Civic Education, Citizenship, and Democracy

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Abstract: Critics suggest that youth lack basic civic knowledge and are disengaging from civic action, particularly political action. The validity of these criticisms depends on how civic knowledge and civic engagement are defined. The results of four studies of civic education, conducted by the IEA over a period of almost 50 years, are examined in terms of the definition of these concepts. Five questions are addressed: (1) What are the goals of civic education? (2) What is civic knowledge? (3) What is civic engagement? (4) What are civic attitudes and values? (5) What do we know about teaching civics in schools? The results suggest that (1) there is disagreement on the goals of civic education; (2) civic knowledge is often equated with the memorization of facts about government and politics; (3) civic engagement is different from political engagement, with today's youth more interested in civic engagement; (4) civic attitudes and values may be more important than civic knowledge or engagement for preparing informed, productive citizens; and (5) there is limited time for teaching civics in schools, and the ways in which civics is currently taught are inconsistent with the kind of teaching needed.

Educación cívica, ciudadanía, y democracia
Resumen: Los críticos sugieren que los jóvenes carecen de conocimientos cívicos básicos y están desconectándose de la acción cívica, especialmente de la acción política. La validez de estas críticas depende de cómo se definan los conocimientos cívicos y el compromiso cívico. En este articulo se examinan los resultados de cuatro estudios de educación cívica realizados por la IEA durante casi 50 años en términos de la definición de estos conceptos. Se abordan cinco preguntas: (1) ¿Cuáles son los objetivos de la educación cívica? (2) ¿Qué es el conocimiento cívico? (3) ¿Qué es el compromiso cívico? (4) ¿Cuáles son las actitudes y valores cívicos? (5) ¿Qué sabemos sobre la enseñanza de la educación cívica en las escuelas? Los resultados sugieren que (1) existe desacuerdo sobre los objetivos de la educación cívica; (2) el conocimiento cívico a menudo se equipara con la memorización de hechos sobre el gobierno y la política; (3) el compromiso cívico es diferente del compromiso político, y los jóvenes de hoy están más interesados en el compromiso cívico; (4) las actitudes y valores cívicos pueden ser más importantes que el conocimiento cívico o el compromiso para preparar ciudadanos informados y productivos; y (5) hay poco tiempo para enseñar educación cívica en las escuelas, y las formas en que se enseña actualmente son inconsistentes con el tipo de enseñanza necesaria.
Palabras clave: educación cívica; conocimiento cívico; compromiso cívico; actitudes y valores cívicos; Asociación Internacional para la Evaluación del Logro Educativo

Educação cívica, cidadania, e democracia
Resumo: Críticos sugerem que os jovens carecem de conhecimento cívico básico e estão se desengajando da ação cívica, especialmente da ação política. A validade dessas críticas depende de como o conhecimento cívico e o engajamento cívico são definidos. Os resultados de quatro estudos de educação cívica, conduzidos pela IEA ao longo de quase 50 anos, são examinados em termos da definição desses conceitos. Cinco questões são abordadas: (1) Quais são os objetivos da educação cívica? (2) O que é conhecimento cívico? (3) O que é engajamento cívico? (4) Quais são as atitudes e valores cívicos? (5) O que sabemos sobre o ensino de civismo nas escolas? Os resultados sugerem que (1) existe discordância sobre os objetivos da educação cívica; (2) o conhecimento cívico frequentemente é equiparado à memorização de fatos sobre governo e política; (3) o engajamento cívico difere do engajamento político, sendo os jovens de hoje mais interessados no engajamento cívico; (4) atitudes e valores cívicos podem ser mais importantes do que o conhecimento ou engajamento cívico para preparar cidadãos informados e produtivos; e (5) há pouco tempo disponível para o ensino de civismo nas escolas, e as formas como o civismo é atualmente ensinado são inconsistentes com o tipo de ensino necessário.
Palavras-chave: educação cívica; conhecimento cívico; engajamento cívico; atitudes e valores cívicos; Associação Internacional para Avaliação de Realizações Educacionais

Civic Education, Citizenship, and Democracy

In a letter to William Charles Jarvis on 28 September 1820, Thomas Jefferson wrote: "I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education" (Jefferson, 1820, lines 31-34). The relationships among democracy, citizenship, and education are evident in

Jefferson's letter. If any form of democratic government is to succeed, its citizens must be enlightened. If citizens are to be enlightened, they must be educated, not excluded from participation.

Echoing Jefferson and writing some 180 years later, Branson (1999) contended that "there is no more important task [of schools] than the development of an informed, effective, and responsible citizenry." He added that "democracies are sustained by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions" (para. 4). Although there seems to be almost universal agreement that the aim of civic education is to develop an informed, effective, and responsible citizenry (Crittenden & Levine, 2018; Holbein & Hillygus, 2020), there is substantial disagreement as to what constitutes relevant knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

Questions concerning the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of students and the role that civic education plays in their acquisition and development have been the basis for studies of civic education and citizenship conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) for the past half century. In this paper I will review these studies in terms of five questions.

1. What are the goals of civic education?
2. What is civic knowledge?
3. What is civic engagement?
4. What are civic attitudes and values?
5. What do we know about teaching civics in schools?

It must be emphasized that my answers to these questions are based primarily, although not exclusively, on IEA data. Because I have relied so extensively on the results of these studies it makes sense to review them briefly.

The IEA Civic Studies

The first IEA civic study, referred to as the IEA Civic Education Project (CEP), was launched in the fall of 1966. Although several preliminary reports were published over the next decade, the final results were published in 1975 (Torney et al., 1975). The time lag between launch and publication was due to the amount of work needed to design and try out cognitive tests and affective surveys to make sure they were (1) aligned with the primary aims of the study, (2) appropriate for use in all 10 countries that agreed to participate in the study, and (3) appropriate for the age and developmental level of three populations of students. Those populations were (1) students who were at least age 10 but not yet age 11 at the time of testing; (2) students who were at least age 14 but not yet 15 at the time of testing, and (3) students who were enrolled in their pre-university grade or year in full-time schooling. A selection of teachers and school administrators also completed surveys.

The purpose of the CEP was to "assess and compare the relative impact of various characteristics of the school and of educational and other experiences upon the growth of information about and the development of attitudes toward governmental structure and process" (Torney et al., 1975, p. 46). To aid in analyzing the data, four composite measures were created: (1) knowledge of civics, (2) support for democratic values, (3) support for the national government, and (4) civic interest/participation.

In 1994, almost two decades after the publication of the results of the first study, a second IEA civic study was begun, the Civic Education Study (CIVED). The decision to engage in a second study was based primarily on changes that had taken place in the political and social life of nations in

the early 1990s. These changes included, on the one hand, the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe coupled with the appearance of new democracies and, on the other hand, an apparent lessening of interest and participation in public life by citizens of established democracies.

CIVED was conducted in two phases. In Phase 1, case studies were prepared for 24 countries (Torney-Purta et al., 1999). Document analyses of textbooks and curricula, interviews and discussions with experts (e.g., policymakers, representatives of the social sciences), and focus groups of students and teachers were used in the preparation of the case studies. Phase 2 was similar methodologically to CEP, that is, cognitive tests and affective surveys were designed or selected, and administered. However, both tests and surveys were expanded with extensive input from representatives of countries that participated in Phase 1. The sample for Phase 2 consisted of approximately 90,000 14-year-old students in 28 countries. Once again, principals and teachers were surveyed, with the teachers chosen being those primarily responsible for teaching civics or civic-related subjects to 14-year-old students (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

About a decade after the CIVED was completed, work on a third IEA civic study began. The motivations for the study, known as the International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS), were the impact of globalization, recognized external threats to civic societies and their freedoms, and the apparent limited interest and involvement of young generations in public and political life. The aims of the ICCS were quite similar to those of the first two IEA civic studies as was the design of the study. Once again, however, modifications were made in the instruments based on what had been learned from the prior two studies. A major innovation in ICCS was the introduction of regional modules in an effort to address issues somewhat unique to particular regions. Among the issues to be addressed were students' perceptions of social cohesion and citizens' movements in Europe, solutions to political conflicts in Latin America, and roles and responsibilities of government officials in Asia.

The targeted student population was students in Grade 8 , except where the average age of students in Grade 8 was under 13.5 years. In those cases, the targeted student population was defined as students in Grade 9. In a deviation from CIVED, the teacher population consisted of teachers teaching regular school subjects to the students in the target grades. The school administrators consisted of principals of selected schools in each country. Thirty-eight educational systems participated in ICCS with a total population of more than 140,000 students in more than 5,300 schools (Schulz et al., 2010).

Shortly after the publication of the results, planning for a second cycle of ICCS, known as ICCS 2016, was begun. A primary purpose of this second cycle was to monitor trends in civic knowledge and engagement in the countries that participated in the first cycle of ICCS. Twenty-five countries participated and two regional modules (Europe and Latin America) were identified. Three final reports were published, one being an international report (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon et al., 2017), one with a focus on Europe (Losito et al., 2017), and the third with a focus on Latin America (Schulz, Ainley, Cox et al., 2017).

Finally, a third cycle of ICCS began in 2018, with 23 countries participating. Data were collected in 2022 with the publication of the international results projected for 2023. The primary foci of the third cycle were (1) the teaching of civic education, (2) students' views of social and political issues as they approach voting age, and (3) the influence of social media on civic engagement.

One important point must be made before moving to a discussion of the five aforementioned questions. All nations have an idea of the meaning of citizenship and have a practice of citizenship education. Furthermore, most if not all nations recognize a need to educate youth to be "civic minded," that is, to think and care about the welfare of the community and larger society.

In reality, then, the IEA civic studies are "not studies of citizenship, but of *democratic* citizenship" (Veugelers, 2021, p. 197, emphasis mine). Thus, whenever the term "citizenship" appears, it should be understood to mean "democratic citizenship."

What are the Goals of Civic Education?

In ICCS, teachers were given a list of 10 possible goals of civic education and asked to indicate the three goals they considered to be most important. According to 60% of the respondents, aggregated across countries, the most important goal was to promote knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities. The second most frequently endorsed goal (about 50% of the respondents) was to promote students' critical and independent thinking. In contrast, only one-third of the teachers indicated that promoting knowledge of social, political, and civic institutions was a primary goal and only 7% chose preparing students for future political engagement. A relatively small percentage of teachers selected the goals of community engagement (20%) and school engagement (19%). The other four goals included on the survey—promoting respect for and safeguard of the environment, supporting the development of effective strategies for the fight against racism and xenophobia, developing students' skills in conflict resolution, and promoting the capacity to defend one's own point of view—were positioned somewhere between these extremes (Schulz et al., 2010; Schultz, Ainley, Fraillon et al., 2017).

The relatively low rankings of promoting knowledge of social, political, and civic institutions, promoting students' participation in school and community life, and, especially, preparing students for future political participation are in direct conflict with concerns raised by critics of the current state of civic education in schools. A survey conducted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) in the United States found that, among other things, only one-third of the adults surveyed could name the three branches of the United States' government. The results led Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the APPC, to suggest that the survey offers *dramatic evidence* of the need for more and better civic education (Jamieson, 2013, emphasis mine). In a similar vein, the United States' Civic Education Initiative (CEI) has actively supported legislation that would require students to pass the U.S. Citizenship test in order to receive a high school diploma (Millard, 2015). Examples of questions include: (1) What is the supreme law of the land? (2) What territory did the United States buy from France in 1803? (3) What ocean is on the east coast of the United States? and (4) What is one responsibility that is only for United States citizens? Answers to these questions require little more than students having memorized isolated bits of factual knowledge. However, as Popkin (1991) has suggested, measuring facts is not a good indicator of how knowledge is used.

This leads to a second point of emphasis of critics of civic education, namely, the lack of civic and political involvement. In his best-selling book, *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) discussed ways in which Americans have disengaged from political involvement, including declining attendance at public meetings, reduced membership in civic organizations, less involvement with political parties, and lower voter turnout. Branson (1999) summarized concerns for disengagement quite succinctly: "The withdrawal of citizens from political and civic life does not bode well for the health and vitality of democracy" (para. 42). In contrast, Schudson (1998) has argued that the act of voting, often taken as a primary indicator of civic engagement, is largely ritualistic and not an example of rational discourse and decision making.

In summary, then, there are large, and emotionally laden, differences in what people believe to be the goals of civic education. As Kaestle (2000) has suggested, these differences reflect the longstanding strain between liberty and order. Critics of civic education tend to prefer what Morris Janowitz (1983) has termed "patriotic civil education." In contrast, educators, specifically those

included in the IEA studies, tend to prefer a broader definition of citizenship, one that includes critical thinking and the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society.

In this regard, the IEA studies offer two important lessons. The first is that civic education is deeply embedded in a political and historical context unique to each country (Torney-Purta et al., 1999). As a consequence, civic knowledge, attitudes, values, and engagement must be discussed in the context of each country's culture and history.

In ICCS, as mentioned earlier, countries were divided into regions. These regional differences concerning the goals of civic education speak to the validity of this first lesson. Similar to the total population surveyed, teachers in the Nordic countries (and also in England, Taiwan, and the Czech Republic) believed that civic education should foster critical thinking, tolerance, and social justice. Similar to the critics of civic education, teachers in Western Europe believed that civic education should focus on the acquisition of civic and political knowledge as well as community participation. Finally, teachers in Asia and Eastern Europe believed that civic education should promote the development of skills in conflict resolution and promote active participation in the school setting (Schulz et al., 2010; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon et al., 2017).

The second lesson to be taken from the IEA studies is that in no country "have the [educational] systems proved fully capable of producing the ideal goal of a well-informed citizenry, with democratic attitudes and values, support of government policies, and interest in taking part in civic affairs" (Torney et al., 1975, p. 21). That is, achieving a proper balance of "requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions" is no easy task. It is, however, a worthwhile goal. Reflecting on the state of civic education over the years, Kaestle (2000) suggested that "we need a vision of a good, empowered citizen in a corporate capitalist world, with elements of appropriate knowledge, critical thinking, collaboration skills, ethics, and a sense of obligation" (p. 67).

A question worth asking at this point in the discussion is whether different views of the goals of civic education make any difference in the larger scheme of things. We shall return to this question when we discuss how civic education is (and should be) taught.

What is Civic Knowledge?

In the first two IEA civic studies, CEP and CIVED, there were two subscales of civic knowledge: knowledge of content, and skills in interpreting civic-related information. The items testing content knowledge were quite similar to those included on the U.S. Citizenship Test mentioned earlier. Here are two examples, the first from CEP and the second from CIVED.

Example 1. Which of the following is a political right? The right …
    (a) of pupils to learn about politics in school.
    (b) of citizens to vote and run for office.
    (c) of adults to have a job.
    (d) of politicians to have a salary.

Example 2. Which of the following is an accurate statement about laws?
    (a) Laws forbid or require certain actions/behaviors.
    (b) Laws are made by the police.
    (c) Laws are valid only if all citizens have voted to accept them.
    (d) Laws prevent criticism of the government.

In contrast, consider these two examples of items testing students' skills in the interpretation of civic-related information. Once again, the first item is from CEP, the second from CIVED.

Example 1. A cartoon is presented to students and students are asked: What is the message or main point of the cartoon? "History textbooks …
    (a) are sometimes changed to avoid mentioning problematic events from the past.
    (b) must be shorter for children than books written for adults.
    (c) are full of information that is not interesting.
    (d) should be written using a computer, not a pencil.

Example 2. Students are asked to read a political leaflet mentioning two political parties: Silver and Gold. Students are asked to respond to three items pertaining to the pamphlet. "This is an election leaflet which has probably been issued by …
    (a) the Silver Party.
    (b) a party or group in opposition to the Silver Party.
    (c) a group which tries to be sure elections are fair.
    (d) the Silver Party and the Gold Party together."

Based on my reading of the complete set of released items from both studies, I would argue that the items testing students' interpretation skills are simply reading comprehension items with civics as the item content. In this regard, it should be noted that tests of reading comprehension often use social studies content in the passages to be read prior to answering the questions or responding to the items. My argument is supported by the results of a study by Zhang et al. (2015). The purpose of the study was to investigate how linguistic features of the CIVED items were related to item difficulty. The results indicated that lengthy words, words with abstract meanings, and sentences with complex syntactic structure were associated with increased item difficulty. They concluded that linguistic features of the test items accounted for more than one-third of the variance in their difficulty.
In the previous section I used "factual" to modify "knowledge." Factual knowledge is but one of four forms or types of knowledge identified by Anderson & Krathwohl (2001). The others are conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive.
      The distinction between factual and conceptual knowledge corresponds with the difference between rote learning and meaningful learning (Mayer, 2002). Rote learning is the process of memorizing information. Its value is to enhance students' ability to quickly recall basic facts and help students develop foundational knowledge of a field of study. In contrast, meaningful learning "requires that instruction go beyond simple presentation of Factual Knowledge and that assessment tasks require more of students than simply recalling or recognizing Factual Knowledge" (Mayer, 2002, p. 227). For at least a half century we have known that students too often are asked to "memorize and repeat ideas, stanzas, phrases, and formulas *without understanding the meaning behind them* (Freire, 1970, p. 72, emphasis mine).
      Among the many important concepts in civic education are citizenship, equality, freedom, justice, rights, and responsibilities. If students are to develop an *understanding* of civics, students must possess conceptual knowledge (Arensmeier, 2015). Permit me to relate two stories to support my assertion.
      In 1960, a British educator named Alexander Sutherland Neill wrote a book entitled *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (Neill, 1960). After its publication, several educators in the United States argued that one could expect the unruly and disruptive behavior of students as they were observing when students are given freedom. In response to what Neill considered to be a misinterpretation of the concept of freedom, Neill (1966) authored a second book entitled *Freedom – Not License.* In it he made clear that freedom concerns the rights of the individual, but because

everyone has rights, the concept of freedom does not justify behavior that interferes with the rights of others. The American educators failed to differentiate two concepts, freedom and license.

Many years ago, I was about to enter my university classroom when I overhead a discussion between two undergraduate students. One student had just been convicted of driving while intoxicated. As expected, he was quite upset and said to his classmate, "They can't do that, I have the right to drive a car." Unable to exercise self-restraint, I entered the conversion. "Driving is a privilege, not a right." The student failed to differentiate two concepts, rights and privileges.

Interestingly, CIVED did attempt to assess students' understanding of concepts such as democracy and citizenship. However, the assessment of these concepts was part of the survey, not the cognitive test, and, as such, "did not have correct answers" (Husfeldt & Torney-Purta, 2004, p. 21). However, conceptual knowledge does have "correct answers." Liberty does not mean what we, as individuals, want it to mean; it has a consensually determined meaning.

The designers of ICCS prepared an extensive framework for cognitive test development. There were four content domains—civic society and systems, civic principles, civic participation, and civic identities—and two cognitive domains—knowing, and reasoning and applying—resulting in a 4 x 2 table. Furthermore, each item was associated with a key concept (e.g., power/authority, voting/franchise, civic involvement). Despite the careful attention paid to the framework in writing the items, the results of the cognitive test were presented as a single total score. "The cognitive test items for the study were developed with reference to the ICCS assessment framework and *designed to measure a single trait labeled civic knowledge*" (Schulz et al., 2016, p. 21, emphasis mine).

By allowing students to decide on the meaning of basic concepts (CIVED) and by reducing student performance on a test of civic knowledge to a single score (ICCS), potentially useful information concerning student civic knowledge—particularly conceptual knowledge—has been lost. Such information would seem to be quite useful as educators attempt to design more effective civic education courses and experiences.

In addition to a lack of concern for conceptual knowledge, concerns for procedural knowledge are also missing. Simply stated, procedural knowledge is "how to" knowledge. Are students taught how to engage in civil discourse, how to deal with controversial issues, how to conduct a campaign for student body president, and how to vote? Should not procedural knowledge be part of the curriculum of civic education?

What is Civic Engagement?

Political engagement and civic engagement often are seen as synonymous, which is unfortunate. Civic engagement refers to participating in and seeking to influence the life of the community, where the community can range from the neighborhood to the world. Civic engagement can be political, but it need not be. Civic engagement becomes political engagement when the intention is to have a direct impact on policies of the state.

Bemudez (2012) has argued that separating political and civic engagement is necessary if we are to understand the meaning of civic engagement in today's world. If we look at the indicators of political engagement that Putnam and others have used, there is evidence that political engagement is declining and has been for some time. If, on the other hand, we look at indicators of civic engagement, we may find, as Bemudez has suggested, that youth civic action is being *transformed*, not in decline. "There is an ongoing emergence, expansion, and recognition of alternative forms of civic identity and engagement, such as community involvement, volunteer work, grassroots activism, and online means of voice and self-expression. Evidence points to a shift in youth civic interest from national to local issues, showing an increase in youth cooperation around targeted problem-solving

and single-issue-based activism" (Bermudez, 2012, p. 537). The IEA civic studies provide substantial evidence to support Bermudez' perspective.

In an earlier section, I mentioned that preparing students for future political engagement was a goal chosen by a small percentage of teachers. Furthermore, only a minority of students surveyed in CIVED reported participating in formal organizations (e.g., political youth groups, environmental groups). In contrast, however large numbers of students reported that they had participated in voluntary activities such as collecting money or volunteering within an organization dedicated to helping people in the community (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). The conclusion drawn by the researchers was that students were much more supportive of social movement activities than of conventional political activities (Torney-Purta, 2002).

Even within civic engagement there are significant differences to consider. For example, although civic participation in the community was uncommon among the surveyed students in ICCS, civic participation at school tended to be much more frequent and was associated with higher civic knowledge and interest scores (Schulz et al., 2010). It is noteworthy that Asian teachers and students placed a greater emphasis on local traditions and concerns (Kennedy & Kuang, 2021).

The data suggest that the meaning of civic engagement and the indicators used to estimate it should be reconsidered. The choice of indicator is especially important because of the relative independence among indicators. For example, the relationship between "having a say in government" and "voter turnout" has been found to be slightly negative, but not statistically significant (OECD, 2020).

What are Civic Attitudes and Values?

Designers of the first IEA civic study were quick to realize that evaluating civic education required more than the administration of cognitive tests. They believed that the field of civic education was conceptualized differently from the other subjects in the IEA's Six Subject Survey, in which civic education was one of the subjects. Specifically, attitudinal and behavioral measures were believed to be important in themselves, not only through their relation to the cognitive test results.

Since their inception IEA civic education studies have included two main affective areas: democratic values and citizenship. Democratic values have included equality, majority rule, civil liberties, women's rights, and tolerance of diversity. On the surveys students were asked to give their opinions on what was good and bad for democracy (e.g., where everyone has the right to express their opinions freely, where courts and judges are influenced by politicians) and what were the characteristics of a good citizen (e.g., knows the country's history, takes part in activities promoting human rights). They were also asked about the responsibilities of the government (e.g., to guarantee a job for everyone who wants one, to provide a decent standard of living for old people) as well as their trust in various institutions (e.g., courts, police, the media).

An important aspect of the IEA civic studies was an investigation of the relationships among attitudes, values, knowledge, and classroom climate and instruction. On an individual variable basis, the researchers found support for democratic values, as well as positive support for national governments. However, they also found that high levels of support for the national government *did not* translate to a high level of support for democratic values. In reacting to this result, Torney et al. (1975) speculated that there may be "inherent incompatibility in trying to foster both patriotism and such democratic values as freedom to criticize the government, equal rights for all citizens, tolerance of diversity, and freedom of the mass media" (p. 18).

In ICCS, students were asked to rate their trust in a number of civic institutions, including the national government and political parties. The two most positive ratings of trust, "trusting

completely" and "trusting quite a lot," were combined when the data were reported. With respect to trust in the national government, the average was 62%. Across countries the range was from 20% to 85%. With respect to trust in political parties, the average was 41%, with a range from 18% to 66%. In no country did the trust in political parties equal or exceed the trust in the national government.

Although the United States did not participate in ICCS, a survey by the Pew Research Center (2022) found that only 20% of those surveyed reported trusting the federal government to "do the right thing." Part of this distrust stems from the fact that 65% said that most political candidates run for office to serve their own personal interests.

How important are civic attitudes and values in the context of democratic citizenship? The importance is summed up quite nicely by Veugelers (2021). "People can have knowledge about democracy, and they can have democratic skills, but it is crucial for them to have attitudes supportive of rights for others and principles of participatory democracy if they are act in a democratic way (p. 296). Branson (1999) echoed this sentiment. "Absent a reasoned commitment on the part of its citizens to the fundamental values and principles of democracy, a free and open society cannot succeed" (para. 4)

What Do We Know about Teaching Civics in Schools?

To answer this question, we need to examine two separate, but related, questions: How much time is spent teaching civics? and What is taught in civics classes?

We have known for some time that time is a constraining factor in teaching social studies in public schools, particularly in primary and elementary schools. Hoyer et al. (2015) reported that an average of 4.2 hours per week were spent teaching eight-grade students "social studies or history." In this regard, it should be pointed out that eighth-grade textbooks in the United States emphasize history, most often United States history, with few, if any, chapters devoted solely to civics.

Several years ago, I attended a conference at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. After a spirited discussion of the importance of Holocaust education and the content that should (and should not) be included Holocaust lessons, a conference participant asked a crucial question: How much time is spent teaching the Holocaust in today's public schools? Although many answers were given, no one was sure. Recently, I came across the results of a survey conducted by the Holocaust Education Development Programme (HEDP), which is part of the Institute of Education, University of London. Despite being a compulsory part of the national curriculum, an average of six hours per year was spent teaching the Holocaust. Furthermore, there was great variation among the teachers surveyed with a few reporting that they spent 20 lessons on it and many saying there was but a single lesson (Curtis, 2009). It is likely that the same can be said about the teaching of civics.

Some scholars have argued that the teaching of civics has "lost ground" in the crowded K-12 curriculum over the past several decades (McDonnell et al., 2000). Several reasons have been given for this decline, including the increasing emphasis on training workers than preparing citizens and the impact of international tests on curriculum and instruction. The IEA data, however, do not support such a decline.

Concerns about the lack of instructional time have been raised in virtually every IEA civic study, covering a span of 50 years. In the final report of the first IEA civics study, Torney et al. (1975) concluded that "although teachers and experts on civics curriculum rated many potential topics in Civic Education as important for students, the relatively small amount of school time actually devoted to Civic Education was insufficient to cover in depth all the topics thought to be important (p. 328). More than 20 years later, Torney-Purta et al. (1999) asserted that civic education

has low-status in most countries. Furthermore, in some countries, civics-related topics are an explicit part of the curriculum for only one or two hours per week.

The IEA studies have much to say about how civics is being taught as well as how it should be taught. The results of the combined IEA civics studies suggest that what students are taught in civic education depends largely on the values and beliefs of teachers (Malak-Minkiewicz & Torney-Purta, 2021; Torney-Purta et al., 1999). It is noteworthy, then, that most teachers reported emphasizing knowledge transmission, that is, teacher-led lessons with a focus on remembering factual knowledge (Schutz et al., 2010). In this regard, teachers reported feeling unprepared to enact an issue-centered curriculum (Alviar-Martin et al, 2008). However, as Kaestle (2000) has noted, "Teaching controversies is difficult, but it is also an opportunity to model democracy" (p. 52).

Data collected over the past half century have led researchers to question the effectiveness of teaching civics by means of recitations, drills, and rituals. These questions began with the very first IEA civic study and continue to this day. Simply stated, focusing on the memorization of subject matter and engaging students in patriotic rituals have, if anything, a counter-productive effect on civic learning (Torney et al., 1975). Schools with a strong emphasis on memorizing facts tended to produce students who were actually less knowledgeable about politics. Furthermore, students who reported frequent participation in patriotic rituals were both less knowledgeable and, equally if not more important, less democratic in their outlook.

Based on the IEA studies, then, what kind of civic education is needed to produce well-informed citizens, who hold democratic attitudes and values, who support government policies, and who are interested in taking part in civic affairs? "In all the IEA civic and citizenship education studies since 1971, a measure of open classroom climate for discussion has been a positive predictor of student civic knowledge in the large majority of countries" (Losito et al., 2021, p. 248). Students in such classrooms were also less authoritarian and more interested in civics (Torney et al., 1975). Experiencing a climate in the classroom that encourages respectful discussion of civic and political issues is associated with increased civic knowledge as well as increased civic engagement (Gainous & Martens, 2016; Knowles et al., 2018; Torney-Purta, 2002). Finally, and consistent with the earlier discussion of civic knowledge, there is a need for civic education with an emphasis on conceptual and procedural knowledge with teachers using open-ended questions and discussions of complex, often controversial, issues (Arensmeier, 2015).

In Conclusion

Effective civic education requires that students achieve a number of balances—between rights and responsibilities, between knowing and acting, and between perpetuating and challenging (Crittenden & Levine, 2018). Here are a few of the lessons that I have learned from the IEA civic studies.

First, the two most important goals of civic education as expressed by teachers are promoting knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities and promoting students' critical and independent thinking. Despite the self-stated importance of these goals, teachers tend to rely on teacher-led instruction with an emphasis on memorizing factual knowledge, most often facts about government and politics. Two of the main reasons for their reliance on this approach are: (1) the extremely limited amount of time available for teaching civics, and (2) a lack of confidence on the part of teachers in teaching an issues-oriented curriculum in an "open classroom" environment. Unfortunately, this reliance on knowledge transmission has a downside. Memorizing facts and engaging students in patriotic rituals are likely to have, if anything, a counter-productive effect on civic understanding and participation.

Second, civic knowledge, as assessed in the IEA studies, consists of some combination of factual knowledge and skills in interpretation of civic-related material. Items measuring students' interpretation skills are quite similar to those found on traditional reading comprehension tests. Concerns for conceptual knowledge and procedural knowledge have been minimal and have emerged late in the sequence of IEA studies. It is noteworthy, however, that in the CIVED study concept-oriented teaching was associated with stronger performance on more complex civic test items.

Third, civic attitudes and values are critical to becoming an active, productive citizen, perhaps more important than civic knowledge or opportunities for civic engagement. Therefore, civic education should embrace the development of appropriate civic attitudes and values. These attitudes and values are particularly important if citizens are to participate actively and responsibly in the life of their communities (Schulz et al., 2017).

Torney et al. (1975) have argued that a hierarchical organization such as the school may not be the right setting for inculcating democratic values. A fourth lesson is that it is essential, therefore, to build links between schools and local and/or regional organizations (e.g., food banks, human rights organizations, internships with businesses (Torney-Purta, 2002).

Next, as is true in most other subject areas, factors outside the school tend to be more important for civic development than what happens in schools. In ICCS parental interest in civic issues was one of the strongest predictors of expected civic engagement; furthermore, students' background variables (such as socio-economic status) were significant predictors of civic knowledge (Schulz et al., 2017).

An equally important point is that civic engagement and political engagement are two quite distinct concepts. Failure to differentiate them may lead to the conclusion that youth engagement is declining, rather than being transformed (Bemudez, 2012). Although neither type of engagement is a particularly important goal as perceived by teachers, students were considerably more supportive of social movement activities than of conventional political activities (Torney-Purta, 2002). One reason for this finding may be that students believed they could make a difference in social movements, particularly those focusing on local community issues and/or issues concerning problems of interest to them (e.g., human rights, climate change). They were more skeptical about their ability to make a difference in the political sphere.

Perhaps the most important lesson I've learned from my study of civic education is that it is critically important to differentiate between *learning about democracy* and *learning democracy*. Stated simply, teacher-led, frontal teaching of factual knowledge may, in fact, be the most effective and efficient way of learning about democracy. It is quite deficient for helping students learn democracy. Learning democracy requires that students experience democracy (Ostrom, 1998). Learning democracy requires that students learn to talk and listen with others about public problems (Crittenden & Levine, 2018). As Ted Sizer (1984) reminded us almost 40 years ago, the best way to teach values is when the school is an example of the values being taught.

Finally, it must be mentioned that there are three factors that threaten democracy worldwide: lack of trust (Pew Research Center, 2022; Schulz et al., 2010), lack of self-efficacy (Bermudez, 2012), and political and ideological polarization (Stirrett, 2022). To these three, I would add a fourth, one that I encountered while reading the most recent material on civics, citizenship, and democracy. It was triggered by the heading of an article in the *New York Times*: "Voters see democracy in peril, but saving it isn't a priority" (Corasaniti et al., 2022). The first line of the article read, "Voters overwhelmingly believe American democracy is under threat, but seem remarkably apathetic about that danger, with few calling it the nation's most pressing problem." With this in mind, I would like to close with a statement made by Justice Learned Hand in a speech entitled "The Spirit of Liberty,"

delivered in 1944. [I believe the date is quite significant.] "I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws, and upon courts. These are false hopes, believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can do much to help it" (Hand, 1944, para. 1).

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