

Introductory Note to the Special Issue: Citizenship education, European identities and Young People on the Margins

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Citizenship Education is a relatively new area in the curriculum of most European states in its current manifestations, and has been mired in controversies about its purpose, its implementation, and procedures. Earlier, more ideological materialisations were largely in the communist bloc, or the autocracies of Spain, Portugal and Greece. The Federal Republic of Germany (FDR) was a notable exception from 1952 to 1990.

The current iterations of Citizenship Education, from the early 1990s, have been accompanied in many states by debates about the nature of citizenship itself, and how citizenship can be acquired, particularly by means other than by birthplace or parentage (Ross, 2024). Europe, the metropolitan power for a set of empires that encompassed much of the globe, had become a destination for many migrants from these former colonies in the previous 70 or so years, and the consequences of this process continue to be contentious in many European states, perhaps particularly for older generations of citizens. Educational policies have been developed in diverse ways, from specifically mandated subjects to cross-curricular approaches (Freires et al., 2024).

Such policies have been categorised and analysed by various pan-European entities. For example, the network of 43

European 'National Units' describing and analysing data about European education systems – Eurydice – suggests that citizenship education focuses on supporting students to becoming active, informed, and responsible citizens, willing and able to assume responsibilities within their own communities (EC/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). More recently, the Council of Europe (2024) has launched an initiative to create a 'European Space' that will

promote quality citizenship education, fostering a higher level of commitment among Member States through an integrated approach to promoting a culture of democracy and preparing active and responsible citizens that participate in democratic life, and to address current and emerging challenges. (...) [it will] enhance co-operation between member States committed to democratic values and principles.

In this sense, citizenship education emerges as a privileged area for discussing attitudes and values that simultaneously inform and construct identity.

The legitimisation of the European Union as a geopolitical bloc has highlighted the concept of a European identity, which has been hypothesised and explored through a series of surveys on this subject since 1974 by Eurobarometer, the European Commission-sponsored cross-national surveys. The specific 'Moreno question', on how respondents see themselves in relation to a European identity, was introduced in 1992 (Lutz et al., 2006; Pichler, 2008; Ross, 2019). The topic has been a challenging issue (Hylton et al., 2018; Landberg et al., 2018; Ross, 2007).

In a period marked by strong migration trends, reflections on borders, and the growth of far-right movements, this issue of *Revista Lusófona de Educação* approaches citizenship education and European identities, with particular attention to groups that are often marginalised, specifically migrants, minorities, and vulnerable populations. Recognizing the uncertainty that marks youth trajectories (Freires et al., 2023), the eight papers integrating this issue reflect on dynamics of citizenship education, and that of schools in general, in responding to issues of inclusion and social justice (Jacott et al., 2024; Ross 2020; 2024; Sainz & Jacott, 2020a; 2020b), to further support the (re)imagination of European identities.

The first text, *Comics in Language Education to Foster Citizenship and Integration*, by Alexandra das Neves, examines how the creation of comics by newly arrived migrant and refugee youth in Germany supports language learning, identity construction and critical citizenship education. Drawing on the *Comixx mit Klasse* project, implemented in Hamburg schools since 2019, the qualitative-exploratory study analyses 26 comics produced by students between 2019 and 2024 and offers interesting insights

into how learner-centred environments have the potential to foster active citizenship and intercultural competence.

The second contribution, *(Des)encontros Paralelos: Percursos Escolares e de Vida de Jovens em Situação de Vulnerabilidade*, authored by Paulo Marinho and his colleagues, problematises the school trajectories of Portuguese young people in situations of greater social vulnerability. While highlighting some contradictions between practices and policies aimed at fostering social justice, equity, and inclusion, the paper affirms that the school can still serve as a place of resistance, providing social mobility opportunities for young people who have experienced non-linear educational trajectories. It is particularly interesting the role of vocational education in this process of resignification of school life.

Formação para a Cidadania: Desafios e Estratégias na Abordagem de Temas Controvertidos is the theme of the paper authored by Marlene Chaves and her colleagues from Portugal. The text revolves around a study on how teachers address controversial issues and develop pedagogical strategies to respond to the related challenges. Despite identifying some discomfort in dealing with non-consensual topics at the school level, the study suggests that teachers reveal an eagerness to face the involved challenges, as they believe the development of pedagogical strategies for addressing controversial issues converges on the common goal of shaping critical, conscious, and respectful citizens. Specialised training as part of a professional development strategy is considered key to enabling teachers to create safe learning environments.

In the article *Entre a política e a prática: Uma reflexão longitudinal sobre a implementação da ENEC em Portugal (2017-2025)*, Sofia Santos and her colleagues analyse the implementation of the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (ENEC, 2017) and the subject Citizenship and Development (CD) in Portugal between 2017 and 2025. The paper draws on a qualitative study aimed at understanding teachers' and students' perceptions of these policies while also identifying organisational, pedagogical, and assessment practices over time. Their findings draw attention to the idea that CD continues to be perceived as a minor subject in the curriculum, being constrained by teacher resistance, weak institutional integration and the predominance of transmissive and classificatory practices. Therefore, the paper highlights a persistent gap between policy and practices that actively promote a democratic and participatory school culture.

Nicolas Martins da Silva and Sofia Marques da Silva author the paper *Escolas como Plataformas para a Participação e para a Agência de Jovens através da Educação para a Cidadania: Estratégias de Escolas e Perceções de Jovens*. Based on a mixed-methods study involving 29 school contexts from the border regions of continental Portugal, the text highlights the importance of an approach to citizenship

education that integrates experiential dimensions, drawing on both experiential learning and participatory approaches. Results suggest that when schools assume the role of platforms for participation by incorporating democratic practices into their experiences and actions, they support the development of young people's political agency in the present rather than projecting it into the future.

The sixth paper, *Dealing with the Complexity of Racism: Teachers' Perspectives in Primary Education Multicultural Settings in Thessaloniki/Greece*, authored by Vassiliki Pliogou and Sophia Tromara problematises the complexity of racism through the lens of teachers' role. The qualitative study situates the discussion within the primary education setting, offering a fresh and original perspective on the theme. The study not only discusses the perspectives teachers have about racism but also targets their responses to related episodes. In their findings, the authors evidence the existence of racial manifestations leading to microaggressions, discrimination and exclusion. As such, the paper sheds light on how teachers employ various teaching practices to foster democratic values, equality, intercultural understanding, and social inclusion.

Moving to the Scottish context, the paper *Holocaust Education and Citizenship Education in a Turbulent International Context*, authored by Paula Cohan and colleagues, problematises the relationship between teaching and learning about the Holocaust (TLH) and Global Citizenship Education (GCE) by discussing the development of school-based TLH in Scotland. Acknowledging the impact of turbulent international contexts on teachers who work on the Holocaust, the study reinforces the importance of a whole-school approach where TLH and GCE are seamlessly integrated. Interestingly, the article examines the nature of challenges teachers face when delivering TLH, affirming that despite an unstable educational context, teachers' commitment to TLH remains consistent.

The last paper in this special issue extends beyond the European context, reaching across the Atlantic from Latin America and specifically from Mexico. The paper *Resistencia transformadora y formación ciudadana. Una propuesta alternativa en Jalisco, México, (Transformative resistance and civic education. An alternative proposal in Jalisco, Mexico)*, authored by Laura Marcela Gueta Solis and Fabricio René Orozco Sánchez explores how alternative schools promote citizenship education through transformative actions in different contexts. The ethnographic study conducted in a school located in the state of Jalisco, which employs an alternative educational approach outside the official school system, is presented as an example of transformative resistance. Its objective is to promote education for critical citizenship and community participation towards achieving social justice. The results of this research highlight how unconventional educational practices can contribute to building active and engaged citizenship, promoting critical and transformative education that pursues social justice.

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