

ACTive Citizenship Projects to Enhance Pupils' Social and Civic Competences

Proyectos de ciudadanía activa para mejorar las competencias social y cívica

**EUROPEAN FOUNDATION SOCIETY AND EDUCATION
QUALITATIVE EVALUATION
GENERAL REPORT**

Juan Carlos Rodríguez
Rafael López Meseguer

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Introduction

The main contribution of the qualitative evaluation to the understanding of the functioning and results of the ACT program is reflected in the national reports for each of the participating countries: England, France, Greece and Spain. They look closely at the implementation of ACT in the field, i.e. in schools with certain characteristics and operating, inter alia, in institutional and cultural contexts specific to each country.

In this general report, we use that research to check whether there have been differences in the implementation of the program, what these differences might be, and, in a rather exploratory way, given the characteristics of the qualitative approach, to provide clues as to why the ACT program might have been more effective in some countries in changing students' attitudes towards active citizenship.

To this end, we begin by synthesizing the purposes and methodology of the ACT qualitative evaluation and continue by synthesizing the main findings of the national reports according to the category system we all followed in the research: baseline scenario, training session, the implementation of the program in the classroom, the description of the projects, the impact of the program on teachers and on students.

1. Goals and methodology of the qualitative evaluation

First, let us remember the general goals of the qualitative evaluation, as stated in the main documents approved by the European Commission.

“The qualitative investigation will aim at understanding the processes at play in the construction of and changes in teachers' behaviour and strategies as well as pupils' levels of engagement, their attitudes and their skill sets. It will complement the quantitative evaluation and provide clarification regarding the mechanisms at work in creating differences between pupils, classes and schools.”

So, it may help to cast some light on the unresolved questions presented in the quantitative evaluation report.

Our evaluation dealt with the implementation of teacher training and of the active citizenship programs in the schools. It collected some information on the principals', teachers' and students' views of citizenship education, school social climate, and school and students' relations with the community, but its main focus was directly or indirectly observing the likely changes that the training of teachers and the implementation of the ACT program had on teachers and, especially, on students.

In order to fulfil these aims, with the input of all national teams and in agreement with them, we designed a methodological strategy, based on the application of a set of information collection techniques to a sample of schools, and on following certain criteria and/or the application of certain categories to the collection of the information collection and the subsequent analysis thereof. Our approach was based on the results of the pilot study carried out in the academic year 2017-2018.

The size of the sample of schools was set in the documents submitted to the European Commission, so all that remained was to take decisions on how to ensure a sufficient degree of diversity, according to the criteria that we would agree upon. In summary, our aim was to ensure

sufficient diversity in terms of territories, the socio-economic origin of the families, the national origin of the students (national/foreign), and the economic level of the locality of the schools.

The research techniques were also, to a large extent, pre-established in the documents submitted to the Commission, but they had to be specified and adjusted to the time requirements and budgetary constraints of each national team. In principle, we agreed, first, to interview all the school principals in person at the beginning of the process. Secondly, we would interview the teachers at three stages: before they received the training (face-to-face interview), just after they received it (telephone interview), and towards the end of the project (face-to-face interview). Thirdly, we would hold focus groups with a small number of students in every school, towards the end of the project. Finally, we would carry out at least two class observations in at least five of the schools. Also, although it was not clearly foreseen in the documents mentioned above, we decided to carry out the observation of at least one training session.

For each of the techniques, in turn, we agreed on fairly detailed scripts.

Not all the national teams were able to fully follow these guidelines, but, in any case, they had to use the techniques applied to answer the research questions that motivated these guidelines. The details of the techniques finally implemented are set out in each of the national reports. As a general precaution, we must take into account the possibility of some effect of the presence of the qualitative researchers in the schools on the behavior of teachers and students, and also that the qualitative research took place in a notable percentage of the treated schools, something that should perhaps be taken into consideration when understanding the results of the quantitative evaluation.

The basic categories that were to guide our analysis were motivated by the need to understand the possible changes caused by the program, both in teachers and, above all, in students, as well as the mechanisms that might be operating behind those changes. Therefore, *grosso modo*, we oriented our work applying the following categories:

- a) A description of the starting point, the baseline scenario.
- b) Analysis of the training session, especially from the point of view of the participating teachers. This training is basically the main intervention, or at least the part of the ACT program on which those who design it have more control, since the other part, the application in the classroom, lies much more at the discretion of the teachers.
- c) Analysis of the implementation of the program in the classroom. In this case, the most relevant issue is to check the extent to which the planned protocols are followed and, therefore, the type of pedagogy typical of ACT is applied, observing, in particular, the resistance of teachers and students and the mechanisms to overcome these. Special attention is given to the possible variation of the students' involvement in the project.
- (d) Description of the projects designed by the students and verification of the extent to which they are carried out successfully and the extent to which the results resemble what was originally planned. This includes a consideration of the content of the projects: final products, target audiences, and the ACT theme within which they are framed.
- e) Impact of ACT on teachers. The aim is to collect their reflections on the extent to which the experience modifies their views on citizenship education and, in particular, how their views may lead to changes in the pedagogy they adopt for similar subjects.

f) Impact of ACT on students. Obviously, the impact is not studied in the long term, but in the short term, and from the point of view of the judgements of the teachers and the students themselves. The section focuses on hypothetical changes in cognitive skills and attitudes related to active citizenship.

We do not summarize exhaustively the findings obtained but highlight those that allow a better understanding of the differences and similarities between the four countries.

2. Baseline scenario

The characteristics of the teachers and of their students

When studying the baseline scenario, we cannot forget that the composition of the samples studied may, from the point of view of the application of the ACT program, differ significantly. We refer in particular to the way in which the participating schools are selected, which may result in a greater or lesser presence of teachers who are, let us say, enthusiastic, very interested in the program, very likely to apply new teaching techniques or to innovate in general. Certainly, this type of teacher is much more ready to carry out a program like ACT, to consider the obstacles as minor, and to transmit enthusiasm to the students, or, rather, to the segment of the student body that is more susceptible to be enthusiastic.

In Spain, the Ministry of Education addressed the letter to school principals in several autonomous communities. We assume that they discussed their schools' participation in ACT with the teachers who were to be in charge of implementing the program (teachers of Ethical Values or tutors). Both school and teacher had incentives to take part, the former, reputational incentives and the latter, as a line in their CV that might turn into more remuneration in the future. The fundamental issue regarding this way of selecting the schools is that the initiative comes from the school management.

In Greece, the procedure was very similar, with an open letter addressed to the schools; that is, to the school management. In this case, unlike the Spanish case, apart from focusing on a specific area in Greece (the Attica region), it was specified that the schools should have previous experience in similar projects. This does not necessarily mean that the Greek schools, on average, would have more experience with pedagogical innovation projects than the Spanish ones, but given the recruitment criteria, this cannot be ruled out.

In England, the recruitment of schools and teachers was quite laborious. Initially, eligible teachers had to be Year 8 or Year 9 students, but later special education schools were allowed to participate, though they did not always group students by age. In this case no letter was sent to the schools, but the British Council prepared a web page where interested teachers could register, and their existence was publicized through various channels: social networks (of the British Council and collaborating partners), through the British Council's network of schools, with leaflets at Department for Education conferences, Department for Education networks in local authorities, etc. In any case, it was the teachers themselves, and not the schools, who showed their interest in participating by registering on the website.

In France, as emphasized in the national qualitative report, teachers were recruited through various channels, via the regional education authorities. In some regions, the email was received by the schools' management; in others, by history or geography teachers; and in still others, by teachers' associations specializing in ACT issues. These emails, unlike those sent in Greece and Spain, were not very detailed, other than informing respondents that the students would be developing a civic project on their own. This led, according to the French report, to teachers

being attracted who had already carried out pedagogical experiments or were sensitive to the issue. Those less inclined to this type of experimentation were, in turn, discouraged by the vagueness of the commitment they were making.

In turn, if the composition of the sample of schools for the French qualitative study reflects the general composition of the sample for the quantitative study, it is remarkable that a large majority of schools (8 out of 10) were part either of the Réseaux d'éducation prioritaire (REP), i.e. a network of schools in disadvantaged areas with a supplement of teaching resources, or of the REP+, a similar network, but for very disadvantaged areas.

In other words, it cannot be ruled out that there may be more teachers involved in the French study who are of the more enthusiastic and committed kind referred to above, nor that there may be more students of a particular type (typical of more disadvantaged areas), who may be more (or less) susceptible to being affected by the ACT program. This does not mean that these issues are easy to measure with indicators such as those we can obtain through a questionnaire.

Nor can it be ruled out that the experience with projects close to ACT was greater in any of the countries than in Spain, due to the mode of recruitment. In fact, in Spain, only 48% of the teachers participating in ACT had been involved in a project with a social orientation that involved a contribution from the students (humanitarian action or aid, environmental protection, etc.), but the percentage rises to 73% for the French, 80% for the Greeks and 72% for the English (Quantitative report).

The place of the subject in the curriculum

In Spain and Greece, the program was applied almost exclusively in time devoted to subjects that specifically dealt with civics or citizenship education. In both cases, these are subjects with a low status in the curriculum, which may be relevant for understanding the degree of involvement of teachers and, especially, students. In particular, if the requirements of that subject, even within the framework of the ACT program, conflict with those of core subjects (like National language or Mathematics), it is to be expected that students will resolve them by favoring their dedication to the latter. Something like this was observed in the Spanish case.

In France, the ACT program tended to be implemented in Moral and Civic Education, taught by History teachers; this has a firm place in the curriculum, its contents having been present since 1945, and as a separate subject since 1985.

In England, the situation is varied, since in some cases the ACT program was part of a specific subject required to obtain the general certificate of secondary education qualification; in others, it is a specific subject, also compulsory, but not leading to a qualification. In most schools the subject in question is taught as part of the wider curriculum, partly in combination with other subjects (Religious Education, Physical, Social and Health Education, Values)

3. The training sessions

In general, the teachers participating in the program evaluated the training received positively, but criticism was probably more pronounced in Spain.

In England all the training was carried out in a two-day session by a single trainer, who had several years of experience in teacher training in the field of citizenship education. Nine of the ten teachers evaluated it extremely positively, citing the skills and experience of the trainer, the

use of very useful and practical materials, the presentation of a variety of options and possible adaptations for one or another type of school, as well as the presence of techniques transferable to activities other than ACT.

In France the training took place in different places and was attended by the teachers who belonged to the educational area in question, working in small groups (about twelve per session). The teachers evaluated it very positively, because of the performance of the trainers, the usefulness of the training, how accessible it was, and for its methodology, far from the most usual in France, much more hierarchical.

In Greece, the evaluation of the training was also very positive. Teachers highlighted the experiential methodology, the development of lesson plans, the possibility of collaborating with other teachers, and the emphasis on approaching the teaching of citizenship with an open and tolerant mentality. However, some doubted the applicability of what they had been taught, especially because of time constraints. And some pointed out that the goals of the training were not entirely clear at first.

In Spain, the training was given in one place and at one time, although four trainers participated. Not all had previous experience in teacher training in citizenship issues, and one did not even have any experience as a teacher trainer. The average evaluation made by the teachers was also positive, equivalent to just under 7 out of 10 in the post-training survey that was conducted at the request of the Spanish Ministry of Education. However, several teachers complained that some trainers did not master the subject (citizenship education) or the ACT protocols. One apparently did not follow closely the ACT recommendations. And two of the trainers acknowledged that they had not have much time to prepare the sessions.

We have little information about how the teachers assessed the online tutoring or monitoring that the teachers were able to use throughout the implementation of the program. In France and Spain, the use was very limited. Those who did take advantage of the possibility did not assign a very high utility to it either.

4. The implementation of the program in the classroom

Compliance with procedures

The protocols foreseen in ACT were complied with in most cases, with the exception of the use of the portfolio, and with some possible exceptions that we will discuss later.

The lesson plans were followed, forming groups of students at random to discuss and decide on the project to be carried out, voting on the winning project, putting it into practice (integrating or not aspects of the non-winners), establishing functional groups, with a more or less clear distribution of functions within each group, and trying to carry out the projects. The only tool barely used in any country was the portfolio in which students evaluated their own progress with their tasks; this is because it was too complicated and time consuming.

As we said, the protocols were generally followed, but the qualitative national reports suggest that teachers' fidelity to them was lowest in Spain and Greece, and very clearly the highest in France. This information is only partly corroborated by the results of the final questionnaire, according to which, in the preparation phase, 51% of Greek teachers said that they had followed the protocol completely, a figure much higher than that of Spain, with 27%, and of England (30%), but clearly lower than that of France, with 69%.

Similarly, the qualitative information suggests a widespread application of random group formation at that stage and of functional groups afterwards, but there are substantial differences from one country to another. All Greek teachers (100%) and almost all French teachers (98%) claim to have formed groups, but there are fewer among the Spanish (88%) and English (90%). Among those who formed groups, the vast majority did so at random, but the percentage among the Spanish (76%) is clearly lower than the French (95%).

Finally, the qualitative information indicates that in all the schools the students voted to choose the project that would be carried out, which is corroborated by the results of the final questionnaire. In general, both teachers and students assessed this procedure positively, which is one of the characteristic elements of the ACT program.

In any case, in each country the implementation of ACT had its own problems, added to those of each school and, ultimately, each teacher and student. In England, for example, the main problem was that the project started very late, which meant greater time pressures than in other countries; these added to the normal pressures related to the school calendar. The teachers adjusted to these pressures anyway, for example by completing the projects after the final exams. In fact, according to the final questionnaire, 50% of English teachers found the recommended hours sufficient, which is the highest percentage of the four countries. In this respect, complaints about insufficient time obtained in the survey and in the qualitative evaluation were highest in France and, in particular, in Greece (only 11% considered the recommended time sufficient) and in Spain (17%). All of which suggests that there is a notable subjective component in the estimation of the time needed to implement the program.

Diversity in the student body

The four national reports suggest that not all pupils were equally involved in the program. In general, although this is more evident in the Spanish and Greek reports, it appears that the pupils most involved are those who are most outstanding academically and/or most involved in school life in general, although it is also recognized in several reports that the ACT type of teaching offers opportunities for some pupils who do not excel academically but have other, more practical, skills (some of these students did benefit from these opportunities). The English report also refers to the difficulty of incorporating so-called disruptive students into a program such as ACT. In France, the evaluators emphasize, more than the difference between students within the same class, the difference between students from more advantaged environments and students from less advantaged environments, even recognizing the difference between students in the same class. If one were to establish a ranking of countries according to the relevance of diversity in the school body, it could be as follows: Spain, Greece, England and France.

However, the feeling conveyed by the results of the final questionnaire is not exactly the same. In Greece, almost all the teachers (84%) say that all the students or a majority of them were involved in the project, while in the rest of the countries those who believe it are around 55%.

Perhaps this type of difficulty is among the ones that impinges upon teachers' satisfaction with the project as a whole, insofar as having more students involved and willing to carry on the project not only translates into a greater likelihood of the project's success (and greater teacher joy), but also into a lesser feeling of having to overcome one obstacle after another along the way. In this sense, the ranking of countries would be more similar to the above. In Spain, only 56% liked participating completely or quite a lot in the project, a percentage lower than the English (65%), the Greek (73%), and, above all, the French (85%). It is noticeable that the French report emphasizes that it was not unusual for students to spend more hours on the project in

order to complete it, even if they were not accompanied by the teacher. In France, this self-organization worked better in schools with a greater proportion of students from higher socio-economic groups.

Variation in the degree of teacher intervention and difficulties for the new pedagogy

The implementation of ACT involves replacing what is often seen as a traditional version of teaching, in which the teacher is, above all, a transmitter of knowledge and the students, receivers, with a very different version in which the role of the teacher is much less directive, and is much more facilitative, operating more in terms of guidance, resolution of doubts or support. In short, it is expected that students learn more autonomously and that the teacher abstains from the type of intervention seen as traditional.

In all the national reports, attempts by teachers to be less 'interventionist' are noted, either by recording their claims in the interviews (whether or not corroborated by classroom observations), or by recognizing that these attempts have not been as successful as the project required or as the teacher in question intended.

Greek researchers tend to share this view, pointing out that teachers only intervened more strongly when they saw a need to do so, while keeping a considerable distance from the autonomous tasks of students and playing a supportive role.

The English report also points to this self-limitation, although it notes the inconsistency between the statements of a couple of teachers, who proudly claimed this self-limitation, and the observations, which suggested a rather directive role - which does not exclude that, for these particular teachers, this experience had not brought about a noticeable change from an even more directive role in the past. The English report also refers to the difficulty several teachers had in assuming that the students would take the lead; the teachers eventually assumed it, once they became more relaxed

The French report speaks of an ambiguous role for the teacher, recalling that, in reality, although teachers are very faithful to the spirit and letter of ACT, they still influence their students: they set the pace, set the objectives, establish ways of organizing the class, lead the discussions, and set some limits to students' behavior.

In the Spanish report this influence of the teachers is made even more explicit, although, obviously, it is depicted as of a different type than a more traditional intervention. It is not a question of 'master classes' or exams or question-and-answer sessions, but rather of offering general and specific guidance on the initial projects and on the one that was finally chosen, of influencing the incorporation of elements of the non-winning projects into the winning project, of forming functional groups responsible for putting the project into practice, of supervising the work done and to be done, of deciding on extra work, of insisting that students work autonomously and that they must comply with timetables. Part of this propensity to intervene may have to do with the feeling that, in the absence of a more direct role for the teacher, quite a few projects would not have been completed. The Spanish report gives some clear examples of this.

Logically, the students do not fail to notice such interventions, as their answers to the final questionnaire show. The students evaluated the degree of teacher intervention in the tasks carried out by the students. The answers in Greece and England reflect a lower degree of intervention than that perceived in France and, especially, in Spain. In Greece, 32% rated it as very or fairly high, the same percentage as in England. In France, however, this assessment is

shared by 45% of the students. In Spain, the percentage is 63%. In this case, the impressions conveyed by the qualitative assessments coincide with the students' opinions expressed through the questionnaire.

The reasons for a greater or lesser degree of teacher interventionism are varied. The French report points to the different characteristics of the teaching staff and the challenges posed by the diversity of the student body. A similar argument is presented in the Spanish report. In this report, but only with validity for the Spanish case, it is suggested that the greater the degree of teacher intervention, the greater the probability that the project will be carried out, or, vice versa, that the probability of "failure" would increase with a greater degree of teacher distance.

5. The characteristics of the projects

In order to put forward possible interpretations about the hypothetical effects of ACT on students, one must take into account not only the degree to which the foreseen procedures were applied or the extent to which teachers and students adopted the most appropriate roles, but also pay some attention to the projects themselves. Projects are at a minimum an intermediate outcome of ACT but are probably also one of the mechanisms that explain why the effects on students are one and not the other.

The success of projects

To begin with, it is relevant to know whether or not the projects were carried out and under what conditions they were completed. This is an indication of the degree of commitment to the program of teachers and students, of their capacity to work, of their collective intelligence in adapting the projects to the reality they encounter, of their pragmatism, of the extent to which the students consider them to be a common undertaking to be carried out. All of this represents skills and attitudes that are akin to those of active citizenship.

The qualitative research reveals that in England the great majority of the projects were carried out. It seems that having started the program much later and therefore having less time to carry it out contributed, with other factors, to the fact that they were formulated so that they were feasible, but still complying with the requisites on an ACT project. The Greek report also suggests that the vast majority were completed, although it points to a greater frequency of adjustments on initial projects. In France and Spain, the qualitative assessment suggests that some projects were abandoned (2 out of 12 in France), and some were completed but underwent substantive changes from the original ones, which changes almost always involved less ambitious targets.

According to the teachers' answers to the final questionnaire, the overall picture would not quite correspond to the results of the qualitative research. In England, only a few, 35 per cent, of the teachers believe that the projects were quite or completely successful, which is less than in other countries. However, it does appear that the level of success in Greece (79%) is higher than in France (54%) and Spain (50%).

On the other hand, 75% of the English students agree with the idea that the project was successful, representing the lowest percentage of the four countries. However, if we accept the portrait painted by the students, the levels of success in the other countries would hardly differ, as 86% of the Greeks, 81% of the French and 87% of the Spanish agree with the idea.

In any case, and although the questions are not comparable, it seems that the teachers have tended to be more negative about completion of projects than students. However, it may be the

case that students and teachers are not using the same criteria to evaluate the success of the projects, surely being the criteria of the former more demanding and thorough.

The orientation of the projects

In the absence of a more detailed quantitative analysis of project characteristics, which would require coding the open-ended responses available in the final teacher questionnaire, we can work with pre-coded questions from the questionnaire and with evidence from the projects analyzed in each qualitative report.

Firstly, we can assume that the effects of the projects on content learning and on the rethinking of attitudes may vary according to their degree of thematic dispersion. The less dispersed, the more likely it is that students will be able to concentrate on one subject and go deeper into it, acquiring more solid knowledge, which may, in turn, be the basis for further knowledge in related subjects. The more dispersed, the more likely they are to touch superficially on different subjects.

In the end-line teachers' questionnaire, teachers were asked about the ACT themes covered by the project (discrimination, social inclusion and cultural diversity) or whether it included another theme. The answers to this question allow us to calculate the average number of themes per project in each country. The least focused would be the Spanish and Greek projects, with an average of 1.6 themes per project (table 1). The most focused would be the English, with 1.4, and the French, with 1.3.

Table 1. Characteristics of the ACT projects in each of the participating countries

	England	France	Greece	Spain
Number of projects (qualitative evaluation)	11	12	10	11
Involves acting upon / with people outside the school (it can be another school)	9	7	4	4
Involves direct, personal contact with people not in the school system (people in need, associations, public officials...)	2	5	4	3
Goal: awareness raising	6	5	8	6
Goal: helping people in need	1	4	0	1
Average number of topics per project (quantitative evaluation)	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.6

Secondly, we wondered whether projects tended to conform, or not, to what we can understand as a basic requirement of the ACT program, that they should involve action in the community and not merely in schools. Going out of school can mean a greater opening of horizons, broadening the type of experiences lived, assuming more adult responsibilities, developing skills of knowledge of the social environment, developing sociability in new environments, etc. All of this depends, in turn, on the type of external involvement that the project entails, since, for instance, it is not the same to write letters to a member of parliament as to help with the distribution of food to the homeless.

From this point of view, we have classified the projects according to two criteria: a) if they involved some kind of action referring to some group outside the school and/or working with people outside the school (it can be from other schools); b) if they involved direct personal contact with people outside the educational system. According to the first criterion, the Greek (4 cases out of 10) and Spanish (4 out of 11) projects would be more deficient, with the French (7 out of 12) and, above all, the English (9 out of 11) would be more in line with ACT provisions. However, according to the second criterion, which implies a more restricted version of the first, England does not fare as well (2 cases out of 11), mainly because a large number of the projects

involved some form of written communication with local or national political representatives, but the students do not 'physically leave' the school. According to this criterion, the French data would not be so different from the Greek or Spanish ones either.

Thirdly, the orientation of the projects may contribute to a greater or lesser experience of reality on the part of the students. If the project's main purpose is to raise awareness with respect to the problems of a social group, it is more likely to foster in the students only a indirect and cursory contact with the reality of that group, since it is easy for the attention to be focused very much and very soon on the communication technique (a video, a theatrical performance, a poster, a song...), and less on the direct, experiential knowledge of the reality of the group in question. Moreover, there is a greater risk of substituting knowledge with clichés about the problem in question. However, if the project is dedicated to providing some kind of direct assistance to these groups, then the knowledge experiences will be much more vivid and probably more transformative, also of the prejudices of the participants. This much is recognized in a couple of the national reports. In other words, the formative implications of helping others more or less directly are not the same as simply telling others to how behave.

From this point of view, we have classified the projects analyzed in the qualitative study according to two criteria: a) if they were meant to raise awareness of a certain problem; b) if they involved direct help to people in need. The first objective is clearly more frequent than the second in all countries, perhaps because of the greater feasibility of projects aiming at awareness raising, or perhaps because many adolescents are impregnated with a visual culture, and it only occurs to them that, precisely, producing images is the best means of acting as citizens. However, the goal (and behavior) of helping those in need is present in 4 of the 12 French projects, compared to 5 projects aimed at raising awareness, while it is only clearly present in 1 English (compared to 8 of the other type), in 1 Spanish (compared to 6) and in none in Greece (compared to 8).

Overall, it might be suggested that the French projects, in view of the qualitative evaluation, would be somewhat closer to the types of projects most likely to produce some kind of cognitive or attitudinal transformation in students, although we can only state this in exploratory terms.

6. Impact of ACT on teachers

As expected, for many teachers, applying the ACT program meant substantive changes in their teaching approaches, as we have already pointed out, although this change was more or less profound depending on the previous trajectory of each teacher. In this respect, the answers to the baseline questionnaire of teachers suggest a greater habit of using pedagogical techniques related to the ACT participatory methodology among Spanish teachers than in the rest, but we must remember the great variation observable in each of the countries. In any case, as we have also pointed out above, the application of ACT has not meant that teachers reduce completely their interventions in students' actions: they reduce it, in general, quite a lot, but they also change the way of intervening.

As can be seen from the national reports, teachers tend to evaluate positively the use of, for many teachers, new pedagogical techniques, as well as the attempt to establish a new learning environment. Judgement varies, as might be expected, depending on their prior habituation to using these techniques, with a minority of more learned teachers expressing that the project was not as innovative. The negative aspects noted are usually related to the shortage of time, which may have caused some, as they themselves say, stress and anxiety, something perhaps a little more common among Spanish and Greek teachers.

In any case, the average levels of satisfaction with the experiment vary substantially from one country to another, something that is not clearly perceived in the qualitative evaluation, but it is in the quantitative one. The highest level of satisfaction is observed in France, where 85% liked participating in the project quite or completely, while the lowest is observed in Spain, with 56% sharing this opinion. Greece and England show intermediate levels of satisfaction, not far apart (73 and 65% respectively).

For the future, the most frequent predisposition observed in all the national reports is to assume that it will be rare for them to apply such an experience *in toto*, but that they will most probably take advantage of some of the teaching tools to which they have had access thanks to ACT.

7. Impact of ACT on students

We conclude the synthesis of the national reports by looking at the possible effects of ACT on the participating students. Obviously, we cannot make any firm statement about the long-term effects, and on the short-term effects we will have to pay attention to the results of the quantitative evaluation. However, we do have the impressions about these hypothetical effects on cognitive abilities and attitudes related to active citizenship that were conveyed to us by the students and, above all, the teachers. The key point here is that the majority of teachers, in the participating countries, assume that the ACT methodology has the potential to produce effects on students, especially on the students more involved in the projects.

Let us look at these hypothetical effects in each country.

In England, students are satisfied with the new way of working. Among the most valued elements are being able to discuss and plan relevant and practical activities; discussing ideas in small groups, even if they had no practical consequences; taking responsibility; and being able to do primary research on certain topics.

Students and teachers had no difficulty in describing a variety of possible improvements in terms of civic and practical skills and knowledge: speaking in public, writing letters to local politicians and newspapers, preparing petitions and surveys. In addition, teachers felt that students were able to develop a more general appreciation of democracy, citizenship, social inclusion and related issues. Among the most positive effects, one teacher mentions an appreciable change in student views on racism. Some teachers were even able to identify changes that went beyond the class in question, reaching out to families, other classes in the school or the students themselves, who were more interested in the issues studied in their daily lives.

In France, the evaluators also do not seem to find much difficulty in getting students and especially teachers to talk about the potential gains of having participated in ACT. On the one hand, they mention a set of improvements linked to a different approach to citizenship. Firstly, they “learn” citizenship through action: they recognize and assume their role as citizens, in an experiential manner, in practice, realizing that it is something that concerns them directly; they acquire a notable knowledge of themes proper to the curriculum of moral and civic education; students conceive and implement actions directed at others and that contribute to the general interest; they develop skills of listening, of considering different perspectives, of working according to shared rules. Secondly, the experience allows for the questioning of prejudices of one and the other: the contact of students with the elderly or homeless people contributes to their awareness of the stereotypes that they have about these groups; but, in turn, seeing students acting in this area outside the school, the rest of the people can rethink their stereotypes about youth. Finally, they open up to the world outside school, mainly by gaining

richer experience, but also by helping the school to establish long-term relationships with external actors.

Moreover, French students and, especially, teachers refer to learning that is not so directly linked to active citizenship. First, practical skills in communication (between peers, with adults - for example, through telephone calls or email), in decision-making (voting, although not always in a “rational” manner; accepting decisions made by others, delegating tasks), in institutions (including better knowledge of how their own school functions), and in organization. Secondly, skills related to group work: with non-related colleagues; listening, dialoguing and adapting; handling frustrations, etc. Finally, they develop pride in completing complex work, something that is especially noteworthy for students with a poorer academic reputation.

In Greece, teachers tend to agree with students that their satisfaction with the ACT program was high, probably because of the kind of improvements that both point to, although teachers, as expected, are more explicit about this. Students appreciated the active part of the program and that their work was echoed in the community. They became aware that, even as teenagers, they can already begin to act as citizens, that they are capable of working as a team, of listening to opinions different from their own, of taking initiatives, that everyone can contribute something to the improvement of society. As we pointed out for the French case, direct contact with vulnerable groups (children with disabilities, orphans) makes them question their previous views.

With regard to the long-term effectiveness of the program, opinions were more hesitant, both because some teachers did not know whether the students would continue to apply the learning obtained in the future and because they believed that to be lasting the effects required a more continuous application of programs such as ACT.

In Spain, the evaluators, when considering the impact of ACT on students, as seen by students and their teachers, begin by pointing out two cautions. The first, that it was not easy to obtain answers from teachers or students to the relevant questions. Second, that not many students participated in the projects with full commitment, so hypothetical effects should only be discernible in a more or less substantial minority.

In any case, in terms of the improvement in learning skills and knowledge of the students, among the Spanish teachers there are mentions to issues such as: acquisition of group work techniques, greater willingness to work with non-affiliates (which improves the knowledge of their immediate environment), some improvement in the ability to work autonomously and to take responsibility, improvements in the ability to speak in public and debate in an orderly manner, and, perhaps, a better knowledge of civic issues, although not so many teachers mention the latter.

In regard to civic abilities and attitudes, non-systematic references from students and teachers point to the following: a certain improvement in the disposition to listen to others, even when they maintain points of view different from one’s own; greater empathy toward others in general, since they had to work with colleagues with whom they did not previously have friendly relations; greater openness of vision; and a greater sense that what happens in school is related to what happens outside, and, in part because of this, a better understanding of one’s own abilities to help others. There was hardly any mention of behaviors or techniques more appropriate to the “active” component of ACT.

National qualitative assessments suggest that students, in general, evaluated the experience positively. This is corroborated by their responses to the end-line questionnaire, according to



which large majorities in all countries agree with the idea of having really enjoyed participating in the project: 80% in England, 87% in France, 88% in Greece and 89% in Spain.