

The impact of school education, family, cultural background and political attitudes and experiences in civic knowledge

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The IEA Civic Education Study in Portugal involved the observation of national representative samples of students from grades 8, 9 and 11. Grades 8 and 9 are the terminal years of basic (compulsory) education, and grade 11 is the mid-year of secondary education. Results on civic knowledge reveal a particular scenario that will be explored in this paper: 8 grade students score clearly below the international mean, but both 9 and 11 grade students score above the international mean. The impact of four relevant variables in the literature on political development - education, family cultural background, political interest and experiences, and interpersonal trust - will be analyzed and discussed.

Several studies with Portuguese adolescents conducted during the last two decades point to a tendency for disinterest in political affairs and skepticism regarding political parties, politicians, and the functioning of the political system in general, even if young people support the democracy regime and the multi-party system; political participation is also low, with a subtle tendency for the increase of less conventional forms of participation (e.g. Benavente/ Mendes/ Schmidt 1997; Braga da Cruz 1985, Braga da Cruz 1995; Brederode Santos/ Dias 1993; Figueiredo 1988; Vala 1985). Villaverde Cabral concludes that there is a strong distance-to-power in the Portuguese population that affects particularly disenfranchised groups, namely those people who have lower levels of educational attainment and of economic status.

These results help to understand why there were intense debates in Portugal, since the eighties, on the relevance of the school's role in promoting democratic citizenship: the recognition that the country had a low level of political development and culture (Braga da Cruz 1985) demanded the need for the school to assume a particular responsibility, counteracting social disadvantages and promoting political knowledge, skills, dispositions and behaviors essential for the expansion of democracy. However, fears of indoctrination and ideological inculcation, closely related to the educational experiences during the dictatorial regime that lasted until 1974, accounted for the lack of systematic curricular strategies to address civic issues (Menezes 1999). In fact, both the general goals of education and the specific objectives of basic and secondary education, defined in the Portuguese Education Act of 1986, emphasize the need to develop conscious, responsible and intervening citizens. The subsequent Educational Reform of 1989 determined that citizenship issues, under the name of Personal and Social Development, should be addressed both as a cross-curricular goal, the object of a specific discipline (alternative to Moral and Religious Education), and of a project area (see Menezes 2002 for a revision of the process). However, apart from episodic practices, generalization of these strategies was never a fact; even if changes in curricular guidelines reveal that some subject contents and methods do appeal to citizenship themes (Menezes/ Xavier/ Cibele 1997; Santos Silva 1999) analysis at the level of the implemented curricula show no clear systematic approach of these issues (Menezes 1999). It was exactly the recognition of this absence - also involving the period of data collection of the IEA study (1999 and 2000) - that led to a Curricular Reorganization that assumed citizenship education as a basic goal of education (Menezes 2002).

However, in spite of this optimistic belief on the impact of school education in political socialization and development underlying curricular change in Portugal, research reveals that school effects need to be further explored. If it is true level of educational attainment and expectations are consistently related with political variables (e.g., tolerance, interest, political participation and knowledge, ...)

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apparent education effects are usually diminished when wealth, income, leisure time and (...) membership of social networks are included in the models (253).

Therefore, although there are some indicators of a direct school effect, these could also be mediated by other variables such as family cultural background and participation experiences. Research on social capital (*Putnam 1993, 1998*) specifically emphasizes the importance of participation on voluntary associations and interpersonal trust for the development of relevant political knowledge, dispositions and competences (*Sullivan/ Transue 1999*). Therefore, it is the goal of this paper to analyze IEA Portuguese data on civic knowledge for grades 8, 9 and 11 regarding the impact of school education together with family cultural background, political interest, political experiences and interpersonal trust.

1. Method

1.1 Sampling and data collection

Three representative samples of Portuguese students from basic (grades 8 and 9) and secondary (grade 11) education were observed. A two-stage stratified cluster design was used for sampling: during stage 1 stratified selection of schools with a probability-proportional-to-size (PPS) method was performed (with region as an explicit stratification variable, and school size as the implicit stratification variable); during stage 2 one class per grade in each school (149) was randomly selected. For secondary education the type of school (regular vs. professional) was an additional implicit stratification variable. Testing was supervised by trained teachers in each school and occurred during April and May 1999 for grades 8 and 9, and during April and May 2000 for grade 11; quality control - in approximately 10% of the schools - revealed no major problems.

1.2 Samples

The mean age for the samples of Portuguese students from grades 8 (n=3261), 9 (n=3219) and 11 (n=2795) is 14.7 (SD=0.99), 15.6 (SD=0.96), and 17.8 (SD=1.24), respectively, which is almost 1-year older than expected in a regular school trajectory, since Portuguese students enter grade 1 when they reach the age of 6. An analysis of the distribution according to the year of birth (*Table 1*) reveals that around 40% of the students attending each grade have experienced one or more years of academic retention; this percentage is slightly higher in grades 8 and 11. Similar values have been found in other studies on academic failure within Portuguese students (IGE, 2002). The samples are relatively balanced regarding gender distribution, even if there are more girls than boys, especially in secondary education; the large majority of the students was born in Portugal (*Table 2*).

Table 1

Distribution according to the year of birth

Variable	Categories	Grade 8 %	Grade 9 %	Grade 11 %
Year of birth	From 1976 to 1981	1,6	6,2	21,2
	1982	4,5	11,1	21,5
	1983	13,6	21,5	56,3
	1984	22,4	60,6	0,9
	1985	57,1	0,6	0,0
	1986	0,7		

In bold the frequencies for the expected year or birth.

Table 2

Distribution according to gender and nationality

Variable	Categories	Grade 8 %	Grade 9 %	Grade 11 %
Gender	Female	52,2	51,5	53,0
	Male	47,8	48,5	43,07
Where were you born?	Portugal	94,6	94,3	92,3
	Other country	5,4	5,7	7,7

1.3 Instrument

The instrument was developed by the Steering Committee of the IEA Civic Education Study, and the translation into Portuguese was subject to revision by experts (both nationally and internationally) to ensure reliability and validity. The instrument included:

- Multiple-choice cognitive items focusing on knowledge of citizens' rights and duties, functioning of democratic institutions, elections, etc., on skills in interpretation of political messages (e.g., cartoons, leaflets) and, for grade 11, also on economic literacy. Although 14 items were the same in the younger (grades 8 and 9) and older (grade 11) populations, the test for the latter included 27 new items.
- Lickert-scale format items on concepts of democracy and citizenship, attitudes (e.g., women and immigrants' rights, ...), dispositions to be politically active in the future, and perceptions of school climate.
- Closed-response items on background information (e.g., gender, parents educational attainment, ...).
- National items, focusing both on knowledge and attitudes related to a national theme, in Portugal the process of colonization and decolonization.

The structure of the items was analyzed through confirmatory factor analysis (for attitude items) and Rasch scaling (for multiple-choice items) with the international data [for this section a detailed revision of the process can be found at [Torney-Purta/ Lehmann/ Oswald/ Schultz 2001](#) and [Amadeo/ Torney-Purta/ Lehmann/ Husfeld/ Nikolova 2002](#)]. In this paper, we will use the international scale on the total knowledge scale, including both civic knowledge and skills, for grade 8, 9 and 11.

2. Results

2.1 Civic knowledge

The international mean for the younger samples (grades 8 and 9) on the total knowledge scale was set to a value of 100 scale points; the older samples have an international mean of 119 scale points ([Amadeo/ Torney-Purta/ Lehmann/ Husfeld/ Nikolova 2002](#)).

As shown in Figure 1, the mean score for grade 8 students falls below the international mean, whereas both grade 9 and grade 11 students score higher than the international mean for their respective age groups. Grade differences are statistically significant for $p = .000$ [$F(2, 9130) = 1455,92$].

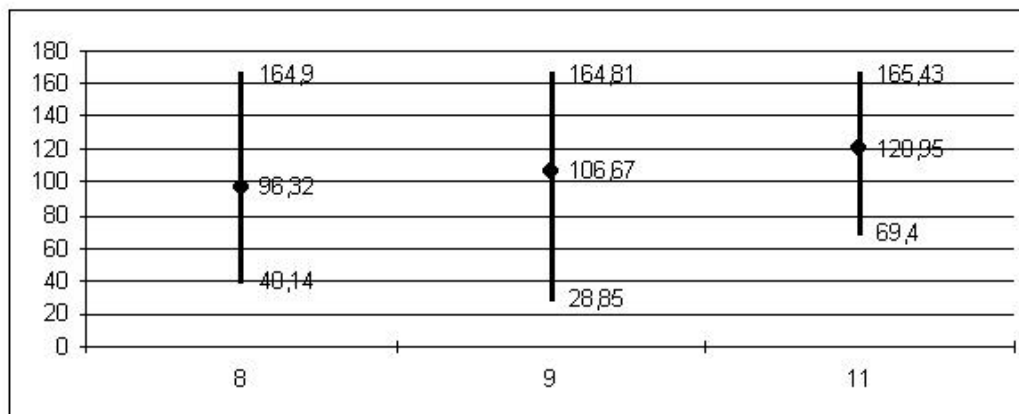


Figure 1

Civic knowledge

2.2 School education

School educational variables consist of educational expectations, a rough index of academic success (based on number of retention years as inferred from birth year), open classroom climate for discussion, and talking about national politics with teachers (Table 4).

Table 3

Distribution according to school education variables.

Variable	Categories	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 11
		%	%	%
How many more years are you going to study?	None	9,4	8,6	1,4
	1 or 2	14,5	7,4	20,7
	3 or 4	23,3	26,4	16,6
	More than 5	52,8	57,6	61,3
Academic success	Failure for 2 or more years	19,7	17,0	20,4
	Failure for 1 year	22,2	21,1	20,6
	No academic failure	58,1	61,9	59,0
Perceptions of open classroom climate for discussion	Negative	12,2	8,0	7,3
	Slightly positive	52,7	48,4	48,5
	Highly positive	35,1	43,6	44,2
How often do you talk to your teachers about politics?	Never	39,8	30,2	27,2
	Rarely	38,2	40,3	45,3
	Sometimes	20,3	28,1	26,9
	Often	1,6	1,4	0,6

Regarding educational expectations the majority of the students aims to have a higher education degree (alternative "more than 5 years"), with growing percentages with grade. The distribution on academic success shows high and persistent levels of failure in all grades, even if grade 9 has significantly less failure than both grades 8 ($X^2 = 11,10$; 2DF; $p = .004$) and 11 ($X^2 = 11,46$; 2DF; $p = .003$). Groups based on scale scores for *perceptions of classroom climate* (1) show that there is a positive trend with grade. Finally, most students in all the grades rarely or never speak with their teachers about politics. (2)

2.3 Family cultural background

Family cultural background variables include access to a daily newspaper at home, number of books at home, mother and father educational attainment, and talking with parents about politics (Table 4).

Table 4

Distribution according to family cultural background variables

Variable	Categories	Grade 8 %	Grade 9 %	Grade 11 %
Daily newspaper at home	No	55,6	57,9	55,7
	Yes	44,4	42,1	44,3
Number of books at home	Until 10	21,6	18,8	11,7
	Until 50	36,1	34,2	32,2
	Until 100	20,2	22,1	23,5
	More than 100	22,1	24,9	32,6
Mother education	Until grade 4	52,1	50,1	58,9
	Until grade 12	37,2	36,8	25,6
Father education	Post-secondary education	10,7	13,1	15,6
	Until grade 4	52,8	51,2	60,1
	Until grade 12	34,6	34,1	23,2
How often do you talk to your parents about politics?	Post-secondary education	12,6	14,7	16,7
	Never	15,6	10,2	5,2
	Rarely	24,4	24,6	18,7
	Sometimes	47,5	52,2	60,8
	Often	12,5	13,1	15,3

Even if there is no variation regarding access to a daily newspaper at home, there are inter-group differences regarding books at home and mother and father educational attainment. Number of books at home grows with grade, with grade 8 students having significantly less books than grade 9 and 11 students, and grade 9 students having significantly less books than grade 11 students [$F(2,8239)=76,547$; $p=.000$]. Grade 8 students' mothers have lower levels of educational attainment than grade 9 ($X^2= 8,77$; 2DF; $p= .000$) and grade 11 ($X^2= 96,74$; 2DF; $p= .000$), the same being true for their fathers in comparison with grade 11 students ($X^2= 90,97$; 2DF; $p= .000$); grade 9 students' parents also have lower educational attainment than grade 11 students' parents (mother: $X^2= 82,01$; 2DF; $p= .000$; father: $X^2= 80,23$; 2DF; $p= .000$) - meaning that secondary education students are, as expected, a more culturally selected group than students from basic (compulsory) education. However, there are also significant differences between grade 8 and 9, favoring the latter. In what concerns talking with parents about politics there is a positive tendency with grade, even if less than 16% of the students discuss politics with their parents often. (2)

2.4 Political attitudes and experiences

Political attitudes and experiences include: interest in politics, interpersonal trust, talking with friends about politics, listening to the news broadcast on TV, and frequency of participation in voluntary associations.

Political interest was based on a single item asking students how much they agreed with the statement "I am interest in politics"; levels of disinterest are high (62,4% overall) with less than 6% overall declaring that they strongly agree (Table 5).

Table 5

Distribution according to political interest

Variable	Categories	Grade 8 %	Grade 9 %	Grade 11 %
I am interested in politics	Strongly disagree	32,4	29,4	20,2
	Disagree	32,5	35,9	36,2
	Agree	29,0	29,5	37,5
	Strongly agree	6,1	5,3	6,1

There were several items addressing trust in governmental related institutions (e.g., courts, police,

parliament,) and the news on the media. A single item asked students how much they trusted their fellow citizens, on a 4-point scale ranging from "never" to "always", and will be addressed as an indicator of interpersonal trust. It is curious to note that extreme percentages of (mis)trust decrease with grade (data not shown), probably due to growing cognitive complexity; overall grade 11 students are clearly more trusting that their younger colleagues, with perceptions of trust ("most of the time" and "always") growing from slightly over 40% to slightly below 70% (Figure 2).

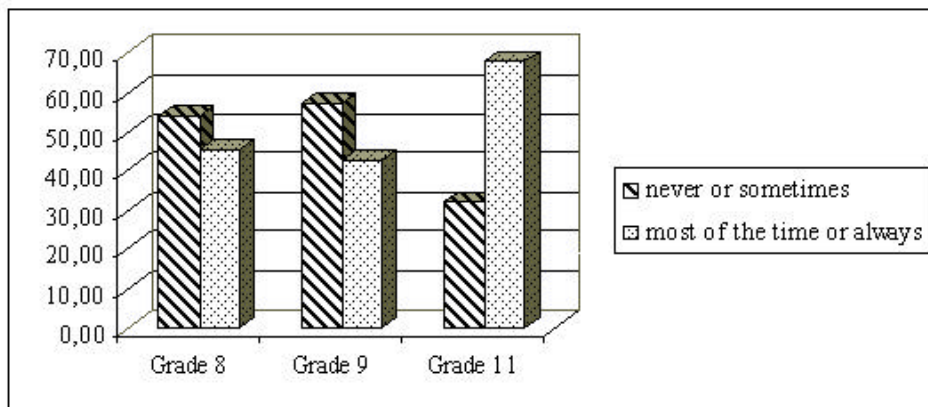


Figure 2

Trust in fellow citizens by grade (%)

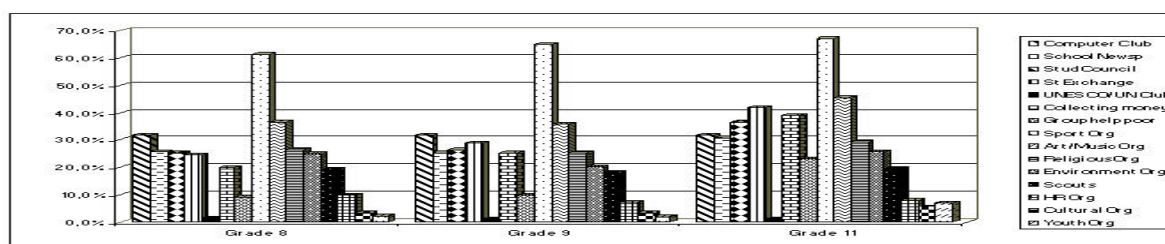
As shown in Table 6, consistently with the growing levels of political interest there is also a slight increase in frequency of listening to the news on TV, even if overall percentages are high which is probably related to the Portuguese habit of having dinner at the time of news broadcast on TV. Regarding talking with friends about politics more than half of the students in all grades rarely or never do it, even if there is a slight increase with grade.

Table 6

Distribution regarding political experiences

Variable	Categories	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 11
		%	%	%
How often do you listen to the news broadcast on TV?	Never	0,8	0,8	0,2
	Rarely	5,7	4,3	2,9
	Sometimes	44,8	44,1	44,0
	Often	48,7	50,8	52,9
How often do you talk to your friends about politics?	Never	27,1	22,5	13,8
	Rarely	34,6	38,3	41,5
	Sometimes	34,3	36,5	41,6
	Often	4,0	2,7	3,1

Participation in voluntary associations was observed in relation to a variety of experiences both in and out of school, ranging from more informal activities and groups (e.g., collecting money for a social cause; a group conducting activities to help the poor) to more organized institutions (e.g., sports, arts, environmental, religious, ... organizations) (see Figure 3).



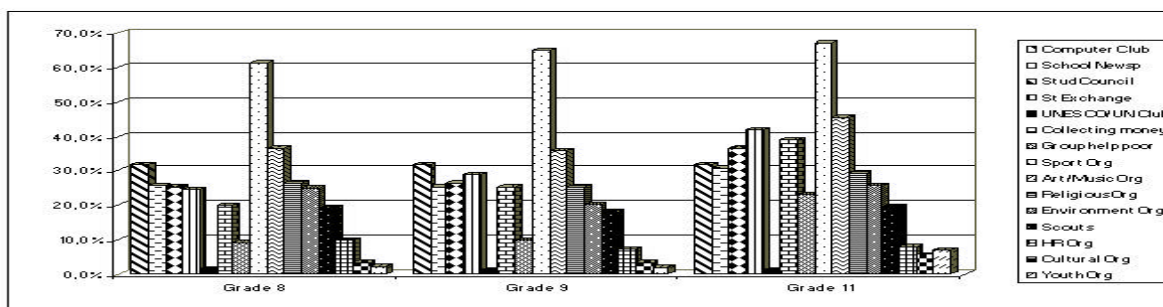


Figure 3
Participation in civic associations/activities by grade (%)

Involvement in computer clubs is the most frequent within-school experience, followed by participation in the school newspaper, a student council or a student exchange program, with a tendency for participation to increase in grade 11, particularly for student exchange programs and student councils (3). Collecting money for a social cause doubles from grade 8 (19%) to 11 (38%). The relatively high participation in sports and artistic organizations is probably related to the involvement in extra-school activities. It is interesting to note that participation in youth organizations affiliated with a political party or union is residual - involving 6% percent of grade 11 students, with the international mean for this population being 10%; however, participation in environmental organizations is always above 20%, with 25% for grade 11 students (above the international mean of 13% for this population). On the whole, frequency of participation is not very high, with only 37% of the students attending meetings of these organizations on a weekly basis (whereas 32% rarely or never do it).

2.5 Impact of school education, family cultural background, and political attitudes and experiences on civic knowledge for grades 8, 9 and 11

The impact of predictors was explored through a Linear Regression with civic knowledge as the dependent variable. Independent variables were organized in three blocks: block 1 includes those variables related to school education; block 2 contains family cultural background variables; and block 3 involves variables related to political attitudes and experiences. In order to explore inter-groups differences, linear regressions were performed separately for grade 8, 9 and 11.

A first and relevant observation is that the percentage of variance explained by the models (R²) grows significantly as an additional block of variables is included in the analysis (see Tables 7, 8 and 9), and this increase is of particular magnitude when family variables (block 2) are added to educational variables (block 1) (4). It should be noted, however, that the variance explained by the model is lower for grade 11.

Table 7

Model summary for linear regression on knowledge scale for grade 8

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Change Statistics				
					R ² change	F change	df 1	df 2	sig F change
1(a)	,424	,180	,178	14,75862	,180	121,805	4	2224	,000
2(b)	,508	,258	,255	14,05502	,078	46,648	5	2219	,000
3(b)	,522	,272	,268	13,93229	,015	8,853	5	2214	,000

(a) Includes educational variables (educational expectations, academic success, classroom climate, talking with teachers about national politics)

(b) Includes educational variables plus family variables (mother and father educational attainment, number of books at home, daily newspaper at home, and talking with parents about politics)

(c) Includes educational and family variables plus political interest and experiences (political interest, talking with friends about national politics, listen to the news broadcast on TV, frequency of participation in voluntary associations, and interpersonal trust)

Table 8

Model summary for linear regression on knowledge scale for grade 9

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Change Statistics				
					R ² change	F change	df 1	df 2	sig F change
1(a)	,441	,195	,193	16,47795	,195	143,431	4	2371	,000
2(b)	,506	,256	,253	15,85467	,061	39,017	5	2366	,000
3(b)	,518	,268	,264	15,74242	,012	7,772	5	2361	,000

(a) Includes educational variables (educational expectations, academic success, classroom climate, talking with teachers about national politics)

(b) Includes educational variables plus family variables (mother and father educational attainment, number of books at home, daily newspaper at home, and talking with parents about politics)

(c) Includes educational and family variables plus political interest and experiences (political interest, talking with friends about national politics, listen to the news broadcast on TV, frequency of participation in voluntary associations, and interpersonal trust)

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Model summary for linear regression on knowledge scale for grade 8

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Change Statistics				
					R ² change	F change	df 1	df 2	sig F change
1(a)	,424	,180	,178	14,75862	,180	121,205	4	2224	,000
2(b)	,508	,258	,253	14,02502	,078	46,648	5	2219	,000
3(b)	,522	,272	,268	13,93229	,015	8,253	5	2214	,000

(a) Includes educational variables (educational expectations, academic success, classroom climate, talking with teachers about national politics)

(b) Includes educational variables plus family variables (mother and father educational attainment, number of books at home, daily newspaper at home, and talking with parents about politics)

(c) Includes educational and family variables plus political interest and experiences (political interest, talking with friends about national politics, listen to the news broadcast on TV, frequency of participation in voluntary associations, and interpersonal trust)

Table 8

Model summary for linear regression on knowledge scale for grade 9

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Change Statistics				
					R ² change	F change	df 1	df 2	sig F change
1(a)	,441	,195	,193	16,47795	,195	143,421	4	2371	,000
2(b)	,506	,256	,253	15,82467	,061	39,017	5	2366	,000
3(b)	,518	,268	,264	15,74242	,012	7,772	5	2361	,000

(a) Includes educational variables (educational expectations, academic success, classroom climate, talking with teachers about national politics)

(b) Includes educational variables plus family variables (mother and father educational attainment, number of books at home, daily newspaper at home, and talking with parents about politics)

(c) Includes educational and family variables plus political interest and experiences (political interest, talking with friends about national politics, listen to the news broadcast on TV, frequency of participation in voluntary associations, and interpersonal trust)

Table 9

Model summary for linear regression on knowledge scale for grade 11

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Change Statistics				
					R ² change	F change	df 1	df 2	sig F change
1(a)	,361	,131	,129	16,58004	,131	84,200	4	2243	,000
2(b)	,407	,165	,162	16,26279	,035	18,673	5	2238	,000

Beta standardized coefficients show curious variations between the grades, revealing that predictors have a different impact in what concerns civic knowledge across samples (Table 10). Regarding educational variables it is interesting to note that while talking with teachers is not significant for basic education students (grade 8 and 9), it gains a negative significant impact for secondary education students (grade 11); the opposite situation occurs for perceptions of an open classroom climate, which is irrelevant of grade 11 but significant for grades 8 and 9. Educational expectations and academic success are the stronger predictors of civic knowledge for all grades.

In what concerns family variables, it is interesting to note that mother educational attainment is always the strongest predictor. Additionally, having a daily newspaper at home has always a negative impact on civic knowledge - which might be explained by the fact that sport newspapers are on the top of sales of newspapers in Portugal. Curiously, talking with parents becomes non-significant for grade 11 students, whilst father educational attainment becomes more important than books at home (and more close to mother educational attainment).

Finally, interest in politics and participation in voluntary associations are the strongest predictors, with the magnitude of interest impact growing with age. Talking with friends has either a negative impact (Grade 8) or is non-significant (Grade 9 and 11); listening to the news on TV only becomes significant for grade 11 students; and interpersonal trust is not a significant predictor of civic knowledge in all grades. The results for grade 11 students could suggest that growth in cognitive complexity and autonomy enable them to benefit more from watching TV news than younger samples.

Table 10

Coefficients for knowledge scale in grades 8, 9 and 11

Grades	Grade 8			Grade 9			Grade 11		
	β	t	Sig.	β	t	Sig.	β	t	Sig.
Ed expectation	,172	8,063	,000	,181	8,349	,000	,165	7,408	,000
Academic success	,166	8,198	,000	,178	8,750	,000	,161	7,664	,000
Classroom climate	,065	3,392	,001	,062	3,306	,001	,021	1,036	,300
Talking with teachers	-,017	-,810	,418	,004	,199	,842	-,044	-2,081	,038
Mother ed attainment	,149	6,166	,000	,111	4,627	,000	,084	2,993	,003
Books at home	,111	5,170	,000	,109	5,201	,000	,049	2,135	,033
Father ed attainment	,075	3,104	,002	,080	3,341	,001	,076	2,725	,006
Talking with parents	,091	4,151	,000	,061	2,864	,004	,004	,169	,866
Daily newspaper at home	-,090	-4,708	,000	-,051	-2,765	,006	-,062	-3,141	,002
Interest in politics	,059	2,974	,003	,104	5,324	,000	,152	7,123	,000
Talking with friends	-,086	-3,975	,000	-,023	-1,125	,261	,005	,222	,824
Listen to news on TV	,024	1,258	,209	-,014	-,740	,459	,052	2,563	,010
Participation in associations	,078	4,144	,000	,054	2,961	,003	,058	2,959	,003
Interpersonal trust	-,030	-1,655	,098	,015	,833	,405	,009	,445	,657

Grades	Grade 8			Grade 9			Grade 11		
Predictors	β	t	Sig.	β	t	Sig.	β	t	Sig.
Ed expectation	,172	8,063	,000	,181	8,349	,000	,165	7,408	,000
Academic success	,166	8,198	,000	,178	8,750	,000	,161	7,664	,000
Classroom climate	,065	3,392	,001	,062	3,306	,001	,021	1,036	,300
Talking with teachers	-,017	-,810	,418	,004	,199	,842	-,044	-2,081	,038
Mother ed attainment	,149	6,166	,000	,111	4,627	,000	,084	2,993	,003
Books at home	,111	5,170	,000	,109	5,201	,000	,049	2,135	,033
Father ed attainment	,075	3,104	,002	,080	3,341	,001	,076	2,725	,006
Talking with parents	,091	4,151	,000	,061	2,864	,004	,004	,169	,866
Daily newspaper at home	-,090	-4,708	,000	-,051	-2,765	,006	-,062	-3,141	,002
Interest in politics	,059	2,974	,003	,104	5,324	,000	,152	7,123	,000
Talking with friends	-,086	-3,975	,000	-,023	-1,125	,261	,005	,222	,824
Listen to news on TV	,024	1,258	,209	-,014	-,740	,459	,052	2,563	,010
Participation in associations	,078	4,144	,000	,054	2,961	,003	,058	2,959	,003
Interpersonal trust	-,030	-1,655	,098	,015	,833	,405	,009	,445	,657

3. Discussion

The IEA Civic Education Study aimed to respond "to the expressed needs of many countries for empirical data as they began to rethink their civic education programs in the early 1990's" (Torney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald & Schultz, 2001, 14). However, the overall model for the study recognized that "learning about citizenship is not limited to teachers explicitly instructing young people about their rights and duties" (21), and that school influences should be conceived in relation to that of other life contexts of adolescents (e.g., family, neighborhoods, peer groups, ...). The goal of this paper was exactly to consider some of these influences, namely by exploring the impact of family cultural background and political attitudes and experiences, together with dimensions of school education, in Portuguese students civic knowledge.

Multiple regression analyses allow us to conclude for the importance of considering, in addition to school education, family cultural background and, to a lesser degree, political attitudes and experiences as predictors of civic knowledge. It should be noted that there are large variations between the Portuguese samples regarding civic knowledge (with grade 8 scoring below the international mean, while both grades 9 and 11 score above) and that this, contrary to the experience in other countries (e.g., Switzerland), cannot be explained by changes in curricular contents.

Across grades, educational expectations, academic success, parents' educational attainment, books at home, access to a daily newspaper (with an unexpected negative impact), political interest and frequency of participation in voluntary associations are the most significant predictors. Here, it is interesting to note that mothers' educational attainment has a strong predictive value than fathers' educational attainment, which might be related to differential patterns of adolescents' relationships with mothers and fathers (*Youniss/ Smollar 1985*). The observation that access to a daily newspaper at home is negatively correlated with civic knowledge might be due to the fact, mentioned above, that sport newspapers are at the top of newspapers sold in Portugal; in any case, this particular result needs to be explored further.

Between samples variations are also worth noting, namely the evolutions in the predictive power of perceptions of classroom climate, talking with parents, and listening to the news on TV. In the first two cases, the significant predictive power of classroom climate perceptions and talking with parents for basic education students (grades 8 and 9) disappears with secondary education students (grade 11); in the latter the opposite pattern occurs. These changes could be due to developmental characteristics of late adolescents, who might be less dependent of classroom and family contingencies, as their "world" expands and their autonomy progresses (*Sprinthall/ Collins 1988*). This might also account for the relative smaller variance explained by the model in grade 11.

Naturally, the analysis presented here has some limitations. To begin with, although the percentage of explained variance by the models is satisfactory, other variables could be included. Besides, multiple regressions do not take into consideration possible interaction effects that might help to understand the differences further. Further analysis of the data taking into consideration both interaction between the predictors and possible mediational processes (*Kenny/ Kasher/ Bolger 1998*) should be performed.

In any case, the results presented here do reveal the relevance of taking into account adolescents' opportunities and experiences in a variety of life contexts for understanding and explaining dimensions of political development and socialization. In particular, in conjunction with school education, family cultural background, political interest and frequent participation in voluntary associations seem to have a relevant impact on civic knowledge. Which finally reinforces the assertion that if it is true that schools cannot deny their special and explicit responsibilities in the process of citizenship education, this is a responsibility that they share with other life contexts of

adolescents. In this sense, citizenship education 'comes with the territory' for a variety of social contexts and institutions - which was exactly the theoretical point of departure of the Civic Education Study (*Torney-Purta/ Lehmann/ Oswald/ Schultz 2001*) - which supports the notion that the reconstitution and reinvention of democracy (*Santos 1998*) is a common task of us all.

Notes

(1) The scale for open classroom climate for discussion (that also exists in international data analysis) resulted from a factorial analysis on classroom climate items with national samples (data not shown). The 1st factor explains 27% of variance and includes items related with a open classroom for discussion in the classroom (e.g., teacher encourages students to make up their own minds, teacher respects and encourages students opinions, students feel free to disagree openly with teachers, ...); scale reliability is fair (Cronbach $\alpha = .76$). Scale scores were then recoded into a categorical variable with three levels: below the scale mean, slightly over the scale mean, and clearly over the scale mean.

(2) $X = \chi^2$.

(3) It should be noted that only Portuguese secondary schools have regulations regarding students' associations and councils; the implication is that opportunities for participation in students' boards are not equally distributed for grades 8, 9 and 11, even if there are several secondary schools that include grades 7 to 9.

(4) A similar situation occurs if we invert the order of the blocks, putting family variables as the first block (data not shown): family variables explain about 18% of the variance, and there is an increase to 25% when school education variables are included. The same does not hold when we enter political attitudes and experiences as the first block (data not shown) that only explains 5% of the variance.

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KeyWords: civic education - Civic Education study, CIVIC youth studies, International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), civic knowledge, political participation, Portugal, Personal and Social Development, civic knowledge, family background, school education, political attitudes



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