

# **WP 12, Teachers as Citizens, Summary**

## **The Danish University of Education**

### **May 07**

## **Introduction**

This is the first work package out of three analysing Danish teachers' experiences, understandings and expectations with regard to the intercultural dimension of citizenship education. The focus of this work package is the teacher's role as educator and as citizen, and the degree to which the teachers see their work as an act of citizenship.

The work package is divided into the following four main categories which were agreed by the partners as relevant for WP 12:

- conceptual framework
- teacher's identity
- teacher's role
- teacher education

Within these broad categories subcategories have been formulated according to the national data. (See summaries of WP 10 & 11 Denmark, for a description of the data collection and methodological reflections).

## **Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework of this project is inspired by the work of Paulo Freire regarding the professional role of the teacher. Freire stresses '*the responsibility of citizenship*' which refers to the political and social responsibility of the civil society to 'keep an eye on the state'. Within this framework freedom, justice and defending of the weak are set out as key components of education. The professional role of the teacher is viewed from an emancipatory perspective which includes the task to support the development of a democratic and critical awareness among students. (Freire, 1998).

Compared to Freire's Brazilian context democracy is not as unfamiliar to education in Denmark nor is illiteracy a current problem. However, inspiration can be collected from Freire when the aim is to describe and analyse the professional role of the teacher in a democratic citizenship perspective.

Within this theoretical framework schools are not seen as neutral spaces, but rather as spaces dominated by certain discourses and specific readings of the world. Based on this notion, an aim of teaching should be to support critical perspectives on these discourses in order to open for alternative readings of the world.

In these educational processes the teacher should set an example for the students by giving weight to democratic values in the daily teaching practice to avoid a discrepancy between what the teacher says and how the teacher acts in the concrete teaching situation. This includes teaching which is based on a relationship of mutual respect among teachers and students and an involvement of the reality of the students in the teaching. Pointing out that teaching includes elements such as emotions, passion and fear Freire argues against dichotomizing cognition and emotion in the teaching role. Rather, teaching should take form as a dialectical process between theory and practice and between school experience and daily life experience.(Freire, 1998)

With this in mind, a central aim of this project is to receive insight in how Danish teachers define and understand intercultural active citizenship education.

For the interviews in Danish, the concept *citizen* was translated to the almost corresponding Danish concepts: *borger* and *medborger*. However, these concepts were relatively unfamiliar to most of the teachers interviewed. A number of teachers wanted us to define the concepts, before answering the questions (which we refused as we were interested in their understandings of the concepts). A general confusion was expressed regarding what the questions referred to and the questions were found to be problematic by many of the teachers. The answers also differ from teachers never having heard of the concepts, to a few teachers who are very reflective about the concepts and their possible related meanings. None of the teachers were aware of or expressed knowledge of international documents issued by the EU or the COE concerning citizenship education.

In Denmark a concept exist, which in certain aspects resembles the notion of democratic citizenship education, which is called '*demokratisk dannelse*'. This concept is far more known and used among teachers of primary and secondary school in Denmark. The concept of citizenship, however, is currently finding its way into Danish educational policies. During the last three years we have been working on this research project the concept has increasingly appeared in educational contexts.<sup>1</sup>

## **Teacher's identity**

The teachers do generally not perceive themselves as political actors. Most of the teachers do not relate their political conviction to their teaching, and they deliberately avoid reflecting on their political conviction during classes. The choice of the teaching profession is not stressed as a result of political engagement or a general involvement in the society, rather choosing to teach seems more or less accidental to most of the teachers. However during their work as teachers, it has for many of the teachers become important to involve themselves both in the life of the students and also to try to engage the students in the surrounding world.

Most of the teachers are not politically active in a traditional sense as members of political parties or associations, NGOs, and only few of them stress a commitment to issues within the area of intercultural citizenship education.

Though the teachers are cautious to express their political point of views during classes, their teaching is stressed as resting on their personally defined life values and their life experiences are often integrated in the teaching. When asked: '*Do you see your role as a citizen as connected with*

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of the entry of the concept citizenship into Danish educational policies, see Haas (2007)

*your role as an educator?* a general reaction to this question is, that the teachers do not clearly separate these roles. The teachers do not think these as separate roles to begin with, as their professional identity as teachers and the life apart from school are closely related.

The mutual processes between the life of the school and the teacher's life are stressed by many of the teachers. They emphasize how experiences within the school contribute to change their view of the world. Likewise, they try to involve private experiences and stories from their own lives, for instance to introduce new perspectives during classes.

Though the teachers in general do not explicitly state their roles and teaching practice as an act of citizenship, the interviews reflect an understanding of a teaching practice, which points out visions and aims of democratic teaching, which will be discussed further on.

Teachers define themselves also as social workers within the context of the school. Their duty is perceived as being inclusive, and an aim is to take care of the weak and students who need help. This is most clearly expressed in interviews with female teachers, both within primary and secondary schools. They engage in the life of the students, students come to them with personal problems, and teachers spend time in between classes to talk to and try to help students with problems.

Teachers define themselves also as enlightened citizens who are supposed to raise the students' awareness. It is stressed that it is the teacher's duty to open the students' eyes and try to make students relate to the surrounding world, both to offer new perspectives on a given theme and also to counteract a self-centred behaviour which is experienced as a tendency among the students in both primary and secondary school.

According to the interviews the media are used in a consciousness raising perspective as a source of inspiration. Current issues are used in class discussions; 9/11, the Muhammad drawings and the midway election in the USA are mentioned as examples of such issues. Newspaper articles, television and radio programmes are made objects for critical discussion, however, at the same time the interviews point to a reproduction of the discourse of intercultural issues which is presented through the media, which will be discussed further in WP 13, *Teachers as cultural workers*.

## **Teacher's role**

The interviews reflect a general understanding of education as a democratisation process. The teacher's mediating role as representative of democratic norms and values in this process is underlined. This is both expressed on a normative level and also as a naturalized part of teaching practice in both primary and secondary school. The democratic approaches also involve the teacher's effort to engage the students in the formal democracy of the school. The intercultural dimension is generally not related to democratic education.

The democratic dimension is more elaborated in social studies as knowledge of democracy and democratic institutions explicitly forms part of the curricula. The ability to view a question from various perspectives, tolerance and participation are key words when teachers of social studies are elaborating on the main purpose of the subject.

Teaching democratic education is stressed as a naturalised part of the teaching practice as well as a natural way of passing on the values the teachers themselves give priority. Democracy and democratic education is often naturalized by the teachers who refer to: *of course we do it, it is natural, it comes up automatically, you cannot help it.*

Teachers of various subjects, working at schools with a high percentage of bilingual students, stress how they take care to involve multicultural aspects in their teaching. This is specifically done by involving experiences and perspectives of the bilingual students during classes, which is described as a natural consequence of the student centred teaching they practise. These teachers explain how they aim to use the students' experiences for a more general discussion of various understandings of the world. The case of the Muhammad drawings and 9/11 are stressed as situations which took the teachers unaware of these intercultural issues. A number of teachers tell how they experienced a great confusion and need for explanations among the students, and the teachers made an effort by making these issues subjects for common discussion in class. However, in classes with only a few bilingual students, the intercultural dimension seems to be a less common perspective, which will be further discussed in WP 13, *Teachers as cultural workers.*

The interviews point to a general aim of reaching a relative coherence between discourse and practice within democratic education. As part of this, it is stressed by a number of teachers how the teacher should be a role model and practise the values of democracy. The awareness of being role models takes various forms - from the teacher's choice of clothes and language to handling diversity in the classroom.

A number of teachers raise the issue of community in relation to democratic education and citizenship. Community is given words as '*a feeling*' or '*a spirit*' and weight is given to the community dimension in order to counterbalance tendencies towards individualism and egocentrism among students. When teachers speak of '*a community feeling*', it is sometimes directed towards the class as a small community and sometimes they speak of a larger community without directly saying whether this community is a national, European or a global community.

## **Teacher Education**

The teachers have not participated systematically in any in-service training within intercultural citizenship education, and only few of them have been involved in working groups or courses involving this issue. Primarily, teachers draw on their personal experiences within the field; they refer to travels to other countries, books they have read or articles and programmes in the media.

When asked whether they feel a need for in service training within intercultural citizenship education, only few of the teachers express such a need or a wish for further education. This applies to both primary and secondary school teachers. The fact that teachers do not themselves call for further qualifications within intercultural citizenship education will of course be a considerable impediment to teacher education within this area.

In a teacher education perspective, the relevance of relating the intercultural dimension to democratic education could be stressed. This could be done by introducing a broader and more dynamic understanding of '*demokratisk dannelse*'/democratic education which includes an intercultural dimension. One way of doing this could be to disseminate knowledge of the European

official documents on Democratic Citizenship Education, which includes an intercultural dimension.

However, the missing link between European recommendations within citizenship education and Danish education policies could be a barrier in this regard. As stressed in WP 6, European recommendations within citizenship education have not been involved in the work of the recent Danish educational reforms of primary and secondary school. In the curricula of foreign languages as well as social studies, Danish, history and religion the intercultural dimension and democratic education are not clearly related, and the concepts of citizenship education and intercultural education are rarely present. This could be an obstacle for further education within this field since as long as it is not a formal aim of the curricula further education will depend on the teachers' personal interest or a special interest of the school.

Though teachers do not explicitly define themselves as political actors, they are generally concerned about what they see as a lack of community feeling among the students, and try to counteract tendencies towards egocentrism and individualism. They also feel a need to introduce various perspectives on a given case by drawing on personal experiences, students' experiences and stories presented in the media. From the perspective of Freire you could say that teachers aim to open for alternative readings of the world.

To take up the perspective of Freire, teaching practice should be made an object for a constant evaluation by the teacher, who should be open to change teaching practice according to new insights and knowledge. (Freire, 1998). In the Danish case, the society is influenced by an expanding cultural diversity. As noted above teachers at schools with a high amount of bilingual students aim to integrate various cultural and religious perspectives during classes. However, it seems relevant also to argue for institutional structures which support a more systematically introduction of intercultural perspectives as an integrated part of the well founded democratic teaching practice.

## **Literature**

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