
GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: A NEED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND A COMMITMENT FOR SCHOOLS

1. Experiences from projects in schools: positive, but

In many European countries, it is common practice for schools to supplement their educational offer of traditional subjects with some projects specifically aimed at all classes or even just some of them.

These projects deal with a wide variety of issues: environmental protection, particularly as concerns waste and waste management; different forms of discrimination; sexism and racism and the value of intercultural encounters and exchanges, child labour exploitation, the fight against mafia organisations, and many others.

The school is aware of the need to provide boys and girls with a space to know and reflect critically on these issues, as they permeate their present time and also the future in which they will live. The school knows that in many cases it must fill the educational gap left by families and counteract the superficial, sensationalist and alarmist way in which these issues are dealt with by the media. It occurs but too often that, in the face of any episode in which uninformed aggressive and provocative young people are protagonists, a cacophony of outraged voices thunder against the school by saying "The school should teach... it should educate... it should shape young people...". In this way, the buck of a responsibility that should fall on all the educational agencies of society is passed only to the school, though it is nevertheless true that the school remains a fundamental place not only to acquire information, but also to reason about values and behavioural choices.

The projects focusing on the problems of the present are therefore excellent initiatives in which interdisciplinary work is often carried out and the school opens up to the collaboration of groups, associations, local NGOs and experts on the specific subject. These projects are generally organized by the most proactive teachers or by those interested in specific topics, are included in the normal school timetable, concurrently with normal subjects, and take up part of the time dedicated to the latter.

But this is also their weakness.

In fact, the project depends first of all on the initiative and good will of some teachers and therefore always remains occasional. Although students generally enjoy participating in project activities, what do they retain of such an episodic experience?

Secondly, since school time is limited, many teachers, who understand the importance of the issues dealt with in the projects, feel the burden of reducing their disciplinary space and complain about it. Finally, project activities are almost always carried out by

people outside the school, and the teacher agrees, perhaps to take a break, and it is not certain that he later takes up the subject again in his lessons.

How can we overcome these limits and provide students with training that allows them to become aware and active citizens in a global world?

I believe that we must first of all be brave enough and recognise that the school we have inherited from our fathers and perpetuated until now is no longer suitable for our children and grandchildren. We must try to question the traditional model of teaching divided into subjects not interlinked with each other, whose educational content follows the rules of a specific "canon", a programme/textbook that foresees a classroom lecture by a teacher followed by students' homework and individual verification.

In fact, although it is always repeated that teaching must be centred on students, who is the real focus of a teaching/learning process where a teacher of mathematics (or other subjects) teaches just mathematics, on a maths textbook, with maths tests, to give a grade in mathematics?

GCE can help change this perspective, as it is also suggested by the National Guidelines and Indications.

2. Working according to specific topics and problems, with a research methodology

We know that the essential condition for meaningful and not just rote learning is motivation, that is, the feeling of doing something interesting, though tiring; something that answers questions and helps discover aspects one had never thought of.

Another condition is not to receive pre-packaged answers (Why did Nazism manage to take power? Go to page xx of your textbook), but to look for them and organize them in a clear discourse that can also be communicated to others. This is the basis of the active methodology.

We are convinced that school education must aim at providing students something different from a mere factual knowledge; in fact, we know that this type of knowledge is short lived (who among us, who is not a specialist in the field, remembers the chemical formula of potassium phosphate, present in our food? Who knows where are jellyfish placed in the zoological classification? Who remembers the date of the battle of Marengo? Yet, we have studied them...). What the school must teach is the critical thinking, the ability to ask questions and find answers, use one's own reason and intelligence and not be satisfied with the first answer provided, but be able to communicate and argue one's opinions.

GCE deals with current issues that have repercussions on everyone's life, are present in the debates among people and in the media, can become the starting point for the entire class council to organize the work plan of the year.

GCE should not consist of occasional projects, managed by people outside the school and organised in a detached and parallel way to the normal subjects taught, but should be carried out by the school teachers, within their didactic planning, tough in collaboration and with the contribution of all other experts present on the territory.

We will see how GCE can become a tool to realize the school curriculum, that is, how it can help choose and organize study contents and how it can suggest didactic methodologies functional to the development of competences.

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