

**“School Mediation and conflict resolution in the perspective of civic engagement and European Citizenship Skills”**

**“When am I an active citizen?”**

**Theofano A. Vlagkouli**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, 4GELA**

- Am I an active citizen if I speak up when I’m mistreated?
- Am I an active citizen if I speak up when others are mistreated?
- And would my speaking up have any value if others didn’t speak up too?
- Am I an active citizen by just existing in the crowd?
- Is this huge maze of people an active society?
- Should people just follow society’s norms?

Well, that is all to think about...

The term “active citizen” is defined as anyone who participates under the law of a nation discussing and educating themselves in politics and society. Active citizens may be involved in public advocacy and protest, working to effect change in their communities.

Nowadays, a sad fact is that a worrying percentage of the younger generation is giving up on social engagement, preferring to act on their own, absent from events like elections, open debates etc. They keep their opinion to themselves, and they avoid making noise in order to maintain their peace. But the truth is that their peace and happiness is slowly destroyed, as their rights. Many will argue that this happens due to their disappointment. They have been let down by a rather “dangerous” type of citizens, those who use their citizenship rights and take advantage of this power to profit on a personal level.

And here comes another question:

- Is an active citizen necessarily a good citizen?

Because a good citizen is the one who does not only participate in social events, but the one who does so with the best intentions, minding the whole unit.

We must admit that not every person who participates and is active has the best interests (intentions). Unfortunately, many of the “active” citizens are only active because they want to make personal profit. If this is their one and only motive, they are no good for the society. On the other hand, if they are “detected”, they can operate as an obstacle that the rest of the community will try to overcome, as a “challenge” that will bring society’s members closer.

A good starting point towards the solution of this problem could be motivating youngsters to see those people as “the challenge” and work in solidarity to win. It may be funny but to beat the ones who think exclusively on the basis of personal profit, we need a little bit of a personal motive ourselves. So, apart from the common good, what’s in it for us? For each citizen personally? We shouldn’t fool ourselves. No one is (quite) willing to be a part of something if they have nothing to gain just for themselves too.

As it has been quoted many times by the ancient Greeks, people could not survive on their own. We would not be able to exist if not in a society. There is a myth from the Greek philosopher, Protagoras, which proves that we made cities to collaborate and to beat wild animals and of course to protect ourselves from the dangers of nature. But what is the point of doing that if we turn to one another? Forming a society does not make us strong. Forming an active society, though, **does!**

This is one of the main reasons why we need mediation to be an important part of our educational system. Since school is a miniature of society, its members must learn to solve their conflicts creatively. If a peer helps other peers to communicate and find a solution to a problem, then he may also later form an active considerate citizen and inspire the rest to do so as well. School mediation is a way of getting our feelings across and coming to an agreement without punishment being given by teachers or a headmaster, an authority that would only terrorise kids and wouldn't actually have any real result either. This way, students have the chance to operate on themselves, accept help from someone equal and at the same age who will understand them. In any case, either this has success or not, both sides and the mediator themselves profit more than they would think, as they will be one step closer to actively practicing their right of expressing their mind, defending their point of view and overstepping to ensure peace between the members of their community. These are all virtues that an active and good citizen is in great need of and that school should be handing out.

In addition, personal profit is also big in terms of mental health. Especially in times of confinement and global pandemic, participating in social gatherings (in person or online) can really help someone improve their social skills. As a result, they will get more hyped confidence and they will as well escape from their own problems by trying to solve common ones. They may as well profit by gaining new friends and making bonds and relationships that will keep them company and bring them new personal life or career opportunities. Socializing through citizenship is a major factor on everyone's personal growth and well being.

As it concerns the so-called European citizen, it must be said that Europe is one more of those unions that humans have the urge to create. As we have always been gathering in groups, we have now started uniting them and making bigger ones that will help in collaborating, exchanging ideas, evolving on a financial level, improving ourselves as countries, smaller societies and as units( each citizen for itsone). A European citizen is an active citizen who also takes into consideration extra parameters as an international thinker who cares about people with differences and different backgrounds too but also with the same ambitions and interests.

We must remember that the great ancient philosopher Aristoteles used to claim that the highest goal of humanity is happiness and to achieve happiness we need an active, well-organized society and a society like that is formed only by active citizens.

In such a utilitarian era, is there any hope that we can combine good intentions for the whole and pure social interest with personal prospects in a healthy way?

**Yes!** is the answer we hope one day may be said with unbiased confidence!