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New International Study on Youth Civic Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviours is Available for the Research Community

In November 2010 the largest international study ever conducted on civic education in secondary schools has been released in Brussels. The study was performed under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), an independent consortium that brings together educational researchers and policy makers in 62 countries around the world. The IEA is probably more widely known in connection of large-scale comparative studies on educational assessment in math and science (TIMSS) and in reading (PIRLS). Yet, the association has longstanding and impressive expertise also in civic education. The first study in this area has been carried out already in 1971 (Torney et al., 1975), the second – so called CIVED in 1999 (Torney-Purta et al., 2001) and now, ten years later, 38 countries around the world participated in the third study – the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). The study tested in 2008–2009 over 140,000 lower secondary students, over 62,000 teachers and headmasters from 5,300 schools in order to analyse how young people are prepared to undertake their roles as citizens.

Keywords:

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While keeping previous knowledge and expertise in making large scale surveys it was decided to bring also some new features into the ICCS. Firstly, the survey data will be complemented by the national context surveys and the ICCS Encyclopaedia, which includes country chapters written by the national experts. Secondly, the increasing number of participating countries produced also an increasing variety in social and educational circumstances that the study aims to grasp. Therefore, besides the international core different regional modules for European, Asian and Latin American countries have been developed. 24 European countries took part in the European module, which assessed students' knowledge about the European Union and attitudes toward EU-related policies and issues such as European identity and freedom of movement.

Thus, generally the study and its results have become more complex that poses new challenges to the researchers and users of the ICCS results. On the one hand, the ICCS Encyclopaedia provides excellent inside information that helps to understand results of the quantitative data analysis. At the same time, readers should be careful to descry, where the information comes from. Sometimes responses of the surveyed headmasters differ from those given by the experts in the national context survey (respectively in chapters 6 and 2 in the International Report). In cases when the contradiction concerns the curriculum or legal acts on civic and citizenship education it may be wise to consult the forthcoming ICCS Encyclopaedia, or (in case of the European countries) the Eurydice database on education systems and policies.

Partly because of the increasing sophistication of the study, publication of the reports and release of

the database takes longer as users would like to see. By the end of 2010 two international reports and the European regional report are publicly available:

- Schulz, W., Ainley, J., Fraillon, J., Kerr, D., Losito, B. (2010) *Initial Findings from the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study*. Amsterdam: IEA, 109 pp.
- Schulz, W., Ainley, J., Fraillon, J., Kerr, D., Losito, B. (2010) *ICCS 2009 International Report: Civic Knowledge, Attitudes, an Engagement among Lower-secondary School Students in 30 Countries.* Amsterdam: IEA, 311 pp.
- Kerr, D., Sturman, L., Schulz, Burge, B. (2010) *ICCS 2009 European Report: Civic Knowledge, Attitudes, an Engagement among Lower-secondary School Students in 24 European Countries.* Amsterdam: IEA, 181 pp.

The international database is expected to be open for the free access in the end of January 2011. All reports and the database together with the codebooks and the user manual can be found at the IEA homepage www.iea.nl

Hopefully did this brief overview to enthuse researcher to undertake secondary analysis on the ICCS data. This is probably the richest database currently freely available to study civic and citizenship competences, democratic values, behavioural intention and current behaviour of adolescents worldwide. At this point let me point just on some highlights from the primary reports that can serve as departing points for the further in-depth investigations.

The study included an extensive test of civic and citizenship knowledge, which allows to relate students attitudes and behaviour to their cognitive competences. Moreover, the achievement level can be analysed in the broader social and educational context. The results reveal notable differences between students in their level of civic knowledge, with significant gaps between 'high' and 'low' achievers and between males and females. In the very top one can see the same countries, which score high in other



educational assessments (such as PISA) - Finland, Republic of Korea, Chinese Taipei. At the bottom end of the achievement scale are Latin-American and some Asian countries. Although in general European countries scored higher there was a considerable variation across them, even within the Western and within the Eastern European country groups.

The first IEA Civic Education Study in 1971 showed that males scored significantly higher than females, in CIVED 1999 this gap was almost closed and in the recent ICCS girls outperform boys in all countries. This result can be partly explained by the general trend in educational achievements apparent also in other studies (TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA). On the other hand, girls' higher scores may reflect alteration of the civic and citizenship education itself. Compared to the 1970s the contemporary civic education pays much more attention to the "soft" issues such as social movements, consumer citizenship and volunteering that make the subject more attractive to the girls.

Twenty of the 38 participating countries included a specific subject on civic education, but this did not bring to the any systemic cleavage in terms of students' knowledge. This finding confirms previous arguments on citizenship education as a topic largely influenced by the extra-curricular activities and social environment. According to the same approach, citizenship education is supposed to promote active participation of the youth in civil society and in the later political life. Therefore it was surprising to find out that nor teachers neither headmasters share this view. Most of them regarded promoting of knowledge and cognitive skills by far the more important than preparing students to the future political participation or equipping them with the effective strategies to fight xenophobia. For example, only 18% of surveyed European teachers mentioned promoting students' participation in the school life amongst three main aims of the civic education. The fact that most teachers and principals in ICCS countries considered the development of "knowledge and skills" as the most important aim of civic and citizenship teaching points to the need to broaden the focus of education to foster participatory skills and strategies in students.

Primary analysis does not allow estimating what is the effect of teachers' and schools' neglect to the

civic engagement to the students' real participation. However, what we can observe is a quite modest level of active participation. Although the vast majority of students (about 80%) are expected to vote in national elections as adults and 48% have some political party preferences already, approximately only 26% said that they would join a political party or stand as a candidate in a local election. About 40% of students have participated in the school governance; engagement in organisational activities outside the school remains even lower and participation in sport events and cultural activities tend to be dominating. What is, then, troubling the youth citizenship participation? We can argue that adolescents are simply not interested in taking an active stance in social and political life. Yet, we can also have a critical look at the survey instruments and think, whether we did not fail to ask some important questions on modern youth political engagement? Possibilities of the young people to be engaged into policy making and policy implementation have enriched enormously during the last decade. For example, in many European countries youth parliaments or assemblies exist, youth organisations are regularly engaged in policy making from the local up to the European level. Until we keep asking students on traditional forms of social involvement as sport and drama clubs, human rights organisations and charity, we will probably miss new emerging trends of youth engagement into public policy. Thus, as the democracy and governance evolve the research instruments studying them need also permanent elaboration. This makes the next IEA study on citizenship education, which is planned preliminary for 2017 an extremely exciting effort.

Anu Toots was the National Research Coordinator of ICCS in Estonia.

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