

Education for Civic and Political Participation

Participation as an element of active citizenship in democracies is a key project of international and national educational policy. Institutionalized approaches for compulsory schools provide participatory access to all young European citizens. But does this picture depict the possibilities and practices of participation appropriately? Can this standard approach to participation be translated into action in view of diverse polities, policies, political cultures, institutions and practices of participation? The volume questions mainstream approaches of participatory citizenship education and critically investigates their assumptions, political contexts and educational outcomes. The book argues in favour of difference and controversy as the core of the political, and examines the prerequisites and limitations for a successful implementation of such a comprehensive international project.

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Education for Civic and Political Participation

A Critical Approach

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and Tatjana Zimenkova**

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Introduction

Critical Approaches to Education for Civic and Political Participation

Reinhold Hedtke and Tatjana Zimenkova

Participation as an element of active citizenship in democracies has developed into a prominent project of international and national educational policy. Institutionalised approaches for compulsory schools are called to provide participation competencies to all young citizens. National and international policymakers subscribe to the philosophy of participation as a core component of active citizenship and as an essential element of the democratic order (cf. e.g. Council of Europe 2010b; OJ 2007, 2010). The activities for participatory citizenship education (PCE) in schools as displayed by the European Union, the Council of Europe and many national education agencies can be viewed as attempts to put participation into practice (Bîrzea et al. 2005; Gollob, Krapf and Weidinger 2010a, 2010b). The protagonists of education for participation paint a promising picture of coherent beliefs, policies and practices: As democracy needs active citizens, research-based policies ensure that schools teach democratic participation effectively to all students who, as citizens, make use of the participatory competencies acquired, are active in society, community and polity, thus, as a by-product, contributing to the sustainability of democracy (Council of Europe 2002; Schulz et al. 2010a, 2010b). Simultaneously, scientific monitoring and feedback guarantee the best implementation of educational programmes and their continuous improvement.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22
In these educational policies and relevant teaching materials as well as in related research and conceptualisations of PCE, basic ideas are often simply taken for granted as they mostly only touch on their theoretical foundations. In consequence, many approaches are built on rather shaky ground of more or less ambiguous conceptions of PCE and weakly defined notions of participation and democracy. Instead, they often emphatically refer to democracy as a good, fair and harmonious characteristic of European societies understood as normal conditions which, nevertheless, need to be supported through educating citizens to participate actively in a democracy (Eurydice 2005; Hoskins 2006). The commitment to fostering participation tends to displace a distanced analysis	23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34