

Globalizing Civic Education?

Reflections on International Cooperation, Agreements or Standards

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Reflections ...

... the careful subtitle of this paper already indicates that for the time being there exist no concepts, no completed programme to be introduced on this topic. Obviously, the topic of our conference – “Future of Civic Education in the 21st Century” – leads us to the problem if for organizing this future an international point of view will be necessary; the latter indicates the question about possible “international agreements that establish norms, standards or practices for civic education”, as mentioned by the title of this panel. At first sight this may look as a rather pragmatic question of work planning for the following conferences. At a closer look, however, it proves to be a very complex topic, in the context of which completely different levels of international cooperation are addressed and which leads to quite fundamental questions about the way in which civic education could be understood. In this paper only a few of this can be addressed, and three steps shall do this - at three levels, with which three aspects mentioned on each.

Civic Education within a Global Environment: Three Reasons for Increased International Cooperation

1. From a historical point of view, the most important foundation context of civic education stems from the age of the development of national states. This is at least true if we understand civic education not only to be a discipline or an independent subject but to be also a dimension of other subjects. It can be shown by many examples that e. g. history and geography, but also mother tongue education and the teaching of literature played key roles for the development of nations. There, Venetians and Sicilians were supposed to consider themselves Italians, Bavarians, citizens of Hamburg and Berlin were supposed to consider themselves members of a German nation, or in the United States immigrants from all over the world were supposed to learn at American schools what it means to be American. Accordingly at a rather early stage, in the late 19th and early 20th century, a debate was started in the USA and Europe on the discipline-related way to understand citizenship education as well as on the tasks of an independent school subject for it. I remind to John Dewey's "Democracy and Education" from 1916 and to the foundation of the National Council for the Social Studies in the USA in 1921 as well as – from the German history of the subject – to the fundamental works on civic education by Friedrich Wilhelm Dörpfeld (1889), Georg Kerschensteiner (1901), and Paul Rühlmann (1908).

Thus, civic education is closely connected to the national state. Still today, in modern societies the ways to understand civic education, its goals and topics are very much related to the national state context of citizenship. For example, Kerry J. Kennedy and Gregory P. Fairbrother by a comparison of the western and the Asian ways of understanding civil society, modernization, and the tasks of citizenship education find important differences but state at the same time: „The nation-state plays the same role in Asian and Western countries in relation to citizenship education.“ (Kennedy & Fairbrother 2004, p. 293).

However, on the other hand there are the generally known processes of internationalization and globalization of economy, politics, society, and culture. The debate on the correct terms in this context cannot be reported here, and definitely they cannot be decided about. Only this: from Walter Parker's paper on the "New International Movement" at American schools on the last NCSS congress in San Diego in the last year I learned that with the American debate the terms "globalization" and "internationalization" are often used alternatively and are connected to different concepts. For my paper these two terms will not be used alternatively but complementarily; in my opinion they are not fundamentally different from each other but by their range: not every internationalization of a social field or process has a global dimension. But what they have in common – and for me this seems to be the essential point for civic education – is that they name processes of relevant developments in modern societies leaving the context of national states and their abilities to shape. In other words: whereas the way in which civic education understands itself is still very much discussed at the level of national states, for long the topical field of civic education, the political practice can only be appropriately understood from trans-national and global points of view. From this perspective civic education must globalize itself because its topics become globalized. To give one example, we would not be able to understand problems and controversies of German security policy if they were only looked at from an inner-German point of view. Indeed, this may be supposed to be hardly the case with the practice of schools. But nevertheless, as far as I see there is hardly any international debate among scientists and teachers, no research, and no international model projects on the question of how security-political issues must be dealt with at school these days. This is analogously true for other fields of politics. But if the topics of civic education become internationalized, would it not suggest itself to also speak about standards of dealing with them at the international level?

2. Second aspects are new *risks and dangers for democracy* in modern societies. What is new about these dangers is that they are less rooted in the particularities of individual countries but that they also appear in an internationalized, globalized way, or at least as a trend in many societies. The most striking example is for sure globally acting terrorism and its environment of religious-political fundamentalism with fluid boundaries of the readiness for violence. Another example is world-wide migration, having the effect that western democracies have to integrate ever more groups of immigrants not seldom coming from democratically little stabile societies; at our last conferences we repeatedly talked about this topic. In Europe there are also the problems of democratic transformation in the eastern states. All this means new challenges for civic education, which by their nature are trans-national and suggest international cooperation. If I am right, it is not at last challenges of this kind which at least in Europe, partly most recently also in Asia, have resulted in a revival of public interest in civic education. One European example for this is the “European Year of Citizenship through Education” organized by the Council of Europe in 2005.
3. A third reason is the necessary *professionalism and professionalization* of civic education. If on the long run civic education shall stay a part of the curriculum of modern school, it needs a scientific basis. It is not an attitude subject but a discipline, which in respect of content and didactics must be based on scientific knowledge and scientific research. But science is international by its nature. Traditionally speaking, it is committed to truth and not to the nation. Probably the long-term effect of the initially mentioned ties of civic education to nation and national state is responsible for the fact that in comparison to others our discipline shows a clearly less degree of internationalizing the scientific debate. Here we have a lot to catch up on if we do not want civic education to be perceived one day as a relic of a past age of the history of school and education.

Areas of Tension and Conflict in the Context of Civic Education: Three Topics for the International Debate

1. In our discipline, what should an international debate deal with, on which could there be agreements or even standards, where are open questions and controversies which need to be debated at the international level? A first and essential topical field would be the question of what are we talking about at all when speaking of civic education being a discipline. At the beginning of last year there happened a German-Austrian conference on the topic of “Confusing Conversation”, organized by the German Federal Agency of Civic Education and the Austrian Ministry of Education. According to the subtitle and the topic of the congress, it was about the difficulties of talking about civic education in a foreign language. The topical starting point was the problem that the German term “politische Bildung (lit. ‘political education’)” is not simply corresponding to any English term but that there are several possibilities to translate it: civic education, citizenship education, education for democratic citizenship – and how are all these terms related to that of “social studies”? Indeed, in my opinion the German way of understanding “politische Bildung”, if it refers to the school subject, is somewhat between “civic education” and “social studies” – to German “politische Bildung”, at least in the opinion of most experts, there belong also society and economy but not history and geography. On the other hand, in Germany there are also federal states choosing the design of the subject in different ways that is for example they take economy away from political education or, on the contrary, they integrate history, geography, and political education. This variety is not only found in Germany but everywhere in the world. Thus, is it not only a confusing conversation but also a confusing organisation?

Probably, on the short run even an increased internationalization of the subject-related debate will not result in a common model of civic education and its relation to the neighbouring disciplines. But maybe there could indeed be striving for something like an international understanding on minimum norms of the institutionalization and subject-related quality of civic education. To have it in the terminology of standards: one topic might be the search for international minimum standards of civic education in the field of *content standards and opportunity-to-learn standards*. Then, there would be these questions, for example: are there certain political problems with which civic education should deal in any case? Is it possible to define basic concepts, which narrow topical prospects and subject-related core questions of civic education? What should be the minimum demands of the subject-related qualification of teachers who are supposed to teach civic education? At what age at the latest should civic education begin at school, what should be the minimum time for the subject? Which essentially necessary co-operations with other disciplines could be named? It may well be very helpful for the profile of civic education if there happens a broad international understanding on such questions.

2. The question of which competences young people should have after having attended civic education will lead us one step further. To ask again in the terminology of standards: is it possible to formulate minimum demands in the field of *performance standards* at the international level? This question is a delicate one, as it touches normative aspects of the goals and tasks of civic education. For the North American and the Western European democracies it may be supposed that a common way of speaking for such a minimum performance will be found rather easily. These societies have in common the concept of individual freedom and the individual's superiority over collective orientations. This concept is the essential normative basis of the free constitutional Western states. Against this background, those competences which civic education is able to communicate aim first of all at the individual's capability to find his/her own position on political controversies and within a varied society. This can be very well recognized for example by those intellectual skills as being mentioned by the CCE's National Standards: the verbs "identify", "describe", and "explain", which are rather oriented towards reproductive performance, are followed by more complex demands such as: "Evaluate a position", "Take a position", and "Defend a position" (Center for Civic Education 1996, p. xiii). That such a way of understanding the goals of civic education is not frequently shared even in democracies becomes obvious by the debate on the so-called "Asian values" with Asian concepts of civic education. Kerry J. Kennedy reports on three variants of these "Asian values" and describes their common nucleus as follows: „What these three perspectives have in common is an outright rejection of the centrality of the individual to economic, social or political development. Rather, the emphasis is on the collective entity, whether it be the family, the community or the State itself. The message is clear: individuals are subject to a ‚greater good‘.“ (Kennedy 2004, p. 15) Probably for this reason and not coincidentally in Asia civic education is closely connected to morality education.

Now, one may object that even in Asian societies there are conflicts particularly about this relation of individual freedom and collective orientations, and this particularly in transformation societies and often between the generations as a result of modernization processes. South Korea's rapid modernization in the course of a few decades with the consequence of a clear change of values between the generations is one example of this. Furthermore one might object that not so long ago also in Western societies there happened processes of values changing towards individualization and that also there we find quite different views in respect of the relation of individual and society, let me just remind to communitarism in the social sciences in the 1980s and 1990s. Nevertheless there are differences. W. O. Lee speaks of the „relationalist perspective of the individual and the collectivity“ and sees *harmony* as its essential concept (Lee 2004, p. 28 f.), which he describes as typical for Asian societies. According to Lee, the problem of an international understanding on the goals of civic

education starts with the boundaries between “soft authoritarianism” and “soft democracy” often becoming blurred as a result of the “relation-based fabrics in Asian societies”.

3. Not less difficult and leading to conflicts is the question of to which way of understanding citizenship civic education may refer. What does “citizenship beyond the nation-state” mean – while knowing that nevertheless national states will still exist? We may suppose that this question can be appropriately discussed only if we accept a plurality of possible answers. Indeed, it is likely that a kind of a model of multi-levelled collective identity will push through in modern societies, according to which most people feel to belong to different social contexts. It is well possible to consider oneself German, European, and a citizen of the world at the same time. But it cannot be the task of civic education to enforce a certain way of understanding citizenship by way of educational means. An international agreement in our discipline might indeed aim at opening up for the addressees the plurality of citizenship concepts, from regionalism to cosmopolitanism.

Steps Towards the Internationalization of Civic Education: Three Action Fields for International Co-operation

1. We may suppose that it will be a long way to a real globalization of civic education. But we may well make steps towards a kind of internationalization with a global prospect. One first step towards this might be a stepwise and case-related *extension and linking of already existing networks*. As we know, CIVITAS is one such network, NECE (Networking European Citizenship Education) is another one, and the International Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies is a third one. As far as I see, also in Asia there do exist networks and cooperation on civic education. But the structures of these networks are very heterogeneous, and one must have the impression that rather they exist parallel to each other than that they form something like an international or even global subject-related public. It would be a big step forward if we succeeded with establishing a tradition of globally oriented subject-related congresses or at least extended conferences of experts in regular intervals which might stimulate the global subject-related debate, maybe even agreements and standards.
2. Furthermore, we need sufficiently marked and globally oriented *publication networks* on civic education. This is one of our subject’s weak spots in comparison to other disciplines. There is a lack of accepted international subject-related magazines, which also have effect on national subject-related discourses, and there is a lack of established series of books with international effect. Where are – as it is the case with other disciplines such as political sciences or sociology – the translations of important scientific works into several languages? Or to have it more modest: more translations of essential publications from national discourses into the lingua franca of sciences, English, would already be an important step, for it seems that we must assume that a great part of important literature on our discipline is not at all accessible at the international level, due to the language problem. Even if in the context of developing global publication networks we at first think of online publications, there will be the translation problem. It would be decisively helpful both for making our subject visible in the public and for the development of an international subject-related public if we succeeded with acquiring resources for translations.
3. Finally, on the medium run a *formal framework* of international co-operation in our discipline would be worth striving for. Already more than 25 years ago, in 1982, for the subject of history the World History Association (WHA) was founded. I am not able to estimate how global the WHA’s structure really is, but we cannot overlook that it is effective and

influences national discourses on the goals and tasks of teaching history. Should it really be impossible to initiate something like a World Civic Education Association, which will offer a common platform for the many individual associations, committed national institutions, and already existing international networks of our discipline? This may seem to be a really daring idea, but as the philosopher Ludwig Marcuse said: “What is mournful about our age is not that what it does not achieve but what it does not try.”

„Should we aim to work to create international agreements that establish norms, standards or practices for civic education?“ My answer is: Yes, we should – but if such agreements shall become possible and if they shall have effect, they will require more networking and a more stabile international infrastructure for our subject-related discourse. For this, however, there remains much to do.

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