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IEA and Civic Education Studies: Pursuing a Moving Target

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IEA, International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, is an independent, international cooperative of national research institutions and governmental research agencies.

IEA became a legal entity in 1967, but its origins date back to 1958 when a group of scholars, educational psychologists, sociologists and psychometricians met at the UNESCO Institute for Education in Hamburg to discuss problems of school and student evaluation. They argued that effective evaluation required not only consideration of the inputs to education and the conditions under which schooling is conducted but also examination of such educational outcomes as knowledge, attitude and participation. The group strongly rejected data-free assertions about the relative merits of various educational systems. They also wanted to go beyond generating a set of performance indicators that would merely establish the well-being or otherwise of a school system, to identify those factors that would have meaningful and consistent influences on educational outcomes.

The founders of IEA viewed the world as a natural educational laboratory, where different school systems experiment in different ways to obtain optimal results in the education of their youth. They contended that while different countries give similar definitions to these 'optimal results', they tend to employ different methods to achieve common ends. The founders assumed that if research could obtain evidence from across a wide range of systems, there would probably be sufficient variability to permit the revelation of important relationships that would escape detection within a single educational system.

Since its inception, the IEA has conducted 23 research studies of cross national achievement in the area of various school subjects, such as mathematics, science, reading, writing, literature, languages, and civic

education. IEA also has been conducting studies on pre-primary education, classroom environment, information technology in education, and since recently - teacher education.

The first IEA Civic Education project was part of the Six Subject Survey, in which six different curriculum subjects were examined: reading comprehension, science, literature, French as a foreign language, English as a foreign language, and civic education. The selection of so diverse subjects was provoked by the *First International Mathematics Study* (1963-67), which identified several different factors influencing both learning and teaching of mathematics and implied a logical question: to what extent were the identified factors unique to mathematics or could be generalized to other subject areas?

Civic education was one of the subjects included in the Six Subject Survey because of its challenging specific characteristics: it was clear from the beginning that the study of civic education had to focus on both affective and cognitive aspects of political socialization, and that this process took place both outside and inside the school, even in countries where civic education was not part of the formal curriculum.

The study began in the late 60s with a survey focused on collecting curricular information on how civic education was defined in different nations. This served as a base for constructing instruments, by means of which the more or less elusive outcomes of civic education could be assessed. In 1971 a set of questionnaires, covering factual knowledge, civic attitudes, perception and understanding of political process as well as background information, was administered to more than 30,000 10-year-olds, 14-year-olds and pre-university students. Teacher and school questionnaires were also used. These included questions specific for civic education as well as more general, administered to teachers and school principals in other IEA subject area surveys. The final list of participants included nine countries. All those nine countries were democracies, with all their differences in forms of government (monarchy, republic, federation).

The first important outcome of the study was that civic education programs were generally an exception to the norm of school disengagement from the transmission of values. Data from every participating country confirmed the great importance of inculcating such values as good citizenship, tolerance, and support for civil rights and democratic practices. In some of the participating countries the role of schools in teaching patriotic and democratic values was formalized in the national constitution or in laws concerning the educational systems. Second, the study provided inconclusive data about schools as agents of political socialization. Though the results suggested that at least part of the differences between and within countries resulted from school factors, particularly the classroom climate encouraging students to express their own opinions (which seemed to foster several important outcomes of civic education), nevertheless school variables appeared rather to operate as part of an interdependent system. The different characteristics of a single school variable didn't have a visual impact upon the educational outcome.

The third finding had to do with the status of civic knowledge and attitudes of students. It was shown that students, at all levels tested, were relatively poorly informed about many aspects of their own country political

organization and international affairs. They demonstrated some basic misconceptions about democracy, about their own government and about global politics. Four facets of democratic citizenship such as civic knowledge, support for democratic values, support for the national government and civic interest/participation were proved to be independent of each other and formed different patterns among students from different countries.

The results of the first IEA Civic Education Study were "difficult" for both researchers and policy makers. The study had shown that in none of the nine democracies the system proved full capability to produce the ideal goal of a well-informed citizenry, with democratic attitudes and values, supportive of government policies and interested in taking part in civic affairs. The results were also unclear as for why schools were unsuccessful in attempts to achieve this democratic ideal.

Civic education "disappeared" from the map of IEA for more than 20 years. Impulses for a new study came from the changes in the real world of political and social life of the nations in the early 90s: the collapse of communism in Central-Eastern Europe and the appearance of "new democracies" on one side and at the same time crises in citizens' activity experienced by many "old democracies". This called for reexamination of the role of school in preparing young people for democratic citizenship and the direction that should be taken to enhance school contribution.

The second IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED) was initiated in 1994 and has two distinct, but related, phases. The goal of Phase 1 (1994-98) was to examine the ways in which young people were prepared for their roles as citizens in democracies and societies aspiring to democracy. The target group was 14-year-old students. 24 countries participated.

The CIVED Phase 1 focused on the school but was not restricted to the formal curriculum. The researchers gathered extensive information on policies, practices and issues concerning preparation for citizenship in their countries. Special attention was given to three domains: the meaning of democracy and its institutions; the meaning of national identity; social cohesion and social diversity. In addition, attention was given to the connection between political and economic issues, to problems in the local community (including the environment) and to mass media. The data was collected from document analysis (textbooks, curricula), interviews and discussions of experts (policy makers, practitioners, representatives of social sciences), focus groups of students and teachers.

Data collected in Phase 1 contributed to the design of instruments for Phase 2. The student test/survey instrument was composed of the test of student knowledge about fundamental democratic principles and processes, and a survey of concepts about democracy and citizenship, attitudes and civic related activities. This instrument was administered in 1999 to approximately 90,000 14-year-olds from 28 countries: 23 from Europe and five from other continents. To collect information about the context for civic education, a student background questionnaire as well as teacher and school principal questionnaires were used. In 2000, 16 countries collected data using similar instruments from over 50,000 upper-secondary students (the mean age of students ranged from 16.6 years to 19.4 years). The results were used for within-country comparisons.

The second IEA Civic Education Study could not provide a trend measure for participants of the first study because of a too big time-span and outdated instruments but it took lessons from this study. It was recognized that civic education is a complex enterprise involving a variety of cognitive, conceptual and attitudinal strands, which should be independently evaluated. It was also decided that a variety of educational experiences in school, in home, in the local communities and broader society should be included in the investigation. Also a new set of factors was taken under consideration: a global youth culture with common aspirations for freedom and a better world, and with shared consumer tastes.

The results of the CIVED study clarified the role of school in preparing young people for their role of citizens. They have shown that there is a rich array of experiences in schools that can be considered important in that respect. For example, significant predictors of the likelihood of voting in participating countries were civic knowledge, emphasis that schools put on the importance of voting as a learning objective, open climate for a classroom discussion (a factor, whose role was for the first time reported in the 1971 study), and frequency of watching television news. Three out of four of these were school related variables. Some other school factors proved to be important for the outcomes of civic education in various constellations for different countries. Besides confirming the important role of school as a place for students to learn about democracy and to practice democracy, the CIVED study has also shown that school is positioned within a set of systems and influences, which shape the experience of students.

In addition to some similarities, students from different countries demonstrated also different patterns of performance in civic content knowledge and understanding political communication, differences in civic engagement of several types and in attitudes of trust and tolerance. Students in some countries earned high scores on civic knowledge but showed lower support for the rights of immigrants or women. Some were low in knowledge but high on measures of civic engagements, and vice versa. These differences were not related to the "new" versus "old" democracies. They were country specific, confirming the complexity of the phenomenon of civic education and its determinants and its anchoring in the individual history and culture of the country.

The second IEA Civic Education Study strengthened the empirical foundations of civic education, providing participating countries with detailed information about similarities and differences in student outcomes. It documented various forms of organization and content of programs and education practices. The analysis of this information has enriched our knowledge of what young people know about democracy, citizenship, national identity and diversity. It increased our understanding of their beliefs and future intentions. It also gave us some predictors of knowledge and engagement. Thanks to its rich findings, the CIVED study played an important role both in participating and non-participating countries initiating or contributing to the debate on education of future citizens and educational reform.

Not surprisingly, a few years after the CIVED data were collected, there was a call from many countries for a new study in this area. Countries, that established new programs in civic education, want to assess their

comparative education standing. Countries, which are considering reforms, require empirical evidence to clarify concept and policy. Following expressions of interest from a number of countries, the IEA General Assembly decided at its meeting in 2004 to launch a third IEA study in civic education.

Similarly the situation in the 90s, ten years later again changes in the world became an important catalyst for the new proposal. The growing impact of processes of globalization, external threats to civic societies and their freedoms, such as international terrorism, the lack of interest and involvement of young generations in public and political life, experienced in many countries: to name only some. These factors initiated once more a new debate on the meaning of citizenship and the role of civic and citizenship education.

The new IEA International Civics and Citizenship Education Study (ICCES) will give participants of the previous study a possibility to generate indicators of national across-time progress in student achievement but it will also be pursuing new targets in this field of education.

The study will focus on two aspects: civic and citizenship education. Civics is generally understood as the study of the political, legal and social institutions, their structures and the roles they play in the processes by which a nation is governed. The place of citizens in these processes, their rights and responsibilities are the other important part of civics learning. The main focus in citizenship education is on the development of understanding and practicing of attitudes, beliefs and values that will predispose students to participate, to become and remain engaged and involved in their political society/culture.

The key research questions will concern student knowledge and conceptual understandings, interest, dispositions to engage and attitudes. Examples are:

- What variations exist between countries, and within countries, in student achievement in conceptual understandings and competencies in Civics and Citizenship?
- What changes have occurred in civic knowledge and engagement since the last international assessment in 1999 (CIVED study) and what is the variation in those changes?
- What is the extent of interest and disposition to engage in public and political life among students and which factors within or across countries are related to it?
- What are students' perceptions of the impact of recent threats to civil society and responses to these threats on its future development?

Young people develop their understanding about, and act out, their roles as citizens in contemporary societies through a number of activities and experiences largely within the contexts of home, school, and their communities. These contexts operate within broader national and international contexts. The experiences and activities contribute to the development of young people's sense of identity and connectedness, their dispositions and values orientations, knowledge and understandings, as well as civics and citizenship competencies. There will be therefore also questions related to the home, school, and community context of acquiring

civic and citizenship competencies, such as:

- What aspects of schools and education systems are related to achievement in and attitudes to Civics and Citizenship including:
 - a. Curriculum or program content structure and delivery.
 - b. Teaching practices such as those that encourage higher order thinking and analysis in relation to civics and citizenship.
 - c. Aspects of school organisation including opportunities to contribute to conflict resolution, participate in governance processes, and be involved in decision making.

- What aspects of student personal and social background, such as gender, socioeconomic background, language background, are related to student achievement in and attitudes towards Civics and Citizenship education?

The ICCES will focus on eight-grade students. Student information will be collected from three sources: the cognitive test, the student background questionnaire and the attitude questionnaire. There will also be teacher and school questionnaires focusing on the school's general ethos, culture and climate, various aspects of school organization and governance, instructional strategies, and others. A possibility to include national and regional options in order to address questions important in their specific contexts is also envisaged. The data will be collected in 2008 and reported through an international report in 2009.

Participation in the new study will be of a particular benefit to educational policy makers, including those from countries that participated in CIVED (by possibility of comparisons with earlier findings) and those from other countries participating for the first time (giving a baseline for comparisons and actions). Participation will also provide information of value to international and cross-national organisations and other international bodies that develop policies concerned with social development. Practitioners in schools, civic leaders, parents and non-government organisations will benefit from the opportunity to place their own situation in a wider context. Researchers in a range of academic disciplines will be receiving material for reflection, secondary analysis and the formulation of other studies in the field.

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Appendix

Participants of the first IEA Civic Education Study: The Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States.

Participants of the second IEA Civic Education Study Phase 1: Australia, Belgium (French community), Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, England, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Switzerland and United States.

Participants of the second IEA Civic Education Study Phase 2 (14-year-olds): Australia, Belgium/French, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong SAR, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, United States.

Participants of the second IEA Civic Education Study Phase 2 (Upper Secondary Students): Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hong Kong SAR, Israel, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland/German.