus concerns the relationship between teachers and students and the moral implication of teachers' behaviour (Hansen, 2001; Oser, 1994). Considerably less research has been focused on the curriculum. Relatively little is known about the effectiveness of the various teaching methods for enhancing moral and social development of students (Solomon et al., 2001).

Usually, the moral and social dimension of education is separated from the teaching of domain specific knowledge and skills. As a consequence, citizenship education is often regarded as a distinct curriculum subject and taught in, for in-

stance, civic education classes or through extra-curricular activities such as service learning (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). We think, however, that the social and moral development of students is inherent to the teaching of domain specific knowledge and skills in regular subjects. Ultimately, students should be able to use domain specific knowledge and skills to judge and act independently and participate actively in the society. It is, therefore, important that students learn to reflect on values within the subject matter and the way they make sense of moral values (see also Sadler & Zeidler, 2005; Yore, Bisanz & Hand, 2003).

Subjects such as history, biology, geography but also languages contain many value related issues and moral dilemmas. Citizenship education can be integrated within these subjects by paying systematic attention to moral values within the subject matter. History, in particular, is a subject with opportunities for citizenship education. To understand historical events, it is important to consider the moral values of that time and to explore different perspectives of people in the past. Moreover, the process of making meaning of the past is influenced by your own moral and social framework. Students also have a moral opinion about historic events (Barton & Levstik, 2004). These value-laden constructions of the past make history an interesting subject to learn how to think about values and to investigate different perspectives. Bringing student perspectives into the history class, gives new openings for students to reflect on their own moral values and to learn to justify their opinion to others.

Integrating citizenship education into the history class is not a new idea. In the Netherlands, for instance, a few years ago the Commission for Historical and Social Education (De Rooij, 2004) presented a curriculum for a new subject that was meant to combine social studies and history education. Citizenship education should have been a central aim of that new subject. That new subject, however, was not implemented, nor did that proposal lead to a wide debate about citizenship education through history teaching in the Netherlands. There has, however, been a lively international debate about the subject (Brett, 2005; Wilson, 2001). In addition, there are several international publications, usually in professional journals, that propose teaching strategies and instructional designs aimed at the integration of citizen education in the subject history (see e.g. the special issue of *Teaching History* in 2002 about citizenship education). Empirical research on the effectiveness of such proposals is, however, scarce.

In this thesis, we aim to gain insight into how citizenship education can be integrated in the subject history. We, thereby, focus on the curriculum. This means we concentrate on the teaching methods and instructional designs to give shape to citizenship education in history classes.

3. A DIALOGIC APPROACH TO CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Stimulating dialogue in the classroom is assumed to be an effective method for the development of the competences citizens need to participate in society. Literature on social and moral development of students usually emphasize the importance of dialogue. A great deal of research based on the work of Kohlberg (e.g. Blatt & Kohl-

berg, 1975), for instance, focused on the effects of moral dilemma discussions on the moral development of students. Several studies conducted on this issue in the seventies and eighties demonstrated a small positive effect (Solomon, et al., 2001). Moreover, sharing their opinion and judgements with others should help students to become aware of their own values and to reflect on them (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). When students engage in dialogue they are encouraged to reason and consider the perspectives of others. In this way, the dialogue is assumed to stimulate the development of critical thinking as a crucial aspect of citizenship education (Ten Dam & Volman, 2004). In addition, it is argued that citizenship in a democratic society requires the ability to communicate with different social groups who have different points of view. Dialogue in the classroom is assumed to provide opportunities to develop communication skills (e.g. Parker, 1997a; Preskill, 1997) and to stimulate attitudes, such as tolerance, respect, 'open-mindedness' and autonomy (Grant, 1996; Saye, 1998).

There are different ways to promote dialogue in the classroom. A common approach is to foster classroom discussion guided by the teacher. By guiding the discussion, teachers can stimulate students to evaluate options and guide them to a deeper understanding of ideas and to a thoughtful conclusion (e.g. Parker & Hess, 2001; Saye, 1998). Another approach is to stimulate dialogue between students themselves. When they work in small groups, more students are able to participate in the dialogue than when the whole class is involved. Also, in small groups the students have more responsibility for the progress of the dialogue. They have to guide the dialogue themselves, and solve possible conflicts. The claim that dialogue will enhance learning is, however, often too easily made. In order to realize dialogue in the classroom, explicit attention must be paid to the skills and attitudes students require to engage in dialogue.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this thesis we investigate the effects of a dialogic approach to citizenship education integrated in the history class on the ability of students to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account when justifying their points of view. Within this context, we focus on how dialogue can be most effectively stimulated in the classroom. We, therefore, investigate the effect of the amount of group work on student's ability to justify their opinions.

The first two research questions in this thesis are:

- 1) *Does dialogic citizenship education as a integral part of history classes enhance students' ability to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account when justifying their viewpoints?*
- 2) *Does the amount of group work in dialogic citizenship education contribute to enhance students' ability to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account when justifying their viewpoints?*

To investigate these questions we designed two curriculum units for citizenship education in the history class. Stimulating dialogue in the classroom is a central element in both units. But while in one curriculum unit, the dialogue takes place mainly in small groups of students, in the other, a competing one, the dialogue generally takes place in a whole classroom discussion under the guidance of the teacher. We examine the effect of both curriculum units on students' ability to take into account moral values and multiple perspectives in the justification of their opinions. Subsequently, we take a closer look on the role of the quality of the dialogue between students in citizenship education. The research questions are:

- 3) *Does dialogic citizenship education as an integral part of history classes enhance the quality of dialogue between students?*
- 4) *How does the quality of the dialogue relate to students' ability to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account when justifying their viewpoints?*

Figure 1 presents an overview of the research project. The numbers in the figure correspond to the four research questions.

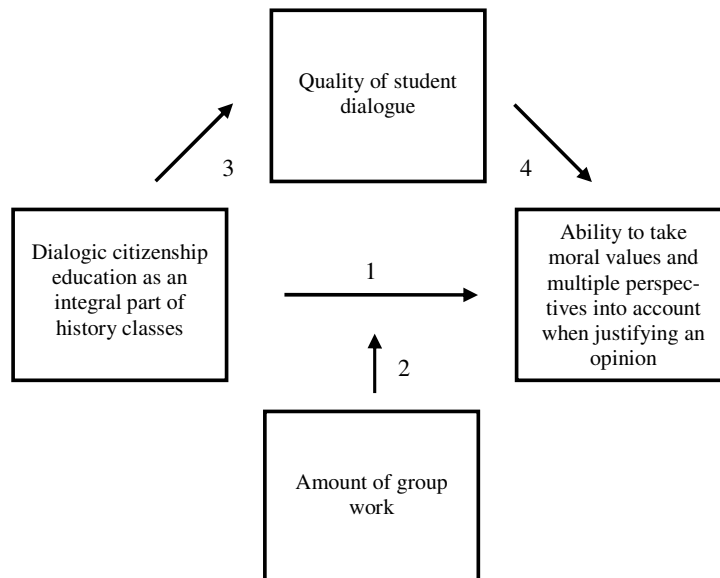


Figure 1. Overview of the research project.

We assume that the quality of student dialogue is important for enhancing students' ability to justify their personal opinion. We expect that students who are engaged in dialogues with a higher quality will be better able to justify their opinions.

Therefore, in the instructional designs for dialogic citizenship education, specific attention is paid to the skills and attitudes students need to engage in dialogue.

5. ORGANIZATION OF THIS THESIS

In chapter 2 we present a review of the literature on teaching strategies for enhancing the social and moral development of students in secondary education. We examine the goals and proposed teaching strategies for curriculum oriented moral education, and we discuss empirical studies to the effects of teaching strategies for moral education.

In chapter 3, we first examine the debate concerning the integration of citizenship education within history teaching. To investigate the effect of the amount of group work, we develop two curriculum units that differ in the amount of group work. In this chapter, we discuss the development of the unit in which students work mainly in small groups. The second unit, not described in this chapter, was derived from the first by reconstructing a large part of the group work assignments into assignments that are appropriate for whole classroom teaching.

In chapter 4, the first two research questions are investigated in a quasi-experimental study. The effects of the curriculum units on the ability of students to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account are investigated and compared with a control group of students who followed regular history lessons.

Research question 3 and 4 were investigated in chapter 5. We discuss the characteristic that we assume to be essential for a dialogue that facilitates learning. We investigated the effect of dialogic citizenship education on these characteristics and the relationship between the quality of the dialogues and students' ability to reflect on moral values and multiple perspectives.

Finally, in chapter 6, we present a summary of the results of the studies, followed by a discussion of the main results. We conclude this thesis with suggestions for educational practice.