Introducing Global Citizenship Education into Classroom Practice:
A Study on Italian 8th Grade Students

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∽   The implementation of global citizenship education (GCE) represents a challenge for the school system in Italy in terms of curriculum planning, teaching methods and contents. After a thorough overview of the Italian educational scenario on GCE, this article aims to present a learning unit on GCE related issues implemented in an Italian 8th-grade class. The study then highlights the educational implications in translating GCE international models into the Italian classroom practice. Its main assumptions focus on the key elements for students' effective learning and on the limitations that characterise the Italian educational system in relation to GCE at the curriculum, school and teaching levels. The implications highlighted in this article are strongly intertwined with the need to plan and implement GCE jointly, within a whole-school approach, and the relevance of the modalities in which GCE instructional contents are selected and presented.

Keywords: global citizenship education, Italy, learning unit, globalisation

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Uvajanje globalnega državljanskega izobraževanja v prakso: raziskava z italijanskimi osmošolci

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∽   Implementacija globalnega državljanskega izobraževanja (GDI) predstavlja izzive za šolski sistem v Italiji v smislu kurikularnega načrtovanja, metod poučevanja in vsebin. Po temeljitem pregledu italijanskih izobraževalnih scenarijev na temo GDI ima ta prispevek namen predstaviti učno enoto o temah, povezanih z GDI, ki bi jih lahko implementirali v italijanski osmi razred osnovne šole. Študija poudarja izobraževalne implikacije pri prevajanju mednarodnega modela GDI v italijansko šolsko prakso. Njene glavne predpostavke se osredinjajo na ključne elemente za uspešno učenčevo učenje in omejitve, ki so značilne za italijanski izobraževalni sistem v odnosu do GDI na kurikularnih, šolskih in na poučevalnih ravneh. Implikacije, ki so poudarjene v tem prispevku, so močno prepletene s potrebo po skupnem načrtovanju in implementaciji GDI znotraj vsešolskega pristopa in relevantnosti modalitet, znotraj katerih so izbrane in predstavljene vsebine GDI.

Ključne besede: globalno državljansko izobraževanje, Italija, učna enota, globalizacija

Introduction

The promotion of global citizenship education (GCE) has become an objective of educational systems in various parts of the world, emphasising how globalisation has raised the idea of citizenship from a national to a global level and has challenged teaching and learning in terms of global understanding and citizens' roles (Myers, 2016; Osler & Starkey, 2006).

In Italy, debate and research on GCE remain at their beginnings. The implementation of GCE, in accordance with the global discourse on the issue, represents a challenge for the Italian school system in terms of both teaching methodologies and curriculum planning. In this view, GCE is closely connected with the larger research field, which receives the most attention at the national level, specifically how best to develop students' key competences (MIUR, 2015; Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2006).

While the academic debate has recently started to focus on the topic, there is an absence of research examining how global citizenship education can be introduced into the classroom practice, taking into consideration the studies developed at the international level and the characteristics of the Italian school system.

This qualitative study addresses this gap by presenting a learning unit on GCE-related issues implemented in an Italian 8th grade class. In the absence of national curricula or guidelines, theoretical assumptions, proposed educational methodologies and instruction contents are drawn from sources found in the international debate on the topic. Implications as they relate to the Italian educational context are then shown.

Finally, this article presents the advantages and challenges to be expected from any future implementation of GCE in Italy as regards curriculum structure, school organisation, and teacher confidence in tackling global citizenship issues.

Defining Global Citizenship and Global Citizenship Education

The development of a widespread academic discourse on global citizenship (GC) and Global Citizenship Education (GCE) has been characterised by contributions from a disparate range of disciplines, encompassing a wide variety of theoretical assumptions and methodologies (Parmenter, 2011).

Oxley and Morris (2013), in a study on the construction of a typology to distinguish the different conceptions related to GC, highlight the multi-faceted interpretations both in the academic and non-academic debate, identifying two general forms of GC: cosmopolitan based and advocacy based.

In line with Oxley and Morris' classification, cosmopolitan theories are indeed widely prevalent and have, more or less explicitly, heavily influenced the conceptualisation and the debate related to GC and consequently to GCE (Appiah, 2006; Archibugi, 2012; Beck, 2006; Dower, 2000; Held, 1995; Nussbaum, 1994).

Cosmopolitan theories have been addressed, although implicitly, also by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which have provided a relevant contribution to the definition of the concept of global citizenship. According to UNESCO (2014), GCE is intended as:

> […] a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity, promoting a 'global gaze' that links the local to the global and the national to the international. It is also a way of understanding, acting and relating oneself to others and the environment in space and in time, based on universal values, through respect for diversity and pluralism. In this context, each individual's life has implications in day-to-day decisions that connect the global with the local, and vice versa. (p. 14)

The present contribution refers to the conceptualisation of global citizenship developed by UNESCO (2014, 2015) and thus considers as core elements of GC the sense of belonging to a world community, the awareness of global interconnections (according to which the actions at a local level can affect the world and vice versa), and active engagement.

In this view, it follows that global citizenship education implies something more than, and different from, previous ideas about global education (Pike & Selby, 1995; Richardson, 1976), albeit its meaning and conceptualisation do remain under discussion (Davies, Evans, Osler, & Starkey, 2006; Hicks, 2003; Reid, 2005), as critical approaches to GCE show. In these critical perspectives, the discourse on GCE is intended to be strongly dominated by Western societies and by the type and form of knowledge they favour (Andreotti, 2006; Andreotti & de Souza, 2012; Pashby, 2016; Wang, 2016).

GCE core concepts concern the promotion of civic awareness worldwide through the conceptual tools of democracy, peace, human rights and social justice (Pike, 2008; Wringe, 1999), in order to prepare students to live and act in a context of global change, interdependence and diversity and to influence the processes of globalisation (Ibrahim, 2005).

In this study GCE is not simply considered in relation to a 'more informed local citizenship education' or, using a minimalist interpretation, a generic 'international awareness' (Davies, 2006 p.6), nor is it an ambiguous sense of belonging to a universal society. Global citizenship education is understood as knowledge

of, and willingness to influence decision-making processes throughout the world and their effects on the lives of individuals in pursuing common interests.

Global citizenship education in Italy

The education system in Italy is organised according to the subsidiarity principle and autonomy of schools. The State has exclusive competence on general issues of education, on minimum standards to be guaranteed throughout the country and on the fundamental principles that regions should comply with within their areas of authority. Schools are autonomous in the areas of curriculum planning, didactics, organisation, and research.

The National Curricular Guidelines for the Italian primary and lower secondary schools (Indicazioni Nazionali, 2012), created by a group of experts on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR), contain the general recommendations for the development of school curricula for students aged 3 to 14. The *Indicazioni Nazionali* provide an overview of essential elements related to curriculum organisation. They are focused on general learning objectives and competence development in relation to every subject, on student assessments, and on relationships between schools, families, and pupils.

These guidelines contain no explicit reference to GCE, although emphasis is laid on the importance of a new citizenship open to global challenges and to diversity, as well as on the importance of traditional curricular subjects. To develop citizens who belong not only to Italy but also to Europe and to the world, schools must foster 'an awareness of multicultural experiences in different periods of human history and different areas of the globe' (ibid, p. 7). The focus is thus on analysing cultural elements, which is done mainly via the traditional curricular subjects of History and Geography.

Considering the above, it is not surprising that in the ministerial curricula a strong emphasis is placed on multiculturalism and the development of intercultural education, one of the issues that is most debated by scholars in Italy, regarding the effects of globalisation in modern society (Luatti, 2009; Portera, Dusi, & Guidetti, 2010; Santerini, 2010; Tarozzi, 2005).

Although Global Citizenship Education is not explicitly part of the existing curriculum, some of the ideas identified by the international debate on the topic (e.g., globalisation and interdependence, sustainable development) are included in the History and Geography curricula, while the development of related skills and attitudes is transversal to the whole curriculum.

In the *Indicazioni Nazionali*, in fact, the goals for competence development in History and Geography by the end of lower secondary school include

some elements that relate to GCE, such as 1) understanding different opinions and cultures, and the problems of the contemporary world (History curriculum), 2) knowledge of the events and processes of European and global history (from the Middle Ages to globalisation) (History curriculum), 3) evaluation of the effects that human actions produce at local and global levels (Geography curriculum).

The rationale underpinning the *Indicazioni Nazionali* can also be recognised in the recent school 'reform'[2] (Reform of the national education, 2015).[3] The law n.107 envisaged, among the new activities to be carried out by an additional teaching workforce (*organico funzionale*), the possibility that schools might implement cross-curricular projects related to the development of democratic and active citizenship. These projects should be focused on intercultural and peace education, on solidarity with others and the awareness of rights and duties, on the strengthening of students' knowledge in relation to legal and economic/financial issues, and on entrepreneurship.

With respect to GCE implementation in schools, Italian NGOs appear more receptive to the discussions which have developed worldwide. They show deep interest in global citizenship education, creating teaching resources and launching several initiatives in schools on the topic. For instance, in 2004-2007Amnesty International Italia carried out several projects with schools on social justice, while TerraNuova and EuropAfrica have dealt with food sovereignty and the land-grabbing phenomenon.

These programmes usually last for a single school day (sometimes only for a few hours), and generally include short activities aimed at student involvement (mainly role-plays, discussions and so on) with the goal of fostering attitudes and values, as opposed to developing theoretical knowledge of GCE-related topics which should be taught during regular school lessons.

However, given the lack of official guidelines for GCE in Italy and given school autonomy in relation to curriculum planning and implementation, in-depth teaching of GCE matters varies from school to school and especially from teacher to teacher.

The main issue is the degree of familiarity of teachers with teaching GCE, in terms of both knowledge of the topics and suitable teaching methodologies. If we consider that in Italy teachers who usually teach History and Geography have a university degree in Humanities, with a strong focus on Literature, History, History of Arts and Classical Language, it is unsurprising that they may face difficulties in addressing matters mainly related to economics or international policy.

2   To what extent, if at all, the law n.107 can be considered a reform is a debated issue in Italy. This is because its main aim was not to reform the whole educational system but rather to overcome some critical structural problems, such as the employment of teaching staff, which have heavily influenced Italian politics on education over the last 15 years.

3   Available at http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/07/15/15G00122/sg.

Furthermore, the lack of specific national guidelines contributes to the extreme variety of the ways global citizenship education can be implemented. They may range from more traditional methodologies (e.g., a lecture) to more dynamic approaches, such as discussions and debates, again depending on teachers' familiarity with applying these methodologies.

Another crucial issue is the kind of textbook adopted by the school or the individual teacher for History or Geography lessons, the subjects most closely related to GCE. As stated above, Italian schools, on the basis of the *Indicazioni Nazionali*, can decide autonomously what specific contents and methodologies to include in their educational programmes. Given this scenario, a school (or more often a single teacher) can opt to plan the contents of curricular subjects by simply following the topics included in the textbook s/he is adopting in that school year. In this way, the use of a traditional textbook mainly focused on physical and human geography means that the chances of tackling GCE matters depend entirely on the teacher's interest and confidence in addressing those topics.

According to these assumptions, it is questionable that Italian students could have many opportunities to learn GCE at school. This consideration underpins the rationale of the present research and led to the creation of a learning unit on global citizenship education.

Identifying GCE contents

Because of the present situation with respect to teaching GCE in Italy, the theoretical assumptions and educational methodologies for this study are derived entirely from international research on the topic.

The guide for schools *A Curriculum for Global Citizenship* (1997, 2006), developed by the British NGO Oxfam, constitutes the general framework for the present study. This has been combined with the content of the UNESCO report (2015) and the GCE-related content included in *Compass*, the manual for Human Rights Education (HRE) developed by the Council of Europe (2012).

In *A Curriculum for Global Citizenship*, the British NGO highlights many key GCE principles in relation to all levels of education. The present study is focused only on some of the knowledge and understanding aspects identified by Oxfam, i.e., social justice and equity; diversity; globalisation and interdependence, which could easily be applied in an Italian 8th-grade class.[4]

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4   It was not possible to tackle issues related to attitudes, values and skills due to the time constraints of the present study. In order to develop and assess GCE skills, for instance, it would have been necessary to devote at least some months or a year to global citizenship education activities. This option has not found the favour of teachers who were reluctant in focusing in the long term on topics that are not compulsory in the Italian curriculum.

The key principles of a global citizenship education identified by UN-ESCO (2015) mirror most of the elements highlighted by the British NGO: GCE students learn to analyse contemporary issues at local levels while considering their connections with the global level and identifying possible solutions.

For the present study, it was deemed of paramount importance to include, in addition to Oxfam's and UNESCO's cognitive elements on GCE, issues more specifically focused on human rights and human rights education (HRE). Human rights represent the values on which moral education can be built, through the analysis of their general principles (Krek & Zabel, 2016). In this research, HRE is intended as the starting point for addressing the social, economic, environmental and political aspects of the contemporary world. Moreover, HRE and GCE share several key elements and can easily be included in a single theoretical framework focused on global issues (Ibrahim, 2005).

According to the Council of Europe, HRE aims at promoting in students the knowledge, skills and attitudes to build and defend the universal culture of human rights (Council of Europe, 2010).

As for the knowledge dimension, the present study refers to those HRE objectives that aim at fostering understanding of: 1) key concepts (such as freedom, justice, equality, human dignity etc.); 2) the role of human rights; 3) the distinctions and co-relations between civil/political and social/economic rights; 4) national and international bodies and NGOs working to support and protect human rights (Brander et al., 2012).

The theoretical assumptions and the educational methodologies for this study thus represent a selection of the different strands deemed relevant by the international debate and highlight, once more, the multiple theoretical intersections that constitute GCE.

The research design

The present study shows the implementation of a learning unit (LU) on GCE in an Italian 8th-grade class, with the ultimate aim of highlighting the implications at curriculum and school levels for planning GCE in Italy.

As stated in the previous paragraph, the LU is focused on those contents, teaching methodologies and sources related to GCE that can be successfully adapted within the Italian school context.

The LU objective is twofold: 1) to provide 8th-grade students with basic knowledge of some GCE-related topics and an opportunity to critically reflect upon the complexity of contemporary issues; 2) to offer teachers lessons and trialled tools to teach GCE issues effectively in the 8th grade.

The LU is intended as a first trial for an effective GCE implementation in Italy. The focus of the LU is entirely devoted to developing students' knowledge in relation to GCE topics.

The LU was implemented within a pre-experimental research design, the one group pre-test post-test design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). This research design involves the administration to a single group (an 8th-grade class, in this case) of a pre-test at the beginning and a post-test at the end and does not include any comparison with a control group.

Due to characteristics of the Italian curriculum, it was not possible to set up a control group. Since GCE topics are not part of the official curricula in schools, not all teachers tackle them in the same way, if at all. This means that any differences that might have been observed between the experimental and a potential control group could have been ascribed, in whole or in part, to the specific topics addressed in the class where the test took place, rather than to any significant differences in pedagogical designs and approaches.

The same test was administered to students at the beginning and at the end of the LU, and it addressed the topics tackled during the lessons. Since the LU aimed at fostering awareness on GCE topics, this kind of instrument proved to be the best option for assessing students' knowledge development (considering the different bias of pre-experimental designs).

The target group was chosen based on the one adopted for the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) survey on civic and citizenship education (ICCS) (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010). Global Citizenship Education is strongly intertwined with the concepts of civic and citizenship education (CCE), in terms of the connections between the national and the global sphere (e.g., the interplay from the local to the global and the different sense of belonging and cultural unconscious at national and international level). Moreover, citizenship education is a subject included in the curriculum (even if with diverse approaches, as the ICCS study shows), while GCE has no official recognition in the school programmes yet.

In light of the above, it was deemed necessary to link this first trial of a GCE learning unit in Italy to the wider framework of one of the most prominent studies on CCE at the international level that also includes, among others, global-oriented issues, albeit with no direct reference to GCE.

Development of the learning unit

Target group characteristics

The class identified for the study was part of a school located in a sub-urban area of the city of Rome, and it was composed of 16 students, ten males and six females, all Italian native speakers.[5] Most of the students came from middle-class families in which both parents work (they were mainly employees and retailers). The highest levels of education attained by the parents were the high school diploma (for the majority of mothers) and the Masters' Degree (for the majority of fathers).

The teacher of Italian Language, History, and Geography[6] of the selected class was the contact person for the present study. As previously stated, History and Geography are the subjects most related to the GCE topics, and it was agreed that the LU would be implemented during regular Geography lesson hours.

The author, who is a researcher and not a teacher, carried out the lessons.[7] The author knew neither the students nor the teacher of the selected class before the study. In the preparatory phase, several meetings with the teacher took place in order to gather information on the characteristics of the students, their approach to learning and their relations with the teaching staff.

According to their teacher, the students were not aware of the topics on which the LU was focused. The pre-test results confirmed this, as detailed in the following paragraphs.

The structure and content of the LU

A learning unit is:

[…] a sub-segment, complete in itself, of a teaching program which is obtained by structuring a portion of content and which includes the definition of the objectives to be pursued, the duration of the learning path, and the assessment tools needed to evaluate outcomes. (Vertecchi, 2004, p. 252)

The learning unit is thus characterised by its self-sufficiency, and by the development of a teaching and learning path with set time limits.

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5   Parents and children consent was obtained before the study.
6   In 8th grade, a single teacher may teach Italian Language, History, and Geography in the same class.
7   This study follows the ethical standards for scientific work developed by the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

The learning unit of the present study was structured into 10 lessons, each lasting two hours and carried out once a week during regular lesson hours over a three-month period (from the end of October 2013 to the end of January 2014). Although the duration of the LU was quite limited, it allowed implementing the objectives of the learning path, also taking into consideration the teacher's requests. Due to strict curricular constraints, mostly related to the final examination at the end of the year,[8] the teacher was unable to provide the author with any further hours to a subject that was not compulsory.

The planning of the learning unit devoted to GCE was organised into five different phases (Vertecchi, 2002):

1.   definition and analysis of the learning contents and their interrelations;
2.   identification of students' learning prerequisites deemed to be relevant for understanding the activities envisaged;
3.   development of activities that foster student learning;
4.   formulation of the learning objectives, i.e., the desired outcomes in terms of students' knowledge;
5.   development of evaluations to assess the attainment of prerequisites and of intermediate and final learning stages.

As detailed in the previous paragraph, the topics of the LU were derived among GCE key strands identified in the Oxfam and UNESCO reports and in *Compass* manual. They covered different disciplines (such as economics, geopolitics, international cooperation, human rights), deemed relevant in understanding today's world matters and strictly interrelated with each other.

The 10 lessons of the learning unit were focused on issues such as poverty, the UN and NGOs, globalisation, migration, human rights, land grabbing, fair-trade, child labour, the global garment supply chain, and child marriage.

The pedagogical approach underpinning the new course encompassed participatory teaching and learning methodologies (role-plays, discussions, plenary sessions to analyse controversial issues in depth, research and group sessions).

The sources used to develop the learning unit were mostly non-educational, including newspaper articles, YouTube videos, NGO and international agency reports on specific contemporary topics, documents (e.g., the Declaration of Human Rights) and speeches (e.g., Malala Yousafzai's speech at the UN in July 2013).

Learning objectives (LOs) followed Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001). Since the LU was focused on the development of student

8   In Italy at the end of 8th grade, students must take an examination to enter upper secondary schools.

knowledge, LOs mainly involved factual and conceptual areas (related to the knowledge dimension) and areas of 'remembering' and 'understanding' (related to the cognitive process dimension), together with their sub-categories.

The test administered at the beginning and at the end of the LU was based on the LOs, structured in an assessment plan. The assessment plan served as a learning objectives framework, i.e., it covered all the subjects tackled in the LU and ensured the correspondence between the LOs and lesson topics. The content validity of the pre-/post-test, in terms of representativeness of all the principal issues included in the intervention, was constantly monitored during the course and was finally guaranteed (Taylor & Bobbit Nolen, 2005).

This test was piloted on 97 eighth-grade students in September 2013 for validation. The data from the pilot were analysed using descriptive statistics and classical test theory (CTT) indicators (items' difficulty index, item discrimination index, and the analysis of distractors).

The pre-/post test administered to the class selected for this study was the result of major modifications to the pilot version. It consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions with four possible answers (see Example 1) and five sets of true/false items.

Example 1 – a multiple choice question
Who are immigrant traffickers (*scafisti*)?[9]
(please check only one box)

Immigrants who arrive in Italy by boat
Fishermen who save immigrants in trouble at sea
People who pilot little boats carrying clandestine immigrants *
Coast Guard officers who monitor Italian coasts day and night

Finally, the LU also included a feedback questionnaire to gather students' comments on the course. It was composed of 15 close-ended questions, seven questions about students' background and eight questions about lesson topics, activity, difficulty, and assessment (e.g., how interested students were in accomplishing the different activities of the course; which were considered the most interesting topics and which issues were deemed to be more difficult to understand). All close-ended questions had a four-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 'very interested' to 'not interested at all' or from 'very difficult' to 'very easy'. Two questions had an open-ended format and were aimed at

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9   The Italian word for 'immigrant trafficker' is '*scafista*' a term derived from '*scafi*', the little boats on which many clandestine immigrants arrive in Italy.

gathering students' opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of the LU structure and recommendations for further improvements.

GCE in classroom practice: educational implications

The lessons on GCE proved to be effective in developing students' knowledge. The results of the post-test showed a positive improvement in all participating students (mean pre-test score = 11.6 (SD=2.44); mean post-test score = 19 (SD=4.23); maximum test score=25). The Wilcoxon matched pairs test showed that the difference between pre-test scores and post-test scores was significant beyond the .01 level[10] (Z=−3.521).
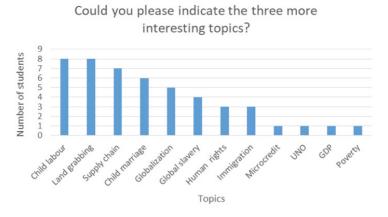
In relation to the learning objectives, developed as stated in the previous paragraph through Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) and focused on knowledge development, students have made progress in the factual and conceptual areas (knowledge dimension) and in the cognitive process dimension of 'understanding' (i.e., in comparing local and global issues, in identifying and explaining their roots, in interpreting possible solutions for change).

Data gathered from the feedback questionnaire revealed that the overall opinion about the course was positive for seven students and very positive for nine students.
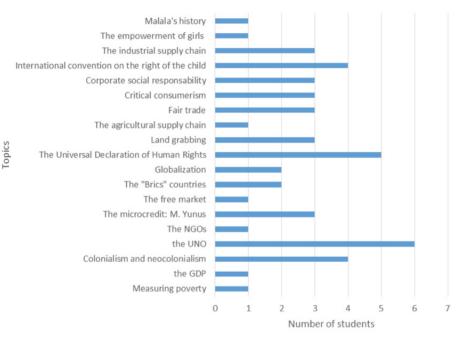
Among the activities carried out during the lessons, all students found doing role-plays, and watching videos and documentaries on YouTube to be interesting. In contrast, the activities that aroused less interest were focused on the reading of newspaper articles and on analysis of world maps.

Topics that were deemed to be more interesting were related to child labour and land grabbing (see Figure 1), while the most perceived difficult issues concerned theoretical contents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Right, the UN history and organisation, the International Convention on the Right of the Child, the colonialism and neo-colonialism (see Figure 2).

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10   However, it must be taken into consideration that in pre-experimental designs it is not possible to control the extraneous variables that can jeopardise internal validity (such as history, maturation, selection, mortality, testing, instrumentation, statistical regression) (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

Could you please indicate the three more interesting topics?

Figure 1. The most interesting topics.

Which of the following topics were difficult for you to understand? Please select three topics

Figure 2. The most difficult topics.

Although the results from this study are mainly related to a single group of students and a specific school context, the creation and development of the

learning unit allows some practical conclusions to be drawn about any future implementation of GCE in Italian schools in relation to: 1) students' prior knowledge of GCE; 2) empathy development; 3) participatory teaching and learning activities; 4) the creation/the selection of teaching resources; 5) the sustainability of GCE activities over time in the classroom.

With respect to students' prior knowledge, the results from the pilot and the pre-test showed a superficial awareness in relation to general knowledge with which students were supposed to be familiar. In detail, the results of the pre-test showed that students were not aware of most GCE issues necessary to understand the LU's topics. These elements might have been acquired in formal learning (the study of colonialism for instance) or in informal education (e.g., the UN role or the meaning of the term *refugee*, something that could be easily learnt through newspaper reading or television).

Since GCE is generally intended as a transversal subject that tackles topics that may often not be included in formal curricula, an analysis of how students stand in relation to the subject's knowledge becomes far from trivial and represents a key aspect that must be carefully addressed.[11]

The questionnaire administered at the end of the course provided useful feedback on strengths and weaknesses related to the implementation of the LU.

In particular, the sections devoted to the topics and activities that interested students the most generated some useful information. All students showed a deep interest in matters that concerned other boys and girls of the same age living in poverty and slavery in different parts of the world. Reading the history of Iqbal Masih, watching some videos on YouTube about children in a brick factory in Pakistan, students became emotionally involved and asked to learn more about those topics. The participatory activities underpinning these lessons (e.g., plenary comments and debates, group activities) and the use of non-educational sources (such as newspaper articles and web-based materials) stimulated their curiosity and participation. Obtaining the emotional involvement of students, who have been provided with a sound knowledge of the causes and consequences of a specific matter, can be considered the most promising takeaway from the present study on GCE. Emotional involvement can develop empathy with other people throughout the world, thus fostering active engagement in society to change an existing situation (Banks, 2008; Merryfield, 2008).

Students also expressed interest in participatory teaching and learning activities. Given that their teacher of Italian Language, History, and Geography

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11   Students' low knowledge of GCE matters was duly taken into consideration when developing the LU. This entailed some additional explanations and analysis of the most relevant preparatory topics of which students were supposed to be aware.

(the contact person for the present study) mostly applied traditional approaches during her lessons, the possibility to interact, to play different roles in role-plays, to carry out research work, and to discuss freely with each other encouraged students' curiosity and interest and motivated their learning.[12]

The teaching resources created and selected for the course represent another element, which strengthened the effectiveness of the LU and contributed to the positive feedback on the course.

The few Italian educational sources available on GCE are usually written texts focused on theoretical analysis or artificial situations and characters that exemplify contemporary phenomena. In contrast, the present learning unit is characterised by the use of non-educational sources (texts, videos, pictures, etc.) focused on real matters and events at the local and global levels. These were largely retrieved from the web and were mainly in English. They consequently needed to be translated and simplified to be fully understood by 8th-grade students, whose English knowledge was not advanced.

On the Internet, the teaching resources developed specifically for GCE, such as those created by Oxfam, are available only in English. Materials on GCE topics available in Italian that can be adopted and used in class are scarce in comparison to the English ones. These materials are mainly precluded to Italian teachers, due to their unfamiliarity with the English language. When translations are offered, they often are a reduced version, including only the most relevant information, with respect to the original English one (e.g., the reports of international NGOs in Italian on the land-grabbing phenomenon or global slavery).

The ability to use the multiplicity of web sources available in English is necessary not only in terms of a wider range of resources that can be adopted in class but also, and primarily, for teachers and students to be able to compare contrasting points of view and critically analyse multi-faceted matters, as research showed (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016; Zhao, 2010). Contemporary global issues are, in fact, likely to have elements and implications subject to much debate, so it is fundamental to study them within a learning framework encompassing the use of different sources, which present contrasting explanations of any given situation. This will then support students in understanding the complexity of today's world, and in avoiding simplistic and often Manichean interpretations of reality.

This latter point is a critical aspect for GCE implementation: teachers who want to address GCE topics in class should be aware of the existence of conflicting analyses of contemporary matters and, at the same time, should

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12   Participatory pedagogy can also boost skills and develop attitudes but, given the time restraint of the learning unit, it was not possible to measure a feasible enhancement of these characteristics.

attempt to avoid allowing their personal opinions to influence the choice of learning contents and subsequent interpretations. Certainly, this issue can apply to any school subject, but since GCE deals with modern phenomena, it is very likely that teachers already have an opinion on them that could affect their lessons' structure and contents. Hence, it is of paramount importance to check contents selected for teaching GCE so as to bring out hidden or personal perspectives unintentionally buried in teaching materials.

This factor was carefully addressed in planning the learning unit. As regards general topics, such as the effects of globalisation or the specific issue of the use of palm oil in agro-industrial production, for instance, the author has been careful not to exclusively present facts or report opinions that reflect only a single point of view. The course was developed for teaching GCE, and its ultimate objective is to provide students with sufficient knowledge to enable them to critically reflect on contemporary issues, not to teach them the author's opinion on world matters.

If the innovative character of the LU's structure and contents represented on the one hand a positive element to students, on the other it was considered a problematic issue for the Italian Language, History, and Geography teacher of the selected class.

At the end of the course, the materials developed for the LU were made available to the teacher as a basis for in-depth analysis, in order to eventually include them in the programme for the 8th-grade exam. However, three main reasons caused the teacher difficulties in further developing these topics: 1) the different teaching approaches adopted in the LU (more participatory compared to her traditional teaching); 2) her lack of English language knowledge, which prevented her from creating her own teaching material from online non-educational sources; 3) inconsistencies between the contents and her background, as she had a degree in Italian Literature and was not fully confident in tackling some GCE issues (e.g., those related to economics and geopolitics).

Due also to curriculum constraints, according to which some GCE topics are not supposed to be analysed in depth in the 8th grade, it is not surprising that she did not manage to devote sufficient curricular time to the further examination of the LU's contents.

Final considerations

The implementation of a learning unit aimed at fostering students' knowledge on GCE issues has highlighted several areas of concern related to introducing GCE into the Italian school practice.

These areas of concern are related to: 1) the importance of considering the basic knowledge students require before the instruction on GCE, the potentiality of their emotional involvement in GCE-related subjects and of participatory pedagogies for effective learning; 2) teacher's difficulties in pursuing further work on the topics covered by the LU for lack of specific pre-service and in-service training on applicable contents and teaching methodologies, as it occurs in other countries (Mahon & Cushner, 2007); 3) problems in teaching contemporary and controversial issues with a neutral and dialectic approach, in order to help students become autonomous individuals who can be critically engaged in the modern world.

However, considering the autonomy in learning and research activities, Italian schools have the possibility of including GCE in the curriculum, even without national guidelines on the topic.

To achieve this purpose, the international academic and non-academic discourse on GCE should circulate among teachers and school principals, informing them about the different tools available at the international level (i.e., the Oxfam guide or the Council of Europe's manual on HRE). These tools can be efficiently adopted in the Italian context, as the present study has shown.

Moreover, the level of interest from schools may be crucial in planning and developing GCE as a cross-disciplinary subject implemented using a whole-school approach (Henderson & Tilbury, 2004), as research on the topic has indicated (Oxfam, 2006; UNESCO, 2014, 2015). The effective implementation of GCE does need to involve all areas of the curriculum as well as school ethos and structure, extra-curricular activities and needs to foster (local and global) community engagement.

It must be emphasised, though, that this kind of school organisation, based on cooperative work among teachers and other professionals and educators at the school and in the community, has unfortunately not yet been carried out in Italy. However, it is the object of strong current interest at both academic and political levels as a way of enhancing key competences. A recent educational programme planned by the Italian Ministry of Education is in fact focused on the development of transversal methodologies in order to foster and assess the eight European key competences (MIUR, 2015; Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2006). GCE, like other educational programmes (education about sustainable development, for instance), shares this need for re-structuring schools' organisation and practice toward cross-curricular and whole-school approaches, and could therefore benefit from national initiatives, although not primarily focused on the topic.

The educational implications highlighted in the present study are

strongly intertwined with the need to plan and implement GCE jointly, involving the school in its whole and all the teaching staff.

The joint nature of GCE implies 1) at a school level, the organisation of specific teacher trainings on the contents, the methodologies and the pedagogical concepts underpinning GCE and the active engagement in the local/global community; 2) at a teacher level, the cooperative collaboration of all teachers can assure a multifaceted framework on the topics as well as the creation of non-educational sources to be used in class.

Additionally, this research showed the relevance of the modalities in which GCE instructional contents are selected and presented. They represent one of the most important strengths of GCE and are strictly related to its conceptualisation. As it has been pointed out through the LU's structure, in order to foster understanding and to engage students in actions for change, they should be urged to analyse and reflect on *real* contemporary events that take place at local and global levels. GCE didactic resources, far from being preordained, should be developed from actual problems that affect a city, a region, and a nation with an impact on the whole world, or vice versa. The connections and the tensions between the local and the global may, in this way, be objectively analysed.

It is thus necessary that GCE is grounded on actual events, as a concrete chance to reflect on the single episode and on the general dimensions behind it. In this way, the focus on and the analysis of real phenomena represent the bridge that connects the school to the world, with the ultimate aim of engaging students in actions (Nussbaum, 1994). This is strongly linked with the overall potentiality of GCE: the combination of a sound knowledge of contemporary world issues and the possibility to reflect critically upon the actual events as a common basis for the development of global responsible attitudes and values.

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