

Theoretical and practical issues concerning young children's citizenship education: The program "Learn, Care and Act about my City"

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Received: April 23, 2018

Accepted: May 4, 2018

Published: August 14, 2018

doi:10.5296/jet.v5i2.13038

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jet.v5i2.13038>

Abstract

Young children's citizenship is a newly constructed concept that elaborates on the placement of children in the civic sphere while it may provide theoretical guidance for relevant educational programs. However, there are restrictions in the way proposed models of citizenship are understood with reference to young children and used to guide pedagogical practices. Moreover, gaps in teachers training and lack of explicit goals and guidance in curricula have resulted in the restricted implementation of targeted programs in the preschool setting and with questionable results concerning children's active participation. The paper discusses the issue of young children's citizenship in light of social pedagogical considerations, analyzing an integrated model of citizenship within five-stage children's participation and agency. Then the design and implementation of the program "Learn, Care and Act about my City" is described. This program was chosen as it incorporates the aforementioned theoretical considerations. It was developed using collaborative action research in 4 kindergarten schools in Northern Greece. 9 kindergarten teachers and 97 children participated in the program which lasted almost 8 months. It consisted of 4 basic thematic units, designed by the coordinator of the program and critical friend, in collaboration with the participating teachers and following several cycles of observation, reflection and redesign of the activities using formative evaluation. Concluding the issue of teachers guidance and professional development along with the dynamics of children's participation in their civic identity formation are discussed.

Keywords: citizenship, early childhood education, social pedagogy, Greek kindergarten

1. Introduction

According to Sears and Hughes (1996), citizenship is a normative concept, especially when the focus is on the educational perspectives of citizenship. The ambiguity characterizing the term is merely due to the fact that the language used to describe its meaning and relative actions and practices may have quite different meanings to different recipients, especially in educational studies and with reference to the expected outcomes. Things may become more complex when the discussion concerns citizenship education for children of different ages, in particular the young ones. In this case, conceptions also encompass certain views about the place and role of children in the society, their competencies and agency within the context of mandates, challenges or restrictions provided by curricula, pedagogical strategies and general educational policy.

Citizenship education is identified as one of the principal means to help young people develop the social and civic competences needed to shape the future of our democratic society which constitutes a major challenge for most European education systems in the 21st century (Eurydice, 2012). The early years, although relatively neglected with reference to the potentials they offer in developing children's civic identity, seem to constitute an important period for providing experiences that shape children's knowledge and skills regarding related to citizenship concepts and set the stage for competencies that are carried forward to later periods. Citizenship education from a very young age is of great significance as sense of belonging and identity is rapidly growing at this period, on the basis of children's experiences, activities and relationships with others (Ben-Arieh & Boyer, 2005; Brooker & Woodhead, 2008).

The preschool pedagogical context seems to favor elaboration and development of democratic concepts and practices as, among others, it promotes dialogue, sharing ideas, negotiating agendas, involving children in planning and acting, responsibility and self-regulation activities (Broström, 2012; Karadimou, Tsioumis, & Kyridis, 2014; Penderi & Rekalidou, 2016). Still, it seems that in most programs and curricula, citizenship education principles and goals are not explicitly stated but mostly are infused through a social skills development perspective and certain topics that refer for example to environmental education, children or/and human rights and intercultural education. This trend is reflected in a study conducted by Konstantinidou, Kyridis and Tsioumis (2017) with student teachers of primary grades, who reported designing civic education activities that focused on environment (42%), democracy (35%) and interculturalism (23%). However, it is not clear if during these programs and activities children purposefully develop ideas about their place in society, explore power relations and are motivated to be actively engaged in decision making, concerning their experiences in different spheres of their personal and social lives.

Adults' contribution to this direction is critical. Their role, in particular for teachers, presupposes a deep understanding of the concept of children's citizenship, acceptance of children's agency and development of activities and practices that provide links with relevant curricula and promote children's active participation. However, teachers' competences to deliver such programs are not properly defined, while the issue of related training, either in

terms of initial or continuing professional development, remains a challenge for policy makers, especially when the focus is on a “new stand-alone citizenship subject” (Eurydice, 2012).

The scope of the paper is to elaborate on the concept of young children’s citizenship and active participation with an aim to discuss pedagogical considerations when designing and implementing relevant programs and activities in the preschool context. An example of a citizenship education program designed with reference to the Greek early childhood education is described. The program “Learn, Care and Act about my City” was developed and implemented following a collaborative action research methodology (Calhoun, 2002; Zhang et al., 2010). This program was chosen as it is based on an integrative model of children’s citizenship that incorporates the two types of citizenship identified by Delanty (1997) in the “7 shifts” of citizenship education as described by Schugurensky and Myers (2003). Moreover, it follows a five-stage pedagogical design to promote children’s participation that reflects the dynamics of children’s agency and can be used as a pedagogical tool or strategy to address the thorny issue of young children’s active citizenship.

At first the concept of children’s citizenship education is elaborated in light of social pedagogical considerations and an integrative model that underlies the development of active children’s participation. Subsequently, the situation in the Greek preschool education is briefly presented and discussed focusing on teachers’ beliefs and practices and the notions relevant to citizenship in the Greek kindergarten curriculum. Finally, the program “Learn, Care and Act about my City” is delineated describing mainly the steps followed in planning and implementing the activities.

2. Young children’s citizenship and social pedagogical considerations

As Nalbantoglou, Kyridis and Tsioumis (2015) state, children’s citizenship is a recently theorized concept that has raised much debate (p. 182), characterized by loose interpretations of what it means and constitutes in practice (Phillips, 2010). One of the reasons for the restricted interest in citizenship education for young children and the implications it may have on children’s life and well-being (Ben-Arieh & Boyer, 2005) is the application of a deficit model for representing children in the civic sphere, perceiving them as incomplete compared to the competencies and social status of adults (Cockburn, 1998). Actually, using the same conceptions of citizenship for children as for adults may be quite problematic and misleading (Lister, 2007).

Children’s citizenship is highly supported by important developments in the psychological and educational theory and research that perceive the growing individual as active agent in a dialectical relation to the social and cultural context (Mayall, 2002; Nutbrown & Clough, 2004; Nutbrown, 2006; Nutbrown & Clough, 2006). From this point of view, Nutbrown and Clough (2009) argue that even young children can be recognized as citizens of “today” or “participating citizens”, as they are able to express ideas and needs and to contribute to decision making that affects them.

Respectively, a new model of the young child has been proposed (MacNaughton, Hughes &

Smith, 2007), that of “the child as social actor” (p. 460), which recognizes children in partnership with adults as they develop new practices ideas and even policies. This idea is based on the assumption that young children can make valid meanings of the world around them, both the social and the political, although in a different way compared to adults’ understandings. What is crucial for children is to see themselves as citizens and participate actively as citizens which largely depends on the extent to which adults view children as participating agents and value such participation (Lister, 2007).

Citizenship education is rooted in the notion of social pedagogy, while in some cases it seems to represent its basic expression in theory and practice. According to Eichsteller and Holthoff (2011), social pedagogy sees education as both person-centred and socio-political, arguing that “it provides opportunities for personal development towards independence, but also has a socializing function in reinforcing social solidarity and interdependence” (p. 61). Social integration, participation and well-being are key issues in social pedagogic thinking and practice (Hämäläinen, 2012). As Petrie (2013) noted, social pedagogy focuses on the development of human beings as full members of the society. This transformation is understood in a lifelong perspective as individuals interact with others and the cultural life. Social pedagogical practices are emancipatory and informed by democratic values. Humans as social members are knowledgeable and act on their rights and responsibilities towards themselves and others. Some of the principles of the social pedagogic practice (Hämäläinen, 2012; Petrie et al., 2009; Smith, 2012) that may guide citizenship education programs for young children can be summarized as follows:

- i. There is a focus on the child as a whole person and support for the child’s overall development.
- ii. Children are not viewed as developing in separate hierarchical spheres, compared to adults.
- iii. Children’s everyday experiences and broader social life contexts constitute an important resource.
- iv. Children of different age may have different kind of processes and problems in relation to their social environments.
- v. There is a broad understanding of children’s rights, such as cultural and social, not limited to formal or legislative requirements.
- vi. There is an emphasis on team work and co-construction of meaning.
- vii. Working with individuals and groups is relational and emancipatory.
- viii. Social and communication skills develop through constructive and supportive relationships.
- ix. Adults working with children should be reflective regarding both the theory and practice.

The interest in a social pedagogic perspective of education and in particular in citizenship

education is not new but today it seems rather relevant due to a number of contextual factors such as (Hoskins, 2015; Kyridis, Christodoulou, Vamvakidou & Pavlis-Korres, 2015; Mylonakou-Keke, 2015; Osler & Starkey, 2006): i. global injustice and inequality, ii. globalization and migration, iii. civic and political disengagement, especially for young people, iv. anti-democratic and racist movements, v. economic hardships and value crisis and vi. high rates of aggression in schools. It is argued that schools are the best places to teach democratic values, skills and knowledge, human rights and respecting attitudes and behaviors (Print, 2007) and this should be done early in children's scholastic lives (Rowe, 2006). However, there is not much evidence that citizenship education is delivered properly or that it has the expected outcomes in children's lives (Howe & Covell, 2007).

Covell, Howe and McNeil (2008) discuss the shortcomings of delivering citizenship education to young children. Lack of teacher training in the area of citizenship seems to be a major restriction together with lack of favorable school culture or school ethos. In addition, teachers do not always think highly of children's competencies especially regarding citizenship issues, or place emphasis on other educational goals and learning objectives, especially cognitive ones. With reference to the Greek educational reality, Karadimou, Tsioumis and Kyridis (2014) concluded that although kindergarten and primary school teachers seem to place high importance on the values associated with citizenship education, their actions and educational activities in the classroom are not aligned with these values, except for the value of communication, environmental awareness and critical thinking. Still, as they noted, the fact that kindergarten teachers are more in favor of these values than primary school teacher, may be attributed to the liberal and flexible character of the kindergarten curriculum which places emphasis on whole child development (Sylva, Ereky-Stevens & Aricescu, 2014), as well as the less competitive classroom climate in kindergarten.

An important step in teachers' professional development concerning citizenship education would be to provide them with pedagogical tools to transform these values and goals associated with citizenship education into practice. While there are certain interesting theoretical models to conceptualize citizenship, there are few examples of how their concepts may guide pedagogical processes especially with reference to young children's citizenship.

2.1 Towards an integrative model of children's citizenship

Citizenship is often conceptualized as a continuum with its two ends corresponding to different orientations or components of its multifaceted structure. For example, Woyach (1991) argues for a continuum ranging from "elitist" views of the role of citizen, that face the average citizen as lacking the capabilities to fully understand and have a critical view of the public issues, to "populist" views that value each individual with their interests and participation in the political processes. (pp. 46–47). Children's citizenship however seems problematic when seen through the lens of the elitist and populist perceptions, as the first a priori exclude children from civic processes while the second downgrade the role adults have in the process of children's civic socialization and participation.

Delanty (1997) bases his five-model conceptualization on two basic types of citizenship: the

formal and substantive. These two dimensions characterize different forms of citizenship within and across the models. He argues that each model puts emphasis on four basic dimensions of civic membership: rights, duties, participation and identity. Each one of these dimensions represents a different model. In brief, the *rights model* focuses on the civic, political and social rights that citizens hold “against” the state, either within an individualistic or a social justice perspective. Although it is a fairly formalistic way to consider citizenship, with reference to young children’s civic education, “rights” would be an important dimension to include as it could provide children with a useful framework to understand their position in the society and a basis to develop their agency. However, it could be argued that a strong emphasis on rights without addressing issues of responsibility and duty, would give children a false understanding of their place and role in social life. The *conservative model* stresses on the obligations citizens have towards the state but also to other entities of social life, even the self. This model is useful in two ways: it provides a balanced notion of civic membership taken together with the “rights” perspective and it assumes some kind of action, individual or collective, although critical discourse is not an issue here. The *participatory or radical model* puts forward an active stance towards citizenship, emphasizing the role of socially critical engagement as fundamental for building the society. Very close to this model but emphasizing on the issue of culture and identification is the *communitarian model* which highlights cultural ties and historical traditions.

These four models conceptualize citizenship through the lens of nationality, as a territorial and psychological space. Even in the communitarian model the cultural perspective is understood as a “community united in a common national tradition” (Delanty, 1997: 292). Current shifts in socio-economical, technological and political spheres have necessitated for new understandings of citizenship with a transnational perspective that may embrace European, global or/and multicultural identity, human or universal rights and sustainable development approaches. Thus, the postnational model of citizenship focuses on active participation and multi-identification, that goes beyond but do not exclude national citizenship. Still, especially with regard to children’s citizenship, a concern is expressed about the interest in global or for example human rights issues, taking into account that it may not actually arise genuinely from children’s concerns, unless they are motivated to.

In parallel, the “7 shifts” proposed by Schugurensky and Myers (2003) reflect the challenges of the 21st century citizenship education. They are embedded in a continuum reflecting the conservative and progressive orientations of citizenship and refer to a shift:

- i. from passive to active citizenship. This shift focuses a. on the development of a critical stance towards children’s understanding of the world as it is, b. their ideas for improving their reality and their future as well as c. their actions towards making these ideas known and even realized. This shift describes levels of children’s participation, which will be analyzed later and refers not only to the children’s immediate experience but also to societal and world issues as long as they are guided to develop understanding of their place and role in world society and sustainability, which actually refers to the second shift of the model.
- ii. from national to planetary/ecological citizenship. This shift is considered somehow

problematic for young children's as it refers to a more abstract understanding of their experience. Still, it can be realized with activities that help children understand the value of collaboration among citizens globally and the interrelations that establish world peace, environmental sustainability and humans' well-being and prosperity. The use of ICT here is important as a tool to elaborate on ideas, products, services and people that travel in the world shaping and transforming our reality and future. In this way children may develop openness to new ideas and responsiveness to other people's perspectives, a prerequisite for the development of an intercultural thinking that characterizes the next shift.

iii. from cultural diversity recognition to fostering intercultural societies. Intercultural thinking promotes understanding and dealing with diversity through the lens of mutual enrichment (Schugurensky & Myers, 2003). This includes identifying inequalities, social problems and power relations in all spheres of children's lives, starting from their everyday experiences, in the family and at school and then relate to the broader community and society. This relation or even tension between public and private, political and personal is dealt within the next shift.

iv. from preparation for the public sphere to inclusiveness. A basic step to inclusiveness is to help children shape and understand connections between their experiences in the microsystems of their everyday activity (family, school, neighborhood etc.) and more distal aspects of the context they live, such as broader society, cultural norms and values, mass media and so on. The promotion of equity, inclusiveness and social justice, at least for young children should be facilitated from the private and personal sphere to the public and the political. Children could understand that power relations, relationships and roles in the family and at school actually reflect values and ethics in the society and that changes in one sphere may cause changes in the other. To do this, they should be able to "explore" and "understand" other people's worldviews, situations and behaviors and critically filter their own experiences and views with an aim to improve their everyday life and future as citizens. By doing so, children could be able to develop ideas and skills concerning a more harmonious and peaceful leaving which is the focus of the next shift.

v. from fundamentalism to peace-building. Developing empathy in young children and promotion of understanding of other people's perspectives and views facilitate ethical and social justice considerations. Children should be facilitated to develop flexible practices to adjust to new situations and circumstances and skills to deal with problems and conflict solving. The second stage refers to creating links to broader society and even to international issues such as world peace. Even regarding curricula that have a more ethnocentric perspective, certain national celebrations, such as in the Greek curriculum, could be used as an opportunity to critically discuss about more global issues. "Opening" the curriculum is essential to work within the next shift that refers to the creation of learning communities.

vi. from school-based to learning communities citizenship. The school context should not be regarded as a "closed" system. Opening the curriculum to the experiences and interest of the children and the societal reality, developing connections with other people of different ages and occupations, collaborating with other services and professionals may create flexible and

meaningful pedagogical spaces to work for personal, local and societal advancement and well-being. In this way, children may cope with real problems and real life situations developing citizenship skills and knowledge and promoting active and democratic participation. Besides, as it is evidenced (King, 2009 · Walker, Hennig & Krettenauer, 2000), talking about real life dilemmas and problems and cognitive disequilibrium that may stem from differences in age, social, cognitive and moral status in interactions, promote children's development and learning. Discussions about injustice, social discrimination and exclusion both in private and public spheres may help children elaborate on discrepancies between democratic and social justice principles and gaps in the real world that is the objective of the next shift.

vii. from formal to substantive democratic citizenship. Talking about rights and responsibilities that stem from a formal consideration of citizenship could be the starting point to engage children in the civic issues and promote their civic identity. However, this is a normative stance towards citizenship education. It is imperative to provide children with opportunities at first to explore their ideas concerning rights and duties in all spheres of their experiences, for example to express their ideas about rules in the classroom and at school, when playing in the neighborhood and so on and then discuss their ideas with reference to more formal expressions, for example laws. The next step is to use children's experiences or current events and mass media as opportunities to identify gaps between formal and substantive considerations of rights and duties, or violation of rights, social inequalities and other tensions in the society in general or/and children's lives in particular.

As described above, an integrated model of citizenship, especially with reference to children's citizenship education, may incorporate the two types of citizenship identified by Delanty (1997) and their underlying dimensions, that is, rights, duties, participation and identity from a person oriented to a collective oriented perspective in accordance to specific topics under consideration and reflect the "7 shifts" proposed by Schugurensky and Myers (2003) to frame the edgy issue of children's participation in citizenship education.

2.2 The issue of participation in citizenship education

When it comes to children's participation it should be argued that in this study it is understood as engagement, empowerment and agency, following a five-stage process: i. be interested and sensitized, ii. gain deep understanding, iii. develop vision and mission, iv. become involved in activities to fulfill their mission, v. reflect on their action and set new goals. These five stages involve different levels of action and power. Depending on the age of children, the topic under consideration and the broader context of the intervention (settings, circumstances, beliefs and qualifications, relationships, etc.), the basic idea regarding children's growing participation is that the teacher act as a facilitator to enhance children's initiation and engagement that gradually promotes higher degree of children's involvement and agency. Although a number of typologies has been proposed to describe levels of participation with quite different perspectives of the "degrees of citizen power" addressed to children (Nigel, 2007), it is argued that, especially for young children, what could be the highest level to reach could be neither predetermined, nor judged. Instead, a good criterion to

evaluate young children's participation is to assess to what extent they feel that their involvement is meaningful and will make a difference (Sinclair, 2004). The stages being described subsequently refer not only to the characteristics of children's participation but also to the pedagogical processes that may facilitate their involvement.

In the first stage children's interest in a certain theme is explored and their ideas, knowledge and their questions are recorded and discussed. The materials and prompts used by the teacher are of great importance as they may facilitate and motivate children's engagement and activity. It is a very important process for a program as it: i. helps teacher explore children's genuine interest and motivation to be involved in the intervention, ii. helps children explore their own and others' ideas, motivations and knowledge over the issues under consideration, iii. provides teacher with the tools to organize the next phases of program and iv. gives children the opportunity to start developing a shared understanding of the situation that is crucial for the next stages of their participation.

The second stage refers to the identification of the basic dimensions of the theme, the critical consideration of the parameters and underlying issues especially the conflicting ones and the development of specific knowledge and skills that relate to the topic. Children are encouraged to negotiate their ideas, understandings and priorities taking into consideration new or/and different perspectives and even conflicting interests that may arise as a deeper and shared view of the situations and circumstances is gradually developed.

In the third stage, children are encouraged and inspired to envision a new situation concerning the selected topic that reflects a common direction of growth, set goals and organize plans for action in the form of a project. Every child should be able to "see" themselves in this vision and find ways to contribute with their unique talents, abilities, knowledge and experiences to the shared mission. Resources as well as barriers should be identified. A realistic plan should include small steps that correspond to clear-cut objectives and allow for adjustments on the basis of formative evaluations. An open dialogue with and input from other people involved in the vision, such as parents, other students and teachers, local community, and maybe collective action are essential to keep the vision alive, powerful and realistic and the mission effective.

The fourth stage concerns the implementation of the project. Children are supposed to organize and coordinate their action according to the plan and mainly work in small groups. After completing each step of the plan, children present and discuss their progress and possible adjustments of the plan are made. All children's commitment to the vision and mission should be confirmed and strengthened.

The fifth stage refers to formative and summative assessment and evaluation of the project and children's participation. Consequently, it is not just a final stage but mainly a process that runs through the whole project. Apart from evaluating the progress and effectiveness of action and the satisfaction of goals, it is important for children to discuss their participation, in terms of engagement, emancipation, communication, collaboration and change. The encouragement of children to present their action in the broader community is essential to give additional meaning to their action and validate their participation. With the term broader

community we refer, for example, to the local community, the parents-families, another school or class, etc.

It should be noted that children's participation understood, promoted and organized using this five-stage process, do not follow a linear mode. The basic idea of the model is to be used as a framework to organize citizenship related activities, especially with young children, taking into account the mandates, potentials and restrictions of educational curricula and contexts.

3. Citizenship education in the Greek kindergarten

The acquisition of social skills, the development of critical thinking and the promotion of children's autonomy, despite being critical in the notion of citizenship, do not seem to be fully understood by kindergarten teachers with reference to how these qualities underlie the rhetoric of citizenship and could be reflected in educational practices that aim to develop children's civic socialization, as evidenced in a number of studies concerning citizenship education in the Greek kindergarten.

Respectively, Tsioumis, Kyridis, Papageridou and Sotiropoulou (2015) found that kindergarten teachers consider the topic interesting and important for children, provide definitions of citizenship that address a number of its ideological and practical perspectives and organize relevant activities in the classroom but do not seem satisfied with the guidance provided by the Unified Cross-thematic Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten (UCCFK) (FEK 304, 2003) and the Kindergarten teachers' Guide (Dafermou, Koulouri & Bassagianni, 2006). From the quotes of teachers' reports it is evident that they adopt a "children as future citizens" perspective and try to teach values, skills, behaviors and knowledge that are useful for the children to develop as members of the society, mainly as receivers of the societal circumstances and resources, and less as critical agents that may bring about changes with their informed and responsible participation.

Balias, Dimiza, Diamantopoulou and Kiprianos (2011) show that kindergarten teachers are not familiar with the concepts of citizenship education, mainly due to lack of training and guidance from the curriculum framework. A research by Nalbantoglou, Kyridis and Tsioumis (2015) also shows that kindergarten teachers do not share a common understanding of what citizenship education may encompass. Although, teachers report setting a number of goals and using a variety of methods that aim at developing children's civic skills and knowledge, the fact that children themselves do not feel quite ready to cope with certain aspects of political socialization such as sharing ideas and participating in decision making in the classroom, denote that unless teachers treat children as partners in the learning process neither children nor teacher could benefit the most from relevant activities. Children as partners in the learning process within the context of citizenship education, means that they are knowledgeable of the scope and aims of the activities, have a clear perception of their place and position in each situation, be able to set goals so as to improve their status and participation, evaluate their progress and reorganize their action in a supportive and safe learning context orchestrated by the teacher that reflects a comprehensive model of citizenship and clear understanding of children's participation and agency criteria.

The Greek kindergarten curriculum and steering documents, although not referring to children's citizenship explicitly, seem to include many relevant concepts, principals and goals that should be highlighted in order to guide the development of relevant activities and programs in the classroom.

3.1 Concepts relevant to citizenship in the Greek kindergarten curriculum and steering documents

Before focusing on the Unified Cross-thematic Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten (FEK 304, 2003), it would be useful to refer to some other steering documents which describe the general missions of Greek education in close relation to concepts of citizenship. In the Greek Constitution, among the aims of education “the formation of free and responsible citizens” is indicated (Mavrias & Spiliotopoulos, 2008, p. 32). According to the Law 1566 (1985) that specified the Structure and function of primary and secondary education and other provisions, students should a) become free, responsible and democratic citizens....., b) develop creative and critical thinking and collective effort and collaboration, so that by taking initiatives and with their responsible participation to contribute decisively to the progress of the society and the development of the country. It is evident that the notion of citizenship, even in the close terms of nationality, is interwoven in the mission of Greek education. The following years the Ministry of Education adopts a more broad perspective of citizenship that “is promoting a stronger identity by focusing on the concept of ‘citizen’ and by emphasizing the common core of European and global values and skills needed in the new world environment” (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2004/5, 8).

Since 2003, kindergarten is part of a unified design for the entire educational system (FEK 303, 2003). Citizenship education is both a separate school subject and a topic addressed through cross-curricular educational activities (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2004/5, FEK 303, 2003). In the kindergarten concepts regarding citizenship are approached mainly through the Environmental Studies Program. The Unified Cross-thematic Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten (UCCFK) (FEK 304, 2003) states that the aim of kindergarten is the whole child development and smooth socialization, giving priority to active, experiential and collaborative learning (FEK 304, 2003, 586). Educational activities should be meaningful and interesting for the children (FEK 304, 2003, 587). In the UCCFK, although there are no explicit references about children's citizenship or citizenship education, it seems that a notion of the child as “social actor” is reflected in the goals of the program and a social pedagogic perspective of children's education is followed. More specifically, it is particularly stated that children through exploration and play should be encouraged to discover the world around them and expand their perceptions about the environment which is constantly changing, as people things and ideas travel from one place to another. They should be able to describe their surroundings and be encouraged to understand the basic differences between this and other wider environments through making meaningful comparisons. A key statement is that children should realize that they can alter their environment with their own intervention (FEK 304, 2003, 588). It is clear that the UCCFK adopts a holistic approach regarding the notion of environment that refers to the physical, social and cultural dimensions. Following this line of thought children are invited to intervene to all these three dimensions by expressing their

ideas and be engaged in cross-thematic activities that help them develop social skills, such as self-esteem, cooperation, uniqueness, identification of similarities and differences with others and respect, which are considered of great importance in the learning process.

In order to achieve these goals, Kindergarten teachers' Guide encourages them to organize challenging, meaningful, supportive and inclusive learning activities for the children that promote their autonomy and active participation (Dafermou, Koulouri & Bassagianni, 2006: 32-37). Systematic collaboration with families and parental involvement in the educational activities is highly suggested. Teachers should listen carefully to children's ideas and encourage them to decide on matters that affect them. In order to i. upgrade the school environment, ii. improve teaching and the quality of education and iii. promote professional development, internal and formative assessment and evaluation of children's learning and socialization process is conducted (p. 41).

As evidenced in the statements derived from the Greek kindergarten curriculum and other steering documents concerning the concepts relevant to citizenship education, there is a focus on a broad idea of citizenship, although not explicitly stated, that includes social, cultural and civic aspects and promotes children's active, responsible and informed participation. Still, the fact that there is a lack of explicit considerations concerning the theory and practice of citizenship education in the official mandates and guidelines provided to the teachers seems affect their ability to conduct relevant programs in the classroom.

4. The program "Learn, Care and Act about my City"

The program "Learn, Care and Act about my City" (LCAC) was designed and implemented as a "School Activities Program" in the field of "Health Education" and under the axis of "Active citizenship" (Ministry of Education, 2014). The "School Activities Program" is not a formal lesson and is distinct from the thematic - limited nature of the school subjects, especially with regard to the collaborative working method and its structure, since it includes a field study and workshops of thematic activities (Ministry of Education, 2014). It may last from 2 to 6 months and is implemented during regular school time as a stand-alone activity/lesson, usually two to three days a week. The "School Activities Programs" have to be planned and be submitted for approval to the Local Educational Authorities and be evaluated during and in the end of their implementation.

The LCAC was planned, with regard to its basic structure, by the author, a kindergarten teacher and PhD holder, who was also the coordinator of the program. It was implemented in 4 kindergartens (5 kindergarten classes) in a municipality of Northern Greece using the methodology of collaborative action research. 9 kindergarten teachers and 97 children (45 girls and 52 boys) aged from 4 to 6 years participated in the program. The author had previously worked with all the participating teachers, so there was an established background of communication and collaboration, which was of vital importance for the teachers to be engaged in and committed to the completion of the program. As it is highlighted by many researchers in the field of action research, the success of action research design programs is largely depending on the ability of the participants to work together with other people, such as students, parents and especially their colleagues (Bruce & Easley, 2000; Gray, 2009;

Mitchell, Reilly, & Logue, 2009).

The first contact with the teachers was made at the end of the previous school year (June 2014) so as to have enough time to plan, organize and prepare for the program before its implementation. This was the first phase of the action research plan (see Figure 1). It was the “introductory phase” that concerned the identification of teachers’ ideas, needs, values, knowledge and agenda for the proposal of the theme and methodology of the program, focusing on citizenship education and action research. Teachers had not before been engaged in action research neither had any involvement with citizenship education as a ‘stand-alone’ subject. The introductory phase was completed with the second plenary meeting (see Table 1). The author provided teachers with written material and they set a timetable for study, as it became evident that they needed some training on theoretical, methodological and practical issues. Particular emphasis was given on the “integrated model of citizenship” and the “stages of children’s participation”, as described in the second unit of the paper, as well as the action research methodology. They also set the objectives of the program and decided on the framework and the basic thematic units.

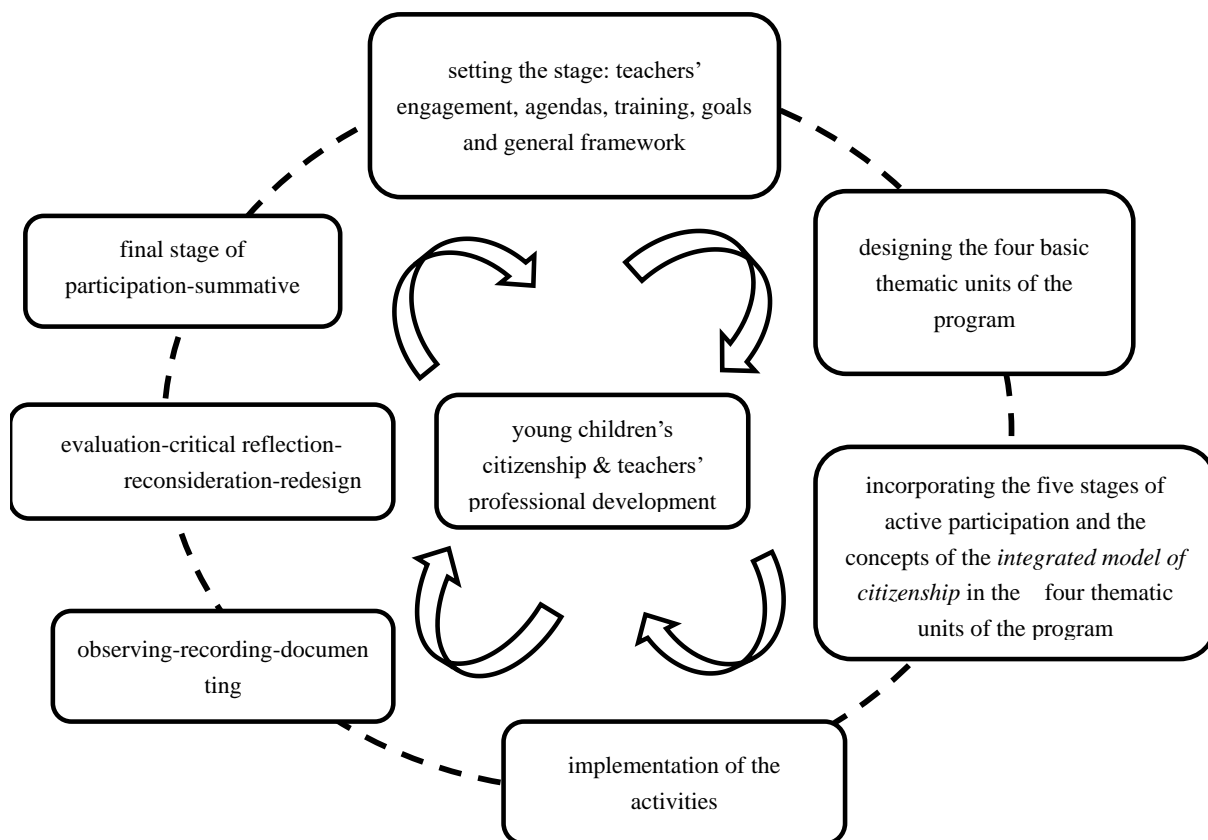


Figure 1. Development and implementation of LCAC

The second phase of the program started in October 2014 and regarded the “implementation and formative evaluation”. At first, the participants discussed on the proposed activities

concerning the first thematic unit and decided on the basic common framework and the educational materials. 15 days before the completion of each thematic unit the proposed activities for the next unit was sent to the teachers by the coordinator and there were contacts among teachers and with the coordinator to discuss on the activities and finalize the common framework. After the completion of the unit a plenary meeting was set to reflect on and evaluate the process of the activities, to discuss about different versions or alterations of the activities and results. Then, participants used the feedback to revise the agenda for the next thematic unit, discuss on the proposed activities and decide on the new framework and educational materials. During these meetings there was also emphasis on teachers' concerns regarding theoretical, methodological and practical issues. The coordinator provided teachers with support and additional materials and discussed with individual teachers when there was some difficulty, especially regarding collaboration among teachers in the same school, as a critical friend (Kember et al., 1997; Wennergren, 2016).

Table 1. Plenary meetings

Timetable	Agenda
1 st meeting June 2014	Introduction to the program, identification of teachers' ideas and needs concerning the program, distribution of material concerning citizenship education and action research
2 nd meeting September 2014	Presentation and discussion of the basic theoretical, methodological and practical considerations regarding the program. Setting goals and deciding on the basic thematic units-general plan
3 rd meeting October 2014	Discussion about the 1 st thematic unit and the proposed activities. Development of activities and proposals about educational materials
4 th meeting December 2014	Discussion about alterations and evaluation-feedback concerning the 1 st thematic unit. Discussion about the 2 nd thematic unit and the proposed activities. Development of activities and proposals about educational materials. Discussion about the museum field trip with the "expert".
5 th meeting February 2015	Discussion about alterations and evaluation-feedback concerning the 2 nd thematic unit. Discussion about the 3 rd thematic unit and the proposed activities. Development activities and proposals about educational materials
6 th meeting April 2015	Discussion about alterations and evaluation-feedback concerning the 3 rd thematic unit. Discussion about the 4 th thematic unit and the proposed activities. Development of activities and proposals about educational materials
7 th meeting June 2015	Discussion about alterations and evaluation-feedback concerning the 4 th thematic unit. Discussion, evaluation, feedback concerning the LCAC program

There were different types and levels of communication and collaboration among the participating teachers. At first, there were face-to-face meetings, telephone or e-mail contacts between teachers and the coordinator and between and among teachers. Contacts with the

coordinator involved individual teachers or the group of teachers from one school or all the participating teachers, the so called plenary meetings (see Table 1). Moreover, teachers communicated with each other either in their group of colleagues in the same school, or with their colleagues from other schools that participated in the LCAC program.

The coordinator sent the proposed activities for each thematic unit to the schools, so as the teachers had a common base for thought, discussions and suggestions. Teachers, after discussions in their school, exchanged e-mails with their colleagues from the other schools and sent their own activities or/and their comments on the proposed activities and suggestions for educational materials. In this way a common structure of activities and materials was formed, still each school could apply their own versions or alterations according to children's ideas, needs and suggestions following a bottom-up approach. These alterations were sent to the other schools and discussed in the plenary meetings with an aim to i. enhance teachers' initiatives and leadership skills, ii. share good practices, iii. encourage reflection and iv. promote teachers' professional development.

Teachers' voices and educational stories should be heard for at least two reasons. Firstly, by articulating and explicating their educational stories to others, which is actually not a simple task, teachers may gain insight into their actions, attach validity to their work (Golafshani, 2003; Johnson, 1997) and may open up spaces to allow thinking of how to change their educational realities (Cotton & Griffiths, 2007) aiming at both personal and school improvement.

4.1 Development of activities

The program started with a puppet, a cat that had the name of the city. Each school had its own cat. The cat visited the schools, introduced herself and invited children to play a hidden treasure game to explore their city and find out about its treasures. Each unit started with the cat bringing an envelope with hints, guidelines, materials and quizzes to introduce the unit and motivate children to be engaged in the activities. The program included four basic thematic units with a number of suggestions about activities that covered the basic goals set by the teachers. The development of activities followed the principles of the Kindergarten Cross Thematic Curriculum (2003) and reflected the conceptions of the integrated model of citizenship and the five stages of children's participation. The basic framework of activities is presented and some basic links to the citizenship model and participation stages are noted in Table 2.

- i. Anthropogenic and natural environment
 - a. *Children's first ideas about the city*: the cat brings photos of some well-known sights and a map of the city. Children are encouraged to express their ideas and experiences about the city while the teacher records their answers to chart their knowledge about the city. The cat shares with the children some of the mysteries of the city that she explored during her night walk in the city and she asks them what they would like to know about their city.
 - b. *Mapping the city*: the cat brings some more photos of the different parts and sights of the city and a video guide of the city. Children try to use the map to find where these sights are

situated using as points of reference the sea, their schools and the big park in the city center. They also use google maps to locate the city. The cat suggests making a visit to the city using a bus and see if they have placed the photos in the right points on the map. The children take roles such as, note on the map, take pictures and ask questions. Children discuss with the cat about their observations and check the map. Then they decide to make a model of the city using useless/recyclable materials that they start bringing at school. The cat brings a memory game with cards that depict sights from the city for the children to play during free-play time.

c. *Sharing ideas*: Then the cat shares with the children in each school one more secret. There are children in other kindergartens that are playing with her and learn about the city. The children want to meet schoolmates from the other schools and share their ideas and works. Then skype meetings are organized and children sent envelopes with photos of their work and notes to share with the other participating schools. These exchanges are used to engage children in a process of reflecting on experiences, knowledge and skills gained so far in the program and set goals for further development and engagement. In addition, children are encouraged to consider others perspectives and ideas while enriching and negotiating their agendas.

ii. History and culture

a. *Connection with the past*: The cat brings a new envelope with cards having letters of the alphabet on them. The children in small groups try to find the right order of the letters so as to form the two names that their city had in the past. They have also two cards with lines corresponding to the letters of the two names of the city. Some lines have a letter on them and other is blank to fill in with the missing letters.

b. *The cut photos*: The cat brings some puzzle cards that form 4 pictures of the city. Still the cards are mixed up. In four tables there are the 4 photos of the city that are depicted in the puzzles. Each child takes a card and during a song they try to find those that have the missing cards to complete the puzzle. Then they go to the table with the corresponding photo. In this way four groups of children are formed in order to initiate group work in the program (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). Each group presents its puzzle picture and then they compare the 4 pictures. They point out that they show two sights in the city as they are now and as they were in the past. Children present similarities and differences between the same sights, now and in the past.

c. *The time capsule*: The cat suggests the children to make a journey in the past. There are two corners in the classroom, one for the present and one for the past. In the two corners there are photos of the city. The children work in their group to match the photos, to find the same sight in the past and in the present. Then they try to group the photos according to their theme and find corresponding titles. They discuss with the cat the way life was in the past compared to the present and they decide to ask their grandparents about their life in the city in the past, to find more pictures or and other materials about the past. They work on a poem about the city and they write their own poem. They listen to songs about the city and write down information from the lyrics. They make a poster with the pictures and ideas about “the city now and in the past”. Then they decide to visit the archaeological museum to explore aspects

of ancient life in the area. Children are encouraged to discuss in a critical way about the way the city has changed over the years and make a list of the positive and negative aspects of the changes and focus on the responsibility of the citizens to these changes and the way peoples' activity has shaped their future and next generations' life.

iii. Life and everyday experiences in the city for adults and children

a. *Art and the city*: The cat brings four paintings from famous city painters that depict sights and everyday activities in the city. The paintings are covered by cards with numbers on them. Each group of children works with one painting and tries to find what is on the painting by taking out the cards one by one as they throw a dice, according to the number it shows. Children discuss about the painting using information from their poster and present it to their classmates. Then they do their own paintings that show their own experiences in the city. Then they organize an exhibition with their works of art.

b. *The city center*: Children's ideas and knowledge about the city center are recorded after listening to a relevant song. Discussion is based on : i. possible activities for adults and children, ii. issues of safety, iii. aesthetics and iv. old and new buildings. The cat brings photos to facilitate discussion in a critical way.

c. *My neighborhood*: Children bring photos of their neighborhood. They locate it in the city map and discuss with they can do in their neighborhood and compare between different neighborhoods and the city center. Children communicate with the other schools to share their ideas. Again this communication is used as an opportunity for reflection and evaluation. New goals may be set. The issue of free time activities is also discussed and relevant places in the city are presented.

d. *City authorities and services*: Children are presented with scenarios in order to think which are the basic authorities and services in the city (for example, "where do we go when we are very ill?"). The focus is on the hospital, the fire brigade, the Police station, the library and the municipality. Relevant photos are used. Emphasis is given on the role of the mayor and the city council.

iv. Me, a responsible citizen-The city of my dreams

a. *Rights and responsibilities of citizens*: Children are motivated to think who are responsible and take decisions at home. Some scenarios are presented and children express their ideas using their own experiences with particular emphasis on their role, rights and responsibilities. Teacher writes down a list with rights and responsibilities at home, proposed by children. Then the same process is followed concerning their experiences at school. What about the city? Here, the same process is followed placing particular emphasis on how children consider their role as citizens. Using the materials and discussions from the previous units, this role is processed through time (both historically and socially) focusing on children's experiences. To have a better understanding of the construction of children's citizenship (their role at home, in the school and in the city) over time, children are encouraged to ask parents and grandparents about the issues discussed and bring their ideas in the class. Parents or/and grandparents are also invited to visit school and share their ideas and

experiences.

Table 2. Examples of activities and links to the citizenship integrated model and participation stages

Activities	Citizenship model	Shifts	Participation stages
iv. Me, a responsible citizen-The city of my dreams/ a. Rights and responsibilities of citizens	<i>rights model</i>	vii. from formal to substantive democratic citizenship	i. be interested and sensitized,
	<i>conservative model</i>	iv. from preparation for the public sphere to inclusiveness.	ii. gain deep understanding
iv. Me, a responsible citizen-The city of my dreams/ c. The city of my dreams, d. The visit to the mayor.	<i>participatory or radical model</i>	i. from passive to active citizenship v. from fundamentalism to peace-building vi. from school-based to learning communities citizenship.	iii. develop vision and mission, iv. become involved in activities to fulfill their mission, v. reflect on their action and set new goals
ii. History and culture/c. The time capsule	<i>communitarian model</i>	iii. from cultural diversity recognition to fostering intercultural societies v. from fundamentalism to peace-building.	i. be interested and sensitized, ii. gain deep understanding

b. *The democratic citizen*: The cat reads a story¹ about the animals in the forest electing their leader. Children using their experience, the story and the issues already discussed in the program, express their ideas about “democratic participation” in the three contexts family-school-city. Then they decide to make elections to vote for a leader and a council in their classroom. They decide on the responsibilities of their representors and the duration of the council. Here a project arises concerning the “Things I want to change in my classroom” and it develops in parallel to the LCAC program.

c. *The city of my dreams*: The cat reminds children about the positives and negatives of their city and their role as citizens, suggesting to imagine how they would like their city to be, in order to be safer, more child-friendly, but also beautiful and clean. Children suggest their ideas after discussing in their groups and collecting information about other cities in Greece

¹ Zarabouka, S. (2011). *The forest*. Athens: Kedros.

and abroad. Then, all the ideas are discussed and grouped according to their theme. Children are encouraged to decide on a theme and propose their ideas. Then they make a plan about how to promote their suggestions. Children then communicate their ideas with the other schools and decide to go to the mayor of the city to discuss about their ideas and proposals.

d. *The visit to the mayor.* Each school has prepared a plan to propose to the mayor. They visit the City Hall. Children of each kindergarten classroom present and explain their ideas to the Mayor and the city council, using a big poster they have made. The posters may include drawings, words, sentences, collage etc. After the representatives of each classroom have explained their proposals, all the children are encouraged to participate in the discussion with the Mayor.

5. Conclusion

There are many challenges when citizenship is conceptualized with reference to young children and relevant educational programs are developed. The development of citizenship education programs for young children should be based on a deep understanding of the notion of children's agency and acquisition of pedagogical tools that facilitate the transformation of the citizenship concepts into meaningful activities. The integrative model of citizenship described above and the five-stage children's participation that incorporate the social pedagogical considerations for citizenship education, may guide teachers in designing relevant programs in pre-primary and primary schools. Within this line of thought, *citizenship is understood as construction of meanings, ideas, values and attitudes that stem from children's interests and negotiations of experiences and beliefs that concern their understanding of their private and public spheres of reference, in meaningful and positive interactions with peers and adults that motivate their agency and participation in decision-making that affects their life and future.*

The program "Learn, Care and Act about my City" (LCAC) that was described, was chosen as an example of how these models and concepts of citizenship and participation can be incorporated in a stand-alone program of citizenship in the kindergarten. The collaborative character of the program apart from fulfilling some of the "shifts" of the integrated model, such as intercultural thinking, inclusion and learning communities citizenship for children, seemed important for teachers professional development as it provided them with knowledge, support and motivation, both by the coordinator/critical friend and their colleagues. The action research methodology provided the tools to organize, assess, reflect and revise their practice in a systematic and meaningful way.

Although the program was implemented with regard to a specific educational context, that of the Greek kindergarten, and with a small number of participants, it could be argued that it constitutes an interesting example of how young children's citizenship could be promoted and elaborated in the classroom, based on certain theoretical and methodological considerations that refer to current trends and perspectives. Teachers and children's competences and beliefs when designing and implementing such programs is an interesting topic for further study but it does not lie within the scope of this paper.

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<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10972-009-9161-8>

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