Education for active citizenship: a learning intervention carried out in a primary school concerning the history lesson based on Kolb's learning cycle

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Abstract

This paper aims at highlighting the ways under which the concept of citizenship is built in primary school. In particular, it studies the learning processes which function as grounds of building experience and which are crucial for developing the perception of relations between the self and the community within the context of the concept of active citizen. Therefore, the essential issue of how to build the concept of active citizen in school concerning of the learning process, highlights the need to develop learning environments that are supported by experiential practices that reflect essential messages and cultivate expectations for active individual public action. By adopting Kolb's model of learning cycle, we form learning bridges with history as context and present the application and results of the teaching intervention in the classroom.

Keywords: Citizenship, Kolb's learning cycle, school subject.

Introduction

Since the concept of citizenship is not merely a matter of conceptual and theoretical approach, but a process of identifying and self-determining the individual in relation to others, education for active citizenship should be accompanied by education practices for understanding, respect and solidarity and, at the same time, aim at cultivating attitudes for action, participation and intervention (Koutselini, 2007).

Targets for students΄ education should be formulated so that they can answer questions such as: what kind of citizens modern society needs? what kind of students should a modern education system create? what is the mission of the modern school?

School and the classroom, as areas of social and institutionalized education, are playing an important role in developing social interaction skills (Holland, D., et al., 1998). On the basis of this perspective, school can be seen as a community of practice. The school area and daily teaching practice should be a safe ground for the cultivation and development of active citizenship in order for students to commit themselves to defending the human rights (UNESCO, 2007). As a result, through the participatory actions, students are trained to evaluate their conceptualisations for their position and role, both within the school community and in the wider community in general (Wenger, 1998).

In Greek school the concept of citizenship, at a first level, is approached theoretically through the teaching of basic knowledge and experience in order for students to gain an image of themselves as members of an organized society. State-citizen relations and understanding of the institutions and their functioning are indicative topics for forming modern and active citizens within the context of humanities and social sciences (5th and 6th Grade of Primary& Junior High School Social and political education).

The theoretical knowledge about these issues, however, is it enough (Engle & Ochoa, 1988), or do we need an educational framework to train the individual in taking on roles of social interest? The scientific community are given us answers to these questions which claim that what we need is an organized and targeted learning environment (Kassotakis & Flouris, 2013), to build on experience, create experiences, lead to conceptualisation, to the acquisition

of skills and attitudes. By using of our teaching intervention, we attempt to create targeted teaching environment, within the context of the history subject, using as a methodological tool Kolb's model of learning cycle, in order for learners to gain a coherent and sufficient body of knowledge, attitudes and skills for managing individuals and collectives.

This paper is organized in two axes. In the first axis, which is the theoretical part of the paper, we attempt to glean the theoretical insights which are embedded to the research question. In the second axis we present the structure of teaching intervention, as applied to a school class of the 6th grade. We unfold a specific learning environment where certain steps of activities take place under the framework stages of Kolb's learning cycle.

Theoretical framework
The definition of the term Citizenship

At the core of the term citizenship, the concept of citizen is central. The citizen is a status that refers to notions such as, common benefit, social action, individual and social rights. Within this cadre, the characteristic of active participation, with the aim of improving the conditions of social coexistence at a global level, remains dominant.

The status of a citizen, in its dual dimension, involves both the concepts of participating in the local community and the understanding of other communities. The constant shifts, changes and transformations of modern societies, however, create conditions for seeking conditions of national embrace and abandoning processes of interconnection with the international reality (Beck, 1996).

Therefore, education's priority should be to support students' active involvement in social activities, giving them the necessary cognitive tools to be able to act with a critical and dialectical attitude.

The cultivation of citizenship requires an interconnection between the learning process and the wider society in order to develop social responsibility skills.

If we study the international and Greek literature, we apprehend that the statements the scientific community converge on that the citizen is the active subject and citizenship is a triptych which declares first, the official relationship of the individual with the politically sovereign state, second, the emotional bonds that the individual develops and which are summarized in the sense of belonging and, third, the individual's involvement in public decision-making processes (Osler & Starkey 2005a, Kontogiorgis 2003, Keating, A.2014)

In light of the above approach, respect and solidarity education should become a priority in order for learners to realize their role within the global community (Banks, 2001).

Citizenship as part of education

As about the education systems of the 18th and 19th centuries, the concept of citizenship was closely intertwined with mechanisms to enhance the social and political cohesion of the nation state (Schissler & Soysal, 2004; Banks, 2009a). These educational imperatives support the nation-state's operation by reinforcing national identity (Kymlicka, 2003), while education for citizenship focuses on ethnocentric teaching approaches (McCowan, 2009).

However, within a multicultural society, education should and must promote the concept of active citizenship through education practices for human rights, for peace (Osler & Starkey, 2005), as well as for the otherness and the acknowledgement of the other as a legitimate "Other" (Panayides, 2007).

Banks argues that modern social and cultural conditions necessitate a review of the objectives of citizenship education in order to promote integration, equality and recognition (Banks, 2009a). It should be conceptualised within the context of a two-fold scheme, which concerns, first, citizenship as a 'status' and second, citizenship as the feeling of 'belonging' (Osler & Starkey, 2005). In addition, the response of education to the conditions of globalised

society, in terms of the concept of citizenship, should go beyond the mere theoretical dimension and lead to structural changes in the curricula (Alderson, 2000).

Kolb's learning cycle

According to David A. Kolb (Kolb, 1984), learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Kolb's theoretical model follows a spiral movement, during which are formed and developed grounds of thinking, reflection, assessment and application.

In the first stage, experiences are presented and new ones are added. In the second stage, existing and recently acquired experiences are reviewed and interpreted after careful observation, conclusions are drawn and the consequences of specific actions are foreseen. In the third stage, the framework of experiences is classified and linked to theoretical schemes, and in the fourth stage, the learner is released from the teaching context and acts in the context of new orientations.

Experiential education and the environment it creates, forms principles of participatory culture, where being self-motivation, respect for different views and critical thinking, proved to be its main characteristics among others. In the context of practice of Kolb's learning cycle, interaction is achieved through an experiential and oriented process and the students learn through experience, reflection, generalization and application.

The contribution of history subject to the formation of active citizenship

The narratives and the creation of the nation state have formed and enhanced practices of social introversion towards creating a strong national identity. In light of this rationale were utilized subjects, such as history and geography, which could promote the vision of creating a based on specific principles citizen and rules capable of creating a nationally determined society.

However, the gradual coexistence of planetary, national, and local elements have formed the dialectic of globalization and broadened public debate on social issues that moved towards the construction of new socio-political identities and the protection of human rights. Consequently, the purpose of history subject needs to be redefined in order collective memory (Liakos, 2007) and historical awareness to be formed on the basis of cognitive, political, and state goals (Barber, 1992).

Barton and Levstik emphasize the inclusion of history education in the promotion of the common good for the beneficial existence of the community members and the proper functioning of world society based on the values of democratic humanism (Barton &Levstik, 2004). Under these terms, the main focus of history teaching should be to educate today's students on important human issues, so that they will be able to confer with each other, negotiate, make decisions and maintain a responsible and active involvement towards a targeted collective action.

Questions such as, what students feel about poverty, slavery and human abuse, the extermination of peoples, and how they justify them; how and under what conditions persons in history are treated, constitute a learning environment that elicits ethical responses. On the basis of reasoning we present a teaching proposal and hope that it will broaden the perspectives and practices where the concept of active citizenship is viewed and cultivated.

Pilot implementation
The purpose of the teaching intervention

The purpose of this intervention was to investigate the possibility of cultivating active citizenship in the context of the history lesson using as a methodological tool Kolb's model of learning cycle.

Research question

Can active citizenship be taught in the context of the subject of history?

Individual questions

a. Can the thematic context of history become an educational ground for the cultivation of active citizenship?

b. Can the targeted learning environment at the basis of Kolb's learning model produce the expected results of cultivating active citizenship?

Methodology

Our teaching intervention was implemented at two 6th Grade classes of a Primary School unit during the 2019-20 school year, intervening for eight hours, four hours for each class.

On the occasion of 6th grade's history textbook chapter entitled "The German Attack and World War II", we formed the learning environment of the teaching intervention entitled "Citizen of my country and citizen of the world: feeling, watching, thinking and acting", which was implemented to a total of 31 students. To implement the intervention, we used the historical information, the pictures and the historical resources of the textbook in order to create a historical database that students would use to prepare themselves cognitively and emotionally for the learning environment that would follow.

The teaching environment is based on Kolb's learning cycle and the target framework on Gagné's taxonomy model (Flouris, 2005), which was selected based on the fact that the particular taxonomy system includes all types of learning (Flouris, 2005). For the needs of this paper we focused on learning information and knowledge, learning cognitive skills and in particular on learning concepts, as well as attitudes.

Concerning the type of learning that involves information and knowledge, the aim was for the students to understand the general historical context, the historical events of a particular period, as well as to be informed and learn about the role of the historical persons of that period. With regard to the type of learning that involves mental skills, and in particular learning concepts, the aim was to conceptually decipher the content of historical terms and concepts such as anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, etc. and lastly, with regard to the type of learning that involves attitudes, the goal was to cultivate positive attitudes towards the "other and the different", to become aware of the responsibility towards society.

At the heart of the intervention activity we put the credibility of implementation, applying a common mode of intervention in both classes. In addition, we took into account factors such as the systematicity of the intervention, the combination of methods, the duration of the intervention and the prospects for continuing it (Barry, 2013).

The sample

The intervention was carried out at two 6th Grade classes of the 2nd Directorate of Primary Education of Athens, to 31 students where no special educational needs students detected. The demographics of the participants are listed in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1
6th Grade

	Class 1	Class 2	General total
Boys	6	6	12
Girls	9	10	19
Total	15	16	31

Research tools

During the research design, in particular at the stage of data collection (Creswell, 2002), the two classes of the 6th grade formed an experimental group, which became the main pillar of the process and greatly helped in drawing conclusions. At the stages of data analysis and result assessment reporting, we adopted the focus group technique in the context of qualitative research (Vaughn, ed al 1996). Education scholars defined this technique as "a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Krueger, 1988), as an environment in which researchers are presented with the multilevel and dynamic nature of human perception, with the fluidity, contrasts, and plurality of respondents' opinions, emotions, and experiences (Wilkinson, 1998). At the same time, it is characterized as a research tool which offers access to the ways people think or to the reasons why they think as they think (Kitzinger, 1994), where actually, according to the scientific community, it is "a way of listening to people and learning from them" (Morgan, 1998).

Mode of data collection

In order to gather the research data, we adopted a two-fold scheme. A pre-test was preceded, i.e. an assessment of students prior to the beginning of teaching intervention, followed by a post-test, an evaluation of the research data after the completion of teaching intervention.

With regards to the pre-test, first of all, the investigation of students' pre-existing knowledge of the concepts of 'citizen' and 'active citizen' constituted the starting points for the development of the teaching intervention.

A question sheet was organized, as described in the relevant form in Table 2 below, in which each of the students recorded his/her views. To support this process, we mostly used the brainstorming technique in order to capture students' knowledge and experiences.

Table 2
Pre-test
Assessment sheet given before the beginning of teaching intervention

Questionnaire	
Question 1	What words automatically come to mind when you hear the word citizen?
Question 2	What are the characteristics of a citizen?
Question 3	Is there a difference between a citizen and an active citizen?

Secondly, it was also deemed important to investigate students' pre-existing knowledge of the main issues of the module, based on the types of learning we set out, as described in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Pre-test
Assessment sheet given before the beginning of teaching intervention

Type of learning	Question
Information and knowledge	Say you are given the word "Holocaust", can you **name** the most important historical events related to it?
Mental Skills: Learning concepts	Can you **define** the meaning of the words: anti-Semitism, concentration camp, holocaust?
Attitudes	1. If you were asked to **state your position** on the Holocaust against the Jewish people during World War II, what would be your position?

2. Could you express in words the result of the actions taken against the Jews?

At this point, it should be noted that the above questions are distributed within the context of Kolb's learning cycle stages, as shown from the stages we will describe below.

With regard to the post-test, students were given the pre-test forms, as described in tables 2 and 3, as well as an assessment sheet on the methodological framework that we followed, as described in Table 4 below.

Table 4
Post-test
Question sheet given after the completion of teaching intervention

	Questionnaire
Question 1	Did the lesson of history help you understand who an active citizen is?
Question 2	Was the way of teaching helpful in making you understand the concept of active citizen and why?
Question 3	Do you believe that this lesson' teaching could be enhanced with extra material and other steps to better understand the concept?

In the stage of post-test also, students' responses were processed at a class group level and recorded in a relevant sheet. The students answered all questions, and the answers shed light on the aspects of the questions we asked, as detailed in our conclusions.

Implementation of the teaching intervention

First stage

By focusing on the first stage (stage of concrete experience), during the first hour, in the immediate environment of the students, we attempt to highlight their experiences and create new ones. We bring to light the existing knowledge of the concepts of citizen and active citizen, based on the topic "The homeless people in my neighbourhood». Answers are recorded on paper roll, a discussion framework is formed based on their views, and light is shed on issues that require solutions. Following a debate on the role of citizens in the immediate environment, general conclusions were recorded.

Second stage

During the second stage of reflective observation (watching), in the second hour, communication bridges were created with the history class of the 6th Grade, as part of the chapter "The German attack and World War II". In this stage, we investigated issues that reflect the realities of the wider social environment and worked on specific activities, as described in Table 5 below.

The aim was to show the student's experiences about the role of citizen in the wider social environment, while focusing on the role of citizens towards the anti-social policies of each country. In this activity also, the answers were recorded on paper roll and a discussion framework was formed based on their views. Following a debate on the role of citizens in the wider social environment, general conclusions were recorded.

Table 5

Learning environment of the second stage			
First stage	**Subject**	**Educational techniques**	**Educational means**
Reflective observation (watching) Reviewing experiences, forecasting. [The citizen in the wider social environment]	**Convicted persons**	Brainstorming Q&A Completing the worktable (paper roll)	Use of the historical sources and photographic material of the relevant chapter in school's history textbook, p.210. Use of additional visual and historical material, at the discretion of the teacher. PC and projector for watching John Boyne's movie - "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas" (Students watch the film at a time chosen by the teacher).

In the second stage, we used cinema as an additional educational tool, in combination with printed and photographic material, in an effort to enhance the students' experiences and to create new ones.

The cinema activity was selected on the basis that art can creatively link national history with the international circumstances, "translate" history, and turn historical reality into a living experience, by utilizing even the subjective perspective of the film maker.

After all, art reflects the world and the world is a source of inspiration for art. In this case also, a film can mobilize both the cognitive as well as the emotional perspective of the learners in the effort to create rational judgement and ethical responses of the students (Husbands, 2005).

In this stage, after watching the film, subject areas are noted, followed by the recording and analysis of the students' moral responses, a process that activates mechanisms for assuming responsibility and taking active roles. The living conditions at the concentration camp, focusing on the daily lives of these people and their emotional load, are topics for discussion and investigation. In the context of this activity, the students go beyond simply quoting words. They have the opportunity to argue and formulate views, in the environment of 'speech' that is formed in the classroom (Englezou, 2014).

Third stage

The third stage (abstract conceptualisation), daring the third hour, focuses on conceptualisation, as described in Table 6 below. The specific synapses that can be created between the theoretical and practical dimension, are expected to be completed in the fourth stage.

Table 6

Learning environment of the third stage			
Third stage	**Subject**	**Educational techniques**	**Educational means**
Abstract conceptualisation (thinking) [The citizen in the wider	Interpretation of concepts and terms:	Brainstorming Completing the worktable (paper roll)	Table

social environment]	anti-Semitism, concentration camp, Holocaust

Through the brainstorming technique, students' answers are recorded on paper roll, grouped together and placed at a prominent place at the classroom for further search and processing. The learning concepts of this stage form secure conceptual networks and conceptual synapses which are reflected in the wider social environment and gradually lead to the core of the topic being discussed.

Fourth stage

In the fourth stage (active experimentation) daring the fourth hour, the students apply and test the new knowledge. They use the new knowledge more effectively, as it now forms part of their way of thinking. At this stage, the aim is to link the concept of active action with the respective matters of modern reality and school life, as well as to issues such as racism, diversity, peaceful coexistence, etc., evaluating their importance for people's life, as described in Table 7 and in the indicative activity sheet below.

Table 7

Learning environment of the fourth stage

Fourth stage	Subject	Educational techniques	Educational means
Active experimentation (doing) **[The citizen in the wider social environment]**	Actions and deeds of the active citizen	Completing the worksheets and the general worktable (paper roll)	Table, projector

Students complete the worksheets based on specific questions about their role as citizens of the world. Their answers are first recorded individually, and then processed in a group level in order to be announced to the plenum.

Indicative activity sheet		
How can I express my respect for diversity?	What can I do against a racist behaviour?	How can I persuade the people around me that we need peaceful coexistence?
The answers		

In that framework, students have the opportunity to produce texts by creating print material, with letters and suggestions to the competent agencies, and to propose solutions in support of any human right.

Data analysis - writing a research report

The evaluation of the answers that students gave us prior to our teaching intervention showed that students should be educated on the concept of citizenship and active citizenship.

In the first and second questions, "What words automatically come to mind when you hear the word citizen?" and "What are the characteristics of a citizen?", respectively, the decoding of the students' answers showed a very simple theoretical approach. For reasons of economy,

students' answers were grouped together and recorded in their original form, as formulated by the students: *"He who stays in a country, who works, studies, travels".*

Their answers on the third question of whether there is a difference between a citizen and an active citizen showed, also, a very simple theoretical approach. The answers they gave us do not reflect the divisions between the two concepts. Their answers were the same as the ones they gave us in the previous question: *"He who lives in a country, who works, studies, travels."*

Relatively to the level of knowledge that the students gained based on the types of learning that were developed, we will present a comparative presentation of the pre-tests and post-tests, as described in Table 10 below, for which we would like to make the following comments.

With regard to the type of learning involving information and knowledge, specifically the post-test process, students were able to fully render the content of the lesson, to put the historical events of World War II in chronological order, to render the main historical information placing particular emphasis on the Holocaust, as opposed to the pre-test process in which students presented an overview of historical events based on what they had heard about the subject. The learning performance in the post-test phase is justified by the fact that the additional material in the first and second stages worked additively as opposed to the students' initial pre-test performance. Concerning the type of learning that involves mental skills and learning concepts, the answers given by students in the post-test process were more complete in terms of rendering than the answers given in the pre-test process. They focused on the subtle conceptual nuances of the terms, as detailed in the table below. At the same time, of particular importance is the fact that upon the completion of the teaching intervention, the students focused on the Holocaust and its analysis, since the learning process was targeted and based on a specific teaching model. Concerning the type of learning involving attitudes, students of both classes were opposed to the Holocaust. Their ethical answers were verbally expressed, fully justifying their attitude. The students' answers during the post-test process were verbally enriched and conceptually charged, as shown in the comparative presentation of their answers in the table below.

Table 8
Comparative presentation of pre-tests and post-tests on the learning types

Type of learning	Question	Evaluation of student pre-test answers	Evaluation of student post-test answers
Information and knowledge	Say you are given the word "Holocaust", can you **name** the most important historical events related to it?	General knowledge	1. Deep understanding of historical content 2. Focusing on the Holocaust
Mental Skills: Learning concepts	**Define** the meaning of the words: anti-Semitism, concentration camp, holocaust.	Anti-Semitism: anti-social behaviour Concentration camp: A place where a large number of people is held. Holocaust: Destruction of peoples	Anti-Semitism: Hostility and hatred towards the Jewish race Concentration camp: a place where a large number of people are held without a trial.

Attitudes	1. If you were asked to **state your position** on the Holocaust against the Jewish people during World War II, what would your position be? 2. Could you express in words the result of the actions taken against the Jews?	1. Negative attitude towards the Holocaust. 2. Destruction	Holocaust: systematic persecution of people by the state 1. Negative attitude towards the Holocaust. 2. Hatred, savagery, pain, extermination, frustration, abuse.

Conclusions

Regarding the methodological framework that was followed, after our teaching intervention, the students' answers recorded the positive contribution of History to the cultivation of active citizenship. On the first question, "Did the lesson of history help you understand who an active citizen is?" the students' answers, which, for reasons of economy, were grouped together and recorded in their original form, show History's positive contribution, recognizing its powerful role in inciting thinking, reflection and in activating their emotional load. *"History was a window to other things. History is not just about facts. It is as if a light was shed on people's actions.* We learn through History". With regards to the second question, "Was the way of teaching helpful in making you understand the concept of active citizen and why?", the students highlighted a number of positive points about stimulating interest, the effective flow of teaching. *"There was a sequence to the course. We only proceeded to the next only when we had "learned" the previous one.* We gained knowledge and used it. *It was not an ordinary lesson. I understood the lesson and I can justify something with arguments",* were the answers of the students who, for reasons of economy, are grouped together and recorded in their original form.

In summary, we could say that the learning outcomes of the teaching intervention within the chosen methodological and teaching framework - Kolb's learning cycle - learning styles, covering the absence of lived historical experience through cinema, created the basis for the acquisition of knowledge and targeted skills.

As it arises from the implementation of research and teaching intervention, school can be transformed into a carrier of humanism and ideas that promote the peaceful coexistence of the human community. Linking the past with the present consolidates and reinforces our understanding of the concept of 'active citizenship' and highlights the continuities and discontinuities in the course of history. The incorporation of the concept of active citizenship can indeed be a valuable orientation in forming the attitudes and values of modern citizens.

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