Building bridges between the Romanian National Curriculum for Elementary Students and the Global Context

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Abstract

Today’s schools need to educate for the future more than ever before, as the world’s challenges and opportunities become more compelling. With this regard, we should provide the students with opportunities for learning about issues that have local, national and global significance, leading to an understanding of human commonalities and empowering them to take thoughtful action.

In this respect, the aim of this article is to show to what extent the Romanian national curricula for primary students, through its objectives and themes, foster the development of global citizenship. Unfortunately, a curriculum for global citizenship has not been developed yet in Romania, but we can identify some aspects in the curricula of various subject areas or disciplines.

Education for global citizenship needs to be based on resources, material and learning engagements that encourage the students to ask questions, argue effectively, use critical thinking and reflection in an attempt to ultimately link learning to their own lives.

The Romanian curricula for primary students offer some support in this sense through themes such as empathy for other human beings, respect and appreciation for human dignity. Moreover, humanitarian values and attitudes, the development of a sense of identity and the acquisition of knowledge about local, national and international institutions, good governance, rule of law, democratic processes, civil society and participation are supported.

Our research also shows that the Romanian curricula support the development of life skills, including intra-personal skills such as emotional awareness, and inter-personal skills such as communication, cooperation, problem-solving, conflict resolution and advocacy.

The conclusion of our research shows that the educational field in Romania needs to be more concerned with creating the right ethos and climate within the school as well as with empowering the students to take responsible action.

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1. Goal of education for global citizenship

The term “global education” has been used to cover similar ground, often for students in developed countries and has as a primary focus the task of educating students in industrialised countries about global problems including those affecting the developing world. (Council of Europe North South Centre) Global education is concerned with global issues and with events and perspectives on a global scale.

The Global Education programme of the Council of Europe’s North South Centre defines global education as “education that opens people’s eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights” (Council of Europe 2002).

Oxfam sees the Global Citizen as someone who is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen; respects and values diversity; is willing to act to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place; and takes responsibility for their actions.

There are challenges regarding how to approach education for the global aspects of these themes. Considerable work has been done in developed countries. Oxfam has worked with teachers in the UK, for example, to develop a curriculum and materials on education for global citizenship (Education for Global Citizenship: a Guide for Schools 2006).

The optimal approach to the global dimension of citizenship education for a particular country should be developed through participative processes involving national stakeholders including education professionals and youth themselves, and perhaps stakeholders from elsewhere in the region. (Education for global citizenship, 2012)

Moreover, educating for global citizenship calls for a pedagogy that emphasises active learning, cooperation, critical understanding of global issues, community participation and development of a sense of justice and equity. This emphasis on attitudes, values and participation contrasts with a focus on knowledge and skills (Boyd Roberts, 2006).

From the perspective of a leading educational organisation in the field of education, namely the International Baccalaureate (IB) Organisation based in Switzerland, education for global citizenship entails educating students so as they come to exemplify the attributes expressed in the Learner Profile. The attributes expressed in the Learner Profile are: inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, reflective (Making the PYP happen: A curriculum framework for international primary education, 2009). Therefore, the aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.

The International Baccalaureate (IB) supports global engagement which represents a commitment to address humanity’s greatest challenges in the classroom and beyond. IB students and teachers are encouraged to explore global and local issues, including developmentally appropriate aspects of the environment, development, conflicts, rights and cooperation and governance. Globally engaged people critically consider power and privilege, and recognize that they hold the earth and its resources in trust for future generations (What is an IB education, 2012).

An IB education aims to develop the awareness, perspectives and commitments necessary for global engagement. The IB aspires to empower people to be active learners who are committed to service with the community.

2. Building a Curriculum for Global Citizenship

At an international level there are more examples of curriculum for global citizenship. For example in the UK, Oxfam Curriculum for Global Citizenship recommends the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which
we believe young people need in order to enable them to develop as Global Citizens. Since the Curriculum for Global Citizenship was developed in 1997, it has been used by many schools.

Another example is provided by the Canadian Ministry, which states that in Canada, recently there has been an increasing attention to what it means to educate for global citizenship and to provincial curriculum policy developments.

The curriculum should enable children and young people to explore all the themes mentioned above, and to learn and internalize them in a way that will help them respect others’ and their needs. Such a case is the curriculum framework developed by the International Baccalaureate for the Primary Years Programme aimed at children aged between 3 and 12, which is broad and balanced, conceptual and connected (What is an IB education, 2012).

As conceptualised by Bruner, any subject can be taught at any age in appropriate form, with greater depth added as students mature (Jerome Bruner, 1960). Education for local, national and global citizenship should begin in primary school with basic values and interpersonal behaviours. As children mature, the curriculum should help them develop deeper understandings of core values and skills and explore their application to the various themes covered here such as accepting diversity, conflict resolution, human rights, humanitarian norms, as well as local, national and global dimensions of citizenship. This approach, namely the “spiral curriculum”, is important for internalization and sustainable learning of values, skills and behaviours for responsible citizenship and peace building. In line with modern teaching practice, students should be made aware of the objectives of their lessons, and of how their learning pathway in this field fits together sequentially (and spirally) over the years.

3. An overview on the Romanian curriculum regarding global citizenship

Even though in Romania a curriculum for global citizenship has not been developed yet, some themes related to the field of education for global citizenship can be identified in the national curricula of primary school. Viewed through an interdisciplinary perspective, several school subjects include topics such as: appreciation of human diversity, human rights, conflict resolution, and appreciation of own culture and identity, etc.

In this study we are going to focus on the importance of resources, material and learning engagements that encourage the students to ask questions, argue effectively, use critical thinking and reflection in an attempt to ultimately link learning to their own lives. Thus, education for global citizenship needs to be supported by various materials that can form the base for discussion and reflection, as well as responsible action as a result of learning.

3.1. Methodology

The curriculum of different disciplines in the primary school as well as several textbooks were analyzed, taking into account five different key aspects such as social justice and equity, diversity, globalisation and interdependence, sustainable development and peace and conflict.

3.2 Results

Several objectives and themes related to the field of education for global citizenship can be distinguished in the national curricula for primary students. Therefore, the National Curricula for Social Studies for Grades 3 and 4 comprise general objectives that aim at developing a sense of identity and self-esteem, empathy for other human beings and respect for human dignity, together with core life skills, including intra-personal skills such as emotional awareness as well as inter-personal skills such as communication and
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cooperation. The themes included in the syllabus contents refer to human rights, types of human relationships, ways of organisation within various groups, etc.

Moreover, some of the general objectives included in the National Curriculum for History for Grade 4 aim at developing the skills of arguing effectively and viewing various situations from multiple perspectives in order to grasp a better understanding of the topics at hand. The syllabus comprises themes which are related to humanitarian values and action, to the development of a sense of identity while learning about local, national and international institutions, good governance and rule of law, conflict resolution, democratic processes, civil society, peace and conflict, participation and advocacy.

In our opinion, the National Curriculum for History lends itself to the development of conceptual understanding of the topics to be studied in Grade 4. In this sense, the body of knowledge included in the syllabus, such as historical periods and their characteristics, wars and battles, leaders and organisations can form the knowledge base upon which concepts such as interdependence, cause and effect, social justice, perspective or reflection can be understood by the students. Thus, the information about the past can help the students understand the present better, acquire a set of values and attitudes necessary to live in a globalised world and, why not, take action and make decisions that will affect our future.

Furthermore, a series of key aspects related to global citizenship which are present in the National Curriculum for Primary Schools have been used by school textbook authors when choosing different texts in order to expand students’ opportunities to learn in the classroom.

Learning from texts represents a useful strategy for primary students as, apart from helping them develop their literacy skills, it contributes to the development of metacognitive skills and in gaining a more thorough understanding of the concept of global citizenship. In this sense, through reading, students can face different situations, such as the attitude to employ towards diversity in opinions, culture, background, race or language. Therefore, the text at hand, if used wisely, can become a valuable tool that the teacher can use in order to make the students aware of the fact that we are all different, but should be treated equally as we are all human beings. Moreover, the students could try and find solutions that can be implemented in order to draw public attention, to raise awareness and to find ways of dealing with inappropriate behaviour related to diversity, such as discrimination or lack of equal opportunities.

A concrete example found in one of the Romanian primary textbook refers to different fables, that are studied by students in the Romanian language classes and which have a strong moral; this represents an opportunity for the students to get into contact with different fictional characters whose actions or way of thinking do not serve society or other human beings. As a result, students can discuss the characters’ actions, comment and bring arguments to sustain proper actions or attitudes that the character should display in order to become a good citizen, a citizen that cares not only about his fellow citizens, but also about his country and the rest of humanity.

Another good example in this sense is represented by the historical texts included in the Romanian language textbooks. The main characters in these texts are famous Romanian leaders that sacrificed their lives for our country, leaders that led brave armies or just simple Romanians that did brave deeds. As with the fables, these texts have a strong moral and constitute a good starting point for discussions about patriotism, identity, compassion, understanding, appreciation, peace, etc. Moreover, these texts contribute to the development of a sense of identity and of the students’ love and appreciation of their country, its citizens, its culture and its history, attitudes which lay the foundation of further feelings, attitudes and values that they are expected to display towards other peoples in a globalised world.

The values of global citizenship stated above have been identified in the National Curriculum for Civic Education in Grades 3 and 4. The concrete examples, the case studies or the questions for reflection included in the various textbooks designed under the framework given by the Curricular Document, invite students to think, discuss, argue effectively, reflect and self-reflect, draw conclusions and make plans of action related to aspects such as respect towards themselves, others and the environment, empathy, appreciation, cooperation and
collaboration, ways of resolving conflicts within small groups as well as impact of actions, interdependence and advocacy of general human values.

4. Conclusion

The conclusion of our research shows that the educational field in Romania has got the premises necessary in developing global citizenship as aspects related to education towards global citizenship are already included in the Curricula of different subjects for elementary school. However, education in Romania needs to be more concerned with creating the right ethos and climate within the school as well as with empowering the students to take responsible action through a shift in methodology, from a pedagogic dialogue to a dialogic pedagogy based on conversations, dialogue and reflection. It is, ultimately, within the teachers’ power and will to use the syllabus in such a way that can move students from a mere recollection of facts and information about global issues and about values and attitudes that are needed in a globalised world towards a responsible and proactive attitude on their part in what regards themselves as human beings, other people or peoples as well as the environment.

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