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GrACE
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THE GrACE EXPERIENCE

GUIDELINES ON BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION



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1. The GrACE Project

GrACE – Green Europe: Active Citizenship and the Environment is an international teacher-training project addressing active citizenship and the political and the shared educational responsibility we bear in confronting the greatest challenge to humanity's future: the climate crisis.

Promoted by the Department of Humanities at the University of Trento and supported by the European Union's Erasmus+ programme, GrACE aimed to strengthen the role of **schools as spaces uniquely suited to critical reflection and democratic participation** in the pursuit of a just and inclusive ecological transition. Since 2024, through a series of webinars and residential meetings, the project has brought together – and hopefully will continue to do so – multidisciplinary content and innovative teaching approaches, fostering a dynamic exchange among academic researchers, public institutions, and educational communities.

GrACE seeks to nurture practices of connection, education, and collective organisation that can help build the change on which our shared future depends. These guidelines are the result of the multilevel exchange and in-depth dialogue we have had with hundreds of teachers over the last few years, and are meant to **collect and share our common experience**.

A wide range of teaching materials and recordings is freely available on the project website, together with forthcoming opportunities for training and exchange.

2. Introduction

We are living through a period of persistent crisis and mounting complexity. Yet, this is not entirely new for Europe. Crisis has been a defining feature of the European project since its inception. As Jean Monnet, one of the European Union's founding figures, famously observed: "I have always believed that Europe would be built through crises, and that it would be the sum of their solutions." (Monnet, 1978, 417). This perspective suggests not only that adversity can serve as a catalyst for positive change in the European context, but also that Europe has long contended with multiple, overlapping crises rather than a single, isolated one.

This has been particularly evident in recent years. Many scholars have argued that we are living through a 'polycrisis', or even a 'permacrisis' – a term chosen as Word of the Year 2022 by the Collins English Dictionary (Shariatmadari, 2022) – characterised by prolonged instability and insecurity (Zuleeg et al., 2021; Bevitori & Russo 2025). Geopolitical tensions, rapid technological transformation, the climate emergency, widening inequalities, and deepening social fragmentation all attest to the multifaceted nature of the current global landscape.

In this context, citizenship education is more crucial than ever. To echo Jean Monnet once more: "the solutions ha[ve] to be proposed and applied." (Monnet, 1978, 417). Today, there is a reinforced imperative to strengthen social and civic competences, not only to safeguard democratic stability and foster a shared sense of European belonging, but also to cultivate resilience and expand political imagination. Young people will inherit a world that demands more than a basic understanding of civics. They must not only act responsibly to uphold and advance citizens' rights, but also learn to navigate uncertainty,

interpret complexity, and recognise power imbalances. More than this, they must be able to forge new, creative alliances with both the human and non-human actors who share the planet. Imaginative solutions have to be proposed.

While traditional pedagogical approaches centred on the transmission and acquisition of knolwedge continue to play and important role in education, they are not sufficient on their own to prepare young people for the complex challenges ahead. To be truly effective, they must be complemented by active and collaborative learning strategies. These guidelines mark an initial step toward helping teachers transform citizenship education into an engaging and meaningful experience. From a theoretical perspective, they are grounded in a relational understanding of human beings that recognizes their plurality and the ways in which, through action and dialogue, **individuals construct a shared historical world of meaning** and establish common institutions (Arendt 1958; Foucault, 1982). They further draw on insights from political ecology and ecofeminism, which seek to reconfigure the relationship between humans, non-humans and the environment by foregrounding **interdependence, care, and ecological justice** (Merchant 1980; Plumwood 1993; Latour 2004).

In terms of foundational learning theories, a useful framework is provided by Vygotsky's **social constructivism** (1978) and Lave and Wenger's **situated learning** (1991), both of which highlight that learning takes place through social interaction and within specific context. Complementing these perspectives, the Council of Europe's *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) offers a structured articulation of the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge required for **democratic citizenship** in diverse European societies. Together, these

frameworks underscore the importance of creating shared spaces of meaning in citizenship education. Within this approach, **critical literacy** (Janks, 2014) and **critical digital literacy** (Buckingham, 2015) also emerge as vital competencies, enabling students to engage critically with both traditional and digital media while navigating complex social and ethical issues.

Creating meaningful spaces for civic learning requires bridging formal education with students' lived experiences, including through participatory and collaborative approaches. The concept of **third space literacies** (Potter & McDougall, 2017) offers a valuable framework for this integration, providing an intermediate ground where young people can connect their informal digital practices with structured civic learning, thereby strengthening their role as active citizens.

To foster meaningful civic engagement, education must also address the interplay between individual moral development and the wider social environment. Kohlberg's model of **moral development** (1963) offers structured ways to enhance students' civic consciousness through moral dilemmas, while Bronfenbrenner's **ecological systems theory** (1977, 1979) highlights the importance of interconnected learning environments that integrate school, family, and community into citizenship education.

Finally, these guidelines take into account key ideas from other influential theories like **transformative learning** (Mezirow, 2000), **critical pedagogy** (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2020), and **self-determination theory** (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Transformative learning encourages students to challenge assumptions and reconsider their perspectives, while critical pedagogy promotes awareness of social injustices and the development of the skills needed to address them. At the same time, self-determination theory highlights the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in

enhancing motivation and making learning more personally meaningful. By integrating these perspectives, citizenship education can empower students to reflect critically on their own assumptions, foster autonomy and motivation, and navigate the complexities of today's world with confidence and responsibility.

Taken together, these models form a robust foundation for a meaningful and empowering approach to citizenship education, one that bridges formal and informal learning spaces and supports active, critical participation in society.

3. Core principles

These guidelines are centred on the following core principles, which support students' growth and adaptability in a rapidly changing world, with specific attention to the European dimension:

a) **Student-centred approach:** Students have a voice and are actively involved in their learning. They are encouraged to ask questions, join discussions, and form their own opinions. By doing so, they become the protagonists of their own education.

b) **Active learning:** Students engage in real-life scenarios, role-plays, and project-based activities, applying what they learn in practical ways. Field trips, workshops, and case studies serve to connect theoretical concepts with real-world experience.

c) **Critical thinking:** Students engage with and critically evaluate information in all its forms. They develop media literacy and analytical reasoning to navigate misinformation – a key challenge in the European digital public sphere. Critical thinking empowers learners to challenge assumptions, consider diverse perspectives, make informed decisions, and engage with the world ethically (Velema et al., 2023).

d) **Reflective practice:** Students act, observe, and evaluate in structured, intentional ways. They draw on relevant knowledge to approach civic challenges, observe the impact of their actions, and reflect on next steps for meaningful change.

e) **Relevance and global perspective**: Students come to see their everyday lives as relevant to local, European, and global issues. They explore how decisions made at

the European level, as well as local action, can make a difference in addressing shared challenges such as climate change and social justice.

f) **Inclusive practices:** Every student feels valued and respected, regardless of their cultural, social, or economic background. This means embracing diverse perspectives and ensuring that the curriculum reflects a wide range of voices and experiences. All students see themselves represented in what they learn.

g) **Digital literacy:** Students learn to critically assess online information, use digital platforms responsibly, and harness technology for civic purposes. Educators are encouraged to incorporate digital citizenship into their teaching, helping students navigate the online world thoughtfully and responsibly.

h) **Collaboration and community building:** Students collaborate, work in teams, and feel a strong sense of community. Collaborative learning experiences promote interpersonal skills, a sense of belonging, empathy, and shared responsibility – qualities that are fundamental to active citizenship and to a positive learning environment.

i) **Empowerment and agency:** Students are empowered to take ownership of their own learning and development. This principle emphasizes fostering students' sense of agency, encouraging them to make informed decisions, take action on issues that matter to them, and engage proactively in their education.

j) **Social responsibility and activism:** Students are encouraged to embrace social responsibility and engage actively with social and environmental issues. By supporting in moving from awareness to action, educators help them make a meaningful impact on their communities and the broader world.

Together, these principles provide a framework for developing informed, reflective, and active citizens. By prioritizing student-centred learning, critical thinking, collaboration, and civic agency, educators can help students take ownership of their education, engage ethically with real-world issues, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

4. Innovative and Collaborative Teaching Methods

Innovative and collaborative teaching methods are essential for making citizenship education truly engaging and transformative. By blending theory with practice, these approaches inspire students to think critically while fostering empathetic, responsible forms of collaboration and alliance-building.

At the core of these approaches is collaborative learning, understood as a pedagogical framework in which students actively engage in shared tasks, peer feedback, and collective problem-solving. Its effectiveness depends on purposeful task design – including shared goals, clearly defined roles, and structured interdependence – as well as explicit teaching of group skills and opportunities for reflection (Jacques & Salmon, 2007; Davidson & Major, 2014). When well facilitated, it enables students to value diverse perspectives and supports both engagement and academic achievement (Prince, 2004).

The following methods and approaches offer practical ways to translate these principles into classroom practice:

a) **Debate:** Students learn to express and defend different viewpoints on complex social and political issues. Debates develop critical thinking, improve argumentation skills, and promote respectful and constructive discussions (Kennedy 2007). To ensure debates are inclusive and educational rather than purely competitive, teachers can use structured formats – such as assigned roles, timed rounds, and clear rules for the use of evidence – while emphasising active listening and fair summarising of opposing views. Debriefing is essential: students reflect on how their thinking evolved, which evidence was most persuasive, and which norms

best supported respectful dialogue. This method was explored in the GrACE webinar series (2024-2025 and 2025-2026), featuring Letizia Cinganotto,[1] as well as during the GrACE 2026 residential course, in workshops held in Italian by Luisa Broli[2] and in English by Tom Smith[3].

b) **Storytelling and Digital Storytelling:** Through narratives, students reflect on personal experiences, historical events, or community stories to foster empathy, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning. Digital storytelling builds on this by incorporating multimedia tools – such as videos, podcasts, or digital presentations – enabling students to share their stories creatively and reach wider audiences (Hampe, 2007). The approach typically involves story circles, scripting, storyboarding, and iterative feedback, guiding students to craft narratives with a clear purpose and audience in mind. It is especially effective when linked to local histories, community voices, or sustainability themes, where personal experiences can be connected to broader civic questions. This method was explored in both GrACE webinar series, featuring sessions on sustainability and film-making by Anastasia Ellis and Tom Dawson,[4] sustainability and social media by Elena Milani,[5] and storytelling by Manuela Kelly-Calzini.[6] During the GrACE 2026 residential course, a three-step storytelling

[1] https://grace.unitn.it/webinars/420/ and https://grace.unitn.it/webinars/822/
[2] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1123/
[3] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1092/
[4] https://grace.unitn.it/webinars/426/
[5] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1469/
[6] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1571/

workshop was led by Andrea Brunello,[7] and a dedicated workshop on podcast creation for active citizenship was held by Moira Stefini.[8]

c) **Critical Literacy:** Students learn to decode texts and media to uncover hidden biases and power structures, empowering them to challenge misinformation and navigate complex narratives around controversial social and political issues (Luke and Freebody, 1999). In practice, they compare sources, analyse framing and language choices, consider whose voices are included or excluded, and reflect on how meaning is shaped by context and power. This approach fosters informed judgement and responsible participation in democratic debate. This method was explored in the GrACE webinar series 2025-2026, featuring Rowan Oberman,[9] and during the GrACE 2026 residential course, featuring Mike Orr.[10]

d) **Systems Thinking**: Students analyse problems as interconnected systems rather than isolated events, allowing them to identify root causes of complex issues like climate change and understand how local actions affect broader systems (Meadows, 2008). They may explore feedback loops, time delays, and unintended consequences, while learning to consider multiple stakeholders and scales, from local and national to European and global. Instruction often incorporates visual tools, such as system maps or causal loop diagrams, alongside iterative questioning that encourages learners to move beyond single-cause

[7] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1223/ , https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1231/ and https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1238/
[8] https://grace.unitn.it/methodology/980/
[9] https://eventi.unitn.it/it/teaching-sustainability-through-critical-literacy
[10] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1135/

explanations. Hands-on engagement with complexity is further supported by tools such as En-ROADS, a climate simulation model that allows students to explore the interplay of policy, behaviour, and systemic change, used in a dedicated workshop during the GrACE 2026 residential course, featuring En-ROADS Climate Ambassador Elisabetta Demattio.[11] The approach was explored in the GrACE webinar series 2025-2026, featuring Colin Sage,[12] who further developed the theme in a collaborative workshop with Raul Pinto during the GrACE 2026 residential course.[13]

e) **Game-Based Learning:** Students learn key citizenship concepts through educational games, making learning both interactive and enjoyable. Effective game-based learning combines guided gameplay with clear learning objectives and, crucially, structured debriefing afterwards. Teachers help students connect in-game decisions to real civic dilemmas – such as trade-offs, rights and responsibilities, and competing interests – so that insights gained through play transfer to real-world civic understanding. This method was explored in the GrACE webinar series 2024-2025, featuring Luana Silveri.[14]

f) **Philosophy for Children and Communities (P4C):** Students explore ethical, social, and political issues through philosophical inquiry, asking any and every question that arises in response to a prompt. This approach develops reasoning skills, keeps pupils open-minded, and encourages meaningful discussions

[11] https://grace.unitn.it/methodology/945/
[12] https://grace.unitn.it/webinars/843/
[13] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1164/
[14] https://grace.unitn.it/webinars/444/

(Topping et al., 2019). A typical P4C session begins with a stimulus (a text, image, story, or case study), followed by students generating questions and collectively selecting one to explore. The teacher facilitates rather than lectures, using follow-up questions to deepen reasoning, clarify concepts, and support respectful disagreement. The method was explored in the GrACE webinar series 2024-2025, featuring Grace Lockrobin.[15]

g) **Participatory Arts-Based Learning:** Participatory art can serve as a powerful means of engaging with the environmental crisis and exploring the deep interdependence between humans and the earth in ways that are immediate, participatory, inclusive, and meaningful (Boal, 1995). Such practices engage cognitive and imaginative processes that are central to learning and meaning-making (Eisner, 2002). Collaborative art-making opens up shared spaces of experience where individuals can deepen their sense of belonging to a community while building trust in their imagination and their capacity to initiate change, understood as a civic resource (Greene, 1995). It supports shared processes oriented toward meaningful and graceful outcomes. In this way, it acts as a catalyst for civic engagement, inspiring people to take care of others and cultivate a shared, forward-looking imagination. By positioning people as active agents of change and connecting global challenges to everyday experience, participatory art embodies a core principle of citizenship education and represents a valuable tool for teachers. This approach was explored during the GrACE 2026 residential course, in collaboration with Lorena Martinello, through the creation of *Mycelium*, a large-scale collaborative textile

[15] https://grace.unitn.it/webinars/438/

installation.[16] It is highly adaptable and easy to replicate: it can be implemented using recycled materials and scaled to different contexts – from large, collaboratively painted textiles to smaller, interactive objects such as bookmarks.

h) **Citizen Science:** Students act as active contributors to scientific research by collecting and analysing data on local environmental or social issues (Bonney et al., 2009). Activities typically involve co-defining a research question, establishing simple protocols for data collection, gathering observations in the field, and interpreting results collectively. This approach emphasizes ethical participation, data quality, and connecting local findings to broader scientific and societal discussion. It bridges the gap between classroom theory and community action, linking student-gathered data to larger ecological monitoring networks, such as the European Environmental Agency (EEA) databases. This method was explored in both the GrACE webinar series 2025-2026[17] and the subsequent residential course, featuring Chiara Fedrigotti and Maria Vittoria Zucchelli from MUSE – Museo delle Scienze.[18]

i) **Challenge-Based Learning:** Students identify real-world problems, develop solutions, and take action. They move from a 'big idea' to an essential question and then to a concrete challenge that matters to their community. Teachers act as facilitators, supporting inquiry, stakeholder engagement, and iterative processes, while students co-design solutions and reflect on the impact of their action. This approach encourages creativity,

[16] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1060/
[17] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1574/
[18] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1321/

teamwork, and problem-solving skills, effectively connecting classroom learning with civic engagement (Nichols and Cator, 2008; Nichols, Cator, and Torres, 2016). It was explored in the GrACE webinar series 2024-2025, featuring Ilaria Pertot,[19] as well as during the GrACE 2026 residential course, in a workshop held by Ilaria Pertot and Stefano Turrini.[20]

j) **Project-Based Learning:** Students engage with authentic questions and real-world projects that address social and civic issues. Project-based learning (PBL) revolves around sustained inquiry: students investigate a driving question, conduct research, consult sources and stakeholders, and develop products that are shared beyond the classroom. Scaffolding – such as checkpoints, mini-lessons on research skills, and structure reflection moments – helps students manage complexity while retaining ownership of their work. This approach fosters research skills, collaboration, and the sharing of findings on topics like environmental sustainability or social justice (Markham, 2011), including through cross-border projects like eTwinning, which enable students to collaborate with peers across the EU. Similar principles underpin initiatives such as "Schools Beyond Regions and Borders" (SBRB),[21] where students engage in transnational collaboration on civic issues, developing both subject-specific knowledge and a strong sense of European citizenship.

k) **Role-Playing and Simulations:** Students engage in role-playing and simulations of real-world scenarios.

[19] https://grace.unitn.it/webinars/432/
[20] https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1072/ and https://grace.unitn.it/uncategorised/1107/
[21] https://sbrb.eu/

Effective simulations include three key phases: preparation – such as role briefs, background research, and rules of procedure – active participation through negotiation, coalition-building, and decision-making, and debriefing that connects the experience to real institutions and democratic values. Activities like mock parliaments, Model United Nations, or European Parliament simulations help students to understand civic roles, practice negotiation skills, and appreciate diverse perspectives. By requiring students to argue from positions that may differ from their own, this approach fosters empathy, perspective-taking, and confidence, while also strengthening public speaking and advocacy skills. A compelling real-world example of this methodology is provided by the Youth Parliament to the Alpine Convention (YPAC),[22] a GrACE partner initiative that brings together young people from across the Alpine region to debate current environmental and governance issues through parliamentary simulation, offering students direct experience of transnational democratic processes.

[22] https://ypac.eu/

5. Assessment in Citizenship Education

When teaching citizenship, the goal is for students to do more than memorize facts – they need to apply their learning in real-life situations. This requires assessing not only knowledge, but also critical thinking, collaboration, and understanding of what it means to be a responsible citizen. Effective assessment begins with clarity about what is being measured. Typically, this involves changes in students' knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes, aligned with relevant competences, such as those outlined in the GreenComp European Sustainability Competence Framework.[23]

Assessment in citizenship education should be seen as Assessment for Learning (AfL) – an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. AfL encourages students to become more active in their learning, reflecting on where they are, where they want to go, and how to get there.[24]

By combining **formative assessments**, which monitor progress regularly, with **summative assessments**, which evaluate overall learning, and integrating **authentic assessment** strategies that mirror real-world situations, educators can gain a fuller picture of students' growth and readiness for active citizenship.

Formative Assessment in Citizenship Education

Formative assessment is central to citizenship education, as civic competences develop gradually through reflection,

[23] https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/greencomp-european-sustainability-competence-framework_en

[24] Cambridge University Press and Assessment (2025): https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/support-and-training-for-schools/leading-learning-and-teaching-with-cambridge/assessment-for-learning/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

dialogue, and active engagement. It serves as an ongoing feedback process, enabling teachers to monitor progress and provide timely support (Black and Wiliam, 1998). It encourages students to reflect on their understanding, question assumptions, and refine their thinking – skills that are essential for active democratic participation.

In the context of a European citizenship education framework, formative assessment supports not only knowledge acquisition but also the development of attitudes, values, and participatory competences. The following strategies are particularly effective:

a) Class Discussions: Structured and open-ended discussions allow students to analyse contemporary issues, articulate their viewpoints, and engage respectfully with diverse perspectives. This is especially important in approaches such as Philosophy for Children (P4C) and Debate, where dialogue becomes a vehicle for democratic practice. Through guided discussion, teachers can assess their students' ability to reason ethically, their openness to alternative viewpoints, and their capacity for evidence-based argumentation. Class discussions also cultivate the democratic habit of listening – an essential but often overlooked civic skill.

b) Quick Writes and Source Critiques: Short reflective writing tasks provide insight into students' evolving understanding. Prompts may ask students to respond to a moral dilemma, analyse a current event, or critically evaluate a media source for bias, perspective, or misinformation. These activities directly reinforce critical and digital literacy, enabling students to clarify their thinking and develop analytical independence. In an era of disinformation and polarised media environments, the ability to critically assess sources is fundamental to responsible citizenship.

c) **Systems Mapping:** Systems Mapping invites students to visually represent the interconnected causes and effects of complex social issues (e.g. climate change, migration, or digital surveillance). By mapping relationships between economic, social, environmental, and political factors, students demonstrate their ability to apply systems thinking and identify interdependencies across multiple stakeholder perspectives. This strategy allows teachers to assess depth of understanding and the capacity to recognize complexity in context. Systems mapping reinforces the ecological and relational dimension of citizenship, reflecting the interconnected realities of European societies.

d) **Self-assessment and Peer Assessments:** Self and peer assessments promote metacognition, responsibility, and autonomy. Students evaluate their own work and provide constructive feedback to classmates, guided by clear criteria. These practices foster accountability within collaborative projects, strengthen reflective capacities, and encourage a culture of respectful feedback. In citizenship education, learning to assess one's own civic participation and that of others is itself a democratic competence.

e) **Exit Tickets:** Exit tickets are brief end-of-class reflections in which students summarise key learning points or pose remaining questions. Simple as they are, they provide immediate diagnostic insight into student understanding, capturing conceptual clarity, residual misconceptions, as well as emotional responses to sensitive topics. Over time, exit tickets help teachers identify patterns in learning and adapt instruction accordingly.

Summative Assessment in Citizenship Education

Summative assessment provides periodic milestones to evaluate how effectively students integrate knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes in response to civic challenges. In a European context, it should emphasise application and democratic competence over factual recall, focusing on how students reason, participate, and take action.

The following approaches are particularly effective:

a) **Project-Based Assessments:** Project-based assessments invite students to engage in sustained inquiry into civic issues and to produce meaningful outcomes. These projects typically require research, critical analysis, collaboration, and solution-oriented thinking (Thomas, 2000). Examples may include developing a local community action plan, conducting a mock trial on a human rights issue, or proposing sustainability initiatives for the school community. Such projects assess students' ability to transfer theoretical knowledge into practical civic engagement. They also reinforce democratic competences such as collaboration, responsibility, and evidence-based reasoning.

b) **Portfolios:** Portfolios provide a longitudinal perspective on student development. By collecting reflective writings, research tasks, project drafts, discussion summaries, and feedback over time, students and teachers can together observe intellectual and civic growth. Portfolios are particularly valuable in citizenship education because they capture progression in critical thinking and document both cognitive and participatory development.

c) **Debates and Presentations**: Debates and structured presentations assess students' ability to articulate

informed viewpoints on complex social and political issues. These formats evaluate clarity of argumentation, use of evidence, respectful engagement with opposing perspectives, as well as capacity for ethical reasoning. In addition to assessing content knowledge, debates cultivate essential democratic skills such as public speaking, tolerance of dissent, and reasoned disagreement that are central to pluralistic European societies.

d) **Simulations and roleplaying:** Simulations allow students to step into civic roles and experience institutional processes first-hand. Activities such as Model United Nations, mock elections, or parliamentary simulations enable students to explore democratic mechanisms in an experiential way. Through these activities, teachers can assess students' understanding of institutional structures, negotiation and consensus-building skills, their ability to represent stakeholder perspectives, and their capacity for strategic thinking into policy discussions.

Authentic Assessment as Guiding Principle

Authentic assessment is a guiding principle that enhances both formative and summative practices by emphasizing students' ability to apply learning in real-world, socially relevant contexts (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). In citizenship education, authentic assessment increases relevance, motivation, and the connection between school learning and democratic life.

The following examples illustrate how authentic assessment can be embedded into classroom practice:

a) **Community-Based Projects:** Community-based projects connect classroom learning to local realities.

Students organize initiatives like food drives, neighbourhood clean-ups, or awareness campaigns, experiencing civic participation directly and on their own terms. These projects demonstrate how knowledge, values, and action intersect in community life, reinforcing the principle that citizenship is practiced, not merely studied.

b) **Citizen Science Reports:** Students present findings from their own environmental data collection, connecting local observations to broader scientific, community, or EU-wide monitoring efforts. This approach allows educators to assess students' observation and data interpretation skills, as well as their ability to relate local findings to broader scientific or policy contexts.

c) **Policy Analysis Tasks:** Policy analysis activities position students as emerging policy thinkers. They research existing public policies – at local, national, or European levels –, evaluate their effectiveness, and propose improvements or alternative solutions. This approach develops advanced critical thinking and systems thinking skills, enabling students to understand the complexity of democratic decision-making and the interplay between knowledge, values, and action.

d) **Civic Action Campaigns**: Civic action campaigns encourage students to design and implement awareness initiatives on issues like environmental sustainability, digital responsibility, or social justice. In doing so, students move from understanding to advocacy, becoming active agents of change rather than passive observers of civic life.

Taken together, authentic assessment strategies do more than measure achievement; they cultivate engaged,

informed, and proactive citizens capable of contributing thoughtfully to democratic life. By embedding assessment within real-world civic action, educators ensure that learning does not end at the classroom door.

6. Conclusion

These guidelines offer a comprehensive, practice-oriented framework for transforming citizenship education into a dynamic and engaging learning experience. By integrating student-centred methodologies, collaborative learning, critical literacy, and systems thinking, teachers can create learning environments that reflect the complexity of contemporary democratic societies and the ecosystems we share.

The combination of innovative pedagogical approaches and carefully aligned assessment practices ensures that students develop not only civic knowledge but also the skills, knowledge, and values required to deal with the polycrisis of the 21st century and contribute meaningfully to their communities and to the future of the planet.

Citizenship education is not a static body of content; it is a dynamic process shaped by dialogue, reflection, and action. Accordingly, these guidelines should be implemented through ongoing professional reflection, adaptability, and collaboration among educators, students, and community partners. Building on the shared learning generated through the GrACE webinar series, residential courses, and workshops, educators can translate these approaches into concrete classroom practices that support democratic participation across Europe and beyond. Through sustained commitment and collective responsibility, schools can cultivate generations of learners prepared to engage constructively, critically, and responsibly in democratic life.

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