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Citizenship Education in Secondary School: Between Teachers Representations and Student Voices

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ABSTRACT: *This contribution illustrates a case study carried out at the IC Gobetti of Trezzano S/N (Milan) on the topic of citizenship education aims at enhance teacher professional development; the research investigate the representations and the teaching practices, through the voice of teachers and students, in relation to Citizenship and citizenship education social constructs. A mixed-method approach was chosen consistent with the need, on the one hand, to involve the entire educational team, and on the other hand, to make a qualitative in-depth geared towards understanding teaching/learning processes. A questionnaire survey for teacher and two focus groups with students of low secondary classes were conducted. Analysis of the questionnaires shows that the most frequently used terms ('right', 'respect' and 'duty') refer to an idea of citizenship 'stricto sensu' of a mainly political-legal nature. In defining citizenship education, the term 'respect' is the most recurrent, however, it presents a multiplicity of meaning, that refer to ethical and value dimensions and, in the case of respect for others and differences, to a cosmopolitan approach. The focus groups with students evidences engagement with socially vivid matters. The transcripts analysis identifies significant evidence: the connection between the local and global experiential dimensions and the shift from recognizing problems to proposing solutions, an attitude characteristic of an active citizenship and emblematic of the construction of an awareness of political dimensions. The comparison between teachers and student voices will provide input for evaluating, reflecting on and rethinking teacher practices.*

KEYWORDS: *Citizenship education, Teacher representations, Student voices*

Introduction

The present research, still ongoing, started in December 2019 from a request of the head teacher of IC Gobetti in Trezzano sul Naviglio, a town in the metropolitan city of Milan, who was interested in investigating on Citizenship education: what kind of idea of Citizenship itself and Citizenship education had the teachers? and what kind of practices they were carrying on within their classes?

We propose to work first on teacher representation, aware of the crucial role they play in teacher practices (Moscovici, 2005), even more in

the field of citizenship education where personal values and beliefs are strongly involved (Pineda-Alfonso *et al.,* 2019). On the other side we proposed to listen to student voices (Cook-Sather, 2006), in order to compare them with the teachers' ones and to foster teachers' reflection on them with the aim of promoting an inclusive curriculum redesign, issue we will address in the next research phase.

We were supposed at the end of the last school year to engage teachers in a focus group to discuss the issues emerged, both from their own questionnaire and the students' focus groups, with the aim to develop a more reflexive attitude towards their current practices (Mortari, 2003). But the pandemic situation affected the research plan and at the present time we've just started the focus group with teachers. Meanwhile the teaching of Civic Education was introduced in the Italian curriculum (or rather reintroduced) by law 92/2019, and the theme of citizenship education was back in the spotlight. The guidelines for the application of the law drawn up by the MIUR, albeit with a few chiaroscuros, emphasize the transversal nature of the new teaching, and represent a useful tool for revising school curricula in order to adapt them to the new provisions. The opportunity to define a vertical Civic Education curriculum has often involved entire teaching boards in reflecting on the need to work in a transdisciplinary and participatory sense in order to promote educational experiences that have a strong link with the context of pupils' lives. Therefore, our schedule delay will allow us to compare the picture before the introduction of the law, given by the questionnaires and the focus group with pupils, and the situation in this first year of the introduction of the 33 hours of civic education, that we are collecting focus group with teachers. In the present paper we are going to present the analysis of the first two phases of the research.

1. Teachers representations

A mixed-method approach (Creswell, Plano Clark, 2017), was chosen consistent with the need, on the one hand, to involve the entire educational team, and on the other hand, to make a qualitative in-depth geared towards understanding teaching/learning processes.

FIG. 1. *Research plan*

PHASE 1 – December 2019
129 Questionnaires administered to teachers (79 answers)
PHASE 2 – January 2020
2 Focus groups with student representatives
Sixth grade, 11 participants, 1:50 h
Seventh and eighth grade, 12 participants, 1:30 h
PHASE 3 – June 2021

Focus group with teachers (pre-primary-secondary school) to present the data collected and discuss it in light of the introduction of the 33 hours of Civic Education

FIG. 2. *Questionnaire administration*
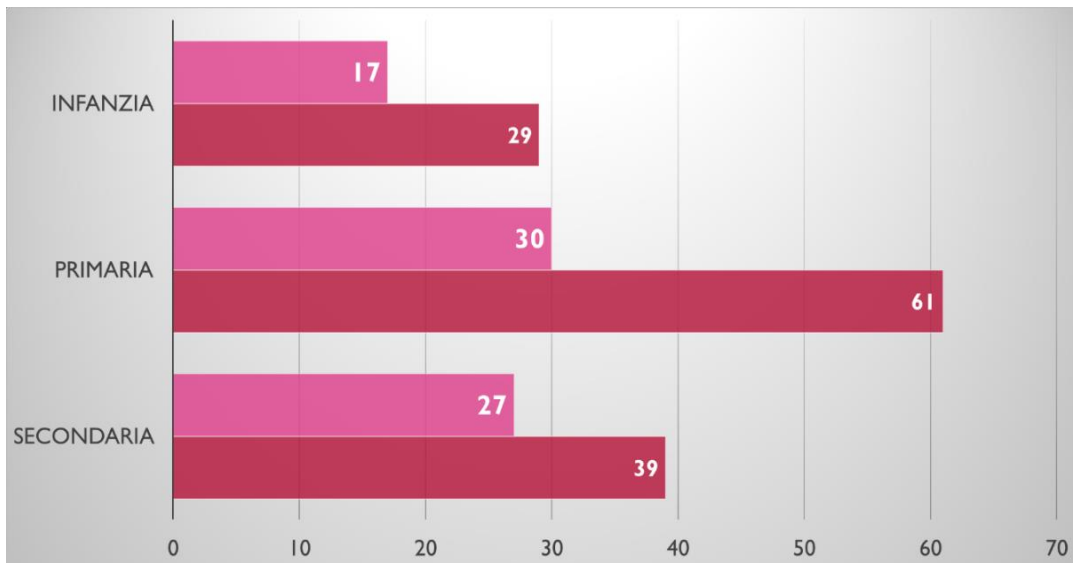
The number of questionnaires was administered to the whole teaching stuff (n. 129) in December 2019 by the school, through a google form, and 79 (61,24%) fulfilled get returned.

FIG. 3. *Questionnaire structure*
Q1. What words or expressions come to mind when you think of the concept of 'citizenship'? (indicate 5 words/expressions)
Q2. What words or expressions come to mind when you think of 'citizenship education'? (indicate 5 words/expressions)
Q3. In the 2012 National Curriculum, and in the 2018 New Scenarios, there is a lot of mention of citizenship education, do you think it is possible to achieve what is indicated?
Q3.1. What are the achievable goals at school?
Q4. Do you use textbooks or specific documentation and/or websites for citizenship education? (If yes, please specify which ones)
Q5. In providing citizenship education, have you experimented activities in partnership with local or national associations and civil society organizations? (If yes, please specify which ones)

The questionnaire has been structured in a fast-filling way and to be inclusive for all school levels and grades. We had also added some professional profile referred questions. As shown the pie charts (Fig. 4-5-6) there is a prevalence of seniority in service, a huge prevalence of female (the Italian average is 78%) and considering pre and primary school teachers, less than 30% is graduated.

FIG. 4. *Sex at birth*
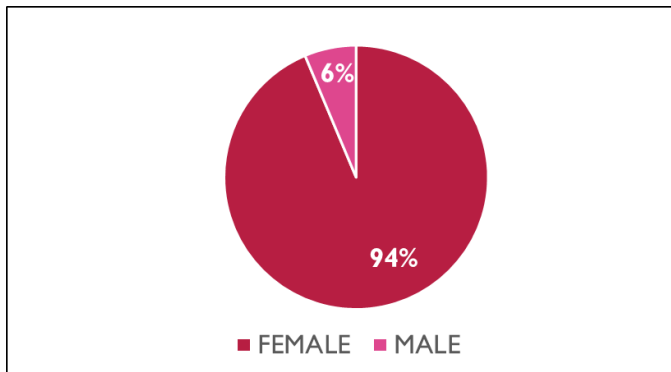
FIG. 5. *Education level*
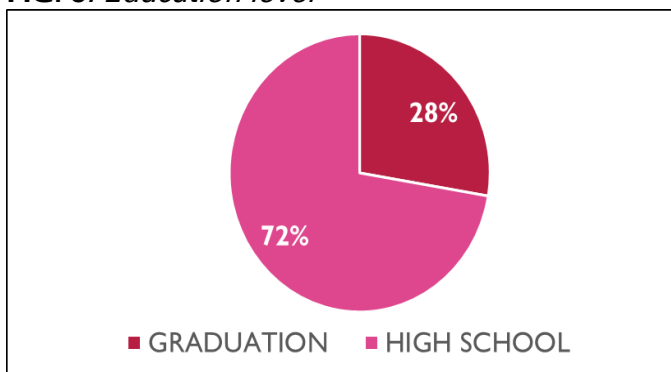
FIG. 6. *Seniority in service*
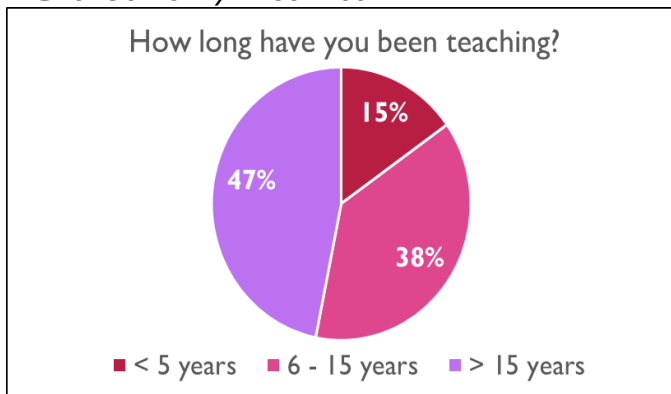
1.1. Comparing citizenship, citizenship education teacher's perspective and K14 curriculum

We analyze the first two questions through the most recurrent words (Fig. 7-8) and building co-occurrence tables (Fig. 9) with the software Atlas.ti. In the idea of citizenship education the most recurrent word 'respect' goes 12 times with the second one 'rules', and often come along also with 'sharing', 'others' and 'living together'. Rights and duties, recurring 10 times together, go also with 'awareness' and 'responsibility', that are often combined with 'active'.

We can see, like for the idea of Citizenship itself, an evident predominance of the issue of respecting rules, that we can refer to an

idea of citizenship of a mainly political-legal nature and considering also the several mention of 'knowing rights and duties' (and the mentions of the Constitutional Charter) we can place this idea of Citizenship education in the level that Francois Audigier label as 'knowledge and understanding' (Audigier, 2000). But with the co-occurrence between 'action' and 'awareness' and 'responsibility' we can say there is also an openness to an idea of Citizenship education aimed at promoting skills, attitudes and values (the levels 2 and 3 of Audiger).

FIG. 7. *Idea of Citizenship*
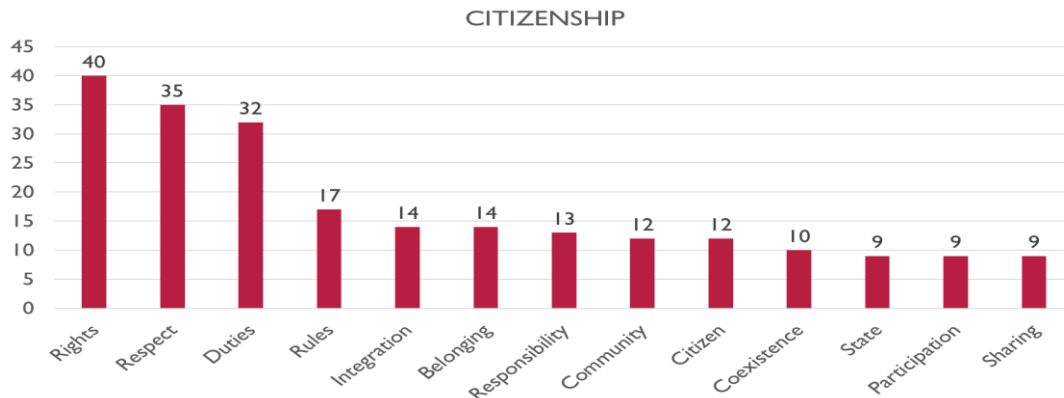
FIG. 8. *Idea of Citizenship education*
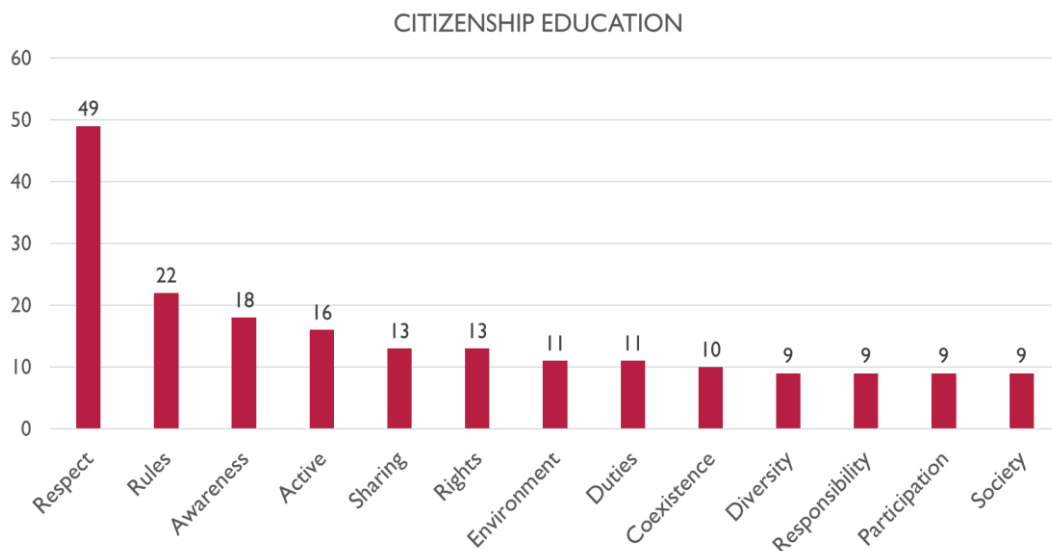
In Audigier's construct of citizenship education, the concept of belonging is crucial, is the main characteristic of being a citizen in a democratic society. Whether local or global, citizenship 'is always a question of belonging to a community, and a reference to politics and rights, particularly political rights. In this sense, the citizen is always a co-citizen, a person who «lives with others» (Audigier, 2000, 17).

**FIG. 9**. *Citizenship Education Co-occurrence table*

	Respect	Rights	Duties	Active
Rules	12	1	1	3
Other	7	1	1	3
Share	7	0	0	0
Living together	7	0	1	2
Awareness	4	8	8	7
Responsibility	4	8	8	7

A sense of belonging, therefore, that, even if acquired by birth (as in the case of the Latin *ius civile*), is built only through the contribution that the individual can, and must, give to the life of the city; a sense of belonging that restores to the term 'politics', «one of the most mistreated words of our time» (Zagrebelsky, 2005, 36), its deepest sense, of Aristotelian memory, of taking care for the common good. The concept of citizenship *stricto sensu* in fact concerns the relationship between the individual and the political-legal order, but this relationship unwinds at the same time in multiple articulations: «expectations and claims, rights and duties, ways of belonging and criteria for differentiation, strategies of inclusion and exclusion» (Costa, 2005, 3-4).

Referring to the goals of Citizenship education there is a large majority who consider the national curriculum applicable (Fig. 10).

FIG. 10. *Applicability of the school curriculum goals*

IN THE 2012 NATIONAL CURRICULUM, AND IN THE 2018 NEW SCENARIOS, THERE IS A LOT OF MENTION OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION, DO YOU THINK IT IS POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE WHAT IS INDICATED?
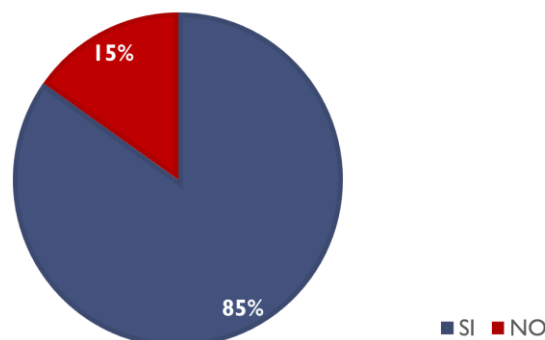
The main goals indicated in the curriculum could be divided in knowledge objectives and objectives related to an idea of active citizenship, under the declared umbrella of the goals of 2030 Agenda (Fig. 11), which directly

involves schools with Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The document New Scenario in 2018 focuses on the theme of citizenship, 'the true integrating background and reference point for all the disciplines that contribute to defining the curriculum. Citizenship concerns all the major areas of knowledge, both in terms of the contribution made by the individual subject areas and, even more so, in terms of the multiple connections that the disciplines have with each other' (MIUR, 2018, 18) and states in conclusion that 'it is not a question of 'adding' new subjects, but rather of recalibrating existing ones' (ibidem).

FIG. 11. *Curriculum goals*

Knowledge objectives:
Constitutional Charter
Political and administrative forms of organisation, social and economic organisations
Citizens' rights and duties
Objectives to exercise active citizenship:
To take care of oneself, others and the environment
To foster cooperation and solidarity
To acquire a sense of legality
To develop an ethic of responsibility
To promote early forms of participation in common decisions
To get a positive meaning to differences, preventing and regulating conflicts.

The 2012 document acknowledges an articulation into three levels of increasing complexity (Balconi, 2017), which correspond to the subdivision of the objectives of educational action into knowledge, skills and behavior (Pellerey, 1998), that could guide the teacher in the design of pathways, in the adoption of methodologies and preparation of settings consistent with the goals for competences assessment.

The analysis of the recurring words in these answers shown that they are mostly coherent with the representation reported in previous answers, and by extrapolating from the co-occurrence table (Fig. 12) the most frequent matches, we have gathered the objectives into three main themes, that clearly have several overlapping areas.

One factor to raise for consideration is the fact that many teachers use catchphrases, mostly from the National Curriculum (MIUR, 2012) itself, some of them just words, and there are 6 questionnaires with all answers identical.

The first category is 'respect' (Fig. 13), of rules, of others and often the environmental issue that comes up combined together with the first two.

FIG. **12**. *Goals Co-occurrence table*

	Environment	Active	Community	Responsibility	Rights	Rules	Awareness	Respect	Oneself
Other	11	8	7	10	3	3	4	6	12
Environment	0	7	8	10	1	2	2	4	9
Active	7	0	8	10	1	1	2	1	6
Community	8	8	0	8	0	2	0	1	6
Share	1	0	1	1	1	5	0	3	1
Knowledge	2	0	2	1	0	5	1	3	1
Responsibility	10	10	8	0	3	0	5	2	8
Duties	1	1	0	3	6	1	3	0	3
Rules	2	1	2	0	2	0	1	6	2

FIG. **13**. *Emblematic quotation of the category 'Respect'*

RESPECT (21)
Rules (6)
Respect rules and institutions.
Educating to civil and democratic coexistence, developing rules of correct behavior to respect and protect the environment.
It is only possible if the right milestones are laid from an early age for a global and continuous knowledge, teaching children respect for what surrounds us and for environmental resources. Creating a network, including a digital one, of shared experiences and rules valid for all.
Other (6)
Civil coexistence respecting others and their stuff.
Accepting and respecting others and those different from oneself, fostering the maturation of personal identity and autonomy.
Environment (4)
Respect others and the environment.

The second one is 'other' (Fig. 14), already seen with respect, that goes frequently with oneself and environment, but also with responsibility. The theme of the 'other' is crucial in the pursuit of education for global citizenship in a cosmopolitan approach (Benhabib, 2008). As states Edgard Morin, in a continuous positive tension between the individual and the community, between respect for the individual and for 'us', education must take on the arduous task of ensuring that «the idea of the unity of the human species does not obliterate the idea of its diversity and that the idea of its diversity does not obliterate the idea of its unity» (Morin, 2001, 56). Is also a fundamental theme in dealing with the concepts of identity and belonging. The consideration of the 'gaze of the other', with whom one shares a specific social and territorial context, indispensable component is the «reciprocity of perspectives» (Bauman, 2002, 8), as well as the dynamics of the development of critical thinking, and which commits us to the reasoned and reasonable construction of a common sense, a 'con-sense' (Di Masi, 2010).

Fig. 14. *Emblematic quotation of the category 'Other'*

> **OTHER** (21)
> Self (12)
> *Knowing how to interact with others, learning to respect ourselves and others.*
> *The achievable objectives in primary school are to live together respecting others and to bring this way of being together outside the school walls.*
> Environment (11)
> *Take care for oneself, others and the environment.*
> Responsibility (10)
> *Choose and act in a conscious way, acquiring responsible behavior towards oneself, others and the environment.*

The third one is 'active' (Fig. 15) that co-occurences with 'responsibility', 'awareness' and 'community' and in this category we find examples of a more complex and thought-out expressions. As Gherardo Colombo (2008) argues, being an 'active citizen' is an intrinsic condition of the democratic citizenship, or as Balibar calls it, a tautological expression (2012). Activism is closely related to taking responsibility and the willingness to contribute in the community.

FIG. 15. *Emblematic quotation of the category 'Active'*

> **ACTIVE** (17)
> Responsibility (10)
> *Developing an ethic of responsibility, caring for places and common material, knowing how to interact with others and making children aware of being an active part of the community.*
> Awareness (8)
> *Developing key competences in a transversal way through authentic tasks and creating aware and responsible citizens who play an active role in the society.*
> Community (6)
> *Raising children's awareness of being an active part of the community.*

Finally we looked also at the verbs teachers use to define the goals and comes out a balance between the ones we can be referred to idea of teaching knowledge (to know, to teach, to provide…) and the ones related to the idea of developing competence and promote action (to activate, to experience, to develop, to do, etc.).
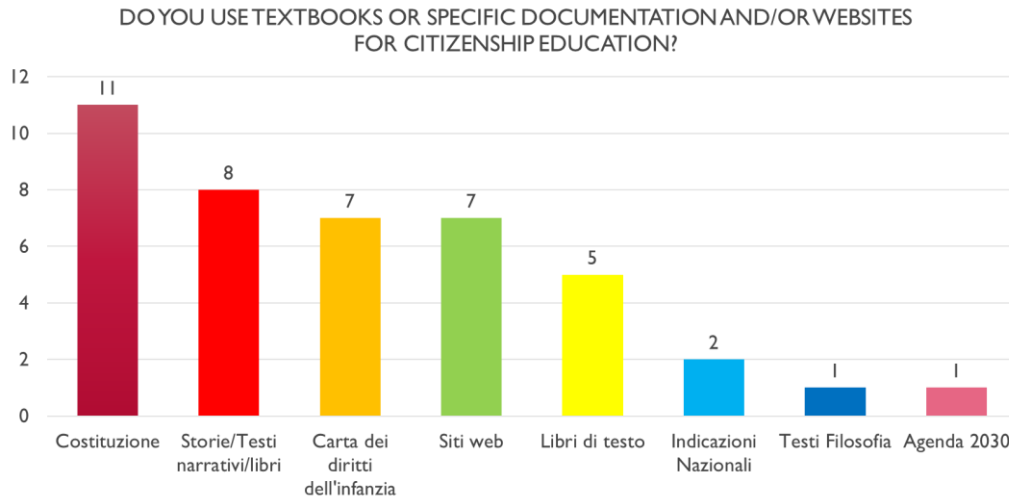
1.2. Teaching tools and strategies
The last two question of the questionnaire aimed to take a rapid glance at two aspects of established practices: texts adopted or similar mediators and partnerships with institution or association in the local area

The 63% of the teachers declared not to use any specific textbooks, documentation and/or websites and those who mention it, use mostly the Constitution Chart itself, narrative books, the Charter of Children's Rights and websites (Fig. 16).

The 65% of the teachers declared declare not to activate partnership, and this percentages lead us to imagine a more common transmissive rather than active teaching practice, on the assumption that engaging with the territory, where community the memories is layered, is
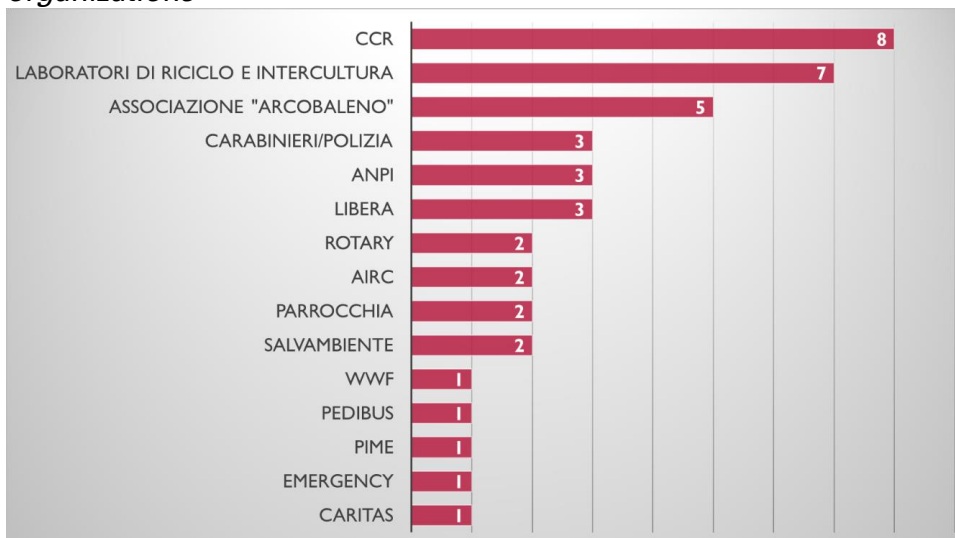
imperative for the formation of citizen identity (Barthes, Champollion, Alpe, 2018).

FIG. 16. *Textbooks or specific documentation and/or websites used for citizenship education*

DO YOU USE TEXTBOOKS OR SPECIFIC DOCUMENTATION AND/OR WEBSITES FOR CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION?

Category	Value
Costituzione	11
Storie/Testi narrativi/libri	8
Carta dei diritti dell'infanzia	7
Siti web	7
Libri di testo	5
Indicazioni Nazionali	2
Testi Filosofia	1
Agenda 2030	1

Those who mention it (Fig. 17) mostly quote the Youth city council, some recycling and intercultural labs, local and national association like ANPI (National Association of Italian Partisans) and Libera (Association against mafias).

FIG. 17. *Partnership with local or national associations and civil society organizations*

Organization	Value
CCR	8
LABORATORI DI RICICLO E INTERCULTURA	7
ASSOCIAZIONE "ARCOBALENO"	5
CARABINIERI/POLIZIA	3
ANPI	3
LIBERA	3
ROTARY	2
AIRC	2
PARROCCHIA	2
SALVAMBIENTE	2
WWF	1
PEDIBUS	1
PIME	1
EMERGENCY	1
CARITAS	1

2. Student voices

We decide to engage secondary student representatives in order to have a manageable number of participants. The outline of the focus groups

(Fig. 18), held in January 2020, retraces the themes of the teachers' questionnaires to address the topic from the two perspectives.

FIG. 18. *Outline of the students focus group*

Incipit
We are interested in your point of view on the theme of citizenship.
Question 1
If I say citizenship, what are the words that come to your mind?
Question 2
Could you give me examples of your experiences of citizenship, both positive and negative?
Question 3
Let us now talk about citizenship education. What does it mean to you?
Question 4
Could you give me examples, if you did it at school, of how you did it? (you can also think of primary school)

The idea of citizenship, of the first group (6th grade), revolves mostly around these concepts: city, rules, organization (Fig. 19):

A: A place where you live and where there are rules because otherwise you wouldn't be able to live.
B: All the rules there are in a place because otherwise there would be chaos.
C: The way should we, as citizens, behave in our city.
D: A lot of people get together and talk about their country or their city.

FIG. 19. *Most recurring words in the idea of Citizenship of the 6th grade*
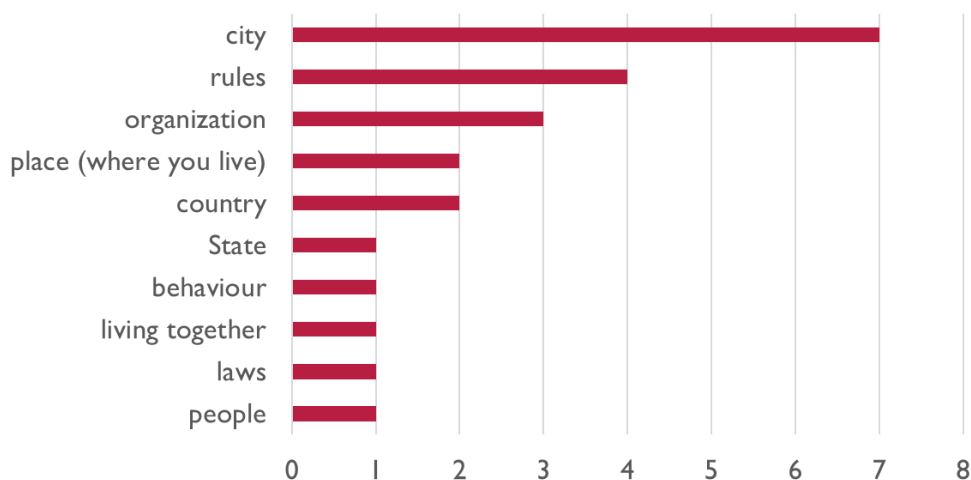

In the 7th and 8th grade (Fig. 20) came out some similar concepts, but also emerged some new concepts like equality, community, and the role of the school itself.

A: In my opinion, citizenship is the rules that a citizen has to respect in order to be able to live better.
B. In my opinion, citizenship is equality, equality of all citizens.
C: Citizenship reminds me of a group of people who live together and try to respect each other.
D: Activities proposed by the school that are done outside the school, in groups.

When they were asked to give some example, raised out in both group many issues, from the respect of the law to the of the environmental care, from participation even to the idea of an European citizenship, with the mention of the Erasmus project.

Clearly the pupils' idea of Citizenship is less structured than the teachers' one, but here the focus on the community emerges to a greater extent and rules and their observance are also frequently linked to better living together, albeit naïve, and sometimes accompanied by a 'justicialist' idea of increasing sanctions for those who cause damage to the community itself.

FIG. 20. *Most recurring words in the idea of Citizenship of the 7th and 8th grade*
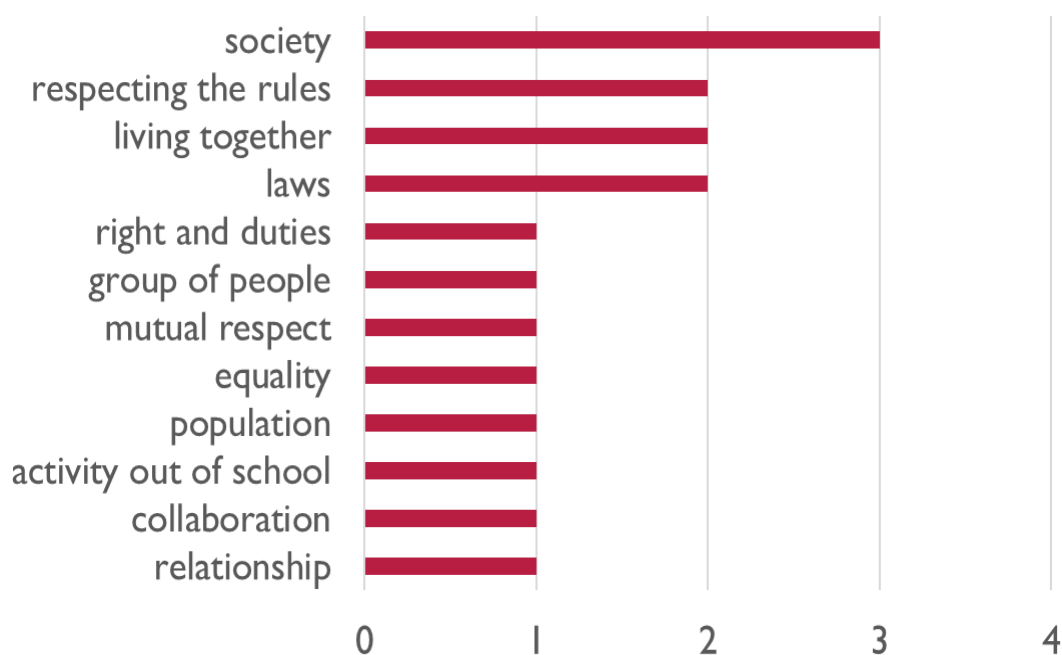
About citizen education at school they first stated they do it «very little» and that «at the beginning of the year we saw how the constitution was born, we read this page, then the book ended up under the desk and there it remained».

This prompt mention of the book implies that the first link students make is with an idea of teaching 'a subject', necessarily based on a textbook, but then, asked to provide more example, they talked about several experiences of citizenship education in their daily life and in the families, and they got back spontaneously at school, they got more and more engaged in the conversation, which became very rich and meaningful.

We organized their ideas per issues in the following scheme (Fig. 21).

FIG. 21. *Quotation of the students' idea of citizen education*

KNOWLEDGE/EDUCATION

Last year we had some kind of lesson on citizenship that I had read, like when the constitution was born, so I knew more or less the things that characterize our state.

Projects that we do at school for the environment with the teachers.

We also had a lesson on food waste.

CONTROL/PUNISHMENT

I would install mini cameras

I would put speed limiters on traffic lights and when they go too fast I would fine them, increase the price of the fine.

In my opinion also maybe increase the punishments, because maybe people keep doing it because the punishments that are there are not enough for their actions.

Making them understand that laws are not made to punish people but to help them live better...

PREVENTION

I would put baskets, I mean, baskets at the lake, at the sea, at the rivers as well.

ACTION

In the morning when I go to the beach I always find cans and all the dirty things, so I pick them up with a rake

I ask my mum if we could buy an electric car

I use the water-bottle

PARTICIPATION

In Trezzano we have this Youth City Council which gives a lot of ideas, last year I was part of this council, so we had a budget, and we spent that budget... I don't know... we inaugurated the nursery behind here, we took away a house from the mafia to give it to people in need, especially women and children. In my opinion this is very important because otherwise it wouldn't be so Trezzano

Recital on the Constitution (at the primary school)

March against racism that we all did together

BAD EXAMPLE/GOOD EXAMPLE

For me, it's enough for one person to throw a cigarette on the ground, for example, and then a child sees it and thinks it's fair enough and then when they grow up they teach it to their children

We have always had a very good teacher and she has always educated us very well, so if there had been someone who was not educated, she would have put him in line immediately.

INFORMATION

Another way to do citizenship is to talk in class, maybe not necessarily from the book, but to go outside the lines and talk a little bit about current topics, like X said about the coronavirus or in general about what's happening.

The history teacher gave us each a newspaper and taught us to read it so that we would always be up to date on what is happening in the country.

And at the end, asked what they would do, if they had the chance to organize the teaching of citizenship in the following year, a lot of interesting proposals came out and some student mentioned spontaneously active teaching methods such as brainstorming and debate, and propose to use spaces out of school. Some other pointed out clearly how the teaching could (and should) be trans-disciplinary, and they imagine to activate dialogues with experts, seeking good examples, to be prepared to provide in the future a good example themselves. A relevant issue are the mentions of the dialogue as in instrument for building 'their own idea' on several vivid matters, fundamental aspect to

be considered when outlining the profile of the active citizen: knowing how to speak out to express one's thoughts. A knowledgeable public opinion is a *condicio sine qua non*, not only for the exercise of democracy, but also for the survival of democracy itself, understood as «coexistence based on dialogue» (Zagrebelsky, 2005, 35), an essential tool for participation.

Conclusion

The Eurydice report (Eurydice, 2017) identifies four broad areas of competence, inferred on the basis of the EU framework on citizenship competences (European Parliament, Council, 2006) and the competences identified by the Council of Europe on democratic culture (Council of Europe, 2016):

- Area 1: effective and constructive interaction with others, including personal development (self-confidence, personal responsibility and empathy); communication and listening; and cooperation with others.
- Area 2: critical thinking, including reasoning and analysis; media literacy; knowledge, identification and use of sources.
- Area 3: acting in a socially responsible way, including respect for justice and human rights; respect for other human beings, other cultures and other religions; developing a sense of belonging; and understanding environmental and sustainability issues.
- Area 4: acting democratically, including respect for democratic principles; knowledge and understanding of political institutions, organisations and processes; and knowledge and understanding of basic social and political concepts.

The students' idea of Citizenship education encompasses the four areas, is rooted in their living environment and they identify the community/city as the place where they can face with and experiment individual or collective deliberative behaviour and actions. They particularly focus on the need to develop critical thinking, to form 'their own ideas', through comparison with reliable sources, on the several issues they consider to be relevant.

There is a gap with the teachers' statements, in which emerge as prevalent the goal of promoting democratic coexistence, mostly by 'teaching' civic education, but their practice is mainly perceived by students as a 'provision of knowledge', even more so long as it remains within school walls.

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