

Citizenship Education as Key Driver for Social Development: A Case Study in the City Of Rio De Janeiro

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Abstract

In recent decades there has been vivid debate on the positive aspects of developing good citizenship education programs in basic education. In this article, we describe the experience of developing and testing a citizenship education module that involves the use of active learning methodologies in a secondary school in the city of Rio de Janeiro, in the year 2018. The article illustrates and clarifies theoretical suggestions on citizenship education scope, informs on the Rio de Janeiro (and Brazilian) educational framework and explains the setting up of the citizenship education module and its test. Sharing this experience aims to be useful for those interested in elaborating strategies of dealing with the subject of citizenship in school environments in general, as well as in cities with a complex social and political texture, facing specific challenges to significant progress in social development and democratic conditions.

Keywords: Citizenship education; problem-based learning; debate; social development; urban setting; polity knowledge, citizenship theories.

1. Introduction

The concept of citizenship today is debated and under tension, often inappropriately addressed merely in the sense of an analytical-reconstructive path, “*as a determinative legal status*” (Nguyen, 2018, p. 93). It goes rather beyond that, having a specific meaning of nexus between individuals and society, and identifies the political, social, economic and cultural characteristics of such a nexus. It is, in fact, identified in specific dimensions, affecting different theoretical aspects (coming from social science and political studies) and practical aspects (legal and administrative). Concerning citizenship, a pivotal role is played by the individual as main actor of this nexus. Each individual needs to acquire knowledge on how to “join” the society as its member. Acquiring the capacity to be a politically, socially, culturally and economically active member of the society is, therefore, a fundamental component of citizenship education. A distinction can be made between citizenship behavior and the components of competences on which this behavior is built. Those components of competences can be formulated in terms of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and reflection (Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, & ten Dam, 2013).

Much has been discussed in terms of satisfactory programs of citizenship education in primary and secondary schools for a positive impact on social development. Part of the specialized literature posits that citizenship education should focus on student empowerment in assuming an active role in the process of defining and expanding citizenship itself (Menezes, 2003; Isin, 2017a; Lin, Fahey Lawrence, & Snow, 2015). Some authors argue that it enables youth to “learn by doing”, that is to put political and social skills and knowledge in action (McIntosh & Youniss, 2010). This would foster students’ orientation towards acting on contingent citizenship. Other scholars, linking the decline of actively choosing capacity, in turn, address the importance of developing citizenship learning situations able to engage students as “active change agents” instead of clients or consumers (Barber, 2008; Pinkett, 2000). Or, as Warleigh would put it, citizenship education should move from the “knowledge about” to “action”, mobilizing students’ experiences (Warleigh, 2006).

This article aims to describe the experience of implementing a pilot citizenship education module within the activities of the project “Urban regimes and citizenship: a case study for an innovative approach”, funded by the Swiss National research Foundation (SNSF), CNPq and FAPERJ (Brazilian research foundation).

It entails the usage of active teaching methodologies – in this case, debate (Kennedy, 2009; Kennedy, 2007), particularly choosing the speed format, and PBL (Problem based learning) (Panlumlars & Wannapiroon, 2015)– in a secondary public school in the city of Rio de Janeiro. We believe that sharing this experience can be useful for those interested in elaborating strategies of dealing with the subject of citizenship in school environments not only, but especially, in cities characterised by a complex social and political texture, which face specific challenges in terms of impairments to significant progress in democratic conditions.

The article presents the following structure. The second section presents a short theoretical discussion on the potential contributions of citizenship education for the development of students’ sense of political and social membership. In the third section we briefly present the situation of citizenship education in Brazil and particularly in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and what it means to talk about this approach in such a context. The fourth section describes how we elaborated the citizenship education module, its outlines, and briefly presents the module test in one school. We conclude the article with a short discussion of the results, highlighting the need to increase the effort in citizenship education.

2. Theoretical discussion: How citizenship education can contribute to social development

Over the last decades citizenship education has become a key issue in numerous academic and public debates. The criteria that characterized the definition of citizenship, from its most influential version in the period after the Second World War (Marshall, 1950) until the end of the last century are no longer sufficient. New meanings of the citizenship concept are visible in a modified social and political context: the aggressive intrusion of information and communication technologies in the public field as well as in private life and in the labor market, the economic and financial interdependence triggered by so called “globalization”, increasing societal inequalities in wealth distribution together with youth unemployment and migration flows (WEF, 2018), have influenced and contributed to redraw the idea of citizenship in contemporary society. Further, migration today is a key variable impacting the concept of citizenship, evidencing manifold forms of participation, identity, ways of exploiting rights and duties and membership. Such impact is effectively traced and gauged in the process of “*differential inclusion*” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012, p. 67) framed from Mezzadra and Neilson. Such slant of the concept of citizenship allow on the one hand “*the emergence of locations of citizenship outside the confines of the national state*” (Sassen, 2002, p. 281) and increase, on the other hand, the role of cities in shaping a modern conception of urban citizenship (Alsayyad & Roy, 2006). These enrichments of the concept of citizenship contribute to understanding why citizenship education is actually a seminal issue, involving the question of how to make citizens aware of the individual potentialities, roles and responsibilities, connecting, in other words, city and citizens with the concept of citizenship.

If we accept Walzer’s definition of citizen –“(…) *a member of a political community, entitled to whatever prerogatives and encumbered with whatever responsibilities are attached to membership.*” (Walzer, 1989, p. 211), this implies that an efficient citizenship education needs to lean on theory providing an account not only of the rights and civic obligations of citizens, but also of who citizens are, the context and condition in which they need to interact both at proximity and on broader levels, and on what basis they are to be “incorporated” into the political community, beyond the cultural aspect. Citizenship is then supposed to contribute to the strong development, in citizens, of a sense of political and social membership. This involves political and social “performative citizenship” (Isin, 2017b) by a revival over: *who may and may not act as a subject of rights; (...) social groups making rights claims; people enact citizenship by exercising, claiming, and performing rights and duties; when people enact citizenship they creatively transform its meanings and functions* (ivi, p. 501). In turn, we question ourselves regarding the efficiency of citizenship education in terms of its effective capacity to promote social cohesion by educating citizens able to cooperate in a performative sense with fellow human beings who think differently and who follow different life styles.

In a context with an unequal development of citizenship conditions, like in Rio de Janeiro, where the mechanisms of reproducing social inequalities are manifold in the school (Koslinski & de Queiroz Ribeiro, 2017, p. 167), such education is a means to increase individual mobilization and responsibility to participate in claiming social and political rights and roles. Educating for citizenship from a civics perspective is the main way to “invest” in all the main learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2015), namely: cognitive (knowledge, understanding and critical thinking); socio-emotional (sense of belonging and sharing responsibilities); behavioral (acting effectively and responsibly, motivation to take action).

A fundamental question that a theory of citizenship education actually has to answer is: which citizen?; Which citizenship? Different answers are possible. In fact there are diverse models of citizenship that propose various solutions to the challenge of promoting social cohesion in a context marked by pluralism (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

From this point of view, one important concept of citizenship education is civic minimalism by William Galston (Galston, 1991; Galston, 2005), political liberalism by John Rawls (Rawls, 2005), and the different versions of republicanism, from the classical republicanism raised by John W.

Maynor (Maynor, 2003) to the liberal one by Richard Dagger (Dagger, 1997). Each of these concepts involve opportunities and risks that each perspective of citizenship education must take into consideration; a fruitful balance must be found in defining contents fitting each specific context, in a frame in which the positive effects of citizenship education in the secondary school (both in curriculum in school, out of school and extra-curricular), in the classroom and on students' awareness of the meaning of being citizens, are demonstrated in various research studies (e.g. Geboers et al., 2013).

In this sense democratic conditions and social vulnerability are tackled since the objective is to foster citizenship awareness and can then be envisaged mainly (but not only) in two ways: a) as a remedy to the risk of exclusion of the students, especially those coming from disadvantaged contexts; b) "*Citizenship is not something given, but must be fought for and claimed*" (Bignami, D'Angelo, & Bednarz, 2016, p. 34) and is mandatory to encourage signals and patterns of participatory citizenship dynamics in socio-political actors not conscious of having such potentiality (citizens not aware to be key players for citizenship).

3. The context: Brief overview on citizenship education in Brazil and in the city of Rio de Janeiro

Until the Secondary School reform of 2017, which has yet to be implemented, secondary school in Brazil was divided into regular secondary school and technical secondary school. Regular secondary school is comprised of three years and attended by students aged 15 to 17. Technical secondary schools are usually divided into four years. In both cases, there is a basic curriculum required in all schools. The mandatory subjects were: Portuguese, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Philosophy, Sociology, History, Geography and Arts. Philosophy and Sociology became mandatory in 2009.

In Brazil, citizenship education is not presented as a secondary school subject/class or a specific course. The topic of citizenship is spread across different subjects, especially the Humanities (Philosophy, Sociology, History and Geography).

Most of secondary education in Brazil is funded and organized by the states; Brazil is a Federative Republic so states have some autonomy and some specific obligations in terms of offering basic public services. Despite this level of autonomy, they are required to observe some federal regulations, and this goes for the curriculum. The Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (LDBE), enacted in 1996, defines that the official curriculum is based on parameters established by the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with sectors of the civil society, organized around the National Education Council. Until 2017, private and public secondary schools had to follow the National Curricular Parameters (PCNs) and the National Curricular Guidelines (OCNs).

Although the topic of citizenship appears in all these official documents, there is no specific governmental initiative to prepare teachers to deal with this subject in the classroom, especially when it comes to a preparation taking into account not only cognitive, but also socio-emotional and behavioral aspects. Mechanisms of assessment of learning in the realm of citizenship education are also virtually inexistent. It is worth mentioning, though, that all undergraduate programs that prepare teachers must include a course load dedicated to citizenship and human rights¹, but it does not necessarily include a preparation to teach these subjects.

In the State of Rio de Janeiro, the public state schools must follow curricular guidelines defined by the Secretary of education. Following the PCNs and the OCNs, the state defined a minimum curriculum. In it are defined skills and competences students are expected to develop. The curriculum is divided into periods of two months, i.e., for each of these periods a theme and set of skills and competences are determined. As expected, the topic of citizenship appears sparsely in the realm of subjects connected to the Humanities. There are no specific programs of teacher preparation focused on citizenship education. As for the minimum curriculum, it is worth noting that the word "citizenship" usually appears related to topics such as human rights, civil society, state, constitution, politics and participation. Those skills and competences cover formal aspects of citizenship, but focus specifically on cognitive aspects in detriment of socio-emotional and behavioral ones. Throughout the document the prevalence of acquisition of knowledge in comparison to other abilities is quite perceptible. For example, within the minimum curriculum taken from the part related to Sociology for 2nd and 3rd year students, the language adopted is oriented towards knowledge (e.g. "*Understand the*

¹See http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_docman&view=download&alias=70431-res-cne-cp-002-03072015-pdf&category_slug=agosto-2017-pdf&Itemid=30192

concept of citizenship and the historical emergence of civil, political, social and cultural rights as a continuous and expanding process; Understand the historic role of social movements in the construction of citizenship², etc.)

We may observe that the verb “understand” dominates, whereas expressions such as “experience”, “develop attitudes”, “enact”, among others related to the field of socio-emotional and behavioral are nearly absent. When it comes to the preparation of teachers to deal with citizenship related subjects, not only they do not receive specific training, but they also suffer from a general lack of proper conditions to work in the State of Rio de Janeiro. They have too many students in their classes (sometimes over 40), usually work in more than one school, and are underpaid. In many cases, they teach subjects unrelated to their major field of study³. On the one hand we believe that only major structural changes can resolve problems such as underpayment and overwork, on the other we consider that small improvements can be made in terms of developing better practices when it comes to citizenship education, especially in its socio-emotional and behavioral aspects.

4. Citizenship education as a case study for an innovative social development approach: methodology and path followed

Within the activities of the project “Urban regimes and citizenship: a case study for an innovative approach”, funded by the Swiss National research Foundation (SNSF), CNPq and FAPERJ, implemented from 2017 to 2019, a module of citizenship education has been setup and tested. This was done through a path framed in different steps. An initial quantitative survey was conducted, by defining two indices referring to the time-range 2010-2016, one capturing characteristics of urban regime and the second focusing on citizenship indicators. It is proper to specify that the setup of the indices present some weak points in terms of some data comparability and in the difficulty to liken Rio de Janeiro city with other peripheral municipalities at social, political and economic levels due the relevant differences between them and Rio. Despite this bias, the indices allow us to grasp relevant information.

The overall situation shows a general increase in both urban regime and citizenship indices. In terms of correlation between sub-indicators, the citizenship index is correlated to the democratic conditions (+0.676) and infrastructure (+0.457) sub-indicators for 2010, and only with the democratic one (+0.577) in 2016. This would mean that in order to increase the citizenship indicator one could work on the democratic condition indicators. On the other hand, the urban regime index is correlated with education (+0.564) and social vulnerability (+0.524) sub-indicators in 2010 and only with social vulnerability (+0.695) in 2016. Therefore, for a better outcome in terms of urban regime one could intervene in the social vulnerability aspects. As output of this quantitative work, the link of the two indices and comparison over time suggests that some elements seem particularly meaningful and crucial, regarding the main three areas where to intervene to improve the frame of both indices, namely: a) democratic conditions; b) social vulnerability; c) education. The connections found and the three areas emerging summarise the necessity that people be enabled to develop capability for thoughtful and responsible participation in political, economic, social and cultural life. The results of the indices suggest that it depends on the development of two “core” themes:

- the first is that people learn most about citizenship by being active citizens, participating (in a broad sense) to social and political life. This requires that education strategy start modeling the kind of society in which participation (as enabler of democratic conditions) is encouraged by providing all with opportunities to take responsibility, build awareness and exercise choice;
- the second is that the development of capability for citizenship should be fostered in ways that aim to reduce social vulnerability by motivating and equipping people (in particular the young) to be active and responsible members of their communities, at local, national and global levels.

Such results are coherent with the statement that citizenship education is one of the most important emerging topics in the educational field and theories (see UNESCO, 2015; Torres, 2015), since actually educating for citizenship is not an option for policy and decision makers, but seems to be the only way to avoid social and political exclusion, and hence to prevent harsh social conflicts. In other words, since citizenship is constitutive of rights and responsibility and since “*who can exercise and claim these rights is itself contestable, citizenship is practiced not only by exercising these rights but also by claiming them*” (Isin, 2017b, p. 501).

A further step was the definition of delivery method. Given the context and objectives developed, the most appropriate approach to achieve the objectives seemed to be combining PBL (Problem Based Learning) and debate. As a mode of collaborative learning based on problem analysis and resolution, PBL stands as an appropriate methodology, due to its

²Governo do Rio de Janeiro. Currículo Mínimo – Ensino Fundamental Anos Finais e Médio Regular. Available at: <http://www.rj.gov.br/web/seeduc/exibeconteudo?article-id=5776111>.

³27,3% of teachers of the State schools of the city of Rio de Janeiro do not have a teaching degree adequate to the subject they teach (Indicadores Educacionais 2017, INEP). Available at: <http://portal.inep.gov.br/indicadores-educacionais>.

flexibility and transversal applicability with secondary school students. This approach enables the appreciation of both theoretical and practical life experience, based on promoting autonomy, in an organized manner, and developing the ability to access the necessary resources to solve problems.

According to some authors (Panlumlert & Wannapiroon, 2015; De Graaff & Kolmos, 2003), in PBL the learning is generated by the work process finalized to comprehend or solve a problem. PBL, which has evolved over the years, lends itself to different methodological interpretations and developments (Kolmos, 2008).

The second approach combined with PBL, debate in the classroom, cultivates the active engagement of students, allowing for the participation of the whole class divided into groups (Kennedy, 2009). In the vast options of debate, we selected a form of debate where the whole class is involved, assigning a topic and forming three groups. One in favor, one against the topic, and the third listening to the two opposing positions and formulating a final decision while motivating the reasons. In the project we then adopted a form of “speed” debate, thought and structured to be appropriately tested optimizing time and output in terms of interaction, ability to exploit the topic facets, and possibility to reach a “conclusion” in single lesson units.

The benefits of using debate as an instructional strategy also include mastery of the content and the development of critical thinking skills, negotiations, finding an acceptable final deliberation, participation in a process, stimulating attention and fostering the appropriation of learning in students and oral communication skills (Kennedy, 2007; Zare & Othman, 2015).

Based on the aforementioned conceptions of citizenship, taking into account Rio de Janeiro’s specificities in terms of democratic conditions and social vulnerability raised from the quantitative initial findings, and considering the potential of PBL and speed debate teaching methods as tools to develop cognitive and behavioral and socio-emotional abilities essential to an active citizen, a module was elaborated in order to give secondary school teachers guidelines and activity suggestions meant to be helpful in their everyday efforts to deal with the complex realm of citizenship education.

The citizenship education module is divided in: learning objectives; contents; activity suggestions; bibliography of support. Though a vast literature was consulted, four important references for the elaboration of the module should be noted: global citizenship education principles (UNESCO, 2015); behavioral dispositions adequate to a democratic life (Benevides de Mesquita, 1996); Isin’s works on enabling an international and performative citizenship; and Rawls’ conception of the political basis constituting a liberal and participatory society. In other words, the module aims to combine the development of the ability to acquire knowledge in order to make better choices, to better judge, to instill habits of tolerance in the face of diversity, as well as to develop active cooperation and the subordination of personal or group interest to the general interest, and to the common good. This is especially needed in a context of growing disbelief in politics, pervasiveness of fake news in the social media and the crisis of traditional media, growing levels of urban violence and the strengthening of ultra-conservative interpretations of the roots of our problems (Messenberg, 2017). Such is the current scenario in most big cities in Brazil, especially in Rio de Janeiro. Our intent was that, though the test takes place in only one school, other teachers could access a valid and theoretically based guide to implement some appropriate activities in terms of citizenship education.

5. Results: the Citizenship education module tested in school

Given the theoretical framework on the fundamental contribution that citizenship education can deliver to the society illustrated above, the citizenship education module was finally completed and tested, and after a process of elaboration and content adjustments, including main stakeholders, comes in three parts. The module has been reprocessed and amended, in order to deliver a simple and clear tool to teachers. It is studied to equip them with a structure of module immediately exploitable, necessarily completed by two instruction workshops and a minimal theoretical background study based on specific literature on citizenship theories and citizenship education.

The citizenship education module is then constituted by a method of delivery based on:

- a) two workshops, with the teachers adopting the module, delivered by project experts;
- b) a basic theoretical literature to be studied, indicated by project experts. This literature can be adapted to the context (e.g. for Rio de Janeiro some articles on the specific citizenship curriculum at school are given) but is focused on the theories of citizenship and on understanding the basic principle of teaching them;
- c) a document describing the citizenship education module for teachers⁴.

⁴The final version of the citizenship education module delivered to teachers, in Portuguese language, can be accessed here: <http://www.supsi.ch/deass/ricerca/banca-dati-progetti/in-evidenza/Urban-regimes-and-citizenship--a-case-study-for-an-innovative-approach.html>

This last document is divided into three parts, each structured as follows:

- brief introduction of the aim;
- learning objectives;
- contents (in list form for each learning objective);
- example of implementation in form of debate and/or PBL.

The three parts of the citizenship education module for teachers are established as follows, including a brief overview of some basic conceptual explanation of contents behind each one:

- **Part 1:** Citizenship in and beyond the nation-state in a context of interdependence (globalization).
- **Part 2:** The contexts of citizenship: institutions, intergovernmental organizations, governance, accountability and citizen participation.
- **Part 3:** The city as laboratory and pacer of citizenship

Some parts of this module were tested in a public secondary school located in a neighborhood called Bonsucesso, in the northern part of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Though this neighborhood can be described as a lower middle class, it is important to note that both the neighborhood and the school are quite close to two of the biggest favelas in the city – Complexo do Alemão and Maré. Many of the students who attend this school come from those areas. The school was inaugurated in 2014 and has a good infrastructure, especially in comparison to other public schools in the city. This factor attracts students not only from the neighborhood of Bonsucesso, but also from other parts of the city, especially Complexo do Alemão and Maré. Its relative success may have led to the school having classes with more than 35 students on average. The average of state schools for secondary education in Brazil is 30,9 students per class, in the city of Rio de Janeiro 32,5⁵, and the OECD average for the same kind of institution is 21. Currently, the school has around 2200 students and a staff of around 170 workers.

The research team followed the test in two groups, both with the same teacher. In one of the groups, the teacher discussed with the students representation and the struggle for the right to choose representatives through elections. The debate, as proposed in the module, was about whether voting should be mandatory or not. One group defended the maintenance of the Brazilian law as it is – it is mandatory to vote in Brazil – and the other defended a change in the legislation, making it voluntary. A third group would decide which group made the best argument. The subject had been discussed in a previous lesson, the teacher indicated some paths of research, and the students prepared their arguments in advance as homework. As expected, on the day of the activity, with the presence of the research team, the students were quite agitated. Although the classroom was already set up for the debate (chairs and seats arranged in a semi-circle), it took at least ten minutes before the activity could be started. Some students seemed to have forgotten about the special activity, but mostly they were ready and excited to begin. For a qualitative analysis of the debate it is important to highlight some of the objectives of this technique. In terms of behavioral and cognitive aspects, it is desirable that the students develop some sense of independence when it comes to self-study and critical appropriation of the new knowledge (see e.g. Kennedy, 2007; Zare and Othman, 2015). It is also important to differentiate non-substantiated opinion from evidence-backed argument. They should also work collaboratively and respect/pay attention to each other's arguments, which involves both behavioral and socio-emotional aspects.

Regarding these aspects, in general it can be said that the experience was positive. Both debating teams presented arguments that were clearly the result of their research. They covered the main arguments for (a) and against (b) the mandatory vote in Brazil. In relation to (a), it was argued that the universal right to vote was something Brazilians had to fight for fiercely in the past and that the mandatory aspect somehow guaranteed that different strata were equally represented in elections. Those who defended position (b) argued that notwithstanding the vote being mandatory, the absenteeism rates were on the rise in Brazil, showing that the requirement to vote was already not being taken seriously by Brazilians, who might consider it a mere nuisance in their lives. Non-compliance, in this case, was not considered as something with serious consequences, thus making the law empty and ineffective after all. The students were very respectful to each other, paying close attention to their times and not interrupting the opposing team.

One of their main difficulties, though, was the counterargument. Both teams, when challenged in their arguments, could not defend their cases properly, sometimes repeating the same arguments, sometimes diverting from the topic. During the debate, it became quite clear as well that not all the team members had prepared properly for the activity. Both teams relied mostly on the research of two or three team members. The main malfunction in the whole activity, though, has to do with the team responsible for judging the debating teams. They sometimes seemed unengaged, some of the members of this group kept checking their phones or doing something else, and only a part of the students were actually paying attention to the discussion.

⁵Indicadores Educacionais 2016, INEP.

In the subsequent class, the teacher discussed with the students the pros and cons of the debate. Generally speaking, they were quite enthusiastic about a class format different from the lecture. They valued the experience of being more active during class and having the opportunity to have a more open space to talk to each other. They also mentioned the importance of investigating such an important subject that some of them had never thought about before. The students also suggested a main adjustment to the dynamic of the debate. According to them, the time for the opening and closing arguments was too long, being more effective for the debate, in their opinion, to have more time to exchange questions between the two teams. In the other group followed by the research team, the teacher discussed democracy and representation and used the PBL technique in the elaboration of the “class constitution”. The class was divided into groups of four to five students. Their first activity was to research, as homework and for part of their grade for the whole activity, state regulation regarding the public schools functioning, as well as their own school regulation. This was done in order to familiarize them with the language and format of regulations as well as to create a “constitution” that respected superior legislation. The same groups then went on to write a set of proposals for rights and duties of the students, bearing in mind subjects such as evaluation, behavior in class, and teaching methods. This was done in class. The result of this first round of proposals was revised by the teacher and was also part of their grades. Each group designated one representative to present their proposals to the commission that would draft the final version of the constitution.

The students were quite participative and talkative. Important issues emerged, both about the form and the content of a legislation/regulation. At the end of the process, they were much more enlightened about the substance of legislations in general. The content of the proposal also gave rise to a series of topics for debate. For instance, a significant part of the class proposed harsh punishments for those who “broke the law”. This caused the emergence of a discussion about vigilantism, “snitching” and alternative ways of dealing with non-compliance with regulation, such as prevention and collectively dealing with emerging problems instead of merely punishing the individual. They also discussed the common practices of teachers, basically complaining about their resistance to abandoning traditional methods, and relying far too much on the use of the blackboard to teach about subjects. The use of mobile phones in class was also a sensitive topic, especially because it is officially forbidden in Rio de Janeiro’s state public schools to use them in class. The students argued that there was no harm, for example, in using them to photograph the information written on the board. In discussing the inadequacy of some state and school regulations, they debated forms of organizing, making the student body’s voice heard, and influencing law making at higher levels.

6. Conclusion

There are many sure benefits in citizenship education. Who could deny the importance of a more peaceful, more just, safe and sustainable context in which to live? In addition to these obvious long-term benefits, there are also immediate benefits. Studying global problems and the various strategies for addressing them at the individual level can generate a renewed sense of participation, membership and optimism. Practicing citizenship whether through personal changes, service learning, grassroots organizing, or other activities to mobilize individual motivation can provide meaning to the school curriculum. Teachers and students can even see that they can make a concrete impact in society, starting from their neighborhood and their city, beyond the individualistic goal of getting a good position in the society or just obtaining a job.

The citizenship education module setup and tested in the Rio de Janeiro context, we can conclude, aims to strengthen on the one hand individual motivation to stimulate critical thinking and to participate in the social process. This aspect seems crucial to kickstart an individual (and then collective) awareness, able to limit, in the long term, an invasive “*financial pantheism*” (Bignami, 2017, p. 133). Such concept goes beyond the already known colonization of finance into the economy, which indicates the occupation of institutions governing the states by the interdependence of economic and financial mechanisms, hampering the citizens’ capacities and capabilities. The accent here is on the individual.

On other hand, we tested citizenship education by taking into account not only the disputes about the privileging of the nation-state as the appropriate scale of political community, but also the acceptance of liberal institutions themselves and their underlying values considered as a threat from some conservative and fundamentalist groups (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 48). Education, historically, has as part of its aim to consolidate a national identity and membership among citizens. Today citizenship education is challenged also from supranational forums, such as the European Union, and from universalistic claims in general, such as global citizenship, but also from communitarian and local interests, and from the individual’s expectation of respect for personality and preferences. Here the accent is therefore on collectivity.

In terms of perspective, taking inspiration from UNESCO's global citizenship education principles, especially concerning the three domains of learning (cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral) seems fruitful in order to maintain a certain linearity and homogeneity between individual and collective learning outcomes.

This inspiration takes into account some bias of such a principles; it seems, in effect, opportune to reflect upon the approach to be used in scaling up citizenship education, since it has implication at the political (and polity) level for neoliberal, radical or transformative implications (VanderDussen Toukan, 2018) linked to values disseminated in different contexts. As a primary target to be pursued, concentrating on teachers, equipping them first with competence and sensibility on citizenship, citizenship education appears to be the main route to follow.

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