

Citizenship and education in a plural world¹

DANIEL TRÖHLER, Director of the Languages, Culture, Media and Identities Research Unit, University of Luxembourg

Notions such as citizenship education, civic education, or political education are an integral part of educational life at school, and as a rule they refer to classroom and out-of-school practices that are understood as educational practices *sui generis*. However, the current understanding of these practices disguises the fact that ideas of citizenship education were not thought of as educational activities *sui generis* in the beginning of modern schooling.

A closer look at nineteenth century foundational documents and developments in various European countries and in the United States reveals that the modern school and its curriculum aimed at educating the future citizen.

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Luxembourg by J. M. W. Turner.

As it is said in an official Memorial of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg in 1828, the school was the “cradle of the citizen” (“*berceau du citoyen*”) (as cited in Witry, 1900, p. 34).

¹ These considerations follow a research project (Educating the future citizens: Curriculum and the formation of multilingual societies in Luxembourg and Switzerland) funded by the Swiss and the Luxembourgian National Science Foundations. It started in 2013 and will be finished in 2016.



A Victorian Classroom (Fort Henry Historical Museum, Kingston)

The overall curriculum was not constructed with the idea that each individual subject within the curriculum intended to create students' commitment to patriotism or to a political ideal, for example, democracy. Instead, it is permeated by a meritocratic system of social stratification since meritocracy is based on the idea of assigning future social roles according to the individual preferences and performance level.

Citizenship education (in this broad sense) as a major objective of modern schooling was developed in the course of a process often described as nation-building. Viewed in this way, citizenship is to be understood, in principle, as a legal category that was shaped by the constitutions, defining the territorial sovereignty and virtually transforming inhabitants to citizens—or to foreigners. But precisely because the transformation of inhabitants to citizens is only a virtual act (by an elite, anyway), it was the role of the schools and foremost the curriculum to implement the idea behind the vision of the constitutional nation-state and its ideal citizens, forming together what Benedict Anderson (1991) called the “imagined community.” On these grounds the citizen is both a legal and an educational concept against the background of collective cultural visions about the good society and the ideal future citizen as the bearer of the modern nation-state.

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In many countries, the idea and ideal of the nation was traced back to a 'natural' commonality of all those people speaking the same natural language. Especially the two dominant nation-states of nineteenth century continental Europe, France and Germany, identified their national characters (and superiorities) with their respective natural languages.² Italy is no exception, but a bit delayed (and there has been less research on Italy than of France or Germany). Italy became united as a constitutional monarchy with Rome as its capital between 1861 and 1870. Immediately, great efforts were made to standardize the wide variety of dialects to one language.

Identifying the national unity with the common language, the family was placed the nucleus of the 'natural' nation-state by extending the family's gendered structure (mother, father) to the pair "mother-tongue" and "fatherland." The biological character of the nation-state ("body of the state", "natural language") simplified the politicization of its unity and eased, in turn, the concerns of those involved in schooling, who pursued greater social acceptance and the advancement of educational sciences.

How strongly and in what ways this equation between nation and language affected the curriculum and the formation of the future citizens is one of the important historical-empirical questions placed at the intersection between nation-building, citizenship education and education policy/curriculum development that still deserves to be answered. The question is different in countries that were and are multilingual, for they were not able to proclaim a 'natural' commonality of those people speaking the same natural language. The construction of the nation had to be, in these particular countries, different, and thus the construction of the future citizens as well. It seems to be not only of historical but of general interest to examine the arrays of curricular strategies of citizenship education in multilingual countries, not least because contemporary societies can less and less claim to be unilingual anymore. In Europe we find Belgium, Luxembourg, and Switzerland, and, to a lesser degree (less than 10% speak Swedish), Finland; in North-America we find, of course, Canada. Studies engaging themselves in citizenship formation and similarities and differences between unilingual and multilingual countries can be helpful for current curriculum policies in most present-day modern societies, which by and large are multilingual. This does not mean that findings would necessarily offer proposals for contemporary educational policy, but they could at least help policy makers avoid rather unadvisable strategies such as to rely on the glorification of one's own history to unify inhabitants and to transform them into patriotic citizens.³

daniel.troehler@uni.lu

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² For France see Weber 1976.

³ For Luxembourg, for example: Péporté, Kmec, Majerus, & Margue, 2010; for Switzerland; Capitani, & Germann, 1987.