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Citizenship Education in Slovenia

1. Citizenship and Educational Policies

The educational reform that took place in Slovenia between 1996 and 1999 introduced one of the most important changes to the public system of education: a national curriculum that placed increasing importance on education for democratic citizenship. This new curricular component emphasized active student participation in school communities and the development of critical and independent thinking, all of which are preconditions for active participation in both local communities and institutions and the society at large, as well as for taking part in the entire spectrum of the democratic process.

The entire reform of the public school system in Slovenia was based on the common European heritage of political, cultural, and moral values manifested in human rights, a state governed by the rule of law, pluralistic democracy, tolerance, and solidarity. The reshaping of the system comprised the following three key stages: a) changes in educational legislation; b) curriculum reform; c) implementation and evaluation. All three stages made important contributions in the efforts to secure strong support for children’s active participation in school and society as well as for the inclusion of citizenship education in the national curriculum.

The Starting Points for Curriculum Reform, one of the reform’s most important documents, identified the educational system’s priorities as

– individuals and their development (as cultural, creative, and working social beings aware of their environment);
– freedom and responsibility of those who participate in the education of pupils, e.g., parents;
– equal opportunities in education for all individuals and social groups; and
– tolerance and solidarity as integral to education and national identity, as well as openness to international cooperation.

The White Paper on Education in Slovenia (1996) and the new educational legislation that went into effect in 1996, both of which established systemic, normative, and legislative frameworks for the entire educational system, stress that the primary goals of the public educational system in Slovenia

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are based on a number of recommendations by leading international organizations in the field of citizenship education, e.g., the European Commission, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and OECD. Article 2 of the Elementary School Act states that the major goals of elementary education in Slovenia are
- developing consciousness of citizenship and national identity, knowledge of Slovene history and its culture;
- educating for general cultural and civilizational values that originate in the European tradition; and
- educating for mutual tolerance, respect for differences, human rights, and basic liberties, and cooperating with others, thus developing the abilities required for living in a democratic society (Elementary School Act, Article 2).

The Organization and Financing of Education Act sets the goals on which active citizenship in all aspects of elementary, lower and upper secondary education are based. In addition to those goals described above in the Elementary School Act (e.g., mutual tolerance, cooperation with others), the organizing and financing Act includes the development of gender equality consciousness and equal opportunities for both sexes, as well as respect for children’s rights, all of which shape one’s ability to successfully live in and contribute to a democratic society. This Act’s goals also include securing equal educational opportunities for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and for children, youth, and adults with special needs (The Organisation and Financing of Education Act, Article 2).

2. Citizenship Through the Curriculum

2.1 Approaches

A significant modification to the national curriculum that resulted from public school system reform was the introduction into the lower secondary school curriculum of two compulsory school subjects that deal with citizenship education:
- Civic education and ethics (seventh and eighth grade of compulsory education, ISCED 2); and
- Civic culture (an optional subject in the ninth grade of compulsory education, ISCED 2).

At the level of primary education, themes on citizenship education can be included in the school curriculum by integrating them with other civic-related subjects (e.g., the social sciences, mother tongue (Slovenian Language).
The school subject *Civic education and ethics* is an integral part of the curriculum in the social sciences and humanities at the lower secondary education level. It is taught in the seventh and eighth grades, with a total of seventy lessons (thirty-five lessons/year, 45 min/lesson). The *Civic education and ethics* syllabus determines the subject’s basic units, knowledge attainment targets, skills and competences, and goals for lessons and teaching units. The syllabus is divided into

- **Mandatory units** (life in the community: nation, country; family; models and authorities; mass media and information; generations and cultures; religions and beliefs, Christianity); and
- **Optional units** (e.g., relationships between the sexes; distant cultures and places; leisure; forms of sociability; European Union; terrorism and peace in the world).

The mandatory part of the syllabus is implemented during the first year, i.e., 7th grade. Pupils study primarily those themes that touch on their own roles in diverse social groups. During the second year, themes are selected from the syllabus’s optional sections, those that concern individuals’ ethical judgements about particular problems in the wider community. These optional units provide pupils and teachers with a range of opportunities to jointly and creatively shape the lessons’ contents.

The optional subject *Civic culture* is also part of a social sciences and humanities syllabus, and is offered during the last year of elementary school, i.e., ninth grade. Instruction is one teaching hour per week, for a total of 32 teaching hours. *Civic culture* represents an extension and deepening of the knowledge, skills, and understanding that were presumably acquired in the *Civic education and ethics* classes taught in the seventh and eighth grades.

At the upper secondary level of general education, the *gimnazija*, citizenship education is a mandatory part of the curriculum and includes a total of 15 teaching hours per school year. The citizenship education curriculum of the *gimnazija* allows lessons to be delivered through a programme that combines the allocation of separate curriculum time for citizenship subjects with specific occasions for students to take part in activities that address citizenship objectives. These lessons and activities are designed to parallel other areas of the mandatory curriculum (forging links with, e.g., philosophy, sociology, and history), as well as more general school activities and opportunities that are provided for students to learn through participation in school and local community life. Of five main curriculum units in the *Civic culture* syllabus for the *gimnazija* (Constitutional Order of the Republic of Slovenia; State; Individual, Society and the State; Political Systems; Economic System of the
Republic of Slovenia), three must be completed within the 15-hour per year teaching provision for citizenship education.

3. Aims and Content of Citizenship Education

The aim of citizenship education at the primary level is to teach pupils about the issues that are most important for the formation of a common citizenship identity. In addition, pupils are taught about human rights and plurality of values, and particular attention is also given to the active integration of pupils into the school community.

The most important goals of the school subject *Civic education and ethics* are a) transmitting knowledge about society that will enable students to develop independent answers to social and ethical questions through such means as acquiring key data, basic concepts and conceptual networks, cognitive procedures, techniques and methods; b) developing the ethical attitudes and skills necessary for independent, free, and responsible social functioning; developing c) social and communication skills; d) a tolerant and communicational culture; e) a sense of responsibility for peers and other community members; f) a reflexive and active relationship with one’s individual, national, religious, and cultural identity; g) the ability to recognize stereotypes and prejudices; h) positive attitudes towards the principles of equity, equality, freedom, and solidarity; and i) the ability to critically analyse media messages and understand the significance of media in society.

The programme of study for the optional subject *Civic culture* derives from the basic knowledge, skills, and competences pupils have acquired during the two years of the *Civic education and ethics* course; pupils’ specific interests and experiences outside of school also play a role. The *Civic culture* subject’s programme of study consists of three core units:

– democracy, political order, and institutions;
– children’s and human rights; and
– equality and diversity.

This programme combines the examination of fundamental documents and events concerning human and children’s rights with social, intercultural, political, and general civilizational themes, as well as discussing contemporary events (both at home and abroad) and how they are presented in the media.

*Civic culture* emphasizes the development of pupils’ understanding of their own national and cultural traditions. At the same time, it familiarizes pupils with other cultures and social structures through the use of intercultural comparisons, and promotes attitudes of mutual tolerance and respect, acceptance,
and understanding of differences. It enables learning about important national and international social and political institutions, at the same time increasing pupils’ willingness to act responsibly in school, in their local community, and in a democratic society in general. The lessons pursued in Civic culture help develop autonomous and critical approaches to topical issues, and include discussions about solutions, tolerance, and open-mindedness. One of the basic characteristics of Civic culture is linking pupils’ knowledge with the experiences they gather in their social environments. Particular attention is paid to gradually shifting pupils’ attention from their immediate milieu to topics that are of specific importance in the development of a democratic civic culture.

4. Competencies to be Acquired

The core competences associated with citizenship education include 1. cognitive: knowledge concerning the rules of life in the local and wider community, knowledge concerning the powers in a democratic society, and most importantly, knowledge of the principles and values of human rights and democratic citizenship; 2. affective: encompassing ethical competences and value choices; and 3. social: the capacity to live with others, to resolve conflicts in a democratic way, and to take part in public deliberation. The most important goals of the Civic education and ethics and the Civic culture courses are

- developing a reflexive and active relationship to one’s individual, national, and cultural identity and that of others;
- learning the basic principles, concepts, and values that characterize a democratic political order, and learning about the origins of modern forms of social life;
- developing tolerance for different cultural, religious, and value systems, and advocating a rational solving of personal and social conflicts;
- becoming familiar with the most important international organizations working at the crossroads of education and democracy (e.g., Council of Europe, UN, UNESCO) and the basic documents concerning human and children’s rights, as well as recognizing violations of those as well as individual rights;
- developing social skills such as participation in decision-making processes and active participation in society;
- discussing contemporary events, domestic and international, and observing how they are presented in the media;
- learning about the role the media plays in transmitting information; developing the ability to construct points of view and perspectives when
observing social phenomena and media messages, and learning to engage in critical analysis; and
- identifying different forms of injustice, inequality, discrimination, bias, stereotypes, and prejudices.

5. School Culture and Participation in Community Life

Two important innovations supporting active participation of schools, pupils, and parents in community life were introduced during the educational reform in Slovenia, i.e., granting certain basic rights to pupils, including placing an emphasis on increasing their active participation, and introducing the principle of school autonomy.

5.1 Participation of pupils in schools

The new educational legislation lent substantial support to the active participation of pupils in various aspects of school life. The Elementary School Act introduced a half-hour session per week for class community discussions, which then form the basis for school parliaments. The establishment of school parliaments was derived from Article 12 of the UN Children’s Rights Convention, which says that ‘every child has the right to freely express an opinion in all matters affecting her/him and to have that opinion taken into account’. The Rules on Rights and Duties of Children in Elementary Schools requires head teachers to summon the school parliament at least twice a year. These mandatory children’s parliaments are among the best forms of education for encouraging pupils’ participation in active citizenship and have been recognized in Slovenia for more than a decade.

6. The European Dimension of Citizenship Education

The issue of European citizenship has received increasing attention in Slovenia since it entered the EU on 1 May 2004, and teacher education and curriculum development activities, as well as the publication of materials on this topic, have been among the results.

6.1 Curriculum

The understanding and implementation of the European dimension in Slovene elementary education is not coloured by subject-oriented and discipline-
bound thinking. The European dimension is not a special school subject but an educational orientation. Environmental protection and a healthy way of life have lately been added as other elements of this orientation. The inclusion of the European dimension into the school curriculum at all levels of primary and secondary education in Slovenia is assured through the cross-curricular approach of curriculum planning and implementation, which forms one of the basic principles of curriculum provision in elementary schools.

6.2 Wider School Context

For more than five years now, Slovene elementary and secondary schools have been included in several EU programmes of exchange (e.g., Comenius and Erasmus projects) and have established many links with schools from the EU member states. In upper secondary general education, the gimnazija, European classes were instituted and began with the 2004/2005 school year. The objective of these classes is to promote a European/global dimension to student learning through a range of curriculum activities, e.g., studying European geographical diversity, European political and social structures, the historical development of Europe (with a particular emphasis on the concepts of law, state, and freedom), European cultural heritage, European multilingual and multicultural society, the work of the EU and its organizations, and the work of the Council of Europe.

Notes

1 UNESCO stands for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
2 OECD stands for Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development.
3 ISCED stands for International Standard Classification of Education.

References

Legislative References
III. Perspectives on Citizenship Education: Country Profiles


Curriculum documents:

Civic education and ethics (syllabi for the compulsory subject of the seventh and eighth grades of elementary education).
Civic culture (syllabi for the compulsory curriculum option of the ninth grade of elementary education).
Civic culture (syllabi for the compulsory subject of the second and third year of the short vocational programme (the gimnazija).)
Social Sciences (syllabi for the compulsory subject for the third and fourth year of the short vocational programme).