

RELIABLE, COMPARATIVE DATA IN A CRITICAL LEARNING AREA

НАДЕЖДНИ, СРАВНИТЕЛНИ ДАННИ В КРИТИЧНА СФЕРА НА ОБУЧЕНИЕ

Barbara Malak-Minkiewicz, PhD

Membership Relations Manager, IEA Secretariat

Mrs. Malak, what kind of international studies were made in the field of civic education in school until now?

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2009 was the third IEA study on civic and citizenship education. The first was conducted in 1971 (nine countries participating) and the second one (CIVED) collected data in 1999 (28 countries) showing relatively increasing engagement of school systems in this educational domain. The ICCS 2009 as its predecessors included tests and questionnaires addressed student's civic knowledge and understanding, perceptions and attitudes, engagement and behavior as well as student's background in 38 countries. A separate European Module test and questionnaire investigated students' preparation for citizenship as Europeans. In addition, information was collected from policy makers, school principals and teachers on various aspects of educational systems, schools and classrooms related to civic and citizenship education.

What was the purpose of those studies?

The civic and citizenship education studies follow changes in expectations of what can and should be education for citizenship in democracy and confronts them with school reality. The first study rose in the times of youth counterculture, social revolution and political activism against the Vietnam War of the 60-ties, which triggered interest in the development of political and social attitudes and questions to what extent school may share an influence with home and parents in the acquisition of citizen's competencies.

Impulses for the second, CIVED study came from the changes in the early 90-ties: the collapse of communism in Central-Eastern Europe which resulted in the appearance of „new democracies“ and crises in citizens' activity experienced by

many „old democracies“. New developments in global youth culture combining common aspirations for freedom and a better world with shared consumer tastes were noticed as a potential new agent of socialization that may play a role. Thanks to its rich findings, CIVED played an important role initiating or contributing to the debate on education of future citizens and triggering education reforms in this area in a number of countries.

The third study had grown from both of them to help some countries evaluate their reforms, some others to clarify concepts and policy in preparation for reforms and address new challenges for civic education in times of global change and regionalization. This last phenomenon lead to the introduction – in addition to the core part of the project – of regional modules (Asian, European, and Latin American) to address issues of special regional interest. Among them were students' perceptions of social cohesion and citizens' movement in Europe, solving political conflicts in Latin America, role and responsibilities of public officials in Asian countries, and others. A prominent aspect of the ICCS study was participation seen as a pillar of democratic societies – starting from school through local communities to broader environment.

Why are so important such type of studies?

A clear understanding of how effectively schools are promoting civic knowledge attitudes and involvement is crucial for countries that want school to play role in this education and there are many (if not all) of them in democratic world.

Many countries are concerned about the low participation of their citizens in civic life and the apparent lack of interest and involvement among young people in public and political life. Understanding the reason is important: there is not democracy without active citizens. There is some evidence that young people are increasingly taking part in alternative forms of participation involving community-based action with peers of similar age and in internet-based campaigns concerning such issues as the environment and ethical consumerism. Societies want to know why they reject more conventional involvement and what school can do to help.

Why is important for different countries to participate?

There is considerable diversity in the content and conduct of civic and citizenship education within and across countries. However, the knowledge, understanding, skills, and dispositions that prepare young people to comprehend the world, hold productive employment, and be informed active citizens are the aspects that education systems, schools and teachers typically value and attempt to foster in all of them. The more countries participate – the more they can learn from each other.

How do these studies benefit to the school education?

All IEA studies provide countries with reliable, comparative data in this critical learning area to help them evaluate and guide educational policies with evidence-based decisions.

Please, describe the state of civic education in Europe, according to the results of the latest civic education study – ICCS 2009. Are students prepared for their role as citizens in a democratic society?

The ICCS results indicate that, on average, majorities of students in the participating countries knew about the main civics and citizenship institutions and understood the interconnectedness of institutions and processes. However, the substantial minorities of students in all countries who had limited civic knowledge suggest the need for ongoing effort to improve pedagogy related to civics and citizenship. The results also highlighted large cross-national differences in the nature of students' civic knowledge. In some of the low-performing countries, about 70 percent of students had, at best, a fundamental understanding and a mechanistic knowledge of this learning area. In some of these cases, attempts to enhance civic learning would most likely need to be tied in with general improvements to the education systems concerned.

Another observation is that even though students who had experienced democratic school practices tended to have the higher scores on the civic knowledge scale and to state their intention to engage in electoral activities once they reached adulthood, their civic-related learning seemed to have done little to encourage them to become active participants, as adults, in the political process (e.g., joining a political party). Furthermore we found that the students who said they would become more actively involved in politics once they were adults tended to be the students with lower levels of civic knowledge.

The finding that most students participating in ICCS expressed rather negative views of political parties aligns with findings from earlier studies. Trust in and preferences for particular parties, willingness to engage in them, and perceptions that party membership is desirable for good citizenship were little in evidence across the participating countries. This pattern is consistent with more general evidence of a growing disenchantment with political parties over the past few decades in many democratic countries. On the positive side, the ICCS results highlighted support (often strong) among the lower-secondary students for social-movement related citizenship behavior and voting as the basic element of citizenship. These students, moreover, expressed their widespread preparedness to become involved in legal protest activities.

In the context of what schools can do to prepare students for more active citizenship, we found that, according to majorities of the school teachers and principals who completed the relevant ICCS questionnaires, the focus of civic learning should be more on developing students' civic-related knowledge and skills than on developing their participatory skills. Consideration of this observation alongside teachers' and principals' reports that school-based student participation in the wider community focuses mainly on sports and cultural events suggests the need to move civic and citizenship learning in the direction of citizenship participation.

One of the crucial questions that arises during study of civic and citizenship education is to what extent schools, and to what extent home backgrounds, contribute to the formation of future citizens. ICCS provides evidence confirming

the importance of socioeconomic background as well as the influence of home orientations, such as parental interest in social and political issues and discussions on these matters with parents. But it also provides evidence that civic engagement at school, more than involvement in community activities, contributes to several important outcomes, such as civic knowledge and intentions to vote in adulthood.

Finally, at least in a number of countries, the extent to which students considered their classrooms provided an open forum for discussion of issues appeared to be associated (both at the individual and the school level) with civic knowledge.

...and in particular – how does Bulgaria rank according to those studies?

Bulgarian students of the eight grade did not get too good results in ICCS but interpretation of reasons I would leave to Bulgarian researchers who know better situation in and out of school in which young generation grows.

Any recommendations that can be made in terms of civic education - in the European countries and in Bulgaria?

Some of recommendation can be driven from the general results reported above, e.g. that there is a need of improvement of teaching civic and citizenship in many countries as well as a need to provide students with more participatory experiences in school and beyond to develop their participatory skills. Some other recommendations, more specific, can be formulated by analysis of specific country outcomes but this should be done by researchers in the country, not by outsiders.

Can we talk about identifying and sharing good practices thanks to these?

We do not study specific good practices in classrooms in the IEA studies. However, exchange of experiences can follow the study since we know which countries are the most successful in teaching civic and citizenships in schools.

The preparation for the next phase of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) has already started. Please share – what is the purpose of this study?

As previous studies ICCS 2016 will investigate the ways in which young people are prepared for citizenship, providing internationally comparable indicators of civic knowledge and engagement to inform policies and practices. For countries that participated in 2009 assessment it will monitor changes in students' civic knowledge and engagement over time. ICCS 2016 will also follow new challenges in civic and citizenship education, to improve countries' understanding of issues such as students' role in the peaceful functioning of school communities, how to help students become effective participants in the complex world of economics, and the role of new social media in students' civic engagement. It will also explore specific topics of common interest, through the establishment of optional regional or thematic modules.

This is too complex area and I am sure the results will be interesting and as always – showing new challenges and needs for improvements for each country.

Barbara Malak-Minkiewicz received a PhD in social sciences and philosophy from the University of Warsaw, Poland. Her MA is in social psychology. She work 18 years at Warsaw University teaching courses in social and developmental psychology and conduction studies on socialization, social identity formation, interpersonal and intergroup conflict and aggression. After the collapse of communism, Dr Malak-Minkiewicz professional interests turned to the transformation processes in Central-Eastern European countries and especially in education. She was involved in preparation of the IEA civic and citizenship education studies (1999 and 2009) serving on their advisory committees.

Dr Malak-Minkiewicz is currently the manager of membership relations at the IEA Secretariat in Amsterdam.