

Georg Weisseno
Valentin Eck
(Eds.)



Teaching European Citizens

A Quasi-experimental Study in Six Countries

WAXMANN

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In cooperation with

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Waxmann 2009

Münster / New York / München / Berlin

Bibliographic information published by die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Education and Culture

Socrates

The participation of the Swiss team has been financed by the Swiss State Secretariat for Education and Research SER.

ISBN 978-3-8309-2178-3

© Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2009
Postfach 8603, 48046 Münster, Germany

Waxmann Publishing Co.
P. O. Box 1318, New York, NY 10028, U. S. A.

www.waxmann.com
info@waxmann.com

Cover Design: Christian Averbeck, Münster
Cover Picture: www.photocase.com
Print: Hubert und Co., Göttingen
Printed on age-resistant paper, acid-free as per ISO 9706

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Preface

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Teaching European Citizens: A Quasi-experimental Study in Six Countries is written by an international research team who collaborated from 2006 to 2009 to examine young people's political knowledge of the European Union. The EC-funded project *Teacher Empowerment to Educate Students to Become Active European Citizens* (TEESAEC) combined research with the development of innovative curriculum materials.

The team created an online WebQuest, designed for independent use by students aged 13 to 15 years, accompanied by a teacher handbook, aimed to support professional development. Teachers in partner schools, from Austria, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK, trialled the curriculum materials with their students. Following feedback from schools, a revised version of the materials is now available: <http://www.politikwiss.ph-karlsruhe.de/teesaec/>

The emphasis throughout is on active European citizenship. The materials are designed to support students in grappling with sometimes complex EU processes by providing them with the necessary conceptual tools. In other words, the aim is to strengthen students' political literacy. The outcome is a resource to support teachers in addressing the European dimension of citizenship, so that students become informed voters and engaged European citizens.

From this followed the ambitious research agenda which is reported here in *Teaching European Citizens*. The research aims of the international project team were: to make an analysis of students' knowledge of the European Union; to assess the impact of the web-based materials on students within selected schools in each nation-state; and, finally, to assess students' learning gain in these schools. In each school, teachers made the WebQuest available to some students; a second control group completed a parallel series of lessons, using material of the teacher's own choosing. Students completed a pre-test questionnaire before commencing their studies and answered the same questionnaire following their classes, as a post-test.

The structure of the book

In chapter one of *Teaching European Citizens* Weisseno and Eck discuss the teaching project and some of the challenges encountered in introducing EU-related concepts and processes to young people. They follow this, in chapter two, with an analysis of the research data from Germany, concluding that a young person's in-

terest in politics and academic self-concept are more strongly linked to learning gain than the actual teaching method to which s/he is exposed. In chapter three, Reinhardt, Waldis and Ziegler also consider the importance of young people's interests and attitudes in predicting learning; in this case discussing young people's study of the EU in Switzerland, a non-EU member-state, where young people are likely to be exposed to rather different political perspectives from those prevalent in Germany. In chapter four, Rijkhoff and Dekker analyze the origins of conceptual EU-knowledge and the impact of WebQuest and other lessons on this knowledge among students in the Netherlands. In chapter five, Taru analyses pre- and post-test results from students in Estonia. The Estonian teachers noted how WebQuest increased young people's levels of interest; it did not, however, prove to be a more efficient way of learning.

In Austria, by contrast, the WebQuest materials appear to have had a greater impact on student learning than the alternative teacher-led classes. Interestingly, Gaertner and Natter explore differences and similarities they uncover between young people with migration and non-migration backgrounds. The final chapter examining country-specific results is by Osler and Savvides, who report on schools in England. The British partners extended the common work plan to interview teachers about their perceptions of students' needs as learner-citizens and students' attitudes to the EU. Their results suggest that teachers in England find it difficult to reconcile their beliefs about active community-focused learning with the topic of the EU, which seems remote to students. In the final chapter, Dekker and Rijkhoff contextualize and reflect on the research results from the six countries.

The challenge remains for teachers across Europe to educate young people for tolerance and cooperation. Young people are entitled to forms of political education which enable them to look critically at alternative viewpoints. This is essential in a context where extremist groups and political parties seek to influence the young.

TEESAEC was funded by the European Commission under the Comenius action programme (Grant reference: 128741-CP-1-2006-1-DE-COMENIUS-C21). The authors extend their warm thanks to all participating teachers and schools and to their universities: University of Innsbruck, University of Leeds, Leiden University, University of Tallinn, University of Teacher Education of the Applied Sciences North-western Switzerland (Aarau), University of Teacher Education Central Switzerland (Lucerne), and Karlsruhe University of Education (coordinating partner). The authors also wish to acknowledge the full research team: Gina Aschwanden, Farah Bazzi, Katrin Hahn-Laudenberg, Tobias Heinemann, Michalis Kakos, Yvonne Leimgruber, Pippa Meer, Jolanda van der Noll, Monika Oberle, Terje Tarve, Louise Williams, and Corinne Wyss.

Concepts on the European Union – A teaching project

Georg Weisseno & Valentin Eck

The “Teacher Empowerment to Educate Students to Become Active European Citizens” (TEESAEC) project that is being promoted by the European Union from 2006 to 2009 within the framework of the Comenius Programme has two objectives. On the one hand, materials on the European Union should be put on-line in the new form of a WebQuest together with curriculum suggestions for teacher training (<http://www.politikwiss.ph-karlsruhe.de/teesaec/>). On the other hand, a test on knowledge is to be effected in the test run of a series of teaching lessons before and after these lessons are carried out, which is to give information on the increase in learning of students of the age of 14 to 15 via the new teaching method. The series of teaching lessons was revised on the basis of the success in learning and the evaluation of the feedback of teachers and students, and is now available in four languages. The materials have been developed jointly by six European partners.

1. Aims and formulation of questions for the series of teaching lessons

The series of teaching lessons devised provides the students with an introduction to the development of the European Union by showing the interaction of the institutions in the example of the planned CO₂ Ordinance for exhaust emissions. This practical example of the on-going legislative procedure during the period of the project shall provide the students with a closer insight in terms of transparency, comprehension and up-to-datedness, into the competences and functions of the institutions of the European Union. The cognitive approach to deal with the discussions on the new ordinance shall improve, resp. support the attitude to the EU. Since the legislative process of the EU deviates in many aspects from the processes in the member countries, the subject of learning is at any rate new for the students. Analogies to their own political system can hardly be helpful to them, and so they have to develop conceptual ideas of a general kind on democracy and on the European Union.

The perception of the EU citizenship requires to have knowledge on the European Union. The competence in politics relating to this develops when one deals with questions posed on Europe, and teaching affords a contribution to this. Agreement on the European values which are fundamental for political action within this context does not come automatically but requires knowledge that influences one's own considerations and attitudes.

What this is dependent on is that the network of European politics is clarified, thus providing the many indecisive and uninformed students the framework to form their own opinions. Given that the European Union as a subject of discussion is treated with minor importance in the family home and with friends, or at least might be backed up with comparatively little knowledge in concrete terms, an important information function is attached to the teaching at school. There, students acquire important specialist concepts of the European Union and are then able to follow the daily news and to build up further their store of knowledge independently. Knowledge can be communicated, positive basic attitudes can be developed and strengthened, the readiness for engagement promoted, and motivation to tackle European issues raised.

The series of teaching lessons is comprised of 4 learning units, having their own logical structure. They can be dealt with in 6 teaching lessons. The first teaching unit presents the content of the planned ordinance to reduce CO₂ exhaust emissions. This is explained on the basis of climate protection against the background of climate change, and reference is made to the effect that the EU is seeking to implement the resolutions in the Kyoto Protocol through this ordinance. Since the EU Commission and the EU Commissioners have initiated the legislation process (right of initiative), the task of the unit is to explain in principle their significance. Thus not all the institutions of the EU are introduced simultaneously, only the Commission as focal point first of all.

In the second teaching unit, the controversial reactions to the draft of ordinance in the Council of Ministers are analysed. It is shown that national interests of individual member states in the specific case strongly rest on the car industry (associations) that is present in the individual countries and less on the influence of environmental protection associations. It is made clear that it is important to forge alliances because individual countries can be outvoted. Without the consent of the Council of Ministers, no ordinance can be passed. Therefore the key powers of the Council of Ministers are explained, which also convenes as Council on the Environment, and prepares the resolution at the level of the specialist ministers. Thereby a further key body in the legislative process is shown in the work involved with a planned ordinance.

The next teaching unit deals with the Climate Initiative of the EU and the contributions of associations and their inclusion in the political negotiating process to solve the problem. To implement the Kyoto Protocol, a series of measures is needed which also affect the car industry. For to prepare the ordinance, a working group, to which the individual government representatives and representatives of the associations belong, advised the Commission. The report is made available as well to the parliamentarians of the European Parliament. The procedure, to especially include the representatives of the European car industry federations and the

environmental protection associations, is characteristic for government action at a European level (lobbyism). Therefore it is made clear that the various associations are taking part not only in negotiations with civil servants and the members of the Commission but also take up positions publicly for to influence within their way of thinking the further adoption of resolutions in the institutions (Commission, Council of Ministers, European Parliament).

The following fourth teaching unit is the interplay of all the participatory institutions in rising complexity. First of all the European Parliament is presented in this teaching unit. As it is responsible for transportation and the environment, it is participated in the legislative procedure. The interplay of Parliament and the Council of Ministers requires that the respective majority opinions are taken into account so that the ordinance can be passed by both bodies. That is why the Parliament gets involved from the outset in the decision-making process with a debate, though a vote has to be taken only after the ordinance is passed by the Council Of Ministers. The European parties must form coalitions in the Parliament in order to influence from their side the process of opinion-forming in the Commission and in the Council of Ministers. This happens at first relatively independently of the opinion-forming process in the Council of Ministers because the parliamentary majority does not have to support the commission and the Council of Ministers is on its part independent. One can recognise from this teaching unit that in such a way a network of relationships and different interests comes into play. The European Parliament, Commission, Council of Ministers and interest groups are shown in a negotiation process that in the end produces a jointly prepared ordinance which looks at any rate different from that presented in the first teaching unit.

As a whole, the following key concepts are introduced within the course of the teaching units: car industry, EU Budget, Climate Protection, EU Commissioner, European Union, European Commission, EU Industrial Policy, EU Environmental Policy, EU Consumer Protection, EU citizen, associations, EU Legislative Procedure, Law Initiative, National Governments, European Parliament, European Elections, Votum EP, President of the European Commission, European Democracy, peace, prosperity, EU institutions, national sovereignty, European interests, national interests, tolerance, global warming, Council of Ministers, Council on the Environment, European political parties. The students are expected to have integrated by the end of the series of teaching lessons as many as possible, resp. all the concepts into their individual semantic networks.

2. Learning with concepts

The learning process is influenced by many factors as, for instance, motivation, the self-image, the level of knowledge, the model and the success in learning. All the factors have a combined effect in the brain. The learning success in school is that what matters to the teachers and students. The role of teaching is to develop cultural skills (general world knowledge) just as well as domain-specific knowledge in school subjects. The domain-specific knowledge belongs to the competence area of subject-related knowledge, in this case to the domain of political science. According to this definition, the competence in politics is determined functionally as a sub-competence, i.e. domain-specific, and is related to a confined sector of contexts and situations (Hartig & Klieme, 2006, p. 129). The competence in politics as a capability to apply domain-specific knowledge in various contexts can be tested in different ways. Factual questions can be asked or questions on conceptual knowledge. Such domain-specific or content-based knowledge, e.g. on the European Union, arise through many perception details in the brain being erased and the important relationships between elements in terms of content being stored via abstraction: “A type of abstraction exists in leaving aside specific experiences and instead categorising generally the features and characteristics of the respective class of experience. Such a type of abstraction creates conceptual knowledge which includes categories like chairs and dogs.” (Anderson, 2001, p. 153)

The cognitive competence is therefore of key importance in the school subject of politics, which can be ascertained via tests of knowledge. It also assumes a prominent position in the TEESAEC project when the success in learning with the teaching method (WebQuest) is measured by the increase in knowledge. Drawn upon as a theoretical general model for the development of competences through teaching is the model of Scientific Literacy of Bybee (1997, p. 56ff.) which defines the levels of a scientific basic education and which can apply for school education. Bybee's concept of general education describes basic capabilities that are necessary scientific terms (e.g. election) and of formalism

- conceptual and procedural Civic Literacy: comprehension of key political concepts and processes, establishing relationships between facts, terms and principles (e.g. federalism with the corresponding network of concepts)
- multidimensional Civic Literacy: comprehension of the special features of political-scientific thinking, capability to arrange in economic, social and cultural associations (e.g. one's own logic of the terms of power in political science and in economics).

The concept of the ‘European Union’ belongs to the field of politics as the concept ‘dog’ belongs to the field of biology. Related to the project, this means that the concept of the European Union explains a whole series of further terms, as e.g. the