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

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Publication date
2008

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Schuitema, J. A. (2008). *Talking about values : a dialogic approach to citizenship education as an integral part of history classes*. UvA/ILO.

SUMMARY

School is increasingly seen as a place where young people can learn to be citizens. Schools are 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 should be of citizenship education and how it should be implemented in the curriculum. This thesis is aimed 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 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). Citizenship education in this perspective necessarily entails the social and moral development of students (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Haste, 2004; Veugelers, 2007).

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 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 (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). Moral values are general beliefs, judgements or ideals pertaining to how people ought to behave towards each other. Moral values are important because they are the criteria or standards upon which moral evaluations and guidelines for moral behaviour are based. The second aspect we consider to be important is strongly related to the first. To participate in a plural and democratic society students need to 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). It is therefore important that they learn to reflect upon multiple perspectives and take them into account while developing their own point of view.

Citizenship education is often regarded as a distinct curriculum subject and taught in, for instance, civic education classes or through extra-curricular activities. 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 (see also Sadler & Zeidler, 2005). Ultimately, the knowledge and skills acquired should enable students to judge and act independently. Citizenship education can be integrated within the subjects by paying systematic attention to moral values within the subject matter. History, in particular, is a subject with opportunities for citizenship education (Barton & Levstik, 2004). However, empirical research on the effectiveness of teaching strategies for citizenship education as a integral part of history classes is

scarce. The general aim of this thesis is to gain insight into effective teaching methods for integrating citizenship education in history classes.

Stimulating dialogue in the classroom is assumed to be an effective method for the development of the skills and attitudes citizens need to participate in society (Solomon, Watson & Battistich, 2001). There are various ways of implementing dialogue in the classroom. A common approach is to foster classroom discussions guided by the teacher. By asking questions, teachers can stimulate students to think about their opinions, and guide them towards a more profound, carefully reasoned opinion than in a dialogue without teacher guidance (Rojas-Drummond & Mercer, 2003). Another method often used to stimulate interaction is for students to work in small groups (Covell & Howe, 2001). When working in small groups, more students are able to participate in the dialogue than when the whole class is involved. In order to realize dialogue in the classroom, explicit attention must be paid to the skills and attitudes students require to engage in dialogue.

In the study reported in this thesis we investigated the effects of a dialogic approach to citizenship education as a integral part of history lessons on the ability of students to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account when justifying their viewpoints. Within this context, we focused on how dialogue can be most effectively stimulated in the classroom. We, therefore, investigated the effect of the amount of group work in dialogic citizenship education on student's ability to justify their opinions. Subsequently, we took a closer look on the quality of the dialogue between students. We investigated the effect of dialogic approach to citizenship education on the quality of student dialogue and the relationship between the quality of student dialogue and students' ability to take moral values and multiple perspectives into account.

1. REVIEW STUDY

Chapter 2 presents the results of a review study on teaching strategies for moral education in secondary schools. We used the term moral education in this chapter as a general term to refer to all education with the deliberate aim of stimulating the social and moral development of students. We concentrated on teaching strategies and instructional designs at the classroom level and on the learning activities of students guided by the following question:

What teaching strategies are appropriate for enhancing the social and moral development of students in secondary education?

The results of our review study show that most of the studies in the field of moral education are restricted to a discussion of the objectives. In one way or another, all approaches to moral education aim to prepare students for participation in society. Some studies accentuate the importance of stimulating skills for critical thinking, moral decision making and moral reasoning. A number of these studies also emphasize the affective and relational aspects of moral development. Other studies focus

on a specific set of values, such as respect, responsibility, honesty and justice, as the main goal of moral education.

A problem-based approach to instruction and co-operative learning are the most commonly suggested teaching strategies to achieve the goals set for moral education. Underlying these strategies is the assumption that learning must be made meaningful to students. Stimulating dialogue in the classroom is often a central element in these proposals.

Compared to the amount of studies on the importance and the objectives of moral education not many studies give concrete teaching strategies to achieve these objectives. We particularly think that most proposed instructional designs have not been sufficiently elaborated and substantiated. 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 (Van der Linden, Erkens, Schmidt & Renshaw, 2000). In addition, empirical research to the effectiveness of proposed teaching strategies is sparse.

2. TWO CURRICULUM UNITS FOR DIALOGIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

To investigate the effect of the amount of group work, we developed two curriculum units that differ in the amount of group work. We developed teaching material that supplements an existing history textbook (MeMo) and is intended for students of the 8th grade. The series of 13 lessons deals with the history of the United States of America from the first settlers to the early nineteenth century.

In the curriculum units systematic attention was paid to moral values. Students learned to recognize and identify the moral values found in the learning materials. They studied, for instance, the text of the American Declaration of Independence from 1776 and parts of the 1788 Constitution. In addition, students investigated multiple perspectives on moral issues in the subject matter. They were, for example, provided with several source materials reflecting different perspectives on a historical event.

The curriculum unit paid systematic attention to the skills and attitudes that students need to participate in a dialogue:

- *Exchanging*: being willing and able to express your own opinions and share these with others.
- *Co-constructing*: being willing and able to form your own opinions in a dialogue, utilizing the input of others, and contribute to the opinions of others.
- *Validating*: being willing and able to validate your own opinion and the opinion of others from the perspective of moral values.

Chapter 3 describes the curriculum unit in which students work mainly in small groups. From the very first lesson, students were encouraged to exchange opinions with other students, for example, by doing exercises in which they wrote down each other's opinions without the need for immediate agreement. Gradually we added activities aimed at co-construction and validation. When the students were co-

constructing, they had to try to reach agreement and state which points they agreed and disagreed on. Then they had to determine the important values that had been involved in forming their opinions (validating). The teachers in the group-work unit were instructed to give as little help as possible with the subject content and explicitly to guide the process of collaboration.

The second unit 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 this curriculum unit, the teachers had been instructed to guide the classroom discussions by asking questions. They were also asked to ensure that as many students as possible participated in the dialogue (exchanging), interacted with each other (co-constructing) and underpinned their opinions (validating).

3. EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.1 Sub-study 1

The empirical study included two sub-studies. The first sub-study, presented in chapter 4, investigated the effect of the two curriculum units for dialogic citizenship education on the ability of students to take into account moral values and multiple perspectives in the justification of their viewpoints. Two research questions are investigated in sub-study 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?

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 focusing on whole class teaching (whole class condition). In the control condition, students followed regular history lessons without specific attention to dialogue, moral values and multiple perspectives. The teachers in the control condition taught the same topics and used the same history textbook as the teachers in the experimental conditions, but without the extra learning materials that we developed. The participating students in the studies were students from three different tracks of pre-university education (gymnasium, atheneum & havo/vwo brugklas) to which we will refer as the low-track, the mid-track and the high-track. There were no high-track students participating in the group-work condition.

The ability to take values and multiple perspectives into account was investigated through an assignment in which students had to form an opinion about a moral issue. During ten minutes students discussed the moral issue in groups of four. Subsequently, 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). Each essay received a score for the use of moral values and a score for multiple perspectives.

First of all, the results show that it is worthwhile to pay systematic attention to moral values and multiple perspectives in history education. The effectiveness of the two different instructional approaches to citizenship education, however, differs. Students who do relatively a lot of work in small groups refer to values in their essays more often and more explicitly, and are better able to validate the different perspectives, in comparison with students who have done more work in whole-class situations. In addition, the effect of dialogic citizenship education appears to differ between the three tracks of pre-university education. Regarding high-track students, it appears that students in the whole-class condition had higher scores for all the aspects of the essays rated than students in the control condition. In the low-track and mid-track classes the amount of group work plays an important role in enhancing students' ability to justify their viewpoints. The students in the group-work condition scored higher for taking *multiple perspectives* into account than the students in the two other conditions. This applies to both the subject-matter related assignment and the transfer assignment. In contrast, the low-track and mid-track students in the whole-class condition did not have higher scores than those in the control condition. These results show that when students work in small groups relatively often they are more able to include different perspectives when justifying their opinions than students who work in small groups less often.

For the aspect of *values* a distinction must be made for the low-track and mid-track students between the subject-matter related assignment and the transfer assignment. It was only in the subject-matter related assignment that the students in the group-work condition scored higher on values than the students in the control and whole-class conditions. Students' ability to refer to values when forming an opinion remains directly linked to the subject that has been taught. No transfer occurred. A possible explanation for the non-transfer of the ability to refer to values is a matter of moral sensitivity (Tirri & Pehkonen, 2002). Did the students realize that the transfer assignment concerned a moral dilemma?

3.2 Sub-study 2

In the second sub-study, described in chapter 5, we took a closer look at the quality of student dialogue in citizenship education. The assumption was that to facilitate learning, student dialogue should meet specific characteristics. Characteristics of student dialogue that we assumed to be important for citizenship education are equal participation, processes of co-construction, and explicating moral values. We investigated the dialogues that students engaged in during the essay assignments, from a

selection of the students in sub-study 1. The central questions in the second sub-study were:

Does dialogic citizenship education as an integral part of history classes enhance the quality of dialogue between students?

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 randomly selected classes from the group work condition and the control condition. In those classes, we taped the dialogues of students who worked with the transfer assignment. 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 their were no differences between selected and not selected students. We concluded that the selection of students for sub-study 2 was not representative for the remaining students, which must be taken into account in the interpretation of the results of this study.

The taped dialogues were coded. First, we focused on the type of communicative act used to identify processes of co-construction. Subsequently, we coded the content of what is being communicated. We focused on utterances in which a moral value is expressed and on the number of moral related themes that was discussed. 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.

The results show 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 than students who did not participated in the lessons for dialogic citizenship education. 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.

The quality of the content of the dialogues appears to be related to students' ability to take values into account in the justification of their viewpoints. 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.

This study indicates that the content of students' dialogue is important for students' ability to substantiate their opinion on moral issues with value laden argumentation. An instructional design for citizenship education in which dialogue is a

central element, should therefore aim to enhance the quality of the content of students' dialogues.

4.   CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In the last chapter, we present an overview and a discussion of the main findings of this research project and give suggestions for future research. We concluded this chapter with implications for educational practice.

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 use this to form and justify their viewpoints. In addition, working in small groups proved to be a productive teaching method for a dialogic approach to citizenship education. This study further indicates that the content of students' dialogue is important for students' ability to substantiate their opinion on moral issues using values. In the final chapter we discuss three unexpected results.

Firstly, the low-track and mid-track students in the whole-class condition did not score higher than students in the control condition. Regarding the high-track students, however, we did find an effect from the whole-classroom condition compared to the control condition. The high-track students in the whole-class condition scored higher on all aspects of the essays in the subject matter related assignment as well as in the transfer assignment than students in the control condition. There are various possible explanations for this result. For example, it is possible that students with a higher cognitive level are 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 other school tracks. It would be interesting for future research to investigate how exactly differences between the school, tracks in students' cognitive abilities, attitudes and skills affect the effectiveness of classroom discussions on moral issues.

Secondly, most of the students that participated in the lessons for citizenship education (low-track and mid-track) were not able to apply the ability to take moral values into account to a new topic. This indicates that transfer of learning did not occur on this point. Further research is necessary into 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. In addition to this, the development of moral sensitivity should be stimulated (Tirri & Pehkonen, 2002).

Thirdly, 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 interest-

ing question for further research. 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). Explorative analyses of the data in our study show that students contributed not many counterarguments. Research has shown that students are usually not inclined to approach other students' arguments in a critical manner (Kuhn & Udell, 2003). To stimulate a more critical dialogue between students, it is advisable for future research to pay more attention to the way values and perspectives are embedded in the argumentation of students and to assignments aimed at argumentation skills (e.g. Amelsvoort, 2006; Kuhn & Udell, 2003).

We conclude this thesis with suggestions for educational practice based on the results of the study. The study confirms the assumption that stimulating dialogue between students is an effective way to involve students' perspective in the classroom and improve students' 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. In addition, 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 useful supplement to history education. 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 make a worthwhile contribution to citizenship education.