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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 6

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In this thesis, we aimed to provide insight on how citizenship education can be integrated in history classes. An important aim of citizenship education is to enhance student's ability to form and justify their personal opinions using moral values and multiple perspectives. We focused on the curriculum and investigated the effectiveness of a dialogic approach to citizenship education as a integral part of history classes. In this section, we present an overview and a discussion of the main findings of this research project. Before discussing the results of the empirical study, we give an overview of the results of the review study. We conclude this chapter with suggestions for educational practice.

1. RESULTS OF THE REVIEW STUDY

In chapter 2, we presented the results of the review study on teaching strategies for curriculum-oriented moral education. We have reviewed studies on teaching strategies for enhancing the prosocial and moral development of students in the period 1995-2003. We focused on curriculum-oriented moral education in secondary schools. In this chapter we used the term 'moral education' to refer to all education aimed at enhancing the moral and social development of students. We discussed, successively, the objectives for moral education, proposed teaching strategies for moral education, and research to the effects of teaching strategies for moral education.

All the approaches to moral education aim to prepare students for participation in society. Some studies we encountered focus on stimulating skills, such as critical thinking, moral decision making, and moral reasoning. Other studies advocate a specific set of values, such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, honesty, justice, and fairness, as the main goal of moral education.

Most studies propose a problem-based instructional design, where collaborative efforts are needed and where students work relatively independently and control their own learning processes. Dialogue takes a central place in many proposals. It is

supposed that through dialogues students develop skills and attitudes for citizenship, such as critical thinking skills, moral reasoning skills, communicative skills, and such attitudes as tolerance and respect for the opinions of other people.

Empirical research on curriculum-oriented moral education appeared to be scarce. Most of the studies we encountered did not evaluate the effectiveness of moral-education curricula, neither in terms of students' learning experiences, nor in terms of their learning results. Furthermore, the empirical studies we found aspire to various objectives of moral education, and the instructional designs they suggest are often very general. This makes it difficult to draw unequivocal conclusions from the studies on the effectiveness of moral education.

We concluded that, despite growing attention to moral education and citizenship education, a solid research domain on curriculum-oriented moral education is still missing. This is not only due to the relatively small number of empirical studies. From an instructional point of view, we think that some of the central issues of curriculum-oriented moral education and most proposed instructional designs have not been sufficiently elaborated. Many studies that advocate dialogic learning, for example, do not elaborate on the conditions in which students can effectively work together and participate in meaningful interactions (Van der Linden, Erkens, Schmidt & Renshaw, 2000). With a few exceptions, attention is not paid to either the specific skills and attitudes students need for collaboration and discussion, or to the required teaching strategies.

2. RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

The empirical study included two sub-studies. The first sub-study investigated the effect of a dialogic approach to citizenship education on the ability of students to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account when justifying their viewpoints. Within this context we investigated the effect of the amount of group work. We designed two curriculum units for citizenship education in the history class. Stimulating dialogue in the classroom was a central element in the instruction of both units. In one curriculum unit, the dialogue took place mainly in small groups of students (discussed in chapter 3), in the other, a competing one, the dialogue generally took place in a whole classroom discussion under the guidance of the teacher. In chapter 4, the first two central research questions were investigated.

- 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?*

The effects of both curriculum units for dialogic citizenship education were estimated using a quasi-experimental design with two experimental conditions and one

control condition. In the first experimental condition students participated in the curriculum unit focussing on group work (group work condition), in the second experimental condition students worked with the unit focussing on whole class teaching (whole class condition), and in the control condition, students followed regular history lessons. The ability to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account was investigated through an assignment in which student had to form an opinion about a moral issue. The assignments included two phases. First, students discussed the moral issue in groups of four. In the second phase, students individually wrote a short essay in which they substantiated their personal opinion. Half of the students worked on a topic that was related to the subject matter (subject related assignment), the other half of the students worked on a new topic (transfer assignment). To estimate the ability to take values and multiple perspectives into account, the essays were assessed. Each essay received a score for the use of moral values and a score for multiple perspectives.

In the second sub-study, described in chapter 5, we took a closer look at the role of student dialogue in citizenship education. The assumption was that to facilitate learning, student dialogue should meet specific characteristics (Rojas-Drummond & Mercer, 2003). Characteristics of student dialogue that we assumed to be important for citizenship education are equal participation, processes of co-construction, and explicating moral values. The central questions in this chapter were:

- 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?*

We taped and analysed the dialogues of a selection of students who worked with the transfer assignment. We randomly selected classes from the group work condition and the control condition. To investigate if the selection of students from which the dialogues were taped, was a representative sample for all the students in the study, we compared the essays scores of the selected students with the essays scores of the student who were not selected. It appeared that in the group work condition, the selected students had significantly higher essay scores on values and multiple perspectives than students who were not selected. In the control group there were no differences between selected and non-selected students. We concluded that the selection of students for this sub-study was not representative for the remaining students, which must be taken into account in the interpretation of the results of this study.

Figure 1 presents an overview of the research project. The numbers in the figure correspond to the four research questions and the relationships that we investigated. Using this overview we will summarize the results of the empirical studies.

The participating students in the studies were students from three different tracks of pre-university education (gymnasium, atheneum & havo/vwo brugklas). The results showed that there were significant differences between the three school tracks. The high-track students (gymnasium) had higher essay scores than the mid-track

students (atheneum) and the mid-track students had higher essays scores than the low-track students (havo/vwo). Moreover, the classes from the different school tracks were unevenly distributed over the conditions. In the discussion of the results we, therefore, distinguish between school tracks.

During the post-test students worked on one of the two assignments: the subject related assignment or the transfer assignment. The relationships 1 and 2 in figure 1 were investigated for both assignments. We analysed the dialogues of a selection of students that worked on the transfer assignment. Consequently, relationship 3 and 4 are investigated for the transfer assignment only. First, we summarize the results considering the subject related assignment, and we go on to discuss the results of the transfer assignment.

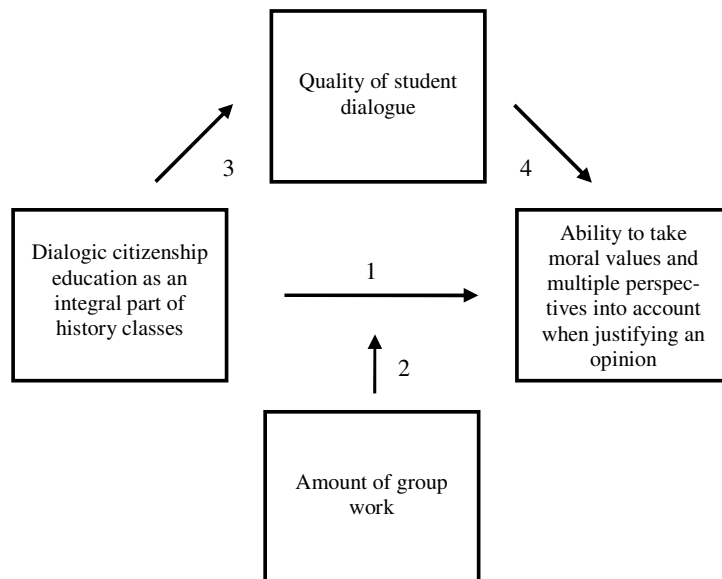


Figure 1. Overview of the research project.

Subject related assignment

Concerning the subject related assignment, the results indicate that for the students in all of the three school tracks a dialogic approach to citizenship education improved students' ability to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account when justifying their opinions (relationship 1). For the students in the mid-track and the low-track of pre-university education, (atheneum & havo/vwo) the amount of group work in dialogic citizenship education is important. The mid-track and low-track students in the group work condition had higher essay scores on *moral values* and *multiple perspectives* than the students in the control group. Students in the whole class condition did not score higher on values and multiple perspectives than

students in the control condition. These results suggest that for the mid-track and low-track students dialogic citizenship education affects students' ability to justify an opinion only when students relatively often work in small groups.

For the high-track students (gymnasium) the result showed an effect from dialogic citizenship education also with a relatively little amount of group work. The high-track students in the whole class condition scored higher on values and multiple perspectives than the high-track students in the control condition. Because there were no high-track students in the group work condition, we could not investigate the effect of the amount of group work with the high-track students.

Transfer assignment

Considering students' ability to take into account *multiple perspectives*, the results on the transfer assignments are similar to the results of the subject related assignment (relationship 1). Our study shows that dialogic citizenship education improved the ability to take multiple perspectives into account for students in all three tracks of pre-university education. Again, the amount of group work appeared to be important for the low-track and mid-track students (relationship 2). The students on these school tracks scored higher on multiple perspectives in the group work condition than students in the whole class condition and the control condition. No differences were found on the multiple perspective scores between the whole class condition and the control condition for the low-track and mid-track students. On the other hand, the high-track students in the whole class condition did score higher than the high-track students in the control condition. As we already mentioned, we could not investigate the effect of the amount of group work for the high-track students.

In contrast with the subject related assignment, we did not find an effect of dialogic citizenship education on the essay scores in the transfer assignment on *moral values* for the low-track and mid-track students. The students in the group work condition as well as in the whole class condition did not have higher scores on values than the students in the control group. We did find an effect on moral values, however, for the high-track students. The high-track students in the whole class condition scored higher on values than the students in the control condition.

To investigate the quality of the dialogues, we analysed the dialogues of the selected students from the group work condition and control condition. From the three school-tracks only the mid-track students were represented in both conditions, and we, therefore, investigated the effect of the condition on the quality of the dialogues for the mid-track students only (relationship 3). The results showed that students who participated in the lessons for dialogic citizenship education exchanged more information, talked more often about moral values and discussed a greater variety of moral related themes. However, due to the fact that the selection of students was not representative for all the students in the first sub-study, it is difficult to attribute the differences between the conditions to an effect of dialogic citizenship education. In addition, the results indicated that dialogic citizenship education did not affect processes of co-construction.

Finally, the quality of the content of the dialogues appeared to be related to students' ability to take values into account in when justifying their viewpoints (relationship

4). Students who worked during the transfer assignment in groups that gave more attention to moral values in the dialogues also discussed more values and in a more explicit manner in their individually written essays. Other characteristics of student's dialogue appeared to be not related to students' ability to take moral values into account. Furthermore, none of the dialogue characteristics we investigated was related to students' ability to take multiple perspectives into account.

3. DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that a dialogic approach to citizenship education as an integral part of history classes helps students to form a more profound opinion about moral issues in the subject matter. Attention for moral values and multiple perspectives using dialogic teaching methods enhances students' abilities to become aware of the moral values and different perspectives that are embedded in the subject matter and to use this to form and justify their viewpoints. In addition, group work seems to be a more effective method to enhance students' abilities to form and justify an opinion than whole class teaching. Students' active participation in the dialogues and responsibility for the process of dialogue seems to be crucial. As we argued in chapter 4, when students work in small groups they can participate more actively in the dialogue than in classroom discussions. Nonetheless, we also expected an effect of the whole-class condition. In the whole-class condition, there was as much attention to moral values and multiple perspectives as in the group-work condition. Moreover, the guidance a teacher can give during classroom discussions on moral issues is also assumed to have an important influence on students' reasoning (Rojas-Drummond & Mercer, 2003). So even if group-work appears to be more effective, we still would expect a positive effect from the whole-class condition compared to the control condition. In spite of this, the results show that, for the students in the low-track and mid-track, attention for values and multiple perspectives did not improve students' ability to justify their opinion when the dialogue generally involved the whole class.

Regarding the high-track students, however, we did find an effect from the whole-class condition compared with the control condition. The high-track students in the whole class condition scored higher than those in the control condition, on all aspects of the essays in the subject matter related assignment as well as in the transfer assignment. There are various possible explanations for this result. First, it is possible that because of their higher cognitive level, the specific teaching methods used might be less important to these students. Attention to moral values and multiple perspectives might be enough for these students to improve their ability to justify an opinion. Second, students with a higher cognitive level might be more able to make constructive contributions to the dialogue during a classroom discussion as a result of which classroom discussions in the high-track are of a higher quality than discussions in the other school tracks. Further, it is possible that high-track students might have had more practice in classroom discussion than other students. Finally, classroom discussions might be more effective in high-track classes because of more general differences in attitudes and classroom climate. High-track students may be

more eager to learn than students in the other tracks. It would be interesting for future research to investigate how exactly differences between the school tracks regarding students' cognitive abilities, attitudes and skills affect the effectiveness of classroom discussions on moral issues.

Transfer of learning

The results show that the lessons for dialogic citizenship education not only improved students' abilities to use multiple perspectives when justifying their viewpoints regarding a historical topic discussed in the lessons. Students were also able to apply what they had learned to a new topic that was not discussed in the lessons. Regarding the ability to take moral values, however, most of the students that participated in the lessons for citizenship education (low-track and mid-track) were not able to apply this to a new topic. This indicates that transfer of learning on this point did not occur. This is disappointing because in the end we want students to be able to form a more profound opinion on moral issues that they will encounter in the future. The curriculum units in this study were developed to enhance students' abilities to justify their opinions with attention for stimulating transfer of learning. For instance, bridges were made to students' own daily life to make the learning content more meaningful, which is considered to be important for the promotion of transfer (Mayer, 2002). In addition, during the lessons attention was paid to reflection on the learning content and the learning process, which is also presumed to stimulate transfer of learning (Perkins & Salomon, 1996). Notwithstanding these endeavours, transfer of learning is difficult to realize. There are different views on what kind of teaching strategies are effective (see e.g. Kneppers, 2007). In the field of moral education and citizenship education, empirical research to teaching methods that focus on transfer is practically non-existent. Further research is necessary to teaching methods that stimulate transfer of learning with respect to the ability to take moral values into account when justifying an opinion. More systematic attention is possibly needed to the skills and knowledge that students need to decontextualize a moral dilemma and to consider it in a broader social context. To be able to do this, students might need to acquire a better understanding of what moral values are (cf. the high road to transfer, Perkins & Salomon, 1996). In addition to this, the development of moral sensitivity should be stimulated (Tirri & Pehkonen, 2002). Students must develop the sensitivity to recognize a certain issue as a moral dilemma. Possibly, not all students have considered the issue of introducing a uniform in schools as a moral dilemma in which moral values are at stake.

Student dialogue

In the study, the effectiveness of student dialogues in small groups seems to be dependent on the quality of the content of the dialogues. Although we have to be careful with causal interpretations, as it appears, students used the value related statements that were made in the dialogues to justify their own opinion. Due to the non-representative selection of students, it is difficult to say if the lessons for dialogic citizenship education have contributed to the quality of the dialogues. It seems more plausible to conclude that there was no relationship between condition and value-related utterances in the dialogues (relation 3), because there was also no relation-

ship between condition and values in the essays (relation 2). This failure of effect of the lessons for dialogic citizenship education on the use of values in the dialogues can also be explained as a failure of transfer. Students were used to discuss historical problems in the lessons and were possibly not able to apply what they had learned to a new subject. However, we did not investigate the quality of the dialogues of the groups that worked with the subject matter related assignment and, therefore, we can not say if the lessons had an effect on students' use of values with a historical topic.

The results further indicate that the lessons for dialogic citizenship education did not enhance processes of co-construction in the student dialogue. Moreover, processes of co-construction appeared not to be related to students' ability to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account when justifying an opinion. What the role of processes and co-construction is in the forming of opinions during a dialogue remains an interesting question for further research. While coding the dialogues, for example, we did not make a distinction between transformative utterances that elaborate on the contribution of others and transformative utterance that challenge the input of other participants. It is possible that for the ability to form an opinion it is particularly important that students are critical and investigate counterarguments during the dialogue (Rojas-Drummond & Mercer, 2003). It is questionable, however, if such a distinction in transformative utterances would have led to different results. As we have argued in chapter 5, students usually agreed with each other. Explorative analyses show that students contributed not many counterarguments. The topic of the essay assignment may be of influence here. However, this result might also be more general. Research has shown that students are usually not inclined to approach other students' arguments in a critical manner (Amelsoort, 2006). Felton and Kuhn (2001) found that students of the same age (7th & 8th grade) as the students in this study were more focussed on the exposition of their own opinion and arguments and hardly got to challenge the arguments of other students. The authors argue that to express and substantiate your own opinion and at the same time challenge and criticize the opinion of others might be a cognitive overload to these students. In addition to this, social factors may be important to student dialogue (Kreijns, Kirschner & Jochems, 2003). In this study, we focused mostly on the cognitive processes during the dialogues. The students may have perceived the dialogues mainly as social interaction. Perhaps it is not socially desirable in this age group to disagree with each other.

How can students be stimulated to take a more critical attitude towards their own opinions and those of others? In the lessons for dialogic citizenship education co-construction was stimulated by having students formulate a collective standpoint. It is possible that this approach did not motivate students enough to criticize each others opinions. During the pilot-study of the curriculum units it appeared that the dialogues between students were not as critical as expected. Students usually agreed with each other and when they disagreed, students seldom tried to convince each other by challenging the argumentation of their opponent with counterarguments. As a response to these observations we added assignments in which students of the same group had to empathize with different perspectives and defend to each other a point of view associated with that particular perspective. In some cases this approach resulted in a lively and more critical dialogue between students. The results

show, however, that this approach did not affect the way students engaged in dialogue with each other at the end of the curriculum unit, during the essay assignment.

In this study, we have focussed on the use of values and multiple perspectives when justifying an opinion. To stimulate a more critical dialogue between students, it is advisable to combine attention for values and multiple perspectives with assignments aimed at the development of argumentation skills (e.g. Kuhn & Udell, 2003; Amelvoort, 2006)).

The role of the teacher

This thesis focussed on the curriculum and aimed to acquire more insight in effective teaching methods to enhance students' ability to justify an opinion. The role of the teachers is for the most part left out of the consideration. This does not alter the fact that the role of the teacher is important and his or her behaviour has (moral) implications on the education of students (see e.g. Hansen, 2001). The way teachers approach moral issues in the subject matter is influenced by their task perceptions as a teacher and their own moral values (Maas, Klaassen & Denessen, 2007). How, for example, do teachers deal with comments of students that conflict with their own values? With their response to students' opinions, teachers give intended and unintended signals to the students which can influence them. Hanson (2002), for instance, shows in her thesis that teachers differ in their approach to a curriculum unit for multicultural education. She argues that teachers' task perceptions and their perspectives on diversity had an effect on the way teachers worked with the teaching materials.

In this study the personal views and professionalism of teachers are also important. Especially, in the whole-class condition in which classroom discussion under guidance of the teacher was a central element. Teachers can choose to what extent they guide the discussion to a conclusion let by their own beliefs. The teachers' manual included instructions on how to guide classroom discussions, but it, nevertheless, left room for interpretation. It is neither possible, nor desirable to minimize the role of the teacher (Goodson & Numan, 2002; Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006). The teachers' manual prescribed, for example, that teachers might give their own opinion, but with reservations and, as much as possible, as an equal conversation partner. When and how teachers give their opinion remains, however, a personal choice that teachers make guided by their personal beliefs, their professionalism and dependent on the situation. Besides, as we have argued, teachers also give unintended signals to students which can have educational and moral implications. A relevant question for further research, therefore, considers the interaction between the teachers' personal views and considerations and the way they work with the teaching material for citizenship education.

Measuring moral values and multiple perspectives

Students' ability to take values and multiple perspectives into account when justifying their viewpoints was assessed by means of short essays that students wrote about a moral issue. We were particularly interested if students developed the skills and attitudes that would enable them to refer to moral values and multiple perspectives of their own accord. The development of a personal opinion on moral issues in-

volves not only the ability to make moral judgements but also the motivation to make a moral judgement (moral motivation) and the ability to recognize a certain issue as a moral dilemma (moral sensitivity) (Tirri & Pehkonen, 2002). In our view, an open response assignment is more apt to measure these abilities than a closed response method in which students can choose between a number of arguments (e.g. DIT: Rest, 1979).

A drawback of an essay assignment is that it is difficult to distinguish the ability to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account from the cognitive skills necessary to produce a written text (see e.g. McCutchen, 2006). The raters in our study were instructed to ignore the overall quality of the text, the specific choice of words and grammar mistakes as much as possible while judging the essays. We did not control, however, for writing skills and it is still reasonable to assume writing skills have a substantial influence on the score. In future research these factors should be taken into account in the assessment of the essays.

Another point of interest is the assessment of the essays. The essays were scored separately for each aspect as a whole. The advantage of holistic scores is that the score of each essay can be determined by comparison with a standard essay (see chapter 4), which has proven to be a reliable method (Blok, 1986). As a consequence of working with holistic scores some information, however, is lost. For moral values the essay score was based on the number of arguments which referred to moral values, as well as the extent to which the students explicitly referred to a moral value. To determine the score for multiple perspectives, attention was paid to the number of perspectives, but also to the degree of elaboration on the perspectives. In the holistic score these different criteria's can no longer be distinguished. Scoring these elements separately might shed a different light on the way student use values and multiple perspectives in their essays and, possibly, lead to different results. Nevertheless, quantitative methods to measure the ability to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account still have certain limitations. Qualitative methods are necessary to provide more insight in how student use moral values and perspectives to justify their opinion and how students make sense of moral values (see Kelchtermans & Simons, 2007).

Another question for further research is the extent to which the results can be generalised to other moral issues that student will encounter in the future. The topics of the assignments concerned a hypothetical dilemma presented to the students in a specific educational setting. More research is necessary to investigate how students respond to moral issues they encounter in their daily lives and in other curriculum subjects.

4. EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Citizenship education is a mandatory part of the curriculum in the Netherlands today. The 'Active Citizenship and Social Integration' bill, adopted by the Dutch parliament in 2005, obliges schools to give shape to citizenship education (Ministerie van OCW, 2006). This necessarily includes the moral and social development of students. Attention to the moral and social development of students is usually real-

ized in special lessons on specific topics such as the holocaust or the multicultural society. In this thesis we have argued that citizenship should also be integrated in the regular subjects in a way that is not to the detriment of the subject matter. We focused specifically on history education. There has been a lively international debate on whether and how history education could contribute to citizenship education (Brett, 2005; Wilson, 2001). To realize the integration of citizenship education in the history class, there is a need for insight into effective teaching methods. Most studies in educational science are restricted to theoretical discourses on the objectives for citizenship education and give only general guidelines for educational practice. Literature in professional journals does provide descriptions of instructional designs, a theoretical framework is, however, usually missing. Moreover, empirical research to the effects of proposed teaching method appears to be scarce. The study presented in this thesis contributes to educational research by investigating the effects of concrete teaching methods for citizenship education on students' ability to justify their opinions on moral issues. Although we have to be cautious with translating results from empirical research directly into educational practice, we can make some suggestions for education based on the results of the study.

The study shows that involving the opinions of students on moral issues in the subject matter and with that paying attention to moral values and multiple perspectives can be a worthwhile supplement to history education. As we stated in chapter 3, there is generally little room in history classes for students to bring in and discuss their own points of view (Wilson, 2001). By making students' own moral values and their moral judgements on issues in the subject matter more central in the history class, history education can contribute to citizenship education.

Educational research shows that there is usually not much room for dialogue in the classroom (Parker, 2006). This study confirms the assumption that stimulating dialogue between students is an effective way to involve students' perspectives in the classroom and improve their ability to justify an opinion. We recommend to implement more group work assignments which are structured in a way that improves the quality of student dialogue. It is important to pay specific and systematic attention to the skills and attitudes students need to interact. To enhance students' ability to justify an opinion on moral issues, they should be stimulated to express moral values during the dialogue.

This thesis has focussed on the integration of citizenship particularly in history education. In addition, the effect of lessons for citizenship education was investigated over a relatively short period of time (13 lessons). To increase the effects found in this study and enhance transfer of learning, we recommend to integrate citizenship education in more subjects and spread out throughout the year. This study indicates that attention to moral values and multiple perspectives does not have to be at the detriment of knowledge of the subject matter. Even more, when citizenship is integrated in the curriculum and students' perspectives are more systematically involved, it might make the subject matter more meaningful to students and possibly help them to foster a deeper understanding of the subject. By implementing citizenship education as an integral part of the curriculum, it can make a valuable contribution to the education of students.