

A SHARED AGENDA FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN PORTUGUESE SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Career education and citizenship education often share the same goals for children's and adolescents' development, as both are concerned with how young people adjust to modern societies, and participate in and prepare for various life roles. This suggests the need to clarify the common conceptual ground and practices of both models, in order to maximize the benefits of these interventions for youngsters. In this work, we discuss the potential that career education and citizenship education interventions have to move children and adolescents towards better citizenship and work ethics, in the context of the Portuguese educational system. A special focus is placed on how career and citizenship education may play a special role in helping students reason about their active contribution for sustainable individual and social wellbeing, through their own educational and career planning. Finally, we address the need to improve educational and career guidance in Portuguese schools in order to achieve this goal, regarding the training of career counsellors, the facilitation of career exploration and ethical reasoning through the school system, and the involvement of teachers, parents and significant others in students' career education.

Keywords: career education, citizenship education, school, ethical reasoning

1 INTRODUCTION

Work is a central part of human life, as it allows the development and expression of personal interests, values and competencies, a sense of personal achievement and value, and the expansion and reinforcement of social ties. Moreover, it has social and economic advantages, as societies with high levels of employment are also richer, more politically and socially stable and secure, and healthier [1]. However, one in three people of working age does not have a job in the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) area, where unemployment rates escalated from 6.8% in 1998 to 8.6% in 2010.

Due to the globalization of economies and the massive use of information and communication technologies, the labor market has not only unemployed a substantial amount of its resources, but also relocated workers and assigned them to different locations and more demanding tasks. In times of financial struggles, uncertainty in jobs has harmed societal and personal well-being, which places new challenges for career guidance and counseling, as the motor to prepare individuals for a meaningful career. In addition, there are more and more echoes of a need to discuss career interventions in a social justice framework [2]. Following this concern, career development should include an ethical reasoning about personal career choice and contributions for individual and society's well-being [3], [4]. Schools have been largely pointed as the laboratories to prepare individuals for this goal, either in order to promote their career adaptability, or/and to educate individuals for a responsible and proactive citizenship. Hence, career education and education for citizenship may occupy a same agenda for individual development and social change in contemporary schools, which leads to the need to discuss the interconnections between the two in Portuguese schools. Such a discussion should clarify the goals, methods, and needs of career education and citizenship education in this context.

2 CAREER EDUCATION IN PORTUGUESE SCHOOLS

The term “career education” was presented in the seventies of the past century as an ongoing process infused into the educational system, that aims at the promotion of career development [5]. It was used to describe an educational reform, which aimed at linking schools to the world-of-work, in a way that students would be able to directly experience work and develop values, habits, and skills that facilitate their adjustment to the occupational world. As a perspective for educational and career intervention, career education involves the totality of experiences by which persons acquire information and develop attitudes about self and work, as well as the skills to identify, choose, plan, and prepare for work throughout life [6], [7]. According to career development supporters, the definition of this concept includes the following elements: i) to help persons in career awareness, career exploration, and career decision-making; ii) to equip persons with general employability skills; iii) to relate education and work; iv) to infuse a 'careers' emphasis in classrooms; v) to promote private sector/education system partnerships; vi) to make work a meaningful part of the total lifestyle; and, vii) to reduce bias and stereotyping and so protect freedom of career choice [8].

Nowadays, career education is broadly seen as an intentional effort of the Educational System and of the community to contribute for an educational reform, to help people, through infused activities in the classroom, relate education and work, and acquire general competencies for a positive career development, in order to make work – paid or not – a significant part of people’s lifestyles [9], [10]. In this sense, career education supports the development of a global perspective of work as something meaningful and pleasing, which can produce socially acceptable benefits, not only to the individual but also to society [11], [12]. Although the term has evolved in its’ conceptions, it still is viewed as viable and supported by a significant number of industrialized, western state and local programmes [13], [14].

According to Hoyt [15], one of the major advocates of career education, the best way to learn about and value work is to experience it. Schools are significant places of work and, therefore, should be seen as optimal contexts for career learning. Accordingly, career education interventions should be infused in the academic curriculum and enhance academic learning by making it more significant and motivating.

During the elementary school years, career education programs should include two types of activities: those that promote the acknowledgement of the wide variety of jobs and occupations in society, as well as the various ways people prepare themselves to play them; and those that help young people learn about the importance of work in various types of occupations [12]. Thus, the primary goal of career education with young children is to promote awareness of themselves, of the society, and of the world of work. During elementary school years, career interventions should not be aimed to encourage occupational choices and decisions, but rather to explore possible options.

During secondary education, career education also includes career exploration activities [12]. Communities play an essential role in this moment, as they may set the opportunity for youngsters to have non-paid work experiences. This learning should also be paired with the exploration of personal characteristics, which can be aided by assessment measures of interests, aptitudes, and values.

In addition to the awareness of self and of the occupational world, and to exploration activities, career education interventions also support students’ decision-making throughout their academic paths [12]. Students might choose to be enrolled in a non-mandatory course of a foreign language, or be called to decide whether they want vocational training or a more academic-based instruction. These curricular choices may later translate into professional choices, as they may coincide with the requisites for the access to certain professional domains. Throughout formal education paths, students make career decisions that express their personal interests, values and abilities, and which most frequently include the participation of the family and peer group. Finally, career education interventions should also focus on career transitions [12], which place progressively different challenges to the individual, related to the different kind of work expected, different co-workers, and different solution to problems.

Due to the need to prepare youngsters for the variety of challenges presented by the world of work, career education should occupy a very central place in schools and academic curricula. In Portuguese schools, basic educational curricula are seen as the first steps of lifelong education and training. In addition, educational and career guidance services are represented by the Psychology and Guidance Services, present in schools’ regional structures, which also aim to support the psychological development of students and facilitate school-community relations [16]. Specifically, information and guidance services are provided as a means to more effectively link learning and working pathways, and promote students’ employability. These services are mainly organised under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity. Nonetheless, career

guidance and education is not a part of the compulsory education curriculum, nor there is an explicit strategy of curricular infusion of career education for elementary and secondary students [16].

In Portuguese schools, the provision of career guidance and education services mostly assumes the form of extracurricular activities organised by the school psychologist, and impeding the voluntary participations of students. However, both the school psychologist and the head teachers of class play a fundamental and continual role in following students and cooperating for their career development [16]. Both have an important role in identifying specific difficulties and needs related to the learning process, plan and implement transition strategies for work environments, and assist educational planning and the transition to secondary and higher education. In addition, the action of both the school psychologist and the teachers is guided by a concern of developing lifelong learning competences and attitudes [16].

Practical contacts with the occupational world and job training are offered in dual certification courses (which confer educational and vocational certification), in the third cycle of Basic Instruction, as well as in vocational courses in secondary education. Traineeships in real work environments are aimed at the development and acquisition of relevant social and technical skills for career management, vocational training, and employability [16].

Although the Portuguese educational system does not implement a major infusion of career education in academic careers, there are a few examples worthy of acknowledgement that contribute for this goal. For example, in the first cycle of basic education, students learn about the world of work, jobs, and products linked to jobs in the school subject "Environment Study". Throughout the school years, but mostly at the end of the third cycle, schools normally organise guidance fairs, school trips to local community organizations and enterprises, interviews to community professionals [16]. Moreover, school psychologists' actions in terms of career guidance and education include: educational and vocational guidance programs (normally structured and group-based), information sessions, study visits and training periods in occupational contexts, training courses for parents and teachers, monitoring job training periods of vocational courses, and support measures to the academic learning process [16].

3 CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN PORTUGUESE SCHOOLS

Citizenship education in schools is a contemporary answer to the challenges of an increasingly complex society, with greater cultural and values diversity and important inequalities in the access to rights and development opportunities. Schools have become increasingly concerned with the social and moral development of students, and more specifically with students' values and positive characteristics, such as honesty, altruism, justice, respect, and responsibility. Accordingly, citizenship education seeks the activation of these set of positive characteristics and values in students, in order to promote a fair, just, and tolerant society. Through the education of "good" citizens, schools and teachers aim to promote the development of social concern and tolerance, as well as a favorable disposition towards moral behavior and active engagement in the community [17], [18].

Education for citizenship provides students the knowledge, skills and understanding to play an active role in society at local, national and international levels. It helps students become responsible citizens, who are aware of their duties and rights. It also encourages engagement and proactivity, as it helps students think about the helpful part they may play in the life of their schools, neighborhoods, communities and the wider world. In addition, citizenship education also aims at teaching about democracy, as well as the respect for different national, religious and ethnic identities [17], [18].

Thus, citizenship education is the process of individual learning and growth that allows young people to positively engage in social and civic life as active and participating citizens. It involves the acquisition of citizenship skills, values, and experiences to promote the individual's capacity to exercise his/her rights and responsibilities and to make a social contribution [18]. The Portuguese formal educational system seeks to implement a model of citizenship as an essential element of society. It asserts that a citizen should be free, responsible, and express solidarity with others, respect other people and their culture, and be capable of conscious reflection on moral and civic values (according to the Law on the Fundamentals of the Educational System). In addition, the Portuguese educational system establishes that education in citizenship is a component of all areas of curriculum, in every stage of education. Education in citizenship is not the responsibility of one single teacher or discipline, but an integral part of all educational experiences. Moreover, three different non-disciplinary

curricular areas were designed for education in citizenship, namely projects, accompanied study, and civic training [19].

Portuguese teachers and curricula aim at civic training, as the development of cognitive, social and effective skills, linked with a set of values that characterize tolerant and respectful democratic societies. More specifically, it aims at: becoming aware of personal and social identity; participation in civic life, in a spirit of responsibility and solidarity; respecting and attaching value to the diversity of individuals and groups; enhancing the interpersonal dimensions of learning and ethical principles governing the relationship with knowledge and with others [19].

As a cross-curricular area, education in citizenship can be approached in Portuguese schools through interdisciplinary projects and activities, which reflect diverse topics such as human rights, the environment, or work. Moreover, it is present in the development of teaching and of the schools' culture, as a whole. Such an emphasis also requires the work with active methods of reflection and participation, which include group work, debating, problem solving, case studies and conflict management [19]. The cross-curricular focus placed on citizenship education, as well as the importance of school subjects as Civic Training which are attributed to the head-teacher of the class, suggest that the presence of goals and contents of citizenship education for the moral training and personal development of Portuguese students is a factor of sociocultural integration and an important condition for their development as aware, participative and active citizens [20].

4 A SHARED AGENDA FOR CAREER EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN PORTUGUESE SCHOOLS

The review we have conducted suggests that career education and citizenship education activities occupy, frequently, the same conceptual and curricular domain, due to the fact that they both aim at preparing individuals for full participation in society as active and responsible workers. Career education focuses on the role of schools as contexts for learning about work and its' relation to the expression of various life-roles (e.g., worker, consumer, partner, friend, citizen). Career education proposes constructive learning and development, and promotes the acquisition of cognitive and social-emotional attitudes, knowledge, and abilities needed to lifelong learning and positive attitudes towards work, school, and society in general [10], [11], [21]. Citizenship education offers youngsters attitudes, knowledge, and skills to understand the possibility they have to be more proactive in society, in their school, in their community life, or even in their country. This perspective encourages young people to learn about and responsibly advocate for their rights and obligations as citizens, without disregarding other's rights [17], [18], [19]. Although distinct, there is evidence to conclude that career education and citizenship education seek to enable young people's own well-being and the well-being of others through their active participation in working and civic lives. Thus, we can suggest a shared agenda for career education and citizenship education, as both contribute for young people's emerging selves in a productive manner, not only for the individual, but also for society in general. Learning about the individual as a worker and as a citizen helps link these roles to other major life-roles, such as spouse, parent, or community member [3], [17], [18].

In a time of social change and uncertainty, career education and citizenship education may provide important instruments for students' and young workers' adjustment to the challenges presented by working lives in global, information societies. Thus, it is necessary to integrate, at conceptual and practical levels, both perspectives and educational agendas. One important approach to this integration is a focus on learning as a central feature in career education and education for citizenship. According to Law [21], a contemporary outlook on educational curricula should focus on "learning-for-living", in a sense that the outcomes of learning are defined in the ways individuals use them in life roles – as a worker, a partner, a citizen. Thinking about learning in these terms requires that students acknowledge how can learning in school be used in work environments and in the global community, leading to a true transfer of learning.

As described for the example of Portuguese schools [16], [19], [20], both career education and education for citizenship occupy a significant area in school curricula and extra-curricular domains, and are suggested to be responsibility of the whole educational system. Although practices of citizenship education may vary from innovative practices in the classroom to global partnerships between the school and the community, aiming for the implementation of an educational environment that favours democracy, all practices are based on the idea that learning about citizenship requires, in the first place, the experience of citizenship in schools [20]. Additionally, the same perspective is

adopted for career education, as it views schools as the primordial context for learning about work and experiencing work, because school is in itself a work environment [10], [21].

Finally, career education and citizenship education are seen as facilitators of societal change, as they help students consider occupational choice as a means for socio-political change [10, 18]. In so doing, students should be motivated to move towards an ethical analysis of their career planning: it is expected that considering the consequences of occupational choice to personal life, family and friends, should be related to a reflection on the possibility of conciliating what is important to the individual, with what is important for others [3]. Thus, allying career education and citizenship education leads to thinking of career in terms of well-being, with and for the others, which implies questioning about what is a fair society, and thinking about career options concerning social functions and ecological impact [3, 4].

Adequate training of teachers will certainly facilitate the inclusion of career education principles and citizenship education assumptions in Portuguese schools. The implementation of such a goal will benefit from the compromise of teachers, as well as parents, to change discourses and attitudes towards the role of education and schools in the lives of young people. For example, teachers may activate a thorough consideration of their own career choices, personal convictions, or the actual environmental constraints on their careers. In addition, teachers should integrate career education and education for citizenship principles in their everyday working lives and classes, which requires consistent planning and intentionality. Moreover, it is important to enhance students' acknowledgement of the utility of learning in class for him/herself as a future worker and citizen, and for society in general.

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