RETHINKING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Dr Tristan McCowan
EUNEC
‘Promoting citizenship and common values through education’
Lisbon, 1-2 March 2018
WE DO NOT WANT COMMUNIST IN BRAZIL SOS MILITARY
Normative-conceptual

Descriptive-empirical
Drivers for citizenship education

- Upholding rights
- Legitimising government
- Social cohesion
- Participatory democracy
- Global justice
- Nation-building/transitions

Citizenship education
Normative debates

■ Liberal and civic republican approaches

■ Tensions:
  - Rights / duties
  - Universality / difference
  - Local / national / global
  - Criticality / conformity

■ Non-western conceptions of citizenship
Forms of citizenship education

- General education
- Traditional Civics
- Embedding through curriculum
- Student councils
- Whole institution
- Service learning

About, for or through?
Dialogical or transmissive?
‘Critical’ or ‘soft’?
Curricular transposition

Source: McCowan 2008; 2009
Voter of the Future programme

- Colonels and corrals: democracy in Brazil
- Origins of the initiative
- Forming the responsible voter

(McCowan 2008)
Ideals
The critical voter

Curriculum
Mock election
Lectures
Visits to public institutions
Competitions

Effects
Knowledge and skills of voting
Little wider citizen development

Implementation
Disengagement of teachers
Wider political constraints
Once we were discussing the use of what is public and they started to say, “It’s wrong!” And I took the chance to say, “I have to confess that often I see military police cars dropping policemen’s children off at school. Then someone rings to report a crime: “Oh dear, there's no police car”.... My wife says, “Look, you shouldn't say these things”.... but we have to show them how things are. We need to show that some things need to be said even though they carry some risk.

(Interview with teacher Robson)
The idea [of the programme] is great as a political theory, but it could integrate politics in a different way, not making the pupil a simple voter, but rather a politician...because when you've got the critical sense that the building of a square, the paving of the roads is not a favour for you, but an obligation...and knowing that you are a social politician participating in youth movements, you are going to know who to elect, you're going to know who to vote for.

(Interview with student Cassia)
Key lessons

- Recognising existing knowledge of students
- Teachers as agents, not instruments
- Deep questioning of political, economic and social structures
Putting the ‘civic’ at the centre...

They [children] learn to ask questions or not to ask them; to take what they hear at face value or to probe more deeply; to imagine the situation of a person different from themselves...; to think of themselves as members of a homogeneous group or as members of a nation, and a world, made up of many people and groups, all of whom deserve respect and understanding.

(Nussbaum 2006: 387)
...but no automatic fix

- Acknowledging the leaps
- The paradox of teacher ownership
- Embracing unpredictability