

Article

The Transversality of Civic Learning as the Basis for Development in the University

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Abstract: The social dimension of higher education seems to have been highlighted in the most recent documents of the European Higher Education Area. Furthermore, the interest in providing future graduates with the competences necessary for their future jobs seems to have grown in recent decades. In this context, the key questions are what social competences could help graduates to enter the world of work and how universities can facilitate the development of such competences. In the present article, we clarify the role of civic and social competence in university education and offer some guidelines to orientate their learning. To address these objectives, the present study is divided into five parts. First, we define what we understand as civic or citizen competence. In the second part, we describe the reasons why we consider that the learning of civic competence may occur in different settings (formal, informal, or non-formal) of university life. We propose character education and integrated learning (IL) as promising approaches to foster civic learning in the third and fourth sections. Finally, we offer recommendations on how university leaders and professors might promote civic or citizenship competence.



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1. Introduction

We are now witnessing, 20 years later, the consequences of the tragedy of 11 September 2001, with terrorist acts and wars which seem to have no end. Another consequence has been the recognition in most countries that people need an education aimed at discovering and living authentic democratic citizenship, acquiring those abilities which allow us to live in a society in a decent manner. These qualities, which are transversal, in recent years have been termed, not without much debate, civic, social, and ethical competences. These fields are so wide that they require some clarification.

Young people in school have been particularly identified as in need of such education. It would, however, be a mistake for governments to create some new, perhaps reactionary, approach to education for democracy. The last decade of the twentieth century saw a remarkable growth of interest in a new approach to this type of education. While this phenomenon was generally worldwide, it was more clearly evident in the newer democracies of Europe and the established Western democracies. This interest took many forms including program reviews, research projects, policy initiatives, and the development of major curriculum resources and initiatives for schools in order to meet the need for a new, more effective educational approach to democratic citizenship [1].

The essential role of education for citizenship has generated an international interest since the end of the 80s of the 20th century [2–8]. Citizenship and the need for it to be

taught is currently a hot topic as is reflected both in the profusion published studies on the matter as in the development of educational, political, and academic fora and research projects, reports, and curricular guidelines [9]. We are witnessing educational reforms in different countries, from Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Australia to the United States, Canada, Spain, and England, which insist on the need for civic education in close connection with an education in ethical values and which are trying to find their place in schools. Their presence may be formal, informal, or non-formal depending on each particular case.

Dahrendorf [10], was not wrong when, in an article published in *The Guardian* in August 1990, he pointed out that the new decade that was beginning was going to be the decade of citizenship. Perhaps one could go even further: the 21st century is the century of citizenship. Of course, there is no doubt that the issue has captured the interest of governments, politicians, educational institutions, philosophers, social researchers, historians, educational centers and teaching staff, and national and international organizations.

What reasons might explain the growing interest in this issue throughout the world? Generally speaking, as Audigier [11] has pointed out, the value of and need for education in general and civic education in particular—whether this is called education for democracy, peace, social justice, or human rights—is usually invoked in times of crisis and difficulty. Today we are faced with several situations that speak to us of the need for rethinking citizenship as a hope to cure the ills of our society. However, we must emphasize that education is not only a response to specific problems arising at particular points in time and that the risk of a partisan utilization of education is always lying in wait.

Among current problems, although the list is far from exhaustive, we can highlight the increase of violence in schools, outbreaks of racism and xenophobia in response to multicultural movements, political absenteeism, the rise of extreme separatist movements, the phenomenon of globalization—driven by economic, technological and communication changes—and the rebirth of international civism.

A broad consensus exists regarding the fact that the health and stability of democracies, the development of societies based on value and attention to human rights, and the response of postmodern society do not only depend on the good organization of the state but on the individual virtue of each citizen.

Even though the civic mission of school education has never been in doubt, the truth is that it is now expressly required, although very different solutions exist regarding the place and way to carry this out. Civic education has adopted several forms in different societies: in some places, subjects exist with this very title; in others, it has taken the form of transversal subjects.

2. On the Concept of Social and Civic Competence or Citizenship Competence

One recurring theme in social research of the last 20 years has been the centrality of the concept of civic or citizenship competence. However, much debate surrounds the content and the way of naming this essential aspect of education: social education, civic education, education for citizenship, citizenship competence, social and civic competence. Furthermore, there is an understandable overlap between the social, civic, affective, and emotional aspects of the term.

A key concept for political, social, and educational thought is before us. We would like to contribute to the debate which we believe is useful as we are far from having satisfactory conceptual frameworks for civic education. We have available a set of contentious and elastic concepts—“umbrella” concepts—which will never fall outside the realm of reflection because they are at the very heart of the debate. We are thinking of the concept of education itself, or those of authority, human action, power, citizenship; and in particular the concept of social and civic competence and that of citizenship competence. We may position ourselves on the boundary closer to minimalism or maximalism in an open dialog through these lines.

An acceptable approach can be found in a doctoral thesis recently completed in the *Universidad Autónoma of Madrid* (whose author is Rafael López-Meseguer, 2021, entitled:

“Educación cívica para una nueva política” (“Civic education for a new politics”), of which we would highlight as a particularly interesting feature its interdisciplinary nature as it encompasses political theory, sociology and educational theory [12].

It was in 2006 when the Parliament and the Council of Europe recommended eight key competences for life-long learning. They mentioned civic and social competence for personal development, employability, and achievement of active and cohesive citizenship in political communities:

“These include personal, interpersonal, and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behavior that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation.” [13]

In 2018, the Council updated the content of this competence so as to adapt it to the times of change in Europe. In this recommendation, it is established that social and civic elements are to be subsumed under the concept of citizenship competence while at the same time including some slight modifications in its definition:

“Citizenship competence is the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal, and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability.” [14]

If we look at the western international panorama, we can highlight three sectors in which the studies and research have been most abundant:

1. Projects developed under the auspices of international organizations such as the Council of Europe, the European Union, the United Nations, and UNESCO;
2. Initiatives carried out in countries of Eastern and Central Europe recently incorporated into democratic systems, as from 1989;
3. Curricular proposals from England, a country with a long democratic tradition which in the decade of the 90s took an interest in the explicit incorporation of citizenship education as a subject into the National Curriculum, although this was subsequently discarded and replaced with character education.

It can be said that the renewed international interest in civic education in schools began to spread in 1990. The studies undertaken from an educational perspective have focused on, to a large extent, the didactic efficacy of certain techniques in the promotion of civic competence [15–17]. In social research, studies into the political socialization of individuals generated great interest, whether from individualist [18], or structuralist or poststructuralist perspectives [19]. This literature emphasizes the influence of the school and pays less attention to other agents such as the family, religion, peer groups, place of work, voluntary associations, mass media, social networks, the sociopolitical context, and so on.

The National Standards for Civics and Government developed and published in 1994 by the Center for Civic Education, highlighted something that has been calmly accepted, which may help us in the task of delimitating the concept we are dealing with in this first part of our paper [20]. It is claimed, based on evidence, that a real citizenship competence (and therefore its education) has three interrelated components, although at times only the first two are evaluated given the difficulty of assessing the third [21–24]. These components of citizenship competence are civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions or virtues. In Table 1, definitions of each component and examples of their measurable manifestations are presented.

Table 1. Citizenship competence components according to the Framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress in Civics [20].

Components	Definition	Measurable Manifestations
Civic Knowledge	Ideas and information about the key concepts students must know and use to become effective and responsible citizens.	Principles of democratic theory, how government works, the problems of democracy, individual rights and the public good, the role of the Constitution, the role of citizens in a democracy, the organization of constitutional governments in other countries; international relations
Civic Skills	Intellectual skills to identify, explain, argue, take decisions, evaluate and defend one's positions in public matters and participation	Dialogue, tolerance, conflict resolution, negotiation of compromises, teamwork, constructive criticism
Civic Dispositions or Virtues	Also referred to as the "habits of the heart" of which Tocqueville spoke. These habits include character features and attitudes of respect concerning the value and human dignity.	Responsibility, public spirit, integrity, tolerance, self-discipline, compassion, and also interest in the protection of rights, confidence, honesty, and promotion of the common good

As for the methodology for promoting this competence, insistence is placed on making schools "living laboratories of democracy" as Dewey indicated. The use of active learning resources such as cases studies, simulation games, and cooperative learning is recommended, as is the use of literature, to teach civic values. As Patrick [24] points out, it is necessary to combine content and teaching process and the study of these components: the understanding that what civic life involves is as important as the application of this knowledge. Judgment and civic character are the two objectives of civic or citizenship competence.

Civic or Citizenship competence enables individuals to fully participate in civil society, based on the knowledge of political and social concepts and structures and the commitment to active and democratic participation [14]. Despite that, we must not forget that the relevance given to this competence has not occurred without some criticism, both of technical aspects (the lack of agreement on ends, what knowledge to include, and the presence of emotional and attitudinal aspects, among others) and operational aspects (for example, teacher training, assessment, presence in the curriculum, and overlap with other dimensions). Such debates do not detract from the value of the central premise: the need to consider civic or citizenship competence as a key concept both in political and social and educational thought.

3. Civic or Citizenship Competence in Higher Education: Three Levels of Educational Influence

Without taking away from other educational settings, it can be claimed, realistically, that educational institutions, and among these universities, can play an important role in the training of the civic competence of university students. Obviously, prior to university, the key time is adolescence, when social virtues are born, as are families from the beginning of the life of children. Even so, in the university, we can and want to make our contribution. Three levels of action can be distinguished: formal, informal, and non-formal.

3.1. Formal Education Level

When we speak of formal education, we refer to institutionalized aspects such as the existence of subjects, or their presence in other curricular material in the form of themes.

The search for a complete education of students in all its dimensions exists, although it is not common, in the form of general educational programs, especially in the final years in some universities. Without going into detail, here we could mention the Oxford Character

Project [25] and the Harvard Human Flourishing Project, and the Core Curriculum Institute from the University of Navarra.

The risks involved with these subjects come from their prestige, as they may be considered to be second-class subjects, the complex timetabling required for them to fit in with other subjects, and so on.

Generally speaking, we can say that the experience of civic education in the form of a specific subject cannot solve social and political problems. It provides knowledge that is without a doubt valuable and necessary, but not sufficient. This is not to belittle, obviously, the value of having available subjects which bring students closer to the real world and problematic social and political issues, but it has to be borne in mind that this alone is insufficient.

3.2. Informal Education Level

Informal action is perhaps the crucial and most valuable resource for developing civic competence in higher education settings. Here we highlight some elements which show the possibilities for educational action that we have inside the university institution itself.

One step forward is the recognition of this dimension of the educational task in the statement of core values of the university. For example, giving prestige to and recognizing the activities that the teaching staff carry out in this sense.

The role of the teaching staff, departmental boards, faculty boards, and the executive council itself as driving forces is fundamental. This is particularly true of those responsible for student relations: vice presidents of students, associate deans of students, student coordinators, course coordinators, etc.

Student course and faculty delegates and mediating students may be key promoters of citizenship and the resolution of conflicts. In some universities, the figure of student tutors exists: older students play an important role in welcoming, protecting, and advising new students, especially foreign students, in matters relating to studies and also orientate them in questions of accommodation, finding their way around the city, etc.

The role of tutoring or personal mentoring is fundamental in this aspect of education. It is key to discover how it is carried out and how to endow it with positive content. The example of professors is, without doubt, a way of learning behaviors and values related to citizenship. Former students are also a reference point in the growth of the public spirit of the students.

A stellar methodology for awakening sensitivity and civil awareness is service-learning. This involves combining the learning of contents from one or several subjects to resolve different social problems in coordination with local partners. In addition, the solidarity work of student associations and volunteer work are excellent ways to foment the acquisition of public spirit in universities.

Also, in informal university settings, we can observe certain means which help to awaken civic learning, from outside the institution. Here we are thinking, for example, of the role played by local government administrations, parliaments, the state forces of law and order, the social services and their work with students at risk of social exclusion, associations for the acquisition of civic habits and virtues and the solidarity work of religious institutions, which is not always sufficiently well recognized.

3.3. Non-Formal Education Level

It is also necessary to consider the educational possibilities in the civic and citizenship area offered in the university in the setting of non-formal education. Here, we refer to the already existing instruments of conventional participation, which are being used less and less or, to put it another way, have been stripped of their essence: learning to participate.

Student representation throughout the whole university and each faculty should be considered. It would be useful to analyze the interest, the profile of the student representatives, and the voting systems to obtain a better picture of the real workings of this medium of civic training. A similar case is that of student class representatives; in this setting, the

importance of the processes of information and the question of the selection criteria that are followed could be studied. The delegates of the university who are part of the academic staff also have a testimonial role.

However, when we listen to the opinions of professors and managers on the effects of the traditional means of participation in the development of civic and citizenship competence, we find an attitude of notable pessimism or deep disappointment. Student participation, in Spain, has been shown to be an inefficient mechanism to promote a greater civic commitment from students.

Overall, where citizenship education is most effective is in the non-formal and informal areas and this is where the most valuable, experiential, and long-lasting learning has been achieved. Our suggestion is to emphasize non-conventional participation, which has been shown to be an excellent way of mobilizing civic or citizenship competence. In particular, we recommend undertaking citizenship projects with students and promoting service learning [26].

It would be interesting to recognize more and better this learning both in students and the professors who promote it. For example, recognizing those professors who choose to become involved in activities of service-learning or other non-conventional initiatives.

We have still not mentioned, although they have a considerable effect, all the administration and service staff of universities. The cafeterias, photocopying centers, libraries, corridors, sports centers, museums, and washrooms are all fields of civic learning, which is manifested, among other aspects, by the respect and care shown to people and things.

The necessary specific training of the management teams and professors involved is a key factor, but one which should not be forgotten, as is the appropriate evaluation of the initiatives of centers, teaching staff, and students in the area of citizenship.

4. Promoting Civic Competence at the Formal Level: A Character Education Approach

There is a consensus among authorities, professors, and students that civic and citizenship learning is relevant. Skills such as leadership, teamwork, and emotional intelligence are considered necessary to improve university students' education and future professional effectiveness [27]. A considerable advance in how university education is conceived can be observed. There is a clear move away from the mere instruction to develop professional competences toward an educational activity aimed at educating individuals in all their aspects. Some of these initiatives have recently emerged under the umbrella concept of Character Education at universities [27].

Character education, rooted in the Aristotelian philosophical tradition, seeks to promote the development of virtues or stable character traits. These can include moral, civic, intellectual, and performative dispositions [27]. In the past, mostly all initiatives about character education were conducted in school or high school settings [28]. However, a surging interest in promoting 21st-century skills, also called graduates attributes, in university has been witnessed in the last decades [27]. This section will introduce Character Education as a valid approach to promote the development of civic or citizenship competence at the university. These initiatives are thought to operate at the formal educational level, which is straightforward in the curriculum. In addition, we will present some examples of Character Education initiatives from different countries that promote civic or citizenship competence.

Character education is rooted in two suppositions: good character is related to flourishing, and to the development of society. Researchers in education and psychology have empirically tested the first statement [29,30], it can also be noted in the emerging interest in promoting flourishing at the higher education level [27]. The second is currently part of the theoretical rationale of educating character at the university. Influential scholars in the education field have called for attention to the fact that professions exist to satisfy real social needs; that is, goods and services to which people have a right [31–33]. As a result, civic and citizenship competence must be required to help the students to understand the connection between the education received and the duties and responsibilities with the society that their future profession involves.

In doing this, university educators are faced with a challenge. If the professions exist to satisfy social needs, the question is how this fact can become a deeply-rooted conviction and an attractive project for students. In other words, how a social sense of job can be developed in the minds of the students? Such a vision is considered as the basis for exercising specific professional virtues, both in the professional area and that of ordinary citizens. Professionals with social sense will exercise their profession in a civic manner, considering the interests of the people who require their services. We consider the promotion of Character Education a valuable approach to promote the social sense of work as part of the development of civic and citizenship competence.

Promoting civic or citizenship competence using a Character Education approach can be carried out using different methodologies. Mostly all of these methodologies are conducted at the formal educational level described in the previous section. In Table 2, we present a group of initiatives that promote civic competence following a Character Education perspective. These programs share in common a focus on higher education, and a commitment toward the promotion of civic or citizenship competence including leadership, teamwork, prosocial behavior, and critical thinking. Mostly all of these programs offer electronic resources, activities, and opportunities for partnership in their websites. By taking inspiration from these ideas, educators and researchers can gain new insights to promote civic competence through new and contextualized initiatives.

The character education projects presented here can be grouped according to the emphasis they give to different aspects of formal educational influence. Firstly, some programs take a strong interest in promoting civic competence by teaching subjects included in the curriculum. An example is the case of the Program for Leadership and Character at Wake Forest University (USA) and the Core Curriculum Institute at the University of Navarra (Spain). In these programs, undergraduate students can take specific subjects and courses on leadership, character, anthropology, and ethics. In some cases, these courses are elective subjects, but in others, the courses are part of a cross-disciplinary curriculum across all the university degrees. Secondly, civic or citizenship competence can be promoted by developing extra-curricular programs parallel to the established university curriculum. The Oxford Character Project (Brant et al., 2020; Brooks et al., 2019) at the University of Oxford and Lead for Life at the University of Hong Kong are examples of it. These programs work on the development of civic dispositions such as leadership, service, honesty, and purpose to contribute to the flourishing and the common good. Following a community learning methodology, these programs propose different extracurricular activities to small groups of students, such as discussion groups, seminars, informal meetings, and retreats. Lastly, some of the programs listed in Table 2 strongly focus on research or academic discussion. This is the case of the Harvard Flourishing Program at Harvard University (USA) and the Virtues and Vocations Project at Duke University (USA). These two initiatives focus on rigorous research and disseminating knowledge through seminars and publications of both scientific and informative nature.

A final consideration regarding the character education approach to promoting civic and citizenship competence is related to the role of professors or mentors in conducting any of these programs. In our opinion, the most direct and precise approach to promoting civic and citizenship competence is conducted by morally excellent role models. Moreover, this begins with the university professors' educational influence on the students. If the teaching staffs themselves possess and promote a social vision of professional work, it will be easier for the students to develop this conviction and feel attracted by this project.

Although on the practical level education is provided in groups (one professor guiding a group of students), it is always an individual task, that is, a relationship between one person and another [34]. Professors, in their personalized dealings with each student, have the opportunity to exert great influence on them. This influence is the main channel through which civic and ethical learning can be promoted in students. For this reason, what seems to be fundamental in conducting any initiative at the formal level is to have an excellent group of educators for their implementation. Taking a well-established image

from the field of pedagogy, the professor must establish a “system of scaffolding”, that is, of bridges that allow students to receive those values and aspirations which are not visible to them at their current stage of development. If professors see their work as a service and manage to transmit this conviction through their way of preparing classes, holding tutorials, and their concern for the professional education of their students, the key point of civic and ethical learning; that is, seeing the future profession as a service to society, will be promoted.

Table 2. Examples of Character Education at the university level initiatives that support the promotion of civic and citizenship competence.

Program	Institution	Objective	Methodology
Program for Leadership and Character https://leadershipandcharacter.wfu.edu/	Wake Forest University (USA)	Develop the qualities of character that enable students to serve humanity by fostering an inclusive culture of leadership and character at the university and catalyzing a broader public conversation that places character at the center of leadership	Courses about character and leadership Curricular support to academic departments that wish to infuse leadership development in their curriculum Discussion groups
Core Curriculum Institute https://en.unav.edu/web/instituto-core-curriculum	University of Navarra (Spain)	Promote humanistic training to students and academics by teaching cross-disciplinary subjects included in all the Degrees of the University of Navarra to foster a spirit of solidarity and develop a critical capacity to form one’s convictions freely.	Cross-disciplinary courses on humanistic subjects Teachers training
The Oxford Character Project https://oxfordcharacter.org/	University of Oxford (UK)	Develop an intellectual and practical understanding of what makes for exemplary leadership in the professional context aiming to further the good of society and enable others to flourish.	Learning community approach Seminars and discussion groups Social events and retreats
Lead for Life https://leadforlife.hku.hk/	University of Hong Kong	Help undergraduate students develop character values and traits essential for lifelong leadership.	Classroom learning Mentor groups Service Projects
The Human Flourishing Program https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/	Harvard University (USA)	Study and promote human flourishing to develop systematic approaches to synthesizing knowledge across disciplines.	Conferences Summer seminars Educational guidance and mentorship
Virtues and Vocations Project https://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/virtues-vocations/	The Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University (USA)	Being a national forum for scholars and practitioners across disciplines to consider how best to cultivate character in pre-professional and professional education.	Monthly webinars

Note. Last access date for all the websites in this table was 16 February 2022.

5. Promoting Civic Competence at Informal and Non-Formal Levels: An Integrated Learning Approach

In parallel with the formal education level, it is possible to promote civic or citizenship competence indirectly as part of the daily development of university life. Undergraduates can acquire civic competence by establishing meaningful relationships with reality. As a result, they can actively participate in their learning process by reflecting and giving personal and social meaning to their lived experience. This holistic approach to university learning emphasizes the civic dimension of education too. The contents of the different university subjects can be related to real situations, and active and committed participation of students in the university community and society will be encouraged.

In this objective, the opportunity that professors have for their students to be able to link what they learn with other subjects, even with other matters and their own life seems to be crucial. This raises a whole series of questions: how can we promote the ability to pay attention to the overall view and that this may help students to reorientate their own lives based on what they have studied? What can the teaching staff do so that their students can find a sense in the material they study? How can we foster in them integrative thinking that will awaken their curiosity and a desire to investigate? And how can this be achieved precisely in a context in which there is so much information that is both complex and dynamic?

The need to answer these questions is the reason which leads us to propose Integrated Learning (IL) as a way of educating students and promoting civic competence. IL is aimed to teach and learn different types of knowledge by establishing links between them, making attitudes more flexible, and applying knowledge to the real world. This approach fosters the integration of attitudes and inherent values and does it with an interdisciplinary approach.

Since its inception, IL has been linked to the tackling of big questions, both contemporary and universal, and to a personal and social responsibility that led higher education institutions to become interested in community participation [35]. In this way, it began taking form in the research undertaken in the US and specifically from the work of some professionals in education such as Ernest Leroy Boyer and different institutions which were precursors of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

Currently, as Conesa [36] has pointed out, there is no standard definition of IL and there probably never will be because it is not in itself a method (although it uses many) or a rigid way of organizing education or educational programs. Rather, it is a philosophy, an attitude or state of mind *vis-à-vis* the complex, ever-changing, and multifactorial reality in which we move.

Therefore, IL implies a way of seeing the world and people. It puts itself at the service of cultivating habits, those of the intellect and of the heart, which are both necessary to successfully negotiate complexity [37]. Universities are thus a space where the profession is learned, but also its social sense which allows students to lead their own lives coherently and in all its dimensions: personal and professional [38].

Unquestionably, this implies different practices for learning and teaching. Without taking anything away from the central role of memory in studying, the truth is that repeating memorized content and applying it without really responding to significant issues of the real world does not favor integrated learning. Students will only reach the goals of IL if they make connections between what is happening in the classroom, in their most immediate surroundings, and/or in the world with the theoretical content. This requires the progressive development of reflexive habits which establish by themselves connections between different subjects and their practice. Hence, integrated thinking has much to do with self-motivation and metacognition.

Unlike explicit civic learning instruction, IL can promote civic competence by connecting the subject contents to real-world issues. The problems of reality can be transferred to the classroom context helping the students generate historical, geographical, and social knowledge connections. By addressing social problems and challenges, students

can develop critical thinking, dialogue, and teamwork habits, and conduct actions that involve collaboration, solidarity, and community participation. For this purpose, the students' activities should allow them to relate academic knowledge with the abilities relevant to life. Students will be able to practice and develop competences to face and solve real-life problems.

For instance, evidence of the impact can be found in integrated quality projects that used service-learning as a methodology. Students reported improvements in self-efficacy, self-esteem, positive attitudes towards school, and an increase in behaviors related to community participation [39,40]. Students also showed greater social responsibility, community awareness, teamwork skills, commitment to their community, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction [41]. At the same time, participation in well-defined projects, with structured activities promoting democratic values, has been shown to favor cohesion and relationship between peers [42]. The improvement in school life climate was also a salient positive aspect.

The contact with real-world issues, as part of IL, requires networking. Educational institutions must be coordinated with other non-academic organizations to facilitate integration into reality and promote the opening of academic institutions to their social environment. Partnerships with non-academic institutions will have a meaningful impact on both students' learning, and the development of skills that can be transferred to their lives.

IL awakens critical thinking and civic responsibility, transmitting values and virtues that allow the development of citizenship resulting in the transformation of the social environment. Students can participate in activities beyond the educational center and become actively involved in the community [43]. These are contexts in which students can be citizens.

Promoting IL not only involves a simple reflection on what is being studied but rather an intellectual position with intentionality on the part of the professors and students. That is to say, to generate integrated knowledge the student has to know how to do it. For this, it is necessary for students throughout their education to have achieved an attitude and an openness towards integration and that they maintain a reflective relationship between the real world and theoretical knowledge. Reflective practice within the framework of any subject is fundamental, and that is precisely where the professors come into the picture. They need to have at their disposal a set of orientations, methodologic strategies, and methodologies that promote integrated learning and thus the transversality of civic and social issues in their subject [44]. With this in mind, we will now offer some guidelines to orientate the learning of civic and social competence through IL.

5.1. Methodological Orientations

Firstly, the methodological orientations which we give below are in line with the vision, sense, and objectives of IL and prioritize the didactic approach which is necessary to develop it in consonance with the sociocultural context.

1. Give a central role to the reflection and critical thinking of students in the process of teaching and learning;
2. Develop the overall cognitive functioning of students rather than just certain particular skills;
3. Contextualize learning;
4. Pay attention to the motivations and interests of students; search for, select, and elaborate diverse curricular material;
5. Promote a research methodology;
6. Use different sources of information to encourage learning;
7. Foster the knowledge that students have about their way of learning;
8. Favor a climate of mutual acceptance and cooperation;
9. Ensure methodological and didactic coordination between professors;

10. Implement formative assessment. By promoting the formative nature of assessment, students may have access to different information to know what their level of development is.

5.2. Methodological Strategies

Secondly, we define methodological strategies as a resource that determines a plan of action regarding the position of the professor and students in the process of teaching and learning. We underline those that have already been proposed or used to favor the transferability of theoretical content which help understand the real world and respond to real, complex, and changing situations:

1. Reflective journals for individual and/or group learning;
2. The recording of experiences and/or the narration of real experiences;
3. Reflective group dialog;
4. Interviewing experts;
5. Simulated teaching;
6. Analysis of cases;
7. Techniques of systematic observation;
8. Shared reflection in Practicum seminars in the university;
9. Metacognitive detection of theoretical gaps to be filled;
10. Self-evaluation and peer evaluation among students using rubrics;
11. The use of inquiry as research;
12. The didactic use of cognitive confrontation or conflict.

5.3. Teaching Methodologies

It is necessary to highlight the integrated value of four teaching methodologies that have been widely developed in education. These are project-based learning, problem-based learning, cooperative work, and service-learning.

Finally, it must be pointed out that together with the didactic aspect which all teachers have at their disposal, IL requires activation at the same time of areas of the educational setting which it may be necessary to transform to leave space for integrated learning. We refer to the following issues: the curriculum, assessment, and the change or flexibilization of the institution and teacher training.

6. Recommendations and Future Research

In this article, we have presented a conceptual clarification of civic or citizenship competence. After discussing the advances in its conceptual definition, civic competence was proposed as a key construct for promoting civic and citizenship learning at the university. Three educational levels of civic learning were presented and examples from each level were shown. At the formal level, a character education approach was discussed. At the informal and non-formal levels, the potentialities emanated from IL were stated. In this section, we offer some recommendations based on the literature we reviewed. These suggestions are expected to encourage future educational initiatives and more research on this topic. Our combined approach—character and integrated learning—to civic competence learning is thought to serve as a starting point that others can use to evaluate their efforts towards promoting civic learning at the university.

6.1. Recommendations for University Leaders

University leaders have an essential role in fostering civic or citizenship competence at university. What seems to be fundamental is to raise awareness about the place and the necessity of civic learning in the university context. It is desirable that civic and citizenship learning may have a relevant place in the list of priorities of university leaders. To our knowledge, this will be possible by departing from a clear understanding of the principal goals of education and the mission of a university. If education is considered a mere instructional activity—i.e., directed toward the acquisition of scientific knowledge and

professional skills, but not holistic dispositions such as civic competence—then it will not be a place for civic learning at the university agenda. For these reasons, university leaders are encouraged to consider a holistic notion of education, on which the transformational power of civic learning requires to be included. This holistic understanding of education should then inform university policies.

If the relevance of civic learning and its place at the university mission are achieved, then this can be evidenced in some institutional actions of the whole university. Promoting civic learning means teaching the students, through the actions of the university leaders, that good citizenship is also lived in the way the institution relates to its immediate society. The most important way of civic participation of the university is to prepare professionals for the service of society. However, other institutional actions as the diffusion of culture (through university museums, participation of scholars in the public debate and science popularization) and the work directed to improve the social conditions of less favored sectors (e.g., with collaborative social projects implemented with vulnerable or in-risk members of the community) would also be necessary.

Regarding the internal life of the university, leaders are encouraged to take into account the three levels of educational influence proposed in this article. At the formal level, university authorities are encouraged to select different existent alternatives to promote civic competence through the curriculum by including new subjects or adding new topics to existing subjects about civic learning and citizenship competence. Some of these subjects or topics could even be transversal to all university degrees. Additionally, university leaders may promote extra-curricular programs for developing civic or citizenship competence. Examples of such programs have been presented along the present research article. At the informal and non-formal levels, university leaders are recommended to promote a civic environment at the campus in different ways. On the one hand, a civic environment can be promoted by publicly recognizing the merits of good citizenship behaviors among the academic community members. On the other hand, university leaders can promote a civic environment by acting firmly against academic dishonesty and public scandals produced by the government body or faculty members.

6.2. Recommendations for Professors and Staff

University professors exert a personalized educational influence of the highest order at an informal level. In their daily interaction with students, professors provide a direct and precise approach to forming the civic and ethical competence of the students. Professors who consider their work a contribution to the common good would be able to transmit this conviction through their way of preparing classes, holding tutorials, and showing concern for the professional education of their students. This implies a call for taking into account the continuous training of professors. In addition, this is a call to professors to take advantage of every interaction with the students, especially the meetings for tutorships or mentoring, to instill the values related to civic and citizenship competence.

From a formal educational level, university professors can consider the techniques suggested in this article. For instance, professors can use service-learning techniques for promoting civic or citizenship competence in their classes. Therefore, students will establish connections between the academic content they are learning and the social needs that they are called to fulfill shortly. Students then may acquire a perspective on which the exercise of their future profession is a concrete way of civic participation. Generating this mindset is very relevant, and professors can consider its attainment as an indicator of civic or citizenship competence.

As proposed throughout this article, not only professors but also administrative and service staff at the university are called to promote civic and citizenship competence. Workers at the stationary shops, dining halls, libraries, and sports facilities can also offer the students examples of good citizenship by showing kindness and efficacy in the development of their roles.

6.3. Recommendations for Students

Although most research has focused on the institutional and professor-student level of civic competence development, we consider it valuable to state some recommendations for students, the principal recipients—or we may say protagonists—of any educational effort.

Our examination of the promotion of civic competence using a character education approach pointed towards the importance of responsibility and personal commitment in any transversal educational program. These programs have followed an aspirational strategy to enroll students: encouraging students to be the actors of their learning, in this case, the acquisition of civic or citizenship dispositions. Following such a methodology, we recommend students take the challenge of civic learning personally and responsibly. Hence, students should be committed to participate in any of the educational modalities of civic learning promotion that can be settled at the university. Professors and university leaders can also contribute to this goal by designing civic learning initiatives that help the students focus on personal development and less on external rewards.

In addition, students can develop civic or citizenship competence by having more civic participation opportunities inside the university. Students can develop a sense of responsibility toward others by electing representatives, participating in university decisions, and working at students' associations. This attitude can be an indicator of civic or citizenship competence development. Other forms of participation can also be encouraged, for instance, the contribution of the individual work to the common good of society. Students can be helped to understand the civic contribution of their future professional practice as a second way of civic participation, perhaps less notorious but proved as more efficient by the history of our culture.

6.4. Future Research Perspectives

Empirical and theoretical research is needed to promote the development of civic or citizenship competence at the university. Regarding empirical research, more studies are required about the efficacy of the existing civic competence programs. This research can offer powerful insights if it involves participants' follow-up after graduation and career years. Such research can include the latest statistical techniques such as structural equation modeling and longitudinal designs. Although empirical research must include assessing the changes at the psychological constructs that express civic competence, this is thought to be not the only focus of appraisals. The value of civic competence for the student's professional identity and the long-term impact of the educational approaches presented here deserve attention. Qualitative research will be essential to understand the changes in the participants' comprehension of the role of the future profession on the common good.

About theoretical research, critical reflection is required on the key concepts around civic and citizenship learning. Philosophy, literature, and art can be promising fields to explore how civic competence or citizenship learning can enhance human potential and the ability of a society to flourish. It can be the case, that the contact with classical authors in humanistic disciplines can foster a more holistic, and at the same time, more profound understanding of the concepts and strategies applied for civic or citizenship learning.

7. Final Thoughts

In agreement with the scheme used by the Active Citizenship Composite Indicator (ACCI), we list four dimensions of civic competence that must be borne in mind: civic values, social justice, participative aptitudes, and democratic knowledge and skills, all the while bearing in mind the diverse facets of civic competence: cognitive, affective, and attitudinal. These elements may be converted into indicators for assessing the different educational actions undertaken.

Putting into practice or finding ways of applying the ideas from this article is a broad-spectrum task. It involves formal, non-formal, and informal activities. As we have seen, there are excellent ways of promoting civic education, such as initiatives for creating a core

curriculum, or others that try to save the best of classical liberal education. However, the awakening of civic competence is not only, nor even mainly, done through direct teaching.

Together with institutional initiatives, we consider that paying attention to the informal and non-formal settings of civic education is of great importance. In this way, the cultivation of civic competence, using methods such as integrative learning and service-learning can provide concrete steps to be followed by service staff and the students themselves. Integrated learning is a proposal for the holistic formation of students. Through an interdisciplinary vision of reality, the integration of knowledge (also civic-ethical) and therefore its humanization is favored. In this way, the personal and professional dimensions of university education are boosted.

Further, service learning nourishes and consolidates the relationship between the university and society. This favors a university-society “conversation” in which various community partners can participate. The community partner intervenes in the different training actions of a service-learning experience. Therefore, the impact is not only observed in students (also in teachers and universities) but is profitable for society. Undoubtedly, service-learning helps the students to improve their sense of citizenship and fosters their personal development with social competences (in addition to intellectual development).

In the context of non-formal education, we have a specific historical institution that could be more appreciated for its educational dimension: the university halls of residence or *Colegios Mayores Universitarios*. These are non-profit, higher education centers—necessarily affiliated to a university—that provide non-formal education to undergraduate and graduate students, through a community learning approach in a residential context. In addition, it should not be forgotten that the examples and spaces offered to the student through daily coexistence in classrooms, corridors, cafeterias, museums, cultural centers are fundamental. They show real proposals for civic or uncivil education, good and bad.

A question that spontaneously and obviously arises is: what time should we devote to civic issues in teaching and in the training of students and teachers at all levels? Part of this question -the time devoted to citizenship education in teacher training- could be the subject of a separate reflection.

Citizenship education is linked to the pedagogical work of teachers. Nevertheless, the teachers’ duty to stimulate the development of values in students is addressed less often. The fact that citizenship also implies moral development is not frequently mentioned in the literature. Furthermore, there is a gap in current research about democracy and the rule of law as a framework for citizenship. As a result, knowledge in this area seems to lack direction, as if all opinions and all ways of dealing with controversial issues are desirable.

This article studies issues related to citizenship and the role of universities in promoting civic competence. It also considered the vertiginous social and political changes the world, Europe, and specifically Spain in the last 30 years, have experienced. We are all in need of building our civic character, not only the students but also each university community member. Therefore, the double dimension of civic learning must be considered: theoretical and practical, knowledge and lived experience.

There is a rise in the relevance of civic or citizenship competence. However, it is far from easy to predict how this trend will develop, bearing in mind the changing political and administrative directions we are witnessing. In any case, what needs to be done is clear, as this is the challenge that education is facing.

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