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Citizenship Education in Germany

1. Historical Trends

The development of 'citizenship education' in Germany began in 1945 when the National Socialist regime was toppled. A fresh democratic start, however, was hindered by the fact that Germans on the whole had a very limited awareness of democratic processes and principles. Unthinking respect for authority, subservience to and blind faith in the *Führer* were the precepts which, until then, had shaped political viewpoints. There was only vestigial consciousness of a form of rule that empowered citizens through having a voice in public affairs and sovereign governance. The end of the dictatorship therefore represented a break with the political past, but not a paradigm shift in political thinking in the population. This is the problem that the re-education programme initiated by the Allies sought to address. Its aim was to alter the political-cultural conditions in Germany so that its people would begin to accept democratic power structures and throw the continuity of German ways of thinking into question. Democratization of Germany could only succeed if its society was made up of citizens who had a proficient grasp of democratic concepts.

Although only a few of the re-education measures struck a chord that could be sustained, citizenship education gave vital momentum to the idea that democracy should not only be fostered as a form of government, but also as a way of life. This was the common thread that ran through the partnership education policies of the 1950s, during which those initial attempts at democracy education were made, and the idea is still with us in the current discourse surrounding the didactics of teaching democratic principles. The influence of the school of American pragmatism on citizenship education is unmistakable, in particular the philosophy of education propounded by John Dewey (cf. Dewey 1993).

In post-1945 Germany, the concept of civics represents the second essential 'developmental thread' in citizenship education. 'Civics education' pursued a different strategy as it also sought to democratize a public that was first and foremost obedient to authority. The challenges to citizenship education, it said, were due less to a lack of democratic behaviours than to a

deficit in the area of understanding when it came to democratic systems. The prime focus of 'civics education' is therefore to transmit and mediate information pertaining to political institutions and their systems. In this tradition, citizenship education is a discipline that falls primarily into the field of political science. Tying the concept to a field, however, reduced didactic reflections to questions of method. The central focus of study was not the 'How?' but the 'What?'

In its initial phase of emergence, citizenship education was derived from the closely related fields of education and political science, and it took until the 1960s for the discipline to expand into a 'didactics of citizenship education'. Its experts were no longer satisfied with applying methods to predetermined subjects of study, and insisted on being allowed to choose their own. The concepts developed for the new field were intended to didactically 'filter' expert insights before they could be accepted as appropriate educational content. The goal was to separate the subjects that *should* be part of a curriculum from the many possibilities that *could* be part of one, and to do it in a reasonable fashion. The categories for regulating the field's content included areas such as basic insights, social challenges, social conflicts, and student interest. These first steps away from education and political science led to the acceptance of citizenship education as an independent discipline, and ever since it has demanded the right to deliberate questions concerned with planning, carrying out, and reflecting on citizenship education processes (for historical developments cf: Gagel 1995, Kuhn et al. 1993, Sander 2004).

In the 1970s, different conceptions of citizenship education led to polarized ideologies. Experts were split into two camps. One believed that the goal of citizenship education was to help citizens make rational judgements, the other believed it was to teach citizens how to emancipate themselves from those who might seek to seize power. Because of the socio-political demands made by citizenship education, the debate was at times bitterly waged. At its root, it reproduced the controversy on scientific theory taking place between critical rationalism and critical theory.

Parties in the conflict surrounding citizenship education were finally drawn together by what is known as the 'Beutelsbacher Consensus', which created a common formula that satisfied all involved (cf. Schiele and Schneider 1977). The first tenet of this declaration prohibits educators from overwhelming students with political opinions, attitudes, or values. Every form of indoctrination, it says, is inherently irreconcilable with the idea of 'politically mature citizens', and therefore, irreconcilable with citizenship education as a whole. Second, educators are bidden to reflect on the variety of perspectives and plurality of interests that problems represent. If a

topic is controversial in science, politics, or society in general, then citizenship education must also treat it as controversial. The third postulate states that students are to be taught to analyse their own political interests, and to influence society in a real way in pursuit of those interests. The 'Beutelsbacher Consensus' has played a fascinating role in citizenship education in Germany. Even today, it continues to act as the fundamental reference for the diverse concepts that are practised in the field.

2. Current Positions and Challenges

The biggest challenge for citizenship education at present is the need to develop further into an independent, research-oriented scientific discipline (Sander 2001: 23). Four different positions have coalesced in the ongoing debate. The first is attempting to re-establish political science as the central discipline in specialized didactics (cf. Massing and Weißeno 1995). The second would like a variety of fields from within the social sciences to be given equal importance in mediating citizenship education (cf. Grammes 1997; GPJE 2004). The third perspective refers largely to recent democratic discourse (cf. Himmelmann 2001; Beutel and Fauser 2001; Behrmann et al. 2004), while the fourth position emphasizes the didactic primacy of learner expectations and develops professional perspectives from the category of political consciousness (cf. Lange 2007 a; Lange and Himmelmann 2007). What the first three approaches have in common is that they place the centre of citizenship education firmly in academics, whether in political science, the social sciences, or the study of democracy. The fourth has disengaged from the demands made by disciplines and takes the perceptions (future) citizens have about socio-political reality as both a mirror and a means of observation in citizenship education.

Citizenship education seeks to teach learners how to recognize socio-political reality as well as how to judge and influence it. Its goal is to train the socio-political consciousness in a way that allows the learner to develop as much autonomy and political maturity as possible. People are therefore at the heart of citizenship education, and its job is to help them develop the ability to interpret and act on political issues so they can live self-determined lives in an increasingly complex society.

Citizens' abilities to interpret and react to political issues are a prerequisite for a functioning, stable democratic system. Unlike other forms of 'political education', 'citizenship education' is not subject to system adaptation, but only to the primacy of political self-determination by politically mature peo-

ple. Citizenship education does not seek merely to maintain a particular status quo, but instead views events within the context of a historical democratization process, subordinate to a fundamental ability for change and improvement in the present state of a society's affairs.

Citizens in modern societies need to become competent in five vital areas; these can be separated into individual platforms for citizenship education content. *Social learning* develops an understanding for social differences and diverse interests in pluralistic societies. Citizenship education teaches abilities that are key to interaction and communication, violence prevention, cooperation, and conflict resolution, as well as to the recognition and acceptance that others might see things differently. *Cultural learning* creates moral concepts and norm values that are relevant to democracy. Its goal is to enable people to make moral choices based on the general principles of human and basic rights. It also provides a foundation for the principle of law. *Economic learning* develops perception concerning the structure and processes of the economy. Citizenship education seeks to enable people to take on active, reflective roles in the working world. *Historical learning* fosters competency in shaping the present and the future by enriching both with past experience. Citizenship education also teaches that social 'realities' are a constant work-in-progress, and can be altered. Finally, people find out more about how social groups regulate general obligations through *political learning*. Citizenship education seeks to teach learners how to critically appraise politically relevant problem zones, and play an active role in the political process.

In this sense, citizenship education integrates several forms of learning taken from a variety of fields in the social sciences. The unifying element is that concepts from those fields are brought into alignment with the guiding principle of democracy. All of the forms of learning inherent in civic education contribute to a democratic citizenship education, and its associated values also bind learners more closely to abstract principles like human dignity, peace, justice, freedom, equality, tolerance, and solidarity. It defines the implicit position of citizenship education – one of opposition to anti-humanitarian and right-wing tendencies. At the same time, however, citizenship education cannot and must not seek to provide instruction in how fundamental democratic principles should be implemented on a day-to-day basis. The call for controversial points of view laid out in the 'Beutelsbacher Consensus' remains the golden rule when solving concrete conflicts. In this sense, citizenship education reproduces the normative principles of living together in a democracy, where people can share a consensual system of values and still be members of conflicting spheres of interest with different points of view.

Along with this 'alignment' with the guiding principle of democracy, the fundamental orientation for citizenship education is also defined by orientation principles that apply to day-to-day experiences, negotiation, and problem solving. Within the framework of *everyday orientation*, citizenship education is involved in the micro-politics of everyday life, as well as in coping with the everyday consequences that result from 'big politics'. This aspect of orientation reveals the dimensions of the 'political' for groups that are very diverse, both in terms of size and make-up (classes, clubs, schools, communities, and societies of every scale, including a global one) (cf. Lange 2004). Active and self-directed learning processes enter the citizenship education equation through *negotiation orientation*, which gives learners the tools for political action. This area includes an innovative, creative repertoire of methods for use in both research and simulation, and for intervening in real-world socio-political situations (cf. Lange 2007b). The principles of *problem orientation* ensure that citizenship education isn't used to trumpet a particular agenda, but instead encourages learners to develop their own political senses and thinking processes. Teaching citizenship education processes in this area generally involves starting the class or seminar by introducing a controversial issue or question (cf. Hodel 2007).

3. The Role Citizenship Education Plays in the German Educational System

Citizenship Education is firmly integrated in Germany's educational landscape. The opportunities on offer can be separated into curricular and extra-curricular activities. Citizenship education in schools falls under the cultural authority of the German *Länder*, which means its importance as a subject varies from federal state to federal state. However, citizenship education does exist as a pedagogical principle at all of Germany's varied educational facilities, at every level of education. Lessons begin in elementary school, where they are part of the general curriculum. In secondary school, the classes dealing with citizenship education go by a variety of names. Depending on the federal state, the type of school, and the grade, these classes can be called 'politics', 'community studies', 'social studies', 'societal studies', 'historical-social world studies', 'civic education', 'social science', or 'political science/economics'. In practise, however, nearly every school provides less than the ideal of two hours of citizenship education every week. In some *Länder*, budget cuts mean that the teaching of these lessons now leads a precarious existence in some school districts.

In the past few years, citizenship education has experienced a renaissance as ‘democracy education’. Through school profiles, study programmes and initiatives, this area has steadily increased in importance (cf. Beutel and Fauser 2005; Edelstein 2005). The goal of democracy education is to increase interest among schoolchildren when it comes to participating in social affairs. Although the two are not identical, ‘democracy education’ has many dimensions in common with the ‘citizenship education’ classes taught in schools.

Alongside school-related activities, another important aspect of citizenship education is engaging both younger and older students outside the classroom in a variety of pursuits sponsored by state and social authorities. State-sponsored activities include civil and army service, working in adult education centres, at memorial sites, or in the Federal or State Agencies for Civic Education. There are also some important areas of non-formal citizenship education such as Right-wing extremism/Racism, Learning Democracy, Migration/Integration, Violence Prevention/Conflict Resolution, and Gender Mainstreaming that are presently being improved.

Such extracurricular citizenship education activities are supported or have been financed by political parties, unions, trade associations, foundations, religious and spiritual communities, the media, academies, independent institutions, and initiatives that pursue citizenship education out of a commitment to its ideals. Because public institutions are withdrawing more and more from the field, private funding for citizenship education has noticeably increased in importance in the last few years, although it still cannot replace the state-sponsored, non-partisan educational support provided by public agencies.

One of a democratic society’s central responsibilities is continuously reproducing and renewing the political-cultural groundwork necessary in order for its members to live with one another – even when the society has to be perpetually reminded of that duty.

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