Article

Making School Happen: Children-Parent-Teacher Collaboration as A Practice of Citizenship

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Abstract: The exercise of citizenship is today understood as a duty and as a right to be enjoyed within any educational context. Within the school, all of its protagonists are invited to exercise practices of citizenship. No one is excluded; even the less important parties have the right to participate in decisions that, for some reason, may have an influence on their academic life. The citizenship of the child is, thus, a challenge to the changing political, social and educational structures, to the transformation of institutions and to cultural renewal. The existence of harmonious relations between the educational community, the school, the children and the family is dependent on everyone's ability to understand and communicate with each other. Parents and teachers have made a commitment to a fruitful and unison dialogue on behalf of the quality of education. In this article, we set out from an analysis of the new social realities and of the different meanings assigned to education, to afterwards reflect upon the current educational values and upon the practices that are consistent with those purposes. Citizenship, as well as autonomy, rise, thus, as central concepts, in which each educational community finds reasons for Making School Happen.

Keywords: citizenship; participation; children; relationship

1. Introduction

The exercise of citizenship is today understood as a duty and as a right to be enjoyed within any educational context. Within the school, all of its protagonists are invited to exercise practices of citizenship. No one is excluded; even the less important parties have the right to participate in decisions that, for some reason, may have an influence on their academic life. The citizenship of the child is, thus, a challenge to the changing political, social and educational structures, to the transformation of institutions and to cultural renewal [1]. The interrelations within educational institutions can be instrumental in giving voice and visibility to the child. If, like until some decades ago, the boundaries between school and families are clearly defined and they are isolated from each other, as it is the case currently, and the relevance of citizenship is taken into account, it is pertinent to carry out collaborative practices involving all actors' responsibilities (parents, teachers and community) in education. A troubled and fragile relationship [2] can therefore become a melodious and refined, albeit not in all cases, relation between the school and the parents.

School is part of the everyday lives of families and, nowadays, the shared management of the school is an increasingly assumed reality, contributing to a closer cooperation between all the members directly involved. The advantages of this vicinity are numerous and clearly positive for a good educational development.

The existence of harmonious relations between the educational community, the school, the children and the family is dependent on everyone's ability to understand and communicate with each other. It should be based on a process of mutual respect, tolerance and recognition of diverse points of view, in order to provide students with optimum conditions for learning, leading them to an educational success. Parents and teachers have made a commitment to a fruitful and mutual dialogue on behalf of the quality of education.

However, the school-parent relationship—apparently stronger nowadays—highlights the idea that the school enables the existence of an effective and active participation of parents in the educational activities. The fact is that, through legislation, the Ministry of Education encourages this partnership; however, studies show that when parental involvement "is required or encouraged by the law, it remains scarce or illusory" [3]. This idea of illusion, according to this author, occurs when one thinks that: (1) there is parental involvement just because parents are represented in educational institutions and in the school management; (2) families of all social classes are represented there; (3) the participation of parents is *real*, when, on in reality "the role that the professionals allow parents to play resembles, in many cases, the role of walkers-on" [3]. It should be noted that the legal school-parent relation exists in all educational institutions, although it is effectively exercised only in a few schools. On the one hand, for the school-parent partnership to be sustained by a more effective bond, it will be necessary for the school to create opportunities for the latter's participation and that it opens itself unreservedly to the families and to the community, by allowing them a real involvement in its activities. On the other hand, parents should also show an attitude of openness and be available to establish and maintain this relation.

We believe that this relation could contribute to make schools more democratic and transform their actors into more autonomous intervenients, and, as such, to increase their citizenship qualities.

In this article, we set out from an analysis of the new social realities and of the different meanings assigned to education, to afterwards reflect upon the current educational values and practices that are consistent with those purposes. Citizenship, as well as autonomy, rises, thus, as a central concept, in which each educational community finds reasons for Making School Happen.

2. New Meaning to Education: Building the Citizenship of Children

In ancient times, school was regarded as an object of possession of a set of teachers, who had the role of disseminating the knowledge in an externally constructed way, which was transmitted in a standardized way; today, in a democratic society that calls for the participation of all people, that social representation can no longer be accepted. Understood as a development agency of the communities, built by them and being at their service, this shift in positions also entails a change in roles, a change in perspectives, a change in functions, including a change in the educational agents and in the active elements in school. The increasing complexity of the purposes and of the organization of schools accompanies the increasing complexity of the various social settings, making it important, at this time, to analyze those involved more directly in the education of children.

We shall start by looking at some perspectives on the agency of the child. In order to really assume the citizenship of the child, it is truly important to hear her/his voice and to enhance her/his participation in the world that surrounds her/him, affirming the values and the rights of children. Assigning importance to the voice of the child (of all students) is a recent novelty in the field of education. Participation in decisions concerning her/his life is progressively being incremented in the different contexts in which she/he dwells.

Listening to children appropriately involves significant changes in many practices, in institutional and in social structures [4]. Giving a voice to children and listening to their opinions is relevant to the construction of citizenship in infancy and, among other assumptions, it implies the involvement of the adult "in a practice with children and adolescents in which adequate information is given to them, in which they can express their thoughts and feelings about the subject in question at an appropriate time and in an appropriate space" [4]. As adults and children have a relationship of interdependence in the learning of the current childhood ambivalence [5], they are also interdependent in the learning process of their citizenship.

Cockburn [5] regards this interdependence as the starting point for the design of children's citizenship, because, when one recognizes this mutual dependence, the social position of the child is less problematic and, thus, the citizenship of the child becomes a fact, and it is no longer a utopia. Thus [5] highlights the idea that the citizenship of the child cannot be excluded when considering that it can only be achieved when the child has the same rights as the adults. Having the notion that being a citizen is not confined only to the rights designed and conferred by the State, and the enhancement of participation as a basic principle for the setting of citizenship being essential, that way of thinking will no longer have force. If we consider that, in Portugal, one can only exercise the right to vote from the age of eighteen years on, we would have a long waiting period and the child would never be considered a complete citizen. Thus, corroborating Soares' [6] point of view, we believe that the issue of the real exercise of the social rights of participation will have to be equated in promoting and enhancing children's citizenship. Jans [5] is of the opinion that, in order for us to put in perspective a

child's citizenship that suits her/his size, we should not neglect the playfulness that characterizes their nature. The child assumes certain responsibilities while playing and, therefore, it is important to know that the child can be called upon at any time to participate and to opine. Regarding citizenship as an identity, as a belonging to a place, is not the best way to describe children's citizenship [5], because when this citizenship is connected with the social and cultural traditions in places where these do not exist or are diminished, the child cannot be considered a citizen. The child has the ability to attach herself/himself to a civil identity, and in doing so she/he binds herself/himself primarily to symbols, values and norms that characterize this identity. Because of this and of the way in which she/he fits into the surrounding environment, some forms of citizenship can easily be at the distance of their fingertips.

If one does not want the image of the child-citizen to be only a mirage, it is necessary to promote a genuine citizenship of the child, bearing in mind that this scenario is a process characterized by inequalities and barriers [7]. According to the same author, on the one hand, we have to overcome the impediments that exist in relationships between adults and children, as is the case of control and regulation and, on the other hand, we have to consider the structural differences of social and economic nature, which have relevant implications on the visibility of children and on the organization of their daily life. Thus, it is essential to regard the child as a person in full possession of her/his rights, who is a social being and, who, for that reason, ends up to have at her/his disposal a citizenship that differs little from that of the adult.

In its social dimension, the valorization of the child-citizen gains a greater magnitude, when one considers the ability to understand the feelings, the intentions, the perceptions, the thoughts and the behaviors of other people, as well as the ability to understand interactions in various situations, to predict behaviors considering the various socio-cultural contexts, and the different personal characteristics.

It is therefore urgent that the child be recognized as a person/citizen with the ability to exercise rights and to enjoy basic freedoms. Recognizing that the success of this task is not easy and sometimes shrouded in constraints, we must, however, not forget that childhood assumes different contours, according to the characteristics of families and of society itself, within which children live, which sometimes may condition their access to the desired citizenship.

This perspective of citizenship for children will always imply the notion of promoting child participation [6,8] "considering children as actors involved in social relationships, primarily involved in the process of social relationship" [8]. This notion is fundamental to implement this concept and to help in the formation of participatory and socially committed citizens.

3. The Family in Its Role of Children's First Socializing Context

The present society is characterized by its versatility. It goes through times of change that create new social settings. The family, responsible for the behavior of Human Beings as people, and of nations as organized collectivities, is one of the core and basic elements of all societies, being even the oldest social institution, and it cannot stand indifferent in the face of societal transformations. Families have gone through many transformations in recent times: (1) The increasing privatization of their nature; (2) the gradual reduction of the number of their members; (3) the progressive reduction of their functions; and (4) the equalization of social roles in their bosom [9].

When we speak today of family, we are referring to a multifaceted reality—its purposes, its interaction time, its intervention spaces—arranged in different ways—single-parent families (one parent and her/his children); reconstructed families (mine, yours and ours); common families (father-mother-children)—with intra and inter relational codes and educational roles that are no longer the same as they were a few decades ago.

Families nowadays have reduced dimensions, which inevitably have implications in the field of education. With the decrease in the number of children—usually one or two, with an average difference of ages of three and a half years—some informal educational practices that used to be carried out inside the families have not, today, the same possibilities for development. The toys that were shared among siblings of approximate ages, the solidarity and complicity in the realization of schoolwork, the assigned responsibility to the older brothers in the socialization of the younger ones with other children, and even in their follow-up and guardianship, currently do not prevail in the same way in these contexts.

All these situations hamper the conditions for the construction of certain social values in the bosom of one's own family, values, which continue to be foundational to a balanced community and to an individual development. Solidarity, sharing, tolerance, co-existence do not have the same conditions to be created between siblings, which has an impact on the education of these children, with repercussions that the school cannot ignore.

The organization of the time of the family is another important constraint of the analysis of educational issues and of its process of participation in the building of citizenship. Organized mainly on a nuclear base, geographically distant from the other families of common roots, the existing support networks in extended families no longer exist.

Little by little, the family roles acquire a new status and "in many parts of the world, women are demanding greater autonomy in relation to the past and entering the labor market in large numbers" [10], not only to see themselves professionally valued, but also in an attempt to help support their families, which brings new problems and new needs. In this context, it seems that the vocational dimension, sociologically speaking, has become more important than the family dimension itself. The participation of women in social activities outside the home (employment, associations, cultural and/or recreational and other) is progressively increasing, this reality not even being accompanied, however, by the implementation of a reorganization of the domestic tasks, which often makes the time spent together at home characterized by a climate of great tension.

At the same time, faced with these realities, and with an increased investment in the education of children, parents try to create other entrepreneurial situations of communication and increase their expectations that in schools these educational dimensions are also valued. The families' expectations *vis-à-vis* the services provided by schools are thus various: on the one hand social, on the other hand pedagogical. The families expect schools to help solve the problems of care and well-being of their children in the periods when there are lag times between parents' and children's schedules, valuing qualified socialization processes. At the same time, conscious of the relation between education, individual and collective development, they have high expectations on their children's academic trajectory.

This institution of primary socialization is of vital importance for the individual to take a leading role in the social and cultural transmission; however, solid and cohesive family structures are becoming

scarce. In the current social landscape, there are families that are no more than a mere illusion and that increasingly dismiss their responsibilities, taking into account the weakening of its their socializing ability.

According to Tedesco [11], the affective charge that characterizes the education of children nowadays is very different from that of yore, perhaps because it is driven either by the different social groups or by multiple pre-defined options to which the child is exposed and that tend to change rapidly. With all these changes taking place at a dizzying pace, this primary socialization agency becomes uncertain in its mode of formation, failing in its mission of education, and it delivers to the school a large part of its responsibilities, including the custodianship [12]. It is not a new phenomenon that "families depend increasingly on other instances to socialize their children in the practice of citizenship" [13]. Families begin to transfer most of the responsibilities that traditionally belonged to them to the school, such as their children's learning of social skills. Simultaneously, we are witnessing a "crisis of the family and of the community as institutions with responsibilities" [12], *i.e.*, their socializing capacity is questioned, going through an apparent crisis. According to this author, the institutions of socialization of children are withdrawn, inhibited, and have lost the ability to "domesticate, discipline and moralize" [12] which contributes to an increase of the necessity and the weight of the school.

Given the difficulties of the households in the field of education, the families deliver that responsibility to the school, which seeks to resist this weakening of the family structure. Thus, the school begins to be required for new and different functions, which involve the exercise of new professional skills and innovative pedagogical practices. The role of the teacher becomes, thus, very influential in shaping the character and the spirit of the new generations. It is up to the teacher and to their partners (educational community surrounding the family) to foster the change and the understanding, contributing to the present and future well-being of children.

4. Parent's and Children's Participation in Schools: A Right and a Duty of Citizenship

The new concepts and perspectives on education in the Western world nowadays result from the awareness of the citizens' rights.

Participation is identifiable as the main right in the area of citizenship. What happens in the public space, with the lives of people in the community, ought to arise from thoughtful acts, designed by the citizens themselves. Thus, these shall no longer be passive social actors in the development of a community, and are called upon to take a role as authors of this community building.

These are new social realities; thus, one cannot continue to understand school as a favor provider to families who are facing difficulties in assuming their educational functions regarding their children, but as an active partner in the education of the community that it serves.

An active and responsible participation as well as an effective involvement of parents in school activities gives the parents a better knowledge about their roles and their skills and provides them with more influence in order for them to better participate in the development and educational process of their children.

In this way, we can say that the social and democratic construction of the autonomy of the school requires that the interaction spaces be extended, and that decisions and directions inherent to an

organizational logic are shared, which may involve the choice of spaces and times of active participation where parents can exercise their citizenship rights and duties in the life of schools.

It is therefore necessary to redefine the relationship between the family and the school on the basis of a constructive dialogue, in an analogy of confidence, because this will reduce the gap between the two of them. In an environment of cohesion, a relationship of friendship and mutual assistance can be established, enabling the child to live a full experience, which loses its double character of learning and of education—at home and at school—to benefit from a convergence of learning and of education.

In turn, the child's participation may take a variety of directions and forms and it differs from the forms of participation of the adult. The child's participation is carried out in society, with their peers and with the adults, and there are many settings where it can be developed in a deliberate, organized and thoughtful manner. Creating real opportunities for children's participation can make the social inclusion of children, which allows them access to and use of their citizenship rights, possible. The family, the school and/or the community are socialization settings, constituting important stages for the development in children of citizenship skills [14]. In this process of socialization, children reconstruct purposes among their peers, assigning new meanings for different life situations, and they become able to grasp the functioning of educational and of social institutions. This process of participation of children will subsist only if it has an influence on the daily life and on life's protagonists [5].

The years of school are referred to as a privileged stage for the participation and practice of citizenship of the child since he/she spends a large part of his/her day in this socialization setting. The school of the 21st century, occupying a significant portion of the time of the child and being imbued of a democratizing dimension, is highlighted as a fundamental space for the promotion of the training of tolerant, autonomous and responsible citizens. It follows the expectation that school is able to ensure the full participation of the child by adopting strategies that ensure its recovery as a person and as a citizen, bringing together all efforts to enable the enjoyment of exercises that include their rights and freedoms, in a gradual assumption of responsibilities, from the perspective that "the participation becomes the criterion of citizenship at school" [15].

By participating in school, the child on the one hand seeks to inform himself/herself and tends to cooperate, to investigate, to express himself/herself, to understand aspects related to his/her citizen status. On the other hand, the child learns to accept democratic decisions, even if they are different from his/her interests or opinions, and begins to become aware of the meanders where participation and citizenship take place.

A conception of democratic, participatory, interactive school, will only achieve all these designs if it is in close articulation with its surrounding community. The school's connection to the family and to the local community shall, thus, be equated unreservedly, because it is necessary to take advantage of the knowledge and experience available within the community, turning them to the advantage of democratic participation.

Assuming that it is unlikely to build a democratic school without the participation of the students, the teachers, the community and all of the stakeholders involved in the education process, it is necessary, thus, to develop participatory educational projects within multiple settings, where children can exercise their action, and which are, consequently, synonymous with the enhancement of the voice and of the turn of the child as a lead actor and, as such, an active, cooperative and dynamic person.

Striving to meet these goals requires that the school is able to boost this momentum by introducing strategies that allow a readjustment of the educational mission, on the one hand at the level of the commitments, including citizenship in the school's agenda and objectives, and on the other hand at the level of responsibilities, ensuring measures that guarantee the feasibility of a democratic and participatory management, establishing healthy pedagogical relations, so that the child actively and democratically participates with the other actors of the educational community towards a more democratic, fair and citizenry school.

In the context of the educational field, it is hoped that the educational agents appreciate the essential intents necessary for the existence of a practice of citizenship that: (1) encourages the child, as a person and a citizen; (2) promotes the construction of his/her identity and subjectivities and his/her interpersonal relationships; (3) stimulates the participation of children in the management and organization of the school, allowing them to feel integral and important partners in this process; (4) fosters the development of an awareness of belonging to the school as a setting of all and for all.

For the purpose of responding to the challenge of citizenship of the child in the educational and social context, the school that recognizes the citizenship of children is assuming the collaboration and cooperation of the child in the participation in innovative character associative activities and initiatives, as well as in carrying out collective projects that excel by their negotiating, debate and sharing characteristics. All this favors the development of the requirements that enable a gradual learning of knowing to be with others, of accepting them, so that the child's opinion, too, is accepted and understood.

What is to be done, then, in order to have a real participation in school? According to Stephenson, Gourley and Miles [16], the secret of a sustainable participation of the child is achieved through the creation of structures, in accordance with the contexts where the child is integrated, that empower him/her with participation skills. The options are varied, and they all uphold the same purpose, which is to allow them to explore several ways of approaching participation, from children's clubs, children's networks and movements to children's parliaments and councils, to which one may add others, such as: sharing in the school management, elaboration of the school newspaper, encouragement of cultural and recreational projects, implementation of several cooperative activities, organization of events (conferences, seminars, *etc*.).

In any case, it is necessary to take into consideration that the participation of children does not have the intent of imitating the adult participation institutions, but that it rather seeks diverse forms that are best suited to their ways of being and doing, acting as forms of communication that suit their expression modes and dialogue channels with the constituted power, whether they take the shape of an assertive perspective of a claim or of an assertive perspective of follow-up.

The success of the interaction between the school, the family, the environment and the child, is dependent on numerous factors, in particular on the willingness of the several actors in the process, and on the intensity of their participation. We know that there are resistances that constitute a barrier to this democratic participation, especially because of the tradition of the distance between these two institutions.

The exercise of participation of children, of families, and of communities requires transparent attitudes, democratic postures, a spirit of openness, an interest in the projects, and a wholehearted and active involvement in the several causes.

5. Schools-families Relation and Education for Citizenship in The Portuguese Educational System

The school-family relations, have a long history in pre-school education in Portugal, however, on all other educational levels, especially in the public schools, their implementation is more recent and have wandered between effective practices of collaboration and practices characterized by some conflict and distance. In the private schools, since they have a regulatory autonomy, we find a diversity of situations in accordance with their ideals: Some of them always regarded parents as partners, others maintain the resistance to this partnership, understanding parents as customers.

The major milestone that opened the doors of the school to the participation of parents dates from 1974, with the revolutionary rupture that created favorable political conditions to the emergence of the first associative practices in this area [17] with the development of social movements, the construction of social projects involving the intersection of social change with educational change, and even the change of power relations within schools and with the central power. Until that time, a centralized regime characterized by a strong social and political control precluded the presence of parents in schools, clearly demarcating areas of action for each educational sector—the family at home, the teachers in the school. According to Stoer [18], the post-1974 season made the clear link between democracy and education as a form of community-based education, playing a vital role in the construction and maintenance of a democratic society. This democratic participation meant that, progressively, the relative invisibility of the social associative movement of parents was replaced by a tendency to its expansion and, above all, the implementation of several new forms of interaction between schools and parents, organized in associations or not. The democracy born with the Revolution of April 1974 brought to light ideals and democratic values, of which we ought to highlight citizenship, understood as the right and the duty of people to influence the processes of decision-making. Parents and/or guardians, and the community as a whole, have the right and the opportunity to participate in the processes of decision-making in schools. Since then, little by little, the educational institutions have become open to the participation of the parents and of the entire educational community, thus changing the way they promote education.

Initially, this process of openness of the schools, of participation of parents and of the community at large was carried out informally, later being framed in a regulatory fashion, and progressively legitimized by new administration models and school managements. Currently, parent representatives in public schools have a presence in decision-making bodies, within educational institutions, participating in the construction and development of their educational projects. In private schools, it depends on the type of institution and on the existing regulation of parents' participation.

In addition to their formal presence in school bodies, composed only by representatives, where they had a low number of elements, there is a great diversity of situations of parental involvement in educational projects, which is largely dependent on representations and prior experiences of both parents and teachers in collaboration practices.

Revisiting an analysis conducted in a doctoral research [19], we can say that the early years post-April 25, 1974 were a great political and reflection movement on the educational sustainability for the promotion of democratic values, of freedom and of participation.

It was in 1986 that the Basic Law of the Education System (LBSE) was issued, in which the educational principles that foster those values were clarified. This law intends to be an ambitious law

that seeks to address "democratic principles, such as freedom of education, the public provision of services, equality of opportunity, fairness, secularism, freedom of participation" [20], consecrating "the great humanist direction enshrined in the best tradition of the Portuguese pedagogical thought, in the international reflection on the democratization of the educational processes and in the progressive values of the Constitution of the Republic" [21]. The promotion and affirmation of personal, social and civic valorization constitute values also stated in the law.

Education for citizenship is singled out as central in the corpus of the Basic Law, highlighting the concern for the students' integral development as responsible citizens able to actively participate and intervene in society. Half of the purposes stated in the LBSE concern socialization, referring to issues of democratic citizenship, of which we can highlight point 4 of Article 2, where one can read: "the education system meets the needs resulting from the social reality, thus contributing to the full and harmonious development of the personality of individuals, encouraging the formation of free, responsible, autonomous and solidary citizens, and valuing the human dimension of work" [22]. Along the articles of the law, specific organizational objective principles for each educational level as well as curricular guidelines are set out in order to substantiate the principles laid down.

The implementation of these purposes occurred only from 1989 onwards, with the execution of the new curriculum of the primary and secondary education, defined by Decree-Law No. 286/89, of 29 August [23], of which states, in agreement with the theme we are here addressing, the creation of two new areas—the School Area and the Area of Personal and Social Training (FPS). The School Area is directed towards citizenship itself and, as such, includes a program of mandatory civic education for the participation in democratic institutions. The FPS itself presents with global goals that favor the development of affective, interventive, cognitive, social, relational skills and several kinds of knowledge (being and doing), which allow students to assume certain positions, attitudes and opinions that facilitate their autonomy, their confidence, their involvement and intervention in areas that are challenges to them and that give rise to doubts.

The basic school thus not only aims at the transmission of several kinds of knowledge, but focuses on the development of attitudes of personal autonomy and solidarity, of working habits and attitudes of cooperation, of respect for work and colleagues, and of availability for mutual assistance.

Later, in 1998, the issue of citizenship was prominent again with the publication of a document produced by the Ministry of Education, entitled *Educação, Integração, Cidadania – Documento Orientador da Políticas para o Ensino Básico (Education, Integration, Citizenship – guidelines of polities to basic education)* [24]. Through discussion, criticism and reflection on this document, it was intended that this document would serve as a basis for the forthcoming curricular reorganization to be implemented in a short time. In this document, aspects of great importance to the school were synthesized, such as the integration of curricular, extracurricular and trans-disciplinary components in the *curriculum*; the valorization of the project work; the school time reduction and strengthening of sport, culture and education activities; the flexibility of the national *curriculum*; the strengthening of the autonomy of schools; the assumption of education for citizenship as a privileged setting.

In accordance with the reflection that this document would have provided, it was expected that the functions of the school would begin to change, focusing on the goal of "ensuring the integral training of the students", ensuring in all basic education cycles "that the educational activities and the education for citizenship are consistently and permanently combined" [24]. To achieve this objective,

the learning and teaching environments would have to favor the development of skills, integrating several kinds of knowledge (doing, being, thinking), developing critical thinking, the exercise of citizenship and of participation, and encouraging collaboration, sharing and research, always keeping in mind the idea that "training for citizenship is lived, experienced, and learned in each moment of school life" [24].

From that moment onwards, a new basic school curricular reorganization appeared in 2001 with the Decree-Law No. 6/2001, of 18 January [25] which stated that citizenship was to be treated as transversal and consecrated the implementation of several measures to promote the full development of the student, the acquisition of attitudes and values, significant learning, and basic skills. The political discourse of that age, expressed through the voice of the Minister of Education, advocated that education for citizenship traverses the entire curriculum as well as the entire organization of the school and its articulation with other bodies of socialization.

From this curricular reorganization, and from the viewpoint of the curriculum, emerged the notion of skill, replacing the notion of goal. The adopted notion of skill had a wide and open nature, being conceived "as several kinds of knowledge being used that were required for the personal and social quality of life of all citizens, to be promoted gradually throughout basic education" [25]. Meanwhile, after ten years of implementation of this curricular reform, and having been subjected to a controversial analysis among the educational agents—some of them reinforcing the relevance of skills-based work with a serious approach to the multiple functions of the school (instructional, personalizing, socializing), others questioning the effectiveness of this approach, with a view to, and in defense of, the knowledge of the contents of the classical subjects—a new curricular reorganization was implemented in 2012 that negates all the purposes and measures previously defined and implemented. Thus, in defense of an adjustment of the curricula that suits the needs of a modern and demanding education, with a view to improving school achievement of our students and a rational management of resources" (ME, 2012) [26], the subjects of Portuguese language and mathematics are revalued as being fundamental, the so-called curricular dispersion is reduced, the discipline of Civic Training is eliminated, while maintaining, transversally, the relevance of its content, and all the learning process must be planned according to "clear, rigorous, measurable and accountable" goals [26].

As a curiosity, it should be noted that at the same time that the new curricular reorganization was announced, in which the issues of personalization and of socialization are absolutely surpassed by the overvaluing of instruction, the Recommendation No. 1/2012 by the National Education Council[1] (CNE), was drafted, which says: "reinforce the centrality of education to citizenship and its crucial importance in the public school", stating that "education for citizenship is part (and should continue to be part) of the *mandates* of the school in Portugal". It follows that there is no effective congruence between the educational policy measures with the consultation bodies in which they should be sustained.

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[1] The National Education Council is an independent body, with advisory functions, whose duty is to issue opinions, advices and recommendations on all educational matters, by its own initiative or in response to requests that of the Parliament and of the Government.

6. The New Roles of the School

These new school directions are opposed to the conservation of the culture of isolation that has characterized it for many decades: In kindergartens and primary schools, because they have little dimensions and are marked by a great geographical dispersion; in secondary schools, because the teachers focus their teaching on their disciplinary groups; in both, because they define clear borders with the communities. If they continue isolated, schools shall remain confronted with the lack of resources commonly noticed, with the constant mobility of teachers, with the overcrowding or the lack of students, with the difficulties of training.

However, the school is gradually breaking the strict boundaries it has built in relation to the communities: Teachers break the barriers that define their scope of action, and parents are then regarded as active partners and full members of the educational process. All of us have the right and the duty to work out together the conceptualization of our children's education.

School is, nowadays, a crossroads of social, ethnic, and religious cultures. The respect and appreciation of diversity is an enrichment for the school in different dimensions. An enrichment in curricular terms, in terms of building social skills, in terms of knowledge, in terms of sharing the feeling that we belong to a world that is not confined to the geographical area in which we live.

The school is now called upon to accommodate the children of families that come from the "outside"; it seeks to host them, to assist them in learning, and to integrate them in the educational community. It also seeks to play an important role in preparing all children for an education for diversity. In assigning importance to diversity, we create new strategies, new responses to promote the interest, and the educational success of all those who belong to the school. It is, therefore, necessary to educate in coexistence, in the respect for democratic principles, in positive interaction, in encouraging solidarity and tolerant attitudes; *i.e.*, to educate in the citizenry. In this scenario, we can say that both families and teachers play a central role, since both can jointly either promote relations of exclusion or constructive relations [27]. Their attitudes, behaviors and ways of thinking can be easily reproduced and imitated, so they are expected to assume themselves as intercultural mediators in their roles of educators.

We believe that teachers should not be alone when one intends to develop projects that promote multicultural education. They must rely on the collaboration of other partners, such as parents and the surrounding community, and of other institutions, who help them to ensure the equality and dignity of all of the actors involved, primarily of children from other countries, and to promote cultural identities in a positive way.

In view of the enormity of requests and of resources of modern times, our children and youngsters overvalue the direct, the immediate, so it will be on the relation between school learning and everyday activities that, gradually, education will be able to open the doors to new dialogues and perspectives, fostering development. Learning is to be active in character, providing children with stimulating challenges and with the manipulation of objects; it must be significant, corresponding to the interests and needs of children; it shall integrate, relating everyone's experiences; it should be diversified, enabling the access to a variety of resources and to the use of numerous strategies; and socializing, ensuring a personal and a social, consistent and critical training. Only with integrating knowledge, shall it become the understanding of reality as an integrated whole be possible.

These perspectives meet the four pillars identified as priorities for education in the 21st century, singled out by UNESCO, whereby it is important to promote learning for knowledge, the enjoyment of learning to learn, the learning of doing, the enhancement of the learning to be, and the learning to live together. Education, nowadays, calls for the revaluation of direct action, of construction, emphasizing social values as insurmountable, such as are democracy, solidarity, sharing, attention to the other, the otherness. On that basis, the dialogue between cultures, the negotiations concerning the participation of each person or of each group on sharing spaces, and on the prospects to follow, are crucial for an active collaboration that seeks the resolution of the problems of our children, as well as to implement community actions that promote progress.

7. The Construction of the Education Project as Making Explicit the Citizenry of the School

It will be on the basis of that dialogue, negotiation and collaboration that the possibility of constructing an autonomous school and, as such, characterized citizens emerges. Autonomous, because unique, because unlike all others, because it has its own identity, given to it by the group of people inhabiting it, by the specific group of partners with whom it interfaces, by the concrete geographical space where it is located. Citizen, because it makes possible citizenship practices, because it experiences and lives democratically, because it creates opportunities for participation and for listening.

The autonomy of each school shall have to be expressed in the construction of a shared educational project.

An educational project where the identity and uniqueness of each school is clarified, where the reference values for the everyday life of all elements of the educational community are clearly defined, which implies from all of its actors—parents, teachers, students, others—openness, a sense of responsibility, refection, and constant and contextualized diagnostic and intervention capacity. An educational project which defines the guidelines of education, the priorities at the level of the education and socialization of the children, young people and adults of this school. An educational project that recognizes that there are different interests in the educational communities, which need to be respected, so that the school can assume itself as the space of a normal and natural coexistence, the field of action of everybody. In the respect of the diversity of interests, one can gather the participation of all members of the school, while preserving specific skills necessary for each group.

Teachers have an expert knowledge; they have their own educational skills and their specific areas of intervention. As have parents. Only through mutual respect shall it be possible for both to stay together, sharing their knowledge, their life histories, their anxieties, their expectations, in order to make possible the smooth development of the educational project. This educational project will create innovating strategies, which shall meet the specificities of each community.

Crucial in this process is the inclusion of a *praxis,* which promotes the appreciation of the ideas and opinions of children, their participation in various circumstances and decisions of life, among other aspects. This new assertion implies the re-conceptualization of the relationship between adults and children, forcing the former to realize the relevance of the child's life experiences to his/her participation, so that, together, they design situations and settings for an effective participation. With the structures created, the children "confront, discuss ideas and plans, enter into negotiation and

sometimes rupture processes... and assume the consequences of their attitudes" [27]. The citizen-child of our age assumes himself/herself as an active, dynamic, interventive social actor, with the skills to cooperate within his/her main spheres of action.

In its quality as an educational community, the school is based on an articulation between the various social partners—parents, cultural and recreational groups, local authorities, and others. All these agents share the responsibility for the education of the children, which means that the educational responsibility is thus understood as a duty of all citizens.

8. Conclusions

A brief summary, in which the core concepts underlying this article are articulated—citizenship, autonomy, educational cooperation, highlights that:

1. The involvement of the several social actors is effective when it follows everyone's voluntary membership. Being present does not mean, just by itself, participating; for participation to occur, each child, teacher, parent or others, have to want to play a role, to assume decision-making, initiative, dialogue and collaboration postures;
2. The development of projects built on a collaborative basis allows the un-concealment of children's participation, facilitating the visibility of their actions, as well as the recognition of children's right to play an active and creative role in their own life, according to a pedagogical process in which learning is built, in a co-construction between children and adults, forcing deconstruction of traditional practices and representations;
3. The promotion of collaborative projects is a basis for the development of democracy and solidarity in today's society, enabling a different understanding of the school, of its aims, of its members and of its area of interaction in society;
4. Citizenship practices are built into everyday life at school, in collaborative processes and by obeying the pedagogical principles tailored to different groups and to diverse communities, on the basis of autonomy, facilitating the reconstruction of new forms of social and educational solidarity.

Thus, it will be on the basis of the exercise of that citizenship, assuming its autonomy that school should be made to happen.

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